



RNCI
THE ROYAL NORTHERN
COUNTRYSIDE INITIATIVE
CHILDREN • COUNTRYSIDE • EDUCATION

RNCI ANNUAL REPORT

December 2024 – November 2025



A cold farm visit in March 2025

Year Twenty Eight Report

December 2024 – November 2025



Year Twenty Eight Report **December 2024 – November 2025**

Contents

Legal & Administrative Information

Background:

1. Aim
2. Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET)
3. Strategic Plan
4. Benefactors & Funding Members
5. Other Organisations

Year Twenty Eight of the Initiative:

1. General Comment
2. Early Years Boxes
3. Classroom Speaker Visits
4. Countryside Classroom on Wheels (CCOW)
5. Farm Visits
6. Windowsill Garden Project 2023
7. Evaluation
8. John Telfer Trophy
9. Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust Art Competition

Other Events:

1. RNAS Spring Show
2. RNAS Education Day

Raising the Initiative's Profile:

1. Publicity
2. Website
3. Social Media
4. Contacts

Legal and Administrative Information

Current Trustees:

Emma Ruxton (Chair)
Derek Skinner (Vice Chair)
Martin Birse (Treasurer)
Philip Wrigglesworth (Secretary)
Chris Stockwell
Ellis Mutch
William Stewart
Nicola Wordie
Mellanie Robson

Charity Number: SCO33448

Company Number: SC234500

Current Registered Office:

The Laundry
Home Farm
Fintray
Aberdeen
Ab21 0HY

Independent Examiner:

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16 Nellfred Terrace
Inverurie
AB51 4TJ

Bankers: Virgin Money

During 2024/2025, three bank accounts remain operational:

- Current Account
- 30 Day Notice Account
- Business Term Deposit Account

The trustees present their report and financial statements for the year ending 30th November 2025. The financial statements comply with current statutory requirements and are attached to this report.

The Executive Committee is elected from members of the Initiative as detailed in the Constitution. The Committee meets a minimum of six times a year. It directs the activities of the Initiative through the Project Manager who also acts as committee secretary though not Company Secretary.

This report was approved by the board on 28th August 2026 and signed on its behalf.



Emma Ruxton, RNCI Chairwoman
On behalf of the RNCI board

Background

The Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI) has grown from links between the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) and the Royal Northern Agricultural Society (RNAS), together with the participation of several leading local agribusinesses. An informal partnership was formed between the participating organisations and businesses to further the aims of the Initiative. An Executive Committee was established with membership drawn from the various partners involved with the Initiative and reporting annually to the funding partners. We now have an extremely strong volunteer committee leading the way in countryside education in the North East of Scotland.

1. Aim

“To develop a greater understanding of farming and the working countryside by pupils and their teachers in the North East of Scotland.”

The Initiative has sought to achieve this by:

-  Linking schools with a local farmer/landowner/working estate and/or agricultural related industries.
-  Encouraging discussion with farmers, landowners and schools on the countryside, food production, farming and the environment.
-  Encouraging and supporting learning about the countryside by practical experience and example, particularly by facilitating school visits onto working farms.
-  Pioneering the Countryside Classroom on Wheels, the first of its kind in Scotland, as a valuable resource in the understanding of countryside education to school children, their teachers and the wider general public.
-  Providing a pre-school box and resources for pre-school age children and their teachers accompanied by pre-school farmer visits to develop an understanding at a young age.
-  Providing a resource box and resources for schools with information on the Working Countryside in the UK, Scotland and the North-east.
-  Providing teachers with cross-curricular learning and teaching resources in support of local and national curriculum initiatives.
-  Establishing links with local authorities and their officials.
-  Providing in-service training for teachers involved with the Initiative.
-  Providing training and resources for farmer speakers going into schools.
-  Providing subsidised transport, where required, to facilitate school visits onto farms.
-  Encouraging communication and partnership with and between other local countryside organisations.
-  Providing information and encouragement on careers in the countryside and agricultural related industries.
-  Keeping schools informed about local events and new resources.
-  Attending shows and educational events.
-  Encouraging and developing novel ideas and different methods of delivery and engagement.

2. The Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET)

RHET has provided back up and supporting administration to the Initiative. A RHET Board representative attends meetings of the RNCI Executive Committee as an observer.

RHET has a network of thirteen Countryside Initiatives throughout Scotland: Angus, Argyll, Ayrshire & Arran, Borders, Clyde, Dumbarton, Lomond & Renfrew, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Highland, Lothians, Perth & Kinross, and RNCI.

RHET is itself supported financially by The Royal Highland & Agricultural Society of Scotland (RHASS). RHASS provides sufficient funding to RHET to cover staffing and administration of the organisation itself but not that of the Initiatives for which funding is sourced from outside trusts and organisations. RNCI remains the only self-financing Initiative.

