



Rural Cultural Strategy

Independent Study Report*



Arts Minister Ed Vaizey MP, with rural leaders; Michael Hart Chairman RCF, and Alistair Davy Chairman UK Hill Farming Cultural Initiative at the launch of the Creative Rural Communities report, House of Commons, Feb. 2010

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*To be read in conjunction with the Creative Rural Communities report (July 2010)

Executive Summary:

On 20 December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on culture and development, which emphasizes the important contribution of culture for sustainable development.

Context

In July 2010 the Rural Cultural Forum (RCF) www.ruralculture.org.uk produced a report, *Creative Rural Communities* (CRC), that sets out why a Rural Cultural Strategy (RCS) is needed and the form it might take. The report was intended to stimulate and inform public debate and to provide the basis for RCF, statutory agencies, and other interested parties to produce a feasible strategic plan in relation to culture, creativity and rural communities. <http://www.ruralculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RCS_web.pdf>

At present there is no formal Rural Cultural Strategy RCS, though the need for one is clear: in a complex and dynamic policy discourse that embraces rural, cultural and economic development, environmental sustainability, and planning issues, it is essential to set direction, co-ordinate initiatives, and sustain and enhance practice. RCF maintains that the role of strategy is to align policy with practice, and believes that the RCS must be based on evidence (economic, social, health, educational and environmental).

The RCF has two main strategic aims; first, to increase the size and vitality of the rural creative economy and, second, to promote the rural sector's contribution to the richness and diversity of the nation's artistic life, cultural identity and world leadership in the arts. In the absence of a formally adopted RCS, RCF has actively pursued three campaigns: 'Cultural Entitlement', advocating fairness and equity in rural and urban cultural funding; 'Cultural Efficacy', concerning 'paying our way and getting things done'; and 'Cultural Responsibility', about the relationship between culture and environmental sustainability.

Content

This Independent Report interrogates three questions, the answers to which provide further evidence in support of the adoption of a RCS.

Q: Is there an urban bias operating within strategic national arts and cultural funding policy?

A: Over the past fifteen years, arts policy and cultural funding have been preoccupied with the discourse of urbanism, and in serving the needs of the urban creative industries and post-industrial urban regeneration. In spite of many welcome initiatives, rural funding for culture remains piecemeal and under-coordinated.

Recommendation: Rural cultural funding should be addressed in order to i) ensure fairness and equality of access to culture for rural communities (ii) sustain the already significant rural creative economy; and (iii) enable and encourage the professional cultural sector to help communities (urban and rural), and government, achieve the national policy goals of full economic recovery and environmental sustainability.

Q: Why is a national rural cultural strategy necessary at this time, will it meet the needs of creative rural communities and artists, and does it also fit with other relevant Government and stakeholder policy agendas?

A: The RCS is vital. It is needed in order to address both traditional policy concerns such as economic development, health and education, some of which have become particularly acute, and also to confront emergent issues that cut across traditional boundaries such as the high-level environmental problem of climate change. The need to produce a strategy *now* is made more compelling by changes in context, including reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the continuing growth of the creative economy that will provide more rural jobs and generate more tourism in the future.

Recommendation: Co-ordination is essential, and the RCS must specifically align with a range of established and identified priorities in ACE, DEFRA, BIS, DCMS, DECC, and DCLG. In turn, those Departmental and NDPB agendas need the RCS, because it will clarify how their agendas can be met, and will then help to meet them. The RCS must be designed to fulfil the aspirations of rural communities and artists; if it were not, it would fail both in its primary purpose and in its desire to meet the objectives that flow from the successful implementation of policy.

Q: What interim processes are needed prior to the introduction of a RCS for taking forward some of the practical proposals contained in the CRC report?

A: In the absence of a formal RSC, a framework is needed in order to maintain momentum and to realise practical projects. The scope of such projects needs to be realistic so that they match available capacity.

Recommendations: the Rural Cultural Strategy working group (RCSWG) should implement a five-year (2013 – 2018) research and development programme that would both initiate and underpin a RCS. The R&D should begin with a one year study of three of the rural arts development strands proposed in the CRC report: the rural biennale, research into the creative rural economy, and a rural arts/documentary professional development initiative. To complement the R&D, three pilot working groups composed of academics, artists, rural workers and others should be set up in order to develop and interrogate the proposed RCS, and also to explore the possibility of forming a new Rural Cultural Agency.

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Rural Cultural Strategy

1. Focus of the study:

The organisation of this report follows the main research question headings as set out in the Consultancy Brief (Final) 25 October 2011, and as clarified in subsequent discussions with the Rural Cultural Forum [RCF] committee. In summary it was requested that the report should:

1. Comment on whether there might be an urban bias operating within strategic national arts and cultural funding policy and assess whether any such bias may have in any way disadvantaged rural communities, or made it more likely that bids from rural communities for strategic arts and culture-led regeneration projects would be assessed less favourably than bids from urban communities? What constructive and practical steps might be taken by the RCF to redress this situation?
2. Summarise the RCF's main arguments and proposals for a national Rural Cultural Strategy, as outlined in the Creative Rural Communities report¹ and examine key issues including: Why is a national rural cultural strategy necessary at this time? Will it meet the needs of rural communities and artists? Does it achieve a strategic fit with other relevant Government and stakeholder policy agendas?
3. Recommend an appropriate mechanism to take forward some of the practical proposals contained in the Creative Rural Communities report i.e. the Creative Rural Economy and Rural Biennale initiatives.

Reconnecting culture and rural development policy agendas

The Rural Cultural Forum, through its campaign initiatives, conferences, and production of the Creative Rural Communities report, has sought to generate a national debate and radical re-appraisal of the significance of culture and cultural activity for the future wellbeing and prosperity of rural communities and the agricultural economy. The RCF has consistently positioned analysis of the role of culture in rural communities in the context of mainstream national creative economy, environmental sustainability and arts and cultural policy discourses.

The Creative Rural Communities report advocates for a national rural cultural strategy that would:

(i) **Achieve** closer integration and alignment of current and future agricultural, environmental sustainability and rural development policy agenda with mainstream arts and cultural policy and strategy. This would ensure that the particular and distinctive needs and potential of rural communities and the agricultural economy are an integral element of the national arts, creative economy and cultural policy agenda and ensure that public investment is both equitable and can harnesses the full creative and entrepreneurial resources of all communities: urban and rural.

