

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

- Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation -

Background Report 2

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

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This report:

- introduces our approach to the area fieldwork and proceeds to analyse the findings:
- sets out the main factors driving and constraining the development and effectiveness of LSPs, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships in nine LSP areas
- describes how partnerships and partner organisations have identified learning and development needs, and the influence of the NRU and GOs in this
- summarises organisational and individual learning needs identified by needs analyses or observed by interviewees
- reports on approaches taken by partnerships and partner organisations
- draws out implications for NRU and GO support

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. 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 our lead LSP contacts in each of our nine case study areas who were so helpful in providing local background and in identifying potential interviewees. These were: Linda Allport-Hodge (Basildon), Pam Brown (Bolsover), Helen Osler (Derby), Roy Beiley (Great Yarmouth), Alan Helliwell (Leicester), Anne Hawkins (Luton), Brian Astin (Pendle), Michael Heaslip (West Cumbria), and Simon Dale (Wigan).

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1 KEY FINDINGS

Area fieldwork for the Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation involved 221 interviews in three regions (East, East Midlands and North West) involving nine LSP areas. Interviewees were drawn across a spectrum of roles in LSPs, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships. We investigated critical factors driving change and learning; reviewed skills and knowledge needs, how these are being addressed, and benefits gained. We also investigated take-up of Skills and Knowledge Programme tools which are reported on separately in the companion background reports.

Critical needs identified

- Our research confirmed the earlier NRU analysis of critical learning needs contained in the Neighbourhood Renewal Skills Framework set out in ‘The Learning Curve’ strategy document. Critical current needs amongst a range of neighbourhood renewal actors include:

Building the knowledge base

- ◆ using evidence (accessing data; using evaluation to improve the evidence base and develop more robust strategies and projects)
- ◆ understanding ‘what mainstreaming means’ and what works in promoting it
- ◆ understanding policy developments and other factors driving and constraining partner organisations

Developing core skills

- ◆ engaging and influencing service providers/ other partners
- ◆ managing complex change (including putting mainstreaming into practice)
- ◆ building consensus and commitment (and resolving tensions and conflict)
- ◆ making performance management work

Changing behaviours

- ◆ creating conditions for effective collaboration and the learning needed for performance improvement
- ◆ problem solving, including a greater propensity to seek evidence
- ◆ strategic and systems thinking (understanding how all the parts fit together, and lifting sights to concentrate on what matters beyond narrow interests)

- Barriers to addressing these needs included:

at partnership level

- ◆ action to develop skills and knowledge being seen by influential partners as something ‘nice to do’ not a ‘must do’ - despite reasonable levels of awareness of the consequences of *not* acting to address learning and capacity needs
- ◆ uncertainties about where best to start in identifying and addressing needs
- ◆ resource limitations, with LSPs in particular very dependent on the *voluntary* basis of partner contributions

for individuals

- ◆ lack of awareness of what their needs are - with some more experienced people assuming that they do not have any significant needs - whereas the experience of delivering neighbourhood renewal suggests that everyone has had needs (eg, in working out what 'mainstreaming' means and how to manage change successfully in a partnership context)

How partners are addressing local skills and knowledge needs

Needs analyses and plans

- 33% of interviewees had been involved in some form of learning needs analysis relating to the main partnership in which they are involved, in some cases facilitated by an NRA or consultant. Some of these analyses were thorough (involving interviews and focus groups) while others were rudimentary. Some partnerships now have staff with responsibilities for learning and development (eg, Derby Derwent NDC and Leicester Partnership)

Range of learning activities and participants

- A wide range of learning interventions is being pursued (eg, coaching and mentoring, study visits and community conferences) but the most common cited by interviewees were workshops (40%), partnership awaydays (36%) and short training courses (33%). Typically, the participation of interviewees in these had been occasional and had not involved a significant commitment of time.
- The most frequently targeted groups of participants in partnership learning activities have been community representatives (mentioned by 46% interviewees), LSP members (43%), and thematic partnership members (29%). Learning involving local residents was reported by 18% of interviewees, and the same percentage for front-line workers.

Equality and diversity

- 45% interviewees reckoned that their partnerships were addressing equality and diversity objectives directly in their learning activities, and 29% indirectly. Of those that were, the main actions were ensuring accessible venues (39%), consulting prospective participants about their needs and tailoring content to their needs (30%), involving contributors from target groups (29%), and running specific events on equality, diversity and community cohesion themes (29%).

Successful activities

- Just under a third (32%) of interviewees were able to talk about learning activities which they regarded as particularly successful, significant or innovative in achieving their partnership objectives. Of these, 48% of these cited engaging with communities and 44%, working in partnership, as topics where participants were

now better equipped. 42% reckoned that partners had made changes to ways of working, systems or procedures as a direct or indirect consequence of these learning activities, and 39% identified changes in personal behaviours and confidence. Changes in relation to mainstreaming or strategic priorities were lower, at 10% each.

- Examples of successful interventions included:
 - ◆ training and facilitation skills for community representatives and activists (Sharing Skills programme in Wigan), leading to greater confidence in engaging with public agencies and better, and more constructive approaches to negotiation and proposals for service improvement
 - ◆ accredited learning programmes in Bolsover and Luton for voluntary sector managers, leading to improved understanding of neighbourhood renewal and the role of the community in this
 - ◆ a range of development activities in setting up neighbourhood service agreements in Basildon and Workington, leading to improved service delivery
 - ◆ programmes of CEN support for community representatives (eg, in Great Yarmouth), ensuring that they are better equipped to articulate community needs and play their roles as partners
 - ◆ annual conventions in Derby and Wigan, proving the opportunity to bring together members of the LSP, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships and other stakeholders to review progress and identify better ways of working together in future
- Most progress has been made where partners have taken the resourcing of the LSP seriously, where the core LSP executive or co-ordinating group has taken a particular interest, or where there is a learning and development sub-group with some clout. The most developed 'learning culture' was to be found in Wigan, characterised by strong commitment from partnership leaders, regular space to stand back from day-to-day business to reflect and challenge thinking and practice, an emphasis on the use of evidence and 'what works', and extensive opportunities for community representatives to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Wigan and Derby also show how learning and reflection can be built in many ways into partnership practices (through facilitated board events and induction groups), not just in the LSP but also across the local 'family' of partnerships.
- Successful partnership learning activities are marked by ways in which they directly address the needs of participants, in helping them as individuals play their role to the full and driving the partnership delivery agenda.

Principal Recommendations

<p>1. Help equip key change agents (partnership managers, chairs, NRAs) with the tools they need - eg,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing skills in effecting change in a partnership setting • tips, techniques and examples of what others have done (eg, on mainstreaming, strategic commissioning and community engagement) • providing alerts to policy developments which affect key partner motivations and room for manoeuvre 	<p>NRU, GOs, <i>RenewalAcademy</i> and delivery agents</p>
<p>2. Review, capture and disseminate ‘what works’ in addressing prominent partnership learning needs (eg, analytical skills for strategy development and Floor Target Action Planning; mainstreaming and managing change across public agencies; implementation of performance management systems and promotion of performance management cultures)</p>	<p>NRU, GOs, NRAs, <i>RenewalAcademy</i></p>
<p>3. Further develop learning provision for councillors, particularly for their community leadership roles at district and ward level in working with others</p>	<p>NRU, IDeA</p>
<p>4. Support learning initiatives to involve front line workers and residents in service improvement</p>	<p>NRU, GOs</p>
<p>5. Build equality and diversity more firmly into programme planning, in relation to priorities, content and promotion</p>	<p>NRU, GOs, <i>RenewalAcademy</i></p>
<p>6. Work with the Academy for Sustainable Communities to ensure that needs for qualifications are met as part of an overall strategy for workforce development in the sustainable communities/ neighbourhood renewal skills sector</p>	<p>NRU, Academy for Sustainable Communities</p>

2 Introduction

2.1 Local approaches to skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal

Prior to the introduction of the National Strategy, relatively few localities had holistic strategies seeking to improve the prospects of the most deprived communities within them - and most tended to rely on time-limited Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) or other Area Based Initiative funding (such as Health Action Zones) which concentrated on only some of these communities. While later rounds of the SRB stressed the “development of inclusive and effective local partnerships and of local people’s capacity to participate in regeneration initiatives” (SRB Round 6 Guidance), it can be argued that the state of the art in partnership working and community participation was still underdeveloped¹. Few local partner bodies regarded building the skills and knowledge of all involved (agency staff, councillors, etc, as well as local people) as a strategic priority in its own right, critical to successful delivery of their regeneration strategies. This was also true for government departments, national and regional agencies.

Thus many areas were starting from a low base in relation to partners’ understanding of the partnership and skill development needs and how best to address these. Furthermore, the National Strategy embodied a significant shift in focus for regeneration policy, with major implications for practice through its emphases on mainstreaming, community engagement and joining-up policies and partner activities, on a scale and in ways not demanded before. Added to the mix were a government-wide policy shift to performance measured by outcomes rather than outputs, and increased emphasis on the use of evidence in ensuring robust strategies and implementation. Local Strategic Partnerships have been given the lead role in making the National Strategy work on the ground. LSPs have tasks in developing and reviewing Community and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for their areas, co-ordinating service delivery and streamlining partnership arrangements. While LSPs do not have statutory backing, those in the 88 most deprived local authority areas have allocations from the NRU’s Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) to support the necessary changes. There are key roles too, for Community Empowerment Networks (in enabling community representation in LSPs and involvement in neighbourhood partnerships), New Deal for Communities (as an ambitious programme to tackle multiple deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country) and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders (focusing on communities working with local agencies to improve services at neighbourhood level).