3. **Strategic Plan**

RNCI works closely with RHET and will continue to do so. 2024-2025 saw the initiative continue provision of free services to schools in the North East of Scotland. The strategic plan lays out improvements to the services, with a target to increase the number of children educated and improve health and safety measures.

The educational goals are:

- 🌱 Promoting understanding of the environmental and economic changes taking place in rural Scotland and its environment by:
 - Providing opportunities for young people to experience the Scottish countryside through visits.
 - Providing opportunities for young people to engage with people who live and work in the countryside in a variety of settings and vice versa.
- 🌱 Working in partnership to develop resources and activities (in the context of rural Scotland) to support educational professionals to provide motivating curricular learning opportunities for Scotland's young people.
- 🌱 Enabling educators to access reliable and balanced information on farming and rural issues.
- 🌱 Supporting and developing people across the North East.
- 🌱 Securing adequate funding to enable the above actions.

Within the organisation we plan to:

- 🌱 Maintain and develop further partnership relationships with educators of sustainable food, farming and countryside for all young people in Scotland.
- 🌱 Expand the current offering to ensure services are kept up to date with changes in the industry and relevant to the curriculum.
- 🌱 Embrace the use of information and communications technology, and to optimise the use of financial and other resources in pursuit of our aims.
- 🌱 Develop further a framework to support reflection and continuous improvement across all aspects of RNCI activities, enabling progress towards our outcomes to be demonstrated.
- 🌱 Continually strive to improve the efficiency and health and safety of how we operate and deliver our educational services.

4. **Benefactors and Funding Members**

The benefactors and funding members for the Twenty eighth year of the Initiative were:



*The Royal Highland
Education Trust*



*Royal Northern
Agricultural Society*

Scottish Government, The MacRobert Trust, Mains of Loirston Charitable Trust, Morayshire Farmers' Club, Stewart Agricultural Ltd, Benzies, East Coast Viners Grain, Farm Management Association, JD Accountancy Ltd, Harbro Ltd, Johnston Carmichael, Kinermony Ltd, Mackies Ltd, Malcolm Allan Housebuilders Ltd, Aberdeen Grain, Groundwater Lift Trucks Ltd, Ravenhill Ltd, Turriff Agri Parts Ltd, The Demigryphon Trust, Turriff Show, Norvite Animal Nutrition Company Ltd, Forest Farm, The Organic Dairy, Duncan Farms, C Pirie Steel Fabrication.

We also have a number of anonymous benefactors.

RNCI would like to record our sincere appreciation to the Trusts and Organisations for their continued financial support.

5. **Other Organisations**

RNCI continues to establish and maintain contact with other individuals and organisations interested and involved in countryside education and the environment. With new funders being added each year we welcome new funding partners. Some benefactors wish to remain anonymous, and we wish to extend our thanks to these parties.

Some of the partner organisations we work alongside to provide delivery

Royal Northern Agricultural Society (RNAS)
Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET)
SRUC
Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)
NFUS

LANTRA
Ringlink
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
Soil Association
Tech Fest

Year Twenty Eight of the Initiative

General Comment

The RNCI continued to look at different ways to provide educational activities for schools and the really popular Windowsill Garden Project was delivered again in 24/25 for primary schools right across the North East, resulted in over 9,500 pupils having the opportunity to take part. RNCI in conjunction with RHET provided online resources in the form of educational films.

Early Years Box

The Early Years Box is targeted to the pre-school to P3 age group and comprises of a variety of items ranging from books, toys, puppets, dressing up tabards, jigsaw puzzles, crop samples and elementary worksheets to encourage the young child to establish the early link between the farmer and the food that they eat. In 2024-2025 RNCI supplied 12 boxes reaching over 550 pupils. These boxes are continually being upgraded with new resources.

Classroom Speaker Visits

During 2024-2025 RNCI visited 24 schools delivering 46 classroom talks which reached 1,700 pupils. Almost double from last year. These talks can cover such topics as Careers, Sustainability, Food Production and Biodiversity.

Countryside Classroom on Wheels – CCOW

The CCOW is one of our most popular resources with 15 schools visited and 66 sessions delivered during 2024-2025. The number of children seen was 1,064.

Farm Visits

RNCI were delighted to facilitate 30 Farm Visits with over 1000 pupils experiencing a variety of farms including the RNAS Spring Show, Crop Tech, DYW Moray Careers Day and visits to various farms around the North East.