(ii) **Transform** common perceptions of the 'rural' and 'urban' as representing oppositional and divorced interests, where the rural is seen as marginal to major contemporary issues and characterized by economic, social and cultural underdevelopment in contrast to the 'urban', and challenging the notion that the rural consist primarily of consumers, as opposed to creative/productive classes. Further, to establish the distinctiveness *and* the synergy between rural and urban communities and the vital role of both in the national plan for economic recovery and environmental sustainability. This shift becomes all the more important in the context of current global economic, environmental and social upheaval. The RCF's proposal for new urban and rural creative partnerships for economic and environmental sustainability is a clear example of how this transformation could be delivered in practice.

¹ **Creative Rural Communities: A Proposal for a Rural Cultural Strategy** [2010] Rural Cultural Forum

(iii) **Demonstrate** that engagement with rural communities and the agricultural economy is also vital for the diversity, criticality, and resilience of the nation's artistic life, cultural identity and creative economies. New artistic, aesthetic, intellectual and ethical challenges, originating in the rural creative and agricultural economies and driven by the engagement of creative people in the specificity of rural communities, now provide challenging opportunities for the wider professional arts and cultural sector. This includes many new employment opportunities and arts audiences for urban artists, curators, new media and other cultural producers in rural areas.

(iv) **Maximise** the outcomes and impact for rural communities and the wider UK economy by revealing the 'hidden', or as yet unrecognised, ways in which the cultural, creative and aesthetic can also contribute to some of DEFRA's other mainstream policy objectives. These opportunities not only have direct benefit for rural communities but could also impact upon the attitudes and behaviours of people from urban communities through, for example, education and tourism. Examples include creative and imaginative farm diversification projects, arts-led rural cultural tourism, enhancing rural community social capital through cultural activity, expanding the creative rural economy, promoting innovation through culture and the arts in rural health, rural digital telecommunications, and other creative approaches to raising awareness and combating climate change, promoting biodiversity and other environmental sustainability initiatives in the countryside.

2. Is there an urban bias in strategic national arts and cultural funding policy?

Background papers supplied by the RCF, and comments contained in the preamble to the Creative Rural Communities report suggest that there still exists a perception within rural communities that they have not benefited fully from past and current strategic arts and culture led regeneration funding initiatives, including the National Lottery Arts programmes. It appears that most initiatives and resources have been targeted at urban communities and priority support for prestige arts-led urban regeneration projects.

Rural leaders continue to express concern about being 'culturally' excluded from mainstream arts and cultural policy discourse. As evidence of this they point to the exclusively urban focused nature and rhetoric of a range of recent major National Lottery arts and other government funded regeneration initiatives: the Urban Cultural Fund ACE/Millennium Commission 2004, Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008, UK City of Culture programme 2010, DECIBEL, ACE's cultural diversity programme 2011, the Liverpool, Folkestone, London Biennales and Manchester International Festivals. More recently, the UK Legacy Trust's Cultural Olympiad programme 2012 has also been felt to be also mainly urban focused in its support for arts projects.

However, within the limited scope of this report, it is not possible to evidence whether the RCF's claims or concerns are wholly valid. However it is clear when analysing the benefits and targeting of some recent strategic national and Lottery funded arts-led regeneration initiatives that rural communities have not been at all favoured in allocation of resources. The previous Government's priorities were also largely urban focused. Consequently, when the new National Lottery Arts funded programmes came on stream from about 1997 onwards, there was also a tendency to focus on urban cultural and arts-led civic regeneration initiatives. **It is clear that there has been a strong and on-going tendency for arts and cultural policy and funding over the past ten-fifteen years to be overwhelmingly preoccupied with the discourse of urbanism and in primarily serving the needs of the urban creative industries and post-industrial urban regeneration.**

Rural communities and artists based in rural areas have also benefited in many ways from other Arts Council England, Big Lottery and other National Lottery arts and heritage funding programmes over the same period. Nonetheless, rural community leaders and the RCF continue to be concerned about what they perceive to be an on-going imbalance within current arts and cultural strategic funding initiatives and policy priorities between the urban and the rural.

The present situation is considered unfair and disadvantageous to rural communities with the result that the particular cultural needs, artistic aspirations and creative economic potentials of rural communities are not being fully addressed or supported.

In light of the major economic, social and environmental problems now also confronting rural communities, the RCF are resolute that they will continue with their campaign to achieve a fairer more equitable distribution of future strategic National Lottery arts and ACE funded resources and recognition of the distinctive character, needs and potential of rural communities in the future framing of such cultural policy initiatives. This, in essence, is the core argument and rationale for the development of an independent strategic rural cultural investment programme. This is also an issue that the RCF could productively take up with its natural partners and advocates in Government: DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities as they have both the resources and statutory remit to tackle such questions.

The Coalition Government at some point in the future, might wish to review current national arts and cultural policy priorities and funding processes to ensure maximum return on public investment for the wellbeing and prosperity of all communities within the UK and in light of its stated commitment to:

- i. Ensure a greater degree of fairness and equality of access for rural communities to public funding resources and services
- ii. Expand the scope of national creative economy investment support to embrace and sustain the already significant rural creative economy contributions
- iii. Encourage the professional arts and cultural sector to do more to engage with and support communities, both urban and rural, and contribute to achievement of the Government's national policy goals of full economic recovery and environmental sustainability.

3. The necessity for a rural cultural strategy and potential strategic fit with other policy agendas

The RCF highlights in particular the potential benefits of increased engagement between the professional arts and cultural sector and rural communities, as noted above, as a key argument in support of its proposals for a national rural cultural strategy². However, there is a concern that the arts and cultural initiatives and funding currently being directed towards rural areas, whilst very welcome in the regions, have in the main been rather piecemeal and un-coordinated at national level with resultant loss of overall impact and failure to achieve maximum strategic added value.

This is a situation that the RCF believes, if allowed to continue, may well further undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of future arts and cultural investment for the creative rural economy and artists and communities in rural areas. This is not to ignore or undervalue the role of existing rural arts and rural touring agencies, the proposed ACE national touring scheme, or the wide range of professional art and curatorial initiatives that are now also active in rural areas such as Beaford Arts, the Falmouth Convention, Wying Arts, Grizedale Arts, Take Art, Aune Head Arts, Allenhead Arts, and many others. Arts Council support for these professional arts initiatives and organisations in rural areas is very welcome and will undoubtedly also benefit rural communities and artists in the longer term.

