

REVIEW OF THE METHODIST/UNITED REFORMED NATIONAL RURAL OFFICER POST**Basic Information**

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Discussion and Decision
Draft Resolution	The Councils accept the recommendations in the review report, but in addition agree to undertake an earlier review of the post where any developments give rise to significant changes in the current funding arrangements and model, or in the bilateral and/or ecumenical partnership arrangements.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The Role of National Rural Officer of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer has been reviewed by evaluating the rural mission project against the work programme established by the Arthur Rank Centre; the Objectives of the project; the Priorities for the Methodist Church; and the Vision 2020 project of the United Reformed Church
Main Points	1. The post of National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches be continued, as a joint full-time post, to run from September 2011-August 2016; 2. The National Rural Officer continues to be based at the Arthur Rank Centre; 3. Within the United Reformed Church no structural changes are made to the positioning of the post; 4. Within the Methodist Church the National Rural Officer remains part of the Connexional Team within the Christian Communication, Evangelism and Advocacy Cluster. The research findings be further considered by the Rural Strategy Group over the next two years; 5. A further review of the post be initiated in September 2014 to be completed no later than June 2015.
Background Context and Relevant Documents	The Methodist Team Focus process led to a decision not to continue with a Rural Officer post within the Connexional Team from 2011. In the light of the current review the current Methodist Strategic Leaders believe it is right to reverse that decision.
Consultations	Office holders across both Methodist Church/URC (Rural Officers, Training Officers, Development Officer, District Chairs, Moderator and Synod Clerks) Ministers in Rural appointments across both churches.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Ongoing implications for Methodist Connexional Team and URC budgets.
Personnel	This review paper proposes to link the NRO to the Connexional Team via the Joint Public Issues Team.
Wider links	The NRO maintains and develops a network of District/Synod Rural Officers.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The NRO works out of the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh as part of a team with the Church of England's National Rural Officer, led by the Centre Director; the ARC is a partnership between the Rank Foundation and the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) and the churches.
Risk	Implications of not continuing to engage in the rural agenda via an ecumenical team.

Review of the Methodist/United Reformed National Rural Officer Post

June 2010

Review Group Membership

Methodist: Revd Dr Gordon Gatward, Revd Graham Horsley, Revd Graham Thompson
United Reformed: Revd Peter Ball, Ms Francis Brien, Revd Elizabeth Caswell
In attendance: Revd Graham Jones and Ms Isabel Taylor

Elizabeth Caswell chaired the group and Isabel Taylor took the minutes and co-ordinated the research and documentation.

Activity

The Review Group met on three occasions - 16th April, 21st May and 8th June 2010. Group members took responsibility for providing papers on how the post:

- fulfils its own objectives;
- fits within the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) work programme;
- meets the *Priorities for the Methodist Church*;
- meets the URC's *Vision 2020* mission priorities.

Research into the post's perceived value was undertaken, funded by the Methodist Church. Over 260 responses were received.

All the papers and research findings are attached as appendices to this report, together with a glossary and budget.

Findings

The Review Group has come to a unanimous view that the post of National Rural Officer (NRO) for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches is of continuing and clear value to both churches as they support rural and market town congregations in relevant mission, and as they participate ecumenically in giving the Church a voice in the setting of government rural policy and the response to contemporary social issues in the countryside. It is our belief that, for two denominations who find their numerical strength in town and suburb, a specialist post is the most realistic way of engaging with the rural agenda and supporting rural congregations. The post has proved its value and the work is continuing to evolve. It is a cost-effective way of meeting the churches' responsibilities to the rural constituency.

a) Local Mission

The NRO maintains and develops a network of District/Synod Rural Officers, supporting them collectively, in conjunction with their Church of England counterparts and individually, as needed. Through materials provided via e-mail, Rural Officers and other network members are kept abreast of developments that affect their pastoral and communication role (e.g. updates on foot and mouth, blue-tongue, bovine tuberculosis and other disease outbreaks). Seasonal worship material is made available and mission training material is provided and commended (*Presence* and *Presence Papers*, *Making Connections*, articles in *Country Way*).

Through the NRO and the network of Rural Officers, local churches and ministers receive information and advice about the use of church premises (e.g. to host post office and shop facilities) and are encouraged to work with others to serve the needs of changing rural communities - everything from affordable housing to tourism, farmers in crisis to migrant workers.

Congregations, which may be numerically and financially vulnerable, are being encouraged to engage in holistic mission. The current post-holder's initiatives in ongoing projects on social entrepreneurship and local collaborative ministry give hope of more confident and self-sustaining congregational life.

b) Training

One of the priorities of the role is to encourage ministers to understand rural ministry. For many years the ARC has run two rural ministry courses each year for those moving into this work. The courses are highly valued - they are usually over-subscribed and evaluated positively by participants. The NRO has a critical role in delivering these courses.

In recent years the NRO has been able to make input into initial ministerial training courses at two colleges (in Birmingham and Durham) and, through the Cambridge Theological Federation, an increasing number of rural placements have been organised for students.

There are regular gatherings of Rural Officers and major conferences at the ARC which provide ongoing encouragement and education for all involved in rural ministry, ordained and lay.

c) Wider Mission

The employment of a staff member to focus on rural concerns enables the two denominations to participate in the consultations about policy affecting rural life that government instigates. The NRO is able to bring a specifically Christian voice to such discussions and the churches are recognised as knowledgeable and respected partners across a wide spectrum of issues. Expertise is critical for this level of engagement. The present NRO took the lead role in the campaign to protect rural post offices, in which many of our churches participated.

This experience enables the NRO to represent the churches' viewpoint in discussions about the many areas of rural life which affect the whole community, urban as well as rural: food security, bio-fuels, use of the countryside, affordable housing, local sourcing and migrant communities. The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) does not have the capacity to absorb this volume of extra and specialised issues and relies on the NRO to lead on rural concerns. The Review Group would like to see enhanced collaboration and collegiality between JPIT and the NRO.

d) The Arthur Rank Centre (ARC)

The NRO works out of the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh as part of a team with the Church of England's National Rural Officer, led by the Centre Director. The ARC is a partnership between the Rank Foundation, the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) and the churches. The churches' main contribution to this joint enterprise is the provision of staff members. It is worth noting that

the Church of England recently reviewed its National Rural Officer post and affirmed both that it should continue and that it should still be located at the ARC.

Working collaboratively, not only as the churches' Rural Officers, but also through the ARC with numerous other charitable groups (e.g. Rural Stress Helpline), enables the churches to share expertise and representation across a much wider range of concerns than any one Officer could engage with alone. It is a model of ecumenical partnership which, to a growing extent, is affecting the working style of District/Synod/Diocesan Rural Officers at regional level. It is hoped that this way of working will encourage effective ecumenical ministry and mission locally.

For the Methodist and United Reformed Churches to withdraw from the ARC would send an unfortunate signal to the government and the farming community about our lack of interest in rural life and concerns. It would be a sad end to twenty-five years of shared endeavour and, a needless end, given the relatively light cost and the major benefits and economies of shared working at the ARC. The effectiveness of the post and the location of the post are intimately connected.

The above findings are based on the attached research and documents.

Recommendations

The Review Group commends the work done within the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church on rural mission. With at least 60% of Methodist churches and 25% of United Reformed churches in rural and/or market town settings, we believe that the role of the National Rural Officer is crucial to supporting them and we, therefore, urge both the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church to remain committed to this work.

The Review Group recommends that:

1. the post of National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches be continued, as a joint full-time post, to run from September 2011 to August 2016.

The attached papers indicate that the National Rural Officer role provides essential and cost effective support for the rural mission of both denominations. It maintains and develops the District/Synod network of Rural Officers, offers lay and ministerial training resources, connects with government and other rural agencies, enabling the churches' voice to be heard and a church contribution to policy to be made.

The review reports indicate the breadth as well as the detail of this work and how it has developed during the tenure of the present Officer. We do not believe that this work could be done as effectively in any other way. A half-time appointment for each denomination secures an involvement in a remarkably effective ecumenical venture. The rewards of this involvement far outweigh the costs which - in 2009-10 - were just under £50,000, shared between the two denominations.

2. the National Rural Officer continues to be based at the Arthur Rank Centre.

The arrangement by which the National Rural Officers of the Church of England and the Methodist and United Reformed Churches work together with the Director of the Arthur Rank Centre creates a strong ecumenical team in which varied skills and expertise allow for shared working and specialisation, benefiting all three denominations.

The ARC team is a healthy model of effective ecumenical co-operation which encourages similar co-operation in rural work locally and regionally, as well as in the areas of worship material, rural mission, campaigning, ministerial training and international and national rural policy. By working together the team enables each partner denomination to benefit from the full range of knowledge and expertise. The loss of the post would cut our two churches off from the ARC, substantially diminish its work and undermine ecumenical collaboration in rural settings. It would also compromise the ability of our two denominations to engage with rural policy at a national level.

3. within the United Reformed Church no structural changes are made to the positioning of the post.

The National Rural Officer is part of the Mission Team, which is accountable to the General Assembly Mission Committee. Within the Mission Committee support is provided to the NRO by a Link Member, who is also part of the Rural Strategy Group. These arrangements have proved to be crucial in supporting the current NRO in his work and for ensuring that rural mission is fully integrated within the work of the United Reformed Church.

4. within the Methodist Church the National Rural Officer remains part of the Connexional Team within the Christian Communication, Evangelism and Advocacy cluster.

The Review Group realises that the re-structuring of the Connexional Team is still recent, but we believe that there are good reasons for this matter to be re-addressed. With at least 60% of Methodist churches being defined as rural and/or market town, it seems appropriate that this missional role should be resourced by the Connexion. Remarkable cost effectiveness is demonstrated by the internal evaluation of the post and by the survey of those involved in rural ministry. Furthermore, it would be unfortunate if the NRO's standing in the two denominations is substantially different. The Review Group believes that the re-positioning of the post within the Methodist Church, without ecumenical consultation with the URC and without consideration of the implications for the post, is another reason for revisiting the decision.