At the heart of the National Strategy and its delivery through these partnerships is a major change management exercise. The design of the Strategy is based on a number of key assumptions including:

- a central role for residents in deprived neighbourhoods in driving change, based on their perceptions of needs rather than those assumed by public agencies
- the need for mainstreaming (bending policies and resources to target the most deprived areas, reshaping services and spreading ‘what works’)

¹ See, eg, Henderson and Mayo, 1998; PAT 16, 1999; Johnstone 2000

- leadership and joint working, with greater accountability amongst agencies for service improvement and neighbourhood renewal
- improved quality of information about needs, services, and neighbourhood change
- learning from successes and failures

These are set in the wider context of the Government's drive for public sector reform, with its emphases on devolving and delegating to the front-line, greater responsiveness to citizen needs and expectations, and increased efficiency.

Responding to these requirements can pose extensive demands on a very wide range of people and organisations to learn and adapt to do new things and to do things differently. This report proceeds to explore how partners and individuals have been responding to this change agenda.

2.2 Skills and Knowledge Programme Fieldwork

Fieldwork objectives

Our area fieldwork has sought to inform the overall evaluation of the Skills and Knowledge programme, including:

- providing a qualitative baseline of skills and knowledge needs in neighbourhood renewal areas
- reviewing different approaches to developing skills and knowledge, including use of Skills and Knowledge programme tools
- highlighting differences in needs and take-up by category of people engaged in neighbourhood renewal
- assessing the extent to which the Skills and Knowledge programme is helping people address their learning and development needs and bring about change in policies and practices in pursuit of neighbourhood renewal objectives and floor targets
- identify what is working and what is not in the delivery of the Skills and Knowledge Programme

This report concentrates on reviewing the findings from our survey work on partnership, organisational and individual development needs and on how neighbourhood renewal actors are addressing these, identifying implications for support provided through NRU and GO Skills and Knowledge Programme activities. We deal specifically with the take-up of Skills and Knowledge Programme tools in the separate reports (on Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, Renewal.net, Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills, and Regional Networks and Networking). Appendix A provides a brief description of the evaluation model used across the evaluation.

The budget for the evaluation allowed in-depth interviews (face-to-face and by telephone) in nine case study areas in three regions. These were selected through a process of negotiation with individual Government Offices and the prospective LSPs. Three Government Offices kindly agreed to become involved: East, East Midlands and North West. The nine areas are set out in Table 1, which includes references to their

involvement in neighbourhood renewal programmes. Of the nine, one, Basildon, is not an NRF area, while Bolsover is the only one in receipt of additional NRF². The table also notes the spread of area categories, as classified by the Office of National Statistics in analysing 2001 Census statistics.

Table 1 Information on case study areas

LSP	GO	NRF	NDC	N'hood Mgt	N'hood Wardens	Rural Floor Target ³	ONS Area Classification
West Cumbria - comprising: Allerdale } Copeland}	NW	✓				✓ ✓	Coastal and Countryside B Industrial Hinterland A
Pendle	NW	✓					Centres with Industry A
Wigan	NW	✓			✓		Manufacturing Towns A
Bolsover	EM	✓			✓	✓	Manufacturing Towns A
Derby	EM	✓	✓		✓		Centres with Industry B
Leicester	EM	✓	✓				Centres with Industry B
Basildon	E			✓			New/ Growing Towns A
Great Yarmouth	E	✓			✓		Coastal and Countryside B
Luton	E	✓	✓		✓		London Suburbs A

We sought a range of LSPs which were characterised - in the opinion of GOs - by *differences* in: (a) the maturity of partnership working; (b) evidence of investment of time, energy and resources in learning for neighbourhood renewal and ways of improving partnership performance; and (c) participation in Neighbourhood Renewal programmes. The selection was also influenced by which LSPs were already involved in NRU or other research - as we and the GOs were careful to avoid risks of creating 'evaluation fatigue' amongst participating LSPs. In return for the co-operation of LSPs, we have provided them with individual feedback on the survey work in their areas.

With the assistance of LSP managers and neighbourhood-level contacts, we compiled lists of target interviewees. We endeavoured to ensure coverage of different categories of neighbourhood renewal actor including individuals from black and minority ethnic communities, as well as individuals playing key roles on specific neighbourhood renewal themes (eg, through community safety or health partnerships). We also looked to interview community activists and representatives and front-line workers in two targeted neighbourhoods per area.

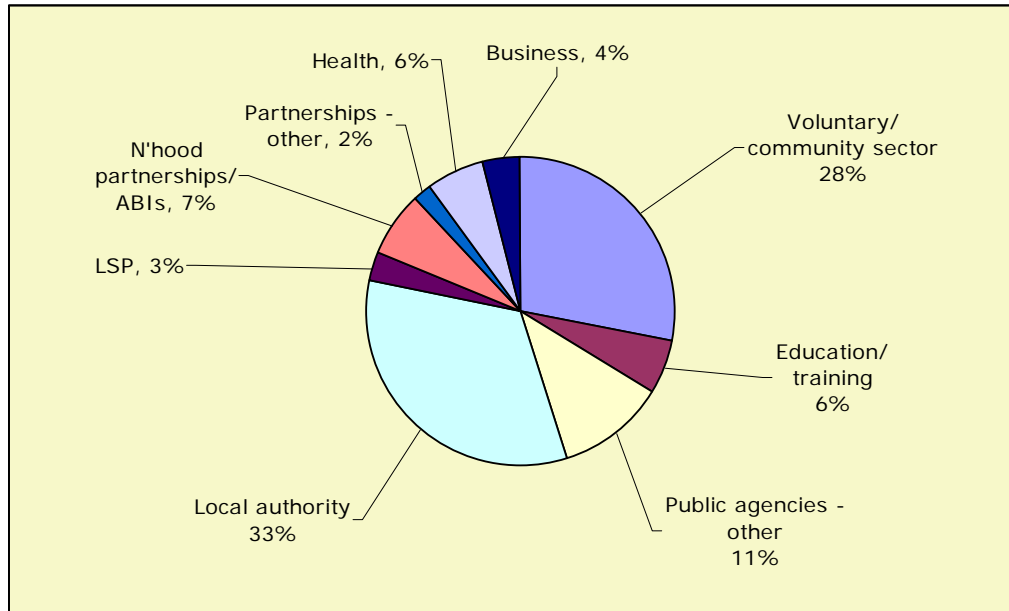
Area Case Studies - Potential Interviewees include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ active residents/ community leaders ▪ neighbourhood partnership managers ▪ LSP manager ▪ local authority service functions ▪ councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local college ▪ Local LSC ▪ PCT ▪ Police ▪ Jobcentre Plus ▪ community development workers ▪ Connexions

² The areas were selected before the additional allocations of NRF were announced. We subsequently sought an additional LSP area in the North West, but had to drop this idea as by this point all the relevant LSPs had begun the Floor Target Action Planning process with the additional calls that this has placed on partner time.

³ The Rural Floor Target relates to defined rural Districts, and aims to reduce the gap in productivity between the least well performing quartile of rural areas and the English median by 2006, and improve the accessibility of services for rural people.

We undertook 221 interviews, with between 18 and 31 interviews per area, with a split of 45% face-to-face and 55% telephone.

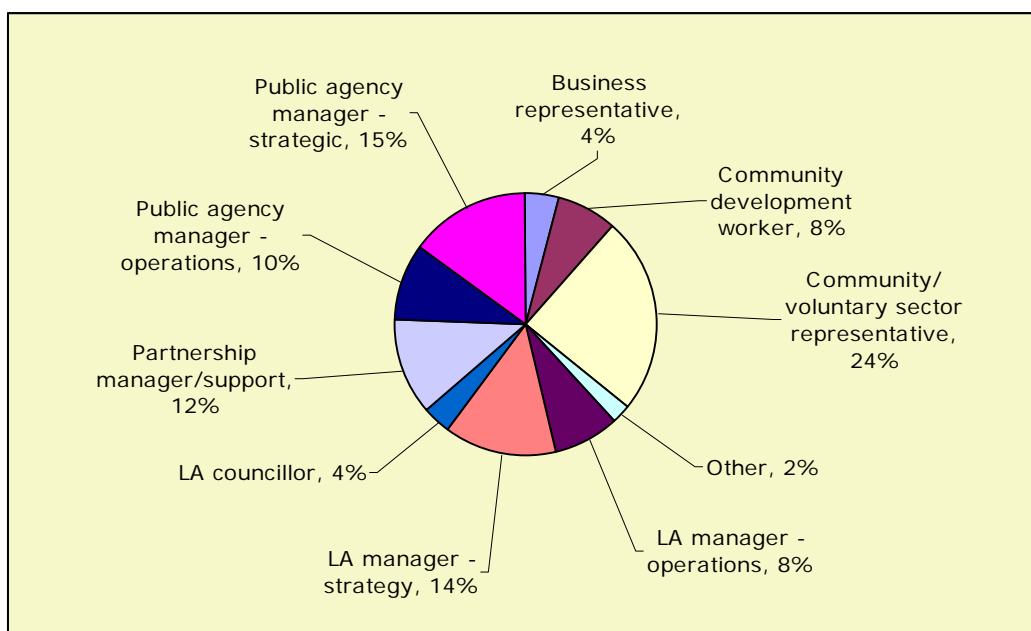
Figure 1 Interviewees by organisation type



N = 221

The largest body of interviewees (Figure 1) came from local authorities (including councillors) with 73 (33%), followed by the voluntary and community sector (including CEN representatives) with 62 (28%). Health, education and other public agencies accounted for 51 (23%), and employees of LSPs neighbourhood partnerships and area-based initiatives, for 21 (10%). There were nine private sector interviewees (4%).

Figure 2 Interviewees by neighbourhood renewal role



N = 221

In terms of neighbourhood renewal roles, community and voluntary sector representatives comprised just under a quarter (24%), and community development workers, 8%. Managers in local authorities and agencies in senior and/ or strategic roles made up 29%, and operational managers, 18%. Eight (4%) were councillors, and 26 (12%) worked as partnership managers or in partnership support roles.

