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# 1 Introduction

## Introduction

In December 2002 the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) commissioned this review of the Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), to increase Defra's capacity to raise awareness of the RES scheme, the number of applications received and the quality of applications submitted. It will assist Defra to achieve its policy goal of 'providing assistance for projects that help to develop more sustainable, diversified and enterprising rural economies and communities'.

This final report summarises the key findings and recommendations from a programme of research conducted between January and November 2003 in all eight rural regions of England. The majority of research was conducted by July 2003. As a result this report presents a snapshot of the scheme at that time. A more detailed report has also been submitted to Defra.

## Aims and Objectives of the Review

The project terms of reference were to 'examine the range of approaches being applied to promote and facilitate the RES, both by Defra and other partner organisations, in order to assess their effectiveness, identify best practice and consider what other approaches might be effective in improving scheme take-up and the quality of applications.'

This review is intended to improve upon the methods used to both promote and facilitate the RES to increase both the number of applications made and the quality of applications submitted. Rural Partnerships undertook to address this by:

- **Reviewing the existing range of approaches** used by both Defra and its partners to promote/advertise the scheme within its target market.
- **Reviewing the methods** currently being applied by Defra and its partners to facilitate the submission of good quality applications eligible for Defra grants.
- **Assessing the 'effectiveness'** of both the existing promotional approaches and facilitation methodologies currently deployed by Defra and its partners and the extent to which they meet rural enterprises' needs through client interviews.
- **Determining 'best practices'** within the approaches and methodologies used.
- Reviewing and **recommending alternative approaches** for both promoting and facilitating the RES while building on the 'best practices' identified and the results of focus group discussions facilitated.

- **Communicating and disseminating results** of this research to both policy makers and implementers/staff.

## Research Methodology

To undertake this wide ranging and comprehensive review **Rural Partnerships Limited**, the specialist rural development management consulting arm of the Plunkett Foundation, led a consortium of experts bringing a unique range of skills pertinent to the review's aims. Consortium members included experts from: **The Plunkett Foundation**, a leading rural and group enterprise development education charity which contributed its experience gained over 80 years in promoting and supporting rural enterprise; **The Centre for Economic and Enterprise Development Research (CEEDR)** of **Middlesex University** which provided more than 15 years' experience in undertaking contract consultancy and research relating to subjects including self-employment, start-ups and entrepreneurship; and from **Enterplan Limited**, a leading management consulting firm, which contributed **expertise** and experience in the **marketing, promotion and management of competitive grant schemes**.

The review process was divided into three broad themes which were allocated to the three participating consulting organisations led by Rural Partnerships Limited. The Plunkett Foundation was responsible for assessing the **supply** of services to promote and facilitate the scheme, CEEDR undertook activities to assess client **demand** and **perceptions** of the scheme while **Enterplan** assessed approaches and best practice in the marketing and promotion of **different schemes**.

The following research activities were undertaken.

- Literature, data and existing research material on the ERDP and the RES was assimilated and reviewed. In particular the objectives, targets, application process and marketing materials of the scheme were assessed.
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with **five Defra and RDS staff** with responsibility for the national RES policy, communication, public relations, promotion and marketing.
- Semi-structured telephone and personal interviews were carried out in all eight regions with local Defra offices and partner organisations with responsibility for promoting and/or facilitating the RES. A total of **18 interviews** investigated the **delivery** of the RES by Defra, RDS and partner organisations.
- The **18 Defra staff** responsible for business support at a regional and sub-regional level and a further **17 facilitators** were interviewed in person and by telephone to gather information on the types of facilitation support provided for RES applicants in their region, and on the relationship between different support providers.
- In assessing the effectiveness of existing promotional activities consultants contacted a representative sample of applicants from three case study regions - the South West, East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside. The representative sample included applicants from each category set out in the

RES documents and included successful and unsuccessful applicants. A total of **30 interviews with business owners** were conducted face to face where possible.

