

# **An evaluation of the adoption and application of the Rural and Urban Definition**

**June 2006**

**A report to the Commission for Rural Communities**

**by**

**Steve Webster, Delta-innovation  
25 Parkside, Gravenhurst, Bedfordshire, MK45 4JJ**

**Philip Jones, The Centre for Agricultural Strategy  
The University of Reading, PO Box 237, Reading, RG6 6AR**

**Jason Beedell, Smiths Gore  
The King's Lodging, Minster Precincts, Peterborough, PE1 1XT**



**SG**  
**SMITHSGORE**



# Evaluation of the adoption and application of the Rural and Urban Definition

---

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	<i>Project brief</i>	<b>1</b>
1.2	<i>Background to the development of the Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>2</b>
1.3	<i>A description of the new Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>2</b>
1.4	<i>Background to the Validation and Dissemination of the Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>4</b>
1.5	<i>The Local Authority Classification</i>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Project methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	<i>The survey methodology</i>	<b>6</b>
2.2	<i>Quality assurance</i>	<b>8</b>
2.3	<i>Categorisation of respondents</i>	<b>8</b>
2.4	<i>Treatment of data from within Departments</i>	<b>9</b>
2.5	<i>Development of the structured interview form</i>	<b>9</b>
2.6	<i>Meetings and discussions with key personnel</i>	<b>10</b>
2.7	<i>Review of documentation</i>	<b>10</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Results – survey</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1	<i>The sample</i>	<b>11</b>
3.2	<i>Awareness of definitions and classifications of rural</i>	<b>13</b>
3.3	<i>How and when were respondents informed about the Rural and Urban Definition?</i>	<b>14</b>
3.4	<i>Understanding the Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>15</b>
3.5	<i>How is the Rural and Urban Definition being used?</i>	<b>17</b>
3.6	<i>Success of the Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>19</b>
3.7	<i>Further thoughts on the Rural and Urban Definition</i>	<b>23</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Results – document review</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1	<i>Background</i>	<b>26</b>
4.2	<i>Results</i>	<b>26</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>The Questionnaire</b>	<b>35</b>

## Executive Summary

---

1. The brief for this project was to evaluate the acceptance, adoption, application and impact of the Rural and Urban Definition (the Definition) by central, regional and local government departments and agencies, with a view to understanding whether it had succeeded in increasing the extent to which rural-urban and within-rural differences are analysed, understood and communicated.
2. To this end, a survey of statisticians, researchers, analysts, policy makers and others within central, regional and local government departments and agencies was undertaken, together with a review of documentation published by these departments and agencies.
3. Awareness of the Definition<sup>1</sup> by those respondents who considered rurality to be within their organisation's focus ranged from 50% within national agencies through to 68% in central government and 100% in regional government. The survey design did not allow for exact quantification of the level of awareness of the Definition at the level of local government, although data collected within this study indicated that it is likely to be significantly lower than for either regional or central government departments or agencies.
4. For those who were aware of the Definition there were high levels of acceptance of it as a classification of rurality. Where definitions of rurality are used, the majority of respondents reported that they employed either the Rural and Urban Definition or Defra's Local Authority Classification derivative. This apparent high level of uptake was not fully reflected in the review of published documentation from these same sources, which may be explained by the time-lag between the acceptance of the Definition and its application within commissioned research. It should be expected that over time a decreasing proportion of publications will use alternative rural-urban definitions.
5. The Definition appears to be serving its purpose amongst those who are using it and together with Defra's Local Authority Classification fulfils the need for a consistent, robust and accepted methodology by which rurality may be classified and analysed.
6. The greatest levels of adoption of the Definition were amongst regional government respondents, whom had been tasked with specific activities for which the Definition was an integral part. Regional government respondents further indicated that they would be adopting the Definition more widely in the future. Lower levels of awareness and adoption were found within government agencies, although it should be pointed out that usage of any form of rural definition by these agencies is normally as a consequence of a specific request from Central Government.
7. The Definition is being used for a wide variety of purposes within government, including rural proofing, policy development, evaluation and analysis and general statistical reporting. However, it does not appear that the Definition is being applied *routinely* as part of rural-proofing. Rather, its application appears to be on an *ad-hoc* basis in response to policy areas having a clear rural component.
8. The New Rural-Urban Definition is being applied, most frequently, through the use of Defra's Local Authority classifications. Although this is clearly not intended for use in policy development it is nevertheless the classification within the New Rural-Urban Definition that can be, and has been,

---

<sup>1</sup> Including Defra's Local Authority Classification, which is based upon the Definition.

applied to the broadest set of data. The Local Authority classifications are in fact being used to inform policy development, in the absence of alternatives, and this is creating some confusion amongst policy makers at a regional and at a local level who are not necessarily fully briefed on the limitations of this classification.

9. Whilst there are high levels of acceptance of the Definition within government, there are nevertheless a number of key actions that could be taken that might further the degree to which it is applied, thereby increasing its beneficial impact. Such actions include the provision of more support for users of the Definition, such as conventions on presentation, further marketing of the Definition so that it becomes more widely accepted and the provision of more data at sufficiently fine resolution to be analysed within the Definition, especially *via* Defra's Rural Evidence Hub.
10. Further, the need for analysis of rural-urban and within-rural differences is not fully appreciated by many and there would be benefit in re-stating the rationale for rural proofing across government as a whole and within central government and agencies in particular.

## **Acknowledgements**

---

The project team would like to thank those who contributed to this project and in particular all those from central, regional and local government who took the time to let us know their thoughts on the Rural and Urban Definition and how it is being used.

Within the project Malcolm Wooldridge, Lucy Mayfield and Richard Tranter from The University of Reading all provided useful support which was most appreciated.

The project team would also like to extend their gratitude to personnel from the Commission for Rural Communities, Defra and the Office of National Statistics who helped guide the project to completion.

## 1. Introduction

---

Rural proofing was launched as a central government concept with the publication of the Rural White Paper (DETR 2000. Our Countryside: The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England). This established that all domestic policies should take account of rural circumstances and needs, making rural-proofing a mandatory part of policy appraisal and evaluation.

Rural proofing continues to be an integral element of policy appraisal and evaluation which the Countryside Agency, with Defra, is endeavouring to embed across Government. A range of methodologies have been created to this end, including the Rural Proofing Checklist (Countryside Agency 2002) and the establishment of Rural Proofing Online<sup>2</sup>. Defra and the Countryside Agency have also undertaken targeted activities including rural proofing the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Local Authorities and ensuring that rural proofing was included as part of the Government's regulatory impact assessment (Defra, Departmental Report 2005).

Rural proofing requires that performance towards Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets (and data indicative of such performance) is measured against rural populations as well as against the general population, using area classifications that specifically identify rural. The Rural and Urban Definition (the Definition) serves the need to classify, accurately and consistently across departments and across policies, that which is rural and that which is urban and within this classification it enables a number of types of rural area to be described. Therefore, for the rural-proofing of policies and for the assessment of policies against PSA targets the Definition is a key product, which should, in theory, be used across all relevant Government departments and agencies.

Since its launch in 2004, the degree of uptake of the Rural and Urban Definition has not been fully assessed. Given the central role that the Definition can play in ensuring that rural proofing is truly embedded in Government policy appraisal and evaluation, it is now pertinent to: (a) examine the extent of awareness of the Definition within government departments and agencies; (b) evaluate the acceptance and adoption of the Definition within and between these departments and agencies; and (c) determine the level to which the Definition has been applied to data relevant to the measurement of the well being of the English countryside.

### **1.1 Project brief**

The brief for this project was 'to evaluate the acceptance, adoption, application and impact of the Rural and Urban Definition across Government and by relevant private sector organisations'.

The focus set out in the brief was on the use of the Output Area, Ward and Super-Output Area classifications, with the project further establishing how rural-urban differences are being examined in the cases where these classifications were not in use.

The specific impact measure outlined in the brief was 'whether or not the Definition has succeeded in increasing the extent to which rural/urban and within rural differences are being analysed, understood and communicated'.

This evaluation sits alongside two other areas of development in rural evidence reporting, these being: i. the identification of data which is fit for purpose and identifying major gaps in these data; and ii. the mapping of the content, locations, collection and use of rural data.

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.countryside.gov.uk/EssentialServices/ruralProofing/automatedchecklist/index.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/EssentialServices/ruralProofing/automatedchecklist/index.asp)

## **1.2 Background to the development of the Rural and Urban Definition**

By the late 1990s a number of rural and urban definitions were in common use by Government departments, agencies and others, each with its own specific focus and limitations. Arising from problems associated with this diversity the need was recognized for a more consistent approach to the use of rural and urban definitions for policy purposes and statistical reporting. An independent<sup>3</sup> review of rural and urban definitions concluded that no single existing definition of rural and urban could meet all the needs of users and that there was a lack of clarity in central government departments around definitions in current use and the choice of definition for particular policy and analysis purposes. Following this review a consortium of five Government departments<sup>4</sup> formed in early 2002 for the purpose of commissioning a new rural and urban definition.

The remit of the new Rural and Urban Definition project largely followed the recommendations stemming from the review. This concluded that it was appropriate for most policy purposes to employ in any new urban and rural classification the 'physical settlements' definition as represented by the ODPM-defined 'urban areas' and to treat areas with a population of more than 10,000 as 'urban', irrespective of their contextual or functional characteristics. All other settlements should be treated as part of the 'rural' domain with the new classification focusing on the morphology of rural settlements (i.e. their physical form) and the wider geographic context of these.

## **1.3 A description of the new Rural and Urban Definition**

The raw material for the classification within the Rural and Urban Definition is determined as all settlements of population less than 10,000. The dataset on which the classification is based is the Postcode Address File<sup>5</sup>, which provides both the postcode and a 10m resolution OS grid reference. A full description of the Rural and Urban Definition is available through the Office for National Statistics at [www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp)

### ***Classifying settlement type***

As a first step the land surface is sectioned into a grid with cells of 1ha in size and the density of dwellings (i.e. the density of residential delivery points within the Postcode Address File) in each cell is calculated. The density of dwellings in groups of these 1ha cells allows for the location of settlements, within which the central 'focal' 1 ha cell can be identified. Settlement types outside of urban areas (i.e. of populations less than 10,000) are then classified by the ratio of dwelling-densities within radii of 200, 400, 800 and 1600m from the focal cell. A set of decision rules is applied to settlements to classify them into nine distinct types as shown in Table 1. Hamlets are designated by applying natural language processing techniques to the address descriptions of clusters of 3 – 8 farmsteads within 250m of each other.

### ***Classifying settlement context***

The broader setting in which settlements are located (i.e. the wider accessibility and sparsity of population) is known as their 'context'. The context of each settlement is measured using the same techniques that are used to designate settlement types but with a wider range, in this case over radii of 10,000, 20,000 and 30,000m (i.e. 30km) centred on the focus cell. From these measurements, two levels of 'sparsity' of population are obtained: 'Sparse' and 'Less sparse', for each settlement type.

<sup>3</sup> Project report at [www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/urban\\_rural.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/urban_rural.asp)

<sup>4</sup> These departments were: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM); Office of National Statistics (ONS); Welsh Assembly Government; and the Countryside Agency.

<sup>5</sup> The 2001 second quarter version is used.

