

# UK National Rural Network



## CONFERENCE REPORT

UK NRN RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORKING CONFERENCE  
Holiday Inn, Belfast, 10/11th March 2010

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## Executive Summary

The UK National Rural Network organised its first Networking Conference in Belfast on 10th and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010. Almost 200 people attended from across the UK regions and feedback from the event was very positive, proving very useful and worthwhile in terms of sharing ideas, experiences, knowledge and practices of delivering and implementing Rural Development Programmes.

The conference was hosted by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland and offered participants the opportunity to:-

- Learn more about the UK National Rural Network, through demonstrating how networks can support programme delivery
- Explore a range of approaches to the delivery of rural development actions within and across the UK, Ireland and Europe
- Network and share experiences; to build and establish new contacts and explore opportunities for transnational cooperation

The conference proceedings took place over a day and half and included a wide range of activities such as speaker presentations, exercises and themed workshops. A networking hub also formed an important part of the conference allowing individual networks to host stands and network and share information with other delegates. A participative action planning exercise on priority actions for the UK NRN activity took place on the second day and the results of this exercise will focus the work of the UK NRN in the future.

Over the course of the two days several key themes emerged through key note speeches, workshops, participative exercises and general feedback. These are summarised as follows;

Networking:

- The opportunity for face to face networking is an invaluable tool for those involved in rural development and should be encouraged both regionally and across the UK
- Network events allow delivery agents to realise that they are not on their own and that many of the issues they face are also shared across the regions despite the differences in local context

Rural Development Practice:

- Much good Rural Development work has been facilitated over the last 20 years across the UK but considerable work remains to be done

- There is a need for a cultural change to take place adopting a rural asset approach, moving away from focusing on what rural areas DO NOT have, to building on and maximising what assets they DO HAVE
- There is a need to empower individuals, communities, agencies, funders from being funding driven to focusing on the development of “sustainable rural communities”
- There is recognition that LAGs need to be more proactive and developmental in their approach to the delivery of the RDP in a way which is truer to the spirit and ethos of the original Leader programme
- The potential of LAGs and RDPs to rural areas needs to be harnessed and encouraged by integrating delivery both across the axes of the RDP and between RDP and other programmes.

Much of this information disseminated at the conference, including speeches and workshop presentations are available to view at [www.uknationalruralnetwork.org.uk](http://www.uknationalruralnetwork.org.uk)

## 1.0 Introduction

The UK National Rural Network held the first Rural Development Networking Conference, hosted by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland, in the Holiday Inn, Belfast on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010.



This major event aimed to bring together those involved in the delivery of rural development programmes from across the UK and beyond. Designed to inspire, motivate and connect, the event delivered a range of opportunities for participants to share ideas, knowledge and practice on the wide range of rural development programme activity taking place across the regions.

## 2.0 Conference Purpose and Aims

The main purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity for the 4 regions of the UK to come together to share ideas, experiences, knowledge and practices of delivering and implementing Rural Development Programmes.

It aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to:-

- Learn more about the UK National Rural Network, through demonstrating how networks can support programme delivery
- Explore a range of approaches to the delivery of rural development actions within and across the UK, Ireland and Europe
- Network and share experiences; to build and establish new contacts and explore opportunities for transnational cooperation

## 3.0 Conference Format

The main conference proceedings took place over a day and a half and included a wide range of activities such as:

- Speaker presentations
- Thought provoking exercise (Conference Refresher)
- Workshops & Plenary
- Round table discussion / Action Planning and feedback
- Networking Hub
- Conference Dinner

The full programme is detailed as follows:

### Day 1: 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010

10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	<b>Registration, Informal Networking, Opportunity to visit Networking Hub</b>
11.00 a.m.	<b>Welcome Address:</b> <b>Martin McDonald</b> , Rural Network for Northern Ireland <b>Rebecca Frost</b> , UK National Rural Network
11.45 a.m.	<b>Keynote Address:</b> <b>Gerallt Llewelyn Jones</b> , Menter Mon, Wales
1.00 p.m. – 1.50 p.m.	<b>Workshops - Session one</b>
1.50 p.m.	<b>Networking Lunch</b>
2.15 p.m.	<b>Conference Refresher, Paul Keating</b> , Ireland National Rural Network
3.20 p.m.	<b>Workshops – Session Two</b>
3.45 p.m.	<b>Ice-Cream/ Coffee Break (<i>locally produced</i>)</b>
4.45 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.	<b>Workshops – Session 3</b> <b>Guest Speakers:</b> <b>Michael Dower</b> , European Network for Rural Development <b>John Davies</b> , European Network for Rural Development
	<b>Concluding Comments</b>

### Close of Conference Day 1

8.00 p.m.	<b>Conference Dinner:</b> Olympic Suite <b>Entertainment by Mc Stoker Ceilidh Band</b>
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### Day 2: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010

10.00a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	<b>Welcome Address: Dr Kate Braithwaite MBE</b> , Carnegie UK Trust <b>Plenary Session - Day 1 Proceedings</b> <b>Action Planning Exercise</b> <b>Closing remarks</b>
12.15 p.m. – 1.00 p.m.	<b>Lunch</b>

### Close of Conference Day 2

## 4.0 Attendance Profile

Final delegate registration for the conference totalled 204, with 190 people actually attending the event. Attendance is broken down across the various regions as follows:

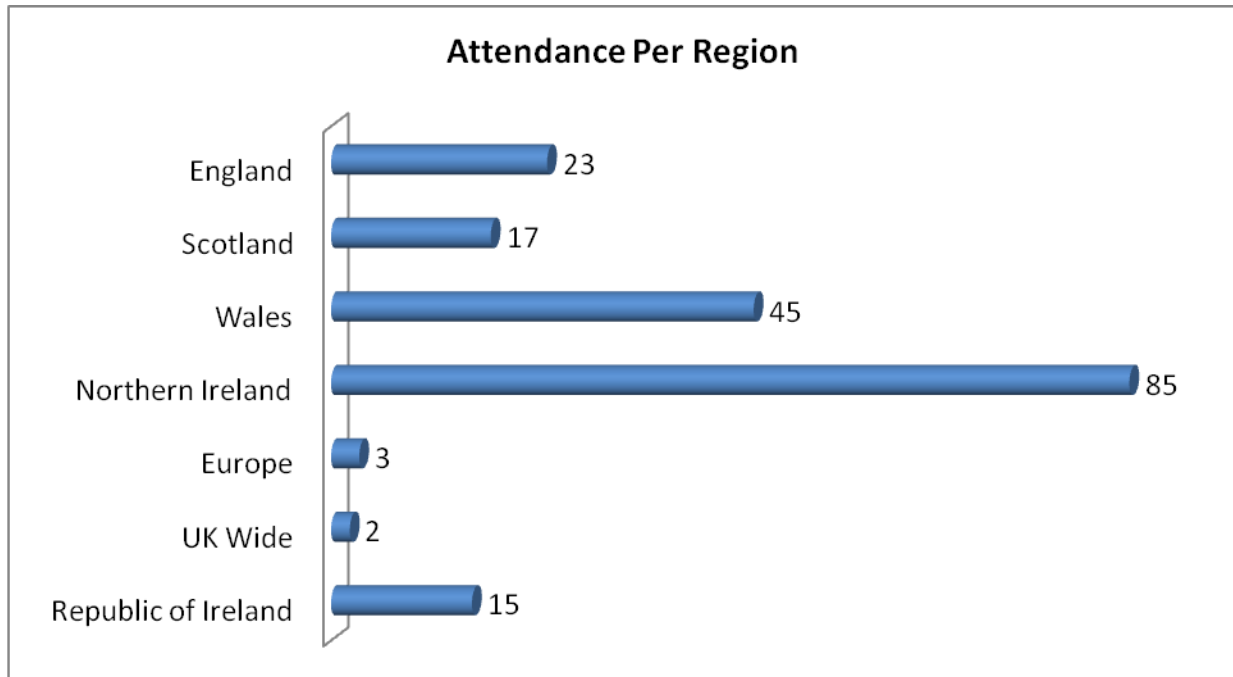


Diagram 1: Attendance per Region

A full list of attendees is provided as *Appendix 1*. Whilst representation from several regions was below that originally anticipated, the list does demonstrate a reasonable representation from across the different regions. Furthermore those attending encompassed a wide range of Rural Development Programme delivery / policy functions and interests including Local Action Groups, Managing Authorities, sectoral organisations and other delivery agents.



## 5.0 Summary of Main Speaker Inputs

### **Geralt Llewelyn Jones, Mentor Mon, Wales**

Keynote address



Geralt’s address, entitled “Food for Thought” provided a very insightful history of Rural Development at a European level from CAP and the first Community initiatives in 1990 through to the current Rural Development Programmes of 2010. In doing so he set the scene for the conference by setting developments at a European level within the context of the cultural and economic changes experienced in rural Wales during the twentieth century.

His presentation then went on to introduce how EU Rural Development Policy translated into action at a local level through the example of the work of Mentor Mon, building on the cultural and natural assets of the area in order to maximise the benefits which can be derived from capitalising on an area’s distinctive characteristics.

Geralt also discussed the changing challenges faced by rural areas over the twenty year period and closed by emphasising the importance of developing a sustainable asset base in order to retain and build on the work of the Rural Development Programme in future years.

### **Michael Dower, ENRD Contact Point**

Integrated Rural Development Experiences

Michael introduced delegates to the work of the ENRD Thematic Working Group 1 “Targeting territorial specificities and needs” outlining the results of the research undertaken to date and the remaining actions to be carried out.

In particular Michael discussed the issue of complementarities across EU funds and how Member States have used a number of different programmes in order to support the development of their rural areas. In doing so he illustrated by way of example how integration can be possible through;

- Co-ordination at the national or regional level, or
- Local integration through LAG development strategies

In concluding, Michael highlighted the importance of LAGs and other local partnerships in rural development as a result of their local focus and participative nature. He also suggested that LAGs may have useful “alter egos” which allow LEADER groups to use resources from both within and outside the EAFRD where complementarity and synergy can be found across the Axes and between funds which can strengthen the response to local needs given national co-ordination and local integration.

## **John Davies, ENRD Contact Point / Chairman of the Wales Rural Network Steering Group**

Speaking as a UK contributor to the ENRD Thematic Working Group “Agriculture and the wider rural economy” John introduced delegates to the work of the group to date, outlining the results of the research undertaken to date and the remaining actions to be carried out.

The initial findings of the Working Group suggest that agriculture remains an influential economic contributor although there exists considerable complexity and variance within and between rural areas. Many examples of good practice have been identified to date of strong links between agriculture and other sectors in areas of adaptability and innovation, and of institutional and technical support to entrepreneurs.

Although detailed qualitative research remains to be done, John identified a number of implications of the work to date for those involved in Rural Development Programmes;

- Agriculture should not be viewed in isolation from other economic activity
- It is important to consider qualitative as well as quantitative analysis
- Recording good practice has enormous potential in guiding current and future activity

## **Kate Braithwaite MBE, Carnegie Foundation UK**

Engaging Rural Communities and Inspiring Community Innovation

Kate introduced delegates to the work of the Carnegie Foundation and it’s recently developed “Manifesto for Rural Communities”. Kate’s presentation drew heavily on the “Manifesto” to outline her organisation’s view of the current challenges and opportunities for the development of rural areas.

Of particular interest was her discussion on the importance of using an asset based approach to rural community planning. Kate emphasised the need for planning activities to focus not on what an area does not have but on what it does have, as has so often been a weakness in previous planning processes.

In using such an approach, however, Kate suggests that care should be taken not to focus only on physical, natural or built assets but to recognise the importance of people as the greatest asset that a rural area has.

Kate went on to discuss some further trends that Carnegie have identified in rural development practice, many of which serve to reinforce the contributions of speakers on Day 1. She identified rural areas as “hotbeds of innovation” leading the way in developing new approaches to service delivery, regeneration and sustainability through community development and local ownership using tools such as mixed use developments, Community Land Trusts and the development of community owned renewable energy assets.

## 6.0 Workshop Summaries & Outcomes

### Into the Den

#### *Entrepreneurship in the Rural Economy*



This workshop was designed to looking at the role of entrepreneurship in the rural economy and how this could be facilitated and supported by the Rural Development Programme.

The workshop was delivered by Joe Mulholland (CAFRE) and Paul McCarthy (TEAGASC), and included hearing about people that have made it work for them.

The facilitators also provided examples of the range of support offered by their organizations to those developing farm diversification businesses, providing examples of good practice in supporting enterprise development and discussing how this could be applied in a broader rural context.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- A risk averse culture tends to exist within support agencies
- Ongoing support required from initial idea through to ongoing operation is vital
- The key characteristics of a successful entrepreneur are seen as motivation, persistence & perseverance

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Providing for dedicated support mechanisms (not just funding) to the rural community generally based on the existing services available to farmers
- Address a gap in existing provision by supporting businesses developing products/services for local/regional markets rather than those with an export focus.

What are the key support needs?

The development of an “innovation centre” to provide a resource base on market research and product development information which can provide up to date information on business trends, technology and legislation.

### Going Green

#### *Developing a Low Carbon Community*



Delivered by Darren Gibbs of PLANED this workshop discussed climate change, what it mean to rural areas and what can we do about it? The workshop provided delegates with an introduction to a toolkit for assessing the environmental impact of individuals, households, businesses and communities, and deciding how to match development needs with environmental opportunities. This “process” toolkit could provide a means to help communities to understand sustainable development and build this into their planning and development of community projects.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- Environmental sustainability cannot be considered in isolation
- The importance of communication and participation
- Be responsive

How can the RDP support this theme?