- A **desk review** of alternative promotional activities methodologies was undertaken to inform the identification of best practice. The consultants reviewed the suitability and applicability of theoretical marketing tools in designing, developing and implementing promotional strategies and other forms of facilitation.
- In view of the diversity and complexity of approaches to the promotion and facilitation of the RES across the eight regions, Rural Partnerships conducted **focus groups** with applicants, potential applicants and RDS staff to elicit responses from potential and existing RES clients and delivery personnel.

## 2 | The Rural Enterprise Scheme

The primary aim of the RES is to help farmers adapt to changing markets and develop new business opportunities, particularly in response to the declining role of agriculture. RES also has a broader role in supporting the adaptation and development of the rural economy, community, heritage and environment. Nine measures from Article 33 of EC Regulation 1257/1999 underpin the scheme. These are:

- setting up farm relief and farm management services;
- marketing of quality agricultural products;
- basic services for the rural economy and population;
- renovation and development of villages and protection and conservation of the rural heritage;
- diversification of agricultural activities and activities close to agriculture to provide multiple activities or alternative incomes;
- agricultural water resources management;
- development and improvement of infrastructure connected with the development of agriculture;
- encouragement for tourist and craft activities; and
- protection of the environment in connection with agriculture, forestry and landscape conservation as well as the improvement of animal welfare.

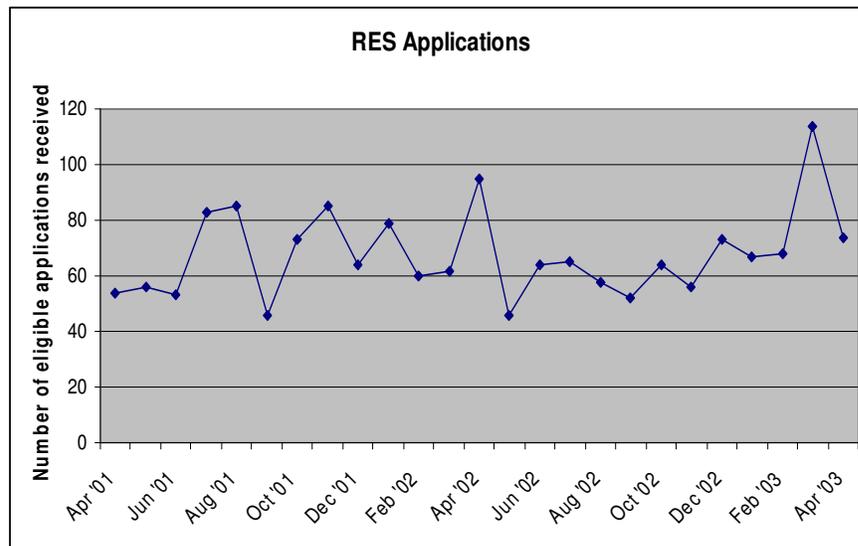
GBP152 million of EU and Government money has been allocated to the RES for the period April 2001 to the end of 2006. The majority of the funding has been allocated to regional budgets. A small proportion has been reserved for national projects on the marketing of quality agricultural products.

The scheme specifically targets farmers, other rural groups including businesses (partnerships and companies) and community groups, and bodies which promote and co-ordinate multiple applications related to a specific theme, sector or area. Any of the above groups may apply but all the final beneficiaries from this funding stream must be non public sector organisations.

The RES has seen a limited increase in the number of eligible applications received each month increased since the beginning of the ERDP. To the end of March 2003 a total of 1,872 eligible applications have been received. This increase in applications received is however less than would be expected for such a scheme when critical mass is achieved in each region and informal channels of communication such as