The majority of interviewees were white, with 9% from BME communities (the largest group being Asian or Asian British - 6%). Over half (58%) were male, and 42% female.

Approach to the fieldwork interviews

In designing our survey tool, and in line with our core methodology (see Appendix A), we wished to explore three dimensions relevant to the evaluation objectives:

- information about the *partnership*: factors driving and constraining change, associated learning and development needs of the people involved in the partnership, how these were being addressed, and with what success
- information about the *partner organisation (or community represented)*, to identify their 'in-house' approaches to meeting learning and development needs
- information about the *individual*: motivations and barriers to learning; personal development needs, practices and plans, participation in GO and regional network learning activities, and use of evidence, the Internet and, in particular, Renewal.net

Underlying questions included:

- what are the main issues and opportunities driving needs for change and learning in relation to neighbourhood renewal?
- to what extent is learning and use of evidence embedded in organisational and partnership practices? Is there a learning culture?
- what have partner organisations and individuals themselves done to address skills, knowledge and capacity needs, to what effect?
- what gets in the way of addressing development needs, and the contribution learning activities can make to improved partner and partnership performance?
- how aware are interviewees of NRU and GO support and tools - and what use are they making of them, to what effect?

Thus we developed a survey workbook, which ensured data collection on a consistent basis on a number of questions while allowing our team members scope to explore particular avenues. For example, it was necessary to ask one sub-set of questions of interviewees who had been responsible for running learning and development activities and another of those who had been participants. The workbook was designed to elicit learning needs from a number of angles, to draw out those identified by partnership and organisational/ sector needs analyses, those which individuals recognise in themselves and - often illuminating - in other people. We also sought in formulating our questions to avoid linguistic traps, where, for example, some people have narrow definitions of 'learning' or 'skills and knowledge', eg, associating learning only with what they did at school, or 'training' only with off-the-job courses. Furthermore, we were alert to issues around perceptions of 'need' within partnerships: sometimes people may consider that others have 'learning' or 'training' needs where closer scrutiny highlights other

organisational development needs (eg, insufficient resources to do a job well) or issues that are political at root (eg, over conceptions of community empowerment or how councillors 'should' relate to community representatives and vice versa).

We proceed to report on:

- factors driving and constraining partnership performance (Section 3.1)
- approaches taken by partners to identifying learning and development needs (3.2)
- the influence of NRU and GOs on what partners have done (3.4)
- organisational and partnership needs identified (3.5), organisational learning cultures (3.6) and the consequences of not acting on learning and development needs (3.7)
- individual needs (3.8)
- barriers to addressing these (3.9)

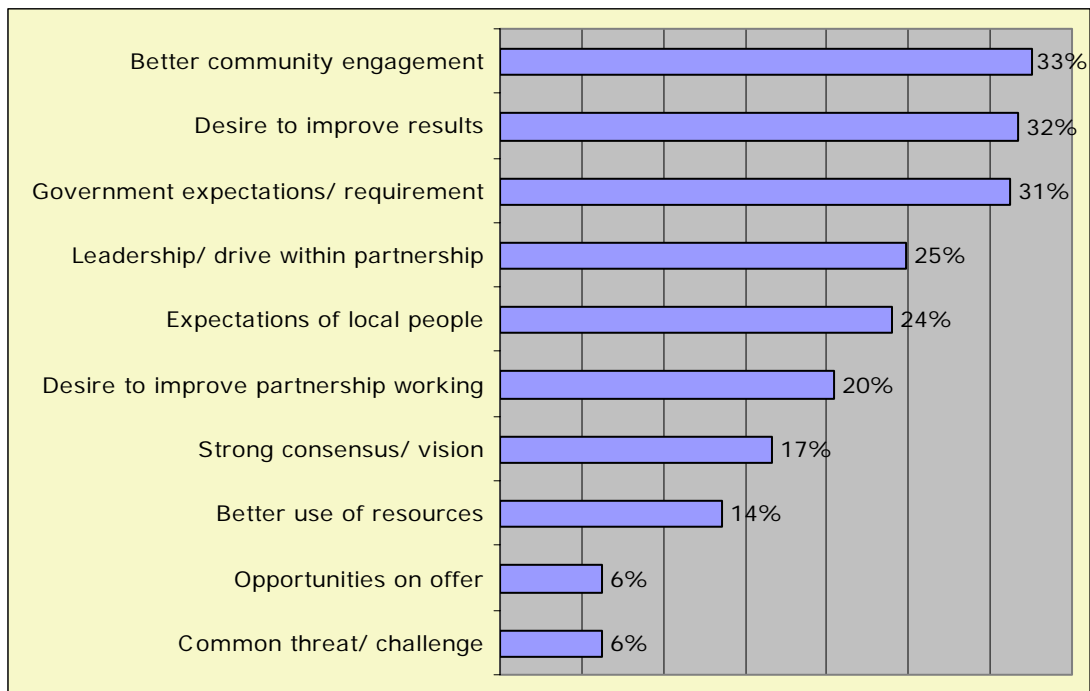
Section 4 then illustrates how partners have addressed these needs, to what effect. Section 5 draws conclusions and implications for NRU and GO Skills and Knowledge support

3 Partnership and Organisational Development Needs

3.1 Factors driving and constraining partnership performance

We took possible factors driving and constraining partnership development and performance as our starting point in reviewing skills and knowledge needs. Each of these is likely to have implications for learning and development needs within the partnership and within partner organisations and partnership sectors (ie, public, private, voluntary and community) - and the relative strength of the factors may influence approaches within partnerships to addressing these needs. Interviewees were asked to comment on the principal partnerships in which they were involved.

Figure 4 Factors driving partnership development and performance



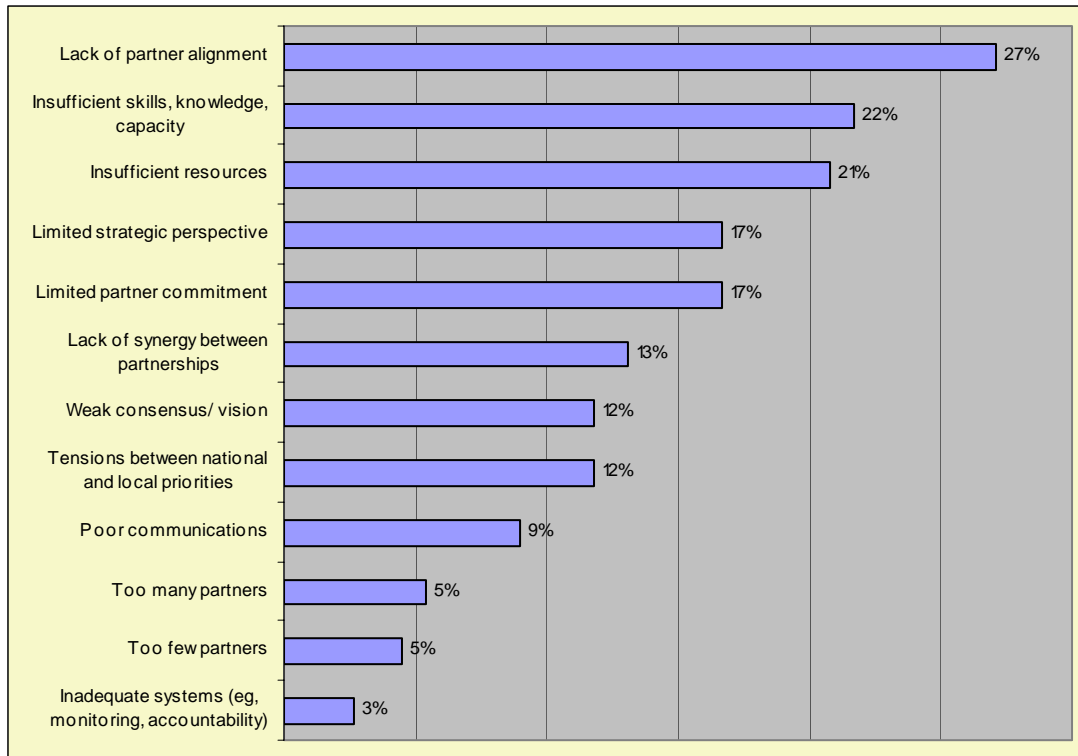
N = 221

Figure 4 shows that the most prominent drivers of partnership development were desires to improve community engagement (33%), improve results (32%), meet government requirements and expectations (31%) - along with leadership within the partnership (25%). Further analysis of the interview data shows that the strongest drives for better community engagement were apparent in Wigan and West Cumbria, and for meeting government requirements/ expectations, in Bolsover and Pendle. The desire to improve results came most strongly from Basildon and Bolsover, and only in Basildon were interviewees prominently motivated by a desire to make better use of resources - reflecting a partnership drive which comes from *not* having access to NRF.

LSP members were slightly more likely to emphasise improving results (34%) than the average, with those in LSP core/ executive roles the most concerned with this (38%).

Similarly, those involved with LSPs were the most likely to raise government expectations as a driving factor (just under half - 49% - of all LSP members). In contrast, Community Empowerment Network interviewees were most likely to cite 'better community engagement' (49%), as were neighbourhood partnership interviewees (37%).

Figure 5 Factors constraining partnership development and performance



N = 221

We found that interviewees were much more forthcoming about hindrances to effective partnership working and performance - which lie at the heart of the change management issues partners have to address. The main constraints were identified (Figure 5) as a lack of, or limited, partner alignment (27%), insufficient skills, knowledge and/ or capacity (22%) and insufficient resources (21%). The next group of factors were limited partner commitment (17%), limited strategic perspective (17%), lack of synergy between local partnerships (13%), and weak consensus or vision (12%). Looking at the case study areas, the partner alignment issue was most prominent in Basildon and Bolsover, and insufficient skills and capacity in Leicester, West Cumbria and Wigan. In these latter three areas, the issue came to the fore because there was a relatively high level of awareness of skills and knowledge required for effective partnership and delivery.