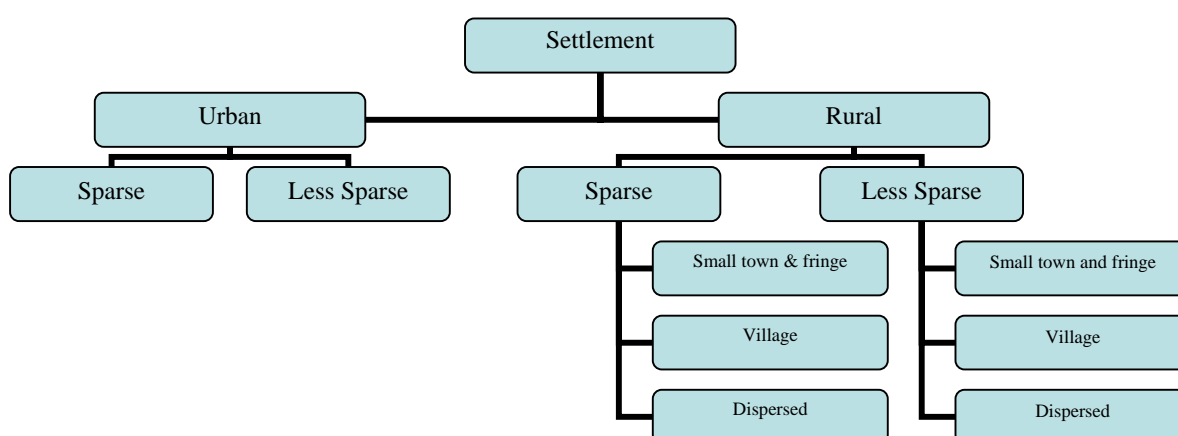
**Table1: Measured density profiles for settlement forms**

Settlement form	Density of residential delivery points, addresses ha <sup>-1</sup> (mean)			
	Within 200m	Within 400m	Within 800m	Within 1600m
Small town	8.23	8.99	8.29	5.59
Fringe (urban town)	6.46	7.21	5.90	4.68
Village	3.81	2.28	0.83	0.58
Peri-urban	.30	0.59	1.57	2.80
Village envelope	.94	1.15	1.31	0.59
Village envelope (in peri-urban)	2.96	3.27	1.81	2.13
Hamlet	0.65	0.21	0.13	0.20
Scattered dwellings	0.39	0.17	0.15	0.23
Urban areas (>10k)	16.09	15.17	13.78	11.89

### ***Application of the Rural and Urban Definition to Output Areas, Super Output Areas and Wards***

Technically, the Rural and Urban Definition can be applied at postcode level. However, the Definition is more normally used to describe larger administrative units for which statistical data is available. For Output Areas (compact socially homogenous areas that are designed to nest within Ward and Parish boundaries), Wards and Super-Output areas the nine Settlement Forms listed in Table 1 are grouped into 4 broader types; 'Urban', 'Small town and fringe', 'Village' and 'Dispersed'.

Output Areas are treated as urban if more than 50% of the population of the area lives in settlements of more than 10,000 inhabitants. The remaining rural Output Areas are classified by the most predominant settlement type. This Output Area classification is known as the 'Combined Settlement Classification'. The most sparse 5% of Output Areas at each of the three radii are designated as 'Sparse' with the remainder classified as 'Less Sparse'. Higher level administrative units, such as wards and Super Output Areas are characterised on the basis of the predominant type of Output Area that each contains.

**Figure 1. The Combined Settlement Classification**

## 1.4 Background to the Validation and Dissemination of the Rural and Urban Definition

### The validation exercise

Proposals for the new rural and urban definition were published for comment in April 2004 through a dedicated website. The website enabled stakeholders to review and offer comment on both the method and results of the classification. 823 individuals registered with the website and 97 sets of comments were received, either online, or via email.

Feedback from the validation exercise showed that satisfaction levels with both the methodology and the results were relatively high (76% and 74% respectively). Some critical comment was received by way of feedback and a summary of this is listed below:

- The settlement type definition should take more account of settlement function
- Settlements should be identified using the OS Mastermap, rather than an address-point based product, as this contains up to 10% incorrectly geo-referenced addresses
- The context dimension should be more richly defined and certainly should include a more access related measure, such as travel time or road distances, rather than just sparsity
- Sparsity should be represented in more detail; a binary variable does not provide enough detail.
- The 10,000 population threshold is too crude to use in isolation for distinguishing between rural and urban settlements
- More detail should be added to the urban classification, eg, into inner city and suburban, to make the urban classification more useful
- Why do 'fringe' areas not appear around larger urban centres?

Comments were assessed in terms of the practicality and costs of suggested changes and two immediate actions were taken. These involved refinements to the methodological report and the publication of an introductory guide to aid potential users of the classification. No changes were made to the methodology itself, but a number of recommendations were made for improvements to future incarnations of the classification.

### The launch of the Rural and Urban Definition

The new classification was launched by National Statistics on 21 July 2004 by means of a letter from the National Statistician, Len Cook, to Defra's then Minister for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael. This letter, which was also copied to other interested departments, stated that ***'The classification will support the reporting and analysis of a wide range of data, particularly socio-economic data, to support both rural and urban policy development. It will enable us to compare and contrast the attributes of different types of areas and identify areas affected by the issues that you have expressed an interest in, such as poverty, social exclusion, poor access to services and low performance of local economies.'***

Subsequently the definition has been promoted directly through the work of the ONS, the Commission for Rural Communities and Defra. The definition has been further promoted through the creation of Local Authority Classification and Primary Care Trust Classification of rurality, based upon the aggregated assessments of the full classification. The Local Authority Classification is outlined below. The ONS has promoted the Definition through, for example, networks of Government statisticians and the Countryside Agency, together with Defra, have worked directly with a number of Government departments to apply the Definition to relevant data sets.

### 1.5 The Local Authority Classification

Local Authority Districts were not initially characterized in the way that Wards and Super Output Areas were, because a simple aggregation of categories to this level causes three quarters of the Local Authority Districts to appear as urban, on the basis that the dominant settlement type is determined by population rather than land use and that a majority of the population live in urban settlements – thus a small urban parcel within an area can lead to that area being classified as urban. Defra therefore introduced the Local Authority Classification in 2005, with the purpose of presenting and comparing data ‘that do not exist at the lower levels’. Full details of the Local Authority Classification can be found at [http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/rural\\_resd/rural\\_definition.asp](http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/rural_resd/rural_definition.asp)

Together with the Local Authority Classification, Defra have developed and made available both internally, and for use outside of Defra, the Defra Rural Evidence Hub. This contains data analysed using the Rural and Urban Definition or classified using to the Local Authority Classification (depending upon the resolution of the data set).

The Local Authority Classification is based upon the classification used for Census Output Areas and builds a picture of an area according to: (i) the mix of rural settlement types and urban areas within the local authority boundary, together with additional criteria which are used to describe the urban elements; (ii) a classification of the larger market towns (included as rural for the purposes of the Local Authority Classification); and (iii) a distinction between major, large and other urban areas. Data are aggregated within each Local Authority District as follows.

**Rural 80:** at least 80% of the population live in rural settlements, including the larger market towns.

**Rural 50:** between 50 and 80% of the population live in rural settlements, including the larger market towns.

**Significant Rural:** more than 37,000 or more than 26% (but less than 50%) of total population resident in rural settlements, including the larger market towns.

**Other Urban:** fewer than 37,000 or less than 26% of total population resident in rural settlements, including the larger market towns.

**Large Urban:** a minimum of 50,000 or 50% of total population resident within a large urban area

**Major Urban:** a minimum of 100,000 or 50% of total population resident within a major urban area

The Local Authority Classification is presented with the caveat that ‘We [Defra] do not recommend that the classification is used to inform detailed policy design (e.g. for targeting local service delivery)’.

## 2. Project methodology

---

The methodology for the project involved;

- a) The development of a structured interview schedule in order that relevant information could be obtained in a consistent format from across Government and relevant private sector organisations.
- b) The identification of national and regional government departments and bodies and private sector organisations collecting, holding or using data relevant to the work of the CRC.
- c) Surveying of these organisations for their knowledge, acceptance, adoption and application of the Rural and Urban Definition, any benefits they perceive that result from adoption and the barriers they perceive to the wider use of the Definition.

### 2.1 The survey methodology

#### Identifying the target population and choice of sampling frame

The first research task was the identification of the population of Government departments, agencies and other public and private sector bodies to be researched. Having done this, the next step was to select an appropriate level of sampling for the survey, from full census to representative sampling. These levels are encapsulated in the following three survey options.

1. *A census of all Government departments and public bodies.* Whilst this would give the most accurate view of the adoption and application it would be somewhat difficult given the volume of departments in existence, the timescale for the project and the available resources.
2. *Random sampling across all Government departments and public bodies.* Such an approach would be suitable if it could be reasonably assumed that all departments and public bodies have an equivalent likelihood of involvement in rural issues / rural proofing, and that general levels of uptake over the whole sample reflects the 'true' rate of adoption. However, it was clear that not all Government departments have an equivalent concern or relevance to rural issues and that many Government bodies have a remit to which area classifications of any sort would not be relevant.
3. *Sampling of a discrete subset of departments, agencies and bodies.* Focussing on those identified as to which rural area classifications would, or should, be of direct relevance, either for policy design, implementation or monitoring. The results from sampling of this subset cannot allow inferences to be drawn about the all Government departments and agencies, but it does provide a direct assessment of whether or not the Rural and Urban Definition has been accepted and adopted by those Government departments and bodies judged most likely to be collecting, holding or using data relevant to the work of the CRC.

#### Central Government

The third of these approaches was chosen for the study of uptake of the definition by central government. The sampling approach involved a search of national Government departments and bodies and an assessment for each of these of the likelihood that they would be collecting holding or using data relevant to the work of the CRC. This assessment was based upon information given either on the home-page of the department's website, or through the direct advice of members of the project team and its steering group. During the course of recruitment for the survey, these judgements were tested against the facts and the sample amended and extended accordingly.

The Cabinet Offices' schedule of Government departments and bodies was used as the starting point for developing this sample of relevant Government departments and bodies, (<http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/ndpb/ndpb.nsf>), with affiliated non-departmental public bodies being assessed for the likelihood that they would work with relevant rural data for each relevant central government department. Those departments and bodies deemed unlikely to be working with relevant data were excluded from this sample. For example, those bodies with a specific and non-geographical remit (e.g. the Royal Mint) or a defined and inflexible geographical remit (e.g. Royal Parks) were not included within the sample.

Additional respondents were also identified through a tip-off procedure, by which an initial respondent would refer the interviewer to a second respondent to whom the survey was considered relevant. This was most normally because the second respondent was known to work with rural issues, rather than being because they were known to use or be aware of the Rural and Urban Definition. Therefore the tip-off procedure should not have increased the likelihood of sampling bias within the population of respondents.

The final sample of Government departments and bodies is given in Appendix 1. The sample finally contacted for survey consisted of every central government Department or Agency which was considered relevant. There was no attempt to sub-sample these qualifying organisations to reduce the scale of the survey.

