



A Classification of Primary Care Trusts in England Based upon the New Definition of Rural Areas.*

Professor John Shepherd
Rural Evidence Research Centre
Birkbeck College
University of London

*Note: the number and boundaries of Primary Care Trusts were changed in 2006. The classification presented here, based upon 2003 boundaries, is for research purposes.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This note proposes a classification of the 303 Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in England as at November 2003 according to the level and type of 'rurality' found within each PCT at the time of the 2001 Census. 'Rurality' is represented as the number and proportion of people living in rural settlements of various kinds as identified in the new rural definition. The methodology used in the classification is identical to that used in classifying local authority districts and unitary authorities (LADs) in England.¹ However, because the number and boundaries of some PCTs differ from those of LADs, the detailed criteria used to produce some groupings of PCTs are different.²

2 Initial Considerations

- 2.1 The new rural definition assigns Census Output Areas outside urban areas with more than 10,000 population to one of three classes according to whether the majority of the population in an Output Area lives in one of three types of settlement, namely, small towns and their fringes (i.e. towns with less than 10,000 population), villages and hamlets and dispersed dwellings. In addition, settlements of all kinds can be assigned to a broader context of rurality described as 'sparse' and 'less sparse'.³
- 2.2 However, as in the case of the LAD classification, certain urban areas with between 10,000 and 30,000 population within PCTs are considered to be 'larger market towns' and are taken into account in assessing the overall rural population of a district. These 'larger market towns' are identified by the presence of a prescribed set of services and commercial attributes which represent a minimum level of importance of a town to its rural hinterland. There are 281 urban areas with between 10,000 and 30,000 population. Two hundred and seven of these are identified as 'larger market towns' and are included in the rural population of the PCTs in which they are located.

3 Classification Principles

- 3.1 The methodology used in classifying PCTs is based upon four main principles:
- the *purpose* that the classification of PCTs is to serve. The classification is seen as mainly for data reporting and analysis and for

¹ A paper describing the methodology for constructing the new rural definition can be found at www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp.

² A paper describing in more detail the approach used in classifying LADs on the basis of their 'rurality' can be found at [www.statistics](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp) (to be entered)

³ However, this aspect of the rural classification is not used in the classification of LADs or of PCTs.

strategic planning purposes. In general, the classification is not a suitable means for detailed targeting of specific resources to localities, such tasks are better served by the new rural definition,

- the recognition of a *framework geography* consisting of the large scale settlement pattern of England perceived through the 'mesh' of PCT boundaries. The chief elements of this framework are (a) a set of major and large urban areas, (b) a set of PCTs in which the rural population predominates and (c) a set of mixed urban and mixed rural PCTs that can be further differentiated on the basis of their level of rurality,
- that it is useful, for policy purposes, to be able to identify the amount and/or type of rural settlement *within* all PCTs and not just those classified as having predominantly rural populations, and
- there should be recognition of both *absolute* and *relative* (i.e. proportionate), numerical criteria used to group PCTs. This allows recognition of the potential significance of rurality for service delivery purposes in PCTs with a large urban population *and* a significant rural component of the total.

4 The Classification Process

- 4.1 The first step in the classification procedure identifies those PCTs which are predominantly 'rural' in that they have over 50 percent of their population living in settlements identified as 'rural' under the new definition and in larger market towns identified for the purposes of this study.
- 4.2 The second step identifies those PCTs which fall entirely within or which contain a significant part of their population within any of the 6 major urban areas of England (i.e. those with over 750,000 population), or within any of the 17 large urban areas (i.e. those with between 250,000 and 750,000). A list of these places is given in Appendix 1.⁴
- 4.3 This leaves a set of PCTs which are either entirely urban in that they lie entirely or mostly within urban areas with less than 250,000 population (e.g. Norwich, Cambridge), or which, to different degrees, have mixed 'urban and rural' populations. This set of PCTs is divided into two groups by identifying those which have a 'significant' number and proportion of people living in rural settlements.
- 4.4 Finally, the numerical criteria used in creating the classification of PCTs are derived from examination of the statistical distributions of the

⁴ 'Urban area' refers to areas of urbanized land defined according to rules established by the Office for National Statistics and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. See www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/cn_106.asp

number and/or proportion of the population in the various types of settlement e.g. major urban, large urban, rural etc. In the allocation of PCTs to groups numbers are rounded upwards or downwards to the nearest 1000 or nearest whole percentage.

5 The Classification of PCTs

5.1 The criteria used to produce the six main groups in the classification of PCTs and the number of PCTs in each group are as follows:

Major Urban PCTs: those with *either* 100,000 people *or* 50 percent of their population in urban areas with a population of more than 750,000. There are 88 PCTs in this group.

