

# **NRU AND GO STRATEGIES AND DELIVERY**

## **- Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation -**

### **Background Report 1**

**Prepared for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
(Neighbourhood Renewal Unit)**

*by*

*Derrick Johnstone, EDuce Ltd*

*Susan Johnstone, EDuce Ltd*

*Peter Tyler, University of Cambridge*

*Solihin Garrard, Makesfive Ltd*

*Geoff Fordham, GFA Consulting*

*January 2005*

**EDuce Ltd**



**Makesfive**  
■■■■ ■■■■ ■■■■ ■■■■



# **NRU AND GO STRATEGIES AND DELIVERY**

## **- Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation - Background Report 1**

### **Contents**

		<i>page</i>
1	Key Findings	1
2	NRU Skills and Knowledge Programme: Introduction & Policy Context	6
3	Delivery of NRU and GO Strategies	14
4	NRU and GOs as Learning Organisations	35

This report serves as an introduction to Skills and Knowledge Programme and provides:

- the wider context for the Programme (key developments in the evolution of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and the Skills and Knowledge Programme; related policy developments)
- a description of how the NRU and Government Offices have sought to implement The Learning Curve and support subsequent developments, especially relating to performance management.
- analysis of roles that the NRU and GOs have played, GO Skills and Knowledge plans
- a review of capacity issues, including the NRU and GOs as learning organisations

This is one of six background research reports accompanying the main evaluation report, “Seeking the Lessons: Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation”, all of which can be downloaded from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk). The six are:

- NRU and GO Strategies and Delivery (Background Report 1)
- Findings from the Field (Background Report 2)
- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (Background Report 3)
- Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills (Background Report 4)
- Regional Networks (Background Report 5)
- Renewal.net (Background Report 6)

The main report contains a brief description of the overall methodological model, the project bibliography and glossary.

*We wish to thank all our interviewees for their time and helpful inputs to the research. We are particularly grateful for the support of the Government Office leads: Sue Hay (East), Mike Meech (East Midlands), Brenda Pearson and Jane Ashworth (London), Barry Errington (North East), Jane Doyle (North West), Angela Hammond (South East), Kevin Griffiths and Annette Pearson (West Midlands), and Janet Munn (Yorkshire and Humber).*

*We also appreciate the inputs from Bill Feinstein (NRU Skills and Knowledge Team) and Gemma Penn (NRU Research and Development Division), in developing and steering this element of the Skills and Knowledge Evaluation.*

© Crown copyright 2005

*This publication, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.*

This report was prepared for:

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
tel 020 7944 4400  
[www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

Enquiries regarding the publication may be addressed to Derrick Johnstone, Director, EDuce ltd, St John's Innovation Centre, Cowley Road, Cambridge CB4 0WS (tel 01223 421685; e-mail [derrick.johnstone@educe.co.uk](mailto:derrick.johnstone@educe.co.uk))

## 1 KEY FINDINGS

The NRU has made very substantial progress in implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme, based on the framework set out in The Learning Curve strategy document. Key building blocks have been put in place to help ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) (detailed in the accompanying Background Research reports on Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme, Regional Networks and Renewal.net). The Programme has become geared increasingly to the requirements of delivering improvements in partner performance in delivering neighbourhood renewal and especially national floor targets.

### *Implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme*

The NRU and Government Offices (GOs) have played complementary roles in delivering the Skills and Knowledge Programme, with roles in:

- *leading and influencing policy and programme design* at national and regional levels in ways which promote skills, knowledge and performance improvement for neighbourhood renewal
- *stimulating awareness, demand and take-up* of opportunities to develop skills and knowledge, encouraging partnerships and organisations responsible for the delivery of neighbourhood renewal to follow effective practice in learning and development and in the use of evidence
- *improving the supply* of learning opportunities relating to neighbourhood renewal, through strategic interventions, increasing the range and quality of learning opportunities and evidence sources, and developing tools to support delivery.

GOs have delivered annual Skills and Knowledge Action Plans, with budgets accounting for just under half of the total NRU Skills and Knowledge budget (£5.09m in 2004-05). These funds have been devoted to a range of activities including the development of networks and networking; learning activities geared to achievement of Floor Targets; internal GO development; promotion of good practice and use of evidence (including Renewal.net case studies); and seminars and workshops on other topics (eg, on mainstreaming and community engagement).

GOs have experienced a steep learning curve as they have sought to develop their Skills and Knowledge activities. The NSNR is a relatively recent innovation, the emphasis on skills and knowledge is new for a government regeneration strategy, and GOs have not had this role (or budget) before. GOs have adopted an iterative approach in developing their Action Plans, trying out different initiatives, typically 'letting many flowers bloom'. The content of most GO Action Plans has tended to be reactive, responding to wants rather than needs - in a situation where LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships have not been clear about what they really need.

Most GOs have not adopted an evidence-based approach to their Skills and Knowledge activities. They have not tended to review systematically what they have funded on Skills and Knowledge nor sought to share lessons widely.

### *Capacity to deliver: NRU and GOs as learning organisations*

As the Learning Curve analysis made clear, there are skills and knowledge dimensions to successful delivery of the National Strategy throughout the delivery chain, not just at the level of local organisations taking action and delivering services on the ground.

Key findings from our interviews with NRU and GO staff included:

#### **NRU as a learning organisation**

- Culture and policy within the NRU tends to be viewed as supportive of *individual* staff learning, but lacks a concerted drive to build the skills and knowledge which the NRU needs as an *organisation* to deliver effectively. Learning and development needs which flow from organisational priorities are not built into team and personal learning plans, and there are skill gaps for many staff relating to their lack of experience in neighbourhood renewal. The NRU has looked outward in bringing in some staff (recruits and secondees) from outside the Civil Service who *do* have such experience, but in turn these individuals typically have learning needs relating to working within government (eg, on resource accounting and programme design).
- Policy staff commented on the onus on them to make the running with other government departments in ensuring that NSNR objectives feature in new policy developments in these other domains. They also raised the sheer difficulty they have in finding the time to keep up with relevant policy developments and connections across neighbourhood renewal interests.
- There are concerns within and outside the NRU about how well teams communicate and present a common view to the outside world, and related comments about the need to improve cross-unit working within ODPM. The importance of recognising and strengthening 'internal customer' relationships - where teams are mutually dependent on others for successful implementation of tasks - is not always recognised.

#### **GOs as learning organisations**

- With GOs performing an increasingly pivotal role in policy delivery, not just in neighbourhood renewal but in the wider Modernising Government agenda, there are critical roles for GOs to play and associated organisational development needs. These bring about new or enhanced skill demands for many GO staff, eg, concerning relationship management; brokering support packages (including adopting appropriate management styles to gain support from local partners); ability to advise on performance management reviews and improvement planning, and on data sources and analysis. Other broader requirements can include, eg, change management and organisational development skills, diversity awareness, and conflict resolution skills.
- Our interviews with GO staff suggested that GOs show some aspects of being learning organisations, capable of adapting effectively to new demands. As with the NRU centrally, GO policies and cultures have tended to support individual learning - though much is left to personal initiative. Interviewees in most GOs tended to feel that a defined organisational development and learning agenda is lacking (despite their organisations being accredited as Investors in People, the relevant national kitemark). There is recognition that GOs themselves need to make more and better use of evidence, and there are associated learning needs

<p>relating to data analysis and interpretation, and performance management models and methods. There are also concerns - as with the NRU - that GOs internally need to be better joined up and presenting consistent messages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GONE and GOWM provide particularly good examples where NR Skills and Knowledge leads have used resources in their Skills and Knowledge budgets as a lever to engage GO personnel/ training managers and other GO teams in development activities which address both NR and corporate needs. They have also anticipated <i>strategic</i> development needs relating to new staff tasks (such as performance management) and organised learning activities in response.</li> <li>• GO interviewees did not consider that as organisations they were very effective at capturing and sharing knowledge, especially in building the 'organisational memory'. High turnover of staff and the recruitment of staff new to neighbourhood renewal has tended to compound the problem – again, an issue also for the NRU centrally.</li> <li>• GOs would welcome further opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. While there are meetings which bring GO staff together, many of our GO interviewees felt that these provided limited opportunities for networking, and more advantage could be taken in organising events with explicit learning objectives.</li> </ul>
--

## Principal Recommendations

	Action by
<p>1. Develop a more strategic approach to meeting the competency requirements for effective delivery of NRU and GO roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review organisational development and learning needs and how best to address them.</li> <li>• ensure that personal development planning takes full account of required competencies and subject knowledge requirements, linked to business planning priorities.</li> <li>• develop effective ways of addressing common in-house development needs, linked to implementation of job tasks</li> </ul>	NRU, RCU, GOs
<p>2. Review the 'state of the art' in performance improvement, drawing on experience across government, inspection bodies and the private sector</p>	NRU, with GOs, NRAs
<p>3. Provide more opportunities for joint learning and development (through practical workshops, task groups, etc) involving NRU, GOs, partnerships, NRAs, and OGDs (as appropriate)</p>	NRU, GOs, Networks, RCEs
<p>4. Sharpen induction arrangements for staff (especially on neighbourhood renewal subject content and job requirements, eg, in relationship management/ partnership roles)</p>	NRU, RCU, GOs

## 2 NRU Skills and Knowledge Programme: Introduction & Policy Context

### 2.1 Origins of the Skills and Knowledge Programme

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) sets out an ambitious vision and programme to turn round the fortunes of the most deprived areas in England. Unusually for a renewal strategy, from the outset it has treated learning for neighbourhood renewal as a strategic priority. The vision for this component of the National Strategy, that *“everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal should be equipped with the skills and knowledge they need”*, is a challenging one.

The rationale was set out in 1999 in the report of Policy Action Team (PAT) 16, ‘Learning Lessons’, one of the task groups assigned to prepare the content of the NSNR. This highlighted a range of factors hampering achievement of regeneration and renewal policy objectives which included:

- poor design of strategies: neither evidence-based, outcome-driven nor prioritised
- deficiencies in implementation (eg, in accountability for delivery, project management, and use of processes such as option appraisal and action planning)
- poor knowledge of research into what works under what circumstances, and reluctance to learn from the past
- weaknesses in partnership working and in developing community institutions
- shortages of skilled staff
- inadequate understanding amongst policy makers of realities of implementation

Needs and challenges were framed partly about **knowledge** (reflecting the lack of a reliable system for learning from ‘what works’), partly about **skills** (such as team building, problem solving, working with communities and conflict management - regarded as poorly catered for by professional training and development), and partly about **attitudes, behaviour and culture change**. PAT 16 recognised that investment in skills and knowledge is not enough in itself - significant changes are needed within organisations, partnerships and communities if national and local objectives for neighbourhood renewal are to be achieved. Systems thinking underlay the Team’s approach, seeing the need for inter-connected action<sup>1</sup>:

*“Neighbourhood renewal will be effective and sustainable when national policy makers develop the right frameworks, policies, funding and incentives and when local people and professionals have the confidence, opportunity and skills to make a difference.” PAT 16, p6*

Other PAT reports highlighted related issues. For instance, PAT 2 (Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal) identified weaknesses in the capacity of local communities to develop and sustain initiatives which can help people improve their skills, and PAT 18 (Better Information) focused on the need for better data and evidence to inform all involved in strategy development, service design and delivery.

---

<sup>1</sup> For further treatment of the need for systems thinking in policy development, see, eg. University of Birmingham/ OPM (1999) Cross-Cutting Issues in Public Policy

## 2.2 National Strategy Action Plan, Skills and Organisational Change

The analyses of PAT 16 and PAT 2 were broadly confirmed by responses to the NSNR consultation in 2000. The culmination of this strategy development process was the publication of New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan in 2001. This set out an ambitious agenda for change, in which new policies, programmes and targets were introduced to galvanise partner action. Organisational development and community development were major underlying elements<sup>2</sup>.

### National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Vision and Goals

**Vision:**

“Within 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. People on low incomes should not have to suffer conditions and services that are failing, and so different from what the rest of the population receives” (NSNR Action Plan, p8)

**Long-term goals:** which promote both absolute improvement in conditions in the worst neighbourhoods and a reduction in disparities:

*“In all the poorest neighbourhoods, to have common goals of lower worklessness and crime, better health, skills, housing and physical environment.”*

*“To narrow the gap on these measures between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country.”*  
(NSNR Action Plan, p8).

