



RDOC/2017/0036 – ANNEX C

Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 Information and Publicity Strategy

Annual Strategic Communications Plan 2017/18



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Introduction

1. This Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Annual Strategic Communications Plan for 2017/18 is part of the SRDP 2014-2020 Information and Publicity Strategy. The Strategy sets out the key messages, communications aims and methods, target audience, key actions, budget and evaluation. This document sets out the key strategic communication objectives from 1 April 2017 until 31 March 2018, and sets them in the context of the five SRDP priorities.
2. The Rural Development Regulation requires the Rural Development Operational Committee (RDOC) and the Joint Programme Monitoring Committee (JPMC) to be informed of:
 - progress in the implementation of the Strategy and any analysis of results – Annex A summarises communications activity over 2016/17 including quantitative data of some of the monitoring measurements from the Strategy
 - changes to the Strategy –the Strategy has been amended to reflect the forthcoming UK exit from the EU and messaging about the impact that this is expected to have on the SRDP. In addition, the requirement for an annual SRDP newsletter has been removed, in favour of producing specific promotion material such as the SRDP animation and case studies prepared by the SRN, along with promoting the SRDP through the existing SRN and Rural Issues newsletters.
 - planned information and publicity to be carried out in the following year – see below

Key communication objectives for 2017/18

3. The key communication objectives are listed below and reflect the overarching aims of the SRDP Information and Communications Strategy.
 - Inform applicants and stakeholders of scheme dates for applications, approvals and payments
 - Manage expectations about the support available, including targeting and budget limitations
 - Encourage high quality applications through discussions with potential applicants prior to submission as well as rejection feedback, guidance updates and promotion of good practice
 - Raise awareness of the SRDP, the benefits it has delivered/aims to deliver in the future and the SRDP schemes/initiatives - e.g. through promotional material and project case studies
 - Communicate any changes to the SRDP, including technical and budget changes expected through Programme modifications
 - Reassure stakeholders and applicants of 'business as usual', while continuing communications around the wider issues that will impact on the SRDP including a UK Exit from the EU, funding guarantees and Scotland's future relationship with the EU

- Engage with key stakeholders, including through the RDOC, JPMC and European Network for Rural Development
- Improve coordination of communication activities between Scottish Government, SRDP delivery partners and Local Action Groups
- Inform stakeholders and public about monitoring and evaluation key findings
- Launch and raise awareness of the Innovation Support Service

Alongside the general promotion activities, particular actions to be taken to support individual schemes includes:

- Extensive promotion of the LFASS loan for 2016 applications, including through social media and via stakeholder communications; keeping stakeholders informed about the future of LFASS.
 - Aim to increase uptake to AECS in the 2018 application window and reduce application rejection rate through targeted communication campaign.
 - Raise awareness of FAS with the aim to provide a range of one-to-one advice to around 700 beneficiaries and over 160 cross cutting events.
 - Launch of the BES advice provision to provide compulsory advice for applicants on delivering the best environment and climate outcomes.
 - Continue engagement with Local Action Groups to help improve the implementation of the LEADER programme.
 - Re-launching of ECAF later in 2017 for contracts to be awarded for expenditure in 2018-19.
 - Promoting woodland creation element of the FGS, including rural sector collaboration for the sheep and trees initiative.
4. The boxes below set out the key communications objectives for 2017/18 against each of the SRDP priorities, to demonstrate how communications activity will be used to support progress towards each of these priorities. The table in Annex B sets out how each SRDP support scheme or initiatives delivers against these priorities.

SRDP Priority 1 - Enhancing the rural economy

All SRDP support helps deliver the overarching objective of enhancing the rural economy to help deliver sustainable economic growth. Since the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2016, there has been an increased focus on the Rural Economy by the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing.

The Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation (FPMC) provides direct investment into food and drink processing businesses; the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) provides support for the forestry sector; LEADER supports rural businesses across a range of sectors; and Broadband provides digital connectivity.