### *Sampling and non-response bias*

By surveying every known eligible central government organisation, sampling bias has been minimised. While some relevant units may have been omitted, these incidences are of a random kind. However, this does not preclude the possibility of self selection bias, i.e., individuals receiving a survey form may be more likely to respond if they had previously heard of, or used, the Rural and Urban Definition. The original intention was that a telephone survey would be carried out. This would reduce the risk of self selection bias because interviewees would have to give an account of why they did not wish to respond. In the event, because of the increased scale of the central government survey, and because some respondents did not feel comfortable with immediate responses to complex questions, a number of the questionnaires were administered by email and were self-completed. In these cases non-respondents were contacted and the reasons for non-response elucidated; in all cases this was due to a consideration by the respondent(s) that rural issues were not relevant to that department.

### **Regional Government**

Within the English regions, excluding London, direct approaches were made to Government Offices, Regional Observatories, and Regional Development Agencies. Responses were received jointly from a number of these, reflecting the different organisational structures existing across the regions. However, by surveying a pre-selected group of organisations, and receiving no non-responses, sampling bias was kept to a minimal level. While some relevant units may have been omitted, these incidences are of a random kind.

### **Private sector**

During the early stages of the project it became apparent that data and analysis relevant to rural issues was commissioned for the most part by central, regional and local government and government agencies, and that the actions of private sector data collectors / analysts and academics were largely driven by these government organisations. That is, private sector organisations would use the Rural and Urban Definition within their analysis for the most part if instructed to do so by those commissioning their services. Therefore it seemed pertinent to look more closely at sponsoring departments rather than private sector data providers themselves. In order that the full range of government commissioning bodies was reviewed within the project a survey of local authorities was therefore included within the methodology.

## Local Government

Whilst organisations from national and regional government and agencies were directly approached, local government organisations were approached by circulation of the questionnaire by members of the Local Government Association (LGA), Central-Local Information Partnership (CLIP), Intra-Governmental Group on Geographic Information (IGGI) and of the Chief Economic Development Officers' Society (CEDOS). Questionnaires were also distributed at a LARIA conference in March 2006.

### *Sampling and non-response bias*

As there was no attempt to limit the sampling to a pre-defined sub-set of Local Authorities, there is minimal risk of sampling bias. However, the terminal sample might possibly be subject to non-response bias. To assess the extent of this a series of direct telephone contacts were made with Local Authorities who had not responded to the initial survey distribution. The distribution of the responses to direct telephone contacts was compared to that of those who chose not to respond and it was found that a non-response bias may have resulted, i.e. those who chose not to respond were more likely to have had no knowledge of the Rural and Urban Definition. This fact must be taken into account in drawing wider conclusions for local government respondents.

## 2.2 Quality assurance

At the data entry stage close scrutiny of responses was undertaken and any queries against the responses were flagged up. These queries were then addressed by means of follow-up telephone calls to respondents.

## 2.3 Categorisation of respondents

A series of classification variables were used for the purpose of data analysis.

1. Organisation
- a) Central Government Departments
  - b) National agencies
  - c) Regional Government and Agencies, including Observatories
  - d) Local Government
  - e) Others (researchers, consultants)

### 2. Respondent type

Respondents were categorised using two variables; their job title and their role. Because respondents indicated multiple roles and because of occasional contradiction between the stated role and the job title the following approach was adopted to create a binary classification of respondents on the basis of these two variables.

'Managers/Policy Advisers' were defined as those who included 'policy advisor' in the statement of their role and/or included this term and/or the terms 'director' or 'manager' or within their job title.

'Researchers/Statisticians/Analysts' were defined as those who did not include 'policy advisor' in the statement of their role nor did they include the terms 'director' or 'manager' or 'policy advisor' within their job title.

3. Geographical remit of organisation
- a) National
  - b) Regional
  - c) Local

## **2.4 Treatment of data from within Departments**

Responses from departments may differ according to the level and role of the respondent. For the purpose of analysis, the 'respondent type' classification serves to differentiate between levels of respondent.

For some ministries/departments eg, Defra and the ODPM, multiple responses were sought, because of the range of relevant functions within each. Averaging over responses within a department/ministry presents a problem. Imagine a situation where only a single response is obtained from a department, but where this has come from an individual in higher management, with control over multiple sections. Such an individual might indicate that their department makes use of the definition because one of the eligible sections under their control does so, when the remainder do not. This would give a false impression of the level of uptake in that department. To control for this potential source of bias it is necessary to ensure that responses come from heads of section/directorate or staff working within sections/directorates (these being sub-departmental sections with sector-specific responsibilities) rather than heads or managers of multiple directorates. This was in part assured at the recruitment stage, where the project team assessed the organisation charts of each of these central government departments and identified appropriate directorates for which a geographical understanding of populations would or should be of direct relevance to policy design and implementation. In addition, responses are scrutinised to ensure that these criteria are being met. Responses from managers at too high a level, i.e. covering multiple sections and sectors of a department's functions, were omitted.

For regional and local government and non-government organisations this rule is relaxed as these have a more restricted focus, either sectorally or geographically, but also because of the separation of policy development (central) from delivery (outsourced through private sector or ndpb's) or because of the relatively specialist function attached to 'rural expertise'.

## **2.5 Development of the structured interview form**

A draft interview schedule was created and piloted upon a series of regional agencies (North West Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward and One NorthEast), Government Offices (North East and Yorkshire and Humber) and Observatories (Yorkshire Futures and the North East Regional Information Partnership) and with a central government department. The pilot indicated that greater precision in data collection would be of benefit to the project and therefore the original questionnaire was revised through discussion within the project team and through the input of the wider steering group. It was also recognised that there would be advantage in creating and circulating a paper based survey to accompany the telephone questionnaire. This would hold two advantages, (i) those individuals proving difficult to pin down for interview would be able to provide a response 'in their own time' which could then be followed up through telephone interview and (ii) the paper based survey could be circulated by email through a selection of networks of possible users of the definition, or in hard copy at conferences and meetings, thereby widening the spectrum of possible respondents, especially at the local level. The pilot also revealed the fact that within the regions there was often very close working between the various Government agencies and bodies and that these were not always easy to separate in terms of their commissioning or use of data. A blank version of the structured interview form is contained in Appendix 2.

The detail of data required from the revised format was significantly greater than would normally be possible through telephone data collection. For example, the question asking whether a department has used the definition for any purpose (Q.4a) may require that the respondent makes checks within their department, in particular where the detail of each purpose is requested (Q.4b). The methodology for data collection was therefore amended to include in addition to full structured telephone discussion, allowance for written/emailed responses, the latter being followed through with repeat telephone discussions to clarify responses.

Following receipt of completed survey forms, data were entered onto a database at The University of Reading at which point further quality assurance checks were made, for example, through the identification

of conflicting or missing responses. These were followed up through further telephone contact with interviewees to ensure that each provided a coherent set of responses.

### ***2.6 Meetings and discussions with key personnel***

To gain further background information on the use and dissemination of the Definition the project team arranged two meetings; with Defra's statistics group in York and with the ONS in London. These took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> December and 18<sup>th</sup> January respectively and key points raised in the discussions are given in Appendix 3.

### ***2.7 Review of documentation***

A search was undertaken of all documents published since 2004 by the organisations involved in the survey. This search was in part web-based, but leads to documents also flowed from the telephone interviews and other sources. On the basis of the document titles and summaries, a decision was taken on whether the document was likely to specifically address rural issues. These documents included policy and mission statements, evaluations of policy and practice, and contributions to the evidence base, reflecting both in-house and commissioned work.

### 3. Results - survey

#### 3.1 The sample

A total of 90 useable responses were received and these were categorised into five types of organisation, as shown in Table 3.1.1 following. Responses were not provided from a further 16 central government departments and non-departmental public bodies for the reasons that either i) they were refused or ii) they were deferred, by the responding organisation, for the whole period of data collection. In particular, a number of non-departmental public bodies were resistant to taking part in the questionnaire for the reasons that the subject matter was considered 'too left-field' or 'not relevant to their work'. However, central and regional government responses were generally consistent with the schedule of relevant departments, agencies and organisations drawn up by the project team, with only a small number declining to take part.

Thus the sample from which this data is drawn may be considered an accurate representation of those central and regional government departments to whom rurality would be expected to be a concern in policy development or delivery, but biased towards those non-departmental public bodies which are specifically aware of rural issues. Local Government responses, which resulted from self-selection, were biased towards those bodies that were aware of the Rural and Urban Definition, although not towards those who considered rurality to be an aspect of their organisations role.

**Table 3.1.1 Organisations responding to the questionnaire**

Classification of organisation	Constituent organisation types (no. times represented in sample)	Number of organisations*	Number of respondents	Proportion of total (%)
Central Government	Central Government Departments	8	28	31.1
	Defra (13)			
	ODPM (7)			
	DfT (2)			
	Home Office (2)			
	DfES (1)			
	DTI (1)			
	DWP (1)			
DCMS (1)				
National Agencies	Non-departmental public bodies	11	15	16.7
Regional Government	Government Offices (2)	15	17	18.8
	Regional Development Agencies (6)			
	Regional Observatories (4)			
	Sub-regional partnerships (3)			
	Regional Assembly (1)			
Local Government	District Councils (8)	28	28	31.1
	Country Councils (11)			
	Borough Councils (8)			
	City Councils (1)			
Research org.	Research & consultancy organisations/companies	2	2	2.2

\* Some regional government responses were from multiple organisations (e.g. a Regional Observatory together with a Regional Development Agency) but for the purpose of this table, these are treated as a single organisation. All of the eight non-London regions were represented at the least by a single RDA, an Observatory or a Regional Assembly response.

The persons responding to the questionnaire indicated that they were employed in a variety of positions within their respective organisations. These responses were grouped into just two types for the purpose of analysis, as indicated in Table 3.1.2 following. Any respondent who indicated in their job title that they were a section- or team-manager, a director, a policy adviser, or who indicated their role as policy advice, were classified as 'MPD'. The remainder, a group containing researchers, statisticians and analysts, were classified as RSA. The proportion of MPD:RSA did not vary significantly across the organisation classifications.

**Table 3.1.2 Occupational types responding to the questionnaire**

Position code	Position description	Number of respondents (proportion of total)
MPD	Manager, director, policy advisor	56 (62%)
RSA	Researcher, statistician, analyst	34 (38%)

A total of one response was rejected because the respondent was considered to be too senior and likely to provide information from across multiple sections/directorates within their organisation. The department concerned was also surveyed at a section level.

While the sample selection procedure was designed to identify specifically those organisations whose work involved or affected rural areas and communities, inevitably some organisations which were requested to respond did not feel that this was the case. Fourteen of the 89 responses categorised their departments as not involving or affecting rural areas or communities. These have been excluded from further analysis. Table 1.3 below shows the distribution of these respondents by organisation type. The marginally larger number of local authority respondents falling into this category may simply reflect the less targeted recruitment strategy employed for this class of organisation.

**Table 3.1.3 Respondents who indicated that their organisations work did not involve or affect rural areas and communities, grouped by organisation type.**

Organisation type	Number of responses
Central Government	3
National Agencies	2
Regional Government	1
Local Government	8
Research org.	0

### 3.2 Awareness of definitions and classifications of rural

Asked if they were aware of any formal definitions or classifications of rurality, 84% of respondents who had responded that rurality is relevant to the work of their organisation stated that they were aware of some such formal definition(s). As can be seen from Table 3.2.1 the proportions of respondents aware of at least one definition are relatively high. Overall, 76% of respondents were aware of the existence of the Rural and Urban Definition.