The National Strategy Action Plan set out imperatives to improve, eg:

- **leadership and joint working** (with an emphasis on ‘joining up’ strategies and actions both horizontally and vertically, involving neighbourhood, district, regional and national levels)
- **community engagement**, ensuring that local needs and priorities are to the fore, and that residents have the tools to get involved in whatever way they want
- **accountability** amongst agencies for service improvement and neighbourhood renewal
- **quality of information** about needs, services, and neighbourhood change
- **learning** from successes and failures

The concept of **mainstreaming** is a core element. This is defined by ODPM as “influencing ‘mainstream services’ to make them work better in deprived neighbourhoods, by shaping and resourcing them for the task, and making them focus explicitly on the places and people most in need of their support”. This may involve reallocating or *bending resources* to target the most deprived areas; *focusing policy* on these areas through targets and legislative change; *reshaping services* to meet needs better; *joining up activities* of different agencies to increased combined impact; and *learning good practice* and applying it to the benefit of disadvantaged communities (Audit Commission 2002).

The Action Plan incorporated the pre-existing New Deal for Communities programme and included several important policy innovations, eg:

---

<sup>2</sup> A short description of the National Strategy and the underlying Theory of Change can be found in Tyler et al (2005), Evaluation of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Scoping Study, NRU



- floor targets, which set a minimum standard for outcomes in disadvantaged areas, or a goal to narrow the gap between them and the rest of the country
- Local Strategic Partnerships, charged with the task of developing and implementing Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies and co-ordinating the work of local partners
- the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, available to 88 LSP areas with the highest levels of deprivation to improve the delivery of services in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- the Community Empowerment Fund, to help the community and voluntary sector get involved in decision-making on a strategic level in these areas
- Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) pathfinder programmes (notably New Deal for Communities - NDC, Neighbourhood Management – NM, and Neighbourhood Wardens), to test new approaches to neighbourhood renewal.

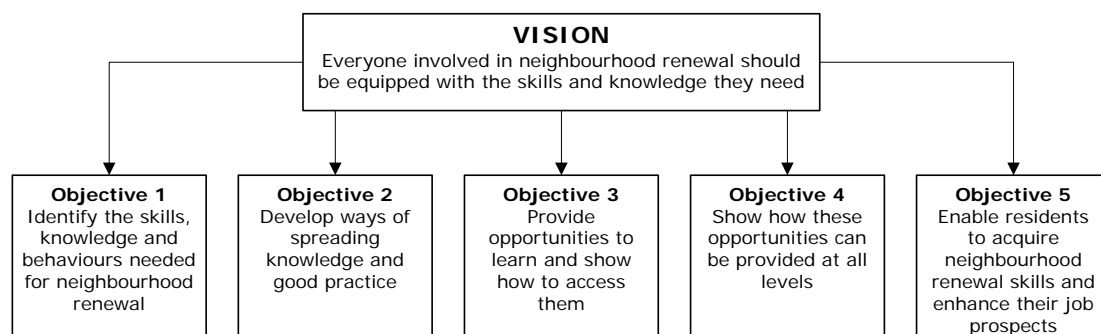
**The Action Plan made the case for a *step change* in capabilities and ways of working**, recognising that the Strategy would place new demands on a wide range of players. It stressed that the practice of neighbourhood renewal was not to be about relatively small numbers of people directly managing area-based regeneration partnerships, but is rather about a very wide range on whom the success of the National Strategy depends: local residents and community leaders, employers, elected members, staff delivering public services, civil servants in policy and programme roles, etc.

## 2.3 The NRU Skills and Knowledge Programme

The National Strategy Action Plan concluded that there needed to be a “*distinct skills and knowledge strand running throughout the Strategy*”. It determined that there should be a Skills and Knowledge Team established within the NRU, and that Government Offices would play a key role in the ‘delivery chain’ of implementation. A national Centre for Neighbourhood Renewal at arms-length from government had been advocated by PAT 16, but this option was not pursued. The reasoning was that there needed to be *leadership* within Whitehall, a strong regional presence, and closeness to communities working on the ground.

The NRU Skills and Knowledge Team, formed in April 2001, was charged with developing a programme to bring about the step change identified in the National Strategy Action Plan. The Skills and Knowledge Programme is set out in The Learning Curve strategy, launched in 2002. The vision and objectives are set out in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Learning Curve Vision and Objectives**



The Learning Curve recognised the need for action:

- at different geographic levels: neighbourhood, local, regional, national
- within and across professions, practitioner networks, etc
- by individuals and by organisations - where the notion of 'learning organisations' comes into play:

*“The strategy is about organisations not just individuals. People will only really be able to use what they learn, if they are working in or with organisations that are also willing to learn.” (The Learning Curve, p7)*

The Learning Curve set out 23 actions, several of which involved tools for learning and developing evidence-based approaches and are at the heart of the brief for this evaluation: Renewal.net - about *learning from what works*; Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (NRAs) - about *learning through face-to-face advice*; Regional Networks and the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills - about *learning from others*. These tools have been intended as complementary, responding to different needs and learning styles of users.

Also featured in the Learning Curve is the Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Framework which sets out essential skills, knowledge and behaviours regarding four target groups of individuals active in neighbourhood renewal – residents, practitioners, professionals and policy makers – drawing out common requirements and those relevant to their particular roles. This Learning Framework (set out in full in Background Report 2, Findings from the Field) was intended to encourage people to think about the competencies they need, stimulate and shape formal and informal learning undertaken by individuals, organisations and partnerships.

The content of the Learning Framework is grouped around:

- **building the knowledge base** (recognising and understanding what works, and applying knowledge successfully)
- **developing core skills** (organisational skills, such as project management and appraisal, finance and budgeting, and influencing mainstream services; and interpersonal skills, such as leadership, community engagement, partnership working, conflict resolution and valuing diversity)
- **changing behaviours** (entrepreneurial behaviours, such as spotting opportunities, solving problems and taking calculated risks, and reflective behaviours, such as evaluating effectiveness and learning from success and failure)

## 2.4 Subsequent development of the National Strategy

There have been several significant policy developments since the publication of the National Strategy Action Plan which have implications for the Skills and Knowledge Programme. These have combined to place greater stress on the importance of performance improvement and how the Skills and Knowledge programme can most directly support partnerships in delivery.

These developments include, during the evaluation fieldwork, the introduction of:

- Performance Management Frameworks: tools to improve the achievement of national and local floor targets and the effectiveness of LSPs, Community Empowerment Networks, NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders
- Floor Target Action Planning (FTAP): a method of focusing LSP efforts to ‘close the gap’ on national and local targets, testing out evidence and plausibility relating to current actions, assessing options and making improvements and changes as necessary
- The Places Project, where the NRU and the relevant GOs have worked with LSPs in Manchester, Nottingham and Southwark to gain a better understanding of reasons for poor performance against floor target indicators
- ‘Transformation and Sustainability’, setting out a framework for future support, management and monitoring of the NDC programme, produced following a risk management exercise in response to NDC programme evaluation findings and an National Audit Office report
- the Single Community Programme, which brought together support for community participation in neighbourhood renewal<sup>3</sup>, and set out more clearly what the Government wants to see the development of:
  - ◆ *governance*: an effective community ‘voice’ that enables communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers
  - ◆ *social capital*: increased confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks that hold communities together
  - ◆ *service delivery*: where communities can influence and, where appropriate, participate in service delivery
  - ◆ *social inclusion and cohesion*: empowered communities capable of building a common vision, a sense of belonging and a positive identity where diversity is valued.

Further developments since the fieldwork include the publication of:

- the introduction of Local Area Agreements, intended to rationalise and enhance area-based funding streams (including NRF), and the new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (which brings together ODPM funding streams on warden, neighbourhood management, community empowerment and liveability with Home Office funding for building safer communities and tackling anti-social behaviour)
- Local Public Services Board prospectus, proposing strengthening of ‘joined-up governance’ and public service delivery in LSPs areas with high performing local authorities (through the creation of ‘LSPs with teeth’)
- the No 10 Strategy Unit joint review, ‘Improving the Prospects of People Living in Areas of Multiple Deprivation’, highlighting the importance of, eg:
  - ◆ a simplified delivery chain, with appropriate accountability to local people and the right capacity at all levels
  - ◆ higher priority to economic aspects of renewal and private sector engagement

---

<sup>3</sup> Including Community Learning Chests, small grants to promote learning relating to neighbourhood renewal

- ◆ concentrating the use of resources and triggers for transforming neighbourhoods

These developments have taken place in the context of implementation of the Prime Minister's four principles for public sector reform:

- setting of *national standards*, within a framework of clear accountability, designed to ensure that citizens have the right to high quality services wherever they live
- delivery through *devolving and delegating to the front-line*, giving local leaders responsibility and accountability for delivery, and the opportunity to design and develop services around the needs of local people
- more *flexibility* for public agencies and their staff to become more responsive to the wide range of customer aspirations.
- expanding choice for the customer - about the service people can have and who provides it.

Implications for government bodies include challenging restrictive practices and reducing red tape; greater and more flexible incentives and rewards for good performance; development of strong leadership and management; and high quality training and development.

Future development of the Skills and Knowledge Programme will take place in the context of policy developments following the publication of Devolving Decision Making Review accompanying the 2004 Budget and the Gershon Review (Releasing Resources to the Front Line). The former recommended that resources, decision making and accountability should be devolved to as close to the front line as possible. More flexibilities, freedoms and incentives are to be built into the system to allow local solutions to local problems, while contributing to (a smaller number of) national targets. Increased autonomy has been proposed for high performing agencies and partnerships, along with strengthened capacity building and intervention strategies for under-performers. There is a commitment to improve the quality of performance data to enable effective real-time monitoring, and to spread best practice in local performance management.

Meanwhile, the Gershon Review has reported, recommending steps that Departments need to take to achieve efficiency targets, reduce staffing in the civil service, and release resources to improve front-line service delivery. Implications include:

- greater evidence-based scrutiny of policy delivery options
- strategic management of procurement
- improved efficiency at the interface between policy functions
- greater clarity of roles within delivery chains
- increased use of outsourcing or co-sourcing (ie, where government enters into a longer term partnering relationship with a provider organisation).

## **2.5 Wider Policy Developments**

The National Strategy, and the Skills and Knowledge Programme within it, also has to operate in a joined-up fashion and take account of parallel developments in wider government policies. These include:

*ODPM*

- Sustainable Communities, and notably:
  - ◆ Regional Housing Strategies and Market Renewal Pathfinders
  - ◆ the Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities, which reported on what makes communities sustainable and the processes and skills needed to achieve this. (This features further in Section 3.1 below which explores the links with the skills agenda for neighbourhood renewal.)
  
- Local Government, and notably:
  - ◆ the Vision for Local Government and associated consultations, eg, on neighbourhood governance
  - ◆ Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), benchmarking local authority performance, linked to improvement planning (with proposals to cover community leadership and addressing floor targets)
  - ◆ Local Area Agreements and the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (rationalising funding streams and seeking to improve working relationships between central and local government and other local partners)
  - ◆ Local Public Services Agreements (LPSAs) (offering freedoms, flexibilities and rewards for local authorities achieving target service improvements, with the new, second generation of LPSAs, emphasising partnership working - in the LSP context - to achieve better results)
  - ◆ Capacity Building Programme (services and activities aimed at under-performing local authorities including peer support, leadership and change programmes)
  - ◆ Local Government Procurement Strategy (intended, amongst other things, to open up opportunities for voluntary and community sector involvement in service provision)

*Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/ Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)*

- the National Skills Strategy, Regional Skills Partnerships and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (including the LSC Widening Partnership strategy and its strategy - 'Working Together' - for engaging the voluntary and community sector)
- Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and their use of their Single Pot budget for economic regeneration (some with an explicit interest in capacity building, eg, EEDA and their Investing in Communities programme)

*Home Office*

- Community Cohesion pathfinders (Home Office and NRU), intended to promote greater knowledge, respect and contact between various cultures, and to establish a greater sense of citizenship

- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) policy, including:
  - ◆ Treasury Cross-Cutting Review of the Role of the VCS in the Delivery of Public Services
  - ◆ ChangeUp - the Capacity Building Infrastructure Framework (Active Communities Unit, Home Office), including the Voluntary Sector Skills Strategy and the Community Capacity Building Action Plan (concerning support for groups and initiatives at community or neighbourhood level)
  - ◆ Firm Foundations, the framework for community capacity building, setting out steps being taken by government to enable more communities to help themselves and engage more effectively with public bodies

These policy developments present particular challenges for Government Offices, who are expected to bring coherence to the delivery of government policy in the regions and add value by exploiting synergies, working constructively with partners and removing obstacles to effective local implementation (RCU, 2003). Each in its own way has 'skills and knowledge' dimensions and potential for synergy with the neighbourhood renewal agenda.