2 options could be considered;

- To operate specific funds focusing on sustainability, making more effective use of the funds that are currently available under RDP
- To incorporate sustainability as a “gateway” question within the assessment process to give priority to those projects which consider the issue of sustainability in their planning

### **Can't See the Wood for the Trees?**

#### *Maximising Woodland and Forestry Opportunities*

Delivered by Martin Glynn of Rural Development Initiatives Ltd. this workshop considered how the Rural Development Programmes could deliver real opportunities for forestry and woodland development, considering what approaches can be used, from across the axes, to support broader forestry and woodland development, whether through related businesses, environmental benefits or local action.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- People are often willing to engage in forestry development but a mismatch often exists between aspirations and people's ability to deliver
- Better communication and information transfer between delivery bodies and beneficiaries is essential to allow better project delivery based on the learning of others
- Need to find ways of capturing an economic benefit to landowners of “non-timber” outputs

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Better integration between the axes considering both how beneficiaries approach the issues and how delivery bodies deal with them
- Make the most effective use of investment by ensuring that projects tick the requirements of as many axes as possible
- Appreciate that the process needs to be managed not simply delivered and provide an interface between applicants and delivery bodies in order to identify potential project opportunities

## **Villages for the Future**

### *Working Towards a Model of Sustainable Living*

Delivered by Nick Mack (Creative Edge Consultancy) and Lindsay Easson (AFBI) this workshop discussed the changing role of the village in rural areas, in light of the current rise in energy prices and the issue of energy supply security and how this should be considered when undertaking any community or village planning exercise. Lindsay also discussed current trends in renewable energy and how these may be used at a community level to provide viable local markets for energy crops and the development of community owned renewable energy schemes.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- Community involvement & ownership is key!
- Demand & supply – need to be realistic in what specific technologies can achieve and also in matching the outputs of technologies to the needs of the end user
- Constraints such as planning regulations can limit effectiveness of efforts to develop a renewable energy project

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Specific consideration should be given to renewable energy when considering applications under the Village Renewal Measure
- When developing Village Plans, the potential for renewable energy projects should be considered

## **Wish You Were Here?**

### *Sustainable Tourism Development*

Allan Forrest (Northern Marches Cymru) and Cath John (Adventa) presented recent trends in rural tourism and the development of sustainable products (both environmentally and economically) and the development of new approaches to co-ordinated, clustered marketing.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

The key issue is getting visitors to stop en route to more recognised attractions elsewhere, which could be addressed through;

- The development of niche products, packages & collaborations, such as outdoor activities tourism
- History, heritage & culture; the importance of local distinctiveness in making a place interesting

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Creating networks to act as a platform for sharing good practice and mentoring
- Providing a forum for the development of innovation and new ideas
- Providing for skills development opportunities
- Pro active targeting of funds to support the development of the sector

## **Eating Well – Eating Local**

### *Growing Your Local Economy*

Food production and marketing is a key aspect to the viability of many rural communities. Paul Mayfield and Patrick Hughes from SAC discussed current trends in local food marketing. The workshop examined what has been successful in maximising the selling potential of locally grown produce and putting together local growers and producers, restaurants, shops, guesthouses, hotels etc., identifying key market factors and trends for the future development of the sector.



The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- The importance of the link between local food & tourism
- Effective collaboration throughout the whole supply chain is needed to limit the constraints experienced by small producers

- Food producers must take the initiative so that initiatives become self financing over time

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Providing facilitation and integration across all issues and directly with businesses to resolve constraints on producers resulting from the power of larger businesses
- Tapping into existing skills provision and developing new programmes where necessary to cover areas such as retailing, processing, regulations, etc.
- Education of the wider community about the importance/benefits of local produce both to them as individuals and as a community

### **Old Problems – New Solutions**

#### *Tackling Service Provision in Rural Areas*

Key to rural development and the development of a sustainable rural community is the delivery of and access to essential services. Amanda Brown (Derbyshire Economic partnership) and Liz Abell (Devon Renaissance) providing some interesting examples of current practice of what can be done through the Rural Development Programme in meeting these needs, and looked at potential developments in IT and other technologies that may provide future opportunities.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- Communities; enabling community organisations to develop as businesses
- Businesses; supporting businesses to add to the services they offer
- You and your partner organisations; Clear lines of communication

How can the RDP support this theme?

Assist community projects to become sustainable by providing mentoring and support in business planning and management

### **Building for the Future**

#### *Engaging Young People in Rural Development*

The three facilitators for this workshop, Barry McGinley and Aileen O’Callaghan (Youth Action) and Joe Hawkins (YFCU) highlighted the importance of young people to the community and economic life of rural areas. Using participatory approaches this workshop examined delegates current level of engagement with and perception of young people before discussing the need to ensure that young people participate fully in and develop



a sense of community. They also presented examples of how young people could be encouraged to participate in the Rural Development Programme and play a fuller roll in their local community and economy as a result.

The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- The provision of a mentor to assist “young people led” applications
- Working & networking with key stakeholder such as existing youth organisations who already have the contacts and trust
- The importance of inter-generational projects using a community development approach to develop relationships throughout the community

How can the RDP support this theme?

- Consider involving young people in grant giving on a small scale (subject to procedural and accountability issues)
- Develop a website at European level to share best practice examples in youth engagement, including an interactive element to facilitate discussion on individual experiences of engagement

### **Farming as a Social Service**

#### *The Social and Health Benefits of the Farm for Others*

Although in its infancy in the UK and Ireland, Care/Social Farming is quite well developed in many parts of mainland Europe. Drawing on their experiences Aideen McGloin and Deirdre O'Connor (University College Dublin) and Debbie Wilcox (UK National Care Farming Initiative) introduced the concept of Care/Social Farming, examining its history and considering the impact of some examples in practice. The workshop allowed delegates to discuss the potential benefits of this approach to farm sustainability and the wider community, looking particularly at the potential for Care/Social Farming in the context of the Rural Development Programme.



The key learning points from this workshop were summarised as:

- There is a need for increased promotion & awareness raising of social farming across all sectors
- Novel? Innovative? – social farming perceived as a new idea within the private sector/family farms but there is a long history of using this approach and an extensive body of knowledge already exists
- A good fit already exists within the current RDP to support social farming

How can the RDP support this theme?

It was suggested that social farming would fit particularly well within Axis 4 but could also benefit from business mentoring and support available to family farms under Axis 1.

As there is a variety of existing delivery mechanisms it was suggested that the use of transnational co-operation would be an ideal mechanism to share knowledge and expertise in different countries and could lead to the establishment of resources such as development plans for the sector or guidelines for potential operators.

What are the key support needs?

A central co-ordination function to link interested farmers to key service and support providers.

## 7.0 Networking Hub

A key element in making the conference a success was the Networking Hub, an area set aside for delegates to mingle and network with each other during free time at the event. This facility was enhanced by the inclusion of stands from each of the UK regional networks, the Ireland National Rural Network, and ENRD.

