

Mark Lawson

So Jane, can you just give me an introduction to yourself and your role within SRUC, please?

Jane Atterton

So I'm Jane Atterton and I'm a senior lecturer and manager of the Rural Policy Centre at SRUC and the Policy Centre does a range of research and knowledge exchange activities on everything from rural businesses and rural communities through to circular economy and land reform.

Mark Lawson

Great. And the rural exchange is one of the projects we're talking about today. How did it originate and what's its purpose?

Jane Atterton

Yeah. So the rural exchange is part of our work in the new Scottish Government funded Strategic research programme from 2022 to 2027 and it's it, I guess it forms part of two projects, the first of which focuses on rural and island businesses and economies and are getting a better understanding of the businesses and economies in rural and island locations. And the second project is looking more at rural and island community related issues from housing to demographic change to exclusion and the rural exchange is part of both projects.

And in in short, it's a new public web portal for us to be able to gather views and information and ideas and opinions from people living and working and indeed visiting rural and Island Scotland. And we're excited to be doing this. It's.

It's a new way of gathering new information, I suppose, as researchers, we often rely on secondary statistical data, but often that secondary data isn't great for rural and island communities that learn for businesses, you know, it's not available at small enough geographical scale, if at all. It's not up to date enough. And what we often miss, I think, is the more qualitative, the more in depth information on people's everyday lives. You know, how does a policy affect someone living in rural Scotland or Island Scotland.

And how does a particular element of service provision affect people locally, so the rural exchange gives us a new vehicle?

To be able to hear about those experiences and to hear about how things are working at local level are things going well in communities, what's going well, what's going not well? What are people's suggestions and ideas for things to change? So, it's a new vehicle, I guess to gather that sort of information, which is so valuable to us as researchers in terms of the work we do and in terms of the work we do to inform policy and practice.

Mark Lawson

Yeah. So that's so you're talking about public engagement with the role and island communities. How will that shape and when? How do you propose to engage with these people directly?

Jane Atterton

So the rural exchange is it's a public facing web portal. We've designed it in such a way that we hope it's easy to use and it's quick to use and we can engage with people across rural and Island Scotland. We know the last two or three years have shown us that digital has a big role to play in terms of how we communicate and how we collaborate with one another. We appreciated. It isn't going to be the answer for everybody and we'll be providing other means for people to engage with us, but.

Jane Atterton

There's really 2 two ways, I guess, to engage with us through the rural exchange. One is basically at any time through a quick link a kind of contact us button where people can tell us about something really good that's happening in their community or tell us an idea that you've had for how something could be improved or just an issue that you think is really important, that maybe hasn't reached the news or reached policymakers. I'll just an opportunity to voice an opinion about something. So that opportunity will be there 24/7 365 days a year and through the rural exchange, what we're also going to be doing is running a series of regular short polls or surveys to gather people's views and experiences and on particular issues. And we're launching with our first poll, which is looking at the experiences and impacts of the cost of living crisis for rural and island communities and businesses. So we've designed these to be short, to be quick to complete.

Umm, there's a mixture of closed and open questions and we'll be looking to do lots of these. As I say regularly over the next well the next five years of the program. And we're thinking about other themes maybe around rural business support and local democracy. So as I say, we've designed it to be quick and easy for people to navigate and to use and we'll be working with rural and indeed non rural stakeholders to try and make sure that we're engaging as widely as possible and getting.

And the involvement of people across across rural and island Scotland, it all sorts of different sectors and communities and groups.

Mark Lawson

OK. So you talk about communities and groups and stakeholders. What kind of stakeholder groups will be engaging with to make sure that we can kind of reach out to these people that live in the rural Scotland environment?

Jane Atterton

All sorts of groups we know there are, there are hundreds and probably thousands of of groups, whether those are community groups or whether they are.

And sectoral groups all sorts of groups operating at different geographical scales across rural and island Scotland, and we're hoping that through our networks and through conversations that we've started to have already with those groups and we can engage as widely as possible. We want this to be something that people feel they can easily go to when they have an idea and plug their idea into the website and give us that information. So if we want to hear from everybody mixture of different ages.

And different parts of Scotland and yeah, it's just we hope a great way of people feeling that they can easily submit their ideas and get their voices heard and it's up to us as researchers to collate and to curate that information effectively to inform both the research and then to inform the sort of policy recommendations that we draw from that research.

Mark Lawson

Alright, I'm going to ask about what you'll do with the information it received through the exchange. Presumably you'll there'll be reports and outputs that will go back to the Scottish Government, policymakers and so forth there. And the other research that we carried out with this data that we could be, what were useful to know about.

Jane Atterton

Yeah, absolutely. So there's, 3 main things I think or three main responsibilities, I guess for us is the research team when we receive this data. And three, three, I suppose three main tasks for us to do. One is we hope with some of the quantitative information that we gather through the surveys, we can quickly report back to people what we're hearing.

Whether that's, you know, in the form of percentages or maps of where the responses are coming from. So that's one way a really quick response so that people can see that their information is.

Is, is being collected and we are doing something with it. Secondly, the evidence will inform the research that we're doing and we'll use this grassroots. This lived experience information alongside a number of other sources, whether that's your more traditional sort of literature reviews, the secondary data that I mentioned earlier, looking at international examples and doing stakeholder interviews. So all these different types of evidence we will pull together to explore the key issues that we're looking at.

And I think really importantly is is how that information that people put into the rural exchange and we then curate and how we then feed that through to policy and practice. It's part of the the really critical evidence base that we need to inform policy and that's a really important outcome. It's really important that through the rural exchange, people feel that by spending the time to give us that evidence, it is directly feeding through to our policy recommendations and to Scottish Government and indeed to local authorities as well.

The rural exchange is being launched a stakeholder workshop next week, which is the 8th of November to discuss Scotland's rural movement. Can you tell us a bit more about the rural movement and what the contribution that the rural exchange would have with this?

Jane Atterton

Yeah, sure. So in brief, the rural movement or supporting the development of a rural movement was a commitment that the Scottish Government made in the programme for government in 2019

twenty and basically we know that across Scotland as we've as we've already said, there are many, many hundreds of groups and networks out there, all sorts of geographies and issues and sectors being represented. And the idea of the rural movement is bringing together all of those diverse groups and.

Jane Atterton

Raising the voice, I guess of rural issues and in Scotland, we see the rural movement I guess as having at least two purposes. One is grassroots mobilization and the other is informing policy and policy development and the rural exchange is really key to both of these. It's a way to mobilize people from the grassroots, if you like to generate evidence. But as I've sort of alluded to, it's a way of ensuring that the evidence that we collect from local level feeds into that that role of the rural movement to inform policy, so it's great in a way that something like the rural exchange is and the evidence that it's generating is really part of that very practical and very exciting drive to strengthen this rural movement in Scotland.

Mark Lawson

Well, that's great. Thanks very much, Jane. That was quite insightful. So we'll look forward to seeing all the elements that comprise the rural exchange manifested soon. So thanks very much for your time.

Jane Atterton

Thank you.