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## How can Newcastle University engage more effectively with rural businesses?

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The university could help rural businesses to achieve unrealised potential for innovation but this requires better links between academics and entrepreneurs.

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### What is the current situation?

- The university culture is moving towards more engagement with businesses.
- Although there is engagement the university does not distinguish between rural and urban businesses.
- Rural businesses have particular challenges of geography and communications.
- Many are microbusinesses and don't see themselves as real enterprises.
- They are not generally aware of how the university could add value to their business.
- Rural businesses may engage if they experience a specific need, but it doesn't happen routinely.
- Many rely on personal contacts rather than official channels because they don't regard the university as being generally accessible.
- Some businesses are aware of a need for change and a move away from a "grant culture" in the North East, and seek to be more innovative

### How could this be improved?

Proposals that could be trialled include:

- A university-rural business club to promote knowledge exchange and to keep businesses in touch with opportunities such as studentships.
- A single, widely advertised point of contact for businesses.
- A timebank/voucher scheme so that businesses could contribute teaching or other resources in exchange for academic expertise.
- "Spinning in" ideas from businesses for development with academics.
- Regular networking opportunities such as "First Fridays" in more rural locations.
- Use of a wider range of media to advertise opportunities.
- Better targeting of rural knowledge brokers.
- Events for rural businesses using techniques such as "speed dating".
- More face-to-face contact between university and business representatives.

## Further information:

- This note is taken from a presentation by Carmen Hubbard and Sue Bradley on *Unlocking Rural Innovation in the North East of England: The Role of Knowledge Institutions* <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/events/item/unlocking-rural-innovation>
- The content also draws on discussion at a workshop, *Rural businesses in the North East: How can Newcastle University engage to support innovation?* held at Hexham Golf Club on 21 February 2013

## Useful resources:

- Anselin, L., Varga, A. and Acs, Z. (2000) *Geographical spillovers and university research: a spatial econometric perspective*, *Growth and Change* 31, 501-515.
- Atterton, J, Hubbard, C and Affleck, A (2010) *Rural Businesses, Innovation and Newcastle Science City*, ISBN 1-903964-31-8, <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/publish/researchreports>
- Brink, C *What are Universities for - Newcastle University* 2007 <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/assets/documents/WhatareUniversitiesfor.pdf>
- Etzkowitz, H. and Leydesdorf, L. (1997) *Introduction: Universities in the global knowledge economy*, In Etzkowitz, H. and Leydesdorf, L. (eds) *Universities and the Global Knowledge Economy: A Triple Helix of University-Industry-Government Relations*, pp. 1-8, Pinter: London.

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CRE Brief No 1

April 2013