**Table 3.2.1 Level of respondents' awareness of rural definitions by type of organisation**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
<b>Aware of any formal definition / classification</b>	22 (88%)	7 (54%)	16 (100%)	17 (85%)	2 (100%)	64 (84%)
<b>Aware of the Rural and Urban Definition</b>	18 (72%)	6 (46%)	16 (100%)	16 (80%)	2 (100%)	58 (76%)
<b>Only aware of the Rural and Urban Definition</b>	5 (23%)	1 (14%)	1 (6%)	4 (24%)	1 (50%)	12 (19%)

One interesting finding is that a proportion of respondents who indicated that they knew of at least one formal definition of rurality, knew only of the Rural and Urban Definition. This constituted 23% of respondents from Central Government departments and nearly 24% of respondents from local government, but only 6% of regional government (see Row 4 of Table 3.2.1). Table 3.2.2 below shows a list of the alternative rural definitions / classifications known to respondents, together with the frequency with which they were cited. Seven of these responses were too vague to be categorised within this list and are reported as 'unclear', and a further six referred to in-house definitions developed for specific purposes. When asked whether or not these alternative definitions were being used instead of or in addition to the Rural and Urban Definition, for any purposes, 19 respondents were able to provide examples of these being used.

**Table 3.2.2 Alternative rural definitions cited as known or used by survey respondents**

*Frequency of citation*

Name of alternative rural definition / classification	Cited by respondents	Used
Countryside Agency Administrative Areas Classification	16	1
ONS classification of administrative areas	10	1
2005 Defra Local Authority Classification (based on the Rural and Urban Definition)	8	
1991 Urban Settlements Definition	8	4
1993 Tarling definition	7	2
Own Internal classifications*	6	8
1991 Acorn Classification	3	1
EU / OECD definitions	2	
Defra's PCT Classification (based on the Rural and Urban Definition)	1	
Home Office classification of police forces	1	
Rural productivity** (Defra, 2005)	1	
Newcastle University definition	1	1
Unclear	7	4

\* Some respondents failed to detail 'internal classifications' as definitions of which they were aware, but cited their use as alternatives to the Rural and Urban Definition.

\*\* This is in fact not a definition, but a paper which uses the Rural and Urban Definition.

### 3.3 How and when were respondents informed about the Rural and Urban Definition?

Respondents report that they, or their organisations, were informed of the Rural and Urban Definition by a variety of means, with no single source dominating (see Table 3.3.1). The most oft cited source is Defra, with notification by the Office of National Statistics following in second and the Countryside Agency in third place. It should be pointed out that these data are drawn only from those respondents that reported an awareness of the new definition and that the percentage values in Column 2 do not sum to 100% because a proportion of respondents eligible to answer this question did not do so. In addition, if all eligible respondents had answered the question, the percent values in Column 2 would sum to more than 100% as some respondents cite multiple sources of their awareness of the definition.

**Table 3.3.1 How respondents were informed of the Rural and Urban Definition**

Method of communication	Frequency of citation (proportion of total)
External - DEFRA	22 (37%)
External – ONS	16 (27%)
External - Other	11 (18%)
External – CA	10 (17%)
Internally from within organisation	0 (0%)

Other sources of awareness of the new Definition that were cited by respondents included:

- Board Members
- Consulting and Norfolk CC Demographic info note
- Consulted on draft version and followed since
- RDA Rural Team (One North East)
- DTI - integrated into RDA tasking framework
- Seminar at Royal Geographical Society
- In publication of previous employer
- info4local email alert service
- Involved in original design of the Definition
- Via partnership working
- Rural and Urban Definition research team

Just under 70% of those respondents who were aware of the Rural and Urban Definition had known of it for a year or more (see Table 3.3.2) with around 8% of respondents indicating that they were involved in some way at the design and consultation stages in the construction of the Definition. While only 8% indicated that they were involved in the development/consultation phase of the Definition, it must be assumed that all respondents who indicated that they had been aware of the Definition for more than 24 months will have been at least aware of the Definition during its development phase if not involved in that development.

**Table 3.3.2 Length of time that respondents, or their organisations, have been aware of the Rural and Urban Definition**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

Length of time (months)	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All respondents
Up to 12 months	4 (22%)	0 (0%)	5 (31%)	7 (44%)	2 (100%)	18 (31%)
13 - 24	6 (33%)	4 (66%)	10 (63%)	9 (56%)	0 (0%)	29 (50%)
> 24	8 (44%)	2 (33%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (19%)

### 3.4 Understanding the Rural and Urban Definition

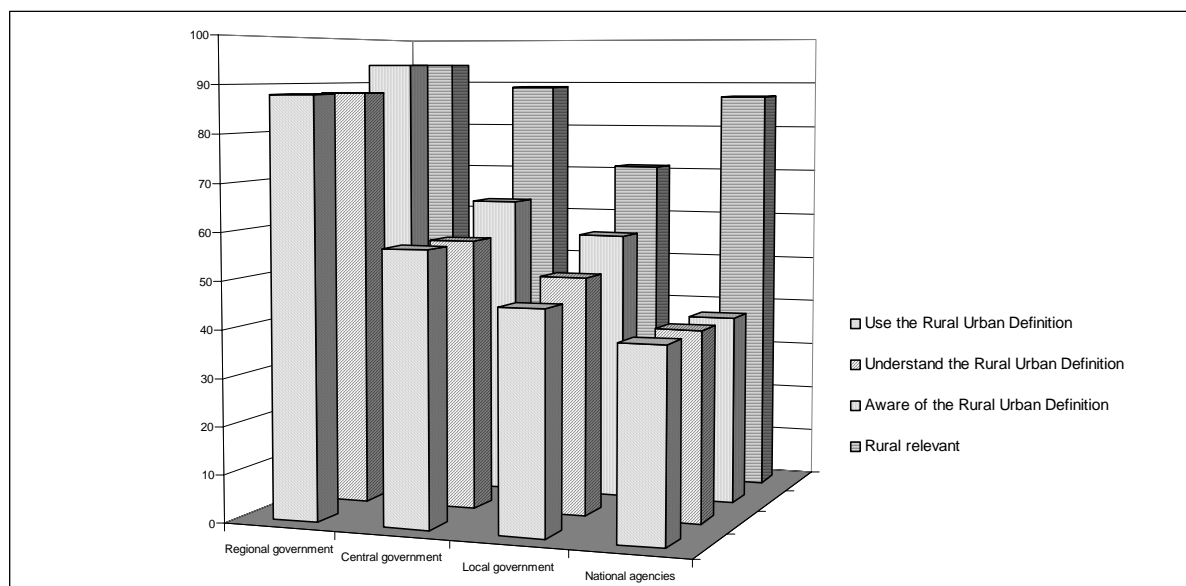
The reported level of understanding of the new definition is high across all types of organisation, although failures in understanding are reported for central, regional and local government. An examination of those respondents who are aware of the Rural and Urban Definition (i.e. excluding those with no awareness) revealed that, averaged over all organisations, 58% of respondents expressed full confidence in their grasp of the Rural and Urban Definition, with a further 35% stating that they had a partial understanding. The relationship between awareness, understanding and use of the Definition is shown in Figure 2.

**Table 3.4.1 Expressed level of understanding of the Rural and Urban Definition**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
<b>Full understanding</b>	10 (56%)	5 (83%)	11 (69%)	7 (47%)	0 (0%)	33 (58%)
<b>Partial understanding</b>	6 (33%)	1 (17%)	4 (25%)	7 (47%)	2(100%)	20 (35%)
<b>Unsure</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
<b>Do not understand</b>	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)

**Figure 2. The proportion (%) of the sample for each level of government reporting that rural issues are relevant and that they are aware of, understand and use the Rural and Urban Definition.**



While respondents were generally confident that they understood the principles underlying the construction of the Definition, they were not so certain that they had been fully informed of the benefits of using it. Although 33% reported that the benefits of using the Definition had been *fully explained* and a further 37% reported that they had been *partially explained* (see Table 3.4.2), the remaining 30% reported that the benefits of using the Rural and Urban Definition had not been made clear to them.

**Table 3.4.2 The benefits of the Rural and Urban Definition have been made clear***Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
<b>Yes fully</b>	6 (33%)	3 (50%)	5 (31%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)	19 (33%)
<b>Yes partially</b>	7 (39%)	2 (33%)	7 (44%)	4 (27%)	1 (50%)	21 (37%)
<b>No not very</b>	3 (17%)	1 (17%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	1 (50%)	11 (19%)
<b>Not at all</b>	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	6 (11%)

A similar picture emerged when asked whether or not the ways in which the Definition could be used had been explained; 68% of respondents reported that the uses had been fully or partially explained; whilst 32% reported that they had not been very much explained if they had been explained at all.

**Table 3.4.3 The ways in which the Definition can be used have been explained***Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
<b>Yes fully</b>	5 (28%)	1 (17%)	4 (25%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	12 (21%)
<b>Yes partially</b>	8 (44%)	2 (33%)	9 (56%)	6 (43%)	1 (33%)	26 (46%)
<b>No not very</b>	3 (17%)	2 (33%)	2 (13%)	4 (29%)	0 (0%)	11 (20%)
<b>Not at all</b>	2 (11%)	1 (17%)	1 (6%)	2 (14%)	1 (67%)	7 (13%)

### 3.5 How is the Rural and Urban Definition being used?

Of those respondents who were aware of the definition, the majority (88% overall) were also aware of its application within their department or organisation, as detailed in Table 3.5.1, below. Usage was much lower amongst local government respondents than amongst regional or central government respondents. This concurs with the finding that more than 40% of local government respondents had been aware of the Rural and Urban Definition for six months or less, (see Table 3.3.3) as compared to 5% and 6% respectively for central and regional government respondents. Reasons for not using the Rural and Urban Definition included lack of demand or need (over 50%), as well as a lack of appropriate data sources, insufficient time being aware of the Definition, and lack of choice as to whether or not to use the Definition.

**Table 3.5.1 Has the department used the Definition for any purpose?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Yes	16 (89%)	6 (100%)	15 (94%)	13 (73%)	2 (100%)	52 (88%)
No	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	6 (11%)
Don't know	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

The Rural and Urban Definition was reported as used for a number of purposes by the majority of respondents who use the Definition at all, with policy development and rural proofing being most frequently cited.

**Table 3.5.2 Purposes to which the new Definition has been put**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Rural proofing	10 (63%)	3 (50%)	7 (47%)	7 (78%)	1 (50%)	28 (58%)
Policy development	12 (75%)	3 (50%)	7 (47%)	6 (67%)	0 (0%)	28 (58%)
Analysis others data	10 (63%)	3 (50%)	8 (53%)	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	25 (52%)
General stat reporting	8 (50%)	5 (83%)	7 (47%)	5 (56%)	0 (0%)	25 (52%)
Analysis own data	10 (63%)	4 (67%)	3 (20%)	4 (44%)	1 (50%)	22 (46%)
Strategic planning	8 (50%)	3 (50%)	6 (40%)	3 (33%)	0 (0%)	20 (42%)
Policy evaluation	10 (63%)	2 (33%)	6 (40%)	2 (22%)	0 (0%)	20 (42%)
Performance management	5 (31%)	1 (17%)	7 (47%)	1 (11%)	1 (50%)	15 (31%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the Rural and Urban Definition, who also provided answers to this question.