Beyond this, a number of schemes directly support farm and forestry businesses through income support under the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) and business development for new entrants, crofters and small farms. The Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF) and the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) will also help support farm businesses by embracing innovative techniques and best practice.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Ensuring all stakeholders and beneficiaries are fully aware that the SRDP is 'open for business'. This includes publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN
- Encouraging high quality applications by publicising success stories, discussing potential applications before submission including via an Expression of Interest (EoI) for LEADER and pre-application forms for FPMC, and providing individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Work is also on-going to raise awareness of FPMC with local Business Gateways about support offered to ensure they can signpost potential applicants.
- Managing expectations as it is expected that there will continue to be strong interest in FPMC and New Entrants support along with business support under LEADER. This is done through discussing potential applications before submission which includes the EoI and pre-application forms for LEADER and FPMC
- Communications about the Farm Advisory Service including how it works, who can apply and the benefits, with the aim to provide a range of one-to-one advice to around 700 beneficiaries and over 160 cross cutting events.
- Communications by individual LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) about the support available and application process

SRDP Priority 2 - Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses

The key direct support that addresses this priority is delivered through the New Entrants and Young Farmer Start-Up Grants (NESUG and YFSUG); the New Entrants Capital Grant Scheme (NECGS); the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS); Small Farm Grant Scheme (SFGS); the FGS; and LFASS. KTIF and the FAS also provide innovative techniques, key training and education support to agriculture businesses.

The FPMC will also support agricultural businesses through providing an outlet for primary produce and improving supply chain efficiency.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Extensive promotion of the LFASS loan for 2016 applications, including through social media and via stakeholder communications.
- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN
- Encouraging high quality applications by promoting agriculture as an exciting and rewarding career, ensuring guidance is regularly reviewed, discussing potential applications before submission where possible and providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants where possible
- Communications about the support available for new entrants, particularly the successful Young Farmers Start-Up Grant Scheme which opens for applications, along with the New Entrants Start-Up Grant Scheme, on 1 April 2017.
- Communications about the Farm Advisory Service including how it works, who can apply and the benefits – with 60 new entrants to receive mentoring support, 100 specialist advice visits and over 2,000 crofter subscriptions and ‘Business Viability and Efficiency’ a key theme of advisory activity
- Continuing communication and liaison with stakeholders about the details of the LFASS parachute payments for 2018, the use of the balance of funds and other support available to LFA farmers and crofters. Also, ensuring stakeholders are aware of progress and options for LFASS 2019.

SRDP Priority 3 - Protecting and improving the natural environment

The key direct support that addresses this priority is support for the environment through Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS); Improving Public Access (IPA), Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF); and agroforestry under the FGS. The environment will also be one of the priorities for KTIF and the FAS

Secondary support comes through LFASS, NESUG, YFSUG, NECGS, CAGS, SFGS which help the viability of the businesses, enabling them to then carry out environmental actions and combine environmentally and commercially successful management in the running of their businesses.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN and delivery partners
- Encouraging high quality applications – for FGS through awareness raising events; publicising improvements to AECS and IPA guidance and targeting;
- Aim increase uptake to AECS in the 2018 application window and reduce application rejection rate through targeted communication campaign
- Communicate a revised and re-launched ECAF which is intended to be announced later this year
- Communications about the Farm Advisory Service including how it works, who can apply and the benefits with 300 Integrated Land Management Plans expected and 'Climate Change and the Environment' a key theme of advisory activity

SRDP Priority 4 - Addressing the impact of climate change

This priority is addressed through support for woodland creation under the FGS and, more broadly for environmental management through AECS and ECAF. In addition the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) aims to deliver economic and environmental improvements and improve efficiency. The environment will also be one of the priorities of KTIF and the FAS, including the provision of farm carbon audits.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through a comprehensive communications programme that includes the SRN and delivery partners
- In conjunction with stakeholders, provide on-going information about the requirements of BES and the launch of the BES Advisory Service, alongside clear guidance for staff, applicants and agents.
- Under the FGS, woodland events will take place along with the development of marketing material
- Communicate a revised and re-launched ECAF which is intended to be announced later this year.
- Aim increase uptake to AECS in the 2018 application window and reduce application rejection rate through targeted communication campaign
- Launch of the BES advice provision to provide compulsory for applicants on delivering the best environment and climate outcomes
- Communications about the Farm Advisory Service including how it works, who can apply and the benefits with 250 Carbon Audits expected and 'Climate Change and the Environment' a key theme of advisory activity.

