



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Rural Community Network Briefing

12 December 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Employment and Learning

### Rural Community Network Briefing

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)  
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sydney Anderson  
Mr Phil Flanagan  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr Chris Lyttle  
Mr Fra McCann  
Mr Pat Ramsey  
Mr George Robinson

**Witnesses:**

Mr Aidan Campbell	Rural Community Network
Mr Michael Hughes	Rural Community Network

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Michael Hughes, the chairperson of the Rural Community Network (RCN), and Aidan Campbell. Michael, I am sorry: I called you the chairperson, but, apparently, you are the chief executive. Apologies for getting that wrong.

**Mr Michael Hughes (Rural Community Network):** That is OK. I am chief executive for another four months, and then I will become one of the redundant. I am going to become one of the unemployed. I am on the road out.

**The Chairperson:** You are very welcome. The floor is yours.

**Mr Hughes:** Chair and members, on behalf of the Rural Community Network, we thank you inviting us here today. Apologies from our chair Raymond Quigg; unfortunately, Raymond's mother died at the weekend and he cannot be here.

For people who do not know what the Rural Community Network is, I will explain very briefly. We were founded in 1991 and are the regional voluntary organisation operating in rural areas. We are interested in articulating the voice of rural communities on issues of poverty, disadvantage, equality and social exclusion through a community development process. One of our visions is to ensure that rural communities play a real part in developing a prosperous, equitable, peaceful and stable society by making sure that it is inclusive and sustainable. We want to provide an effective voice for and support to rural communities, particularly the most disadvantaged ones, and we make no apology for that. We are a membership-based organisation. Half of our board is elected from that membership and the rest through other sectoral interests. Currently, in wider regional work, we are delivering the

regional community infrastructure support programme with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Community Evaluation Northern Ireland and Chief Officers 3rd Sector.

The issues for discussion include the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) commitments in the rural White Paper action plan. We thank DEL for making those commitments, and we will be interested to know how those commitments are being played out, given the resources available to the Department. One of the commitments is to seek to ensure local access to higher education through an equitable distribution of maximum student number places across all the further education (FE) colleges. From a rural perspective, we will certainly be interested to know how that is progressing.

**Mr Aidan Campbell (Rural Community Network):** I am a policy officer with the Rural Community Network. I will talk a bit about community-based learning. We have a concern about the reduction in community-based learning provided by FE colleges. We think that that has had a disproportionate impact on rural communities. DEL core funding for community-based providers such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the Ulster People's College and the Educational Guidance Service for Adults was stopped in 2008. I declare an interest because I am on the board of the WEA and was on the board at that time as well. The issue for us is that, while we know anecdotally that the numbers of learners are down, no one knows the exact figures, as there is such a diverse range of funders and no overall picture. We urge DEL to develop a comprehensive picture of community-based adult learning as part of developing its work with hard-to-reach learners.

Distance and access are particular issues in rural communities. Poor public transport links and long distances are disincentives for all but the most motivated learners in rural communities and those with the means to travel to courses. From our work in rural areas, we know anecdotally that community-based FE provision is down because of two factors. First, accreditation requirements that FE colleges now have to undertake put off hard-to-reach learners, particularly if it is their first step back into learning. It also puts off older learners who do not want accredited training or learning. Secondly, minimum numbers for classes are also an issue in rural communities, and a lot of classes in FE colleges are not economically viable unless they have a minimum number, which, in most cases, is 10 learners. In lots of rural communities, you cannot gather up those numbers of people to run a viable course. That issue is particularly pertinent to rural areas. We think that DEL policy and strategy needs to better recognise, acknowledge and actively support the role of community-based learning providers in addition to the role of FE colleges. The people who are most excluded from learning are unlikely to take that first step back by accessing an FE course. Engaging with the more excluded groups of people is the added benefit that community-based provision can bring.

What about our provision of adult learning? We run courses in community development for volunteers, and our experience has shown the importance of taking it into the community. A total of 84 learners have gone through our Open College Network level one award in community development and received accreditation between January 2011 and November 2012. We had a retention rate of 95%, which we put down to the fact that we deliver in community venues that are accessible to rural communities, as well as to the fact that our tutors create informal environments. Admittedly, we are a very small provider, and we run only a narrow subject area, but the key difference is that we have the flexibility to run courses. We are not DEL funded, and we run courses with fewer than 10 people. The learning experiences that are provided to those smaller numbers are equally valid and important to those learners.