The Rural and Urban Definition appears to be being used through two separate means; by reference to the ONS postcode file, and through Defra's rural hub. The geographic level at which the Rural and Urban Definition is most used, for both central and regional government, is the Local/Unitary Authority level. Use of the Definition at a finer resolution was commented upon by many respondents, as a process that was hindered by a lack of appropriate data sets.

**Table 3.5.3 Geographic level at which the Definition used**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	<b>Central Government</b>	<b>National Agencies</b>	<b>Regional Government</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>Research org.</b>	<b>All</b>
Census Output Area	<b>4</b> (36%)	<b>2</b> (33%)	<b>8</b> (67%)	<b>4</b> (50%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>18</b> (46%)
Census Super Output Area	<b>5</b> (46%)	<b>2</b> (33%)	<b>4</b> (33%)	<b>6</b> (75%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>17</b> (44%)
Ward	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)
Local/Unitary Authority	<b>7</b> (64%)	<b>1</b> (17%)	<b>10</b> (83%)	<b>4</b> (50%)	<b>2</b> (100%)	<b>24</b> (62%)
Other	<b>5</b> (46%)	<b>2</b> (33%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>0</b> (0%)	<b>7</b> (18%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the new definition, who also provided answers to this question.

### 3.6 Success of the Rural and Urban Definition

The great majority of respondents who reported use of the Rural and Urban Definition stated that its use had been *partially* or *greatly* successful. None of the respondents stated that its use had been *not at all* successful, although 10 % did state that it had been *not very* successful.

**Table 3.6.1 Has your use of the Definition and/or Classifications been successful?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Yes – greatly	5 (36%)	3 (50%)	5 (33%)	4 (36%)	0 (0%)	17 (35%)
Yes – partially	9 (64%)	3 (50%)	7 (47%)	5 (46%)	2 (100%)	26 (54%)
No – not very	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	2 (18%)	0 (0%)	5 (10%)
No – not at all	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the new definition, who also provided answers to this question.

When asked whether or not the Rural and Urban Definition and / or classifications had been useful to their organisation's work (Table 3.6.2, below), responses followed a similar pattern to the question of whether the use of the Definition had been successful, confirming the generally positive reaction from those using the Definition.

**Table 3.6.2 Have the Definition and/or Classifications been useful to your organisations work?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Yes – greatly	4 (29%)	4 (67%)	6 (40%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	18 (38%)
Yes – partially	9 (64%)	2 (33%)	7 (47%)	6 (60%)	2 (100%)	26 (55%)
No – not very	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)
No – not at all	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the new definition, who also provided answers to this question.

However, it should be noted that in both cases just over half of respondents stated that the use of the Definition was only *partially* successful. Respondents were then asked what it was that had contributed to the success or otherwise of the use of the Definition. Responses were subsequently classified into four groups of contributors to success and into five groups of contributors to lack of success. These are shown in Tables 3.6.3 and 3.6.4, below. Contributors to success are centred on the structure and background to the definition (robust, straightforward, consistent), with only two respondents citing the greater geographical resolution available through the Definition as a contributing factor.

Asked about what contributed to the lack of success of the Definition, responses were polarised on two issues; the difficulties of using the Rural and Urban Definition and Local Authority Classification (misclassification, insufficiency of datasets, and the fine geographical resolution) and the structure and background to the Definition (too complex, not universally accepted). However, comparison between the contributors to success and to the lack of success reveals that the structure and background to the definition elicits twice as many positive as negative responses.

**Table 3.6.3 Contributors to success**

Broad description of contributor	Frequency of citation (proportion of total )
Offers a consistent approach to classification and monitoring	11 (55%)
Straightforward and understandable	5 (25%)
Robust definition, inspires confidence	2 (10%)
Greater geographical resolution	2 (10%)

**Table 3.6.4 Contributors to lack of success**

Broad description of contributor	Frequency of citation (proportion of total)
Misclassifies market towns and other areas (e.g. urban fringe)	5 (27%)
Insufficient datasets to be of much use	4 (22%)
Too complex and difficult to understand / explain	4 (22%)
Not universally accepted or understood	3 (17%)
Greater geographical resolution	2 (11%)

Responses further highlighted the fact that some respondents did not appear to be aware of one or the other of the Rural and Urban Definition or Defra's Local Authority Classification. The criticism of the misclassification of market towns is only relevant to the Rural and Urban Definition. The demand for greater geographical resolution can really only be made of the Local Authority Classification. Therefore, knowledge and application of both the Definition and the Local Authority Classification should, in theory, overcome these criticisms.

Considering rural proofing in particular, respondents were asked whether or not the Definition had improved their understanding of rural needs and circumstances. Responses were less positive than for the previous questions, with 70% stating that the Definition had partially or greatly improved their understanding and 30% stating that it had not (see Table 3.6.5, below). However, given that rural proofing was only cited by 60% of respondents (see Table 3.5.3) as a use to which they had put the Definition, this is perhaps not surprising. That is, use of the Definition improved understanding of rural needs and circumstances even when this was not the primary purpose to which it was put.

**Table 3.6.5 Have the new Definition and/or Classifications improved your understanding of rural needs/circumstances?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Yes – greatly	4 (29%)	1 (17%)	2 (13%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	8 (17%)
Yes – partially	6 (43%)	1 (17%)	10 (67%)	7 (70%)	1 (33%)	25 (53%)
No – not very	3 (21%)	4 (67%)	2 (13%)	2 (20%)	1 (33%)	12 (26%)
No – not at all	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the new definition, who also provided answers to this question.

The relationship between these perceptions of success and the extent to which respondents reported that the Definition's uses and benefits had been explained was examined using a Chi-square test. Three classes were created: 'Fans' of the Definition were those who stated that the Definition was very or quite useful *and* that the Definition had greatly or partially improved their understanding of rural needs and

circumstances; 'Critics' of the Definition were those who stated that the Definition was not very or not at all useful *and* that it had not (very or at-all) improved their understanding of rural needs and circumstances and 'Mixed Views' were those who responded positively to one of these questions but negatively to the other. As there were very few Critics this class was disregarded. As expected, Fans were significantly more likely than expected to report that the benefits of the definition had been made clear to them and that the uses of the Definition had been explained, whilst the Mixed Views group were more likely than expected to report that the benefits had not been made very clear and the uses of the Definition had not been explained.

In order to ascertain the extent to which organisations have attempted to apply the Rural and Urban Definition respondents were asked whether they had taken all, some or few opportunities to apply the Definition (Table 3.6.6). Whilst this demanded a relatively subjective response it was supplemented with an open question on what would encourage a wider application of the Definition and/or classifications. Responses to the latter were classified into eight categories and these are shown in Table 3.6.7. The three key categories which gained most citations by respondents i.e. they would encourage a wider application of the Definition, were: i) the application of the Definition to a wider range of data sets (presumably through the Defra Rural Evidence Hub), ii) more explanation of the method of application of the Definition and iii) more explanation and case studies of the benefits of Definition.

**Table 3.6.6 What opportunities has your department taken to apply the new Definition and/or associated Classifications?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
All opportunities	9 (64%)	3 (50%)	4 (27%)	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	17 (35%)
Some opportunities	2 (14%)	3 (50%)	10 (67%)	6 (55%)	0 (0%)	21 (44%)
Few opportunities	3 (21%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	4 (36%)	2 (67%)	10 (21%)

Note: data based only on respondents reporting some use of the new definition, who also provided answers to this question.

**Table 3.6.7 What would encourage a wider application of the Rural and Urban Definition?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of total)*

Broad description of contributor	Frequency of citation and proportion of total (%)
Application to a wider range of data sets	7 (32%)
More explanation and case studies of the benefits and uses of the Definition	5 (23%)
More explanation of the method of application of the definition	4 (18%)
Consensus on aggregation of categories (e.g. from 8 to 4) for mapping and use with lay audiences	2 (9%)
Government use of the Classification for resource allocation	1 (5%)
Consistent definition across the UK	1 (5%)
Better handling of market towns	1 (5%)
A better appreciation of what rural looks and feels like – examples from the real world	1 (5%)

Responses to a number of key questions were further examined to determine whether differences existed in the reported value of the Definition between those using the Definition at the Output Area, Super Output Area or Ward resolution and those using Defra's Local Authority Classification. A classification variable was therefore created based on the level at which the Definition had been used. Eleven respondents did not report the level used. For the remainder, the two categories comprised of 1. those using the Definition at Output Area, Super Output Area or Ward only and 2. those using the Local Authority or Primary Care Trust Classifications either solely or in combination with one or more of the Output Area, Super Output Area or Ward resolutions. No differences were found between the two categories of respondents in their perception of whether the use of the Definition had been a success, whether it had helped their organisations' work, or whether it was clear. However, a chi-square test revealed that those using the Local Authority Classification were more likely than expected to report that the Definition had improved their understanding of rural needs and circumstances. There are a number of reasons why this could be so, including the greater range of data available at the Local Authority Classification level, increasing the likelihood that its use will yield positive results.

### 3.7 Further thoughts on the Rural and Urban Definition

To gain a more comprehensive picture of the thoughts of users of the Definition two sets of questions were asked, enquiring about the perceived clarity of the definition and about whether it is seen to be fair, reasonable and relevant. The results of these questions are given in Tables 3.7.1 and 3.7.2, below. Ninety percent of respondents considered the Definition to be clear, with just 2% considering it to be not clear at all. Similarly, the majority of respondents considered the definition to be fair, reasonable and relevant. Interestingly, some respondents were unwilling to state that the definition was fair, reasonable or relevant because of issues raised elsewhere in the questionnaire, such as the classification of market towns or urban fringe.

**Table 3.7.1 Do you think that the Definition is clear?**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Very Clear	3 (25%)	1 (20%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	10 (20%)
Quite clear	8 (67%)	4 (80%)	11 (73%)	9 (60%)	2 (100%)	34 (69%)
Not very clear	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	4 (8%)
Not clear at all	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)

Note: Based on all respondents who reported being aware of the new definition and that answered the question

**Table 3.7.2 Proportion who consider that the Definition is a fair, reasonable and relevant definition of rurality**

*Numbers of respondents (proportion of category)*

	Central Government	National Agencies	Regional Government	Local Government	Research org.	All
Fair	88%	100%	100%	80%	100%	91%
Reasonable	100%	100%	85%	100%	100%	95%
Relevant	100%	100%	82%	100%	100%	94%

Note 1: Based on all respondents who reported being aware of the new definition and that answered the question

Note 2: The missing percentage of respondents either answered no to this question or indicated that they were not in a position to judge

Respondents were asked to comment freely on the use and clarity of the Definition and on the improvements that might be made to it. Thirty three respondents took this opportunity and raised a wide ranged of issues that are pertinent to encouraging the increased adoption and application of the Definition. Similar responses have been aggregated, where appropriate, and are presented in Table 3.7.3, below. The three key issues which, based on the numbers of citations, should be addressed in order to improve the Definition were: i) market towns and urban fringe being classified as urban, rather than being recognised as having rural qualities, concerns and needs; ii) simplification of the Definition and the language used to describe it; and iii) the meaning and relevance of sparsity. The latter of these is further alluded to in those responses which discussed the accessibility of areas and their access to services, both of which may correlate with but are not necessarily causally related to measures of sparsity.

Some respondents also took this opportunity to comment on the value of the Definition, for example, that it 'captures the complexity of rural areas' and the layering of the Definition 'allows users to choose which level of detail and number of sub-groups is most desirable'.

