

Rural Services APPG

Notes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services

Thursday 19th April 2012, 8:30am-10:00am
Dining Room C – HoC

In attendance:

Members:

Graham Stuart MP – Chairman
The Lord Dear QPM

Rural Services Network (RSN) (Secretariat):

Graham Biggs – Chief Executive
David Inman - Director
Wendy Cooper – Administrator

Speakers:

Landex

Meredydd David – Principal of Reaseheath College

1. Notes of the Previous Meeting – 11th November 2011

Agreed with no matters arising.

2. Introduction

The Chairman, Graham Stuart MP, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the speaker for his attendance.

Cross party support for the Rural Fair Share Campaign had been achieved and support would now be invited from MP's and Lords and a campaign plan established.

It was noted that the RSN were holding a meeting following the APPG with Council Leaders and Finance Officers which would be looking at funding formula issues.

Graham Biggs said that (subject to the cost not being too great) the RSN were prepared to get one of its consultants to see if a government grant per head of population for urban and rural areas of England calculation was possible across the public services in the same way as they had recently been done in respect of local government funding by central government.

3. Landex

Meredydd David, Principal of Reaseheath College made a presentation to the meeting (notes attached).

Reaseheath College was established in 1921 covering the subjects of agriculture and horticulture. It currently had 8,000 students and a turnover of £25m pa. The College was the only establishment in the UK which specialised in Agriculture and dairy production.

Landex as an organisation was set up in 2006 from its predecessor Napaeo and consisted of 37 full members plus 6 associate members in Wales, Scotland and N.Ireland with a focus on Peer Review (quality support) and influencing (policy/funding etc.,).

It was noted that Landex:

- delivered 77% of all landbased higher education provision, representing over 11,300 students
- delivered 80% of all landbased further education provision representing over 37,000 students
- had £1 billion turnover p.a.
- provided residential accommodation to around 7,000 students
- managed approximately 11,000 hectares of land

The following main points were raised with which it was hoped MP's could assist:

It was felt that Defra did not recognise the service that Landex colleges could provide as a "test station" with respect to the practical application of primary research.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation did include an access to services domain but it was not used in any central government funding formulae. It was hoped that this could be looked at as part of the Rural Fair Share Campaign.

Local Authorities had cut their support for student transport which was resulting in colleges having to subsidise this area. This meant that less funding could be allocated to education funding or students that were required to travel would be disadvantaged (or both). These were costs which urban colleges were not faced with having to meet. It was felt that Local Authorities should be responsible for providing transport to students 18 years old and under in their areas – funded by central government. Members present at the meeting asked for further details on this issue to enable parliamentary questions to be raised.

The Residential Bursary Fund was at risk due to a government review. This provided invaluable assistance to approximately 140 students and needed to be kept in place. Members present agreed to prepare a joint letter on this issue.

4. Next Meeting

26th June 2012 – 8.30am – Dining Room C, HoC – This meeting will be the AGM.

5. Any Other Business

a. Normal Schedule of Meetings

It was agreed that the meeting dates for September and October be changed due to the House of Lords recess and attendance figures.

b. Rural Fair Share

Investigations would be made into the possibility of a Rural Fair Share Dinner.

All Party Group on Rural Services

Thursday 19th April House of Commons

Background to Landex (Land-based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence)

Landex was formed in 2006 from its predecessor organisation, Napaeo, which was founded in 1950.

Landex's primary functions are to secure continuous improvement in all its members through peer review, support and CPD; and to promote the interests of members and their various client groups through dialogue with government, funding agencies, sector skills councils and professional bodies.

The most recent Ofsted 'outstanding providers' list names nine Landex members in the FE college sector that were found to offer outstanding provision, and confidence in college management has been expressed in every one of the seventeen Landex colleges that have received either a QAA 'Institutional Audit' (Higher Education Institutions) or an 'Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review' (Further Education Colleges with Higher Education provision) of the quality of learning and for the standards of awards that they offer on behalf of awarding bodies

Landex currently has:

- 37 full members including one in Wales, and a further 6 associate members in Wales, Scotland and N.Ireland. We are also working with and supporting a further 7 colleges and private providers with significant land based provision that are not eligible for membership of Landex.

Landex members:

- deliver 77% of all landbased HE provision representing over 11,300 students
- deliver 80% of all landbased FE provision representing over 37,400 students. This figure excludes apprentices and students following subject other than landbased.
- have a turnover of £1billion/annum (excludes university members)
- provide residential accommodation for around 7000 students
- manage approximately 11,000 hectares of land for commercial, educational and training purposes

The Cheshire Context

Cheshire is frequently viewed as a wealthy county with little or no areas of deprivation.

Cheshire is a predominately rural county with approximately 40% of Cheshire's population living in rural areas (including market towns). One in four residents of Cheshire live in rural wards that have a population of below 5,000.

Land classified as rural extends to 173,000 hectares or 83% of the total county area.

Of particular concern is the conflict of the prosperous image of rural Cheshire and the pockets of rural disadvantage. This will be an issue in most rural counties. Disadvantage in rural areas can often be related to the individual or household and can be easily missed by analysis at moderate aggregations of geography such as ward level. Disadvantage in rural areas is often hidden due to the dispersed nature of those who are disadvantaged.