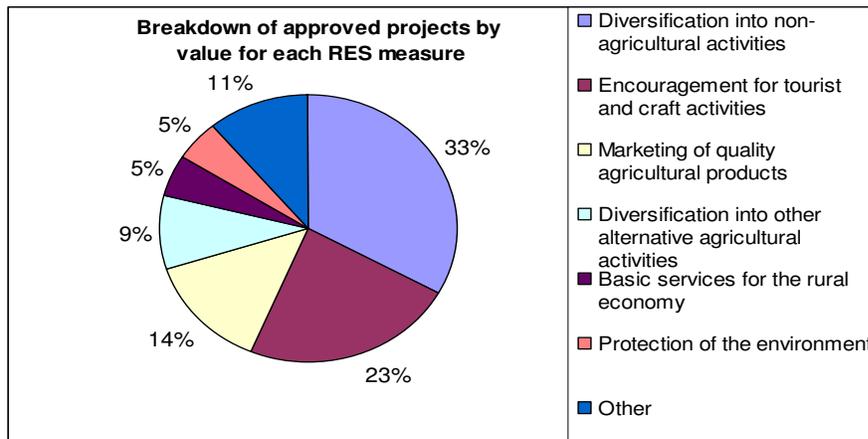
word of mouth start to raise awareness and disseminate the benefits available to successful applicants. Figure 1 illustrates the limited increase in eligible applications received.

**Figure 1: RES Applications and Approvals**



Uptake of RES funds is however disproportionate between its nine different measures as illustrated in Figure 2<sup>1</sup> which indicates the clear bias for agricultural diversification, tourism/craft and marketing of quality products.

**Figure 2: Breakdown of projects approved by RES measure**



Performance to date against RES measures, indicators and targets as detailed in Annex VII of the ERDP further indicates the difficulties experienced in stimulating uptake across all target segments. Table 1 below contains a summary of performance against selected targets and shows the contrast in progress made in

<sup>1/</sup>

Source ERDP Quarterly Report January to March 2003

achieving targets in measures like promotion of tourism and crafts against measures like provision of services for the rural economy.

**Table 1: RES performance against selected targets**

Measure	Objective	Key Indicator	% achieved
ii	Diversification into non-agricultural activities	No. Projects	45.80%
iii	Setting up farm relief / management	No. Business Benefiting	344.08%
iv	Marketing of quality agricultural products	No. Businesses participating	141.88%
v	Basic services for the rural economy	No. of beneficiaries	4.63%
vi	Renovation and development of villages	No. of beneficiaries	10.12%
vii	Diversification into other agricultural activities	No. new enterprises supported	15.88%
viii	Agricultural water resource management	No. businesses supported	26.70%
ix	Development / improvement of infrastructure	No of businesses benefiting	8.89%
x	Encouragement for tourist and craft activities	Tourism/craft enterprises supported	52.97%
xi	Protection of environment etc	No. projects supported	7.51%

The unique characteristics of the RES influence both how it is delivered and how potential and actual applicants perceive it. Knowledge of these characteristics provides a useful backdrop to the strategic issues facing the promotion and facilitation of the scheme outlined in this report.

RES applications are assessed against the schemes multiple objectives. Proposed projects are subjected to detailed analysis including how they contribute to the economic, social and environmental objectives of the ERDP, whether they are sustainable, what form of additionality they offer, whether the applicants can demonstrate the ability to manage and deliver the project and if the proposed projects are economically viable, represent value for money and need grant aid to achieve their objectives. To ensure that applications for a scheme with a broad range of objectives can be objectively assessed it is unavoidable that comprehensive and detailed information will be required with each application and applications be reviewed by skilled professionals.

The RES offers the opportunity for often substantial grants to be given to a broad range of rural enterprises from private commercial firms to community groups. The application process therefore reflects Defra's requirement to be able to comparatively assess a broad range of applications from a wide range of target applicants and designed to deliver a range of projects with different economic, social or environmental goals.

EU funding of the RES means that EU regulations on state aid are applicable. As a result Defra is obliged to request information with each application that is additional to that required solely for the purpose of appraisal of applications.

The RES seeks to identify the best use of public funds to meet its objectives through competition at a regional level. The RES, unlike many schemes available for the same beneficiaries, judges the merit of each application against other applications

received by the RAP at the same time. While the promotion of competition for grants is an effective strategy to ensure best use of public funds, competition inevitably acts as a disincentive to some applicants who are unable or unwilling to invest in the preparation of an application without greater certainty of it being successful.