We propose that the NRO should link to the Connexional Team via the Joint Public Issues Team and that this relationship should be strengthened by ensuring that the NRO's link person within the Connexional Team is also a member of the Rural Strategy Group.

5. the research findings should be further considered by the Rural Strategy Group over the next two years.
6. a further review of the post be initiated in September 2014 to be completed by no later than June 2015.

Review of the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer

Appendices

Evaluation Papers

One of the central objectives of the Review of the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer was to review the historic achievements of rural mission work. Appendices A to D detail the findings from this work, which was done by evaluating the rural mission project against:

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Further background information gathered and used to inform the recommendations of the review can be found in appendixes E – G:

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**Evaluating the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer against
the work programme established by the Arthur Rank Centre**

Established in 1972, the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) is a charity with three founding partners, the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the Rank Foundation and the national churches, and the stated objective 'to serve the rural community and its churches'.

Based at the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh, the ARC has direct contact with the other organisations on site and has established close working links with the National Farmers Union, the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, etc. and is widely acknowledged by them as the rural voice of the churches. The ARC has established a strong chaplaincy ministry to a number of these organisations as well as to the wider farming/rural community.

The strength of the ARC's ecumenical credentials is represented in the membership of the board of trustees, its wide range of project partners and activities and the use of its resources by most of the churches and church organisations active in the countryside. It is widely recognised across the denominations as the churches' national rural resources unit.

The Methodist/URC NRO works as part of the ARC's closely knit ecumenical team. This includes the NRO for the Church of England as well as a number of project and administrative staff.

The basing of the Methodist/URC NRO at Stoneleigh not only extends the range of skills represented in the team but also enables the two denominations to have direct access to all of the ARC's resources and to be directly involved in its governance, policy and strategy.

The oversight of the post is exercised by the Rural Strategy Group (RSG), membership of which is drawn from both denominations. The RSG meets at the ARC and nominates a trustee for appointment to the board. The Director of the ARC is a member of the RSG.

The ARC's current work programme runs from 2009-2013 and illustrates the spread of activities with which the NRO is involved, in addition to denominational responsibilities. Copies of the work programme are available from the ARC. Although compiled by ARC staff, the programme has the full backing of the ARC trustees who exercise overall responsibility for monitoring its progress.

1. NRO's Direct Responsibilities and Roles:

- **International representation**

The NRO represents the ARC on the Churches European Rural Network (CERN) and the International Rural Churches Association (IRCA) as well as having responsibility for leading on the ARC's international links. The NRO will be attending the four yearly IRCA conference in Germany in September 2010.

- **National representation**

The NRO represents the ARC on the following bodies (in some instances the NRO is the only rural and/or church voice):

- Rural Support England
- Rural Community Buildings Network

- Get Fair Coalition
- Places of Worship at The Heritage Alliance
- Churches' Regional Network
- Farm Crisis Network (serving as a Trustee)
- **Project responsibilities:**
 - The Rural Church Entrepreneurs Project
The NRO is responsible for the project and is currently working with the Churches' Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber to construct a regional leadership development programme re entrepreneurial skills. The project:
 - encourages greater social entrepreneurship amongst lay and ordained rural practitioners, as well as encouraging the churches to value entrepreneurial skills more highly
 - provides training in entrepreneurial skills
 - is looking to encourage the churches to include entrepreneurial skills in their recruitment criteria and formation processes.
 - Local Collaborative Ministry (LCM)
With all denominations experiencing a shortage of ordained ministers, there is a very real need to explore and develop new forms of sustainable ministry in rural areas. Defined as "*The development of self-sustaining congregational life built on the ministry of all the baptised*", LCM is clearly one such form. The NRO is responsible for progressing the project, this includes:
 - promoting LCM across the churches as well as the good practice and experience of churches already engaged in LCM
 - producing and promoting resources for rural churches
 - convening an ecumenical group of interested parties seeking to promote and develop LCM in the rural church
 - editing a paper on the theology of LCM to be presented as a seminar at the *Faith and the Future of the Countryside* national conference in November 2010
 - staging an LCM training event (£4000 has been secured to fund the event)
 - developing a working partnership with the Foundation for Church Leadership to further strengthen the role of LCM across the churches
 - Migrant Workers Project
The NRO represents the ARC on all matters regarding migrant workers' issues and is responsible for all information and resources on the ARC website regarding this area of work.
 - The Rural Stress Helpline (RSH)
The NRO provides pastoral support for the RSH Manager/operator. This is a much valued and crucial role as the RSH receives many difficult calls involving financial, business and personal issues.

2. NRO's involvement in other ARC activities includes:

- **Rural Ministry Course**
A twice yearly course for those entering rural ministry for the first time. It is regularly over-booked and always highly rated on the evaluation forms. The NRO is one of the key leaders of the course.

- ***Country Way***
A magazine produced three times a year by the ARC that is a highly valued resource for both rural churches and rural communities. The NRO is a member of the editorial board and a frequent contributor.
- ***Liturgy, Prayers, etc.***
One of the most requested and well-used resource areas produced by the ARC relates to rural services and especially prayers and liturgies for special occasions in the life of the rural church and community. The NRO provides a large proportion of the wide-ranging and extensive worship resources available on the ARC website.
- ***Making Connections***
The NRO is co-author of the recently published workbook encouraging and helping rural churches to engage effectively with their communities.

Overall, and as has already been expressed, the NRO for the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church is an integral member of the ARC team. Working closely with the NRO for the Church of England, the NRO provides the capacity, expertise and ability without which the ARC would be unable to fulfil a large part of its work programme.

**Evaluating the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer against
the objectives of the project itself**

The objectives were set out in section 5 of the document *Proposal for Continuing a Post*, the report of the review conducted into rural mission work in 2005. The objectives 1 to 5, as set out in bold type below, are those that were highlighted in 5.1 to 5.5 of that report.

1. Developing, strengthening and resourcing the networks of District/Synod Rural Officers together with enabling links with other people, as appropriate

This objective has remained a top priority throughout the four years of the current National Rural Officer (NRO) who has maintained effective contact with District and Synod Rural Officers (ROs) by e-mail, a planned number of visits (always exceeded) and an annual gathering at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh (ARC), jointly organised with the Church of England. The NRO also exercises a degree of pastoral care amongst the Rural Officers' network. The total network of the three Churches includes 93 Officers, a few of whom are full or part-time paid, most of whom are voluntary.

A report on the *Roles, Responsibilities and Resources of Rural Officers* by Revd Jonathan Still was published in 2007 and has given useful encouragement in the support of this network. It showed that ROs rely heavily on the briefing papers sent out from the ARC and the networking it maintains. The team at the ARC work collaboratively and the NRO is a highly valued team member, without whose time and expertise the ARC work would be greatly diminished.

This collaborative working has contributed to the development of regional ecumenical networks which increase the confidence and effectiveness of the denominational ROs who are involved. Groups currently exist in Cornwall, the South West, the North West, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, the North East, the South East and East Anglia. They are at different stages of development.

One of the chief concerns of this network is that officers feel under-resourced and under-valued. It remains a priority of the national role to encourage Districts and Synods not only to make these appointments but to resource them appropriately and to give them a clear route for reporting and accountability. It has, therefore, been important that the NRO has created and maintained regular contact with the Chairs' Rural Group and the Synod Moderators. Moderators and Chairs new in post are invited to the ARC and the NRO is invited as a speaker at Synods, which further encourages and raises the profile of the District/Synod Rural Officers.

2. To enable rural congregations to rediscover their confidence in the Gospel and be an effective Christian presence in their communities by such means as:

- ***providing and advocating worship and training materials***
- ***helping churches to access information relating to regional funding***
- ***providing a support and consultancy service to local congregations taking new initiatives in ministry and mission***

- ***providing appropriate information for use in ministerial education***

Jonathan Still's research confirmed that rural congregations have a distinct character, with theological emphases and mission opportunities that differ from the suburban norm. The provision of distinctive worship and training materials therefore continues to be important. As part of the ARC team, the National Rural Officer has provided such material, frequently by e-mail to the whole network of interested people but also through printed material: *Presence*, the new publication *Making Connections* and the regular journal *Country Way*. Special opportunities (e.g. *British Food Fortnight*, *Year of Food and Farming* and *Open Farm Sunday*) are highlighted on the website and by e-mail, and prayers are provided for the Methodist Church website. Substantial articles have been published in *Reform*.

The NRO has given significant assistance in the development of the ARC's Rural Faith and Life Project. The publication of *Making Connections* provides local churches with a high quality study and work material for developing mission in a village context. Work continues in the resourcing of changed uses for church buildings as part of an incarnational model of mission. A growing number of churches now host post-offices and shops, helping to maintain community cohesion. The NRO has been the team's lead person in the rural post-office campaign. In conjunction with the Church of England and Post Office Ltd., the NRO has drawn up a set of Guidelines for churches wishing to host outreach post offices.

Recent research done through DEFRA (the government's Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) confirms that, in secular circles, the local church is recognised as one of the five most important features of healthy village life. The continuing provision of staff time to resource rural churches is critical, especially as government - national, local and regional - recognise the Church as an effective partner. The NRO is an active participant in the Rural Community Buildings Network (established by DEFRA in July 2006) where he represents the Arthur Rank Centre and the URC (the Methodist Church has an additional member).

An emphasis on ministerial education has continued with the NRO having direct input into courses at The Queen's Foundation (Birmingham) and Wesley Study Centre (Durham). A creative relationship with the Cambridge Theological Federation has seen a steadily growing number of students undertaking rural placements. Contact has been made with the URC Resource Centre for Learning in Manchester.

The ARC organises two rural ministry courses each year which are always fully subscribed. Participants' evaluations show an average value rating of 'four out of five'.

In addition to availability to speak at Synods, the NRO helps to organise and speaks at conferences and training events and hosts visitors to the ARC. He also has regular contact with local congregations as they contact the Centre or during visits to Districts or Synods.