Agriculture in Cheshire

Agriculture is a key industry in Cheshire. Although agriculture employs 3% of the County's workforce, when allied industries of tourism and food are included, they account for 11% of employment. This is very likely to be replicated across other rural counties and to a greater extent in many such as Cumbria and the South West. The scale and importance of the industry is therefore often missed.

Index of Multiple Deprivation – Implications for Rural Areas

The Index of Multiple Deprivation, now includes the 'Access to Services' category which acknowledges a previously unrecognised problem facing people in remote rural areas. The Access indicator shows that, although Cheshire is not generally deprived from a national perspective, 14 rural wards in Cheshire appear in the top 10% most deprived wards in England. The top five wards are Peckforton (Crewe & Nantwich), Combermere (Crewe & Nantwich), Shakerley (Vale Royal), Brereton (Congleton) and Tilston (Chester).

Rural Deprivation and its impact on education

Rural deprivation is not currently recognised adequately by the YPLA or SFA funding methodology, which defines disadvantage funding entitlement by post code. Rural deprivation is usually dispersed over wide areas with low population densities often in localities with a high average GDP. Hence the deprivation is masked and is very difficult to pick up and funding premiums are not triggered in those post-code areas, making colleges and schools less able to support the associated needs.

It is important that rural deprivation and its inherent cost is recognised and addressed during the current revision of the Education Funding Agency's funding methodology.

i) Access

Transport to and from a place of learning tends to be more problematic for young people and adults living in rural areas than those in an urban areas. The distances involved are larger and hence the cost higher. Less public transport tends to be available in rural areas than in urban areas, and also due to the low population densities and dispersed pattern of dwellings its provision is uneconomic for operators thus services are infrequent.

Local authorities must have a transport policy statement, but do not have to provide financial support or transport for young people (16-18 year olds) and adults to access education. Although some counties have always provided/funded home to College/School transport and will continue to do so, other LAs stopped providing/supporting transport for all but the most needy (very low income or LDD learners) as early as 1993 which was when colleges received corporate status. With the squeeze on Local Authority budgets many of those that were providing subsidised transport post 16 have reviewed their policies and have removed this or are phasing it out. Cheshire East and also Cheshire West and Chester are just two such examples. This is a particular issue for students attending land-based colleges. The relatively small number of specialist land-based providers, coupled with the dispersed and largely rural homes of their students, makes access difficult. For my College the required subsidy is now in excess of £750K per annum with this type and level of investment repeated at many other land-based colleges across England. Reaseheath hires a fleet of 25 coaches to transport around 1200 students on to campus each day and without this service and

investment access to our specialist education and training would be impossible for many rural people.

Full-time residence is the solution for some students, but as demand exceeds supply, for many colleges this is complemented increasingly by extensive subsidised transport networks.

It is essential that local authorities are legislatively required to provide transport for pupils/students who fall within the compulsory education age bracket which will soon be raised to 18 years of age.

ii) Choice

Choice of post-16 education and training is often restricted for young people living in rural areas. For many the nearest provider, often a school 6th form, will be the only accessible option. As a consequence, they are more likely than those in urban areas to follow an inappropriate programme or engage in work without training.

iii) Residence and Subsistence Costs

For some land-based programmes these costs can be particularly high. Where livestock are involved, exposure to a range of activities often requires students to be present at College outside the working day and week. For example milking of dairy cows often takes place as close as practicable to 12 hour intervals in order to maximise animal welfare and production levels. This activity cannot therefore be contained within a 'normal' College day. As a consequence students routinely undertake early morning (from 4.30 am in some cases) and weekend duties. Similar routines, although with a later start, exist in relation to equine, other livestock, fish, small animal and protected plant enterprises. Where students are required to undertake duties (supervised work experience) outside the normal college day, residence at the College is the most convenient, and often the only practical option. As a consequence most Colleges with substantial land-based courses provide on-site residential accommodation, which is helpful for students living close to the College, but essential for those who live in more remote locations.. Unless significant means tested financial support is available to these students, access for those from less affluent backgrounds, who live in remote rural areas becomes difficult or impossible. We have 600 residential places offered to students and these are oversubscribed.

It is essential to ensure that the means tested financial support available for students to make residential accommodation an affordable option for those who cannot commute to college due to distance or lack of public transport is continued.

All of the above restrict educational options available to young people and adults in rural areas thus limiting their potential of reaching their full potential. Also it adds a further dimension to the challenge faced by specialist further and higher education colleges in maintaining the critical mass of learners required to enable access to their provision. This critical mass is essential in enabling the business to continue to invest in the infrastructure required to deliver specialist education and training in agriculture and related subjects. This area is capital heavy as it is very much science based and is now a strategically important subject and sector.

Professor Beddington, Chief Scientific Advisor's report that outlined "the perfect storm" of food, energy and water security is now being recognised by the coalition Government as a significant risk and challenge to this country.

This has raised the importance education and training and knowledge exchange which all fits within the mission and remit of land-Based colleges. The land-based colleges are an asset that must be recognised and utilised by Government particularly in this instance through Defra.

**Meredydd David OBE
Principal, Reaseheath College**