I will hand back to Michael so that he can talk a bit about reskilling for older workers.

**Mr Hughes:** I do not know why I got to discuss reskilling for older workers. It is maybe because I am in the older age bracket.

One of the things that we want to point out is that the construction industry and the allied businesses, such as the local builders' yards, plumbers, electricians and so forth, in rural areas have felt the recession heavily. We recognise that it is important to retain a skill level in the construction work in the hope that there will be an upturn in the economy, but we all recognise that there is no chance of a return to the housing building boom of the 2000s. That was a one-off.

We in the RCN are picking up a lot of evidence that the situation has left many people in rural communities between the ages of 30 and 50 unemployed. Many have family commitments and were reluctant to emigrate. They are not on the planes at 7.00 am on a Monday morning going to England, Scotland and Wales or wherever else. We need to recognise that those people will need to be retrained to enter the labour market; otherwise they will face long-term unemployment or employment in low-paid, low-skilled work. With the FE colleges focusing on the 16- to 25-year-old provision, we

think that there is a gap that DEL needs to consider so that we can ensure that those people between the ages of 30 and 50 who have become unemployed can gain training to get re-employed in meaningful jobs. The question for us is how the Department engages, or whether it can engage, with older unemployed people in rural areas.

One of the areas that, thankfully, has been quite sustainable, even in a time of recession, is forestry, farming and agrifood. It continues to perform well, despite the recession. In agriculture, it is really important to retain the skills in and knowledge of food production and land management in rural communities. There will be issues with food security and land management into the future, and, as the trend is to consolidate small farms and as more land is let out in what is called conacre, we think that there will be a resulting deterioration in the skills and knowledge base. There is evidence, particularly in the west of Ireland, of skills such as stonewalling are being lost as young people leave the area. So, we do not want to lose that type of skill.

**Mr A Campbell:** I will talk a bit about the NEETs strategy and the particular issues for young people in rural areas. I am aware that the Committee had its own inquiry into NEETs before the strategy was developed. There is an additional set of issues for people who are in the NEET category or who are at risk of falling into that category in rural areas, and the distance from appropriate services can compound the difficulties that they face. Issues such as distance from education, training and job opportunities, poor public transport links and poor broadband connectivity in rural communities restrict those opportunities for young people.

We welcome the NEETs strategy. We think that it recognises those additional accessibility issues that rural young people face. That is a positive. We welcome that the strategy recognises the role of the voluntary and community sector in reaching those who are disaffected from formal education and training, and we welcome that there is specific action in the strategy endorsing that approach. We also welcome that youth work approaches can be an important method in engaging NEETs, but we think that there is an issue with that in rural areas. Although funding for formal youth work in rural and urban areas is limited, the strategy may have missed a trick in trying to consider how non-traditional youth providers in rural areas, such as the Young Farmers' Clubs, the GAA, church groups and uniformed groups, are important providers in rural areas compared with formal, paid youth workers. They may have a different skill set than formal youth workers and volunteers in rural communities. Much of that rural youth provision is run by volunteers. The strategy needs to consider how it engages that rural voluntary workforce in working with young NEETs and people who are at risk of becoming NEET.

The other issue that we have with the strategy is the concern that the actions that are related to young people are a list of commitments that Departments are already engaged in. There are a couple of actions from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on tackling poverty and social isolation, and there is an action from the Department for Regional Development about improving rural transport. However, no specific commitment is made to monitor the strategy overall and the impact that it has on young people who come from a rural community. People in a rural area who find themselves in the NEET category are very isolated from services. Are the interventions that the NEET strategy proposes reaching those young people, or are they reaching young people who are based in cities and towns? That is one thing that we think that people need to keep an eye on.

The tackling poverty and social isolation programme, which DARD delivers, is the final thing that I want to mention. It includes a youth employability programme, which an organisation called Advantage Solutions delivers. That programme commenced only in the past six months, so it is very early days for it. If there is learning coming out of that and it is specifically targeted at and successful in engaging young people in rural areas, I think that it is important that DEL learns any of the lessons that come from it.