3. To enable both denominations to contribute effectively to the development of UK rural policies and to engage in informed political debate at a time when rural issues are high on the UK and European agenda

The staff team at the ARC work collaboratively, each developing their expertise and areas of responsibility, thus enabling each denomination to benefit from the full spectrum of engagement. The NRO has been the lead member for the work on migrant workers and rural post offices; other ongoing areas of involvement, concern and campaigning include animal welfare, supermarkets, poverty and the *Get Fair* campaign, Care Farms, the Rural Stress Helpline and a developing international and European involvement and networking.

The ARC provides an excellent model for effective ecumenical collaboration and the added value it provides for each of the participating denominations. Team members are often the only specifically Christian voice in political discussions of rural matters. Without continuing active membership in the ARC team, the Methodist and United Reformed Churches would cease to have ready access to government and the benefits of ARC's research and campaigning.

Moreover, with the removal of a key staff post, the ARC's capacity would drop and much valuable work would have to be abandoned. The ARC's credibility with both government and the farming community would be seriously damaged and the role of the churches as partners with the Royal Agricultural Society of England and the Rank Foundation in the work of the Centre would be put in question.

4. To act as a rural advocate within the denominations

At the commencement of the present six year period of this post, the NRO was a member of the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church and a member of the Life and Witness Committee of the United Reformed Church. Both Churches have subsequently undergone restructuring.

In the Methodist Church the NRO is now a member of the Christian Communication, Evangelism and Advocacy Cluster (CCEA) and links into the cluster via the Coordinator of Evangelism, Spirituality and Discipleship (ESD); he also has links with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT). The absence of formal CCEA meetings since restructuring and the meeting pattern of ESD and JPIT (both have regular one hour meetings in London) have made it difficult for the NRO to link in well. The NRO's role in working with the Chairs' Rural Group is therefore of heightened importance. A recent development has seen the NRO become a member of the Chaplaincy Sub-cluster within the Discipleship & Ministries Cluster, attending meetings three or four times a year. There is no London based Connexional Team member on the Rural Strategy Group.

In the United Reformed Church the NRO has become a member of the Mission Team. He attends regular team meetings, Mission Committee, the Mission Council and the biennial General Assembly. A member of the Mission Committee is tasked with supporting the NRO's role and advocating rural work to the committee. The same committee member is one of the URC members of the Rural Strategy Group. The NRO is thus connected structurally to the denomination with two-way lines of communication.

Within Methodism the NRO finds a voice chiefly through the Chairs' Rural Group, which highly values his work, and the *Methodist Recorder*, which seeks contributions from him several times a year.

5. *To model sound ecumenical practice by bringing a skills balance to the Arthur Rank Centre team and the wider areas of its work and by maintaining a distinctive free-church voice and presence in all it does and says*

The ecumenical working of the ARC has been described above under point 3.

The NRO is part of a team that includes many groups which work from the ARC and are supported by the NRO's work. The Church of England has recently reviewed its National Rural Officer post and has confirmed that it should continue, and be based as at present, at the Arthur Rank Centre.

The current Director of the ARC, the Revd Dr Gordon Gatward, is a Methodist minister and will be retiring at the end of 2012. The Director's post will then be subject to open advertisement appointment. If the post of NRO is discontinued, the possibility arises that the Free Churches will cease to have any connection with the rural work of the ARC and the Church of England, severing the tie with this unique vehicle of rural mission and the excellent model of ecumenical working that it offers.

**Evaluating the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer against
the Priorities for the Methodist Church**

The *Priorities for the Methodist Church* were agreed by the Methodist Conference in 2004 and adopted as the guiding principles for future work. They were the focus of the church's strategic plan for 2005-08 and continue to shape the direction and decision making of the denomination. This review is focussed on the period since September 2005 and, therefore, the work needs to be considered and assessed in the context of the *Priorities*.

As well as making the *Priorities* central to strategic planning for 2005-08, the Methodist Church also embarked on a process of review called *Team Focus* which sought to make the Connexional Team fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. *Team Focus* was a three year programme leading to the establishment of a reconfigured Connexional Team with effect from 1st September 2008. When the process began, the post of National Rural Officer (NRO) was part of the Connexional Team. The outcomes of *Team Focus* now mean that, with effect from 31st August 2011, the post will no longer be part of the Connexional Team.

The Methodist Church states as its first priority:

'To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.'

Every aspect of the work of the NRO is directed towards this objective, in the context of rural communities. The highlighting of God's engagement with both the Church and the wider world lies at the heart of the work. There is a clear focus on renewing confidence in God's presence and action in rural churches and communities. The emphasis is on exploring new and creative ways in which an effective Christian presence can be sustained and promoted in rural communities, which are often small and vulnerable. Evidence for this can be seen in the following examples:

- promotion of *Presence* and the *Presence* papers
- hosting of post offices and/or community shops
- Local Collaborative Ministry (LCM)
- Rural Church Entrepreneurs (RCE)
- the *Making Connections* workbook
- *Country Way*
- development of tourism and heritage initiatives

The five subsequent priorities, through which this first one is to be realised, all find expression in the work of the National Rural Officer.

1. Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer

Training is offered in providing contextualised worship and churches are encouraged to think creatively about worship and how to make connections with the wider community, for example,

- through seasonal worship, rogation and harvest
- through offering worship at a variety of times, at significant community events and in places other than the church

Worship, Bible study and rural theology resources are developed and offered and a wide selection of publications made available through networks, at events, courses, Synods and meetings and through the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) website.

Currently the NRO is promoting *Open Farm Sunday* (an annual event organised by LEAF - Linking Environment and Farming) which encourages people to visit their local farms in order to learn about farming and food production and *British Food Fortnight* which celebrates all that is great about food produced in Britain. In both cases, the NRO has developed worship materials to encourage local churches to get involved.

2. Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide

Engaging in community development and action for justice is central to this area of work, in particular through

- resourcing the work of local churches
- rural-proofing church strategy and policy at local and connexional levels
- contributing to the development of government rural policy
- liaising with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

Rural poverty and disadvantage present particular challenges as they are often hidden and less concentrated than in urban areas. The needs of such people and communities were highlighted in a report to the government entitled, *Tackling rural disadvantage through how public services are reformed* published in November 2008 by the Commission for Rural Communities which states:

"We know that there are many rural people who do not have the wherewithal to choose. Primarily, they are the relatively poor, those with disabilities, and those affected by financial poverty, access poverty and 'network poverty' (i.e. a lack of informal contact with, and help from, friends and neighbours). The most vulnerable groups today are children and families, the elderly, women, and minorities. The causes of their disadvantage have been thoroughly researched and well documented (for example, in our 2006 study into rural disadvantage). Targeting and addressing the problems of these groups is made more difficult because much rural deprivation is hidden and masked by the affluence of many rural areas."

The work of the NRO enables both denominations to explore ways in which churches in rural communities can provide a faithful and effective Christian presence and, in so doing, seek to meet

the needs of the most deprived. A number of activities and resources have been developed to encourage and resource local churches in rural areas for mission. These include:

- the creative use of buildings
- Local Collaborative Ministry
- learning modules for rural mission
- Rural Church Entrepreneurs
- *Presence* and the *Presence* papers
- the *Making Connections* workbook
- *Country Way*

Establishing and maintaining a network of Rural Officers has been a key instrument in equipping local churches for mission and engagement with the rural poor. The research on *The Roles, Responsibilities and Resources of Rural Officers*, undertaken by Jonathan Still, analyses the work of the ecumenical network of Synod, District and Diocesan Rural Officers and highlights the importance of the network in supporting rural mission in the Methodist Church. As a representative figure for Rural Officers and Agricultural Chaplains, the NRO has recently become a member of the Chaplaincy Sub-cluster in the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster.

The fact that the NRO currently has a connexional role means that a more consistent and informed approach can be made. Particular examples of this would be the time given to establish a programme for the hosting of post offices by churches and ways in which the issue of migrant workers has been tackled. Work is currently underway to establish guidelines for churches wishing to host community shops.

3. Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved

The needs of the rural church are easily overlooked and the NRO seeks to address these so as to make the response of the church as relevant and appropriate as possible. The response involves being and doing, listening and speaking with confidence and in ways that make sense to all involved throughout the community.

This work also seeks to make the church more credible in its context, thus increasing its capacity to speak of faith more effectively. Much of this is achieved through training and the dissemination of good practice and creative ideas. The recent publication, *Making Connections*, provides an important resource in support of these aims.

Making sense to communities - many of which still believe the Church is central to their life - is a challenge that rural churches are facing. Programmes such as Local Collaborative Ministry, the *Making Connections* workbook, *Presence* and *Presence* papers and Rural Church Entrepreneurs help to gain credibility for the Church and, thereby, the right to speak of faith in Christ and the love of God to communities that may previously have been unresponsive. Again, in being a member of the Chaplaincy Sub-cluster and supporting the work of Rural Officers and Agricultural Chaplains, the NRO has an important role to play in facilitating this work.

4. Encouraging fresh ways of being church

Promoting and sustaining an effective Christian presence in villages, which has characterised much of recent Methodist mission in rural communities, requires at its heart a willingness to explore fresh ways of being church, such as

- the creative use of church buildings (e.g. the hosting of post offices)
- innovative ecumenical arrangements
- Local Collaborative Ministry
- Rural Church Entrepreneurs
- the pooling of resources
- the development of tourism and heritage initiatives

Fresh Expressions in a rural context are also encouraged and the NRO contributes to the 'rural-proofing' of the *Fresh Expressions* agenda.

A connexional role encourages new and creative thinking and facilitates the effective communication of good practice and fresh ideas, through, for example, *Country Way*.

5. Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

The publication *Presence* openly advocates the understanding that an effective Christian presence may or may not require a building and will necessarily be flexible in adapting to the huge changes and challenges facing rural churches and communities. In some contexts this requires a significant cultural shift to a more people-centred approach and this area of work is committed to such a shift. The development of a series of *Presence* papers has been overseen by the NRO so that rural communities can be helped to make relevant changes. The topics covered by the *Presence* papers are:

1. Stories of how Christian congregations have made a difference in their rural communities
2. The Pulse-Rate of Presence - Your Church's "Health" Checklist
3. Presence and Buildings
4. Presence in New Housing Areas
5. One Church - Several Congregations: Multi-locational Church
6. Presence with Purpose

The NRO is currently engaged in facilitating the creation of a *Presence* interactive website to promote the agenda of the rural church to a wider audience and is involved in a conversation relating *Presence* to discipleship.