Furthermore, analysis of the scheme must be informed by an understanding of Defra's need to ensure that the substantial investments of public funding delivered through RES grants to beneficiaries, including purely commercial organisations, represents the best use of public funds.

## 3 Promotion of the Rural Enterprise Scheme

Defra regional offices use a wide range of different promotional strategies developed at local level. These include adverts, publications of case studies, word of mouth, journals and intermediary organisations. Promotion appears to be most effective when given on a one-to-one basis, although events may be a way of raising awareness and creating the opportunity for one-to-one interaction. Publications in the agricultural press are also a significant source of information for many clients. Table 2 provides a brief summary by area of the perceived most effective promotional methods.

**Table 2: Regional perceptions of most effective promotional methods**

Region	Method		
North East	Clinics	Media	Business Link
Yorkshire & Humberside	Holding of RES workshops	Attending events	Partnerships
East	Word of mouth	Partnerships	Newsletters
South East	Clinics	Good news stories	Farm - visits
South West	Clinics	Partnerships	Advertisements
West Midlands	Word of mouth	Mail drop	Forums & workshops
East Midlands	Events & conferences	Farm visits	Clinics
North West	Partner organisations	Events / conferences	Advertisements

In general intermediaries such as agents, other public sector bodies and private sector companies are seen as an effective tool to promote the scheme. Consultants and facilitators are an important source of information to many businesses that take the advice of known and trusted people who already understand the nature of their enterprise. In total 44 percent of all respondents had heard about the RES through these channels. Many RDS staff provide training to various intermediaries on the RES allowing them to promote and market the scheme on behalf of Defra. A majority of RDS staff interviewed reported that this was a cost effective mechanism for increasing awareness.

However the use of intermediaries can present potential conflicts of interest resulting in applications that are geared more towards the intermediary's objectives rather than those of the RES. For example, 'piggy backing' RES promotion on events and workshops facilitated by other organisations may restrict the types of clients reached.

In general there is a significant lack of targeting within all of the promotional activities pursued. Agricultural trade journals, word of mouth and attendance at events appears to focus on potential applicants from the agricultural sector. At the same time the majority of those who heard about the RES through intermediaries reported that they had done so through agricultural related organisations such as the Farm Business Advisory Service providers and the NFU. Table 3 below presents how respondents hear about RES.

**Table 3: How respondents heard about RES**

Source	Number using this source	Percentage
Defra (workshops, talks, informal conversations)	10	33%
Press	7	23%
Facilitators	6	20%
Specialist /membership organisations	5	17%
Word of mouth/other farmers	3	10%
Solicitors and accountants	2	7%
Don't know	3	10%

(Note: Six enterprises identified more than one source of the idea to apply)

From the research conducted it would appear that other groups such as community groups, tourism entrepreneurs and environmentalists have limited exposure to the RES. Some organisations advising social enterprises and community projects did not know about the RES or felt it inappropriate for their clients and had therefore not been promoting it. These include some of the local authority funding officers and some of the Rural Community Councils. Many Defra regional offices did not prioritise the promotion of the scheme to these target groups and had 'assumed' that they would hear about the RES through mass media stories and radio broadcasts. While these methods of promotion will certainly reach a broad audience the publication of agricultural based case studies (used in the main by most Defra regional offices) will tend to alienate these groups and discourage applications. At the same time best practice in social marketing clearly suggests that promotional campaigns should be responsive to the specific characteristics of the target group.

Many respondents felt that the scheme was not interested in assisting established businesses to expand or change. It is believed that RES funding is just as important but sometimes denied for businesses which have been trading for two to three years in favour of funding start-ups.

In general, promotional literature is provided by the Defra head office. With no financial resources the regional offices use this generic material to promote the scheme with almost no adaptations to specific regional circumstances. This approach does not allow the regional offices to respond to their target groups needs and further results in the increased alienation of specific groups. In addition some of the promotional tools used by Defra are out of date. In April 2003, the National Website, for example, still contained the MAFF logo almost certainly acting as a barrier to some potential applications. A lack of flexibility in being able to develop and maintain local web sites constrains the use of this effective promotional channel.