## 3 Delivery of NRU and GO Strategies

### 3.1 Skills and Knowledge strategies and roles

#### *Early strategy and implementation*

As we explained earlier, 'The Learning Curve' set out a strategic framework for the NRU, Government Offices and others to achieve the overall vision of 'equipping everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal with the skills and knowledge they need'. Implementation has depended on actions at different stages in the 'delivery chain', with the NRU developing policy, guidance and tools and providing funding; Government Offices (GOs) developing regional action plans, allocating regional Skills and Knowledge budgets and liaising with individual partnerships; and partnerships, partner organisations and individuals identifying their learning and improvement needs and taking steps to address them.

Within the context of The Learning Curve, GOs have "*responsibility for driving skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal*", expected to ensure that their activities on Skills and Knowledge relate directly to their wider role in support of the delivery of neighbourhood renewal programmes and serve to 'join up' national, regional and local policy agendas. GOs have crucial relationship management roles, working with LSPs, NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders, expected both to support and challenge partnerships (eg, through Performance Management and annual review processes). These roles are often not easy, given inherent tensions between developmental and compliance objectives. Closer to delivery, they have an essential function in providing feedback to the policy centre and can play an informed role in new policy initiatives.

The NRU has a dedicated Skills and Knowledge Team (of 11 staff), undertaking a range of policy development, guidance and support, contract management, and administrative functions. It is for each GO to determine how best to organise internally to make its contribution, though all have dedicated leads on Skills and Knowledge. In some cases, there is a specific, albeit small team; in others, staff combine responsibilities, eg, as members of area teams or oversight of LSP development. GOs do not report to the NRU directly, rather their line is to the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU), also part of ODPM.

The Skills and Knowledge Team has worked alongside other NRU teams who have also had an interest in developing skills, knowledge and capacity for neighbourhood renewal within their areas of policy, programme and research responsibility. Examples led by programme teams include: training, qualifications and support for neighbourhood wardens; the National Neighbourhood Management Network; Partnership Academy support for Business Brokers; and training in community facilitation and conflict resolution (Community Participation Team). Specific arrangements have been implemented, eg, in making NRAs available in support roles (eg, advising on actions plans for Community Cohesion pathfinders and Business Broker projects, and on support for performance management reviews). There has been close involvement with the LSP policy team on LSP performance management arrangements and support.

### Other skills and knowledge actions pursued by the NRU

#### Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Wardens

- guidance on training Neighbourhood Wardens (2001)
- subsequent development of a flexible learning package for Neighbourhood Wardens and Warden Managers, linked to a National Vocational Qualification for Community Wardens (NVQs)
- introduction of Regional Warden Resource Centres to support this programme, running training courses and supporting local schemes in the use of distance and e-learning materials
- National Neighbourhood Management Network - set up to support the development of NM initiatives and provide opportunities for everyone involved to share and develop effective practice
- NDC and NM action learning sets, conferences and seminars

#### Research and Development

- dissemination events as part of the NDC programme evaluation; role of local evaluators in advising on evaluation methods and providing targeted feedback to individual partnerships (based both upon NDC-specific findings and on evidence emerging from the evaluation as a whole)
- action learning sets as a component of the formative evaluation of LSPs and the second phase of the Neighbourhood Management programme evaluation
- production of guidance notes (eg. on developing strategies and evaluation for Neighbourhood Management pathfinders)

#### Business engagement

- Partnership Academy – funded as part of the national Business Broker pilot programme, providing advice and networking opportunities for Brokers employed to promote business involvement in LSPs and neighbourhood renewal

#### Community Programmes

- Community Facilitation: development and delivery of conflict analysis, management and skills training to: civil servants responsible for programme delivery; members of partnerships and programmes; and local communities. This is intended to tackle the root causes of local inter- and intra- ethnic conflict and to raise local capacities for conflict resolution and prevention.

#### Single Local Management Centres

- pilot programme co-funded by the ODPM Regional Co-ordination Unit to join up regeneration funding schemes and initiatives, removing bureaucratic barriers to delivery. It has involved support, eg. for networking (South Yorkshire Regeneration Network)

Links are maintained with NRU policy leads (who are the locus for the NRU's work with other departments), typically pursuing shared interests in promoting better use of evidence, and to plugging particular knowledge gaps (eg, relating to good practice on economic development, public health and transport in the neighbourhood renewal context). There is increased interest in the use of thematic NRAs, eg, in helping LSPs and NDCs develop stronger economic dimensions to their strategies. A close relationship has been established with the Research and Development (R&D) Team who are increasingly concerned to ensure that the learning from research and evaluation projects is transferred effectively to policymakers and practitioners, and that sufficient analytical skills and capacity to ensure that robust strategies are in place. The Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) programme is being piloted in four regions to provide neighbourhood research support services. Floor Targets Interactive, the NRU's online service for monitoring progress towards Public Service Agreement Floor Targets and developed by R&D, is promoted alongside Skills and Knowledge tools.

The NRU Skills and Knowledge budget in 2004-05 is £5.09m, small (1.1%) in comparison with the total allocated to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for the same year. Just under half is allocated to GO Skills and Knowledge Action Plans. There is a



further annual budget of around £5m associated with The Learning Curve, for Community Learning Chests (CLCs) - though this has been administered through Community Participation Team channels. CLCs have provided grants in NRF areas, in the form of small awards of between £50 and £5,000 to help individuals or groups of residents play an active role in neighbourhood renewal through learning. (The CLC budget is now part of the Single Community Programme, with funds earmarked for supporting resident involvement in neighbourhood renewal.)

Table 1 sets out roles pursued by Skills and Knowledge functions in the NRU and GOs. These have involved *leadership and influence* (in setting the agenda within and outside government for action on learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal); *stimulating interest and demand* (raising awareness, helping people identify their needs, promoting learning opportunities and access to them); and *improving the supply* of learning opportunities. Some actions have involved developing 'tools' (specific products and services to help meet needs - such as Renewal.net and the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills training programme); while others have concerned organisational infrastructure (such as the development of networks and Regional Centres of Excellence), or sought to publicise and promote the need for action and opportunities available. These activities have been carried out through a variety of means of delivery: through joint projects, commissioning specific services from contractors, providing pump-priming grants to partnerships.

**Table 1 Roles in implementing The Learning Curve**

Roles in implementing The Learning Curve	
NRU Skills and Knowledge	GO Skills and Knowledge
<b><i>Leadership &amp; influence</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ advising other NRU teams on embedding learning in programmes and performance management arrangements</li> <li>▪ supporting GOs in delivering the Skills and Knowledge Programme</li> <li>▪ liaising with other parts of government (eg, ODPM Sustainable Communities Unit on development of Regional Centres of Excellence)</li> <li>▪ engaging national stakeholders (eg, IDeA, LGA, NHSU, Learning and Skills Council)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ engaging and influencing regional stakeholder bodies (eg, Regional Assemblies, RDAs) - in particular in the collaborative development of RCEs</li> </ul>
<b><i>Stimulating awareness, demand and take-up</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ promoting key messages about skills for neighbourhood renewal and embedding learning and improvement in partnership practice</li> <li>▪ identifying gaps, weaknesses and barriers relating to skills and evidence-based approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ sponsoring research on needs and ways of addressing these</li> <li>▪ researching and disseminating case studies of good practice</li> <li>▪ advising and encouraging partnerships on their approach to learning, development and performance improvement (directly, through NRAs, or through negotiated grant awards)</li> </ul>
<b><i>Improving supply</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ through strategic interventions, improving the range and quality of provision of learning opportunities and evidence sources (including specific 'tools' for knowledge management, networking and skills development)</li> <li>▪ managing national programmes (NRAs, Delivery Skills Programme)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ providing or commissioning learning events and other networking activities</li> <li>▪ working with providers to develop new learning opportunities, routes to qualifications, etc</li> <li>▪ working with GO colleagues to set up and commission NRA assignments</li> </ul>

Many activities pursued at both national and regional level have been *experimental* in nature, sometimes designed as a pilot with the potential for wider roll-out, in other cases, to ‘suck-it-and-see’ and learn the lessons. Given the innovative nature of the Skills and Knowledge Programme and its components, what was not known at the outset was which activities would prove to offer the best return on the expenditure.

Table 2 provides examples of measures undertaken in implementing The Learning Curve, linked to each of the Learning Curve objectives.

The Learning Curve also highlighted the need to address **learning needs within the Civil Service**. The Skills and Knowledge Team is working with GOs *“to ensure that NRU, GO staff, and civil servants across Whitehall have the skills and knowledge they need to develop and implement neighbourhood renewal policy”* (Action 12, p56). Actions have included the provision of briefings and specific training provision, eg, on conflict resolution. Increasingly, joint events are planned which are designed to help the NRU and GOs prepare for specific tasks in implementing policy developments, eg, in preparing to assess LSP performance management reviews and improvement plans. GOs have responsibility for implementing their own training plans, across the GO, and may make use of their Skills and Knowledge budget from the NRU to support these for neighbourhood renewal-related purposes. We explore actions taken and related issues later in this Chapter.

**Table 2 Implementing the Learning Curve - examples of steps taken**

<b>VISION</b> <i>'Everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal should be equipped with the skills and knowledge they need'</i>					
<b>Objective:</b>	<b>1) Identify the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for neighbourhood renewal</b>	<b>2) Develop ways of spreading knowledge and good practice</b>	<b>3) Provide opportunities to learn and show how to access them</b>	<b>4) Show how these opportunities can be provided at all levels</b>	<b>5) Enable residents to acquire neighbourhood renewal skills and enhance their job prospects</b>
<b>NRU S&amp;K action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Framework (in The Learning Curve) - a basis for clarifying learning needs and gaps</li> <li>▪ Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Renewal Skills (occupational standards framework and ways of developing kite-marked provision)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Renewal.net - knowledge management system containing comprehensive and readily accessible evidence of 'what works'</li> <li>▪ deployment of NRAs</li> <li>▪ national support for development of regional networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme</li> <li>▪ induction training for NRAs, GOs, etc, and NRA professional development (briefings, networking opportunities and e-community)</li> <li>▪ funding for RCE development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ research by LSDA into neighbourhood renewal learning opportunities for provided by FE and HE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Residents Consultancy (pilot led by DfES to test out how residents can share and grow their experience in neighbourhood renewal)</li> </ul>
<b>Other NRU</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action learning sets (NDC; NM; LSP evaluation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighbourhood Wardens training and qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community Learning Chests (small grants for community-based learning)</li> </ul>
<b>GO action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ needs analyses (LSPs, NDCs, etc; internal GO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Renewal.net (sourcing case studies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ regional support for regional regeneration and programme-based networks</li> <li>▪ partners in RCE development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ pilot projects (eg, Barnsley Neighbourhood Management 'Learning Curve' initiative)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ research into learning needs and qualification routes for community representatives (NW; WM)</li> </ul>

### *Shift of focus: performance improvement*

In the first two years of the Skills and Knowledge Programme, the NRU and GOs have made significant progress in implementing the 23 actions in the Learning Curve. We describe in our other Background Research Reports progress in implementing what have been regarded as the main Programme tools (NRAs, Renewal.net, Regional Networks and the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme). New actions have been added to the Programme over its course, eg, the development of the LSP Delivery Toolkit, available via Renewal.net and intended to advise LSPs on developing and implementing neighbourhood renewal strategies. This sought to reinforce key messages regarding the need for better core resourcing of LSPs to drive performance, the benefits of a systematic approach to performance management, the effective use of evidence, and investment in partner skills and knowledge.

What was clear at an early stage in the evaluation was that, while the tools were largely in place, there was still a major challenge in ensuring that learning and development was embedded in the work of LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. At the same time, there was growing concern within Government about the speed of progress on delivery that partnerships were making, leading to the introduction by the NRU of Performance Management Frameworks (for NDCs, NMs, CENs and LSPs). Politicians have been looking for greater evidence of impact, while at the same time research has been highlighting the time it takes to build and sustain partnerships that deliver.

In Section 1, we noted related developments such as the introduction of Floor Target Action Planning and the Places Project, and policy responses to the NAO report on New Deal for Communities and programme evaluations of NDC and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders. In 2004-05, work under the Skills and Knowledge Programme has been taken forward directly in relation to NRU Business Planning priorities:

- working with government departments to secure delivery of neighbourhood renewal floor targets
- influencing how national, regional and local agencies make mainstream services work better in deprived neighbourhoods
- supporting and challenging LSPs on delivery of floor targets and other Neighbourhood Renewal targets
- supporting GOs to drive changes needed to secure delivery of floor targets on the ground, and ensure that delivery is built on a firm evidence base.