The work undertaken by the NRO on migrant workers' issues has encouraged greater engagement by rural churches. The ARC website provides resources that can be offered to migrant workers by rural churches, enabling them to be relevant and responsive.

Country Way also keeps churches informed of the rural social justice agenda.

The NRO provides training and information on a wide range of matters - some of it in close co-operation with JPIT - such as:

- biofuels
- changes in agriculture
- environment
- farming help
- food - including food ethics and promoting greater church engagement with food issues
- housing
- migrant workers
- poverty
- service provision

The NRO has also promoted the *Get Fair* campaign and *Faith in Affordable Housing* which provides churches with advice about the use of church land and buildings for affordable housing. He recently supplied a rural issues page for CTBI's *Faith in Politics* resource and responds to government consultation papers.

The NRO is a trustee of Farm Crisis Network and serves as a chaplain to the Rural Stress Helpline.

Until very recently the work of 'Eco-congregation' was based at the ARC and is still being promoted by the NRO and other members of the ARC team, enabling local churches to make their buildings and practices more eco-friendly.

The beginning of the Priorities states that:

'In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

'To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, etc.'

This being so, partnerships are also seen as an essential part of the strategy of the Methodist Church and the work programme of the Connexional Team. The very fact that the NRO post is shared with the United Reformed Church shapes the many partnerships involved. The engagement with the Joint Public Issues Team further makes the point.

Ecumenical Partnerships

The NRO post plays a crucial role in developing ecumenical partnerships through the work programme of the ARC and by supporting the

- Rural Officers' Network
- Rural Strategy Group
- Churches' Rural Group
- Churches' Regional Network

Two of the ongoing projects - Rural Church Entrepreneurs and Local Collaborative Ministry - support the development of ecumenical partnerships. Both have been initiated by the NRO and he continues to be central to the way in which they develop.

World Church Partnerships

The NRO is engaged in particular partnerships in Europe and New Zealand and is helping to develop the ARC's involvement in the European and international rural church networks.

The NRO is actively involved in the International Rural Churches Association and will soon be attending its conference, held every four years.

The NRO's sabbatical in 2008 focused on Local Collaborative Ministry in New Zealand and relationships have strengthened since then such that colleagues in New Zealand have embraced the concept of *Open Farm Sunday* from the NRO.

**Evaluating the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer against
the United Reformed Church's Vision 2020**

The period under review (from mid-2005 till the present) spans two phases of strategic mission development in the United Reformed Church, *Catch the Vision* (2003-2007) and *Vision2020* (2008-present). Whereas *Catch the Vision* focused on restructuring the church for mission, *Vision2020* provides a ten year strategic framework for the development of mission action at local, Synod and Assembly level. The initial proposals for the *Vision2020* framework have been widely discussed within the URC and a final proposal has now been submitted for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly in July 2010.

A key part of the *Vision2020* strategic framework are the so called statements of mission and purpose, which are based on the *Five Marks of Mission* but have been expanded to reflect more accurately the priorities of the United Reformed Church at all levels. It is these priorities that form the basis for the evaluation of the Rural Mission Project from the perspective of the United Reformed Church. This will enable the reviewers to look forward as well as backward and may contribute to the second objective of the review: *to identify any new priorities and future needs for rural mission work*.

The ten statements of mission purpose in *Vision2020* are listed below. Each statement is followed by a brief description of how the Rural Mission Project/the work of the National Rural Officer (NRO) is contributing to the realisation of this priority. This description is based on a review of workplans and appraisals of the work of the NRO in recent years.

1. **Spirituality and Prayer:**

We will grow in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A focus of the Rural Mission Project has been on providing worship, Bible study and rural theology resources for use in local congregations. These have been made available through the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) website, *Country Way* and other publications, network meetings, events, courses and meetings. Training is offered to enable churches to connect creatively with their local communities through worship and the NRO is available to lead worship in local churches and at special community events.

2. **Identity:**

The URC will be a church where every local congregation will be able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

A key focus of *Vision2020* is to enable churches to articulate an identity that is firmly rooted in God's mission. The work of the NRO is crucial in exploring ways in which churches in rural communities can provide a faithful and effective Christian presence. A number of activities and

resources have been developed to encourage and resource local churches in rural areas for mission. This includes:

- Resources to encourage the creative use of buildings
- Developing Local Collaborative Ministry (LCM)
- Developing learning modules for rural mission
- Producing the *Making Connections* workbook
- *Country Way*

The network of Rural Officers has been a key instrument in equipping local churches for mission and strengthening this network is a major part of the work of the NRO. The research on *The Roles, Responsibilities and Resources of Rural Officers* analyses the work of the ecumenical network of Synod, District and Diocesan Rural Officers and highlights the importance of the network in supporting rural mission in the URC and delivering the resources of the ARC to the local church.

3. **Christian Ecumenical Partnerships:**

We will be more confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the church.

Seeking a wide variety of ecumenical partnerships at local and national level is integral to the URC's vision to seek further Christian unity. The NRO post, itself the result of ecumenical co-operation, plays a crucial role in expressing and developing such partnerships: through the overall work programme of the ARC, supporting the Rural Officers' Network, the Rural Strategy Group (RSG), the Churches' Rural Group and the Churches' Regional Network.

Two projects particularly support the development of Christian ecumenical partnerships: Rural Church Entrepreneurs (see below) and Local Collaborative Ministry in a Rural Context (LCM). Both have been initiated by the NRO who continues to play a driving role in their strategic development.

4. **Community Partnerships:**

We will be a church that is more active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

Enabling rural churches to be more active in their local communities and to contribute to their development is a central part of the work of the NRO. This has been done through a range of initiatives, such as promoting the creative use of church buildings through the Rural Officers' network (including publishing guidelines for churches wishing to host post offices and working on similar guidelines for hosting community shops), encouraging local church mission through training, the production of resources such as the *'Making Connections'* workbook, which encourages rural churches to engage with their communities in proactive and creative ways, and in particular through Rural Church Entrepreneurs. Within the wider work programme of the Arthur Rank Centre the NRO takes the lead on this initiative and collaborates with the Churches'

Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, exploring how entrepreneurial skills can be encouraged and developed within the lay and ordained leadership in the rural church and creating a leadership development programme. The NRO also promotes *Open Farm Sunday* (an annual event organised by LEAF - Linking Environment and Farming) and *British Food Fortnight* (celebrating all that is good about British food), in both cases developing worship materials to encourage local churches to get involved.

5. **Hospitality and diversity:**

We will be a church committed to becoming even more welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

The URC is a multicultural church, seeking to be a church that includes, affirms and welcomes all. The NRO's work on migrant workers' issues has promoted greater engagement with diversity issues in rural churches. Through the ARC website, resources and services for migrant workers provided by rural churches and other agencies are publicised and promoted. *Country Way* also keeps churches informed of the rural social justice agenda and the situation of migrant workers in Britain's rural areas. Stories of specific projects in rural churches focusing on migrant workers have been widely disseminated in order to promote good practice and inspire others.

6. **Evangelism:**

We will be more confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

Reclaiming an understanding and practice of evangelism at all levels of the church are ongoing concerns for the URC. The work of the NRO supports this by encouraging local church mission and developing Local Collaborative Ministry. Sharing good practice and creative ideas are effective ways of equipping churches for evangelism. The NRO supports and resources the Rural Officers, who provide training for rural churches and facilitate the sharing of good news stories and creative ideas. Furthermore, through this network, ideas for the imaginative use of rural church buildings are promoted, which enable churches to reach their communities in new ways. A recent example is the URC in Belford, Northumberland which is now home to a cinema, showing films on a monthly basis. Written resources have been provided through the ARC website, *Country Way*, the *Making Connections* workbook and the *Rural Life and Faith Project*, which will ensure that relevant and accessible training materials are available to the rural church.

7. **Church Growth:**

We will be a growing church with an increasing membership.

The URC seeks to be a growing church in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Encouraging churches to explore new/fresh ways of being church is at the heart of seeking to realise this priority. The work of the NRO in the areas of encouraging local church mission, developing new models of church leadership through Local Collaborative Ministry and Rural Church

Entrepreneurs continues to make an important contribution to the growth of the church. Rural *Fresh Expressions* are also encouraged and the NRO contributes to the 'rural-proofing' of the *Fresh Expressions* agenda.

8. **Global Partnerships:**

We will be a church that is an active partner in God's global mission with other churches around the world.

The URC is an active partner in the world church, sharing its resources for mission with others and discerning together God's action and call. The NRO contributes to this through seeking to re-connect the ARC to the European and international rural church networks and developing new links, working closely with the URC's Secretary for World Church Relations. The NRO plays an active part in the International Rural Churches Association and will shortly be attending its four-yearly conference. Through the Churches' European Rural Network the NRO is also looking to increase rural input into the work of the Conference of European Churches. Following his sabbatical in 2008, which focused on Local Collaborative Ministry in New Zealand, the NRO has developed strong links with this country and one of the results of the continuing exchange has been the adoption of *Open Farm Sunday* there.

9. **Justice and Peace:**

We will be a church committed to peacemaking and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

The NRO's work to equip and enable the church to respond effectively to rural social justice issues is an important part of the church's social justice work. The NRO has provided training and information on issues such as Food, Migrant Workers, Poverty, Housing, Environment, Service Provision and Farming Help, co-operating closely with the Joint Public Issues Team. The NRO has promoted the *Get Fair* campaign through his networks and *Faith in Affordable Housing*, providing churches with practical and technical advice about the use of church land and buildings for affordable housing. The NRO also rural-proofs church strategy at local, Synod and Assembly levels and, as part of the ARC team, contributes to the development of government rural policy. He recently supplied a rural issues page for CTBI's *Faith in Politics* resource and occasionally responds to government consultation papers. The NRO is a trustee of Farm Crisis Network and acts as chaplain to the Rural Stress Helpline.