Windowsill Garden Project 2024/25

Over 400 Gardening kits were delivered into primary schools to enhance the Curriculum for Excellence. Each kit contained 5 different packs of seeds (peas, beans, salad leaves, carrots and sunflowers), compost, seed trays, teachers' booklet and a How to Sow film on our YouTube channel. This resulted in over 400 kits into 159 schools and 9,577 pupils. This was a huge undertaking and was not possible without help from Directors, Committee and Volunteers.

Evaluation

All teachers and farmers who request or undertake a Pre-school Visit, Classroom Speaker Visit, CCOW Visit, Farm Visit and visits to specialist events have the opportunity to complete an evaluation survey, results of which are collated by the RNCI and utilised to improve the service.

John Telfer Trophy

The John Telfer trophy is presented annually to an individual or organisation that has provided exceptional help to the Initiative. The directors and committee vote each year and in 2025 were delighted to award the trophy to Alan Simpson, Mains Of Leslie for going above and beyond to help RNCI with the school education. Previous winners have been Roger Polson, Derek MacDonald, James and Mandy Stewart, and Heather Bowie.



The John Telfer Trophy 2025 being presented to Alan Simpson.

As a note of interest RNCI records every interaction with schools and we are delighted to report that since 2018 RNCI has interacted with 98% of Primary Schools across the region. (4 schools in both Shire and Moray have not engaged with us but 100% of schools in City). We have also engaged with 74% of academies across the region (4 in City, 6 in Shire with no engagement but 100% engagement in Moray)

Other Events

RNAS Spring Show, Thainstone – 26th February 2025

Delight to be able to host school pupils at this event again. 322 pupils from 12 schools visited and learnt about farming and food production across the north east. They had workshops with QMS, LANTRA, Norvite, SRUC, Forestry, Machinery, Livestock, crops and the judging ring.

Beef Tech – 28th May 2025

149 Pupils attend a fantastic day for all held at Home Farm, Kininmonth. A mixed arable farm the children not only learnt about crops, but got close up with cows and sheep.

DYW Land Based Careers Day – Dipple Farm – 25th June 2025

Secondary pupils from every secondary school in Moray got the opportunity to visit a variety of workshops regarding careers in the Land Based Sector. 85 pupils attended.

Sustainability Day – 42 secondary pupils

Aberdeenshire and Angus students attended the joint sustainability day with RHET hosted by Willie Officer at Ardoch of Gallery, with a variety of interactive workshops on renewables, cropping, the use of pollinators, machinery and technology.

Raising the Initiative's Profile

Publicity

As always, the RNCI is extremely appreciative for the support that is received from all media sources. Clear, positive coverage in farming, educational and general media has proven invaluable to the ongoing success of RNCI. Press releases were published in local press and jointly with RHET in national press. For a mainly voluntary, charitable organisation, which is built on goodwill, this route of communication has had a significant positive impact in recruiting farmers for visits, enlisting the help of volunteers and sourcing funding.

Website

As we now have full control of our web platform, we can tailor our content and monitor our visitor's experience. This allows us to have up to date headlines and control over forms and requests in this fast-changing time. The website is frequently updated with new logo added and booking forms updated.

Social Media

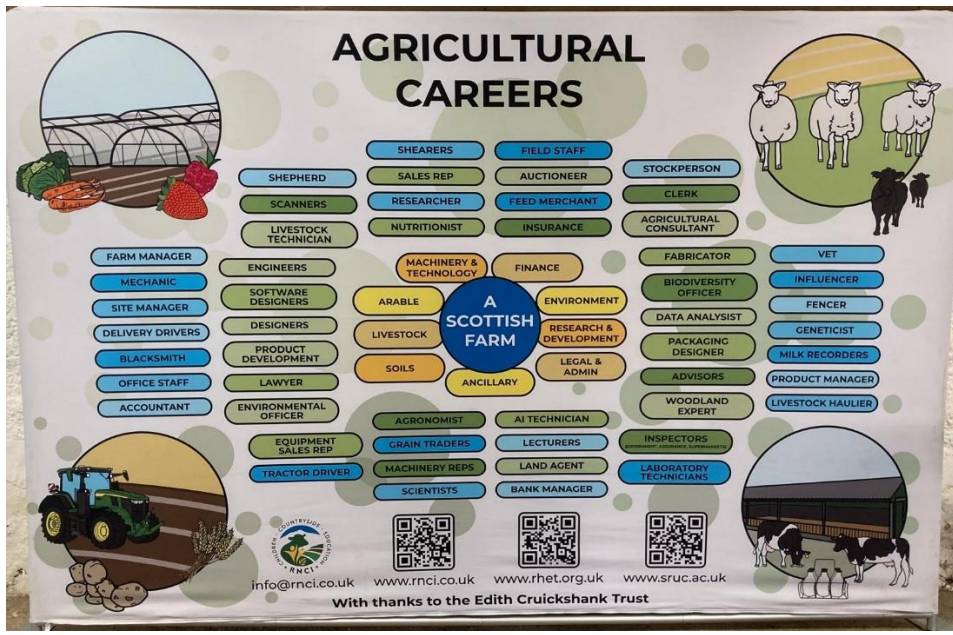
Social Media has continued to be our window to the world with picture and stories being shown, It has continued to grow and we have worked hard to maintain a presence on Facebook, and Instagram.