We welcome the strategy, and we welcome that it considers social clauses as a means to provide employment to NEETs. DEL should consider investigating with DARD the possibility of including social clauses in the next rural development programme. There will be significant investment in rural areas when the new rural development programme comes on board. Given that that is being consulted on and developed, it might be opportune now to see whether social clauses are a chance to get more young people into training and employment.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much indeed for the submission. It raised a number of points.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Good morning. You are very welcome. I was interested in the part of your presentation that dealt with further education and the reduction in community-based education programmes. Can you provide us with the evidence of where that took place, where it was reduced and the effect that it is having? What types of courses were involved?

**Mr A Campbell:** That is very difficult to do. We have connections with a lot of organisations. As I said, I am on the board of WEA. Trying to put numbers on it is quite difficult. WEA is an organisation that lost 4,000 learners when we lost statutory funding from DEL. We were able to quantify that. A specific example that I know of is courses for older people, which previously would have been provided free of charge. Charges were then brought in, because FE means business. In my rural area, I know of leisure courses that were running. They were provided free, as was the tutor. Older people still valued that learning and had the means to fund it themselves. They were able to pay a tutor, and 10 or 12 people were able to give £3 an hour, or whatever it was.

**Mr P Ramsey:** We are here to help. We hear from many organisations that advocate for them or write to the Minister. You state that you are:

*"concerned that the reduction in community based learning provided by FE colleges has a disproportionate impact in rural areas."*

You need to provide a wee bit more meat on the bone of that. You need details of where it is. Perhaps it is subregional.

You also said that DEL has identified geographical cold spots where people in rural areas are not getting access to higher or further education. Again, I put it back to you: where is the evidence, and where are those cold spots?

**Mr A Campbell:** To be honest, that is a mistake of ours. That commitment was in the draft rural White Paper, and it changed as a result of the consultation. The commitment that DEL now has is that it will seek to secure local access to higher education through an equitable distribution of maximum student number places across all FE colleges. That is the commitment now, so it has changed. We are supportive of that, and we want to know how it is being implemented.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I need to clarify that for the record. Are you saying that the Department identified specific geographical cold spots in rural areas —

**Mr A Campbell:** No, I am saying that that was in the draft rural White Paper. That is gone; it is out of the rural White Paper. That is our mistake, so apologies for that.

**Mr P Ramsey:** It is positive that, in the rural community, there is great strength and immense capacity in the agrifood sector. How can we do it better? Are there training programmes to ensure that younger generations are involved in that sector? I am not intimately involved, but I hear so many good news stories from it. What can we do better, even in this Committee, to encourage people to take on learning programmes and to get jobs from them?

**Mr Hughes:** There needs to be better liaison with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on the key skills that are needed and on what may be needed in the future. It has a research unit, and a lot of its work is on what agriculture and rural development will look like in the future and how the two Departments can work together to provide the opportunities for young people and, indeed, others, to engage in that.

You made a point earlier, Pat, about adult education courses. When I started in the Rural Community Network, I was the Peace I funder, and a huge number of groups were able to access FE college training through Peace I grants using the WEA. When that stopped, you could see the number of education classes in rural areas, particularly in community halls, that were reduced. That was some way of quantifying what we did and how many people were engaged in that, but, since the move from community-based education to accredited education, for the want a better term, the access to that type of education has been different. It is about a commitment to learning for life, and, in a rural area, for a lot of people, that is completely different from accreditation.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I am happy with that. We should follow through on the agrifood issue with some letters to Ministers so that we get the skill base through the audit.

**Mr A Campbell:** You made a point about agrifood. Careers services in schools can encourage young people and show them what opportunities are out there. I know that local schools link with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise at Loughry as well as, I am sure, at Greenmount. Exchanges are happening, but they might need to be more systematic and a bit more thought through.

**Mr P Ramsey:** It came up in our inquiry into careers, and you would imagine that there would be a priority focus on rural catchment areas.

**The Chairperson:** We will take that point on board. There is an issue with the rural side of things.

**Mr Lyttle:** Thanks for your presentation, gentlemen. I will pick up on Pat's theme. You seem to be saying that there is a need for greater provision of community-based learning in addition to FE and that people are unlikely to take their first step into learning directly via FE. Are you familiar with the likes of the learner access engagement (LAE) programme, and where does that potentially fit into trying to bridge the gap between people being comfortable taking that first step into learning and then being able to avail themselves of the resources that the FE colleges can bring for learning and upskilling?

