Since 1999, there have been many policies, programmes and funds to support community resilience. When the original Social Justice Strategy was launched, data was seen as essential, so that "Scotland will know if we are moving towards a fairer, more just nation". However, 17 years later, we do not know whether all these policies have changed outcomes for communities across Scotland.

This is because: (1) policies and programmes do not feed into each other; (2) indicators change significantly with each new policy; and (3) local-level evidence is not pulled together to assess progress towards national community outcomes.

In rural areas, lack of evidence is particularly concerning, especially coupled with over-reliance on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). But it is no longer acceptable to say that it is "too difficult" to collect data in and for rural areas.

There is an urgent need to develop a framework for further evidence-gathering plus smarter use of what we already know. If this does not happen soon, we will have no clear picture of what has changed and why. It will also be impossible to know what to stop and what to continue.

To develop ways of measuring progress in order to track how rural is delivering to (a) its vision and (b) the Outcomes of the National Performance Framework.

Combining these three aims ensures that the rural strategy would not lead to rural becoming siloed or separated. Instead, the role of both national and rural-specific interventions in supporting (or hampering, delivery of that rural vision, potentially using a type of "rural proofing" approach.

In our 2016 Report, we have examined agricultural sectors and their trends, the multiple outcomes of diverse estates, the feasibility of woodland and forestry goals, the economic significance of wider rural businesses, and the policy landscape surrounding community resilience.

We have highlighted complexities, trends, drivers, inhibitors and enablers. We have described directions of travel, exploring how and whether these have delivered (or not) higher-level outcomes, together with the need for adaptation.

We have reflected on timelines dating back many decades. These reflections have enabled us to assess where rural has come from, where and how drivers and priorities have changed over time, and — by projecting forward, even in these times of heightened uncertainty — we have explored potential future options.

Based on our analysis, we continue to see the need for a coherent, measurable rural strategy situated within a national policy framework, which builds on the innovation and creativity of those in rural Scotland. Such a strategy would bring together the resources, needs, opportunities, conflicts, threats, all areas and wider policy context within a collective, single frame of reference.

We propose that such a rural strategy would need to have three aims:

1. To set out the vision for rural Scotland, and how the different rural-specific interventions deliver to that vision.
2. To monitor, evaluate and review how national policies are supporting or hampering delivery of that rural vision, potentially using a type of "rural proofing" approach.
3. To develop ways of measuring progress in order to track how rural is delivering to (a) its vision and (b) the Outcomes of the National Performance Framework.

Although we are entering a time of unprecedented uncertainty, this period also presents opportunity – one which a consistent and ambitious rural Scotland can seize by being creative, innovative and forward-thinking.
**Foreword**

Scotland’s rural economies across the private, public and third sectors, who have shared their valuable perspectives and knowledge, lending additional depth and importance to our findings. As with our previous reports, we are driven by the desire to provide impartial, objective, high quality evidence and commentary for the future.

Principal and Chief Executive Scotland’s Rural College

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**Changing Land Management**

**Agriculture – time for change?**

Scottish agriculture is constantly changing. However, the farming sector is in the midst of the most fundamental reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy in over a generation.

- **Uncertainty** leads to a drop in investment; important long-term system changes are postponed.
- **Farmers** need to grasp the nettle and make changes to improve technical efficiency, business viability, and improve the viability of the sector – increasing the attractiveness of farming as a career choice.
- The farming population is ageing. There is a need to allow the younger generation to implement new ideas and take new approaches to farming, by stimulating quicker inter-generational transfers of farms and crofts.
- It is a time to revisit the Scottish Government’s Future of Scottish Agriculture: A Discussion Document and create a roadmap for success during the unprecedented period of policy transition.

**Outcomes from different landownership models:**

- Policy shifts have increased pressure on landowners to deliver public benefits and involve communities.
- All landowners face challenges: financial pressures, public and political perceptions and expectations, uncertainty and conflict.
- Some differentiation of landownership types has occurred, with different outcomes: some more successful and others falling short.
- The farming population is ageing. There is a need to allow the younger generation to implement new ideas and take new approaches to farming, by stimulating quicker inter-generational transfers of farms and crofts.

**What future for woodland and forestry in Scotland?**

- **New** landownership models can increase the vibrancy of woodland and forestry.
- **Some** diversification of landownership types has occurred, with different outcomes: some more successful and others falling short.
- **What** future for woodland and forestry in Scotland?

**Scotland’s Rural Economics: Looking beyond the land-based sector**

- There are 51,000 businesses in rural Scotland. This is one third of Scotland’s registered small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Over 70% of these – nearly 37,000 businesses - operate outside the primary sector.
- While the evidence base about primary sector businesses is relatively good, evidence about the characteristics, needs and contributions of businesses operating outside the primary sector is more limited. This has led to two false assumptions: (1) the rural economy = agriculture and (2) that cities are the only engines of growth with rural areas dependent on them.
- **Evidence shows that rural businesses are different to those in urban Scotland, in terms of size, ownership structure and growth plans. They may therefore need different support.**

**Rural businesses generally have higher survival rates. Business registration rates vary – higher in Aberdeen and Stirling, lower in Dunbartonshire and East Ayrshire.**

**We need to know much more about business productivity, innovation and connectivity, the numbers of unrelated businesses, the routes that individuals take into setting up their business and their future plans.**

**Improving the evidence base is now more important than ever. We need to understand: the impacts of Brexit and associated uncertainty for businesses; the role of new actors (particularly LEADER) in providing support for rural enterprises; the impacts of Scotland’s changing financial powers and of new support for businesses announced in the Programme for Government 2016-17; and the increasing diversity of businesses across rural Scotland.**

**The Strategic Review demonstrates the importance of Scotland's businesses, to challenge assumptions and to ensure appropriate support is available to all businesses in order to fulfil the Scottish Government’s purpose of building a dynamic, inclusive and sustainable economy across Scotland.**

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**For more information:**

Scotland’s Rural College: [www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk)

**Foreword**

Scotland’s Rural College is delighted to welcome you to the fourth edition of SRUC’s Rural Scotland in Focus. Our three-page reports give you a fast-track to up-to-date evidence and commentary on key topics of rural and national importance. We aim to provide you with a reality check which not only brings together the policies and programmes that affect rural areas, but also couples these with the energy, enthusiasm, pressure and public perceptions that surround them.

In 2016, our combination of evidence leads us to conclude, as in our previous reports, that there is a pressing need for a rural strategy which not only brings together the policies and programmes that affect rural areas, but also couples these with the energy, enthusiasm, pressure and public perceptions that surround them.

The combination of evidence that we show the evolving face of agriculture across all its sectors, examine the important role of private, public and third sectors, and explore the importance of rural Scotland’s diversity is now more important than ever. We need to understand: the impacts of Brexit and associated uncertainty for businesses; the role of new actors (particularly LEADER) in providing support for rural enterprises; the impacts of Scotland’s changing financial powers and of new support for businesses announced in the Programme for Government 2016-17; and the increasing diversity of businesses across rural Scotland.

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