The RCF is also very aware that despite the economic downturn there continues to be an extraordinary proliferation of professional rural arts, crafts, architecture, theatre, arts festivals, design and other initiatives now active across country areas. This includes

² **Sustainable Cultures - Beyond the Rural** pp. 7 – 9, CRC report, 2010 cited above

many, as yet undocumented, creative rural community, farmer creatives and related creative rural SME initiatives. This activity both represents a major untapped creative rural economy resource and potential and is a sector that must also face and survive the challenge of the current uncertain economic climate. It is argued that a strategic national framework is therefore needed at this point to help mobilise and co-ordinate these and other emerging new rural creative capital ventures, and better direct currently unrealised or under-exploited creative potential in support of the Government's national policy agenda for agriculture diversification, rural regeneration, rural tourism, renewable energy and environmental sustainability in the countryside. These can be further summarised in five principle motivational agenda or objectives:

(a) Managing complexity and uncertainty; proliferation and generation

The proliferation of problems and radical changes now confronting rural communities, due to the economic downturn, climate change and other demographic pressures, require the generation of imaginative, inspirational and radical creative new solutions. The cultural sector has a major part to play in achieving positive outcomes. For example, through an imaginative and sustained critical engagement with these challenging new rural 'creative fields' that may also be attractive for future economic, social, environmental and cultural policy research work and growth

(b) Expanding the creative rural economy to support further national growth

There is a compelling need to find new ways of **expanding** and realizing the optimum of the creative rural sector's potential contribution to the national creative economy, from its current base estimated at around £500 million per annum towards £1 billion per annum by 2015; **pioneering** the creative rural economy in new areas and promoting other innovative urban-rural creative partnerships for economic recovery.

(c) Achieving longer-term urban/rural environmental sustainability goals

A rural cultural strategy would be the means to further:

Promote new urban rural cultural partnerships for environmental sustainability
Enable increased collaboration between government agencies such as DEFRA and DECC on strategic environmental sustainability and climate change initiatives
Address other creative, imaginative and deliverable solutions in the context of renewable energy, carbon neutral targets, waste management/recycling, and bio-diversity challenges

(d) Generating new audiences, experimental rural art forms, and challenging contexts for the arts in rural areas

A rural cultural strategy would be the means to:

Promote important new employment opportunities for professional artists, media and cultural producers in rural areas
Generate challenging new critical contexts for experimental contemporary art practice and curatorship, including the proposed rural biennale initiative
Inspire emergence of a new rural aesthetic and professional rural arts genres
Stimulate the theoretical, arts research and pedagogical coordinates for pioneering study and dissemination of best practice in art and agriculture, the new rural arts, artfarms, and new field art projects

(e) Inspiring a new spirit of rural community self-confidence and creative entrepreneurship; investing in farmer creatives and rural cultural capital

A rural cultural strategy would also be the means to:

Empower farmers and rural communities to mobilise their full resources of natural creativity and generate new rural cultural and social capital
Utilise the arts in support of innovative and joined up cross sector rural healthcare, education, communications, and environmental initiatives in the countryside
Encourage a renewed rural self-help spirit and a new range of rural community-based creative entrepreneurial and SME activity e.g. rural crafts, textile, arts, design and digital creative industries projects.

In addition, a strategic approach now would include an integral and robust evaluation process to monitor progress and generate verifiable statistical research data, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform the development of future pioneer creative rural economy initiatives. It would also enable DEFRA, DCMS and ACE policy makers, as well as other Government and public sector agencies such as BIS, DECC, DCLG, to better assess and target future funding resources and support for rural initiatives, and explore other potential new policy interfaces aimed at connecting up future arts and cultural work with rural development, agriculture and environmental sustainability agendas.

The rural cultural strategy would also engage the private sector and business community as natural partners in all its future enterprises. Including fostering the growth of new rural SMEs and other commercially viable cultural activity in rural communities.

3.1 Addressing other relevant policy contexts and agendas

The report also addresses other potential additional areas of future strategic policy fit. These are already thoroughly documented and summarised in the main body of the Creative Rural Communities report. In particular, the report appraises policy initiatives currently being implemented by DCMS, DEFRA, CRC and Arts Council England.

However in commissioning this study the RCF recognises that, if it is to make further progress, it must be able to evidence strong alignment to Government national policy agendas and demonstrate clearly to Government and other stakeholders the outcomes and impact of a Rural Cultural Strategy, not only for the arts and cultural sector but also critically for the national economy and related over-arching social, health and environmental sustainability policy objectives.

The RCF will also want to consider the future resources and organisational capacities that it will need in order to deliver on such 'policy sensitive' objectives. It will also need to formulate an interim research and development programme, with a realistic timetable and sound business plan, as a pre-requisite to taking forward any future strategic vision or programme. Recommendations for this process are included in Section 6 below.

3.1.1 Correlation with DCLG, National and Local Government agenda/LEPs

At the Centre for Rural Economy, John Shucksmith argues that DCLG proposals on planning reform will favour rural areas by putting more power in local hands. The implications are vast. For the first time since 1945, he argues, 'jobs and housing will be put before the visual and amenity aspect of the countryside'. However he notes that the necessary advocacy and negotiation skills may not currently be in place to ensure the 'community right to build' brings benefit to the community. He suggests that more clearly defined objectives will be helpful in making unambiguous approaches to national and local government, particularly if the RCF gives consideration to the way it articulates its relationship with rural areas at national, regional, community and Local Government levels.

The changes initiated by the Public Bodies Bill (2011), specifically the absorption of the functions of the Commission for Rural Communities into the Rural Communities Policy Unit of DEFRA, will also require a reappraisal of the potential future role of the RCF, especially if 'culture-proofing' becomes a part of its strategy.

Rural planning experts are as yet divided in their opinion about the effect of the major pieces of legislation affecting rural areas stemming from the 2010 Coalition Government. It is suggested that 'localism' offers more opportunities than challenges for the RCF. The RCF, along with other organisations insisting through their existence and their work on the vitality of rural creativity, such as the Falmouth Convention, provides a valuable counterweight to an assumption of a more passive role for the countryside as a spectacle for consumption by the metropolitan and international tourist.

However, there are signs of growing political energy behind regional development, in part due to the negative perception of the economic divide between London and the South-East and the rest, and especially the North. It remains to be seen whether this will in time remedy the loss of funding through the Regional Development Agencies, or begin to realise the promise of the regional assemblies. Although the language of 'entitlement', which was current when the RCS was drafted, has been superseded the notion of 'fairness' is still very widely regarded as a goal in setting policy and deciding resource allocation and relates directly to the arguments put forward by the RCF for a national cultural strategy.