**Mr A Campbell:** LAE has gone through its first phase, as far as I am aware. I am not intimately involved in LAE, but the evaluation from PricewaterhouseCoopers on it was quite positive, in that it had engaged quite a lot and hit its targets. There are still some issues with LAE, in that it can still exclude people. Given the criteria that were set up, if you have any type of level-2 qualification, you are not eligible for LAE. Basically, if you have an O level or a GCSE from 20 or 30 years ago, that can exclude you from LAE even though it may have nothing to do with your career path. So, a cohort of people is excluded from it. As far as I am aware, LAE is approaching its next phase, and a tender is due soon for the next phase in the western college.

**The Chairperson:** I think, Chris, that it might be worth writing to the Department about that point. The level-2 qualification is quite a cut-off, and we might write to the Department about whether we could look at any different threshold on that issue.

**Mr A Campbell:** Part-time work is the other issue with LAE. If you are in any sort of employment at all, even five or six hours' employment, that can exclude you from LAE, as far as I am aware. You strictly have to be unemployed or out of the employment market. People with very low qualifications but who are in a low-paid, part-time job cannot access that support through LAE because they are outside the criteria.

**Mr Hughes:** Our understanding is that minimum numbers apply. In rural areas, that is an issue.

**Mr Lyttle:** The qualification threshold, employment and class size were raised previously. It might be worthwhile contacting the Department to see what how have been addressed, or not addressed, in any new programme that will be rolled out.

**Mr A Campbell:** People who I have spoken to have said that, if there is a good relationship between the local support providers and the contact person in the college, it has worked well. If that relationship has not been as good, it has been more problematic.

**The Chairperson:** We understand that point, and we can work round those issues. Let us get a formal response on the issues that you raised.

**Mr Flanagan:** Gentlemen, you are very welcome; thanks for your presentation. The Minister has spoken about the rural university, which is one element of rural education provision, and we are hoping to hear more from the South West College on 23 January about its plans. Are you across the detail of that, or do you know anything about it at this stage?

**Mr A Campbell:** To be honest, no; I had not heard that proposal. It would be interesting to hear more about it.

**Mr Flanagan:** How big a problem is a lack of affordable childcare in rural communities? Coming from a rural community, I know anecdotally how bad it is, but how big a barrier is it overall across the North

for people who either want to return to employment or to take part in skills training or self-improvement?

**Mr Hughes:** It is a big issue, Phil, and affordable and accessible childcare is a problem. More recently, last week or the week before, a parent highlighted the issue at the launch of the Employers for Childcare report at Stormont. That really brought it home to people that, although industry has moved to an ever-growing demand for shift work, childcare has failed to keep up with that demand. Childcare is usually provided from 7.00 am to 5.00 pm, but, for people who are looking to access employment or training in the evening, very few childcare providers across the whole of Northern Ireland operate childcare on a shift basis, with none in rural Northern Ireland. We have to look at that. We know that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development rolled out a rural childcare programme in the previous anti-poverty fund, and we still have to get the statistics on how many new places were provided and how many went to people who, for us, really needed them and could access them through tax credits.

**The Chairperson:** Who did you ask for those figures?

**Mr Hughes:** DARD.

**Mr Flanagan:** I asked that question about a fortnight ago, and it has nothing to do with what RCN is doing. When I get the statistics, I will give them to Cathie, and she can pass them on.

**The Chairperson:** That would be good. Thank you.

**Mr Hughes:** The general trend in rural areas is that childcare is lacking. For some people, it is not affordable. However, for people who are trying to access classes for adult learning, particularly at night, and then childcare on that basis, it is non-existent.

**Mr Flanagan:** Is the provision in the colleges that provide the training uniform across the North, or are there some gaps in those colleges as well? Is it still a 7.00 am to 5.00 pm service?