In Pendle, Bolsover and Basildon, a lack of synergy between partnerships was relatively prominent, along with limited strategic perspective in the first two. Interviewees in Bolsover were also particularly concerned about tensions between national and local priorities; in Great Yarmouth and Wigan also, though to a lesser extent. Insufficient resources for partnership working were an issue notably in Basildon, Pendle and West Cumbria.

We note that partner alignment is a bigger concern for LSP members and core/executive interviewees (32% and 40% respectively) and less at neighbourhood partnership (20%)

and service delivery/ project level (11%) - as might be expected given government and local agency expectations that the LSP is the primary locus for this to happen⁴.

Insufficient skills, knowledge and/ or capacity was a bigger concern for interviewees involved in CENs (27%), neighbourhood partnerships (24%) and service delivery/ project partnerships (25%). A few interviewees noted turnover amongst staff and community representatives as an issue, reflecting a key finding in the national NDC programme evaluation. A quarter of those involved in LSPs also raised 'limited strategic perspective' as a constraint - often mentioned in relation to community representatives on LSPs.

The following comments from interviewees provide a flavour of the nature of partnership issues which those involved have to negotiate:

- partner commitment and styles

"Time is the biggest barrier - the main partners have their own priorities."

LOCAL LSC MANAGER

"There's a public sector tendency to micro-manage, which blocks creativity."

LSP MANAGER

- partnership politics

"There are tensions between meeting community needs and who is writing the agenda."

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL

"The reality is that we are not all equal."

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CE

"Partners have an over-concern for not stepping on others' turf."

CVS WORKER

"The public agencies have limited appreciation of what community empowerment entails."

CVS MANAGER

- partnership basics

"There is lack of clarity of partnership role and partner responsibilities."

COLLEGE PRINCIPAL

"We don't have an appropriate and strong enough evidence base."

LEISURE PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

⁴ Issues of agency engagement and alignment, however, are raised as significant in the latest reports on the national programme evaluations for New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (see the 2003/04 annual reports by Lawless and by SQW, 2004)

“There’s too big a disparity of knowledge between the players. It’s most evident when we’re arguing about NRF.”

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

“There’s insufficient understanding of constraints on partners.”

PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGER

- partnership development

“We’ve lost our way a bit and are not sure of our remit”

COLLEGE MANAGER

“We have not yet effectively achieved the ability to bend mainstream funding.”

LOCAL AUTHORITY COUNCILLOR

“We’ve got the wrong people at the table, and long wish list. NRF has focused our attention on money not strategy.”

LOCAL AUTHORITY CE

- partnership burdens

“There’s too much bureaucracy, requirements to feed back, monitor. Sometimes feedback required centrally is not the issue that’s the priority for the partnership.”

LA REGENERATION MANAGER

Some of these comments relate to the tensions inherent in the NRU LSP model. Public agency and community sector representatives may struggle to deal with a set of issues relating to different perspectives and priorities, actual and perceived power imbalances, different understandings of what neighbourhood renewal is about, and the ‘maze’ of policies, organisations and jargon. The NAO report, ‘Getting Citizens Involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal’ found that (in their case study areas), while 84% of the other LSP board members felt that the LSP board listen to CEN member views a lot or a fair amount, only 31% of the CEN members felt the same way. The gap was even bigger in response to a question on whether they were satisfied that the LSP took account of CEN views: while 72% of other board members were satisfied or fairly satisfied, only 16% of CEN members were. We observe that the associated learning needs may be significant:

- for many public agency representatives, to appreciate better the gains from effective community involvement, recognise how they themselves may help or hinder this (intentionally or unintentionally), and how they need to change the ways they operate to enable this involvement
- for many community representatives, to develop their strategic understanding of neighbourhood renewal and community well-being interventions, and appreciate their roles as active *partners*

At root, however, is something more than a learning need: the extent to which the public agencies are genuinely prepared to ‘empower communities’. There is also a related concern within the voluntary and community sector that when public agencies talk about ‘capacity building needs’ they tend to think only of the needs that voluntary and

community organisations have - and not needs they have themselves. The need to tackle this is a theme that has been pursued in the context of government policies in relation to voluntary sector engagement, in particular promotion of Compacts (to improve relationships between voluntary and public sectors) and 'ChangeUp', the Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

3.2 Partnership life cycle and learning needs

We also sought to establish where in the 'life cycle' of partnership working the LSP or related partnership sat. We hypothesised that development needs within partnerships would vary according to the stage of the partnership's development (see Figure 6⁵, explained further in Appendix B), with early stage needs relating to consensus building, developing knowledge about partners, exploring where the partnership can best add value, and managing tensions and conflicts. The model draws on the Tuckman (1965) model of group development (characterised by the 'forming, storming, norming and performing' stages) which often features in generic team building training. Essentially, the model suggests that until partnerships have been through the 'frustrating' or 'storming' stage, there is likely to be a limited partner alignment behind common goals and limited partnership productivity. Many strategic-oriented partnerships become stuck at the 'frustration' stage, often carrying on without a strong deal of purpose and added value (Johnstone, 2003). Too easily 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham 2003) can apply, with many factors tending to slow rather than speed partnership progress. Many LSPs suffered from this in their earlier days (evident in findings, eg, of the ODPM LSP evaluation and the Business Broker pilot programme evaluation⁶). The model also suggests that these partnerships will be relatively more interested in pursuing specific service improvement interventions once past the 'frustration' stage when there is more commitment to common goals. The model also highlights the need to keep working at partnership: even the most successful may atrophy.

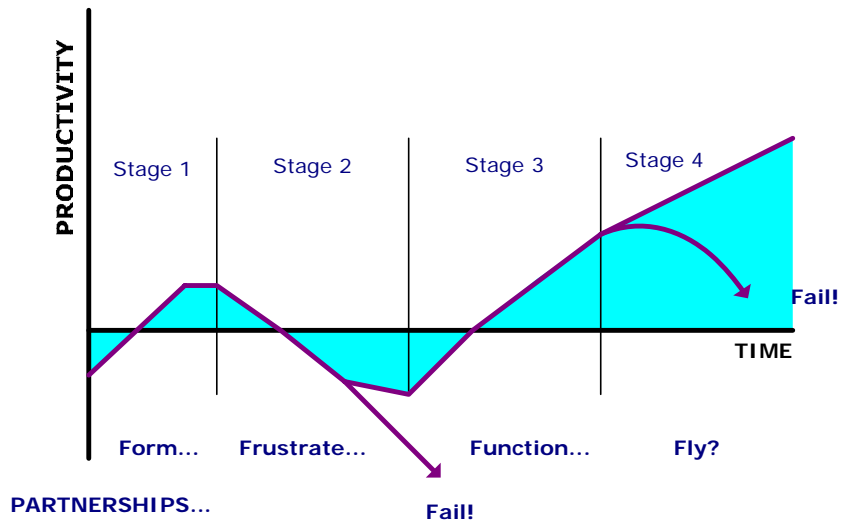
It can be very difficult for partnerships to overcome obstacles to their progress. As we noted above, there are critical skill demands in managing change, for example, helping partners revisit and re-establish common ground, focus on the added value that can be gained from the partnership (for the community served and for the individual partners), making sure that there are some 'early wins' demonstrating these benefits, and encouraging more productive behaviours which seek to 'fix the problem, not the blame'. Sometimes, it can be difficult to engineer changes from within, in which case, an independent outsider with facilitation skills (perhaps an NRA), may be the key to partnership progress. The introduction of Performance Management Frameworks (PMFs) for LSPs, CENs, NDCs, and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders by the NRU can be seen as an external intervention to drive the partnership focus on results, encouraging actions which might otherwise have been taken to improve partnership productivity.

Project-based partnerships are more likely to progress quickly through the stages - though even they can benefit from steps to ensure successful transition from 'forming' to 'flying' (see, eg, ODPM guidance on Service Delivery Partnerships).

⁵ Model developed by EDuce and GFA Consulting for DfES, published in 'Five Vital Lessons: Successful Partnership with Business', 2001

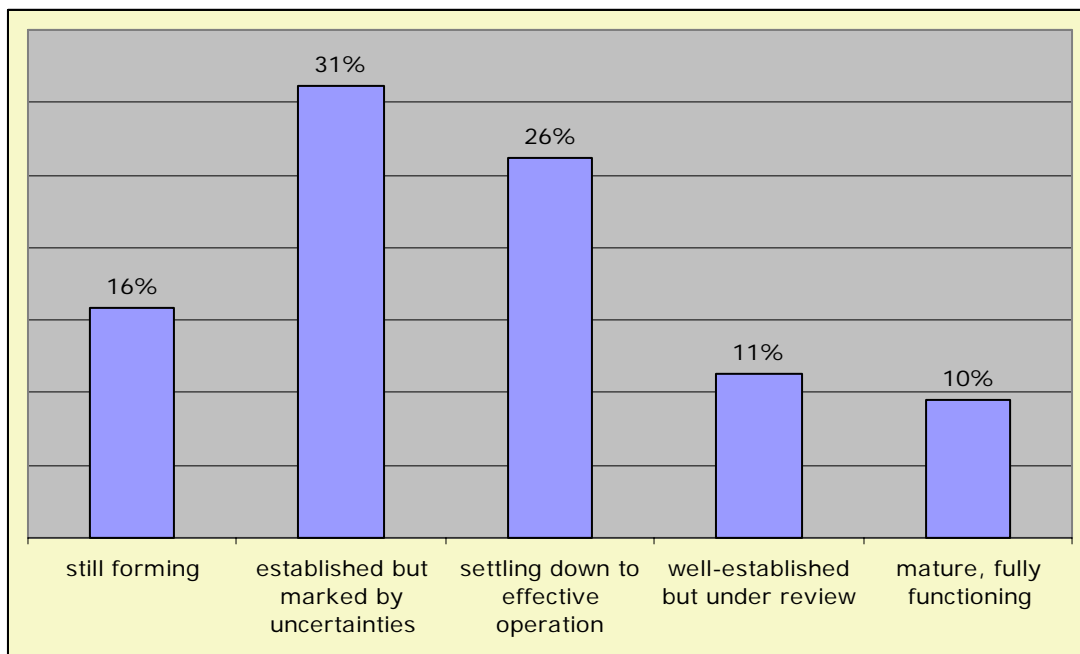
⁶ University of Warwick and others (2004) Evaluation of LSPs: Case study interim report: A baseline of practice; Johnstone, Johnstone, Tyler and Warnock (2004) Business Broker Pilot Programme Evaluation: Interim Report

Figure 6 Partnership Life Cycle



We asked our area fieldwork interviewees for their assessment of the stage of development of the main partnership in which they were engaged. We gave interviewees a choice of five stages, broadly corresponding to the Life Cycle Model, but including a category of ‘well-established but under review’ which we found in testing the questionnaire was a common situation. Where this occurs - with, say, a change in partnership membership and remit, partnerships may return to the forming stage.