Thus, during the course of the evaluation, the Skills and Knowledge Programme has moved towards how the programme can best support performance improvement in LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. Inherent in this has been a shift towards addressing organisational and partnership development issues and away from concerns with the skills of individuals. The emphasis on performance management has increasingly been regarded within the NRU as the primary means of embedding skills and knowledge activities within partnerships, contributing to the culture changes called for in the Learning Curve and making it more likely that skill needs will be treated as a priority. Implementation of partnership improvement plans will put this to the test.

Learning and development is incorporated (in different ways) in the PMFs for LSPs, CENs, NDCs and NM pathfinders. Actions relating to skills and knowledge for

neighbourhood renewal may arise, however, arise anywhere across the PMFs, eg, relating to reshaping service delivery, alignment of partner business plans and performance management arrangements, and use of latest technologies to improve communications and accessibility. By July 2004, over 200 partnerships had undertaken their first PMF review, many with advice from NRAs.

NRU support has continued to develop, eg, with the introduction of NRA assignment managers in LSPs with the greatest challenges and risks. These assignment managers are expected to work with the partnerships and GOs, providing in-depth diagnostic support and managing inputs from other NRAs as required to help ensure that improvement plans are robust and implemented successfully.

### *Bringing together skills agendas for Sustainable Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal*

Also during the course of the evaluation, momentum has built up behind the development, first, of Regional Centres of Excellence, and subsequently, the National Centre on Sustainable Skills, a principal recommendation of the Egan Review on Sustainable Communities and Skills. On both, the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team have been closely involved with the ODPM Sustainable Communities Development Unit. A consequence has been that plans for the RCEs rather than Regional Networks have increasingly become a priority for the NRU, given the key role that RCEs are expected to play in the regional infrastructure to support learning for neighbourhood renewal and sustainable communities. Their development - along with that of the National Centre - has allowed the Skills and Knowledge Team to concentrate more on the more immediate NRU priority for performance improvement. RCEs and the National Centre have thus been seen as the proper location for action on broader and longer term issues of skills supply, regeneration careers and qualifications.

In autumn 2003 and summer 2004 there were funding rounds for RCEs to speed their development. The first was intended to support RCEs in building capacity to deliver (especially within their core team and steering group) and provide support to strengthen participation and ownership. The second shifted to delivery of ODPM priorities:

- encouraging and working with RDAs, GOs, Local Learning and Skills Councils, HE and FE and others to improve the delivery skills of those involved in neighbourhood renewal and sustainable communities
- promoting relevant learning and employment opportunities
- facilitating evidence-based delivery and promoting good practice
- encouraging joint working across regions and nationally (eg, where collaboration will improve quality and effectiveness)

Work had been progressing at varying speeds across the regions since proposals were floated for RCEs, originally by the Urban Task Force in 1999. There was a false start in the North West and subsequently RegenWM was the first to become operational (in 2003). The speed of development work has been frustrated in different regions by difficulties, eg, in clarifying the added value that an RCE could bring and building consensus around its purpose and role; establishing a project development partnership between the GO and RDA (the latter allocated project management responsibility); the need to gain interest and support from regional and local stakeholders; and differences of

view about concepts and priorities - including where and how 'neighbourhood renewal' relates to 'sustainable communities'.

Following the publication of the Egan Report, the Government made a commitment to establishing a national centre for sustainable community skills to carry forward many of the recommendations. The Skills and Knowledge Team provided a secondee to the project team working to develop this national centre, announced as the Academy for Sustainable Communities in January 2005.

In principle, the Egan Report provided a helpful basis for progressing a common agenda for skills development for neighbourhood renewal and sustainable communities. Neighbourhood renewal can be regarded as a component of the overarching definition of sustainable communities proposed by the Egan Report:

*'Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.'*

The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities, 2004

The Egan Report proceeded from a review of policy action needed to promote sustainable communities to look at skill needs. In a similar way to The Learning Curve, it recognised the *"success will lie in changing the behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of everyone involved, many of whom may not have realised that in the past they had anything to do with each other, or with sustainable communities"*. It also produced a skills framework which has much in common with that in The Learning Curve. The chairman, Sir John Egan made a point of calling for action to meet needs in relation to *"sadly lacking generic skills"*, including skills in leadership, visioning and strategic planning; working in teams; communication; and managing change. Similarly, his report advocated changes in ways of thinking and acting (strategic and creative thinking; challenging assumptions; a can-do mentality; inclusive approaches; commitments to making things happen). Where there are differences with The Learning Curve, these are differences of emphasis (eg, in relation to community engagement and skills *in* communities), plus much greater emphasis on the knowledge base relating to the built environment, and skills in financial appraisal and attracting development finance.

References to 'neighbourhood renewal' in the Egan report, however, are limited, eg, with mention of the Learning Curve skills framework and a compliment to Renewal.net as a good working example of on-line access to evidence-based practice. The report identified 'neighbourhood renewal and regeneration practitioners' as a cross-cutting occupational category within its overall ambit. There are several references to RCEs as key partners in developing a "more joined up approach to skills development", and to their roles in brokering secondments, helping to create cross-disciplinary teams for specific projects, and encouraging more entrants into core occupations. Specific recommendations mentioning the NRU refer to ensuring availability of relevant information and enhancing *"the development of knowledge networks for communities, linking key players in the community - LA, schools, local employers, colleges and universities, residents groups, etc"*.

Significant overlaps with the interests of the NRU Skills and Knowledge Programme include promotion of generic skills in professional training and continuing professional development (CPD), development of occupational benchmarks, encouragement of cross-sector working, an on-line tool to provide access to information about sustainable communities, and councillor training. The Project Task Group has taken as its starting point the Egan recommendation that the national centre should have as its aim the development of “*world class skill sets amongst all those involved in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities*” through objectives including:

- providing a high profile national focus for skills development and research
- working with partners to provide and promote excellence in sustainable community skills development
- acting as a catalyst for innovation and a focus for national and international debate on sustainable community skills issues
- acting as a resource and communications hub on the sustainable communities agenda

The Egan Report did not draw attention to the NRU Skills and Knowledge programme as a source of learning about ‘what works’, relevant to taking forward its proposals. We note from our fieldwork and interviews within the Civil Service, that there can be tendencies for people to view ‘neighbourhood renewal’ as something different to ‘sustainable communities’, and that the priority for RCEs should be on built environment aspects of renewal. Plans for the development of the Academy for Sustainable Skills must address this, and ensure that neighbourhood renewal needs (from practitioner and policy perspectives) are fully taken into consideration.

### **3.2 GO Strategies**

As we noted above, a significant part of the Skills and Knowledge programme budget has been devoted to regional activities, with GOs tasked to produce and implement annual Skills and Knowledge Action Plans (SKAPs). These were originally intended to:

- support development of local neighbourhood renewal strategies
- support delivery of neighbourhood renewal pathfinder programmes
- identify and share good practice
- develop the regional knowledge and learning infrastructure
- encourage a culture of learning for residents, practitioners, professionals, civil servants, and their organisations

In the first two years of SKAPs, NRU guidance left a great deal to the discretion to individual GOs, though in 2004-05, objectives have been tied more closely to the NRU business planning priorities - and thereby to support for performance improvement. Support for internal GO staff development has also become a more prominent component of SKAPs. Typically, SKAPs bring together an assortment of projects, rather than setting out a regional strategy for neighbourhood renewal skills and partnership capacity building. The nature and degree of consultation on these plans has varied in terms of involvement with others, within the GO and externally.

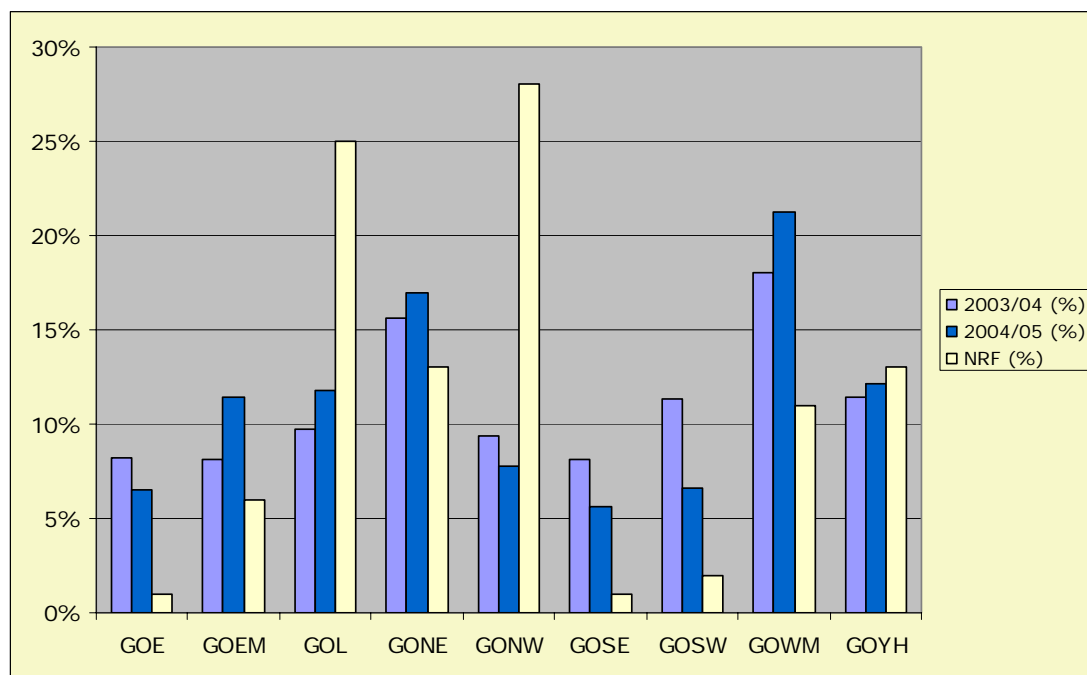
The balance of activities undertaken by GO Skills and Knowledge staff has varied amongst GOs, with some playing more of a hands-on role than others, eg, in providing

support and advice, organising events and networks, and researching case studies. In some GOs, there has been a tendency to see 'Skills and Knowledge' as being in a box rather than as a mainstream GO activity, though there are some signs that this has diminished, as programme staff have seen more of the benefits of Skills and Knowledge actions and there is greater understanding of the links between these and performance improvement. Several regions have recruited secondees to bolster their Skills and Knowledge function, usually individuals who have more grounding in skills and knowledge matters (especially community-based learning) than existing GO staff. Otherwise, SKAPs are delivered by partner organisations, consultants and NRAs.

### Skills and Knowledge Action Plans

Figure 1 shows the relative shares of funds allocated to GOs in 2003-04 and 2004-05, compared with their share of the national NRF budget. Regional shares reflect bids made by GOs and subsequent negotiation with the NRU, rather than being based on a formula according to a 'needs' criterion or some other basis. The total budget accounted for by GO SKAPs in 2004-05 is £2.5m (nearly half of a total NRU Skills and Knowledge budget of £5.09m), similar to the 2003-04 budget<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 1 Regional shares of SKAP funding, compared to NRF shares, 2003/04 and 2004/05**



*For comparative purposes, the percentages are calculated on totals which include NRU funding other than SKAP, eg. for Single Local Management Centres and race equality training.*

Comparison with regional shares of NRF (as a proxy for 'need') shows that East, East Midlands, North East, South East, South West and West Midlands have been relatively favoured, while there is a significant gap for London and North West, regions with the

<sup>4</sup> GOs have also been the channel for RCE development funding - which has provided a further £1m in 2004-05, half from the NRU and half from the ODPM Sustainable Communities Development Unit.



heaviest concentrations of NRF LSPs. Our interviews with GO staff brought out a number of explanatory factors:

- the baseline in each region with regard to expressed demands from LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships, GO staff resources and background, partner relationships, etc
- the substantial learning curve associated with a new strategy (with the shift to mainstreaming, emphasis on community engagement, the introduction of LSPs and CENs, etc) *and* with developing a new approach to supporting implementation through Skills and Knowledge
- success in the previous years in delivering the plan to profile
- receptiveness of GO Neighbourhood Renewal programme staff to embrace what the Skills and Knowledge Programme has to offer
- caution in trying to ensure that funds will be used in ways which add most value (recognising that GO-sponsored activities take place in a 'marketplace' where there are other learning events and programmes, networks, websites, etc which compete for people's time and money)
- other funding for neighbourhood renewal-related Skills and Knowledge in each region (eg, in both North East and North West core funds for regional networks have been provided by SRB and thus subsequently through the RDA)

The NRU had also agreed that Skills and Knowledge budgets can be used outside NRF areas in the less urban regions to support action against social exclusion - particularly relevant to GO East, GOSE and GOSW. (We note that there has been a more even spread of NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders across the regions.)

