

Dear All

It was very pleasing to see many of you at our launch event at the National Centre for the Uplands back in May, and the level of enthusiasm was very encouraging. We've since held meetings in both the South West and North West primarily looking at potential opportunities under the European Innovation Partnership's (EIP) programme to support operational groups (see below). Many of you have signed up as members of the Uplands Alliance via the website and I would encourage you to do so if you haven't already. I'm conscious though, that time passes and people may begin to ask – but what next for the Uplands Alliance? I'm taking this opportunity to answer that!

But first I wanted to reflect on what people actually said during the launch as we wanted to use it as a sounding board. There was, as anticipated, much discussion about the need for a body to signpost people. There is a great deal going on all over the country but knowing what is happening in Northumberland if you live on Bodmin is not always easy to find out. We need to be able to address that in a simple way. Part of it is about making sure the website functions properly and we need to do some work on that. If you would like to see particular things on it, please let us know. The other side of it picks up on people's desire for a 'rolling roadshow' – in other words making sure that we hold events across the country.

Another running theme was the need to bring farmers closer to science so that they can become active participants in experiments designed to scope and test different approaches to sustainable and successful business management. Bringing practitioners, policy makers and researchers together is a key aim of the Uplands Alliance so it was encouraging to hear this.

And finally, there was much discussion around ensuring we share best practice and celebrate positive, successful upland management. Best practice doesn't necessarily need to be about the actual land management itself, it could also be best practice in engaging and consulting stakeholders.

So what will we be doing over the coming months? We are starting to build a dialogue around new business thinking, between farmer networks, local initiatives, and researchers, and examining success factors for sustainable farm businesses. Various UA members are working towards a bid into the EIP funding pot (see below), and researchers at CCRI, with Defra advice, are doing some detailed analysis of Farm Business Survey results for all upland farms in the survey, to look for the strategies which seem to underpin improved business performance. We

hope to begin a programme of business and policy field days, perhaps kicking off with a meeting on a farm in the southwest Uplands, in the spring.

With regard to Common Land there are two initiatives underway. One is to apply to establish a Common Land Operational Group under the European Innovation Partnership programme. This will explore innovative ways commoners can improve their management of common land while delivering public benefits. The second initiative is the application for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to implement the findings of Better Outcomes on Upland Commons.

We have also just co-hosted two workshops on operational groups under the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability. For those that haven't heard of it, this is a £5m grant scheme with applicants being able to apply for a grant of between £5k and £150k to fund the cost of running a project for up to 3 years. This is about real world trials of solutions already identified by research. It provides funding to operational groups to help projects that aim to improve productivity and sustainability using innovative means. We think this offers a great opportunity for applicants in the Uplands so we want to make sure as many quality bids as possible are funded.

Recently we have secured the agreement of the NERC Valuing Nature Programme to co-host an uplands event, the spec for which I am now be working on.

Finally, Julia and I met with Rory Stewart, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs in October to discuss the work of the Uplands Alliance. He was very supportive of the approach we are taking and was keen for us to engage in various initiatives on the horizon. We will keep you updated on this.

Over the coming weeks we will also be putting together a short term action plan that we hope will make it clearer to people how our approach to doing things will be different as well as setting out some clear actions for the coming years. We will share this with you so that we can ensure that it reflects your priorities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Winter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Professor Michael Winter OBE
Chair Uplands Alliance