10. **The Integrity of Creation:**

We will be a church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Taking steps to safeguard the integrity of creation is high on the agenda of the URC and is an area of work in which the NRO is playing a vital role. The NRO has produced work on food ethics, promoting greater church engagement with food issues, biofuels and on changes in agriculture. Before its recent move to A Rocha 'Ecocongregation' was based at the ARC and is

still being promoted by the NRO and other members of the ARC team, enabling local churches to make their buildings and practices more eco-friendly. Active efforts have also been made to provide a rural pilot congregation for the *Living the Future* programme. Service provision in rural areas is another focus of the NRO's work. Information has been produced and provided through the ARC website and *Country Way*.

Resources

The NRO has played an active part in producing materials for the ARC website, *Country Way* and the *Making Connections* workbook, which are appropriate to the majority of *Vision2020* statements. The ARC's three-year *Rural Life and Faith* project also contributes to a number of *Vision2020* priorities. The NRO was involved in the formation of the project and continues to support and facilitate it.

Review of the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer

Rural Mission Research Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1. An ecumenical post dedicated to rural mission across the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church has been in existence since the mid 1990s. Currently, a National Rural Officer (NRO) working for both denominations is based at the Arthur Rank Centre.
- 1.2. As specified in the job description for the NRO, the purpose and objectives of this post are:
 - To enable rural congregations to engage with their communities with renewed confidence.
 - To enable the rural voice to be heard in both the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.
 - To enable the denominations to contribute effectively to the development of UK rural policies.
- 1.3. This survey was undertaken as part of the review of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer. The findings from this research will help to shape the recommendations of this review and future work on rural mission within both denominations.

2. Research Methods & Report Outlook

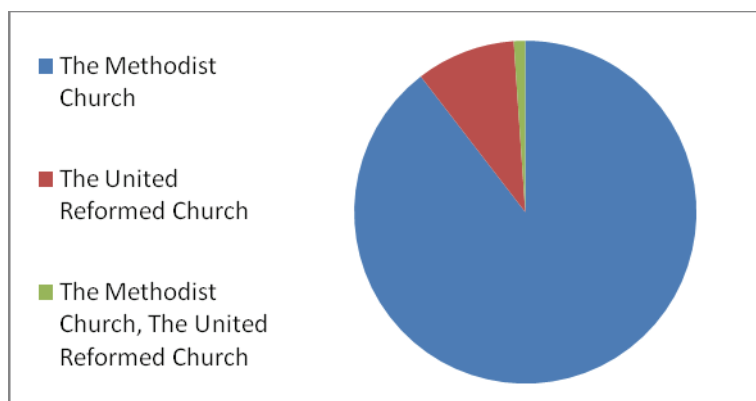
- 2.1. This report contains evaluation of the results of a survey conducted across two weeks in May/June 2010. Two different groups of contacts were invited to take part in this work. It should be noted that due to the tight deadlines for this work, those contacted were asked to complete the survey within a two week period. This impacted some potential respondents' ability to contribute to this research.
- 2.2. Firstly, 139 office holders across both the Methodist Church and the URC (including Rural Officers, Training Officers, Development Officers, District Chairs, Moderators and Synod Clerks) were invited to complete the survey. They were also given the opportunity to complete the survey online or over the telephone with a specially employed researcher. The response rate (counted as those who successfully took the questionnaire) was 30%.
- 2.3. Secondly, ministers in rural appointment across both Churches were invited to complete the survey using the same method. Open invitations were issued to 1117 Ministers and 182 responded, thereby a response rate of 16%. Their responses in particular will be helpful to inform the needs for rural mission going forwards.
- 2.4. This method was employed to attempt to gain the views of a wide variety of people whose work involves, to varying extents, rural mission. The respondents had wide ranging experiences of ministry, and particularly rural mission, across both Churches. They were asked to specify the focus of their Church and/or mission so to allow the findings to be analysed according to the needs of different types of churches.
- 2.5. The survey aimed to measure the impact of rural mission work across the Methodist Church and the URC and to gather information on future requirements for work in this

area. These findings are intended to inform the review group as it formulates proposals for future work in this area.

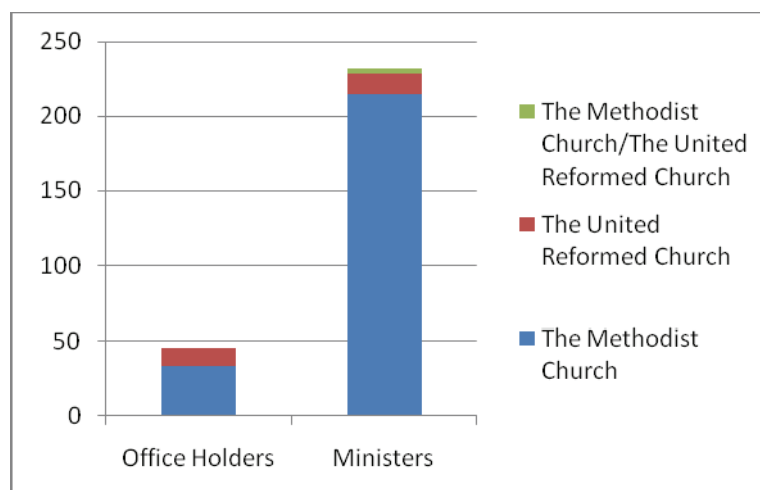
- 2.6. During the course of this research, anyone contacted who requested further information on rural mission was directed to the Arthur Rank Centre website as well as the web resources of the Methodist Church and URC.

3. Demographic Information

- 3.1. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to gather demographic information of those completing the survey.
- 3.2. The vast majority of respondents were from within the Methodist Church. This is partly because a larger number of Methodist Ministers were invited to take part in the survey as more information was available within the Methodist Church to help to identify ministers in rural appointments. However, it should be noted that there are 1500 churches within the URC in Britain and approximately 25% of these are in rural and market town settings compared to over 60% of approximately 6000 churches in the Methodist Church.
- 3.3. Therefore, this meant that, overall, there were many more Methodist (248) than URC (36) respondents to the survey. In addition, 3 respondents identified themselves as being linked to both the Methodist Church and the URC through a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP):

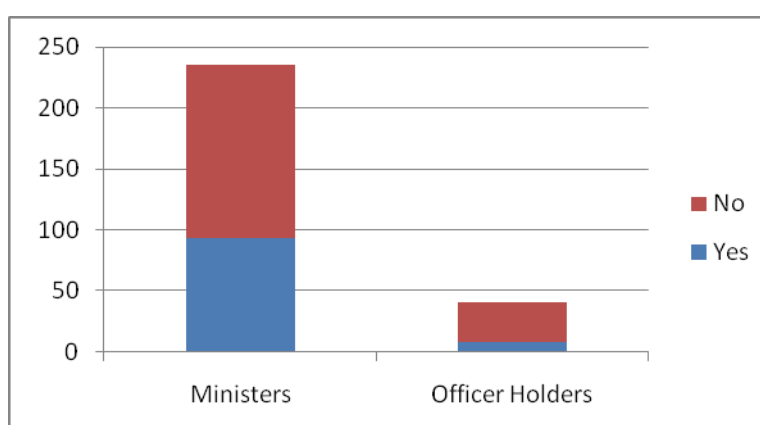


- 3.3 However, the sample of office holders who participated in the survey was more equally spread albeit a much smaller sample due to the number of Ministers contacted in the Methodist Church and invited to take part in the research:



3.4 When asked if they saw rural mission as the main focus of their work, the majority of respondents (174 or 63%) said that they did not.

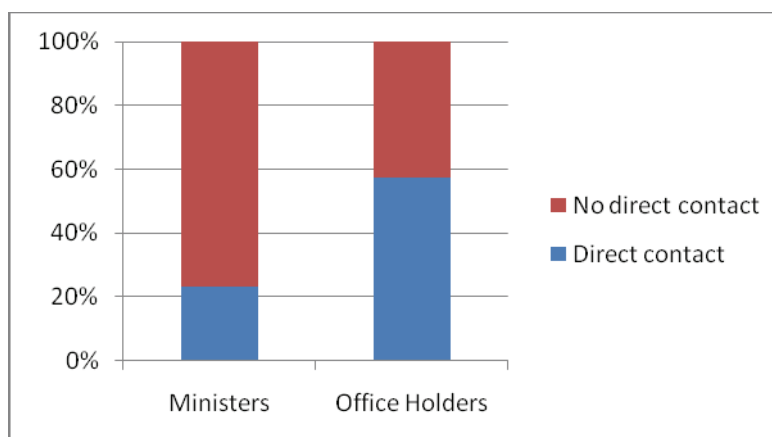
3.5 However, the results for only the ministers asked to take part in this survey were slightly more equally spread. Whilst only 20% of office holders canvassed saw rural mission as the focus of their work, almost twice as many (39.6%) of Ministers considered their primary focus to be rural mission:



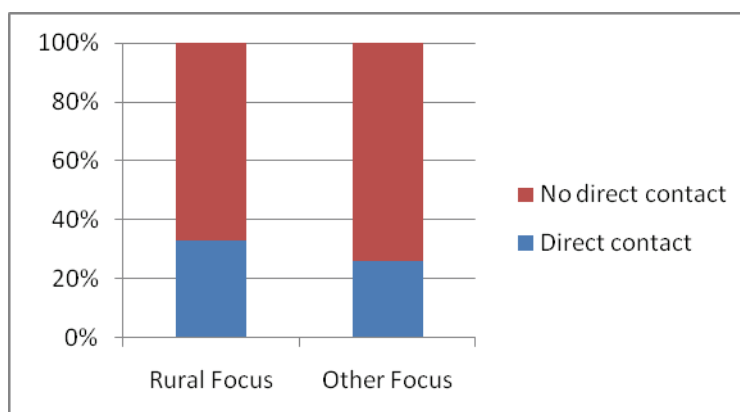
3.6 Those who did not feel that rural mission was the main focus of their work were asked to specify what they felt this was. Many saw this as one aspect of a mixed and varied remit.