The promotional material used and applications forms provided (specifying the rules and regulations) were also criticised by some groups who thought that it was over complicated, difficult to understand and threatening. Simplifying the application forms and producing forms that are specifically geared towards marginalised groups would be a good first step in encouraging applications from smaller farmers and different target groups.

Regional offices employed various strategies to manage their promotional activities. Some used RES co-ordinating bodies and/or a Marketing and Promotions Group, others had a designated promotions and marketing manager within the office while others left it to the responsibility of each individual advisor. With RDS offices

commonly being structured geographically this means that sectoral targeting is weak. In addition the lack of 'management' for promotion often means that lessons learned elsewhere are not translated into practice at the local level. Table 4 below presents an overview of the general management characteristics of promotional activities within regional offices.

**Table 4: Overview of general management characteristics of promotional activities within local offices**

Regions	Marketing & Promotions Group	Regional Communication Scheme	In house promotion manager	Individual advisers solely resp.
North East	x			
Yorkshire & Humberside		x		
East			x	
South East	x			
South West				x
West Midlands				x
East Midlands			x	
North West				x

Promotional planning, monitoring and evaluation was weak within all of the regional offices with no specified marketing campaigns and/or targets and few methods to identify successful campaigns or practices.

## Recommendations

- The capacity of RDS publicity and promotions group require further development and support.
- Defra staff would benefit from training in *marketing*, not just communication/publicity.
- The RES requires a defined marketing strategy with targets and indicators. This would require clarification on the types of enterprises to be supported and the overall purpose of the RES.
- Promotion of the scheme would be enhanced by regionalised and sector specific promotional materials being available.
- Application forms should be simplified and specific forms produced for targeted groups.
- A wider range of intermediaries should be used, particularly those that are used by those enterprises not applying to the RES such as accountants, solicitors and Rural Community Councils.
- At both national and regional levels, the impact of promotional activities on awareness, interest, desire and action within all segments targeted by the RES should be actively monitored and evaluated.
- It is recommended that promotional materials be designed in partnership with potential clients.

## 4 Facilitation of the Rural Enterprise Scheme

Facilitation is defined as<sup>2</sup> 'Capacity building activities', 'Specific help to individual businesses seeking to access funding streams ('handholding and form-filling') and 'Follow-through support to recipients of grant aid.' It covers a wide range of services and includes relatively 'hands-off' services such as the provision of explanatory notes accompanying the application forms, telephone conversations and/or informal meetings, as well as relatively 'hands-on' services such as the preparation of a business plan or application form by an intermediary.

Facilitation for applicants of the RES is perceived as crucial to ensure good quality applications. Good quality applications are taken to mean those that directly respond to the RES's aims and objectives, contain all information required and specifically assist the RES to achieve its targets in relation to all beneficiary groups covered by the scheme. At present the quality of applications submitted varies significantly from region to region. In the South East for example 50 percent of applications are considered to be of good quality and awarded grants, in Yorkshire and Humberside only 35 percent of applications are considered as good quality with 20 percent being classified as poor. Although these types of statistics were not available for all regions quantitative data collected during the study suggests that the quality of the RES applications in all regions needs to be improved.

Actual and potential applicants stress the importance of receiving accurate and quality advice for first-time phone enquiries. Help-desks should be staffed by those with knowledge of not just the RES but a range of ERDP and other schemes.

When questioned about perceived key success factors regional offices were able to identify a number of issues that they felt were crucial in facilitating good quality applications. These included:

- close contact between the facilitators and the RDS office to ensure that the facilitators fully understand policies and areas of interest for the Regional Appraisal Panel;
- trust, experience and a long working relationship between facilitators and RDS staff;
- provision of training for agents and facilitators to ensure good quality applications;
- provision of clinics that provide one-on-one advice to applications making submissions;
- the use of RES funded facilitators to specifically focus on the facilitation of good quality proposals to the RDS office;

<sup>2/</sup>

Janet Dwyer June 2002

- the use of an independent web site run by a facilitator to provide on-line support; and
- regular internal monitoring of applications from facilitators to review quality.