The principles of the RCF's strategy also directly complement the ethos and core values of the Government's 'Big Society' initiative. The RCF's objectives and its rural cultural strategy proposal are an excellent example of a genuinely community-initiated 'self-help' and bottom-up cultural policy initiative. The outcome of a five year grassroots research and lobby campaign (2006 – 2011) it has a solid rural mandate³ and is also supported as a cross-party agenda in the House of Commons, led by Tim Farron MP, Chairman of the Liberal Democrat Party.

3.1.2 Alignment with BIS agendas

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Plan for Growth also identifies the growth potential of rural areas.

Rural England makes a substantial contribution to national economic growth contributing 19% of England's GVA in 2008, estimated to be worth around £200bn. Studies have suggested its potential could be worth up to £347bn a year. Rural workplaces also house 22% of employment. Actions including those listed would benefit from creation of a co-ordinated and cross sector targeted RCS:

- Targeting £100m of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) to support growth
- Opening the £20m Rural Community Broadband Fund
- Funding up to six Rural Growth Networks to demonstrate what local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships can do to sustain economic growth in rural areas
- Committing £25m to promote rural tourism and develop rural tourism destinations

3.1.3 Possible alignments with DECC and DoH - Department of Health policy agendas

Arts Council England, in its recent 'Environmental Sustainability' report 2012, clearly sets the future agenda for the arts sector: "*Arts and culture have a particular role in bringing to the fore issues that changes in climate will mean – and what a future might look like as we take steps to significantly reduce our carbon emissions*" P 14.

The rural cultural strategy, with its mobilisation of community and professional (urban and rural) arts sector partners, could make a further useful contribution to some of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's programmes. For example, under DECC's [promoting] Behavioural Change, Natural Environment and Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Waste and Recycling initiatives. In the latter instance, the contemporary arts, crafts, architecture, design, and textile and fashion industries (urban and rural) are already making a significant contribution in promoting greater public engagement and support for recycling, environmental sustainability, and creative/environmental waste management initiatives. Farmers and artists have also been experimenting with creative application of renewable energy projects, using biomass willow, sustainable farm woodlands, and acanthus crops, etc., over a wide range of mixed low carbon, cultural, creative arts, architectural and renewable energy applications.

³ **Rural Cultural Summit Report**, Tate Britain, May 2005.

The rural cultural strategy aims to support other creative solutions to climate change, waste management, recycling and provision of renewable energy initiatives in the countryside. DEFRA, under the ACC UK Climate Change Impacts Programme have previously funded several very successful arts and cultural projects aimed at promoting wider public awareness and engagement with key climate change and environmental sustainability issues and actions.

Although the scheme has since ended there is no reason why these and other very successful arts-led environmental sustainability and climate change public engagement projects, should not be continued through a rural cultural strategic framework. And, further, given the Government's lead on prioritising green agendas to also benefit from a major infusion of new Arts Lottery funding which would be targeted specifically for 'Climate Change' strategic arts and public engagement programmes. These are critical national agendas that now also need an urgent response and some concrete action from the professional arts and cultural sector. This, in essence, is what the 'Sustainable Cultures' initiative, as outlined in Section 3 p. 11 (advocating Cultural Responsibility) in the Creative Rural Communities report, is proposing. While statutory and governmental agencies may not, technically, be allowed to benefit directly from public Lottery funds it should be possible for an independent national cultural agency (like the RCF) to take on some of this role. Precedents for this already exist. For example, the RSA's Art and Ecology programme (now ended) and also the Wellcome Trust's arts-based public engagement with bio-medical science funding scheme. Using these as models the RCF could productively engage in a dialogue with DECC and DEFRA, aimed at promoting a wide range of imaginative new arts and curatorial initiatives to support wider public engagement with key Government environmental sustainability and climate change agendas.

Elsewhere, artists and cultural projects are making a useful contribution to public health, health education and healthcare delivery programmes in rural areas. These contributions are particularly valued during times of great stress and economic and community disruption, as with the FMD (Foot and Mouth) outbreak in 2001. In addition, artists have collaborated with rural health care professionals on a range of farm health education and rural mental health awareness campaigns. Some excellent arts work has also been done around public education about (animal) pandemics and promoting farm safety and rural suicide prevention projects. Advanced digital arts and new media projects have further been employed in conjunction with experimental rural tele-medicine (i.e. telepresencing) projects. A value also needs to be put on the hitherto 'hidden' healthcare and health-related recreational resources and cultural benefits that the rural community and countryside areas also provide for urban communities. It is argued that, without free access to the countryside and recreational activities in rural areas, also clean water, fresh air and wholesome foods, the costs to the nation in 'negative' healthcare terms could be quite significant. In this context the RCF could discuss targeting further support for innovative arts and rural health projects with, IRH (Institute for Rural Health), RSIN (Rural Stress Information Network), RABI (Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute), regional NHS community health providers, and WONCA (the world organization for family doctors).

3.1.4. Alignment with DCMS, DEFRA, and EU CAP reform agendas Post- 2013

Also helpful here, are the indicators available for England since 2005 – the DCMS Active People Survey and the ONES Rural-Urban Local Authority Classification permit precise measurement of the extent to which rural populations, as defined by the ONS, experience the arts. The 'cold spots' can readily be identified and progress in addressing them over time can be measured. The two most rural groups (Rural 50 and Rural 80) contain six of the 71 local authorities whose populations are within the lowest 20% for participation in arts and culture according to DCMS Active People 2010. Artists and cultural projects have also been very active in promoting the health and resilience of rural communities. The location of industrial activity in rural areas can also be analysed using the Creative Industries definitions of DCMS and, as with participation, change can be measured.

Existing services such as the DEFRA Dashboard, IRH Institute of Rural Health, RSN, Rural City, and ACRE Bulletins could also provide a valuable context for a specifically rural cultural service.

Further research could play a useful role in highlighting other DCMS and DEFRA priorities as part of a possible future rural cultural strategy, e.g. the exponential growth in Digital/Broadband services (although still restricted in many rural areas) and related content generation initiatives for creative economy and other 'knowledge economy' jobs in rural areas. The Creative Rural Communities report highlights the urgent need for a strategic creative rural economy investment and research framework and to expand the potential for growth within the new creative rural sectors. The rural cultural strategy also proposes to tailor its future strategic objectives to address some of DEFRA's other core rural economic and developmental priorities; i.e. RDPE. In particular, the RCF's research and advocacy work around the Creative Rural Economy. This work could also take on board some of the current RDPE priority areas for rural development (i.e. Axes 3 and 4) as possible areas for creative input, artistic analysis and cultural investment.