SRDP Priority 5 - Supporting rural communities

The key direct support that addresses this priority and the programme's contribution to the social fabric of rural Scotland is LEADER with further support from the Broadband Scheme and IPA.

Secondary support comes through LFASS, NESUG, YFSUG, NECGS, CAGS, SFGS, FGS farming, agriculture and business support schemes which help the viability of rural agricultural and forestry businesses, enabling them to then provide downstream benefits to rural communities.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Promotion of the opportunities available under LEADER through individual LAGs including events, workshops, local awareness raising, including via the SRN and newsletters/social media
- Ensuring good communication with the LAGs through the LAG Communications Workstream led by the SRN and other workstreams relating to guidance and the IT system etc.
- Publication of the Broadband Scheme, with Community Broadband Scotland working directly with local communities.
- Encouraging high quality applications through the EoI process for LEADER and working with rural communities to develop applications for the Broadband Scheme
- Managing expectations by LEADER LAGs and Community Broadband Scotland discussing potential applications and ensuring communities are aware of the support available
- Promotion of Improving Public Access, in particular the opening and closing dates of application rounds

Annex A - Summary of communications activity in 2016/17

1. The key aim in 2016/17 was continued awareness raising of each of the schemes, the procedures of applying, selection criteria, process and timetables for approvals and payments. The UK referendum on EU membership required good communications to all stakeholders to ensure that they understood how this impacted on the SRDP, and provide reassurance that the SRDP continued to operate.
2. Two separate funding guarantees for EU funding, including the SRDP, were provided by the UK Government in August and October. Significant effort was put into explaining the impact of these to stakeholders, and after the second guarantee promoting the SRDP as 'business as usual'.
3. Over 40 press releases or news articles that are relevant to the SDRP have been produced by the Scottish Government to ensure stakeholders, applicants and potential beneficiaries are aware of information relating to individual schemes, the Single Application form and updates following the EU referendum in June 2016.
4. In addition, two Parliamentary debates have been held to look at the future of the rural economy and rural funding.
5. The Farm Advisory Service (FAS) was launched in September 2016 and has been widely promoted. There are two elements to the FAS:
 - Advice line and one-to-many advice – since the launch of FAS 77 events have been held and 190 projects are running, overall delivering to over 2,100 beneficiaries. Also 1,226 crofters subscriptions and 20 small farms.
 - One-to-one advice – process established and advisors trained, to date 96 Integrated Land Management Plans underway, 72 instances of specialist advice, 102 carbon audits and 13 mentoring.
6. The SRDP was launched alongside wider CAP Reforms, which drew resources towards the delivery of Pillar 1 payments. This has continued to impact on the processing and delivery of SRDP grant schemes despite concerted efforts to minimise delays, and ensure customers and stakeholders were aware of these challenges. This communication included the loan provision put into place for LFASS 2015 to provide security to farming and crofting businesses.
7. This was the first year that Scottish Rural Network Support Unit operated at full capacity. Highlights in 2016/17 included:
 - Production of a [film about the LEADER programme](#), featuring six LEADER projects
 - Areas facing Natural Constraint ([ANC stakeholder workshop](#)) in June
 - Publication of [17 SRDP project case studies](#), including projects funded under LEADER, KTIF, FPMC and FGS.
 - Production of short [animation about the SRDP](#).