All GOs have adopted an iterative, 'suck it and see' approach, trying out different initiatives, sometimes in a very hands-on way. Several GOs acknowledged that their approach has been largely reactive, responding to 'wants' expressed by local partnerships and partner organisations rather than 'needs' identified through more strategic processes asking, 'what is it that that we need to know and develop if we are to achieve our neighbourhood renewal goals?' This is in part a function of the stage of development of local partnerships and their strategies; the question can be difficult for partnerships to answer without the context of them already having developed a clear set of strategic objectives and priorities. Only comparatively recently (partly in the context of RCE development) have several GOs commissioned or supported projects investigating learning and partnership/ organisational development needs. Notable examples have included research into practitioner needs in the South West and into LSP board member development needs in the West Midlands, while GO East and GONW/ GOSW (jointly) have funded projects looking at the development needs of regeneration partnerships in neighbourhood renewal and other regeneration areas.

Increasingly, however, SKAPs have shown innovative elements (eg, more emphasis on active learning, less on presentation-based seminars) and greater focus on how learning activities can contribute to the achievement of floor targets, national and local. With the increased NRU focus on using Skills and Knowledge funds to support improved delivery, these have become relatively more strategic and cohesive.

## *Differences between GO Skills and Knowledge Plans*

Figure 2 provides a broad breakdown of GO activities contained in 2004-05 SKAPs. Substantial proportions have been earmarked for regional networks and networking (23%) and for improvement and research activities geared to achievement of Floor Targets (20%). Next come learning programmes and events (17%), internal GO development (13%), Renewal.net and related good practice/ knowledge management actions (10%), and activities relating to community engagement (9%)<sup>5</sup>. (These figures do not include the additional funding for RCE development, some of which has been used explicitly for neighbourhood renewal learning activities.) To some extent the pattern reflects previous years' priorities and commitments (including actions building on earlier projects). The main change has been a reduction in one-off or short series of seminar-type events - with a significant shift to Floor Target-related activity. There has also been an underlying trend towards commissioning suppliers to provide a package of services, and increased interest in action learning as a method for addressing learning needs.

Unsurprisingly given the scope to tailor activities to regional circumstances, there have been quite marked variations in Government Office budgets and priorities. We describe some of the more significant differences between GOs and some of the similarities below:

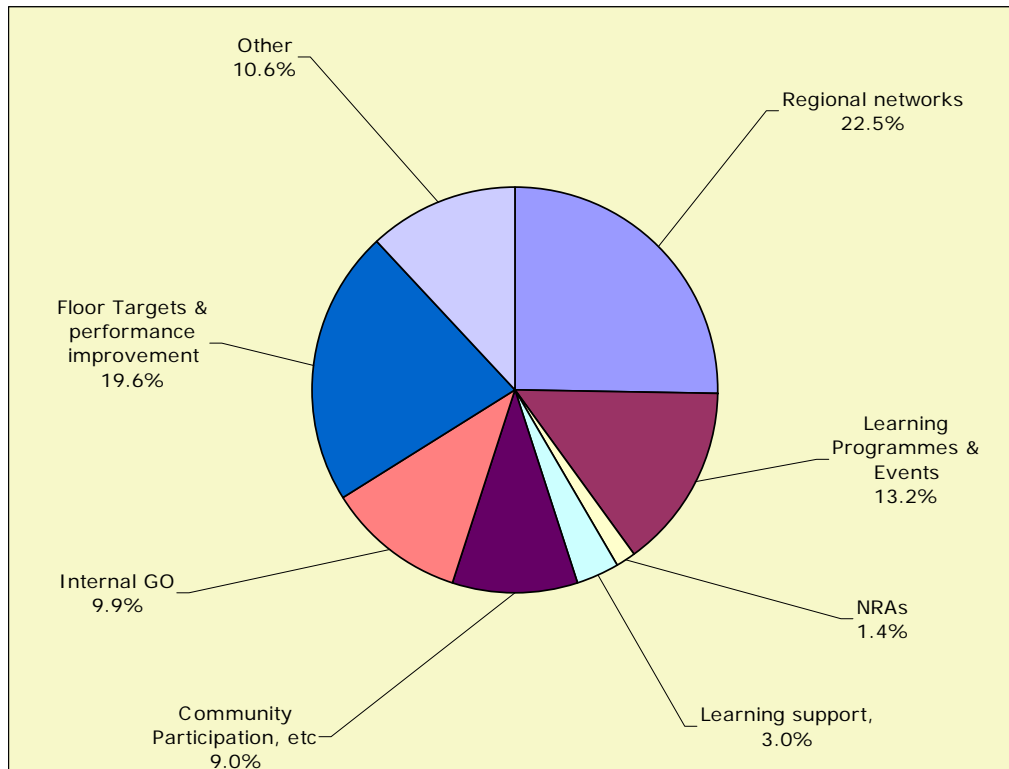
### *Networks*

- Several GOs continue to allocate substantial proportions of their SKAP budgets to the **Regeneration Networks** which have been part of the National Regeneration Networks Initiative (see our Background Report 5 on Regional Networks). These include the broadly-based regeneration networks (Community Renewal Network East - 26% of the GO East SKAP budget; SEE-Regen in the South East - 33%; Regeneration South West, 42%) or, in the case of London Renewal.net (22%) supporting NDC and Neighbourhood Management partnerships.
- Planned spend relating to networking associated with **Community Participation Programmes** is more prominent than elsewhere in London (26%, mainly on workshops for Community Empowerment Networks) and East Midlands (12%, on activities including a regional CEN network, and events on business and BME involvement in LSPs). Other regions including NW, SE, WM and YH have also made provision to bring CENs together.
- Several regions are resourcing **networks dedicated to LSPs, NDC and Neighbourhood Management**, eg, in the East Midlands, networks for LSPs and neighbourhood management; while GOSE has made provision for an NDC/NM network, an LSP network, themed LSP events and a 'virtual' LSP group. Other examples include the North East LSP Learning Network (of learning and performance improvement 'champions' from LSPs), and in the North West, the GO has supported a regional NDC Network, funding the Co-ordinator post to mid 2004 at which point the NDCs themselves took over the funding responsibility. This network has fostered thematic networks on housing, sport and education associated with, but not exclusive to, the North West NDCs.

---

<sup>5</sup> The low proportion for NRAs reflects solely regional activities to network and promote NRAs and learn from NRA assignments. The NRA budget is administered centrally by the NRU.

**Figure 2 Planned GO SKAP Activities, 2004-05**



- GOWM has packaged a number of activities as part of a regional Leadership and Partnership Development Programme. These include separate networks for LSP, NDC, Neighbourhood Management, and Regeneration Zone managers plus tailored, support for the individual managers. GOWM also has a secondee working with RegenWM on a project to strengthen existing regeneration networks across the region, and otherwise liaise and contribute to a joint programme of activities.
- Thinking along related lines to GOWM, GOYH is supporting a Regional Learning Programme for LSPs and Regeneration Partnerships which includes an LSP Knowledge Exchange (network meetings for LSP managers and support staff), neighbourhood renewal delivery events and action learning groups. It is also funding the South Yorkshire Regeneration Network (from additional ODPM Single Local Management Centre - SLMC - funding<sup>6</sup>).

*Renewal.net and 'What Works'*

- budgeted action in support of Renewal.net and related 'what works'-type activities takes up a significant proportion of the GONE budget (22% - case studies concentrating on the effective use of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund), and East Midlands (23% - which includes researching case studies and a 'Writers in Residence' network).
- GOYH have supported the 'Writing Renewal' project over two years, which has sought to raise awareness and promote the role of writing as a catalyst for regeneration. Case studies are being generated for Renewal.net as well as for

<sup>6</sup> SLMCs are an approach, promoted by the RCU, to identify and resolve bureaucratic barriers to effective local delivery of area-based initiatives. SLMC funding also contributes to several other GO SKAPs for local initiatives, eg, in Luton, Sunderland and Derby.

- regional publication. Another project is 'Pride of Place', researching a book intended to draw out the ingredients of sustainable communities, along with a CD-ROM/ web version incorporating a 'walk-round model village' where users visit and hear recorded interviews with key individuals. Both projects have sought to make 'what works' material available in ways which will appeal to wider audiences than say Renewal.net or GO events.
- Actions in other regions include case studies (London; South East; and in the East, sourced via the Community Regeneration Network East), the development of regional pages on Renewal.net (London; East Midlands; South West) and linking the London NDC/NM website to Renewal.net.
  - GONW and GOWM have not allocated funds to Renewal.net activity, preferring to concentrate their interest on 'what works' to activities with their RCE. RegenWM, for example, have a project exploring what 'best practice' means, and run a competition to identify the most transferable project, the most effective evaluation, and 'Roses from the Ashes', highlighting the ability to learn from failure.

#### *Floor Targets and Improvement Planning*

- To varying extents, floor targets, performance management and improvement planning are themes picked up in programmes of activity pursued by regional networks and GO events. Additional activities include, however:
  - ◆ East Midlands (10% on funding for 'Opportunity Statements', reviewing what works in addressing floor targets)
  - ◆ GOWM programmes to demonstrate the potential for closing the gap in the most deprived neighbourhoods
  - ◆ GOYH: 'New Localism' project on neighbourhood delivery of services (a health-based model and learning event for social enterprises)
  - ◆ GONE: improve access to quality information (linked to the development of the SELD programme)
  - ◆ GONW: a Places-type project in Burnley reviewing floor target performance, data requirements, and action/ improvement planning
- GOYH have found it particularly useful to have a secondee from the Audit Commission as a performance management adviser, working with LSPs to raise awareness of NRU requirements and prepare them for the PMF validation stage, and assisting the GO in moderating the final assessments.
- With the exception of GOWM, budgets identified by GOs for improvement actions with *individual* LSPs were held in a single pot, subject to agreement with the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team. GOWM were treated as an exception in introducing customised agreements with individual NRF LSPs.

#### *Learning programmes and other learning support*

- Other current or planned learning programmes and learning support included:
  - ◆ development of a web-based assessment tool by Sheffield First (GOYH) - building on an earlier learning needs assessment and review of learning provision, linked to The Learning Curve Skills Framework (This was one of a number of partnership-specific projects which GOYH has supported. Others have included the Barnsley Neighbourhood Management training pilot and Doncaster awareness raising for frontline staff. GOYH in the past have also made small grants available to LSPs to develop their learning plans and activities.)

- ◆ the 'On Board' training programme run by Regional Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum (the regional voluntary and community sector network), aimed at voluntary and community sector representatives on LSPs, Neighbourhood Management pathfinders and NDCs
- ◆ GOWM Regeneration Graduate Apprenticeship Scheme (run by RegenWM)
- ◆ GOSW: training and development for NDC resident board members and staff (eg, on project management and appraisal; working with the media; working with BME communities; conflict analysis); project cycle management training (including training trainers in this technique)
- In previous years, there have also been projects (eg, in North West and West Midlands) to explore accreditation of learning needs and accreditation for community activists/ resident board members. These made the case for action, which is being taken forward through the relevant RCE, linked to the NRU's Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Learning project and the development of the National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills. GOYH have sponsored the development and launch of an OCN qualifications programme, and an earlier conference on voluntary and community sector skills<sup>7</sup>.

#### *Internal GO staff development*

- Differences in allocation to internal GO development are particularly marked, with a range of 0% (a GO which planned to carry out limited activities entirely from other GO funding) to 22%. The upper case is that of GONE, who have used SKAP funds to contribute to a 'talent mapping' (needs analysis) exercise and are now funding a leadership development programme. Next highest priority has been given by GOYH (16%) including plans for a skills audit of the Neighbourhood Renewal Team along with networking, regional events programme and in-house training.
- GONW have made provision (13%) for both individual learning and team-based activity to build staff skills for supporting programme delivery. GOWM (8%) includes a leadership development programme and joint activities with AWM staff. GOSE propose actions to support staff in their roles in relation to Floor Targets, and also to fund training to meet needs identified in personal development plans. GOEM have planned for a range of learning opportunities (seminars, shadowing, secondments, workshops) and carrying out a self assessment exercise.