In a wider EU rural policy context, i.e. CAP, the RCF has been working with Dutch partners (Kasteel Groeneveld/Dutch Economics Ministry) on the outlines of a possible Pillar III Cultural Proposition for CAP agriculture reform and rural development policy, post-2013. A research seminar on this topic; 'After CAP - a Pillar III? Towards a cultural strategy for future EU agriculture and rural development policy post-2013' is also proposed for London in October 2013. In this context, the RCF should seek to be more involved with the DEFRA in the consultations on the next round of the CAP and also join the new Rural and Farming Network. It has been argued that the next CAP round is an opportunity to focus afresh on rural diversification in the context of the 'post-agricultural' economy. Some authorities argue that RDPE, Leader+ and other mechanisms cannot be expected to deliver as much for the English regions after 2013. This makes it only more urgent that the issues for the rural economy are seen as part of the DCMS and ACE national arts and cultural policy mainstream discourse, rather than a special commitment to be dealt with using DEFRA or EU/EAGGF funds.

3.1.5 Arts Council England National Arts Strategy - Great Art for Everybody

Arts Council of England's 10 Year Strategic Framework for the Arts, Achieving Great Art for Everyone, also offers a range of potential benefits and other valuable new support and investment opportunities for artists, arts audiences and communities in rural areas. In designing its programmes, the ACE strives to accommodate different levels of capability and organisational complexity. Alongside funding for its National Portfolio of arts organisations and Renaissance partner museums, ACE sees its strategic funds as crucial to success in supporting artistic innovation and developing new opportunities for wider public engagement with the arts.

As the full range of programmes becomes available the RCF may well find that, in addition to the conventional GFTA (Grants for the Arts) funding application routes, that the Catalyst, Capital, Touring, Arts mark, Audience Focus, Creative People and Places funds can also be applied to, either by themselves or by partners, and combined to direct additional support for the creative rural economy. It is worth noting also, that the recently announced ACE grant commissioning process is designed to be responsive to evident investment need that does not fall easily within the remits of the named programmes.

The Creative People and Places programme would also seem to be relevant to the RCF's work. A possible proposal might start by cross referencing those Local Authority areas which are in the bottom 20% of the DCMS Active People survey and those which fall within the DEFRA Rural 50 and Rural 80 category. The programme anticipates a first stage of partnership building which should play to the strengths of the RCF and could also enable geographically dispersed, economically excluded, but similarly situated communities, explore their common cultural experiences and artistic goals. An obvious example here being the Uplands/hill farming communities, including the possibility of re-activating the RCF's, 'Your Rural Neighbours' – Uplands rural arts and cultural programme proposal bid which was rejected previously by the Cultural Olympics/UK Legacy Trust. It is recommended that the RCF should meet, if possible, on a quarterly basis with ACE Head Office officials responsible for Strategic Partnerships and the visual arts (etc.) activities in rural areas, to exchange ideas and develop a closer working relationship.

3.1.6 Other potential national and international rural-cultural policy interfaces

National: The RCF does not claim to work for all of the UK, as most of its work is with the arts and rural policy frameworks pertaining in England. However, the RCF is currently exploring a dialogue and partnerships with other leading arts and rural-based organizations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Further to this, it is discussing the possibility of an informal alliance with Hi-Arts (based in Inverness, in the Scottish Highlands) towards the development of a possible UK-wide rural cultural strategy network or research initiative. Contact has also been established with the Carnegie UK Trust to see if these ideas might fit under their new Knowledge and Culture initiative.

On the international front, the RCF's pioneering work on the creative rural economy is also well known and valued in Australia (ACRE), Canada (Eastern Ontario's Creative Corridor project) and in the Netherlands. Richard Florida, celebrated author of the 'Creative Class' and an internationally renowned expert on the creative economy, has also acknowledged and expressed his support for the RCF's pioneering work in this field. In Canada Dr Greg Beaker has been propagating a 'four pillar' model⁴ for a rural economic strategy, which rests on innovation in agriculture, rural tourism, commerce and industry and rural arts, culture and history, which also corresponds to the RCF's rural cultural strategy. Similarly, in the Netherlands the RCF has established good links with Dr Jan Hartolt, Director of the Dutch Economics Ministry's rural policy research and conference centre at Kasteel Groeneveld, based near Baarn.

4. Benefits for rural communities and artists?

4.1 Rural Communities.

One of the main aims of the rural cultural strategy is that of achieving cultural equity and a greater degree of fairness for rural communities, in terms of accessing existing strategic arts and cultural funding initiatives. This includes proposals for a re-alignment of current arts and cultural funding policy priorities more in favour of the cultural priorities and creative needs of rural communities. Such a realignment would enable rural communities to attract in new sources of (Arts Lottery) and other strategic arts funding investment, and also better target these resources to support vital rural regeneration, creative rural economy, and rural community development initiatives. Such a strategic framework, the RCF argues, would further enhance rural community self-confidence and cultural self-esteem, as well as encouraging new grassroots rural community-led entrepreneurial skills and cultural capital initiatives. Other community benefits likely to follow from a rural cultural strategy include the possibility of increased innovation in delivery of other mainstream rural services, e.g. promoting rural healthcare, veterinary education, countryside environmental/biodiversity, rural media and broadband communications content, rural educational, rural tourism and regional/local farm foods and culinary arts marketing initiatives.

⁴ **Canada's Creative Corridor:** Connecting Creative Urban & Rural Economies - Eastern Ontario and the Mega Region

This would also help to achieve a better strategic fit and targeting of existing arts funding to support a wide range of countryside and rural arts festivals, international arts projects in rural contexts, new rural cultural tourism, rural social documentary, rural public art, new field arts/art and agriculture (e.g. ArtBarns) and art farms marketing initiatives. In practical terms, a cultural strategy could be said to be a useful creative tool that all communities (rural, farmers, and art professionals) can utilize in re-inventing or re-imagining their future creative (life) options. As such, it would encourage and stimulate rural communities to experiment with radical new economic, social and cultural formations and outputs. That is, encouraging rural communities to re-think themselves in new (i.e. non-rural) economic and entrepreneurial contexts, including new aesthetic and social relationships. Further broadening the rural communities' strategic horizons, while also bringing in to play new entrepreneurial options, artistic partnerships and cultural capacities for the rural sector.