This time was invaluable in facilitating links between Managing Authorities, Networks, and implementing bodies from across the UK to share their experiences, and allowing delegates to get to know more about the Network structure, what it does and who is involved.

As well as providing information on the role of ENRD and bringing a broader European perspective to the event, their stand also incorporated “Co-operation Corner” an opportunity for delegates to view all co-operation partner search requests that were currently open and to discuss these and any other project ideas with staff from ENRD.

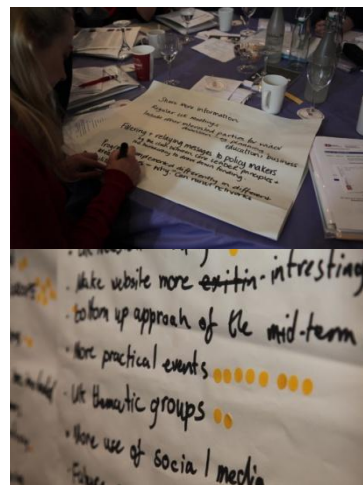


## 8.0 Outcomes of Action Planning Exercise

One of the final elements of the main conference was an action planning exercise that allowed participants to direct and prioritise the future actions / activities of the UKNRN in supporting Rural Development Programme delivery across the UK.

The format involved a short refresher presentation on the purpose & work of the UKNRN followed by round table discussion focusing on useful actions / activities that the UKNRN should undertake between now and 2013 to support programme delivery across the UK. The full list of suggestions is included in appendix 4.

A representative from each table then fed back their main suggested actions and these were recorded on flipcharts around the room. Participants then individually prioritised their top three actions on the summary flipchart pages using sticky dots. The main suggested actions and the numbers prioritising is included in appendix 5.



### Summary of Priority Actions

These are combined as appropriate and presented in order of priority based on the number of dots received, it should be noted that a number of the actions are interrelated.

#### 1. Better / More Information Exchange (43) – including:

- *Online Discussion Forum (6)*
- *Forum to standardise working practices (7)*
- *Quarterly Newsletter (6)*
- *Thematic Groups (4)*
- *Matchmaking / Partnering*
- *Projects database*

#### 2. Lobby / Advocate / Work with Managing Authorities / EU in relation to delivery issues / LEADER approach (31) - including:

- *Simplifying language and processes (10)*

#### 3. Study Visits / Tours within the UK / Europe (27)

- 4. Conferences / Events (20)**
- 5. Training / Support / Best Practice advice (14)**
- 6. Cross Axis engagement (12)**
- 7. Post 2013 Discussions (10)**

Post Card Exercise

Individuals were also invited to complete a post card exercise – identifying three actions that they personally can undertake in relation to improving programme delivery. (These will be posted back to individuals as a reminder week beginning 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2010), 66 postcards were completed.

## 9.0 Participant Feedback

A conference feedback questionnaire was issued to each delegate within their pack. Of the 190 delegates attending, 40 completed and returned the questionnaire (21%). It should, however, be noted that a proportion of the 190 delegates included the organising members from each of the UK Networks, who, it was anticipated, would not complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire asked delegates 6 questions, with some requesting a rating of various aspects of the conference programme. The responses to each of the questions are summarised as follows.

### **Question 1: How did you find the format of the conference?**

This question sought to enquire if the format of the event; 2 day conference, including speakers, followed by a series of workshops - met the needs of the delegates.

Each respondent was asked to rate the format against 'poor', 'fair', 'good', and 'excellent'. The majority of respondents described the format as 'good' or 'excellent'. No delegates described it as 'poor'. A number of comments on the format of the event are gathered under Question 6 below.

The following chart demonstrates the responses to Question 1:

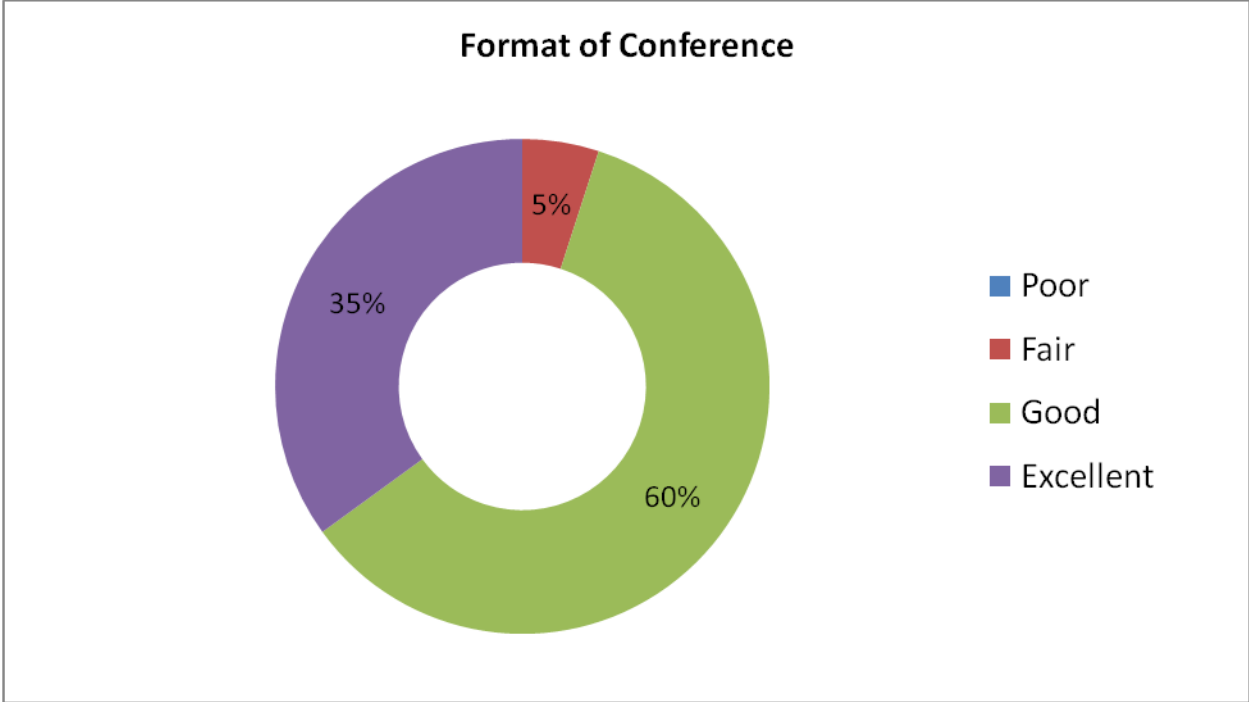


Diagram 2: Views on Usefulness of Event Format

## Question 2: How would you rate the following?

This question sought to gather views from delegates on the key strands of the conference agenda in terms of:

- Contribution of key speakers
- Facilitated exercise
- Networking Opportunities
- Exchange of information

Not all respondents gave a response against each element of this question as in some instances delegates were not present for all agenda items over the 2 days. Responses are demonstrated below:

### Contribution of key speakers:

Overall, the 4 key/guest speakers were well received. The following chart indicates the percentage responses against 'not useful', 'useful' and 'very useful':

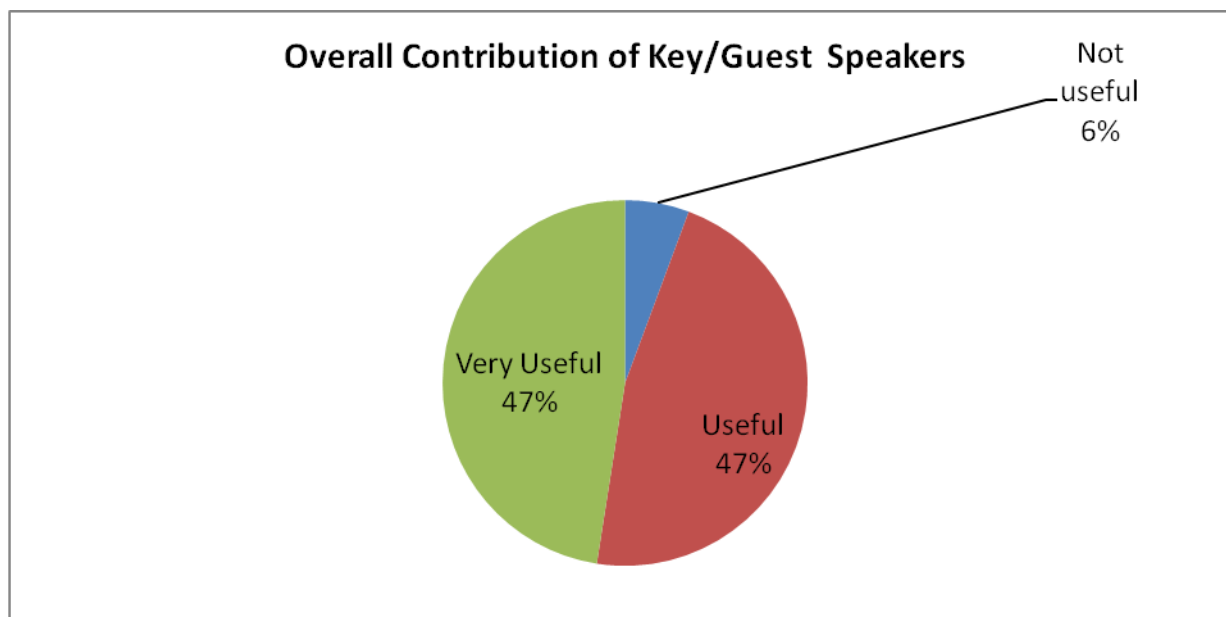
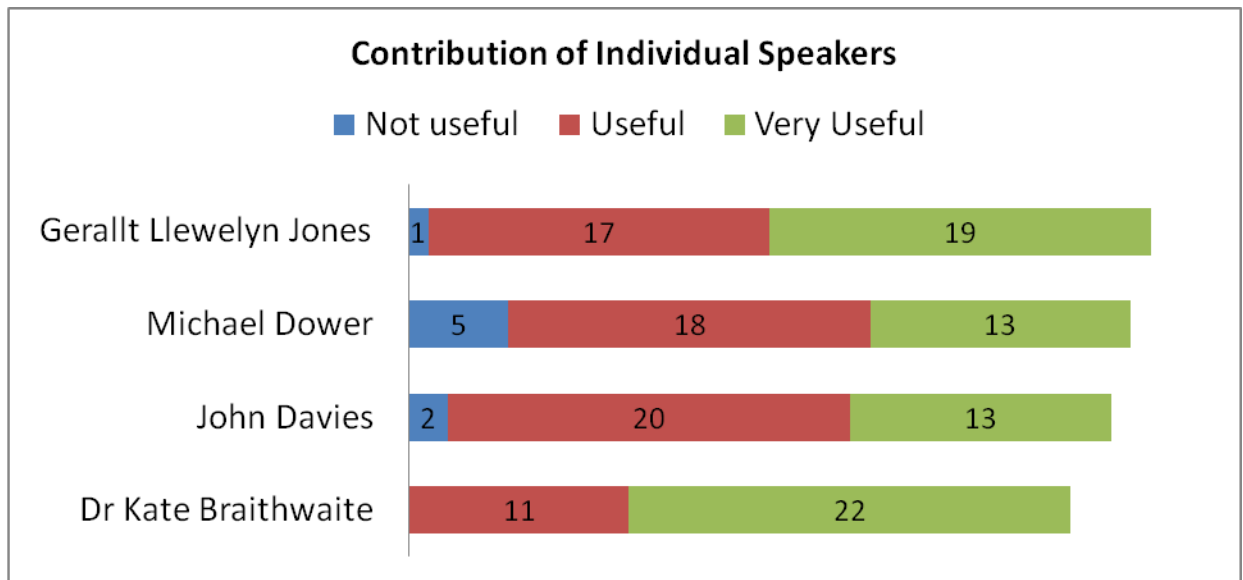


Diagram 3: Overall Usefulness of speaker contributions

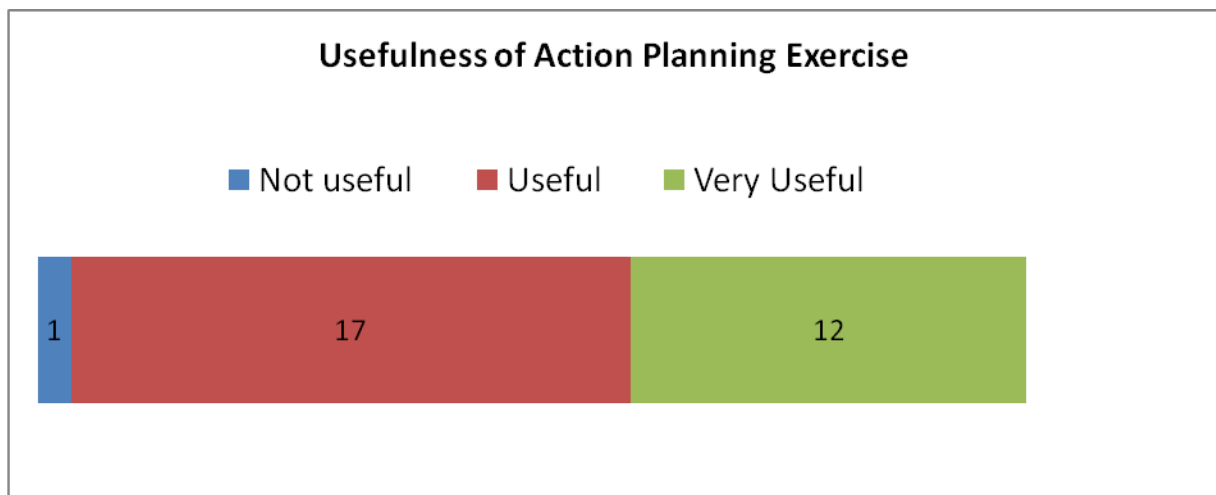
Against each individual speaker, the responses were as follows (plotted against the total questionnaires received). Some comments in relation to speakers and their slot within the agenda are highlighted under Question 6.