Expenditure allocated in relation to NRAs is small (given that the NRA budget is administered centrally by the NRU), primarily funding events to foster contacts between GOs, partnerships and NRAs. (A regional breakdown of NRA assignments can be found in Background Report 3.)

The current picture is incomplete without reference to the additional ODPM funding routed through GOs to RCEs. This has been a mixture of development funding (business planning, staff recruitment, etc) and projects, either commissioned or developed as a joint activity. Several have neighbourhood renewal dimensions, directly or indirectly. Examples include:

---

<sup>7</sup> The programme includes national qualification units in Running a Small Business, Managing Volunteers and Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations, and regional units (from entry level up) linked to Behaviours, Skills and Knowledge outlined in the Learning Curve Skills Framework.

- an on-line ‘expert system’ – a diagnostic service to help users clarify needs, find evidence and contacts, etc (North East)
- Introduction to Regeneration programme, a buddying initiative and learning bursaries (East Midlands)
- masterclasses and other events (North West)
- partnership skills training (South West)
- best practice awards, graduate apprenticeships, and a pilot multi-disciplinary learning programme (West Midlands)

GOs have been looking to ways of strengthening RCE development and considering their respective roles, typically looking to RCE functions, eg, in promoting networking/acting as a bridge, and improving communications between sectors, running events and commissioning high quality training. We found that not all GOs and regional partners shared a common, well-developed view of what the core functions of an RCE should be, and it cannot be assumed that RCEs will be able to play similar roles in all regions. Some GOs have had to argue strongly in favour of neighbourhood renewal priorities, in a context where other partners have been more concerned about needs relating to physical regeneration. Several GO interviewees also expressed concerns about the financial sustainability of RCEs - in that RCEs can only expect limited further core and development funding and must increasingly find other ways to generate income and the surpluses needed for survival as independent bodies.

### *Commentary on GO strategies and contributions*

The analysis of GO Skills and Knowledge Action Plans provides examples of ways in which GOs are fulfilling their roles, akin to the NRU centrally, in providing regional *leadership* for the Skills and Knowledge agenda; *stimulating demand* for and take-up of learning and evidence-based approaches, and *improving supply* of learning opportunities.

The *leadership* role has been pursued as part of the overall promotion by GOs of the neighbourhood renewal agenda and the need for change and improvement if neighbourhood renewal targets are to be achieved. It should be seen in the context of the wider set of GO relationship building activities, including collaboration with RDAs (eg, in developing RCEs) and working with other regional partners to review and develop regional networks.

GOs (in parallel ways to the NRU centrally) can also play a leadership role on skills and knowledge by, eg:

- demonstrating how their own investment in learning and development helps them improve what they themselves offer
- promoting pilots designed for learning and dissemination purposes, ensuring dissemination activities are well-designed and giving them a high profile
- engaging directly with opinion formers and decision makers

GOWM in particular have been very conscious of the need to get others to take responsibility for skills and knowledge actions, seeing their role as to “*catalyse, stimulate, pump-prime*”. They have sought to “*create activity, presence and excitement, and get people in the same room and talking*”. Initially, their philosophy was “*just do it*” - to provide a platform for

future development. They see their approach as a journey, with an iterative process of taking stock of needs/ interests and planning future activities. As they have proceeded, they see their role all the closer to RegenWM, the first RCE to be up and running, and to whom they have seconded a member of staff. GOWM also recognise the importance of influencing other developments in the region, such as the Local Government Capacity Building programme (which may have an LSP-oriented dimension) and Strategic Area Reviews (StARs)<sup>8</sup>.

GOs have experienced a steep learning curve as they have sought to develop their Skills and Knowledge activities. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was a recent innovation, the emphasis on skills and knowledge was new for a government regeneration strategy, and GOs have not had this role (or budget) before. They have largely relied on staff without specialist background in organisational learning, training delivery or training procurement, and this has affected their confidence and ability to influence others. Only in the North East and North West were there existing regeneration networks at regional level with potential to help deliver the neighbourhood renewal skills agenda. As a consequence:

- GOs have taken time to work out what makes strategic sense in promoting the regional neighbourhood skills and knowledge agenda, and what makes best use of their own time. Many SKAPs have been an assortment of projects rather than a coherent strategy, and it is difficult to see how some projects are likely to make a significant contribution towards improving partnership performance.
- GO Skills and Knowledge staff have encountered - to varying degrees - a challenge in winning support from programme colleagues and from other GO staff in related fields who might also be expected to share an interest in capacity building.
- They have also had a challenge in promoting skills and knowledge messages in a context where partnership managers and representatives have been too busy, or not inclined to see skills and knowledge activities as a priority, or unaware of their development needs. It has been difficult to strike a balance between asking partnerships what they want, and providing a lead.

Most progress has been made where GOs have allocated dedicated staff time to the Skills and Knowledge function. These GOs tend to be the ones which have made most progress in developing in-house staff development activities and have been better positioned to argue for sizeable budgets for their SKAPs. They have also gained greater awareness of needs and 'what works'.

In some regions, a number of GO staff felt that more progress has been made with NDCs than other forms of partnership, and in all regions there were concerns about the extent to which LSPs have made progress in their approaches to embedding learning and improvement. The over-riding sense is that GOs have faced an "*uphill battle*" with LSPs on this - echoed in a conclusion in the main report from the LSP formative evaluation in 2004<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> StARs are being undertaken by local Learning and Skills Councils as major exercise to reshape training provision, including potentially, steps to improve provision of neighbourhood renewal and community-based learning

<sup>9</sup> M Geddes and others (2004) Evaluation of LSPs: Case study interim report: A baseline of practice, Full Report ODPM NRU)

*“Learning is one of the key facets of a well performing LSP, and there is some but not much, evidence from the case studies about learning practice. There is widespread recognition that organisational change is a slow issue and that it takes time for partners to know each other, understand each other and trust each other. A number of partnerships hold away-days or the like, but there is little time for busy people to engage in such activity, and in general there is reliance on a process of experiential evolution as attitudes and behaviour slowly adjust to a new environment.”*

Many hopes within the NRU and GOs have been pinned on how the PMF review process can assist. However, it is one thing to be able to diagnose improvement issues and another to determine and agree how best to address them. Our interviews with GOs suggest that many key players in LSPs are supportive - but do not necessarily understand how best to proceed. This is potentially an important role for NRAs, and could also be supported through case studies and ‘how to do it’ materials<sup>10</sup>.

#### *Working with NRAs*

GOs have increasingly been making use of NRAs in support of their work with neighbourhood renewal partnerships, increasing their ability to engage effectively with partnerships<sup>11</sup>. Figure 3 indicates that East Midlands, North East and South West are taking particular advantage of NRA services (relative to their NRF allocation and number of NDC and NM areas) - with relatively lower usage in London and the North West. GONE in particular have found that early suspicions about NRAs have been overcome (‘were they being sent out by GOs to snoop?’), and now word of mouth from satisfied partnerships is a powerful marketing tool. Increasingly, partnerships are welcoming packages of support (with linked NRA assignments), with evidence of the benefits becoming more widely known (eg, where the performance of individual NDCs has been improved).

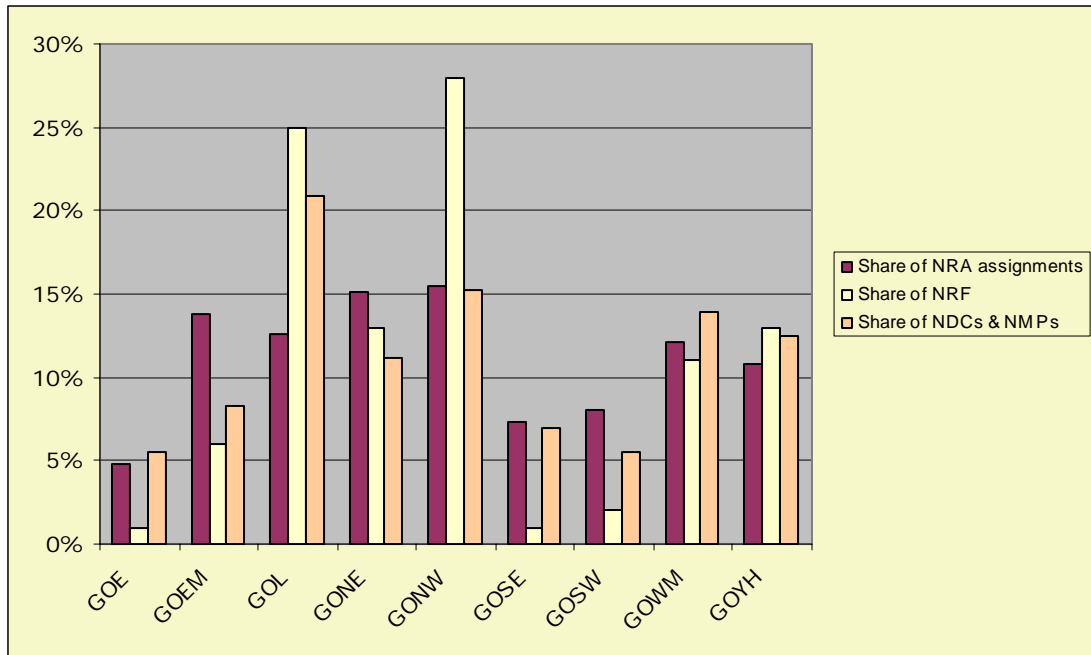
---

<sup>10</sup> This thinking lay behind the development of the Smarter Partnerships website, developed by the Employers Organisation for Local Government: [www.lgpartnerships.com](http://www.lgpartnerships.com). It provides interactive diagnostic tools for identifying partnership development and individual learning needs; prompts for action planning; facilitation tools; case studies; and links to other websites relevant to developing partnership skills. The partnership review tool is being used in the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills training programme.

<sup>11</sup> Background Report 3 provides further information on the use and benefits of NRAs.



**Figure 3 Regional distribution of NRA assignments compared to regional NRF allocations and presence of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and NDCs**



Source: NRA data (December 2002 to mid-June 2004)

*Improving supply of learning opportunities*

The role of GOs in *improving the range and quality of provision of learning opportunities* has concentrated mainly on supporting provision through regional networks, either generic regeneration networks and specific to, eg, NDCs/ neighbourhood management, LSPs, or CENs. Some GOs opted to await the development of the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme, while others have supported the development of initiatives like Regen School in their region. GOs have increasingly recognised the need for participative events, and tailoring the content all the more closely to practical issues and opportunities that prospective participants want to tackle. The theme of ‘active learning’ - promoted in The Learning Curve - has come more to the fore. GOs are looking for themes which people find compelling, relevant and worth making the time to attend.

On improving the supply of evidence sources, this is being pursued mainly through researching case studies for Renewal.net, and related activities such as the Dearne Valley Story (intended to capture the experience of this successful City Challenge area in South Yorkshire) and ‘writers in residence’. Some GOs have been encouraging neighbourhood partnerships and initiatives to write up their experiences for Renewal.net (one example involving NRA support was the work on citizen juries by Hyson Green and Radford NDC in Nottingham). GONE have funded Regeneration Exchange and the University of Teesside to review how LSPs in the region are using NRF, and produce case studies.

*Promotion of Community Learning Chests*

We did not find in our GO interviews much awareness about the take-up and use of Community Learning Chests (CLCs), and thus of the role these have been playing in addressing grass-roots learning needs. The parallel evaluation of the Community Participation Programme has highlighted some imaginative use of CLCs but overall, Community Empowerment Networks have been unclear about how best to use the funds. There has tended to be little strategic relationship between access to the funds and

goals for community involvement in neighbourhood renewal. The main benefits have occurred where lead organisations have used CLC to introduce groups to formal learning opportunities for the first time and encourage them to think about their learning needs.)

#### *Equality and diversity in GO SKAPs*

Most SKAPs have included some action in relation to *equality and diversity*, and community cohesion often features at least as a learning theme. GOs have, for example, taken part in training activities with the NRU on community conflict resolution and the Race Relations Amendment Act. GOL are promoting Community Cohesion activities and running race equality training, as have GOE and GOSE. GOSW have given priority to equality and diversity, running awareness training and supporting a Regional Advisory Group on race equality (prompted by an active BME voluntary sector in Bristol) and a regional learning group on mainstreaming community cohesion. GONW have commissioned diversity training which they are piloting with the region's NDCs with potential to extend more widely at a later stage.