- [Development day for the new Moray Local Action Group](#) in September.
 - [Rural Parliament project visits](#) and '[Celebrate Rural Scotland](#)' photo competition October
 - Launch of new [SRN Funding Search](#) in December (provides information on more than 1,000 funds available in rural areas).
 - Publication of short [summary of ex-post evaluation of SRDP 2007-13](#) in February.
 - [LEADER Cooperation Exchange visit](#) with Local Action Groups from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Scotland in March.
8. EU and UK level engagement has continued through regular informal meetings, bilaterals and formal meetings such as the Rural Development Council and the Annual Examination Meeting. In addition the SRN has:
- UK - we have continued to work with the other UK NRNs and the Irish NRN to share knowledge and good practice and to identify opportunities for harmonisation across the RDPs, particularly in relation to LEADER cooperation. The SRN convened and chaired two meetings of UK NRNs – in June and in December 2016.
 - Europe – The SRN participated in 14 ENRD and EIP events in 2016/17. The SRN also coordinated the attendance of stakeholders from Scotland at a number of international events related to rural development, including LINC2016 in Hungary and the Swedish Rural Parliament.

SRDP Communications 2016/17 – quantitative data

The table below gives a summary of the quantitative data where it is available, against the monitoring measurements laid out in the Information and Publicity Strategy. It is intended to carry out a mid-term review of communications through a stakeholder and staff survey to ensure communications are responsive and remain effective throughout the Programme period.

Method of measurement	Progress
Number of applications submitted (since 2015)	11,652 across all schemes, excluding LFASS which is around 11,300 each year
Number of applications approved (since 2015)	7,663 across all schemes, excluding LFASS N.B some applications are currently being processed
Website page views (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	Rural Payments and Services SRDP scheme pages – 248k page views (195k unique page views) with AECS and FGS being the most visited pages SG SRDP pages – over 224k page views (14k unique page views) SRN – 145k page views (115k unique page views)
Monthly Rural Issues newsletter circulation	Circulated monthly to around 12,000 recipients and includes relevant information on the SRDP (amongst other issues)
Social media activity (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	RPID – 1221 Twitter followers RPID - 4933 Facebook followers with a reach of over 30k SRN – 5k Twitter followers as at March 2017 / 12.3K tweets since August 2009 SRN Facebook likes – 1027 Videos produced by the SRN have been viewed 5,058 times on Facebook and Vimeo.
Monthly LEADER newsletter (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	12 editions of the LEADER newsletter were issued in 2016/17 to 233 people. Average open rate was 49% and average click through rate was 45%.
Weekly SRN newsletter (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	52 newsletters were issued in 2016/17. Number of subscribers as at March 2017 was 1192. Average open rate of 38% and an average click through rate of 45%.
SRDP project case studies (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	17 new case studies were published in 2016/17, with a total of 2,432 page views
LEADER Expression of Interest (Eoi) forms	2,263 Eoi forms have been submitted on the on SRN website since the LEADER programme opened
SRN events	Since the start of the programme, 711 people have attended 14 SRN events (183 people at 5 events in 2016/17).
Qualitative stakeholder consultation via RDOC, CAP Stakeholder Group, bilaterals (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	SRDP-wide updates have been provided at 10 formal stakeholder meetings throughout the year. Beyond this, a number of

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	bilaterals on specific areas and an ANC workshop was held in June 2016.
Farm Advisory Service (since launch in 2016)	Advice line and one-to-many advice – 77 events have been held; 190 projects are running, overall delivering to over 2,100 beneficiaries. Also 1,226 crofters subscriptions and 20 small farms. One-to-one advice – 96 Integrated Land Management Plans underway, 72 instances of specialist advice, 102 carbon audits and 13 mentoring.
Agent updates (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)	79

Annex B – SRDP scheme priorities matrix

The table below highlights the main priorities delivered by each scheme, although it is acknowledged that support provides secondary benefits to most of the priorities.

	Enhancing the rural economy	Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses	Protecting and improving the natural environment	Addressing the impact of climate change	Supporting rural communities
New Entrants	X	X	X	X	X
Small farms	X	X	X	X	X
Crofting	X	X	X	X	X
FPMC	X	X	X	X	X
LFASS	X	X	X		X
AECS		X	X	X	
ECAF			X	X	
Forestry	X	X	X	X	X
Broadband	X	X		X	X
LEADER	X	X	X	X	X
KTIF	X	X	X	X	X
BES		X		X	
SRN	X	X	X	X	X
Advisory Service	X	X	X	X	X