Large Urban PCTs: those with *either* 50,000 people *or* 50 percent of their population in one of 17 urban areas with a population between 250,000 and 750,000. There are 45 PCTs in this group.

Other Urban PCTs: those with *either* fewer than 40,000 people *or* less than 26 percent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. There are 45 PCTs in this group.

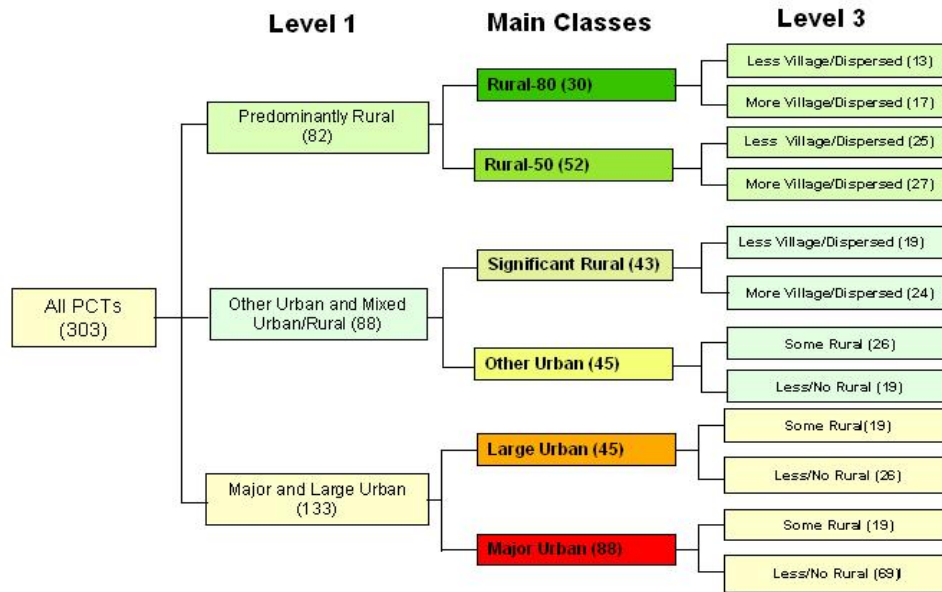
Significant Rural PCTs: those with at least 40,000 people *or* more than 26 percent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. There are 43 PCTs in this group.

Rural-50: PCTs with at least 50 percent but less than 80 percent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. There are 52 PCTs in this group.

Rural-80: PCTs with at least 80 percent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. There are 30 PCTs in this group.

5.2 A further step in the classification procedure can be taken to identify the *amount* of rural/market town population within PCTs classified as 'Major Urban', 'Large urban' or 'Other Urban' and the predominant *type* of settlement within districts classified as 'Significant Rural', 'Rural 50' or 'Rural 80'. A third level classification of PCTs and the numbers of PCTs within the groups at each level is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Structure of the Classification of PCTs



5.3 The 'break points' for the 'Level 3' grouping of PCTs were identified from the relevant statistical distribution as follows:

Major Urban PCTs:

more than 15,000 population in rural settlements = 'Some Rural'
 less than 15000 population in rural settlements = 'Less/No Rural'.

Large Urban PCTs:

more than 10,000 population in rural settlements = 'Some Rural'
 less than 10,000 population in rural settlements = 'Less/No Rural'.

Other Urban PCTs:

more than 10,000 population in rural settlements = 'Some Rural'
 less than 10,000 population in rural settlements = 'Less/No Rural'.

Significant Rural PCTs:

more than 20,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'more village/dispersed',

less than 20,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'less village/dispersed',

Rural 50 PCTs:

more than 35,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'more village/dispersed',

less than 35,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'less village/dispersed',

Rural 80 PCTs:

more than 35,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'more village/dispersed',

less than 35,000 population in villages and dispersed settlements = 'less village/dispersed',

- 5.3 It should be noted that although the twelve-fold grouping of PCTs at 'Level Three' of the classification adds useful detail for analytical purposes, the recognised classification of PCTs is the 6-fold 'Main Classes' grouping.
- 5.4 The geography of the 'Main Classes' classification of PCTs is shown in Figure 2. The overall similarity with the local authority district classification will be apparent. However, there are important differences of detail which derive essentially from the fact that PCTs are generally more 'tightly bounded' around urban areas and that PCTs in more deeply rural areas are generally significantly larger than the LADs in those areas.

Figure 2: The Geography of the Classified PCTs