*Diagram 4: Usefulness of contribution of individual speakers*

### **Action Planning Exercise**

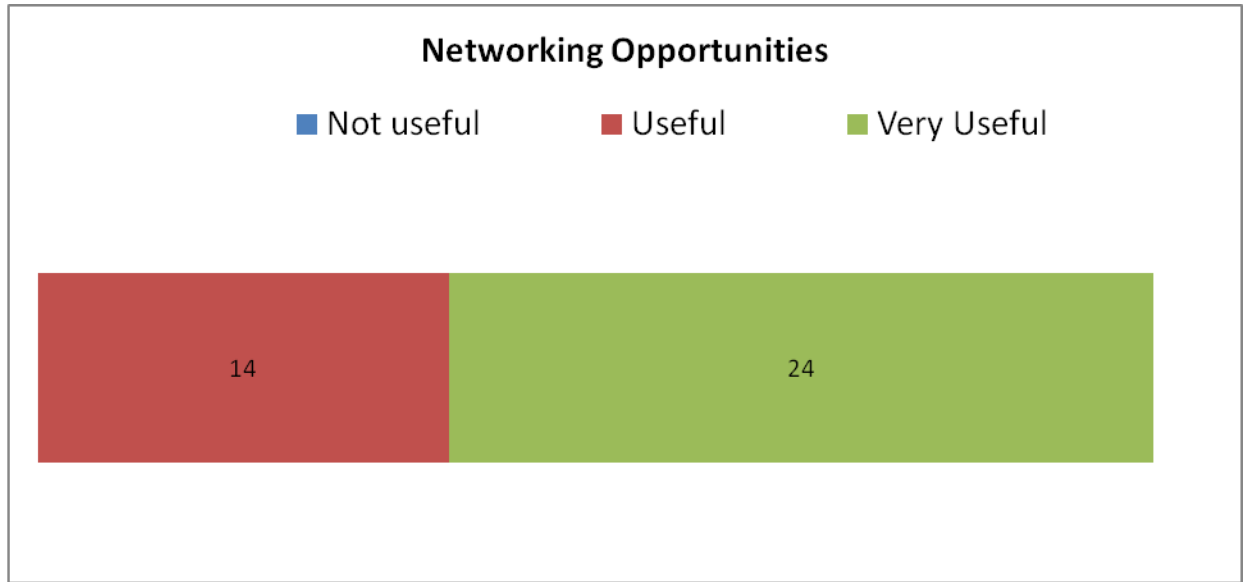
During Day 2 of the conference, a facilitated exercise was delivered to ascertain priorities for the UK Network. Respondents rated this exercise as follows:



*Diagram 5: Usefulness of Action Planning Exercise*

## **Networking Opportunities**

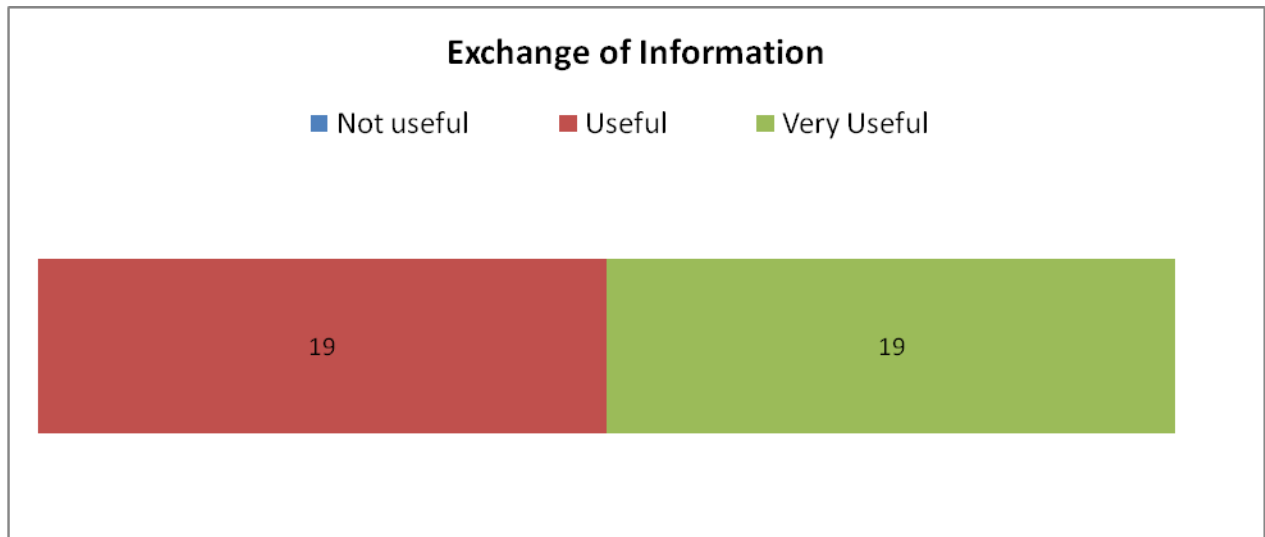
One of the key anticipated outcomes from the conference was the opportunity for delegates to network with other agencies and organisations involved in the Programme. The chart below indicates that the conference was 'very useful' in terms of networking, no respondents indicated that the event was 'not useful'.



*Diagram 6: Usefulness of Networking Opportunities*

## **Exchange of Information**

Again under exchange of information, respondents found the conference either 'useful' or 'very useful'.