**Table 3.7.3 Aggregated responses received in response to an open-ended question on the 'use or clarity of the Rural and Urban Definition', and on 'improvements that could be made to the Rural and Urban Definition'.**

Broad description of comment	Frequency of response (proportion of total)
It is 'unfair' to classify Market Towns as urban / can the threshold for designating 'urban' be increased where such areas are in a rural setting. Does not provide similar breakdown of urban areas.	7 (19%)
Simplifying the definition and the language used within the Definition would make it more useful	5 (14%)
Sparsity, as used in the Definition, is difficult to explain and can be meaningless.	4 (11%)
More explanation and case studies of the relevance, benefits and uses of the Definition	3 (8%)
Government use of the Classification for resource allocation, and more use by central government (especially health and education), would encourage a wider uptake	3 (8%)
Consensus on aggregation of categories (e.g. from 8 to 4) for mapping and use with lay audiences, and understanding of how rural population counts change between SOA and District. The link between the LAD based classifications and the COA based classifications needs explaining.	3 (8%)
Real-life comparisons would make the classification more consistent with local perceptions.	2 (6%)
The name is unhelpful, and the Definition needs a 'strap-line' to remove the exclusivity which can be associated with it.	2 (6%)
Consistent definitions across the UK	2 (6%)
Access to services and the nature of road networks are not factored into the Definition.	2 (6%)
More datasets using the Definition would be of use.	1 (3%)
Ha grid squares (building blocks) should be made available	1 (3%)
Does not account for local knowledge	1 (3%)

Finally, respondents were asked to comment freely on the Rural and Urban Definition and to raise any thoughts that were not addressed elsewhere in the questionnaire. Twenty-five respondents took this opportunity and raised a range of issues, questions and comments, of which 23 were clear commentary. Similar responses have been aggregated, where appropriate, and are presented in Table 3.7.4, below.

**Table 3.7.4 Aggregated responses received in response to an open-ended request for ‘any other comments on the Rural and Urban Definition’.**

Broad description of comment	Frequency of response (proportion of total )
What plans are there to update the Definition / the Definition will need updating / how can local authorities have an input into the Definition?	3 (13%)
The trade off between accuracy and ease of presentation needs resolving / a simple mapping tool showing key data sets mapped against the classification would help / a guide is needed as to how the classifications collapse down for GIS mapping work	3 (13%)
Communication of the existence and benefits of the Definition are not sufficiently pro-active / many do not understand the Definition	3 (13%)
(The Definition) gives a common understanding of rural, which allows rural needs to be addressed more effectively / little need to distinguish between urban and rural, more important to distinguish different types of rural / a list of places associated with each aspect of the classification would help policy makers translate the Definition	3 (13%)
Urban areas could be classified according to the role they play for the surrounding rural areas? Greenfield land can be ‘wrongly’ classed as urban.	2 (9%)
Definition needs to be used flexibly / guidelines better than absolute criteria	2 (9%)
Small Local Government departments don’t have the resources to research (rural) issues themselves	1 (4%)
Promoting the Definition should not be confined to chief executives and senior managers, who may not understand its value.	1 (4%)
Useful that ONS All Fields Postcode Directory already includes the Definition	1 (4%)
Government departments holding datasets may not know if they or Defra are responsible for providing the rural marker.	1 (4%)
There will continue to be a need for definitions based on the physical extent of settlements.	1 (4%)
The classifications within rural seem meaningless	1 (4%)
The Definition does not appear user-friendly	1 (4%)

Responses to a number of key questions were further examined to determine whether differences existed between the two categories of respondents, ‘managers, directors and policy advisers’ and ‘researchers, statisticians and analysts’ in terms of their awareness, their understanding, or their perceptions of success of the Rural and Urban Definition. No evidence of group differences was found.

## 4. Results - Document Review

---

### 4.1 Background

Part of the project methodology involved the gathering of secondary data from Government and non-Government departments in support of the primary data collected through the survey. These supporting data were based on a review of any documents published by these organisations where a significant rural perspective could be assumed. Because little was known in advance about the type and number of documents published by each organisation, or indeed the likelihood of rural issues even being addressed, the sampling technique could not be too prescriptive.

### 4.2 Results

A total of 40 documents went through to the formal review process. The titles and authorship details of these documents are listed in Appendix 4. The purpose of the document review was primarily to confirm the rate of uptake of the Rural and Urban Definition in the research and policy outputs of the same organisations represented in the survey. The true rate of uptake in these published outputs is not immediately apparent, as it is not simply the percentage of use amongst all documents reviewed. While all of the documents contain some treatment of rural issues and/or data, in only a subset of these cases might one expect to see used a rural definition or classification. To account for this the rate of uptake was based on only those publications that were observed to have used some form of classification/definition of rural. While this approach excludes cases where no form of classification was employed, but where use of the Rural and Urban Definition would have been possible, it would be very difficult to make such judgements in isolation from the publication's authors and there would be a real possibility of introducing noise into the data.

Table 4.2.1 below lists the subset of reviewed publications that had made use of some form of definition/classification of rural. There are 23 of these in total, representing 57.5% of those reviewed. These publications have been divided into two groups, those which had used the Rural and Urban Definition, either in isolation or alongside other definitions, and those which had only used alternative definitions.

Of the 23 publications that used some form of rural classification, 12, or 52%, had used the Rural and Urban Definition. This figure is somewhat lower than the average level of uptake of the Rural and Urban Definition reported across departments in the survey.

This lower rate of use might be expected, given that the Definition was only introduced a little over two years ago and that some types of publication and some official measures and rural classifications, especially those that underpin resource allocations, are only infrequently updated. Those using the Rural and Urban Definition were published, at the earliest, in March 2005 and half of them were published in the last four months of 2005 or the first four months of 2006. Given the time that can be taken between commissioning and publishing a report it would be expected that a delay would occur between the launch of the Definition and its entry into publications. However, what is surprising is that three central government departments published commissioned reports using alternatives to the Rural and Urban Definition as late as 2006, demonstrating just how significant this time lag can be.

The Rural and Urban Definition and Defra's Local Authority Classification have been used in published reports, for the most part by, regional bodies. The primary use of the Definition within these reports was for the purposes of describing the landscape of areas and regions, and for describing the relationships between rurality and other factors such as skills levels and service provision.

For example, in the East Midlands Development Agencies' 'Interim Evidence Base' the Rural and Urban Definition is used to describe the demography of the region and to distinguish between the relatively prosperous rural areas of much of the region, and those which are less so, 'it is important to make a clear distinction between the issues facing non-sparse rural areas... and the isolated sparse rural areas... sparse hamlets and isolated dwellings, although accounting for only small numbers of people, have quite

Table 4.2.1 Publications using some form of definition/classification of rurality

Publications using an alternative to the Rural and Urban Definition	Published by	Publication date
Crime in England & Wales 2004/05	Home Office	2005
State of the English Cities Volume 1	Liverpool John Moores University for ODPM	Mar' 2006
G.P Practice Vacancies Survey 2005	Health & Social Care Information Centre, Department of Health	Jul' 2005
State of the English Cities: Urban Research Summary No. 21	ODPM	Mar' 2006
Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement	Department of Work & Pensions (DWP)	2006
Carers' Aspirations and Decisions Around Work & Retirement: Research Report 290	DWP	Nov' 2005
CPA – The Harder Test, Scores & Analysis of Performance in Single Tier & County Councils, 2005	The Audit Commission	Dec' 2005
Improving the Prospects of People Living in Areas of Multiple Deprivation in England	Cabinet Office & ODPM	Jan' 2005
Local Environmental Quality Survey of England, 2004/05	DEFRA (ENCAMS)	2005
Intermode: Innovations in Demand Responsive Transport	Department for Transport & Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive	Jun' 2004
Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards Wave 6 UK Report	TNS for the Food Standards Agency	Feb' 2006
<b>Publications using the Rural and Urban Definition</b>		
Post Office Ltd – Rural pilot Activity report, 2006	Post Office Ltd	Mar' 2006
Yorkshire & Humber Rural Framework	Government Office for Yorks & Humber	Nov' 2005
Review of Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016, the Evidence Base	SEEDA	Nov' 2005
State of the South West	South West Regional Observatory	Accessed Mar' '06
West Midlands Rural Delivery Framework Consultation Draft	West Midlands Rural Accord	2005
West Midlands Regional Lifestyle Survey	West Midlands Regional Observatory & West Midlands Public Health Observatory	2005
The Geography of Poor Skills & Access to Work	University of Warwick for Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Sep' 2005
State of the Rural North West Region	Pion Economics	Mar' 2005
East Midlands Economic Strategy: Interim Evidence Base Section 1, the Demography of the East Midlands	EMDA & the East Midlands Public Health Observatory	Sep' 2005
A State of the Region – Update Report	West Midlands Regional Observatory	2005
Progress in the Region, 2005	Yorkshire Futures	2005
Active Rural Communities.	Department for Culture, Media & Sport	May 2005

different characteristics and are often faced by acute challenges related to their remoteness, reliance on agriculture and associated activities, with limited employment opportunities in other sectors’.

Similarly, the West Midlands Regional Lifestyle Survey used analysis of data according to Defra’s Local Authority Classification to demonstrate that access to services, particularly health and public transport, was more difficult in the rural parts of the region, with a clear gradation from the Major Urban through to the Rural 80 Local Authority Districts.

Table 4.2.2 recasts the data to make it easier to see trends in the use of the Rural and Urban Definition, as opposed to alternative definitions, in the published material of the different types of organisation. As the table clearly shows central government departments have been much slower to implement the use of the Definition in their research and published outputs, in spite of a relatively high rate of awareness of the Definition and a self-reported high rate of adoption. The use of the Definition is largely confined to regional government departments and agencies, with some use by non-Governmental organisations, particularly consultancies and academics.

**Table 4.2.2 Frequency of use of the Rural and Urban Definition by organisation type**

Type of organisation	Alternative definitions Frequency of use	The Rural and Urban Definition Frequency of use
Central Government	13	1
Regional Government/Agencies	0	8
All others	0	3

Table 4.2.3 lists the reasons for non-use of the Rural and Urban Definition. The most important reason is that the Definition ‘is not relevant’ i.e. the authors do not cite Rural Urban differences, or within-rural differences, as being relevant to their analysis. The second most frequent reason for non-use is that the authors see an alternative definition as more appropriate i.e. it reflects some key dimension of rurality that the Rural and Urban Definition does not capture.

**Table 4.2.3 Reasons for non-use of the Rural and Urban Definition**

Reason for non-use	Percent of observations
Definition not relevant	40
Some other definition more appropriate	30
No opportunity to date	10
Not part of role of authoring body	10
Other	10

Table 4.2.4 lists the purposes to which both the alternative definitions and the Rural and Urban Definition have been put, where these can be determined. The two most important uses to which the alternative definitions are put are policy development and evaluation, with Strategic planning and Performance management tied in second place.

**Table 4.2.4 Uses of definitions of rurality**

Purpose to which definition is put	Alternative definitions & classifications - Proportion of observations, %	Rural and Urban Definition Proportion of observations, %
Better understand rural needs & circumstances (rural proofing)	8	39
Policy development	20	12
Strategic planning	16	24
Policy evaluation	20	3
Performance management	16	0
Analysis of own datasets	8	3
Analysis of other's datasets	8	18
Other	4	0

Where the Rural and Urban Definition is used, this tends predominantly to be for the purposes of rural proofing, with some strategic planning. These differences tend to reflect the division of responsibilities between regional and central government. Table 4.2.5 shows the *degree* of implementation of both the Rural and Urban Definition and alternative rural definitions in the various published works/analyses that have made use of some form of rural definition/classification.

