

Rural Opinion Advocacy and Development (ROAD) 2018/19

Maintaining UK Rural Links with Europe

This Report sets out the work that was carried out and achievements of the UK ROAD Project.

It does not attempt to make assumptions or provide any detailed analysis.



Purpose of Project

To bring together ERP partners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in order to demonstrate commitment to European relations and to enable a voice in Europe. The partners were to consider the situation of rural development post-Brexit and future working relations with other EU Countries. It was intended that a fringe event at the Scottish Rural Parliament in November 2018 would bring together ERP partners to discuss possible policies and solutions which would be shared during workshops across the UK and discussed with partner ERP Countries.

Summary of Project

Representatives from the 4 UK Countries and Republic of Ireland held a Skype Conference to agree the process for this project.

- 1. Given the short timescale for the work which had to be completed by 31 March 2019 it was agreed to mirror the Scottish Rural Action Brexit Project survey and workshops to gather information from rural communities.**

Scottish Rural Action's survey was adjusted with input from all partners and, using Survey Monkey, created for use by all participating countries. It received 171 responses from across England, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland. It was used to find out how people felt about Brexit and its perceived impacts, their understanding of the funding their communities had received from the EU and opinions on the future of funding.

The survey identified 3 areas causing most concern as

- 27% said a loss of funding
- 20% said trade
- 13% said citizen's rights (for all UK & EU) and Rules & Regulations came in at 8%

Comments on this question included the destruction of community unity, being outside a forward-thinking collective, isolation from European decision making, loss of identity as a European and the social, economic and political effect on Ireland.

Despite this some opportunities were identified:

- Britain will not be governed by EU laws; we can develop in our own way
- There will be more opportunities for small business and greater confidence in UK investment
- New trade links can be created

Impacts at local level scored evenly with direct support to community groups, local housing and the environment leading slightly. Farmers, young people and residents generally will be most affected by BREXIT but there was a comment that any impact would be neutral.

Participants felt their knowledge of funding from the EU was average or good with the best support coming from enterprise agencies and local authorities. They overwhelmingly wanted CLLD activity that was stimulated by EU funding to continue and were most familiar with the ERDF, LEADER and ESF funds.

Overall maintaining links is seen as important because we are European but will be outside the EU. Links are important for sustaining trade (imports and exports) and tourism, maintaining our diverse culture and historical connections and continuing to share knowledge and skills and learn from European partners. It is important to maintain the links and continue to work in partnership for the benefit of education, employment and trade and we need to build on the networking and links that are already in place. To do this we need to try and ensure a strong infrastructure, co-operate and share experiences and keep abreast of what is taking place in Europe. We can use technology to educate the public on the importance of co-working and sharing information.

Links must be maintained at all levels by everyone; Government, Local Authorities, communities and individuals. Government needs to provide the leadership to maintain the links and build on the relationships that have already been formed. Rural movements in the UK and Ireland have a role to play as do all national and international networks and academics.

The challenge is how we can do this!

2. Workshops were carried out in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland

The following questions were used to create discussion.

Why is it important to maintain links with Europe?

What kind of links do we need to maintain?

How can we do that?

Who needs to do it?

3. Scottish Rural Parliament Fringe Event

The Scottish Rural Parliament was an opportunity to promote the work of the European Rural Parliament. We circulated information about the role and activities of the ERP in the 200 delegate packs. The workshop held on 15th November was well attended and was the first group to tackle the 4 questions. The answers summarised below reflected the discussions that we would continue to see across future workshops.

15 th November 2019 Scottish Rural Parliament			
Why is it important to maintain links with Europe?	What kind of links do we need to maintain?	How can we do that?	Who needs to do it?
Because we all learn from experiences through projects, administration, peer 2 peer, arts, universities etc	Partnerships – EU Countries want to work with us	Look at what other Countries are doing.	Other national and international networks e.g. Nat Trust
Joint working	Develop links with our closest EU Neighbour - Ireland	Use existing links, networks and relationships.	Rural movements in the UK and Ireland including ourselves
Different models and systems	Educational	Network across UK and Ireland.	Academic networks and journals at all levels
Solidarity	Employment	Ensure strong infrastructure.	Politicians as enablers ‘outward looking’ however not solely
Inspiration and interest	Trade	Town twinning – partnering between municipalities.	Smaller local grassroots organisations (place based)

Non-government networks are important	Farming and Fishing (fresh food from within Europe – Countries outside EU are further away)	Share co-operation experiences.	
Stimulate local economy and benefit our community	Community Led Development (rural needs can require specialist support)	Increase opportunities and reduce barriers (face up to them and be resilient).	
Mutual understanding	Scientific research and development	Keep abreast of what is going on in Europe.	
Identity (critical) because we consider ourselves European		Continue the work we are already doing.	
Trade		Cascade opportunities to embrace Europe for all.	
Cultural links e.g. (Wales with Brittany)			
Shared movement		ERP is the obvious voice but need more conduits to spread across UK & Ireland.	
Almost half voted to remain		Mutual understanding	
		Continuity of engagement which takes time	
Diverse culture/richness & culture		Encouraging generosity and sharing ideas	
Overcoming prejudice to keep peace		Scientific research & Development	
Sharing rural best practice and learning from neighbours		Skills/drain & transferable skills	
Investing in communities through assets		Empower citizens	
To avoid risk of others not valuing the UK.			

4. Partner Workshop Feedback

Feedback from the workshops is provided in the following Partner Appendices

Appendix 1	Rural Community Network NI
Appendix 2	Irish Rural Link
Appendix 3	PLANED
Appendix 4	Scottish Rural Action '21st Century Clearances: What does Brexit mean for Rural Scotland'
Appendix 5	ACRE

Results of our ROAD Project

1. The UK ERP partners have joined with Republic of Ireland and set up the UK & Ireland Rural Network. This Network will allow each of our Countries to better understand how we can share information between our organisations and ultimately with our European partners.
2. The project has confirmed that all sectors agree on the importance and necessity of maintaining links between the UK and Europe post Brexit.
3. We reached over 385 rural people during our project.
4. Contributions were made by ERP Partner Countries: Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Republic of Ireland, and Netherlands. Kosovo and Iceland expressed interest but were unable to join the Zoom meeting.
5. We have ideas and suggestions for how links can be maintained which we will take to the ERP Gathering and use to discuss and create an implementation plan.

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ACRE 2019