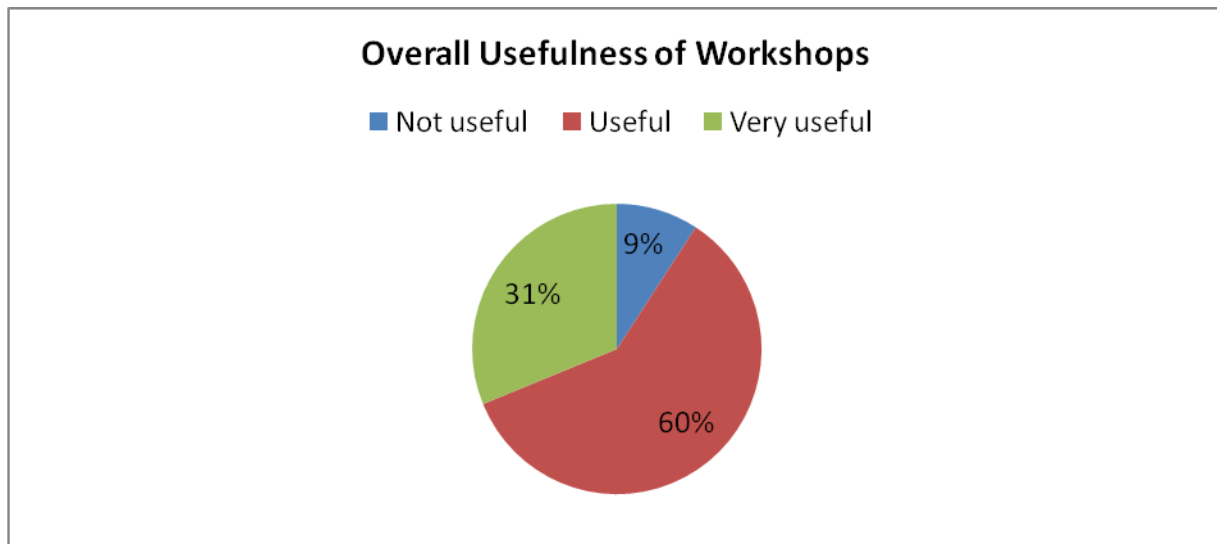


*Diagram 7: Exchange of Information*

**Question 3: Please indicate the usefulness of the workshops you attended?**

Workshops provided a key part of the conference programme and offered opportunities for networking and sharing of information and ideas. 9 workshops were planned, covering themes of the Rural Development Programme and each workshop ran 3 times. Feedback against each of the workshops is as below. Again, it should be noted that attendance at some workshops was greater than others; hence the number of respondents commenting on each workshop will vary.

The majority of respondents found the workshops either ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’.



*Diagram 8: Overall Usefulness of Workshops*

In terms of individual workshops, responses are as follows:

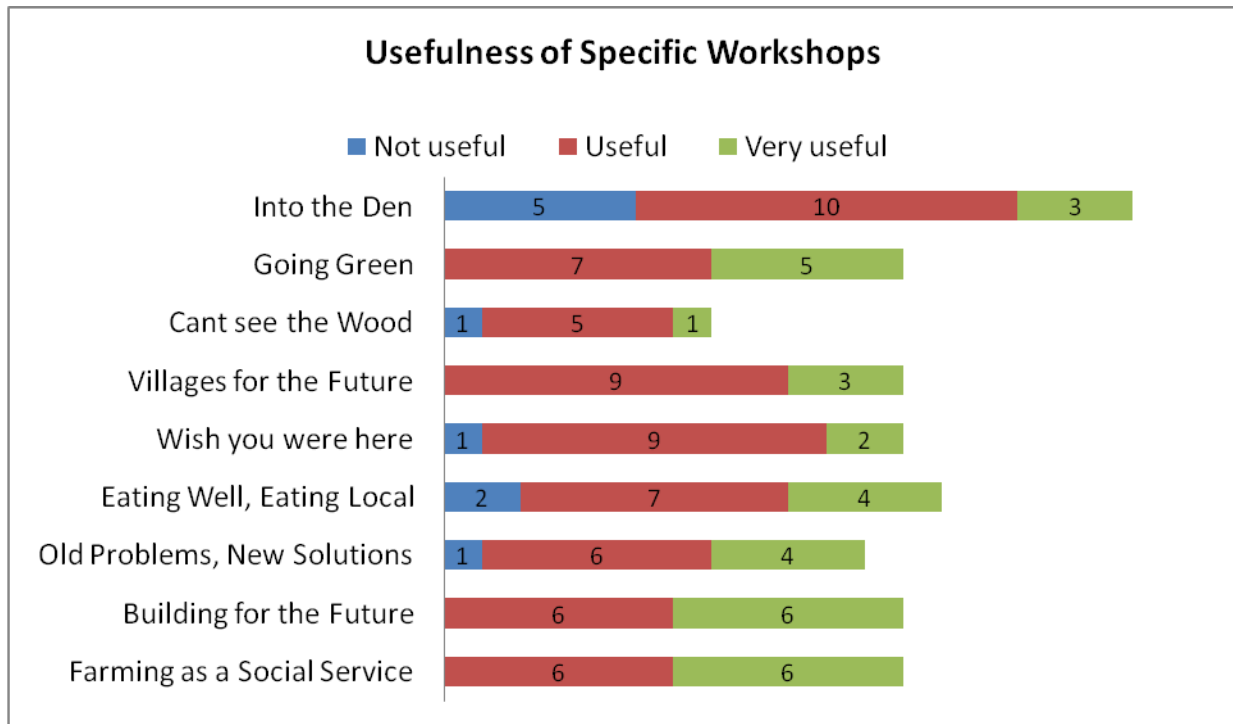


Diagram 9: Usefulness of individual workshops

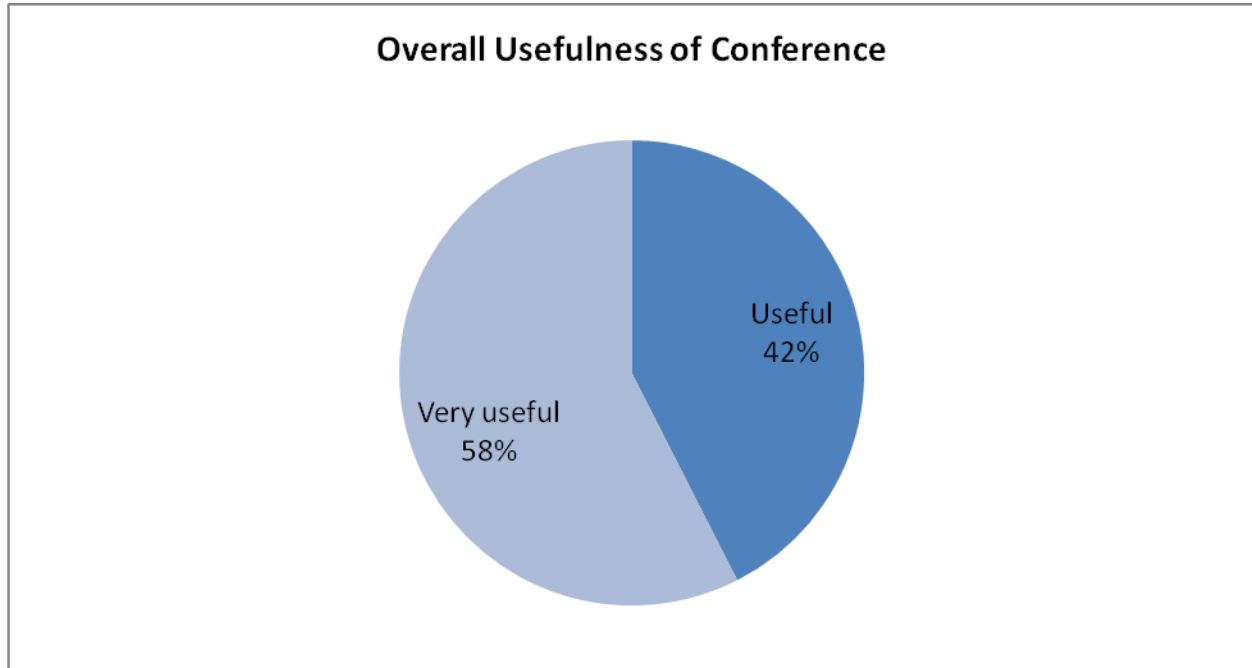
**Question 4: What one action are you going to carry out as a result of attending this event?**