Both the regional offices and the applicants reported that access to facilitation services was extremely beneficial. There is little doubt that these services; encourage those who lack the confidence or skills to submit an application; result in the submission of better quality applications (in general); produce more innovative and demanding projects and cut the level of bureaucracy for the client.

Those facilitators who work closely with the RDS provide, in general, good facilitation services that result in good quality applications. Close contact, trust and experience were highlighted as key success factors in this process. The provision of training for agents and other facilitators can assist in the development of these relationships and help to ensure that RES aims, objectives and targets are clearly understood and communicated. In addition the use of RES co-ordination bodies has also been identified as an effective vehicle through which quality applications can be facilitated and ultimately submitted.

Research suggests that those who benefit the most from access to facilitation services are those involved within the agricultural sector and in particular farmers. While it is noted that the RES represents the main instrument through which farmers can be helped to adjust or reorient their business in order to take advantage of business opportunities the literature specifically notes that 'you do not necessarily have to be a farmer to benefit from the scheme'. 'Those involved in local or speciality foods, traditional craft skills, maintaining local buildings or managing local community initiatives<sup>3</sup> are also eligible to apply.

The lack of quality applications from particular target groups such as community groups may be linked to the lack of awareness of appropriate facilitation services. Only two of the five interviewed community enterprises receiving support had had facilitation support and this was less comprehensive than the support offered to other enterprises. Given the reported link between accessing facilitation services, identifying opportunities and submitting good quality proposals it is perhaps not surprising that the RES is failing to attract good quality proposals from some target groups. In addition community groups and tourism and marketing groups were reported to have a limited understanding of the RES suggesting that these groups have an unmet need and demand for facilitation services.

Levels of support provided by Defra vary significantly from region to region and from individual to individual. Given the type of expertise of Defra staff it is not surprising that the majority of respondents who praised Defra support were from the farming sector. Representatives from both community groups and the tourism sector both stated that support from Defra was limited, attributed to the lack of expertise on these sectors within the RDS.

This lack of consistency and policy on the levels of support provided could potentially cause problems in accountability and transparency. Since the facilitation services

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<sup>3/</sup>

Rural Enterprise Scheme 'Guidance notes for applicants' Part 1. Information about the scheme and its operation

provided range from individual to individual this could allow some to question the fairness of support given.

The costs involved in accessing facilitation services varied significantly. Some clients received services for free while others paid substantial amounts to intermediaries to complete the application (up to GBP2,000). For some clients the cost in accessing services (where these are not provided for free) can act as a significant barrier. Those groups who cannot afford to pay the up-front costs and/or access free services are at a disadvantage given the reported benefits of using facilitation services. Given that 70 percent of all applicants interviewed stated that they would not have applied to the RES without facilitation many of those groups who could benefit from the scheme but who cannot afford to pay for facilitation are currently being excluded. This means that RES is potentially missing out on innovative ideas and initiatives from other sectors of the community. This research also shows that with facilitation applicants are more likely to have gone ahead with their projects without the RES grant, suggesting that existing facilitation is not being targeted at those enterprises that need it most.

Monitoring and evaluation of facilitation services provided is extremely weak. Although some regional offices do 'rank' applications these are not broken down by target group or type of facilitation service provided and are not evaluated against targets. The use of appropriate spreadsheets to record the number of quality applications received from each target group by facilitator would be a first step. Collecting this very basic information would allow the RDS to identify good quality facilitators, and select best practices sharing lessons learned for future strategies.