4. Contact with the National Rural Officer

- 4.1. Respondents were asked to comment on the contact they have had in the past with the National Rural Officer. Graham Jones was named as the current postholder to ensure that those who knew Graham Jones but not his official title within the Churches were able to answer these questions as accurately as possible.
- 4.2. Less than a third of those surveyed (78 respondents or 28%) indicated that they had had direct contact with the NRO.
- 4.3. Office holders canvassed were almost twice as likely as Ministers taking part in this research to have had direct contact with the NRO (23.3% compared to 57.5%):



- 4.4. However, there was much less discrepancy between those who see rural mission as the focus of their work and those who did not; a third of those who stated rural issues as their mission focus stated that they had been in direct contact with the NRO whilst 25.9% of those whose work was dedicated to different or more diverse issues had experienced such contact:



5. Methods of Contact

- 5.1. Written resources and electronic communication proved to be much more popular than face-to-face or telephone contact. Although we did not ask why respondents used particular media, it is clear that many more people benefit from regular usage of the website, published resources and email contact than from telephone contact or face-to-face meetings with the NRO:

	Face-to-face	Telephone	Email	Printed Publications	Website/ Electronic Resources
Weekly	0	0	5	1	5
Monthly	1	3	20	8	8
Quarterly	19	6	12	24	19
Annually	30	21	13	27	26

Never	67	83	68	58	61
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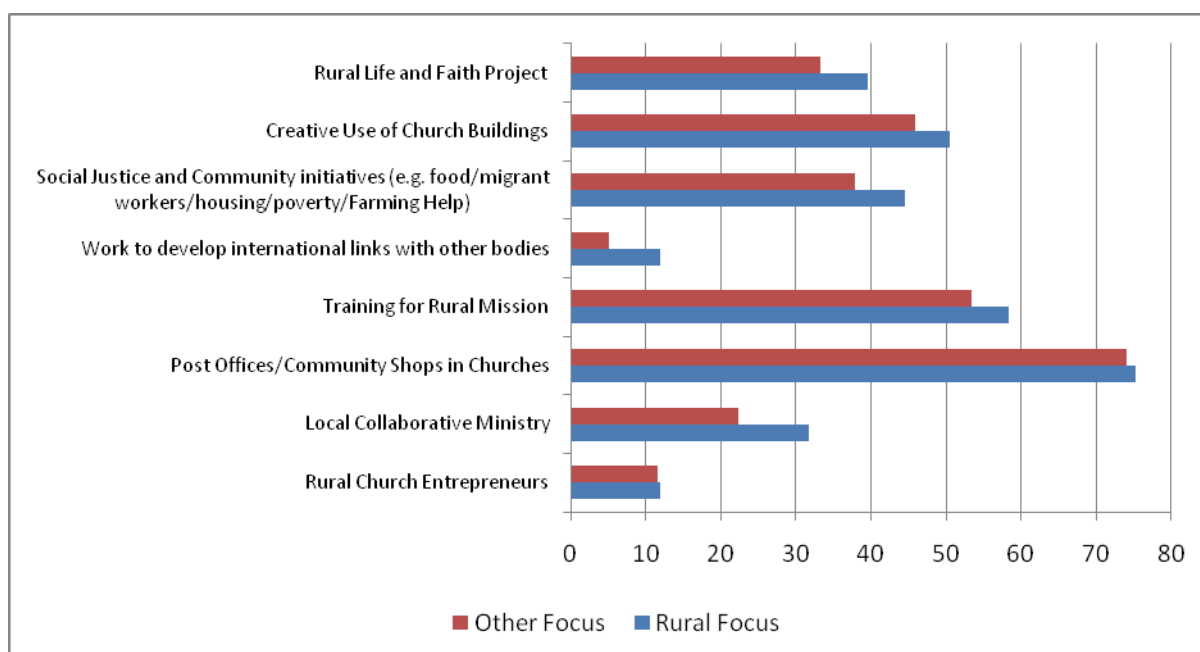
- 5.2. Very few respondents reported weekly contact with the NRO in any form, however, email and other forms of electronic communications were recorded most often. This suggests that respondents have regularly utilised the printed and electronic publications produced by the NRO.

6. Engagement in Past and Ongoing Programmes and Initiatives

- 6.1. A list of programmes and initiatives on which the National Rural Officer has worked was given to respondents who were asked to indicate if they knew about any of this work. The number of respondents (out of a total of 277) who had heard of each programme or initiative is shown in the table below:

Rural Church Entrepreneurs	32
Local Collaborative Ministry	71
Post Offices/Community Shops in Churches	205
Training for Rural Mission	153
Work to develop international links with other bodies	21
Social Justice and Community initiatives (e.g. food/migrant workers/housing/poverty/Farming Help)	111
Creative Use of Church Buildings	131
Rural Life and Faith Project	98

- 6.2. These findings can be broken down between those respondents who do and do not see the main focus of their work as being rural mission. Whilst all initiatives were better known amongst respondents who see rural mission as the main focus of their work, there is little disparity between these figures for a number of programmes and initiatives, particularly the work to promote post offices and community shops in churches.
- 6.3. However, work to develop links with international bodies was not well known amongst the respondents and particularly not those whose work was not dominated by rural mission and there were larger differences in the level of knowledge between those with and without a rural focus dominating their work on the question of Local Collaborative Ministry.



6.4. They were also given the opportunity to add to this list any other programmes or initiatives of which they were aware. This included work to support parish nursing, planning in rural areas and elderly people who live alone as well as the Farm Crisis Network.

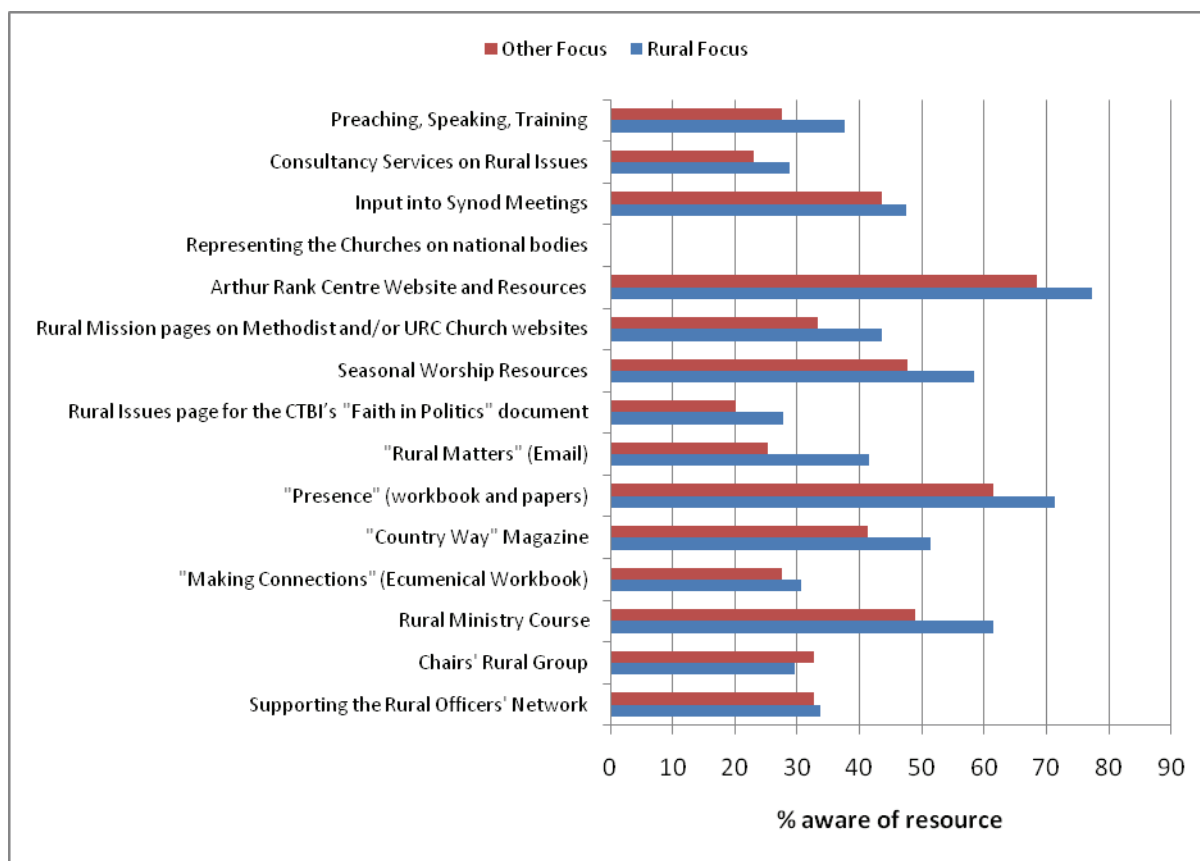
7. Resources, Events and Networks that Support Rural Mission

- 7.1. Respondents were asked if they had experience of any of a list of resources, events and networks supporting to rural mission which the National Rural Officer has produced, encouraged or promoted.
- 7.2. It is evident from their responses that many initiatives were well known and often well used. Over half of the respondents were aware of the top 4 resources, and all listed resources apart from the NRO's work to represent the Methodist Church and URC on national bodies was known by over 22% of those surveyed.
- 7.3. However, the findings show that while resources such as 'Presence', 'Country Way' magazine and seasonal worship resources have been used by the majority of people who knew of them others, including the ARC website, rural ministry course and service to offer input into synod meetings, were well known but not as well utilised.