33 respondents completed this question. A full list of comments is included (*Appendix 2*), in summary the actions highlighted included:

- Pursue issues, learning and best practice examples highlighted in workshops, eg social farming concepts, engaging young people, exploring sustainable energy, local food produce, and diversification challenge
- Disseminate information gathered locally
- Visit UKNRN/ENRD websites more regularly
- Maintain new links made and strengthen existing links
- Support co-operation ideas

**Question 5: Overall, how would you rate your attendance at the conference?**

This question provides key rating in relation to delegates' opinion on attending the conference; providing rationale for future conferences of a similar nature. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 'Not Useful', 'Useful' and 'Very Useful'. Majority of respondents indicated the overall usefulness as 'very useful', with no respondents indicating a 'not useful' rating.



*Diagram 10: Overall Usefulness of Conference*

### **Question 6: Any other comments/questions?**

26 comments were received under Question 6. A full list is available in Appendix 3, in summary:

#### Positive:

- The conference was very useful, well organised / co-ordinated and offered good networking opportunities
- Key speakers' well chosen
- Good range of workshops offered
- Action planning exercise useful and generated a lot of energy – keen to hear feedback from this session.
- Great band!

#### Improve for future:

- Late starts wasted some time / hurried first workshop - need to allow time for

discussion and interaction therein

- Day 1 was long and some speakers were too complex for their slot in the agenda
- Timing of the event coincided with end of year claims

#### Suggestions:

- Format - should include opportunity to question speakers
- Workshops –
  - aims and outcomes need to be clearly defined
  - outputs need to be captured well
  - encourage delegates to send relevant information in advance of the conference - i.e. examples of best practice in relation to workshop themes
- Include opportunities for strategic influencing, such as mid-term evaluation
- Preferred study visits on Day 1 to tie in with travel arrangements
- Include a tour of Belfast

#### Participant “quotes”

*“The conference was extremely well organised, the speakers well chosen and relevant and the networking was very useful.”*

*“Some speakers suffered because of timings - too complex to take in at end of the day.”*

*“Last ‘sound off’ event raised very useful issues for the next conference/future NRN events.”*

*“I wasn’t sure sometimes what the aims (or end outcomes) of the workshops were. They were too short sometimes to have a valuable exchange of ideas.”*

*“Thank you for all the hard work and enthusiasm you put in to ensure such a successful event. Great band!”*

*“Diolch Am Y Croeso - Thanks for the welcome”*

*“Thank you very much for facilitating our participation in the UK NRN conference in Belfast. It has proved to have been a very useful networking event for us and has opened some avenues that should help to support the development of Social Farming both North and South.”*

*Aideen McGloin, UCD, Facilitator – Social Farming Workshop*

*“It was very well organised. I think the workshops were the most useful part. Participants who had travelled seemed very impressed with Belfast (and the weather helped!).”*

*Sheelagh Blair, Countryside Agri Rural Partnership*

*“Warm thanks to you and your colleagues for the excellent arrangements for the UK NRN event, which I much enjoyed. I was impressed by the setting, the food and the whole atmosphere of a cheerful gathering. Congratulations.”*

*Michael Dower, ENRD, Guest Speaker*

*“Just to say well done, the conference was very good.”*

*Elaine Cullen, SOAR LAG*

*“Please would you pass on my thanks and appreciation to the organisers as it was an excellent event. It has really inspired me to do all sorts of things in Neath Port Talbot. Thank you again. “*

*Helen May, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council*

## 10.0 Conclusions & Key Messages

The main purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity for the 4 regions of the UK to come together to share ideas, experiences, knowledge and practices of delivering and implementing Rural Development Programmes.

It aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to:-

- Learn more about the UK National Rural Network, through demonstrating how networks can support programme delivery
- Explore a range of approaches to the delivery of rural development actions within and across the UK, Ireland and Europe
- Network and share experiences; to build and establish new contacts and explore opportunities for transnational cooperation

The Conference attracted a wide range of participants from across the UK regions, which was very positive and encouraging. The Programme was clearly designed in order to maximise the opportunities for all three objectives to be achieved through the mix of guest speakers, workshops and facilitative exercises undertaken.

Networking and the sharing of experiences were also facilitated directly through the Networking Hub and the Conference Dinner.

A participative action planning session took place on the second day of the conference, where a number of useful priority actions for the UKNRN were identified (see page 15-16). These priorities and suggestions will direct the focus and work of the UKNRN and the individual Regional Networks constituents in the future and will be incorporated through future work Action Plans.

Supplementary to the main Conference proceedings the Rural Network Northern Ireland hosted a Study Visit programme, and in partnership with the Irish Rural Network, a Cross-border Networking Workshop. Both of which were also positively received and very well attended by conference delegates having provided additional opportunities for focused sharing and networking experiences.

As reported in the previous section, participant feedback on the event was overwhelmingly positive in relation to both the format of the event and the content with the majority response to all formal feedback questions being either Useful or Very Useful, in addition many

participants fed back during and after the conference as to the need for such an event and it's benefit, therefore the three main objectives of the overall event are viewed as having been achieved and well received.

### **Key Messages**

Over the course of the two days several key themes emerged through key note speeches, workshops, participative exercises and general feedback. These are summarised as follows;

#### **Networking:**

- **The opportunity for face to face networking is an invaluable tool for those involved in rural development and should be encouraged both regionally and across the UK**
- **Network events allow delivery agents to realise that they are not on their own and that many of the issues they face are also shared across the regions despite the differences in local context**

#### **Rural Development Practice:**

- **Much good Rural Development work has been facilitated over the last 20 years across the UK but considerable work remains to be done**
- **There is a need for a cultural change to take place adopting a rural asset approach, moving away from focusing on what rural areas DO NOT have, to building on and maximising what assets they DO HAVE**
- **There is a need to empower individuals, communities, agencies, funders from being funding driven to focusing on the development of "sustainable rural communities"**
- **There is recognition that LAGs need to be more proactive and developmental in their approach to the delivery of the RDP in a way which is truer to the spirit and ethos of the original Leader programme**
- **The potential of LAGs and RDPs to rural areas needs to be harnessed and encouraged by integrating delivery both across the axes of the RDP and between RDP and other programmes.**