**Table 4.2.5 Degree of implementation of definitions/classifications of rurality**

Level of use	Alternative definitions & classifications - Proportion of observations, %	Rural and Urban Definition Proportion of observations, %
Fully used (ie, for all analyses)	20	43
Partially used (for only part of analyses)	80	57

There are a number of explanations for the apparently lower levels of use of the Definition in government reports released into the public domain than would be expected on the basis of the survey results for those same departments. Follow-up discussions with a sample of interviewees from central government departments highlighted the following as of particular relevance.

First, the time-lag between commissioning and publishing reports would prevent its appearance to any extent prior to 2005. From 2005, the Definition should appear with increasing frequency as research and analysis which have used it are published. This is reflected in the dates of publication of those reports which did use the Definition, starting at March 2005.

Furthermore, this time-lag may be exacerbated by additional delays in embedding knowledge and appreciation of the Definition in the population of users. Those specifying tenders for externally commissioned programmes of work, to which rural-urban analysis of data might prove useful, may themselves be unaware of the relevance and usefulness of the Definition. The teams which specify these tenders vary in the scope of their expertise both within and between government departments and there may be no additional check, or framework for commissioning research from external consultants, by which the need or value of using the Rural and Urban Definition within sampling frames, analysis and reporting of data is flagged up. Thus the use of the Definition is dependent not only upon those specifying a tender being aware of it, but also upon their opinion that its inclusion within a programme of work would lead to more useful results.

Moreover, many of the reports surveyed were products of research programmes that took considerable time to complete and at their inception, the Rural and Urban Definition may not have been known to those undertaking or commissioning the work. It should also be noted that not all work carried out by government departments, or on their behalf, is placed within the public domain.

Finally, dependent upon the department, the scope for using the definition may be confined to a very limited number of reports over the course of a year. Thus, while the Definition may be used relatively extensively in the analysis of a large set of data, this may be apparent in only a small part of a single report, leading to the appearance that the Definition is under-utilised. Similarly, while the Definition may in some cases be used within the analysis of data, this fact may not be reported in commentary report, especially if no significant rural-urban or within rural differences are found. This would in itself lead to the appearance of an under-utilisation of the Definition.

For the reasons stated above, the appearance of the Definition within published reports would, *a priori*, be expected to be at a lower level than the awareness or uptake of the definition reported in the survey.

## 5. Discussion

---

The brief for this project was to evaluate the *acceptance, adoption, application* and impact of the Rural and Urban Definition, with a focus on the use of Output Area, Super Output Area and Ward level classifications, to understand whether the Definition had succeeded in increasing the extent to which rural-urban and within-rural differences are being *analysed, understood* and *communicated*.

In order to fulfil this brief a survey was made of statisticians, policy makers, and others within central, regional and local government departments and agencies. Overall it was found that the levels of acceptance of the Rural and Urban Definition and of Defra's Local Authority Classification are very high whilst the adoption and application of the Definition and of the Classification are somewhat lower.

### Awareness

The acceptance, adoption and application of the Rural and Urban Definition are predicated upon the awareness of the Definition by those who would use it. Awareness of the Definition ranged from 50% within those national agencies (non-departmental public bodies) that considered rurality to be an issue which they should take into account, to 68% in central government and 100% in regional government.

### Acceptance

Amongst those who are aware of the Rural and Urban Definition there are high levels of acceptance of it as a classification of rural. Of those using *any* definition of rurality (out of all those consulted), the majority appear to be using the Rural and Urban Definition and/or Defra's Local Authority Classification. Alternative definitions that remain in use are primarily 'internal' definitions, which have been designed for specific purposes and which it can be assumed will be used for only a limited while longer. Except for these internal definitions, the Tarling and Urban Settlements definitions were the only others cited on more than one occasion as still being in use. However, this may be explained by: i) the Tarling definition being used alongside the Rural and Urban Definition in order to introduce readers to this 'new' definition in the light of the old; and b) the continued need for flexible cut-off points to determine the population size at which rural ends and urban begins.

Amongst those who are aware of the Rural and Urban Definition there are generally high levels of stated understanding. Additionally, the vast majority of those using the Definition and/or Classification reported that this had been at the very least a partial success, with over a third reporting that the use of the Definition had been a success and had been helpful to their organisation's work.

Users praised in particular the consistent approach that the Definition offers for classification and monitoring and they also indicated that they found it to be straightforward and understandable. Importantly, although users were also forthcoming in the ways in which the use of the Definition could be improved, they did not criticise the structure or detail of it except in relation to sparsity and the treatment of market towns and they did not compare it unfavourably to any alternative definitions or classifications.

The Definition appears to be serving its purpose amongst most of those individuals and departments by which it is being used. It does not appear to be fundamentally flawed, and for the two aspects of it which are subject to most criticism: a) the classification of market towns is addressed within Defra's Local Authority Classification; and b) additional 'accessibility' measures to sparsity may be included on an ad-hoc basis.

### Adoption

The Rural and Urban Definition has been adopted widely across central and regional government departments and agencies in their analysis, interpretation and communication of rural-urban and within-rural differences. For local government respondents to this survey who were aware of the Definition, the

level of adoption of the Definition was similarly high. However, it should be borne in mind that there is a widespread lack of awareness of the Definition at this level, which would need to be addressed to achieve wider adoption within local government.

The most widespread use of the Definition is to be found within the regional government respondents, which is worthy of explanation. First, the Regional Development Agencies have been informed directly of the definition by central Defra contacts and Government Offices in the regions have been targeted by Defra in an information campaign to raise awareness of the Definition. Second, each region has been tasked with examining (and producing a report upon) the state of their rural evidence, to underpin the development of their Regional Delivery Frameworks, as part of the Modernising Rural Delivery agenda. Thus, the regions were provided with the Definition as a tool, and tasked with delivering the very outputs that the tool would create.

Interestingly, Government Offices for the East and for Yorkshire and Humber now include details of rural proofing and of the Rural and Urban Definition within the Environment and Rural sections of their websites. Not all of the regions used the Definition within their reports on the state of rural evidence, perhaps reflecting the points in time at which they were commissioned and the extent to which they were in directly involved in their production. For example, Yorkshire and Humber used the definition to its fullest extent in producing their report, internally within the Government Office. In the North West the production of the report was outsourced, but the consultants who wrote it were provided with details of the Definition and the data sources.

The extent to which the other regions have used the definition varies. In some the reports use mapping which is clearly based on the Definition, but which does not refer directly to it, and in one case the report omits the use the Definition altogether. Discussion with the Regional Development Agencies, Observatories and Government Offices indicated that they would all be adopting greater use of the Definition. The only minor caveat to this was that the examination of data using a rural split in effect competed (for resources) with the examination using other splits.

The adoption of the Definition amongst non-departmental public bodies was relatively low, judging by the particularly poor response rate achieved in this sample, by the low levels of awareness amongst this group and by the relatively low levels of use. Use within this group was normally as a result of a request or demand relating to a specific line of research, often into overtly rural issues. For many central government departments much of policy development and delivery, including monitoring for equality and diversity measures, is conducted by the associated non-departmental public bodies. The low levels of adoption in this group may therefore be cause for some concern. However, the fact that these demonstrated the lowest apparent adoption of the Definition is countered to some extent by an apparent desire to learn more of the Definition and of how they might use this, in particular as it relates to measures of equality.

### **Application**

The Definition is certainly being used across Government departments and agencies, with only 10% of central government and 6% of regional government respondents being unaware of its application within their organisation. That said, it should be noted that in many departments usage was not widespread, with single examples and reports being cited. It appears from these data that the Definition might not be being applied routinely as a means of rural proofing policies, but might instead be being used on an ad-hoc basis, principally in response to policy areas that are perceived to contain a clear rural element.

The Rural and Urban Definition and Defra's Local Authority Classification are being used for a wide variety of purposes within government, including rural proofing, policy development, evaluation, analysis and general statistical reporting. Discussions further revealed that the use of the Definition as a routine practice may occur with little evidence shown to the outside world, since internal reporting and analysis would not necessarily be made publicly available, and since differences between urban and rural, or within-rural, may not be reported or commented upon unless they are significant. Therefore, the application of the Definition is liable to be understated by review of public information, documentation or statistical reporting.

There do remain inconsistencies across government departments and across levels of government in the extent to which the Definition is understood and the level at which it is applied. For example, the use of the Rural and Urban Definition as compared to Defra's Local Authority Classification was lower across all government regions. Whilst mapping employed the finer resolutions, very little evidence was found for the classification of data and interpretation within-rural, at these finer resolutions, for policy development or strategic planning. Respondents were clear in their reasons for this; that there are insufficient datasets to which the Definition has been applied at finer resolutions, and that there are insufficient datasets to which the Definition can be applied in retrospect. In many situations the Definition is therefore being used to define what is rural (cf. urban) rather than being used to understand rural issues better.

### Ways forward

Responses to this survey indicated a number of ways in which the use of the Definition could be improved, so as to increase the extent to which rural-urban and within-rural differences are being analysed, understood and communicated and these are detailed below under the four broad headings of The Premise, The Definition, Communication and Data.

#### The Premise

The use of the Rural and Urban Definition is justified by the premise that differences between rural and urban, and within rural, may result in disadvantages to those populations. This is most clearly demonstrated in relation to access, wherein rural populations may be seen to live further from, with less public transport available to, schools, doctors, and other public services.

However, data within this survey indicated that for a number of government departments, and in particular for non-departmental public bodies, the value of examining rurality as a factor impacting upon access to public services has not been understood. The predominant reason given by non-departmental public bodies in declining to take part in this study was that 'rural' was not considered relevant (p.11).

*If the Definition is to be more widely adopted and applied, the value of rural-proofing as a means of tackling issues of equality and diversity should be given a higher profile.*

#### The Definition

The Definition is by and large fit for purpose. However, there two particular issues, regarding the application of the Definition, that might usefully be addressed, as follows.

First, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which users are aware of the Definition and/or Defra's Local Authority Classification, and in the degree to which the differences between these and their relationship to each other are understood. In addition, those who reported that the Definition had been a success and that it had increased their understanding of rural needs and circumstances were significantly more likely to have had the benefits and uses of the Definition made clear to them. That is, communicating the benefits and uses of the Definition appears to lead to greater levels of acceptance and application amongst users (p.21).

*Communication to statisticians, analysts and researchers of the details of the Definition and the Classification, the assumptions behind them and the relationships between them, remain a key element to their acceptance.*

Second, the absence of more direct measures of the effects of sparsity (e.g. access to services) or of factors possibly missed by the sparsity measure (e.g. road networks) were raised by respondents in discussing improvements to the Definition and in providing more general commentary. The notion of sparsity was reported as being difficult to communicate to lay-audiences, especially in the way it has been used within the Rural and Urban Definition (p.24).

*Consideration should be given to the ways in which a wider understanding and acceptance of sparsity is achieved by all users of the Definition.*

### **Communication**

For many respondents a better and more widely targeted explanation of the Definition, its uses, method of application and benefits were seen as critical if a wider application was to be achieved. In particular, respondents called for case-studies of the application of the Definition. Such case studies might also include details of how the larger market towns have been handled successfully within the application of the Definition, overcoming both the general lack of understanding and the specific problem of within-urban classifications.