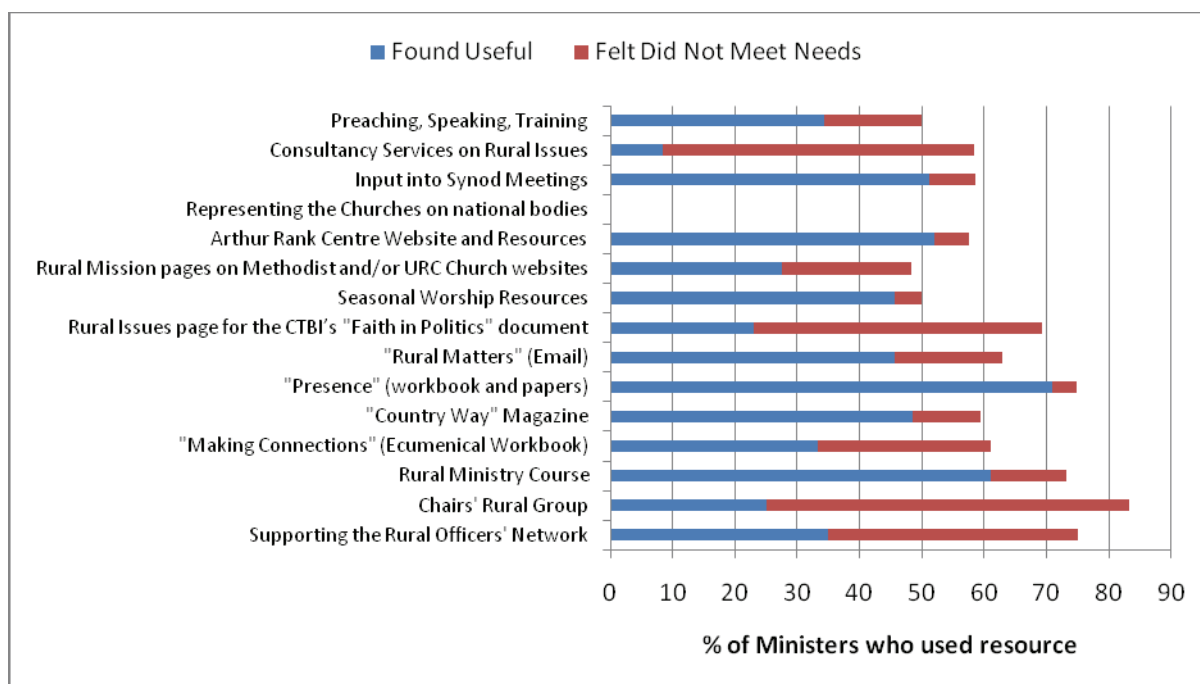
	Aware of	Used
Arthur Rank Centre Website and Resources	198	94
"Presence" (workbook and papers)	179	125
Rural Ministry Course	147	52
Seasonal Worship Resources	142	82
"Country Way" Magazine	124	79

Input into Synod Meetings	124	52
Rural Mission pages on Methodist and/or URC Church websites	102	39
Supporting the Rural Officers' Network	91	30
Chairs' Rural Group	87	26
"Rural Matters" (Email)	86	53
Preaching, Speaking, Training	86	37
"Making Connections" (Ecumenical Workbook)	79	26
Consultancy Services on Rural Issues	69	19
Rural Issues page for the CTBI's "Faith in Politics" document	63	21
Representing the Churches on national bodies	0	0

- 7.4. Conversely, other aspects of the NRO's work were not well known amongst those responding to the questions asked. This is particularly obvious regarding the NRO's work representing the Methodist Church and URC on national bodies as no respondent indicated that they were aware of this part of the NRO's remit. Those resources offering a more direct service to practitioners on the ground were much better known amongst the respondents.
- 7.5. When the sample was split between those who said their main focus was and was not rural mission it was clear that most resources were better known amongst those who saw their work focussing in this area. Only the Chairs' Rural Group, focused at officer holders rather than Ministers in circuit, was better known amongst those who did not see rural mission as their focus:



- 7.6. The survey also asked if respondents felt that these resources met their rural mission needs or not. Amongst those completing this survey who had used these resources, there was endorsement of the usefulness of most resources. In particular, the ARC website and resources, seasonal worship resources, "Presence" and the Rural Ministry Course were endorsed by substantially more users than those who felt they did not meet their needs.
- 7.7. However, more users felt that consultancy services on rural issues and contributions to the CTBI's Faith in Politics document did not meet their needs than those who felt these services were useful. However, as the chart above displays, these resources were used by the 2nd and 3rd least number of respondents.
- 7.8. These results can also be broken down according to respondents' position within the churches; Ministers who indicated that they had used the resources showed particular support for the usefulness of the NRO's input into Synod meetings, the Arthur Rank Centre website, the rural ministry course and, in particular, the "Presence" workbook and papers. In contrast, they indicated that consultancy services on rural issues and the Chairs' Rural Group (which is a service provided for particular office holders) did not meet their needs.



- 7.9. None of the rural officers who responded to the survey indicated that any of the resources which they had used were not useful in their work. However, both the rural ministry course and the ARC website received particularly high support; 75 % of rural offices who had used them found them to be useful.

8. Duplication of Work

- 8.1. The survey asked if respondents felt that any resources or services offered by the National Rural Officer could be provided from elsewhere. About 9 out of 10 ministers and office holders (90.2 and 90% respectively) stated that they did not believe that any services offered or resources produced by the National Rural Officer duplicated those that they could or should receive from other sources.
- 8.2. Those who did indicate that they believed such resources could be obtained from other sources were asked to specify from where they could or would expect to receive such support. Those who indicated that they felt they got the information from other sources generally cited services offered at district and local level, as well as other work undertaken by the ARC not purely under the label of the NRO's work.
- 8.3. However, many of those responding to this question did not necessarily perceive any overlap of work to be a problem, with one Methodist respondent suggesting that:

"It is inevitable there will be some duplication - most of us receive information from a variety of different networks - some local, some from other denominations. I don't think this really matters. It is a bit like hearing two sermons preached on the same passage by different preachers. It is important for someone to have a national overview. I think it is also important for the URC to be involved. There is a danger that the denomination/synods might withdraw from rural areas because of the expense of putting ministry into

small churches which cannot 'sensibly' be grouped with others as they can in towns and cities."

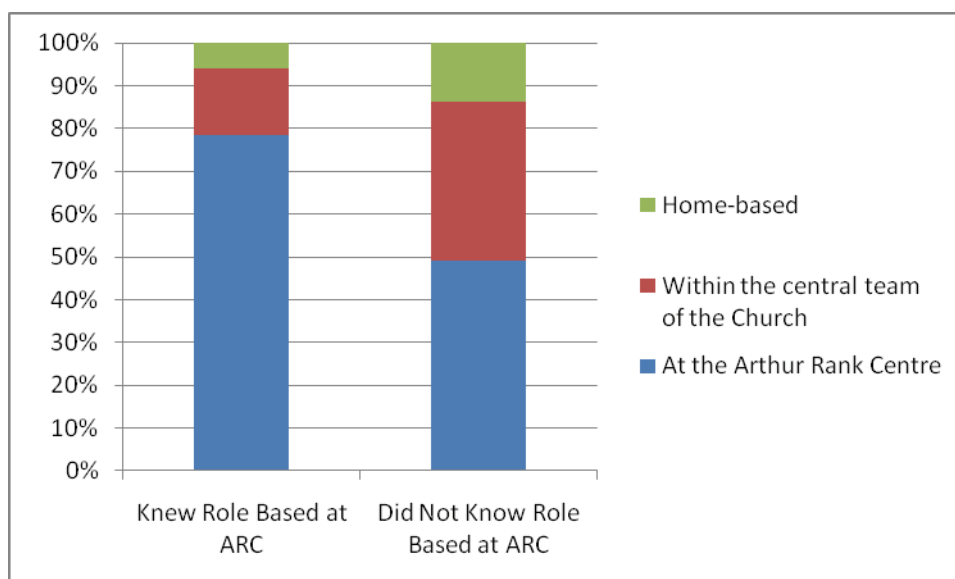
- 8.4. Nonetheless, concern was shown by some of those who completed the questionnaire who were not based in England but other parts of the UK. They indicated that the resources made available to them by the NRO were not always as relevant to their work.

9. Links to the Arthur Rank Centre

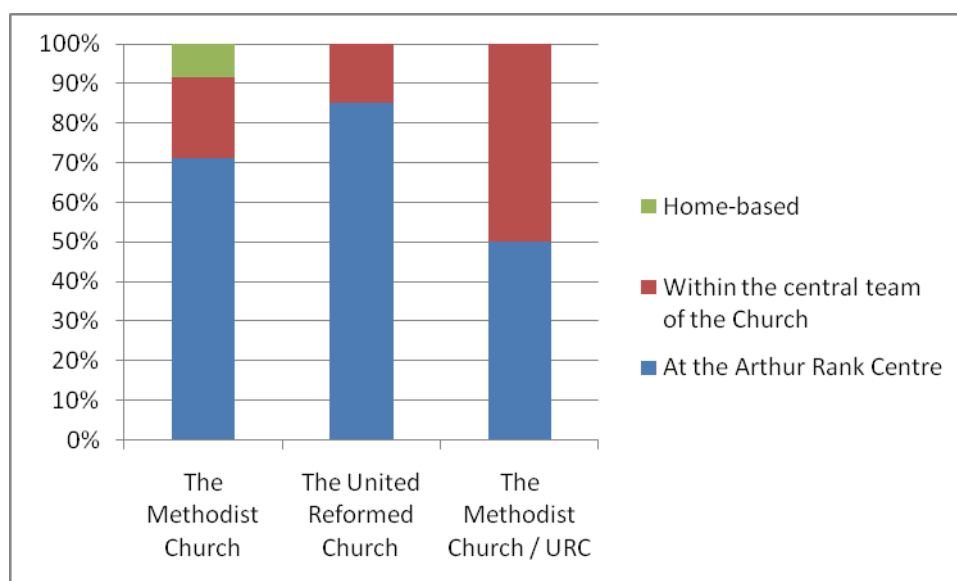
- 9.1. Questions as to work carried out by the Arthur Rank Centre, where the National Rural Officer is based, were also included in the survey. This was designed to ensure that the impact of the NRO's work as part of the ARC team was reflected in responses to this research.
- 9.2. The survey asked if the respondents knew that the NRO post was based at the ARC. The vast majority (208, just over three quarters of those asked) did know of this link.
- 9.3. Those surveyed were also asked where it would be most useful for the NRO to be based in future. They were given three options (the ARC, within the central team of their church or as a home-based position) and most asserted that the role should continue at the ARC:

At the Arthur Rank Centre	168
Within the central team of the Church	47
Home-based	18

- 9.4. Of those who did know that the post was currently based at the ARC, almost 80% supported a continuation of this arrangement:



- 9.5. Although the majority of respondents from each individual denomination supported the post remaining at the ARC, a greater proportion of respondents from the URC believed the post should continue to be based there. However, there was no support from URC respondents to this research for the post to be home-based:



10. Success Stories

- 10.1. As well as the quantitative information gathered from the above questions, respondents were also asked if they wished to share news of any success stories relating to the work of the National Rural Officer or the ARC. A wide range of anecdotal evidence was offered to support the work of the NRO and the ARC.
- 10.2. In particular, the Presence resources, Rural Ministry Course and ARC website were once again highlighted by a number of people who responded to the survey. In addition, updates offered on rural issues (at both the national and international level), networking opportunities that are co-ordinated by the NRO and tailored work on particular issues affecting rural communities (such as the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease) were also cited as success stories for the ARC.
- 10.3. However, some comments also displayed the perceived limitations of the post of the NRO including calls for there to be more courses in more diverse locations, criticism that the focus of the NRO is too limited to farming rather than more general rural issues and the belief that the NRO's remit is *"too big and too vague"* to be effective.

11. Future Needs

- 11.1. As the review is largely focused on future needs of those involved in rural mission, the survey asked those involved in this work if there were any specific resources and/or services which they anticipate will be required in the future.
- 11.2. A number of practical issues were highlighted by numerous respondents. Many of these concerned issues relating to small church congregations meeting in rural communities.

This included questions as to how the Church could have an effective presence without a dedicated building, positive ways to amalgamate smaller congregations (both geographically and ecumenically) and the creative use of Church buildings. Work on Fresh Expressions in rural areas was also frequently identified.

- 11.3. A number of social issues, particularly rural unemployment as well as transport, youth services and working with older people were also highlighted. Farming matters were mentioned by a number of people (in particular with relation to food production and local produce within the UK), along with the lack of understanding within urban communities of the farming sector.
- 11.4. A number of respondents also listed a number of resources that are already in place as important future needs. These included seasonal worship resources, dedicated training for rural mission, representing views to national and local government and work on existing projects such as Local Collaborative Ministry.
- 11.5. A number of respondents highlighted the fact that many churches deal with rural issues even when they were not based in a purely rural area. They called for cross-over(?) resources to address general issues but with a rural focus that could be used in a wider range of situations.
- 11.6. A number of particular issues to specific circumstances were also raised by respondents. These included concerns from the Isle of Man as to the needs of its rural community which sits outside UK and EU jurisdictions, issues recruiting volunteers with appropriate skills in rural Churches and protection of the sea.

12. Additional Comments

- 12.1. A number of respondents lodged additional comments about rural mission work. Some of these were specifically aimed towards the NRO and/or the ARC asking for particular help, guidance or contact on a specific issue. These will be passed on to the NRO along with the complete findings of this research.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1. Overall, there are a number of patterns that can be identified within this research.
- 13.2. Over a third of those canvassed saw rural mission as the main focus of their work. Many more saw it as one aspect of a varied focus highlighting the impact of rural mission across both Churches.
- 13.3. The majority of office holders across both churches enjoyed direct contact with the NRO. In particular, email contact along with the production of written and electronic resources was recorded as happening much more frequently than face-to-face and telephone contact.
- 13.4. Most initiatives were well known both amongst those who do and do not feel that rural mission is the focus of their work. High profile initiatives that have a stronger presence on the ground, such as work on post offices and community shops in churches and the creative use of church buildings were better known amongst respondents and the NRO's

work to develop international links with other bodies was the least recognised part of this work.

- 13.5. Likewise, the NRO's work to represent the Methodist Church and URC on national bodies was not identified by any respondent to this questionnaire suggesting that such work is not well recognised by, or communicated to, people Ministers and office holders.
- 13.6. Many resources were endorsed by those who had used them with the "Presence" workbook scoring particularly well. However, other services such as consultancy services offered by the NRO, contributions to CTBI's web pages and the Chairs' Rural Group were considered not to meet many users' need.
- 13.7. The vast majority of respondents (over 90%) did not feel that they could obtain the resources or services provided by the NRO from elsewhere.
- 13.8. The majority of respondents, particularly the majority of those who knew of the existing links between the NRO and the ARC, believed that the post should continue as part of the Arthur Rank Centre.

Review of the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer

Outline Budget for 2011-16

EXPENDITURE	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Salary	24,436	25,169	25,924	26,702	27,503
Ni and Pension	7,186	7,402	7,624	7,852	8,088
Office, travel etc	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Housing	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
Miscellaneous	178	229	252	246	209
Total Expenditure	48,800	49,800	50,800	51,800	52,800

An inflation figure of 3% per annum has been assumed for the salary and pension costs

Office and housing costs fluctuate and, therefore, they are shown here as being the average expected costs over a five year period.

Review of the Role of the Methodist/URC National Rural Officer

Glossary and Bibliography

Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) is a charity established in 1972 with three founding partners, the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the Rank Foundation and the national churches. Its stated objective is 'to serve the rural community and its churches'. It is based at the National Agricultural Centre in Warwickshire.

British Food Fortnight is the annual national celebration of all that's great about British food.

Care Farms are farms providing social, educational, therapeutic and development opportunities for a wide range of client groups through the use of land based activities. The national network is supported by the National Care Farming Initiative of which the ARC is one of the four founding partners.

Catch the Vision is a process by which the United Reformed Church focused on restructuring the church for mission between 2003 and 2007.

Churches' Regional Network brings together those working on behalf of the churches in the English Regions.

Churches' Rural Group is a coordinating group of Churches Together in England, bringing together a wide range of denominations and organisations involved in rural mission.

Commission for Rural Communities is a government quango that was established 'to promote awareness of the social and economic needs of people who live in rural areas.' The lead officer is Revd. Dr. Stuart Burgess who also serves as Rural Advocate to the Prime Minister.

Country Way is a magazine published three times a year by the Arthur Rank Centre.

CTBI is Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

DEFRA is a department of national government with the full title of the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

Eco-congregation is an A Rocha UK project seeking to help churches begin to address environmental issues in all that they do. It is suitable for all kinds of churches to use.

Faith in Affordable Housing is a web-based resource (www.fiah.org.uk) that provides churches with practical and technical advice about the use of church land and buildings for affordable housing. Hard copies of a promotional leaflet are available from the ARC.

Farm Crisis Network is a UK network of groups of volunteers drawn from the farming community and rural churches providing practical and pastoral help to farming families and businesses. FCN volunteers are there to 'walk with' and support farming people and families as they seek to resolve their problems, whatever they may be.

Get Fair Coalition brings together over 50 organisations in campaigning for an end to poverty in the UK by 2020

Joint Public Issues Team has been created by some of the Free Churches to effectively to engage with current public issues, mainly in Great Britain. The Team is based at Methodist Church House.

Local Collaborative Ministry - an approach to ministry which empowers the laity and is bearing much fruit in churches as far a field as New Zealand and Canada. It has a strap-line of 'the ministry of the baptised' and encourages local teams of people to take responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church in the local context, resourced by an external 'enabler'.

'Making Connections' workbook encourages rural churches to engage with their communities in proactive and creative ways.

Methodist Recorder is a weekly newspaper targeted and members and friends of the Methodist Church

National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh is where the Arthur Rank Centre is located and is the home of many of the major organisations in the agricultural industry, including the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the National Farmers Union, the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board.

Open Farm Sunday (an annual event organized by LEAF - Linking Environment and Farming) which encourages people onto their local farms to learn about farming and food production). In 2010 over 450 farms were open to the public, attracting in excess of half a million people.

Presence is a workbook published in 2004 to help promote and sustain an effective Christian presence in villages. A series of Presence papers have been prepared to further support and sustain rural ministry.

Priorities for the Methodist Church is a document agreed by the Methodist Conference in 2004 and adopted as the guiding principles for future work. The *Priorities* were the focus of the church's strategic plan for 2005-08 and continue to shape the direction and decision making of the denomination.

Reform is the United Reformed Church's monthly magazine.

Roles, Responsibilities and Resources of Rural Officers by Revd Jonathan Still was published in 2007 and has given useful encouragement in the support of the network of Rural Officers. A copy can be obtained from the ARC.

Rural Church Entrepreneurs - an initiative in collaboration with the Churches' Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, to encourage rural churches to engage with their communities in proactive and creative ways, exploring how entrepreneurial skills can be developed in the rural church.

Rural Community Buildings Network was established by DEFRA in July 2006 in order to ...

Rural Life and Faith Project is a three-year ARC project seeking to further develop the range of appropriate training materials available to rural churches and practitioners and addressing the barriers to learning.

Rural Ministry Course is fully ecumenical and is held twice a year at the ARC for those entering rural ministry for the first time.

Rural Strategy Group (RSG) consists of members drawn from both the Methodist and United Reformed Churches. The RSG meets at the ARC and exercises oversight of the NRO post.

Rural Stress Helpline is a confidential listening service, based at the ARC, for rural people who are anxious, worried or stressed.

Team Focus is a process of review which sought to make the Methodist Church's Connexional Team fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. It was a three year programme leading to the establishment of a reconfigured Connexional Team with effect from 1st September 2008.

Vision2020 is a document produced by the United Reformed Church in order to provide a ten year strategic framework for the development of mission action at local, Synod and Assembly level. The final proposals will be considered by the General Assembly in July 2010.

Year of Food and Farming (September 2007 - July 2008) aimed to reconnect children and young people with the food that they eat and to promote healthy living by giving young people direct experience of countryside, farming and food.