Figure 6 Stage of partnership development



What is striking about this picture is the extent to which interviewees felt that their partnerships were relatively immature, illustrated by comments such as “our LSP is like an overactive adolescent”. Reviewing responses by partnership type shows some variation, with

neighbourhood partnerships most likely to report 'settling down to effective operation' (in two in five of these cases), followed by service delivery partnership projects (in a third of these cases). LSP and CEN interviewees were most likely to opt for 'established but marked by uncertainties' (two in five). CEN interviewees were most likely to say 'well-established but under review' (one in five).

Interviewees in Great Yarmouth were most likely to say that their partnership was 'well-established but under review' of their partnership, reflecting the existence of the Great Yarmouth Partnership prior to LSPs and a current review of partnership structure; while those in Derby, tended to say 'settled down' or 'fully functioning' (again reflecting the earlier establishment of the Derby City Partnership and also that of Derby Derwent NDC). Wigan too, has a strong foundation of partnership working, though this comes out less prominently in this analysis because of the numbers of interviewees in new or recently formed thematic partnerships. Interviewees in West Cumbria, Bolsover and Pendle were most likely to say 'established but marked by uncertainties'.

Relating these findings to those on partnership drivers and constraints tends to confirm the picture that in most areas, the strategic partnerships are relatively young, and demonstrate issues common to early stages of their life cycles. In Bolsover, for example, interviewees tended to stress a desire to improve results but at the same time expressed concerns about partner alignment and commitment. These findings are consistent with there being less clarity about the partnership added value and partner mutual benefit - prerequisites of partnership success. We note that uncertainties around LSPs are quite common: an NRU review in autumn 2004 of GO summaries of LSP PMF reviews found reference in two out of five cases to recent, current or planned LSP restructuring, and many examples of new thematic partnerships, especially on employment and housing.

Our findings on partnership drivers, constraints and stage of development confirm the analysis presented in *The Learning Curve*, highlighting the leadership and influencing skills needed to build stronger commitment from partner organisations and also the knowledge about what makes partners tick, their room for manoeuvre, etc required to build and sustain robust partnerships. They also bring out the importance of skills in change management amongst key players in partnerships, especially amongst partnership managers and chairs. Table 2 sets out some of the critical requirements relating, for example, to leadership and influencing skills, in a context where typically these leading players do not have direct control over partners and stakeholder groupings⁷.

⁷ This analysis draws in part on the 'Developing Skills for Partnership Working' diagnostic tool developed by EDuce for the Employers Organisation for Local Government as part of its Smarter Partnerships website, www.lgpartnerships.com

Table 2 Critical skill and knowledge requirements for partnership leaders and managers

Skills and knowledge	Comments
fostering shared leadership and a partnership culture	<i>ensuring...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agendas are set by all partners ▪ partners are well-informed ▪ each partner participates fully ▪ there is equal weight and influence in decision making ▪ there is mutual respect and all input is valued ▪ partners accept equal responsibility for the success of the partnership
building coalitions and consensus	<i>where these key change agents must be adept at:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ understanding what drives and what constrains individual partner practices and behaviours - and the levers which can be applied to effect change ▪ helping others weigh up the benefits and costs of collaboration and making a persuasive case where necessary ▪ understanding group dynamics ▪ negotiating roles and contributions
managing relationships and building trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ developing and sustaining networks of relationships ▪ modelling personal behaviours which reinforce partnership working, eg, focusing on the future, accepting responsibility, avoiding placing blame on others, talking of 'we' not 'them' and 'as a partner' not 'as a representative', being open and inclusive
making the best use of levers for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ understanding how national and regional policies help and hinder achievement of local objectives and how to influence these ▪ also how developments in policy and performance management arrangements across government departments can be used as levers and arguments for change

3.2 Identifying learning needs

A third of interviewees in the area fieldwork had been involved in some form of learning needs analysis relating to the main partnership in which they are involved, in some cases facilitated by an NRA or consultant. (A further 15% noted relevant analyses within their own organisation or community of interest). Interviewees in Leicester and Wigan were most likely to report having taken part in a review, and least likely in Pendle, Bolsover and Luton. Priorities identified have related mainly to developing specific skills (eg, in communications, problem solving, negotiation, conflict resolution, or project management) (75%) or capacity amongst partners to work better together and/ or with communities (63%). An objective of developing capacity to deliver *specific* neighbourhood renewal outcomes was less common (32%), in line with our argument relating to partnership life cycles.

Table 3 sets out the different approaches adopted to leading or championing 'skills and knowledge' within each LSP. In some cases, such as Leicester, Luton and West Cumbria, there has been a dedicated working group, in others such as Wigan, the LSP co-ordination group of senior officers has taken a close interest. A dedicated working group has not necessarily meant significant influence in the development of the LSP, though it is interesting to note that the Learning and Development Group in Luton has recently become the Partnership Development Group, formally a sub-group of the Co-ordinating Group, and responsible for oversight of the partnership's improvement plan and a budget for skills and knowledge.

Table 3 LSP Approaches to identifying skills and knowledge needs

AREA	Lead responsibilities
Basildon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No formal lead on skills and knowledge for the LSP (not an NRF area; though the Interlock Neighbourhood Management pathfinder has a learning plan)
Bolsover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ working group with NRA support. (This was put on hold pending the completion of the PMF exercise)
Derby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NRA review, working with sub-group. Initial work on a draft learning plan taken forward by a part-time consultant working in the core partnership team, pending appointment of a Capacity Building Co-ordinator
Great Yarmouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ working party established in 2004 ▪ support from GO-funded consultant
Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Action on Learning Plan Sub-Group, chaired by LSC Leicestershire Chief Executive, and with the active involvement of the Leicestershire and Leicester City Learning Partnership ▪ learning needs analysis undertaken by a consultant in 2002/03 ▪ Partnership Skills and Knowledge Manager appointed in autumn 2004 to support and facilitate learning amongst members of the Leicester Partnership and its sub-groups; residents, voluntary and community organisations; frontline staff and managers in public agencies; and the business community.
Luton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Group, with informal support from the GO Skills and Knowledge lead ▪ Became the Partnership Development Group in autumn 2004, reporting to the LSP's Co-ordinating Group and responsible for oversight of the partnership's improvement and skills and knowledge plans
Pendle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Action on Learning Plan produced in 2002/03, without time to undertake a needs analysis. The Partnership subsequently decided to concentrate on the PMF, seeking to ensure learning needs were identified.
West Cumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Group (co-ordinated by a CVS lead, drawing membership from across partners, including HR managers). Role has included acting as an informal think tank for partnership development. (Local Action on Learning Plan produced in 2002/03, without time to undertake a needs analysis.)
Wigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership Operations Group are driving the LSP's Local Action Learning Plan ▪ consultant support for preparation of action plans for the LSP and for thematic partnerships ▪ Partnership Induction Group has an ongoing role in relation to meeting the needs of community and voluntary sector representatives.

Examples of approaches adopted included:

- Wigan Borough Partnership undertook a review in 2003 (carried out by a trainer/consultant, a District Audit manager and staff from Wigan and Leigh College) in preparing its first Local Action Learning Plan. It focused on those most closely involved with the LSP and the related thematic partnerships, and covered both partnership development needs (using diagnostic tool produced by the District Audit service⁸) and individual learning needs and perceptions. Further research was planned later to review and address the needs of professionals and practitioners involved in delivery and community members who are not members of partnership bodies but who are seeking to play a stronger role in governance and decision-making. Priorities which emerged from the research included needs for:
 - ◆ improved, shared understanding of key strategies
 - ◆ understanding how their own organisation (and thematic partnership if relevant) contributes to the Community Plan and Local Neighbourhood

⁸ Part of the Audit Commission

- Renewal Strategy - and of the roles, and contributions, objectives and targets of others
 - ◆ processes for conflict resolution, improved cross-partnership communications, and common approaches to performance monitoring
 - ◆ strengthened induction and buddying arrangements
- The Leicester Partnership (LP) followed the lead provided by The Learning Curve in developing a Local Action on Learning Plan (LALP) in 2003, in reviewing needs in relation to the knowledge base, core skills and behaviours. Their analysis differentiated between the needs of LP and LP sub-group members; residents, community groups and voluntary organisations; and frontline staff, managers and senior managers in public services. They also identified needs of private sector managers involved with LP and neighbourhood renewal, particularly in relation to their appreciation of regeneration and renewal issues, and their understanding of the voluntary and community sector. Subsequently, in May 2004, the Local Action on Learning Plan Sub-Group undertook a review as part of the LSP PMF, identifying priorities for action such as promoting opportunities for joint training across different sectors and tiers of management and developing techniques to promote understanding between staff, professionals, and resident and business representatives.