Users report that communication of the Definition to lay-audiences can be difficult. Conveying the assumptions underpinning the Definition and the meanings of the various classifications is hindered by the apparent absence of a consistent simplification of the detailed classification. The issue is particularly important if policy makers and strategists are to be convinced of the value of examining within-rural differences; for as long as they do not have a feel for what the different levels of rurality are, there is an increased likelihood that the importance of examining the impacts of policy development and delivery within these levels will be overlooked. Whilst conventions on the simplification and communication of the Definition may exist, many users are not fully aware of them (pp.24-25).

*Guidance on how the Definition can be communicated to lay audiences, together with accepted conventions for simplifying data presentation, would encourage greater use of the Definition by statisticians, researchers and analysts and greater demand for the Definition by policy makers.*

### **Data**

The lack of available data, particularly at the Output, Super Output and Ward levels, appears to constrain the wider use of the Definition. Application to a wider range of data sets was the most frequently cited factor which respondents considered would encourage a wider uptake of the Definition (p.21, although respondents were not forthcoming in the specific data that they would like to see made available). This is mirrored by the greater usage of Defra's Local Authority Classification than of the Rural and Urban Definition itself. However, Defra 'do not recommend that the classification is used to inform detailed policy design', and users are faced with the choice of using the Definition, for which there is limited available data, or Defra's Local Authority Classification, from which they are not recommended to create detailed policy.

*If greater application of the Definition for analysing, understanding and communicating rural-urban differences is to be achieved, then the availability of data at an appropriate level and guidance on what to do in the absence of such data are both areas that would be usefully addressed.*

## Awareness and adoption of the new Rural-Urban Definition

This survey is part of a study to investigate the implementation of the new Rural-Urban Definition, as launched by the Office of National Statistics in July 2004. The study is being conducted by Delta-innovation, The University of Reading and Smiths Gore for the Commission for Rural Communities.

**We would be most grateful if you would take a few minutes to answer the questions below on behalf of your organisation.**

On completion, please return this form by email to [info@delta-innovation.co.uk](mailto:info@delta-innovation.co.uk) or by post to Delta-innovation, 25 Parkside, Gravenhurst, Beds, MK45 4JJ.

A description of the Rural-Urban Definition is given at the end of this form. Please *fill in the form before reading the description*, so as not to bias any answers on your knowledge or understanding of the definition.

<b>Name</b>						
<b>Organisation &amp; department</b>						
<b>Your phone number</b>						
<b>Your email</b>						
<b>Your work address</b>						
<b>Your job title</b>						
<b>Your role</b> (please <i>circle</i> or make answer <i>bold</i> the roles that are a major part of your job)						
<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%;">Statistician</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Analyst</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Researcher</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Policy advisor</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Other</td> </tr> </table>	Statistician	Analyst	Researcher	Policy advisor	Other	<p><b>Please also provide brief details of your role / work</b></p>
Statistician	Analyst	Researcher	Policy advisor	Other		

### SECTION 1. YOUR ORGANISATION'S WORK

#### 1a. Please provide brief details of your organisation's work

#### 1b. Does your organisation's work involve or affect rural areas and communities?

Yes / No / Don't know (please *circle* or make answer *bold*)

#### 1c. Do your organisation's policies, data or statistical analyses take specific account of rural needs and circumstances (i.e. rural proofing)?

Yes / No / Don't know (please *circle* or make answer *bold*)

---

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

**SECTION 2. AWARENESS OF THE NEW RURAL URBAN DEFINITION**

**2a. Are you aware of any formal definition and/or classification of rurality?**

Yes / No

*(please circle or make answer bold)*  
**If NO then please move on to Section 6.**

**2b. Are you aware of the Rural-Urban Definition (launched by the ONS in 2004) and/or associated classifications<sup>6</sup>?**

Yes / No

*(please circle or make answer bold)*  
**If YES then please complete all sections below.**  
**If NO then please complete 2c and 2d below and then move on to Section 6.**

**2c. Are you aware of any other rural-urban definitions?**

Yes / No

*(please circle or make answer bold)*

***If 'Yes', please detail which other definitions they are. If you are unaware of the name(s) of these definitions, please provide a brief description of them here.***

.....

**2d. Do you use any other rural-urban definitions and classifications instead of or in addition to the new Rural-Urban Definition?**

Yes / No

*(please circle or make answer bold)*

***If 'Yes', please detail which alternative definitions and the uses they are put to.***

.....

**SECTION 3. LEARNING ABOUT THE NEW RURAL-URBAN DEFINITION**

**3a. How was your department informed about the new Rural-Urban Definition?**

**Informed by** *(please circle or make answer bold)*

**Detail** *(please provide brief details e.g. how was this done?)*

Internally from within your organisation

External – Office for National Statistics

External – Defra

External – Countryside Agency/  
Commission for Rural Communities

External – other

**3b. How long have you been aware of the New Rural Urban Definition?**

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Defra's 2005 classification of Local Authority areas and Unitary Authorities

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

	Years		Months
--	-------	--	--------

**3c. Do you feel that you understand the new Rural Urban Definition?**

Yes / Partially / Unsure / No *(please circle or make answer bold)*

**3d. Have the benefits of using the Definition and/or classifications been made clear to your department?**

Yes-fully / Yes-partially / No-not very / No-not at all *(please circle or make answer bold)*

**3e. Have the ways in which the Definition and/or classifications can be used been explained to your department?**

Yes-fully / Yes-partially / No-not very / No-not at all *(please circle or make answer bold)*

**SECTION 4. USE OF THE NEW RURAL-URBAN DEFINITION**

**4a. Has your department used the new Definition and/or associated classifications for any purpose?**

Yes / No / Don't know *(please circle or make answer bold)*

*If 'No', please indicate below the reasons for not using the new definition or classifications.*

**Please go to Section 5.**

**4b. For what purpose(s) have you used the Definition and/or associated classifications?**  
*(please circle or make bold all appropriate answers)*

Purpose	Detail <i>(please provide brief details including the data sets the Definition has been applied to and, if known, the frequency of use of the Definition in analysis and reporting)</i>
To understand rural needs and circumstances (rural proofing)	
Policy development	
Strategic planning	
Policy evaluation	
Performance management	
Analysis of own data-sets	
Analysis of other's data sets	
General statistical reporting	
Other	

**4c. At what geographic level have you used the Definition and/or classifications?**

Level	Detail <i>(please provide brief details)</i>

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

Census output area	
Census super output area	
Ward	
Local Authority / Unitary Authority	
Other (e.g. Primary Care Trust)	

**4d. In your opinion has your use of the Definition and/or classifications been successful?**

Yes—greatly / Yes—partially / No—not very / No—not at all (please **circle** or make answer **bold**)

**Please provide any relevant details as to why you consider the use of the Definition and/or classifications to have been successful or otherwise.**

**4e. Do you think that the new Definition and/or classifications are useful / help your organisation's work?**

Very useful / Quite useful / Not very useful / Not useful at all (please **circle** or make answer **bold**)

**4f. Have the new Definition and/or classifications improved your understanding of rural needs and circumstances?**

Yes—greatly / Yes—partially / No—not very / No—not at all (please **circle** or make answer **bold**)

**4g. What opportunities has your department taken to apply the new Definition and/or associated classifications?**

All opportunities / Some opportunities/ Few opportunities (please **circle** or make answer **bold**)

**Please indicate what would encourage a wider application of the new definition or classifications.**

**SECTION 5. YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE NEW RURAL-URBAN DEFINITION**

**5a. Do you think that the Definition is clear?**

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

Very clear / Quite clear / Not very clear / Not clear at all (please **circle** or make answer **bold**)

**5b. Do you consider the Definition to be a fair, reasonable and relevant definition of rurality?**

	Yes / No	Detail (please provide the reasoning behind your answer)
Fair		
Reasonable		
Relevant		

**5c. Do you have any specific comments on the use or clarity of the new Rural Urban Definition? What improvements could be made to the Definition? (please provide details)**

**SECTION 6. OTHER COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK**

**6a. Do you have any other comments, or would you like any further information, on the new Rural-Urban Definition? (please write them in the box below)**

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

Thank you for your time and patience in filling out this survey form.

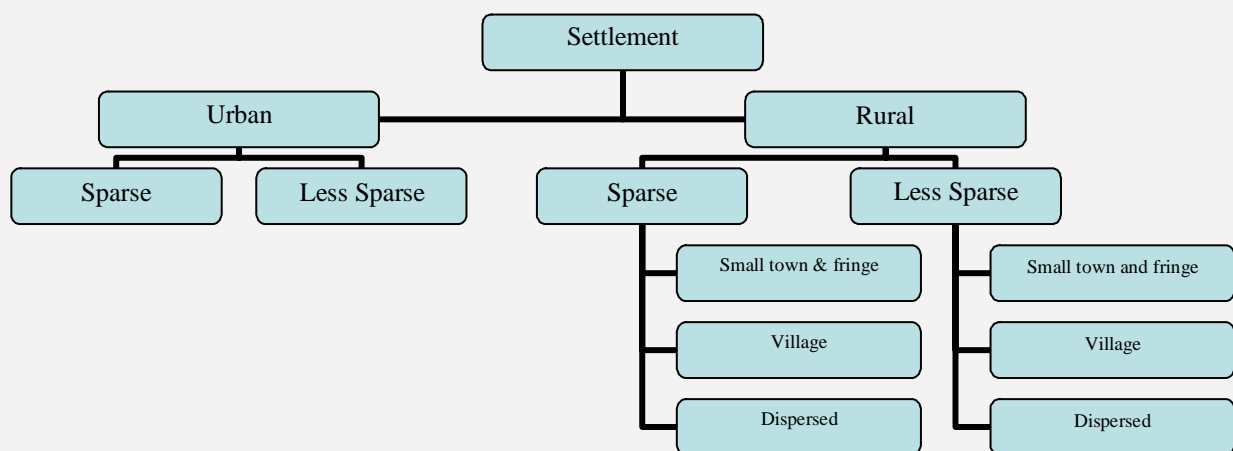
If you have any further comments on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Steve Webster (Delta-innovation) on 01462 711739 or [steve.webster@delta-innovation.co.uk](mailto:steve.webster@delta-innovation.co.uk)

Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence. We will not publish the responses of individuals or individual organisations, although we do intend to report findings in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please **circle** or **bold** 'Yes' YES/NO

### New Rural Urban Definition

The Office for National Statistics launched a **New Rural Urban Definition in July 2004** to replace a number of definitions in common use. Its aim is to develop a **more consistent approach to the analysis of rural-urban differences**.



Urban areas are defined as settlements where the majority of the population falls inside a settlement of 10,000 or more. Rural areas are classified according to **residence density** (called sparsity) and **predominant settlement type** (small town / fringe, village or dispersed).

### Data Protection Act

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK.

### Remember

Please return this form by email to [info@delta-innovation.co.uk](mailto:info@delta-innovation.co.uk) or by post to Delta-innovation, 25 Parkside, Gravenhurst, MK45 4JJ

**THANKYOU**

---

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.

---

We respect your privacy and will always comply with data protection legislation currently in force in the UK. Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and findings will only be reported in aggregate form for all respondents and for specific sectors.