The adoption of a formal rural cultural strategy would also help better target existing arts resources and cultural funding in support of marginal rural communities; i.e. Roma/gypsy/traveller communities, rural elders, young people in rural areas, women in rural communities, the fishing port communities of England, and other hitherto 'overlooked' rural cultural minorities (e.g. rural migrant workers, BME rural residents, etc.). Including other rural residents with particular physical, emotional and mental disabilities. Helping these often overlooked rural constituencies and communities are at the heart of the RCF's 'fairness for rural communities' campaign'.

In addition, a developed cultural strategy would provide an important new cultural voice for grassroots rural and farming communities (and their leaders), thus enabling them to have a greater say and input in the setting of future priorities for national arts and cultural policy; i.e. achieving full cultural enfranchisement and fairness of opportunity. Obviously, all of these 'benefits' would need to be properly documented and evaluated as part of a parallel research or study project, in order to yield up some useful concrete evidence or verifiable research data in the future. This could also be done as part of the proposed one year Pilot research programme; see Section 6.

4.2 The new rural arts and artists living in rural areas:

Over the past ten years the contributions and benefits for artists, craft workers, designers, performers, etc., based in rural areas have been well documented via a number of useful research papers and reports. Some of these also expand on the role of innovation, creativity and the arts in rural communities. They include: Rural Virtues – (Rural Touring Report, NRTF 2004), Crafts in the English Countryside, (Countryside Agency, 2004), the New Rural Arts Report (ACE, 2004), the Arts in Rural England – Policy Review (ACE, 2005), The Creative Rural Economy Report (ACE NW 2007) Rural Innovation NESTA, (2007), Creative Countryside reports (BOP/Experian, 2006 -08), and the Creative Rural Communities Report (RCF, 2010).

Section 5 of the Creative Rural Communities report (July, 2010) provides a useful summary and background to the range of creative opportunities and other exciting artistic and intellectual challenges now available to the professional arts community in rural and agricultural contexts. These, the report argues appear to constitute the outlines of a new 'rural aesthetic' and set of theoretical guidelines for the new rural arts (as first articulated in the New Rural Arts Agenda report, ACE 2004) and also art agriculture, which are now gaining international exposure and acceptance within the mainstream art world.

In summary, there would appear to be four new critical interfaces and/or creative opportunities for contemporary artists* and curators now operating in rural contexts:

1. Employment for artists: generating new employment opportunities for artists within the creative rural economy, e.g. via the rural biennale exhibitions, residencies in rural communities, and art farms, etc. One of the RCS's aims is also to try and create new jobs and rewarding employment opportunities for urban and rural artists, including the many designers, performing arts and crafts people now also interested in working in the countryside and/or setting up new businesses in rural areas.
2. New art forms: surfacing important new critical, intellectual, aesthetic, and philosophical problems and challenges for artists and cultural practitioners to also work on; new rural contexts for art, generating a wide range of exciting new art works, exhibitions concepts, curatorial models and related artistic, aesthetic and cultural policy discourses.
3. New arts audiences: creating and sustaining new rural audiences for the arts, including the emergence of other nascent audiences (urban and rural) for new art works and productions originating in the rural sphere; the rural and agriculture (farming practices, farm land, animal husbandry, etc.) also offers unusual and challenging new contexts for the production and presentation of new artworks and cultural events.
4. New policy contexts: formation of new cultural policy research contexts and strategic partnerships for contemporary art work in rural areas; farmers, rural communities, statutory agencies, government, and artists working together to deliver on key national policy agendas for the environment, rural transport, health, economic recovery.

These are further proposed as novel contextual arenas and possible future operational characteristics for the new rural arts and art and agriculture practice genres. Which could also benefit from further research and analysis. The emergence of new specialist rural art practices and advanced curatorial initiatives also reveal a critical shift in thinking on the part of some practitioners and arts promoters engaged with rural issues and communities. Basically, this represents a move away from a notion of the rural as primarily an 'audience', fixed stable entity, or passive consumer of professionally managed and delivered events, towards more participative, community-led/self actuated, policy sensitive and socially engaged approaches. These include; new rural public art, critically engaged rural art, relational rural arts, rural ecological art, and art and agriculture. These and other benefits for artists are further summarized in Section 6 of the CRC report, under 'Future Research programmes'.

What would seem to be needed now is a clearly defined and strategically targeted new rural arts research/development, training and investment programme. That would also help to capitalize and support all the new creative, imaginative, and artistic potentials - as represented by professional artists in rural areas. How to take this forward is outlined briefly in Section 5 under.

*Includes designers, performers, crafts, theatre, film, writing, dance, new media practitioners, etc

5. Supplementary commentaries

We were also asked to provide some supplementary commentaries about: (i) addressing the wider potentials of the creative rural economy; (ii) ideas for a possible future international Rural Biennale and/or national rural cultural symposium event; (iii) an outline for a new rural arts and rural documentary professional development initiative; and (iv) and proposals for an initial programme of work, or practical mechanisms, for taking forward a national rural cultural strategy. The commentary on the latter (iv) is outlined in more detail under Section 6 of this report.

5.1 Creative Rural Economy- making the economic arguments

There have been a number of previous reports published on the potential of the creative rural economy; Rural Innovation report, (NESTA 2007), and the Creative Countryside reports (BOP/Experian 2006/8). While useful in pointing up possible future new directions for policy makers and research these have, in the main, relied on previously published academic reports which, in turn, are mostly based on statistical or 'hard systems' data capture or analysis. It could be argued that they really only tell one side of the story and, consequently, miss out some of the other perhaps less statistically visible, and emerging new areas of potential growth in the creative rural economy sector. The Creative Rural Communities report details what some of these 'overlooked' new creative rural potential contributions might be. In summary some of these are:

- Creative agricultural sector - art farms, agri-arts festivals, and farmer creatives;
- Rural economy other 'value added' contributions by artists, designers, performing arts;
- Grassroots rural community creative (amateur) arts and cultural capital contributions;
- New rural media creative content providers active with the rollout of rural broadband;
- Contemporary and traditional crafts, toys, fashion and textiles in creative rural SMEs;
- Urban-rural cultural diversity business partnerships, rural cultural tourism initiatives;
- Rural 'illegals' and the informal rural economy; Nu-raves, 'smokies' and agri-tainment.