In Great Yarmouth, the lead manager for the LSP reviewed relevant plans and practices against headings suggested by The Learning Curve, and more recently needs have been identified through LSP priority setting workshops (facilitated by an NRA) and work undertaken by a consultant funded by GO East. In Luton, members of the LSP have been asked about their individual and group needs through a number of learning events. The box on Derby below goes into more detail on the approach taken there, which has sought progressively to strengthen ownership of the partnership's learning plan amongst relevant stakeholders.

Identifying needs in Derby
<p>Derby City Partnership first produced a draft learning plan, focused on members of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Task Group and using the services of an NRA on a 16 day assignment. The plan identified four priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>area and neighbourhood co-ordination</i>, addressing needs for a more strategic approach to service integration: including joint planning and commissioning; partnership working; community engagement; opportunities for bending mainstream services; problem solving; and the programme and project development skills needed to bring forward ambitious and well-prepared projects▪ <i>mainstreaming, service innovation and delivering floor targets</i> (developing the concept of what mainstreaming could and should be achieving; promoting an evidence-based approach; sharing knowledge of 'what works'; designing, developing and commissioning new services and reshaping/ targeting existing services)▪ <i>leadership</i> skills and adapting to changing roles for community representatives and councillors▪ <i>partnership development and culture change</i> (including addressing the needs of managers in dealing with complexity and stress; facilitation techniques for multi-agency working; and understanding of cross-cutting developments in policy and practice, such as community cohesion) <p>The Strategy Co-ordination Group recognised, however, that while the plan clarified needs and priorities, there was a need to build ownership of the plan amongst partners. DCP then employed a consultant to undertake a more consultative and in-depth needs review, making use of the draft framework of National Occupational Standards for Neighbourhood Renewal produced by the NRU⁹. The consultant - previously</p>

⁹ PA Consulting Group (2003), Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Provision

Chief Executive of Derby Derwent NDC - had undertaken similar exercises and knew the strength of a standards-based approach in providing a rigorous basis for reviewing job requirements and skill needs, used in visual ways which help bring abstract concepts to life¹⁰. Benefits for individuals have included increased awareness of they fit into their organisation and partnerships as a whole, reinforcement of personal strengths and a clear development path. The approach has been found useful in helping service managers understand how some of the problems with which they are grappling with are not necessarily solvable within their own service area but require effective partnership action.

The consultant has tested the framework with 16 practitioners involved in the management and delivery of neighbourhood renewal, to establish how far they recognise the eight functional areas in the draft national framework as relevant to their jobs and development needs. These cover management functions of planning, resourcing and evaluating; structures and systems for partnership and community engagement; fostering leadership in the community; and promoting strategies and interventions on specific neighbourhood renewal themes - health, learning, economic regeneration development and reducing worklessness; tackling crime, safety and neighbourhood security; improving housing and the physical environment - plus an additional section using the values and principles from national occupational standards for community development work. Two workshops have also been run with the Community Network.

Some interviewees pointed to theme-specific exercises. For example, in Basildon, under the Home Office's Partnership Support Programme for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, NACRO carried out a skills analysis on the mainstreaming of community safety under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This gauged awareness of what community safety is and what it is intended to achieve, helping council staff develop their understanding of how they contribute to community safety and how they could contribute more in future. The process related to partnership working by enabling staff to appreciate how they *shared* responsibility with the Police and others for improving community safety. There were also one or two examples of learning needs analyses being undertaken in developing new Children and Young People's partnerships (in the case of Luton, in developing their Children and Young People Participation Strategy).

Several of the CENs have undertaken needs reviews, using a range of methods. In Great Yarmouth, Community Connections carried out a skills audit, and have strived to keep it updated through feedback from community development workers. INVOLVE, the Bolsover CEN, implemented a training needs audit of committee members of community associations, taking special care to ensure that interviewees did not have contend with the jargon of neighbourhood renewal and training. This has been geared to developing an events programme intended to very targeted and providing 'quick hits' in terms of participant benefit.

Some of the early learning needs analyses were rudimentary, and undertaken before many of the individuals concerned - understandably - had a good idea of what their roles in or around the LSP were. Consequently, they were unlikely to be sure quite what they needed to be good at and to know. In Leicester, for example, individuals joining a 'Community of Interest' (a building block for community representation the LSP) were asked to fill in a form asking them about what issues they were interested in, what training needs they had, and what barriers they had faced in the past affecting their participation. Only later did our interviewees feel that they could have answered these questions satisfactorily. Activities in some other fieldwork areas, while beginning to

¹⁰ See the Merseyside chapter in 'Occupational Standards for Economic Development' (EDuce 2000) report for DfES. A Renewal.net case study, 'Hexagon Diagrams: A Tool for Strategic Planning' sets out a visual mapping technique successfully adopted by Derby Derwent NDC in pursuing this approach.

address individual needs, have not necessarily promoted a *strategic* view of learning and development requirements, and how these can best be met across partners. For example, in West Cumbria, CEN members have had one-to-one support in producing individual learning plans (leading, eg, to coaching of two involved in chairing roles - one of the LSP itself); while in Pendle the approach was to survey, in conjunction with Adult Learning (Lancashire County Council), voluntary organisations and community groups to identify which short courses they would find most useful. Other ad hoc actions in the past have included a recommendation from a local Learning Partnership manager to LSP members to use the services of the local Adult Guidance Network.

3.4 NRU and GO influence on approaches to identifying skills and knowledge needs

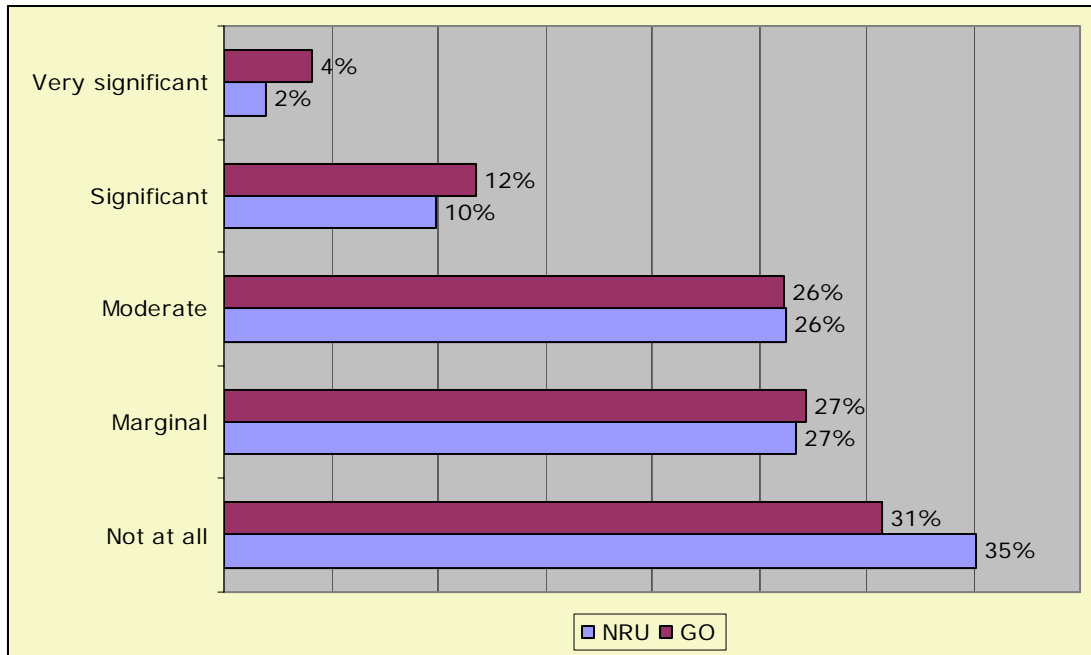
It is clear from some of the approaches above to identifying skills and knowledge needs that LSP approaches have been influenced by the NRU's strategic framework, The Learning Curve. Most LSPs have drawn on it in developing Local Action on Learning Plans (LALPs) and preparing their responses in meeting LSP Accreditation requirements¹¹.

When we conducted our fieldwork, five out of the eight NRF LSPs had developed such a plan (of which only three were based on a needs analysis), and three had not. Of the latter, Bolsover had made some progress with the support of an NRA, but had decided to defer further work until they had completed their Performance Management review and Floor Target Action Planning exercise. Several LSP managers had referred to the NRU document, 'Lessons from the Local Action on Learning Pilots' which provided pointers for the development of LALPs, but there was a general sense that LSPs were breaking new ground in developing these plans, and that these tended not to be early priorities in the eyes of many LSP partners.

We asked interviewees in the fieldwork areas 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 (Figure 7). 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 not relate very directly to the NRU or GO neighbourhood renewal teams. (The proportions for partnership managers and support officers are higher).

¹¹ The LSP Accreditation Guidance in 2001/02 introduced the concept of local action on learning plans, proposals for improving skills and knowledge as part of Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. This was maintained in the guidance the following year, though it was anticipated that not all LSPs would be able to produce fully developed plans by the time of accreditation. The minimum requirement was that LSPs should have identified critical learning and development needs of LSP partners. For 2003/04, the relevant criterion had become simply 'The LSP is aware of its skills and knowledge needs to prepare and deliver plausible and achievable Community Strategies and LNRSS' - though it was expected that a range of learning actions would be identified in LSP improvement plans.