**Mr Hughes:** To be fair, Phil, I cannot answer that.

**Mr Flanagan:** I know that broadband is also a big issue. I have been working with some people in RCN in Fermanagh about improving broadband. One of the things that strikes me about broadband is that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has worked up a dedicated scheme with BT. Any rural business, which includes anybody with a farm holding, is guaranteed at least 2 Mb of broadband at the same retail price as any of the service providers offer. However, nobody knows that. There are alternatives to your standard broadband, but they are not being promoted and rolled out. How many of your members and the people with whom you engage, raise the lack of access to high-speed, reliable and affordable broadband as a major barrier to accessing information on the internet, starting a business or taking part in skills classes or things like that?

**Mr Hughes:** That happens on a regular basis. If you were asked what the top three issues in rural areas are, you would be told that they are broadband, transport and childcare. Although I recognise the provision of the 2 Mb broadband, rural businesses are still operating at a disadvantage. Many urban areas are now on the third or fourth generation. So, it is an inequitable service. It is true to say that Northern Ireland is broadband enabled, but it is not equitably broadband enabled. That is the argument that RCN will always maintain.

**Mr Flanagan:** Apart from the urban areas, where there is super-fast broadband, we are no better off than anywhere else in western Europe. They can access the same satellites in the sky that we can. It is nonsense to say that every household and business has access to broadband of at least 0.5Mb. It is no different here than it is anywhere else in western Europe. We are no better off than anybody else.

**The Chairperson:** There is an issue about broadband. It was helpful that you put down the three issues. Does anybody know what has happened? My phone has started to ring a lot. Chris, you have not done anything recently, have you?

**Mr Lyttle:** No. I have had lots done to me, but I have not done anything.

**The Chairperson:** We are interested in the broadband. All of us will have heard from people who are outside the catchment; that is, the 6% who do not get the broadband. We are interested to see how we can help with that. The UK broadband funding is being released, I think, in February; it will happen within the year. We will see what we can take on board for you. We will look at how we can do that. There are issues of education in and around that; it is not about just businesses.

A couple of members are drifting out, because they have other functions to attend. I want to make sure that we do not lose a quorum and things like that. Phil, are you finished?

**Mr Flanagan:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** We got the three points that you raised. We will see how we take those forward for you.

**Mr Buchanan:** I welcome you here this morning. The slump in the construction industry has no doubt been one of the big issues in the rural area. In west Tyrone, we really see the effects of it, which are fairly severe at the moment. You said that 30- to 50-year-old age group is really affected by it. That group is going to perhaps be the most difficult to connect with, which you mentioned. You said that a key question for the Department is about how it engages with those older people. I put that back to you as people who are working in the rural areas. You have your ear to the ground; you know exactly what is happening. What do you think the Department should be doing, and what should we, as a Committee, be looking at to try to address the issue in the short term? We can bring forward strategies and different retraining programmes and all that type of thing. Those are needed, and they will be coming forward, but that is more in the future. How do we fill and address the gap in the short term? Quite a number of people are unemployed. Are there any areas that DEL or the Committee should look at to try to address issues in the shorter term to alleviate the difficulties and problems in the rural areas?

**Mr A Campbell:** One of the things, I suppose, is that the issue is wider than this Committee's remit, and it is about demand. It is about the wider economic climate. The Chairman mentioned the idea of the shovel-ready projects in DEL and the infrastructure projects that are out there.

I suppose that some respite came for people who had been unemployed in construction with the farm modernisation programme, and money was put into slurry storage. Some of those people, who had previously been employed in construction, were able to get work on farms in shuttering and slurry stores and that type of thing.

I know people who were involved in construction and who are now working for NI Water as subcontractors. They are doing that sort of infrastructure work, which applies similar skills and is outside work.

I appreciate that the employment service has its job to do; it has its regulations and is implementing the regime, which, by law, it has to. However, if you think of someone who has worked for 20 or 30 years in the construction trade, and he is brought to the jobs and benefits office once a month, or whatever the regime is, you will see that it can be quite demeaning, especially for those who are very proud, who have worked all their lives, provided for their families and have been self-reliant. I know that universal credit will put more conditionality and a different regime of sanctions on people if they do not comply. However, sitting someone down who is in their 30s, 40s or 50s, month after month, fortnight after fortnight or week after week and asking "What skills have you added to your CV?" seems to be a box-ticking exercise. It may be better if someone tried to think creatively about how we harness their skills knowledge and the work that they have done over the years.