It is estimated that these and other hitherto undocumented 'informal' or 'hidden' sectors of the creative rural sector could represent a potential £300-400 million p.a. additional contribution to the national creative economy. But this would obviously require further independent and detailed study and verification. Meanwhile, a number of Creative Economy AHRC funded academic research projects have recently been established, which might help to further elucidate these and other new areas of potential growth in the creative rural economy sector. Two of these may have a particular relevance for the creative rural economy in England; i.e. CX and Dot.Rural.

Dot.Rural is a University of Aberdeen-led research project which brings together researchers from a range of disciplines to explore digital opportunities and challenges for rural communities. CX- Creative exchange, based at Lancaster University, also aims to open digital public space, and encourage the ability of everyone to access, explore and create in any aspect of the digital space, moving from 'content consumption' to 'content experience'. This includes new forms of engagement and exchange in the broadcast, performing and visual arts, digital media, design and gaming sectors, by focusing on citizen-led content, interactive narrative, radical personalization and new forms of value creation in the context of the 'experience economy'. Professor Rachel Cooper, who leads the CX programme at Lancaster, agrees that these opportunities and related research work should also be made available to rural communities.

The RCF has recently been in contact with Dot.Rural, Cumbria University (who are also working on a proposed Creative Rural Economy research project), and CX about the possibility of future collaborations and research crossovers for the creative rural economy. It is possible that researchers and PhD candidates from these and other partner institutions, could undertake further study of the future (digital and non-digital) creative economy potentials of rural communities.

In this context, DEFRA, ACE, BIS and DCMS might also wish to consider the setting up of a new rural knowledge economy/creative rural economy research network or forum.

5.2 The International Rural Biennale

The concept of a rural biennale has been under discussion in the artworld (and through the RCF's own networks) for some time. Initially, proposed as an alternative to the mainly urban-focused international art biennales, the emphasis has shifted slightly to incorporate new creative and cultural ways of addressing some of the Government's key Climate Change and environmental sustainability policy objectives. In the context of the RCSWG's future deliberations, it is also possible that a rural biennale project could fulfil a very useful capacity building function, i.e. allowing rural communities to work with leading UK and international artists, curators and cultural policy experts to develop a more rigorous conceptual model for a future international rural biennale project; one that could further integrate the RCF's rural cultural strategy aims with other overarching national environmental sustainability and climate change agendas. Such a project would be very helpful for artists and curators interested in engaging with rural communities by providing them with interesting new research projects and critical platforms (exhibitions, commissions, symposia, etc.), and enable them to address other rural and agricultural issues and problems.

This particular concept (i.e. the development of a dual-focused rural and environmental sustainable biennale model) was recently put to a number of leading international art Biennale directors and curators, and seeking their views on the project's intellectual, curatorial and artistic goals. Their responses have been both positive and encouraging. They include: Lewis Biggs (former Director of the Liverpool Biennial), Professor Ute Meta Bauer (Head of MIT's arts research faculty and curator of SITE/ San Diego and a past Kassel Documenta), Teresa Gleadow (formerly head of the RCA's curatorial programme, and advisor for the Plymouth Convention), Professor Gunalan Nanarajan, (Director of Research at MICA/Maryland Institute of Art, ISEA2011 and Ogaki Biennale, Japan '08), and Marco Marcon, Director of SPACED, a pilot rural biennale project based in Perth Western Australia.

5.3 New Rural Arts and rural documentary/professional development initiative

The CRC report also puts forward some cogent arguments for a professional development framework and pedagogy for the new rural arts. These proposals were first outlined in detail in the New Rural Arts Study report (ACE 2004), and were later refined and simplified in the current CRC Report (2010). What seems clear is that the rural is now rapidly becoming a major new critical focus for professional contemporary art practice and curatorship, and also for related cultural policy research and investment. In this context, the RCF is again advocating support for a new rural arts professional development and training programme, to be developed in combination with a new rural documentary project (i.e. a new rural photography and media documentary initiative). A new rural arts professional development and research framework is also important for rural communities because they will need a sustainable supply of skilled, motivated and well qualified professional artists and curators to help them deliver a future rural cultural strategy. It would also help younger generation artists, curators, and arts researchers, etc., who may not have rural backgrounds or experience, to gain new skills and confidence in working with rural communities and in working in unfamiliar and challenging new agricultural contexts. It could also help generate some of the new pedagogical, aesthetic and critical/theoretical co-ordinates required to sustain the new rural arts and the rural cultural strategy into the future. How this proposal could best be taken further is explained in Section 6 under.

6. Mechanisms for implementing a future rural cultural strategy

6.1 Proposal for five year rural cultural strategy R&D programme (2013 -18)

We recommend that the RCF, and its working group partners DCMS/ DEFRA/ACE, consider the implementation of a rural cultural strategy as part of a five year (2013 – 2018) strategic research and development programme.

Basically, the RCF's rural cultural strategy can be restated as two primary strategic aims: (1) enabling the creative rural sector to enhance and better direct its increasingly significant contribution to the national creative economy and, (2) to expand and sustain its ongoing valuable contribution to the richness and diversity of the nation's artistic life, cultural identity and world leadership in the arts. Particularly, during this time of global environmental change and social and economic uncertainty.

Following on from this, our main recommendation in this context is that the Rural Cultural Strategy working group (RCSWG) consider the implementation of a formal rural cultural strategy, developed initially as a five year (2013 – 2018) exploratory research, capacity building and arts development programme. Secondly, having reviewed the seven original rural cultural development project strands proposed in the CRC report, (Section 4: Introduction), we further recommend that RCSWG consider taking up three of the proposed rural arts project development strands as the focus for an initial one year (2012 – 2013) rural cultural strategy R&D scoping study or pilot programme; i.e. a Stage 1 initial consultancy and capacity building project.

6.2 Stage 1 Consultancy and capacity building (Sept. 2012 – Oct. 2013)

That the RCF could initiate this work as an interim one year consultancy and scoping study based around three of the original seven rural arts development strands; i.e. the rural biennale, creative rural economy, and new rural arts/documentary professional development initiatives.

This would become Stage I is what is proposed as an interim three stage developmental process. Commencing with an initial one year (Stage 1) consultancy and scoping study phase. This could also then lead to the formulation of a later (i.e. Stage II) national/international rural biennale event. The biennale could in addition function as a review and showcase of 'best practice' projects and outcomes from the interim programme development strands (i.e. Stage I). Stages I & II (depending on the funding and resources available) would also be designed to build up the rural community and agricultural sector's experience, self-confidence and organizational capacity in managing and sustaining a future longer term strategic rural arts development and cultural investment initiative, post-2018.