Figure 7 Degree of influence by NRU and GOs on partnership learning activities



This influence was mainly through advice, guidance and ideas (for 55%); 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. A number of comments also related to improved access to data and support for analysis, prompted by LSP work on floor targets. These latter needs are being addressed in participating regions in the NRU's Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) programme which is developing pilot Neighbourhood Research Support Services (NRSS). The purpose of these services is to provide expert advice to practitioners on social research and analysis, data sources and evidence about neighbourhood renewal needs and interventions. The programme is also intended to build bridges between local research and national research and improve dissemination of research findings.

GOs have continued to respond to partnership requests for support in developing their Skills and Knowledge plans. In the three regions involved in the fieldwork,

GO East

- support for an action learning set on LSP performance management
- financial support for learning plans in the two NRF LSPs and two neighbourhood Management pathfinders

GO East Midlands

- establishment of a regional LSP network to meet skill needs and raise awareness of developments in policy and practice relating to neighbourhood renewal (network for both NRF and non-NRF LSPs)

GO North West

- introduction of LSP learning sets

Meanwhile, GOs in other regions have also supported innovations relating to learning in LSPs and other neighbourhood renewal partnerships, including support for the LSP Learning Group in the North East (which brings together learning 'champions' from LSPs - those leading on skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal in their areas), the Leadership and Partnership Development Programme in the West Midlands (which targets the needs of LSP, NDC, CEN, Neighbourhood Management and Regeneration Zone partnership managers through coaching, action learning and networks), and the Regional Learning Programme for LSPs and Regeneration Partnerships in Yorkshire and Humber (which includes LSP network meetings, workshops on supporting delivery, and action learning groups).

Skills, Knowledge and PMF arrangements

In developing performance management arrangements for LSPs, CENs, NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders, the NRU has sought to ensure that learning is embedded in criteria contained in Performance Management Frameworks and highlighted in guidance to GOs for their conduct of their support and challenge roles. For example, in the LSP annual review process in 2004, GOs were expected to help to help LSPs identify learning needs and access appropriate support. One key question was to ask, 'Are the learning needs of the LSP and all partners identified and are partners participating in the actions to address these?'. Many of the other questions in the review process also had implications for skills and knowledge needs within the partnerships, eg, on progress on mainstreaming, plausibility of interventions, integration of performance management into partner business, and engagement of local communities in helping to improve service delivery at neighbourhood level. In reviewing LSP improvement plans, GOs were encouraged to establish the extent to which LSPs have identified required changes, targeted on specific areas and groups of people, and the learning support that will enable people to bring these about. There continues to be reference to the use of LALPs in this context.

GOs have produced summaries of LSP PMF reviews, which we have been able to access in the last stages of the evaluation in autumn 2004. Examples of actions identified in the improvement plans of fieldwork area LSPs are set out in Table 4 below. Many points relate to steps to improve the evidence base, review strategies and interventions in relation to the achievement of Floor Targets, and 'drill down' to neighbourhood level (targeted analysis and targeted activities). There are also three references to improving

internal and external communications and three to increasing core LSP capacity to drive delivery.

Table 4 Examples of actions in LSP Improvement Plans

LSP Area	Improvement Issues & Actions Identified
Bolsover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strengthen resourcing of LSP support team ▪ improve communications ▪ set clearer and 'smarter' targets, embedding partners responsibilities
Derby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ mainstreaming, monitoring, evaluation and 'developing learning' (for neighbourhood renewal) are main priorities ▪ introduce plausibility testing, reviewing and developing DCP targets at neighbourhood level, and how interventions address floor targets
Great Yarmouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ undertake learning needs assessment ▪ all members of the LSP to build their capacity to become more representative and reach all excluded communities
Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ developing focus on evidence and delivery of floor targets ▪ work on mainstreaming, including appointment of a Mainstreaming champion
Luton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ enhance partnership working in tackling individual neighbourhoods (including Marsh Farm NDC) ▪ seek assistance from partners on capacity issues ▪ access relevant data, especially at neighbourhood level ▪ implement communications and information strategy ▪ ensure more of an outcomes-focused approach ▪ strengthen business engagement
Pendle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strengthen commitment and accountability of service providers and manage issues associated with two-tier working ▪ develop strategic overview in relation to national floor target priorities ▪ strengthen evidence base, develop SMART targets and plausibility of actions linked to floor targets
West Cumbria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ review partnership structure and capacity of partnership support team, aiming to strengthen focus on delivery ▪ develop communications strategy ▪ fill gaps in baseline data ▪ promote embedding of performance management across the LSP
Wigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ extend Performance Plus monitoring system across partners ▪ continued work with thematic partnerships on addressing floor targets

NB Basildon is not included as there is no PMF requirement in non-NRF areas.

This table presents a similar set of issues and actions across LSPs to those identified by a comprehensive review by the NRU of all 87 GO LSP PMF summaries¹². This review highlights notably needs amongst LSPs to:

- strengthen the evidence base to sharpen plausibility testing and service improvement
- identify 'what works' systematically, especially in the use of NRF and mainstreaming - capturing and sharing local knowledge and drawing on experience and evidence elsewhere
- strengthen LSP capacity, not just to run the partnership but also the authority of members to challenge each other in order to drive improvement
- improve engagement of BME communities and targeting of services to meet their needs

¹² LSP Performance Management: Review of GO LSP Summaries 2004 (unpublished)

- devise better means of accessing and sharing robust, timely data, especially at neighbourhood level
- embed performance management in partnership strategies and in partner practices
- improve community and business involvement, including, on the former, through an enhanced CEN role in supporting delivery of neighbourhood renewal strategies¹³

Such needs, by their very nature, are likely to require partners to learn to do new things and do things differently. Nearly half of the GO summaries note specific skills and knowledge actions as part of LSP improvement plans.

Leicester Partnership - Improvement actions relating to learning

As part of the LSP's PMF in spring 2004, the Local Action on Learning Plan Sub-Group reviewed the PMF criterion that an LSP should be "aware of its skills and knowledge needs to prepare and deliver plausible and achievable Community Strategies and LNRSSs". It concluded that there were needs to promote joint training opportunities across agencies and sectors and across tiers of management; strengthen support for LSP members in improving their own learning and skills; develop techniques to promote understanding between staff, professionals and resident and business representative. Further steps included identifying a 'learning champion' and agreeing an action plan to utilise evidence-based learning. Partners also agreed that capacity building was particularly needed at neighbourhood level rather than at the Partnership level.

The Sub-Group has since revised its role and remit, with a focus very much on delivery. A Partnership Skills and Knowledge Manager has now been appointed, funded through NRF and based within the core Partnership Development Team. Her main roles are to:

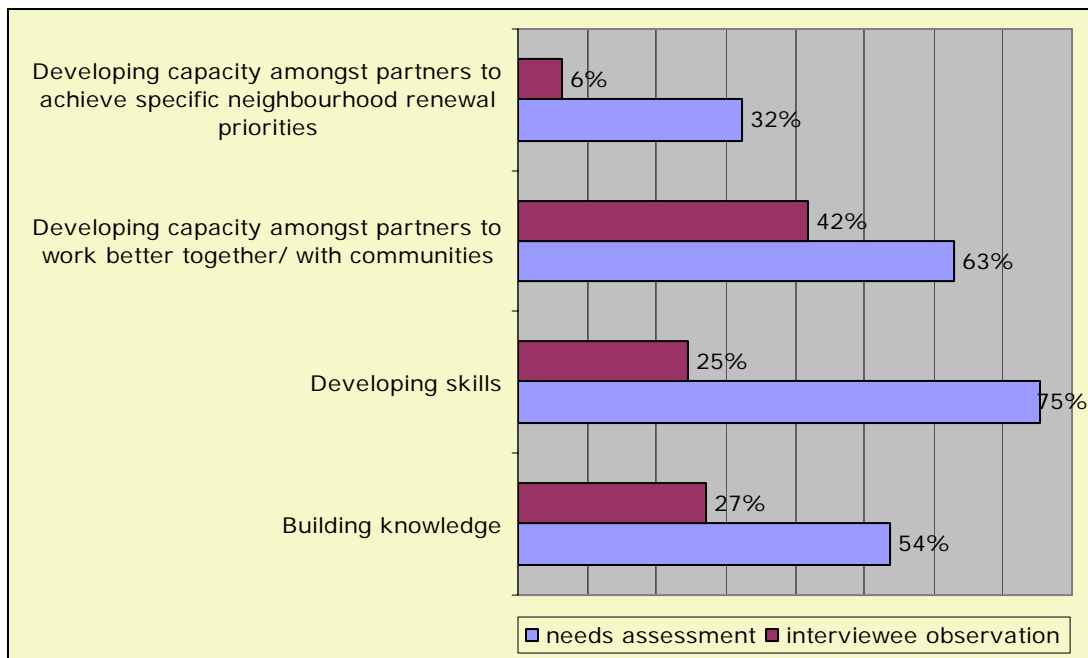
- co-ordinate the delivery of the Local Action on Learning Plan
- identify local skills and knowledge needs for neighbourhood renewal, ensure that there is a response to meet those needs, and review the effectiveness of the response

3.5 Learning needs within partnerships and partner organisations

In our fieldwork, we asked interviewees to comment on learning needs within their partnership that they observed personally, as well those which had been identified by formal needs analyses. We invited them to comment on the three or four that they saw as critical, rather than going through a list of possibilities and asking interviewees to rank these. (Section 3.8 explores what interviewees saw as priorities for their *personal* development.)