## Recommendations

- RDS should develop closer working relationships with a few intermediaries covering all of the target groups (holding training sessions to keep them abreast of targets and policies etc).
- Facilitation services should be designed in partnership with clients allowing them to be designed to respond directly to clients needs.
- The RDS should be allowed to make recommendations on the use of the selected high performing intermediaries.
- The advice and service given to first-time telephone enquirers should be prioritised and strengthened at the regional level.
- More RES grants should be provided to co-ordinating bodies who are specifically responsible for facilitating the RES amongst different target groups.
- Facilitators should be identified and targeted to cover all marginalised groups. They should be briefed on common constraints facing applicants and the scheme.
- It is recommended that a fund(s) for groups who cannot cover the cost of facilitation services (using a short application form to assess need) be

established, for example farmers who need business plans or community groups who need to think about sustainability.

- Defra's policy on the level of facilitation support provided by Defra / RDS requires further clarification.
- RES literature, including case studies, and different application forms should be available that relate to and are relevant for marginalised groups.
- Regular reviews, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to identify high performing facilitators and to review progress.
- A wider range of intermediaries should be used particularly those that are used by those enterprises not applying to RES such as accountants, solicitors and rural community councils.
- It is recommended to improve coordination with other forms of support, particularly in Objective 2 areas.

## 5 The RES Application Process

The length of time to receive a response from the RAP varies significantly from region to region and can be as much as 6 months. In addition the length of the time taken to prepare an application form, formulate a *business* plan and collect 'additional' information (such as quotes for construction) can take up to 18 months. This presents a significant problem for many clients who need to plan and mobilise resources quickly to take advantage of business opportunities. Initiatives to reduce the waiting times either through 'fast tracking' smaller projects or holding RAP meetings on a monthly basis would respond better to clients needs, while a reduction in the amount of information required would reduce the length of the application process. A clearer policy on 'turn around' times for applications and amendments in the application process could potentially result in more submissions.

The need to cover significant up-front costs within the RES also acts as a barrier to some applicants. In particular the smaller farmers, entrepreneurs and/or community, environmental and forestry groups with limited access to financial resources find these costs difficult to cover. This results in a reduced number of applications from these groups negatively impacting on the RES to achieve targets and to fund innovative interventions from these groups.

Responses given from the applicants and facilitators interviewed suggest that the criterion for the selection of applicants is not clear. While some insisted that social benefits were not weighted appropriately others felt that they were not prioritised enough with preference being given to those projects with significant financial returns. A clearer indication on the criteria used to evaluate and select applicants may clarify the selection process and the perceptions of both clients and facilitators.

### Recommendations

- The submission of a concept paper, evaluated within 1 month of submission, would potentially reduce the amount of unsuccessful applications and allow clients to 'test' ideas before preparing the full application.
- A guaranteed turned around time should be established for applicants of 2 months following the best practices of the Countryside Agency.
- A fund(s) should be established for those with limited resources to cover up-front costs.
- More information should be provided on selection criteria and relevant weighting.
- A fast-track application process should be developed.

- The number of RAP assessors in each region should be increased to allow RAP to meet on an ad hoc basis when a threshold number of applications is received.

# 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of the preceding analysis the core conclusions and recommendations of the review are summarised as follows.

**1. There is some flexibility in how the objectives of RES are interpreted by Defra staff, those facilitating applications and applicants themselves. This can lead to confusion on how the scheme should be targeted and how applications should be assessed. In particular there is confusion over the relative emphasis that should be given to agricultural or non agricultural enterprises.**

**2. While national level communications activities do play a crucial role in raising and maintaining general awareness of the RES, converting customer awareness into action requires the delivery of regionally appropriate promotional activities through multiple channels to reach a wide range of audiences.**

**Recommendation:** A more strategic approach to promoting the RES is required at a national level, which recognises the need to emphasise the wider responsibilities of Defra with respect to rural development. In addition, each region should be required to develop a plan for promotion, with an appropriate resource allocation. There is a particular need to promote the scheme to eligible groups outside the farming community. Generic RES promotional material should be produced for sector specific and disadvantaged groups, which illustrates the variety of types of project eligible for support through the scheme. At a regional level clearer line responsibility for promotion should be established and funding made available for innovative and targeted promotion of activities.