Stages I & II could therefore constitute the exploratory, experimental and capacity building steps towards a formal rural cultural strategy. Stage III (2015 – 2018) could then presumably become the consolidation and rationalization stages; i.e. fleshing out or profiling the outlines of a fully developed national rural cultural strategy. But this would become clearer as Stage I and Stage II unfold. Again, DCMS, DEFRA, and ACE would also have an input and capacity for response as all these different ideas begin to coalesce.

The specific programme for Stage I could be achieved through the establishment of an interim one year (three parallel) consultancy working groups (possibly from Sept. 2012 – Oct . 2013). In this context we further recommend:

(1) The establishment of three initial rural cultural strategy consultancy working groups. One for each of the proposed future developmental project strands; i.e. (a) the Rural Biennale, (b) the Creative Rural Economy research initiative; and (c) the New Rural Arts and Documentary initiative, the latter also incorporating a professional development new rural arts research, theory and pedagogy/skills strands.

(2) Coordination of up to two or three supporting research seminars or symposia; that is one each for the rural biennale and the creative rural economy proposals. These could run chronologically as follows: Rural Biennale; the arts and agriculture symposium at Tate Britain, May 2013. A one-day Creative Rural Economy research symposium, possibly to be held at the NAC Stoneleigh Warwickshire July 2013. And a final stakeholders rural cultural strategy review seminar, proposed for October 2013 in London. Perhaps hosted in partnership with DEFRA, DCMS and ACE national office?.

(3) Publication of a Rural Cultural Strategy review report. A final report summarizing all the above data, including submissions from; (i) the three consultancy working groups, (ii) paper from the three research seminars/symposia and (iii) a number of short review papers from a panel of invited independent arts and rural policy experts.

This two stage process should allow sufficient time for a wider public debate, and input from other experts and arts and rural stakeholders towards the formulation of a more concise and detailed set of proposals or briefs for; (i) the establishment of a future rural biennale/creative rural communities symposia project; 'New Fields' which could possibly be staged over the summer or autumn of 2015. And, (ii) following on from the Rural Biennale, the implementation of a formal three year creative rural economy R&D and pilot projects investment initiative.

6.3 Pilot rural cultural strategy consultancy working groups

That each of the three consultancy working groups be made up of a mix of academics, policy experts and consultants in the fields of arts, culture and rural policy, including representatives from lead stakeholder rural community, rural NGOs, and farming rural business sectors.

Each of the consultancy working groups could be made up of leading academics and consultants in the in the field (i.e. curators of international Biennales, creative economy research consultants, and managers of rural arts, media and social documentary projects, etc.), including invited academics, cultural policy experts and art consultants. Rural community, rural NGOs and farming sector stakeholders should also be well represented on each of the working groups.

The main purpose of the designated consultancy working groups would be to undertake a more in-depth study within each of the proposed projects development strands; i.e. the rural biennale, creative rural economy and new rural arts/documentary professional development. The three working group chairs, or lead consultants, would also prepare a detailed study report towards the end of the first year, to include a robust budgetary and business plan required to take forward each of the nominated project development strands, to 2015. And possibly as future rural biennale showcase projects or events.

These reports could later form the basis of other key advocacy or fundraising documents, for circulation to potential funders, and detailing the implementation methodologies for the main Rural Cultural Strategy programmes (2013 – 2018).

6.4 Stage II The Rural Biennale (June – Sept. 2015)

Consideration should also be given to the development and coordination of an international rural biennale aimed at linking up art, agriculture and environmental sustainability policy agendas in new ways. This event could also become a useful mid-term focus and catalyst towards the implementation of a future developed rural cultural strategy.

The Rural Biennale would aim to employ a wide range of creative, curatorial and artistic means to inform wider public participation in a new national debate on the future of rural communities, agriculture and the countryside. In this context, it could also address and open up some of the other questions and projects developmental strands as contained in the CRC report. A Rural Biennale project would further help to promote and consolidate new partnerships and policy interfaces involving, DCMS, DEFRA, ACE, BIS, DECC, DCLG, DoH, etc., and also ensure that their advice and agendas are also embedded within the mature phase of a Rural Cultural Strategy. This could include addressing some of the important overarching questions/issues concerning the future of sustainable food, farming and other key environmental and climate change agendas. Further, given the expectation of continued access to future public and Lottery arts funding subsidies, it would also encourage the professional arts and cultural sector (rural and urban) to do more to engage with and help delivery of other key Government economic, social, renewable energy, public health, and environmental sustainability goals.

6.5 Stage III The core Rural Cultural Strategy programme (2015-18)

Following on from the Rural Biennale, Stage III could then go on to address the possibility of implementing some or all of the other seven core elements for a future rural cultural strategy, as outlined in the Creative Rural Communities report (July 2010):

Proposed original seven project development strands:

1. National Rural Cultural Centre/Museum of Contemporary Art and the Countryside
2. International Rural Biennale and Sustainable Urban/Rural Cultures initiative
3. Creative Rural Economy and Rural Digital Media/Broadband content programme
4. A New Rural Aesthetic – National Rural Design and Architecture initiative
5. Grains of Truth – national rural photography new media documentary programme
6. Rural Diversities – new urban rural cultural partnerships and marginal communities
7. Contemporary rural crafts and textiles – new fashion, fibre textiles and farming ideas

Stage III would also aim to support: (i) capacity building work towards the establishment of a formal Rural Cultural Agency, (ii) the commissioning of further new or experimental rural arts projects, and (iii) additional fundraising, arts research and curatorial development work.

6.6 A future Rural Cultural Agency; invoking the legacy of CoSIRA?

It is too early to begin to speculate on whether the establishment of a new rural cultural agency would be appropriate proposal at this juncture. However, many in the arts and cultural sector (urban and rural) lament the disappearance of CoSIRA (the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas), which was merged with the Rural Development Commission in 1988. This is not an appeal to bring back CoSIRA. The organisation had in fact run its course and fulfilled its job, and so needed to change. However, the RCF has always acknowledged that the development, implementation and coordination of a fully developed Rural Cultural Strategy would require the establishment of a new type of rural arts research and development organization and/or rural cultural advocacy agency; i.e. a Rural Cultural Agency. This idea could perhaps be taken further as one of the agendas for a future Rural Biennale conference, or as part of the next creative rural economy symposium.