Relatively few GO actions have been targeted explicitly at black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Examples include sponsorship by GOYH of a regional seminar, 'Are black communities moving in the right direction?', to review progress on BME issues relating to education, employment and regeneration, and research undertaken through BECON (the regional BME voluntary sector network in the North East), supported by GONE. This project adopted participatory action research to identify barriers to the take-up of capacity building/ training opportunities amongst BME communities in the region. This highlighted issues about access to learning opportunities for front line staff and (especially) volunteers. Findings included low awareness of opportunities and limited participant involvement in the design of provision and in decisions within groups and organisations as to who gets training and on what. The Community Participation Programme evaluation (Taylor and others, 2004, forthcoming) notes that the extent to which the CPP has reached and benefited BME communities has depended on how well connected they are as part of the VCS infrastructure.

#### *Monitoring and evaluating Skills and Knowledge activities*

Most GOs have tended not to review systematically what they have funded on Skills and Knowledge nor draw and share lessons widely. To date there has been little evaluation, while monitoring of activities has been concerned with participant satisfaction with event quality and not attempted to ascertain what people have learned and plan to do (in line with the model for this evaluation). Evaluations to have been carried out include that of the GOWM 'Tuesday Set' of topical seminars. Many GO events have been received positively, often for the quality of presentations and usually the chance to network, although others have drawn criticism. GOs have responded to constructive feedback and typically sought to make events more interactive, providing more opportunity for participants to share experiences in smaller groups and work on specific tasks.

There are increasing linkages across GOs in 'joining up' various aspects of government policy, including capacity building and interventions with regard to poorer performing services/ agencies, though more can be made of these. The SELD project, for example, points to better use of regional infrastructure resources, linking RCEs and Regional Observatories.

### **Feedback from the evaluation fieldwork**

In Background Report 2, we set out the findings from our area fieldwork. In each of our nine LSP areas in three regions, we asked interviewees about the extent to which they been influenced by the work of the NRU and their Government Office in developing their neighbourhood renewal learning activities.

- Across all interviewees, we found that over a third (38%) had been influenced by the NRU to a reasonable extent ('moderate', 'significant' or 'very significant'), and 42% by their GO. Some 35% and 31% considered that they had not been influenced at all - though it must be borne in mind that the spread of our interviewees included many (eg, in public bodies with thematic responsibilities) who do relate very directly to the NRU/ GO and who are involved in learning for neighbourhood renewal. (The proportions for partnership managers and support officers are higher).
- This influence was mainly through advice, guidance and ideas (55% of those influenced); 38% through NRA support; and 28% through encouragement to invest in skills and knowledge (with The Learning Curve document itself helping to substantiate the case for action). The nature of their role means that GOs are much closer to individual partnerships than the NRU, and the bulk of informal feedback from LSPs in the case study areas was in most cases very positive about the supportive role that the GO has played in general, not just in relation to skills and knowledge.
- The main requests for further NRU and GOs assistance were: information and advice on what works (30%); specific learning opportunities (eg, on mainstreaming and LSP/CEN collaboration - 24%); improved communications (including greater consistency in advice provided - 23%); support for networking (14%) and technical assistance, including NRAs (13%). Other requests related to practical and moral support for partners in implementing their partnership learning plan, signposting to relevant learning opportunities and providers, and access to further resources. Action to help develop integrated performance management systems was also raised.
- Just over a third (36%) had attended GO events. Of these, 38% reported the main benefit as improved awareness of policy developments; 32%, access to information, evidence or experience not otherwise accessible; and 31% knowledge of 'what works'. Networking benefits also underpinned many participant comments. Half had used the information gained in their partnership work and 40% had passed details onto to others. 29% felt that the GO events had led to a better informed debate within their partnership, and 20% that they had provided a solution to a particular problem or identified a way forward.

## 4 NRU and GOs as 'Learning Organisations'

### 4.1 A focus on 'learning organisations'

The Learning Curve highlighted the issues relating to capacity within Government to drive and support implementation of the National Strategy Action Plan, in terms of individual skills and knowledge and the extent to which the NRU and Government Offices are 'learning organisations', embodying good practice in fostering learning and performance improvement. We were asked to investigate this as part of the evaluation and we sought to explore this through our interviews with NRU and GO staff. Drawing on Pearn and others (1995) these covered, eg, the extent to which there is:

- a defined learning and organisational development agenda, which is given priority by managers and staff
- a culture which encourages learning and welcomes challenge and innovation
- active search for and applying evidence of what works (including for this evaluation, use of Renewal.net)
- formal and informal ways of capturing and sharing skills and knowledge
- avoiding making the same mistakes over and over again

We proceed to comment NRU/ GO relationships - crucial within the context of the overall policy delivery chain - and draw out suggestions for improvement.

### 4.2 NRU as a learning organisation

#### *Priority to personal rather than organisational development*

Current practice in the NRU features well-established processes for personal development planning, occasional awaydays for the whole Unit and individual teams, and lunchtime topical seminars. We found from our interviews that the culture in NRU tends to be seen as supportive of *individual* learning: there are opportunities but the extent to which people take advantage of these depends very much on the individual. However, learning and development needs which flow from neighbourhood renewal delivery priorities appear not to be built sufficiently and consistently into team and personal development plans. There are also skill gaps for many staff relating to their lack of neighbourhood renewal experience (most recently highlighted by an NRU staff awayday in May 2004). Staff who have come in from outside the civil service may have more experience, but they may also have learning needs relating to working within government (eg, on resource accounting, policy formulation and programme design).

There were concerns about high staff turnover and a relatively low value placed within civil service culture on specialist knowledge - both of which diminish the organisation's capacity to build knowledge and transfer learning in neighbourhood renewal. We note that 'specialist' staff in the NRU and GOs (say, responsible for policy links on crime or education) do not necessarily have in-depth background in these fields, and may have limited ability to comment on 'what works', the plausibility of particular approaches, or detailed knowledge of practical implementation issues - especially when new to a role. Postings tend not to be long enough for individuals to perceive the value in developing neighbourhood renewal-specific expertise that may not be relevant to their next job.

There were related comments that the Civil Service competency framework (used for personal appraisal and development planning) tends to underplay the importance of subject knowledge in relevant policy fields and some critical skills of growing importance in partnership working and relationship management, including in carrying out 'support and challenge' roles. A suggested consequence is that use of the framework may lead to staff missing important areas of personal and team development need. There are steps in hand to strengthen the neighbourhood renewal subject content in the induction of new NRU staff; and there are current discussions with team leaders on building neighbourhood renewal-related learning into their own plans.

*Need to capitalise on knowledge gained*

While the NRU promotes evidence-based approaches, it was suggested that insufficient use is made of evaluations and opportunities have been missed to capture and use management information and feedback from GOs and the field, eg, from performance management reviews carried out in 2003. There is more awareness now of the need to capitalise on such sources of evidence - as demonstrated, for example, by work commissioned from NRAs to review GO summaries of LSP performance reviews. There is also need to improve how research findings are disseminated, thinking through the needs of particular audiences and how best to communicate with them - along with devoting adequate resources to the task. The R&D team have produced guidance for research contractors, to be published on Renewal.net.

*Knowledge and skills for cross-government working*

Policy staff commented on the onus on them to make the running with other departments in ensuring National Strategy objectives feature in the latter's policies, and on the sheer difficulty they have in finding the time to keep up with policy developments and connections across neighbourhood renewal interests. There are concerns within and outside the NRU about how well teams communicate and present a common view to the outside world, and related comments about the need to improve cross-unit working within ODPM. Members of the Skills and Knowledge Team themselves recognise that they can do more to work with policy staff (eg, in planning expert seminars on floor target themes). The importance of 'internal customer' relationships - where teams are mutually dependent on others for successful implementation of tasks - is not always recognised. This links to the broader need for partnership working skills within government (managing across departments and agencies as well as between tiers in the delivery chain).

A theme throughout the evaluation is the importance of seeking to anticipate the practical implications of policy developments, such as:

- what an outcomes-based approach means, in terms of data requirements, baselines, proxy indicators and trajectories, and the support local areas need to implement this
- performance management, involving partners all with different systems, targets and requirements
- community engagement, developing a framework to measure success - where there may not be local agreement at the outset about what indicators to use

Proposed training relating to the introduction of Local Area Agreements is one example which recognises this need. This builds on the experience of events on performance

management and Floor Target Action Planning earlier in 2004 and similarly will involve GOs and NRAs.

*ODPM Excellence in Delivery programme*

A number of the needs which flow from this analysis should be addressed in the context of implementing the ODPM's Excellence in Delivery programme in the NRU. This is being introduced to support ODPM change management, and promote generic skills which have been undervalued in the past within the civil service (eg, project management and risk assessment). It is built around five themes:

- leadership (improving how the Department is led by senior managers)
- engaging stakeholders (making the most of collaborative working)
- managing delivery (improving project and programme management)
- human resources (keeping skills and experience up to date)
- financial management (improving financial procedures and making resources go further)

Elements include a leadership plan (implementing Civil Service-wide proposals for Improving Leadership Capacity), a new stakeholder engagement strategy, training in programme and project management training and a new training and development strategy. Competencies used in staff appraisal have been revised to reflect the principles underpinning Excellence in Delivery, and individual teams have been encouraged to assess skill needs to meet personal and team objectives and plan how best to meet these (eg, through training, shadowing, secondments and mentoring). There is also action to embed understanding and use of Resource Accounting and Budgeting (the Government's framework for reporting on and analysing expenditure by departmental aim and objectives, related to output measures where possible).

*Gaining experience in the field*

There is a continuing need to promote opportunities for interchange (opportunities for civil servants to work in external organisations on secondment, placement or job shadowing - and vice versa). This features as an action in The Learning Curve, and was the subject of a high proportion of recommendations in the predecessor PAT 16 report, Learning Lessons. This commented on the need for a shift in organisational culture and greater understanding of poor neighbourhoods and the realities of implementation, remarking on how few civil servants involved in policy development or programme management have first hand experience of living or working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There is evidence in our evaluation of growing understanding within the NRU and GOs, in part helped by secondments, though our fieldwork did reiterate criticisms of failures to appreciate the realities of partnership working. Sometimes, for example, local partners have felt that policy makers assumed that LSPs sprung into life fully formed, inclusive and capable of effective delivery. Limited practical experience also has implications for performance support roles, in that this typically weakens abilities to diagnose partnership development needs and propose courses of action - and can also affect the credibility of civil servants in partnership roles. The speed of the introduction of LSP PMFs and Floor Target Action Planning was a related area of concern, where initial deadlines were felt to limit the scope for partnership development and learning - in a context where partnerships depend on the *voluntary* input of many people and organisations.

Our interviewees within the civil service felt that there has been less take-up of interchange opportunities than was thought necessary by PAT 16. We found on contacting the Cabinet Office (the civil service lead on Interchange) that there has been no evaluation of the Interchange programme as a whole, and thus less evidence potentially on which to argue the case.

### **4.3 GOs as learning organisations**

#### *Skill needs in GOs and contributions to wider GO development*

GOs have increasingly taken advantage of their regional Skills and Knowledge budgets for internal GO staff development. In addressing priorities in relation to neighbourhood renewal, GOs have used this funding to contribute to their wider change management agenda, given that many of the skills and knowledge needs are common across broader regional governance and joining up government policy more generally. These roles can be difficult to balance, as the evaluation of Area-Based Initiatives (2002)<sup>12</sup> has pointed out:

*“There remains, as always, a tension between a collaborative participative ‘partnership’ role and the role of vetting and authorising bids, approving large projects, and monitoring delivery.”*

There are implications for the skills and behaviours of GO staff at all levels, especially as GOs can only engage effectively in partnerships and relationships with stakeholders by delegating responsibility and providing appropriate support to staff, many of whom may not have played the required roles before. Some of our GO interviewees expressed concern that these requirements have not been fully reflected either in recruitment or staff development, such that relatively junior staff have been expected to play roles almost as organisational development consultants, which can undermine GO credibility with partnerships. The introduction of Performance Management Frameworks and Floor Target Action Planning has raised the bar in demands on GO staff - as further will the introduction of Local Area Agreements (see below). We note that, on Skills and Knowledge, some GOs have identified the need to bring in staff with complementary skills (eg, in community-based learning and in strategic procurement of skills and knowledge services).