**3. The selection of a lead regional office to improve inter-regional learning and provide practical support for regional marketing activities is commended. However, the roles, responsibilities and support available from London and RDS communications are not fully understood or utilised. Resource constraints on support services is a key constraint.**

**Recommendation:** Clarify and communicate the role, responsibilities and support services available to regional and local offices from the ERDP Publicity and Promotion team, the Communications Directorate and RDS Communications. Adequately resource bodies with responsibility to support promotional activities.

**4. Promotion of the RES does not include measurable targets corresponding to uptake of grants from full range of target applicants. An improved MIS for the RES is being developed which will improve targeting and overall scheme performance.**

**Recommendation:** Targeting strategies and corresponding management information systems to include targets and indicators for delivery of appropriate promotional activities for client segments. In introducing any future scheme Defra should ensure that an appropriate MIS is in place to enable appropriate and sufficient

data to be cost effectively captured and accessed for monitoring purposes on a harmonised basis across the country.

**5. Practitioners Workshops and other inter-regional opportunities to share lessons learned and best practice should be strengthened. However, at present these initiatives do lead to the cascading of ideas and resources through regional offices.**

**Recommendation:** Practitioners Workshops should be supported and developed. They should result in action plans with measurable outputs to ensure lessons are widely shared. Workshops on promotion (and facilitation) involving regional and local level RES staff should be held and findings made available to all RES staff.

**6. Many Defra / RDS regional and local staff acknowledge a lack of experience in marketing and promotion of grant schemes but express significant interest in training and support to improve the strategy and delivery of promotional activities.**

**Recommendation:** Produce guidelines and where possible make accessible training on the design and management of marketing and promotional activities with particular emphasis on monitoring and evaluation.

**7. Attitudes within Defra / RDS towards customer-facing 'business' practices and the need to improve communication appear to be changing for the better. Embedding a marketing philosophy and approaches will accelerate this.**

**Recommendations:** Recruitment of staff with commercial marketing experience and increased use of standard marketing tools and approaches to define not only communication and promotion strategies based on understanding of 'customer' need.

**8. RES funded co-ordinating bodies present an effective and responsive means to facilitate quality applications and reduce pressures on RDS staff therefore freeing them to focus attention on promoting and mobilising interest from target groups otherwise underserved by the RES.**

**Recommendation:** Increase use of coordinating bodies for both promotion and facilitation of RES.

**9. Many existing facilitation structures are historically and culturally linked to the provision of advice for farmers. Understanding of non-farm target groups and networks is often limited, as is ability to deliver appropriate advice for non-farm initiatives.**

**Recommendation:** Identify and target facilitators to promote and provide facilitation services for non-farm applicants. It may be beneficial if these services are delivered by organisations with existing networks and insights into target non-farm groups and not 'bolted on' to existing facilitation services.

**10. Available guidelines and information resources do not match client need.**

**Recommendation:** Guidelines, information and signposting to resources should be made available to applicants, particularly covering market research and the ability to

produce business plans sufficient to enable the viability of projects for which RES support is sought to be assessed . For non-agricultural groups RES literature should be made more 'accessible.'

**11. For many non-agriculture groups up front costs act as a barrier to applying. This disincentive deters many of the smaller farmers, entrepreneurs and community/environmental groups from underserved RES sectors.**

**Recommendation:** Investigate creation of small regional funds to encourage and support feasibility studies for innovative initiatives with social or environmental impact.

**12. The fast-track pilot project presents an opportunity to reduce demand on RDS staff and free resources for more targeted promotion and facilitation activities.**

**Recommendation:** Mainstream use of fast-track approach for smaller applications.

**13. The interval between RAP meetings deters applicants and creates periodic bottlenecks in RDS workload pre-RAP.**

**Recommendation:** Create larger pools of RAP members who can meet on ad hoc basis when critical mass of applications are received.

**14. The RES application forms are not suited to the needs of community or other not for profit initiatives which fall under the scheme.**

**Recommendation:** Review existing application forms and develop and disseminate good practice materials to encourage applications from non-farm individuals and groups.