It is not an easy question. To me, there is something about infrastructure and trying to promote that as much as possible and for Departments generally to try to promote infrastructure projects and bring them forward as quickly as possible to try to alleviate some of the difficulties.

**The Chairperson:** Those are good points.

**Mr S Anderson:** Thank you for your presentation, gentlemen. I want to touch on the reskilling of the unemployed in rural areas, and maybe not just of the unemployed. Your statement mentioned land letting to conacre and that a lot of small farmers perhaps give up their land and seek jobs. You also mentioned the loss of skills and expertise that results from that.



I sat on the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council for a number of years. Do you still touch base with the Rural Development Council on grant funding, farm diversification and those issues to try to regenerate the rural community and bring jobs into it?

**Mr Hughes:** We are in regular touch with the Rural Development Council. Both of us sit on the rural development programme monitoring committee. The chair, Tony McCusker, and I meet on a regular basis. At present, the council is going through a restructuring, which will not be finished until March. There is an intention to bring the two organisations closer together to see how we can do things differently and better. For instance, there is the DARD rural challenge fund and the workshops that are compulsory for groups to go to or apply to. All 13 were delivered jointly by the RCN and the Rural Development Council. Although we do different things in different ways, there is still a lot of joint working on highlighting issues for rural communities. The Rural Development Council is the network that manages the leaders.

**Mr S Anderson:** I am pleased to hear that, because I think that, in the past, there was perhaps not as much co-operation. However, now I think that it helps rural communities through this difficult time. It was always going to be a difficult time, but I think that there has to be a closer working relationship. I am pleased to hear, Michael, that that is coming about, and maybe it will help in many ways, too.

**Mr Hughes:** It cannot do any harm.

**Mr Buchanan:** Following on from that, planning is a stumbling block in the area that Sydney raised. Planning is a big issue, and maybe we should ask the Executive to look at how it affects rural development programmes, farm diversification, and so on. It is a nightmare for folk to get planning approval for those types of things. It may be that some work could be done to try to free up that process a bit.

**Mr Anderson:** That is a good point.

**Mr Hughes:** In response to that, Thomas, the new Department for Social Development housing strategy refers to bringing unused houses back into use for habitation. The construction industry in rural areas could link into that very quickly. Northern Ireland's present planning regulations make it difficult for that to happen. So, on one hand, we want things to happen; on the other hand, we cannot let it happen. Perhaps, we can meet somewhere in the middle. We are not saying that development should go ahead unchecked in rural areas, but there is a huge amount of unused housing in rural areas that good, well-skilled construction workers could bring into use.

**The Chairperson:** Do we have any figures on that, though? Can we quantify how many unused houses there are in rural areas? Is there any source of information?

**Mr Hughes:** We could check that for you, Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Given the general interest shown by George, Sydney and Tom, it would be good to get some figures that we can take to people. Will you undertake to get us information on that point? If you write to the Committee, we will take it from there.

There is one point that I would like you to consider. We will work out how we can help with the various points. In fact, we will send a copy of the Hansard report to the Department, in addition to the specific points raised, and invite the Department to comment. So you can watch out for that. The Committee has an inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance to which you have not yet made a submission. You do not have to make a submission, but I think that it may be an interesting exercise for you. I was particularly taken by your comment that the skill of dry stone wall building was being lost. The serious issue is that you probably will not find that included in DEL's priority skills strategy. Yet, it is a viable career for some people. So you may want to find a way of articulating something about skills, which although modest in number, are necessary in a rural economy and may be essential to its overall fabric. It is worth having a look at that. Please take the time to write to us or come back to see us about the type of careers advice that you think people from a rural community need, how that may differ from advice in urban areas and how we can get the appropriate services out. I just draw that to your attention and invite you to respond to the inquiry, if that is of interest to you.

**Mr A Campbell:** When is the deadline, Chair?

**The Chairperson:** The deadline has passed, but, as it is you, we will make a special exception, all right? *[Laughter.]*

**Mr G Robinson:** Tomorrow.

**The Chairperson:** I think that we would like to see your input because you have raised some pretty valid points. So we would appreciate your thoughts on careers advice, and you could even drift into the skills that people need to survive and prosper in a rural environment and, of course, what the rural environment itself needs. OK?

So thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it and look forward to seeing what we can do.