In addition to specific subject knowledge needs relating to neighbourhood renewal, the detail of government guidance, etc there is a range of typical skill needs, originally highlighted in The Learning Curve:

- analytical skills (described as “the ability to apply techniques to analyse possibilities, create opportunities and evaluate alternatives”) - spelt out by interviewees to include:
  - ◆ effective use of evidence: knowing sources of ‘what works’, being familiar with research and evaluation findings
  - ◆ knowing what to look for in partnership strategies, delivery plans, improvement plans, and project proposals - including evidence of mainstreaming

---

<sup>12</sup> Stewart and others (2002), Collaboration and Co-ordination in Area-Based Initiatives

- ◆ interpreting data (as a non-specialist), understanding processes to achieve outcomes, and using proxy indicators
- “*ideas leadership*” (stimulating new approaches, different ways of looking at issues, etc) and communication skills more generally
- co-ordinating, influencing, negotiating and brokering (including the need to understand drivers/ constraints on partner bodies)
- “*skills for joining up*”: consensus building and partnership working across central government boundaries
- entrepreneurial and problem-solving behaviours
- reflective practices for ensuring learning from experience

The concept of ‘relationship management’ has come to the fore, where individual members of GO staff have responsibilities for maintaining and developing relationships with local partnerships and partner organisations. Typically, this requires great care, in having to balance needs to be both supportive and challenging - especially in cases of relatively poor performance. Behavioural skills are important - for example, it can undermine relationships to refer to “*failing LSPs*” (as we heard on several occasions) when the evidence may be based on historic data, not on what partnerships are doing now to improve performance. In this context, there is a need to review the ‘state of the art’ of performance intervention, drawing on the experience in other fields of public sector reform<sup>13</sup>, though recognising the particular dimensions of partnership working, especially diffuse chains of accountability and departments and agencies making different demands of their local offices or delivery agents.

To the list of skills above can be added:

- organisational development and change management skills, including partnership diagnostics and approaches to support and intervention which (as the ODPM Local Government Vision paper stresses) avoid a ‘Whitehall knows best’ mentality
- knowing when to deploy/ encourage the use of NRAs at appropriate times and in appropriate ways, and ensure that they are well-briefed and supported as necessary
- implementing internal systems for knowledge management, and ensuring they work as a means of capturing and sharing knowledge
- conflict resolution
- giving advice, eg, on performance management and improvement planning
- diversity awareness

It was clear from our interviews with staff in most GOs that funds available for internal GO Skills and Knowledge had made a difference to internal capabilities. One proxy for this is the quality of GO summary reports produced in autumn 2004 on following LSP performance reviews. Broadly speaking, reports from those GOs which have been more active in developing skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal appear to be the ones which present a more thorough though concise analysis of partnership strengths and development needs, highlighting emerging good practice and identifying significant building blocks which give confidence in LSP capacity to deliver.

---

<sup>13</sup> See, eg, ODPM research on ‘Learning from the experience of recovery’ (Skelcher and others, 2004) and ‘Improvement through inspection - An evaluation of the impact of Ofsted’s work’ (Matthews & Sammons, 2004)



*Internal GO development activities*

Internal GO development activities (sometimes within the neighbourhood renewal function or 'Communities' division, sometimes GO-wide) have included:

*needs analysis*

- 'talent mapping' exercise in GONE - a GO-wide self-assessment survey and staff workshops, intended to review needs against a set of core delivery skills reflecting the evolving GO role. The approach treated 'neighbourhood renewal' as a skills area in its own right, and - amongst other needs - identified development needs for Executive Officers in influencing and negotiating; for some individuals - depending on their jobs - in 'ideas leadership' (described as 'innovating and applying learning'); and for staff in planning/ business functions in consensus building.
- GOWM staff workshops in 2003, preferred as a method to a needs analysis survey. These involved around 60 staff in small groups discussing their roles, development needs and those of others. This succeeded in bringing out barriers to learning and development, raised specific issues, eg, concerning how to enable GO staff to play a more effective role in partnership settings, and identified needs such as negotiation skills. Follow up action included a session in October 2003 to strengthen staff ability to advise on floor targets.

*awareness raising and professional development*

- lunchtime seminars on neighbourhood renewal topics
- problem solving sessions designed to explore how teams can help each other tackle specific challenges (eg, in GOWM)
- attendance at NRU briefings and courses (eg, on conflict resolution)
- development of GO-specific training (eg, GOEM facilitation skills; GONE on influencing and negotiation skills and on performance management frameworks - both generic and NRU-related)
- tailoring of GO-wide provision to include neighbourhood renewal requirements (eg, GONE Leadership Development Programme, which includes specific neighbourhood renewal content and case studies)
- induction briefings (the GOWM modular programme, which is proving to be valuable in updating existing staff as well as for new staff)

*broadening skills and experience*

- provision of interchange opportunities, including inward and outward secondments (eg, GO East have an Interchange Group on Neighbourhood Renewal which has organised site visits and opportunities to shadow street wardens, and are setting up opportunities for NDC area residents to shadow GO staff)

*project-based learning*

- a more recent development has been to introduced project-based learning, activities with learning objectives linked to work tasks: for example, GONE is running a 'business assignment' project, bringing staff together to address the question, 'how can we best support the new Neighbourhood Management pathfinder?', an initiative much welcomed by the newly appointed Neighbourhood Manager. (GONE have also made use of practical materials in

- their leadership training, eg, in simulating LSP issues which GO staff might encounter)
- there is a related intent in GO East, where Geographical Information Groups have been formed on a county-by-county basis to consider 'how can we in the GO best add value, supporting local partners on the Sustainable Communities agenda?'

### *GOs as learning organisations?*

Our interviews with GO staff suggest that GOs show *some* aspects of being learning organisations, capable of adapting effectively to new demands. Organisational cultures and policies do support personal learning - though much is left to individual initiative. On the other hand, staff in most GOs do not feel that there is a defined organisational development and learning agenda (despite being accredited as Investors in People) - linked to the strategic changes that their GO must manage. There is recognition that GOs themselves need to make more and better use of evidence, and there are associated learning needs relating to data analysis and interpretation, and performance management models and methods. There are also concerns - as with the NRU - that GOs internally need to be better joined up and present consistent messages.

A few GOs still rely on conventional personal development planning and the offer of a suite of training opportunities, and have done less to clarify and address needs relating to their neighbourhood renewal responsibilities. There are concerns, too, that previous strategic initiative such as skills audits have not been followed through sufficiently. In contrast, we point to good practice in other GOs where they have attempted to anticipate future job requirements, such as the GONE training on performance management.

GO interviewees did not consider that as organisations they were very effective at capturing and sharing knowledge, especially in building the 'organisational memory'. High turnover of staff and the recruitment of staff new to neighbourhood renewal has tended to compound the problem. And as with learning events organised for partnerships as part of the regional Skills and Knowledge programme, there has been little formal evaluation of in-house training.

A common concern amongst GO Skills and Knowledge Teams has been that of gaining 'buy-in' from other members of staff: Skills and Knowledge Programme activities can be seen as a diversion from their paramount concern for 'delivery, delivery, delivery' or otherwise low priority. Strong support has been forthcoming from other staff where they have seen the relevance of internal staff training or external SKAP actions (eg, improvements in relationships and mutual understanding which have happened through regional networking events).

GOs would welcome further opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. While there are meetings which bring GO staff together, many of our GO interviewees felt that these provided limited opportunities for networking, and more advantage could be taken in organising events with explicit learning objectives.

There is a view within GOs that not enough has been done to share experience across their Skills and Knowledge programme activities, including their internal initiatives. There are cases, however, where GOs can point to transfer of ideas and experience, eg, GONW learning from GOWM in their approach to their induction programme.

### *GO/NRU relationships*

Our interviews also explored relationships between GOs and the NRU, which as we have noted are crucial in the policy delivery chain. These are said to be generally - though not always - positive. GO Skills and Knowledge staff welcome the lead that the NRU has given on skills and knowledge, and the message that learning activities need to be embedded in partnerships further as a means of achieving more effective delivery. They welcomed the 2003-04 SKAP planning guidance for the stronger steer it gave to skills and knowledge activities in support of performance improvement. There are wider - and robust - GO concerns that the NRU has unrealistic expectations of what can be delivered by partnerships on the ground within particular timescales. That said, there *is* understanding of the political and administrative drive for improved performance - though less tolerance of what is perceived as “*do as I say, not as I do*” behaviour on the part of NRU. The picture is not an unusual one - such comments are typical of relations in many policy fields other than neighbourhood renewal. However, the concern must be that there is not as much trust and mutual confidence as there could be.

One factor is that individual GOs have adopted different approaches on some tools, eg, in their deployment of NRAs, and in their priority to supporting the development of Renewal.net. Some GOs present more of a sense of being ‘at one’ with the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team than others.

During the course of the evaluation, there have been tensions around roles, with differing views as to who should lead on performance support for individual partners, with GOs arguing for greater autonomy. This has been accompanied by GO criticism of “*micro-management*” by the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team in negotiating approval of SKAPs - contrasted with previous, ‘laissez-faire’ practice. At the same time, the NRU centrally has had concerns about the range, cost-effectiveness and added value of a number of GO SKAP actions.

Suggestions from GOs for improvements in relationships with the NRU include:

- taking steps to reduce turnover of (NRU and GO) staff, and ensure greater time and space for learning
- greater promotion of the benefits of Skills and Knowledge Programme and tools within NRU and in government departments - and how they assist delivery and the ‘joining up’ agenda
- more effective co-ordination within NRU, ODPM and OGDs, including of planning of events, ministerial and senior civil servant visits, etc
- longer lead times to facilitate better planning and implementation

A key is seeing the relationship as a partnership, a sense of being involved in a common endeavour, and having opportunities to share in developing policy and practice, thereby generating greater ownership. Some GOs have adopted this thinking more than others, eg, in inviting NRU staff to SKAP consultations, case conferencing on LSP annual reviews and the like. Others volunteered that they should do this more. There is an onus too, on the NRU to encourage more GO engagement (eg, in developing policy and guidance). A key to progress will be to provide more work-based opportunities to work

and learn together (building on the experience of previous joint events, eg, on LSP reviews and improvement planning).

GOs remain concerned about difficulties in playing their role in managing the wider 'joining up' agenda: the comments by interviewees tend to endorse the finding by Stewart and others in their research on Area Based Initiatives (from their second interim report, quoted in 'Collaboration and Co-ordination in Area-Based Initiatives', 2002):

*"A lack of integration between central departments creates problems over conflicting objectives, unintended consequences, and contradictory incentives which contribute strongly to the fragmentation and separation of initiatives."*

#### *Meeting the challenge of Local Area Agreements*

In practice, though the neighbourhood renewal agenda is intended to be cross-cutting, it is often seen as one policy area competing for attention. There is a challenge for GOs to bring together a raft of policy developments, where each policy has some impact on neighbourhood renewal and there is scope for synergy in how the GO approaches its tasks. The big test is now the introduction of Local Area Agreements, which can be expected to place more intense demands on GO staff. Proposals in the LAA prospectus are intended to strengthen GOs by giving them the leading role in negotiating and agreeing outcomes for the Stronger and Safer Communities Fund and the 20 pilot LAAs. While ODPM LAA Prospectus states that GOs will focus on outcomes rather than means,

*"...they will also play a challenge role in relation to local authorities and their partners, benchmarking results across them and providing analysis for authorities on what works. They will also be supportive, reinforcing persuasive cases for removing obstacles to the ability of partners to enhance what they can achieve locally and working closely with central Departments on providing these flexibilities."*

The GO Regional Director will oversee a 'regional relationship team' to lead the process for each LAA. The pilots will provide an opportunity to develop the arrangements for such teams, including building the capacity of GOs and developing arrangements for joint working with Government Departments. Regional relationship teams are to be drawn from functional teams within the Government Offices (for example, crime reduction and community safety, education and skills, public health and neighbourhood renewal), working with related agencies (such as the LSC at regional level) in order to assess LAA proposals, and to monitor and evaluate implementation.

In moving forward, it will be important to ensure that there is clarity over the respective roles and functions of the NRU centrally and GOs. What are the critical functions that must be carried out, and who is best placed to do these? From this should follow a keener focus on the skills and knowledge required in GOs and the NRU to deliver policy requirements. We note that the approach behind the Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Renewal Skills project is relevant: functional mapping takes as its starting point the overall mission or purpose of an area of work, then breaks this down into job roles, standards and associated underpinning skills, knowledge and behaviours. This thinking can usefully be applied to considering future roles of the Academy for Sustainable Communities and RCEs, potentially under commission to the NRU.