Fundraising

This year saw us take on the Speyside Way, which a group of the committee walked and cycled 60 miles and raised almost £3000.

Contacts

RNCI continues to build on the many useful links and contacts that have been made over the years here in the North East both within schools and the farming and food community. We work in partnership with leading Scottish organisations to benchmark our delivery and provide a quality service.



Our Careers poster, a source of amazement for the older children.



March 25, children enjoying a talk from one of our volunteer farmers

Future Plans

RNCI will continue to fulfil its aim of increasing countryside awareness to the school children and their teachers in the north-east of Scotland whether in person, virtually or through funded projects.

We will work alongside teachers and our educational partners tying into the Curriculum for Excellence and the Sustainable Goals set by the United Nations as sustainability and our natural environment becomes increasingly important.

Our CCOW, Farm Visits and events remain the mainstay of our work and we are always looking for new volunteers and farm hosts.

RNCI have invested in technology and training to aid film making for not only for social media but for promotion of all things farming, food and the countryside embracing the digital world we now live in.

RNCI has also been awarded funding to purchase new environmental resource boxes, which will look at soils, grasses and wildlife, these boxes are aimed at P4-7 and will follow on from the Early Years Boxes.

We are also working hard to increase the number of classroom talks we deliver into schools in the next year.

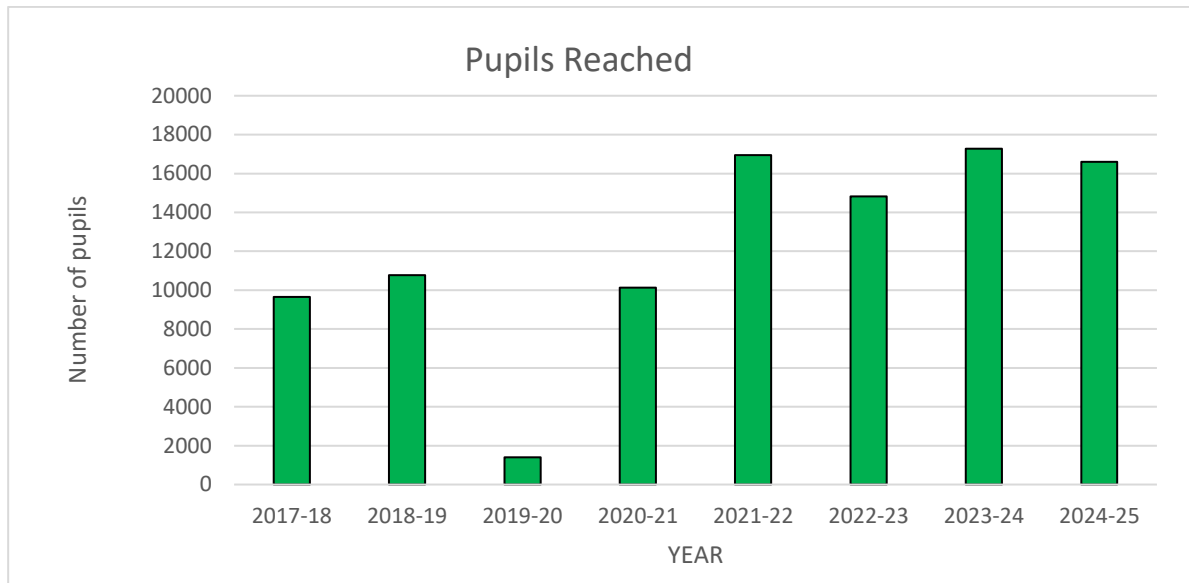
We plan to run the Windowsill Gardening Project again in the springtime.

Our latest creation is a Careers' Banner highlighting the huge range of careers in the rural economy, which can be overlooked and underestimated. This has been a huge success so far and we look forward to seeing it out and about over the coming years.

We remain deeply indebted for the continuation of financial support from our existing benefactors and funding members and will continue to enlist the support of new benefactors and funding members to support us. Applications to grant aid bodies will continue and, with the support of donations from individuals and/or organisations, we will achieve our aims.

The RNCI Executive Committee remain committed to their goal and are looking at the resumption of visits and events that pupils, teachers, farmers and volunteers enjoy alongside developing new projects and events which support schools in the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence.

RNCI Summary of Activity 2017-2025





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RNCI Chairperson

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