¹³ Needs relating to business involvement are also explored in the evaluation of the Business Brokers pilot programme (see EDuce and CEA, 2004)

Figure 8 Main types of learning need identified by needs assessments and by interviewees



N = 65 for needs assessment; 110 for interviewee observation

On analysis, we found that, broadly, needs identified by formal assessments (Figure 8) tended to fall into the categories of:

- ‘developing skills’ (75%) (eg, communications, problem solving, influencing, negotiation, conflict resolution, project management, research and use of evidence, IT)
- ‘develop capacity within the partnership/ partner bodies to work better together and with local communities’ (63%) (eg, through facilitated exercises to build collaborative competence and mutual understanding)
- ‘building knowledge’ (54%) (eg, about local communities; ‘what works’/ good practice elsewhere; policy developments relating to neighbourhood renewal; partner roles and responsibilities; induction for new members)

Needs to ‘develop capacity within the partnership/ partner bodies to achieve specific neighbourhood renewal priorities and targets’ (eg, task groups focusing on partnership priorities/ floor targets/ mainstreaming; training on methods of implementing neighbourhood management) were rarely mentioned specifically in the context of formal assessments - perhaps reflecting where the partnership was in its life cycle at the time of the assessment.

It is interesting to note that interviewees, when asked for their own observations on priority needs, were more likely to mention ‘developing capacity amongst partners to work together and with communities’, reflecting their personal concerns about the effectiveness of collaborative activities. Relatively few referred to ‘capacity amongst partners to achieve specific neighbourhood renewal priorities’ - though may be a topic which interviewees would have raised more, had we undertaken the interviews after the LSPs had completed their PMF reviews.

Understanding the LSP, neighbourhood renewal and mainstreaming

A strong and consistent theme under 'knowledge' was a need (apparent in most areas) to improve understanding *locally* about the LSP and thematic partnerships and how they fit together - including in their use of NRF. The following quote was indicative of many comments:

"We found that not all partners knew exactly what the other partners delivered, and there were quite a few gaps in understanding the LSP structure and workings, including how the thematic partnerships relate to each other and to the LSP. And we need to take another look at roles and responsibilities, so that we're all clear about what we need to do in future."

LSP MANAGER X

Improving understanding the LSP (how it really can make a difference, roles and responsibilities, principles of partnership working, etc) was mentioned by almost half - 21 out of 44 - commenting primarily on their LSP - and over a quarter of all interviewees who commented on learning needs. Several interviewees made related comments about the need for greater understanding of the local Community Plan and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Two of the LSP managers felt that partners were *"getting it"*, but there was still some way to go.

"The biggest challenge has been getting partners to recognise the need for mainstreaming, bending the spend - and their own responsibility for delivery. We think the penny's now dropped on how best to use NRF and the need to provide evidence in relation to floor targets. The message has got home but we've had to work hard at it."

LSP MANAGER Y

The following quotes provide a further flavour of responses:

"The biggest demand is to understand structures and workings of, for example, the LSP and sub-partnerships, including relationships with each other. There are also challenges around the management of information, managing meetings and generally understanding better how to perform community based roles."

LA COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

"The LSP has a broad spectrum of ability. There is a need to look at the range of skills and see where the gaps lie - but resources are a problem. Key area needed is awareness of the LSP and its objectives - what it is trying to achieve and the role of the Community Plan/PMF, etc"

LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

"People need to be made more aware of how the LSP can improve things and what the partnership is all about."

LA HOUSING MANAGER

“It would be helpful to revisit what the LSP is about, for each partner to understand their remit and contribution and how this links to the wider agenda. Trust between partners is lacking.”

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

“Understanding the heavy concept of the LSP and the various constituent bits of it. Community reps need to understand how they feed into the decision-making process. And training around the purpose of the Community Plan is needed.”

COMMUNITY WORKER

The next most commonly reported need in the LSP context was for ‘greater strategic perspective’ (mentioned by 13), sometimes linked to that of ‘better understanding of government policy’ (9). Several referred to constant need for updating on policy - and help for them in managing information overload - actual or potential. Knowledge needs relating to influencing mainstream services were raised by 13 (particularly relating to how other areas are seeking to do this) and understanding partners (10) (their roles, agendas, etc). Other examples included a desire to know which LSPs are making greatest impact on a particular floor target, how and why.

“Although everyone is very knowledgeable about what's going on at the surface, perhaps we need to be more aware about what's going on internally within each partner organisation.”

JOBCENTRE PLUS MANAGER

“There's a lack of knowledge among the various service providers as to what each other does. It's evident in the meetings we hold with them.”

NEIGHBOURHOOD OFFICER

“How to engage with the community; the whole area of impact and how to measure impact; setting targets - ‘killer’ targets; monitoring and evaluating what works - that's particularly weak; setting joint targets - knowing how the work of one organisation impacts on that done by the organisation next door, how they can get together in setting targets.”

NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

While understanding of ‘mainstreaming’ has grown (evident in reforms many LSPs have introduced to their NRF decision-making processes), many people are searching for practical examples and change management techniques to adopt. Some also have narrow working definitions, eg, seeing mainstreaming as only about ‘bending the spend’ in favour of deprived communities, and not embracing wider concepts of reshaping and joining-up services and being systematic in learning from and spreading good practice. The experience of a recent, NRA-assisted workshop held by one of the case study LSPs on principles and practices of mainstreaming demonstrated how widely perceptions vary - such that the lack of agreement made progress difficult¹⁴.

It was clear from a significant number of interviews that there is an underlying, latent need for improved understanding of NRF and mainstreaming. There were cases where

¹⁴ The national NDC evaluation Annual Review for 2003/04 also notes prevalent confusion over ‘mainstreaming’ and little in the way of learning from good examples.

interviewees saw NRF as a straight replacement for the SRB as a competitive bidding programme, and a few who thought that the LSP itself would no longer exist after the current NRF funding period. It seemed that the SRB (and other competitive funding regimes) was casting a long shadow: so many people had become used to bidding (and reliance on project-specific funding) that they have had difficulty in adjusting to a new approach. Skills for 'strategic commissioning' have become a focus of concern, combining analytical, project development, procurement and monitoring skills amongst core staff and balancing a partnering approach with robust practices to support and ensure results on the part of delivery partners. There are also related needs in terms of people's understanding of the implications of the shift from output targets (as under SRB) to outcome targets, including developing shared models of how interventions may be expected to impact on neighbourhood renewal outcomes, baseline requirements, and the use of proxy measures to chart progress - needs more widely identified in the experience of LSPs implementing Floor Target Action Planning.

Even more worrying was a propensity for a number of interviewees working in thematic partnerships to see 'neighbourhood renewal' as marginal or irrelevant for them. To describe the contrast, in one area, the Community Safety Partnership Manager said that neighbourhood renewal was "*nothing to do with me*", while in another, their view was that it was almost entirely about neighbourhood renewal.

Across our interviews, we have found some evidence of a tendency for people to want to put 'neighbourhood renewal' in a box, rather than accepting it as a cross-cutting priority with wide ramifications for the delivery of public services and engagement of communities, business and voluntary organisations.

We note that many of our interviewees (outside core 'neighbourhood renewal' or 'regeneration' practitioners) had not been previously involved, or in the way now required, in LSPs, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships. They typically have much to learn, and quickly - placing importance on their induction and continuing support, especially for 'lay' representatives from community, voluntary and business sectors.

More generally, there is a big job for all involved to keep on top of a fast moving agenda, both nationally and locally. Derby City Partnership has done most to address this, with a communications officer and concise reporting to maximise the likelihood that people involved in different roles in the partnership know what is going across the partnership's themes. Wigan have stressed induction and continuing support for those most closely involved in the workings of the LSP.

Partnership behaviours - positive and negative

The Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Framework contained in The Learning Curve (see Appendix C) highlighted the theme of 'Changing behaviours', requirements common to *all* actors involved in neighbourhood renewal. These behaviours were defined as including reflective practices, entrepreneurial ('can do') attitudes, problem solving orientation, an inclination to challenge traditional ways of working, and an aptitude for taking calculated risks and innovating. These relate to change management skills and characterise a learning culture.

What came through further in the interviews, however, were behaviours which undermine rather than reinforce effective partnership working and improved delivery - and which can lead to unnecessary conflict. Table 5 illustrates some of these.

Table 5 Positive and negative partnership behaviours

Positive behaviours		Negative behaviours
talk of "us"	↔	talk of "them"
"as a partner"	↔	"as a representative"
"air issues"	↔	"conceal agendas"
ask & listen	↔	tell
plan the future	↔	go over the past
accept responsibility	↔	pass the buck

Some interviewees referred to profound behavioural issues which made inclusive working difficult. These included the frequent use of jargon by public agency representatives, occasional bullying behaviours by senior agency staff and councillors, and variable willingness to listen to alternative points of view. Further evidence of these needs is provided by, for example, GOYH-funded research on Skills and Knowledge in Sheffield¹⁵ which remarked that, *"all too frequently, this was identified as a need for other individuals, organisations and sectors to change"*. This review concluded that there was a strong need to challenge and change existing behaviours, underlying attitudes and assumptions and accustomed types of relationships. This was hinted at by some interviewees, eg:

"There are time-related issues, that is, more time and patience to work alongside people who do not have that training; services to be co-designed with users."

LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

A consequence is that the confidence to engage amongst some community representatives is less than it could be - in a situation where such representatives have tended to face a steep learning curve in getting to grips with the neighbourhood renewal agenda. We encountered many comments on this theme, with some remarking along the lines of *"many people are intimidated in partnership setting"*. Sometimes there was a gender dimension mentioned, or alluded to, expressing concerns about domineering male practices in some regions, characteristic of individuals in senior roles. This has caused GONW to commission training, piloted with the region's NDCs, to raise the level of awareness about diversity, intended *"to ensure that everyone can work with confidence and feels valued"*.

Behavioural issues are not easily tackled through training activities. There is often need to encourage individuals to place themselves in other people's shoes to appreciate better how their behaviour may help or hinder. Skills in dialogue are important (listening closely, clarifying and checking understanding, enquiring into what we take for granted). Partnership ground rules can help, including agreement to avoid springing surprises on fellow partners, minimising and explaining jargon, being constructive at all times and accepting collective responsibility once decisions are taken.

¹⁵ Sally Robinson Associates for Sheffield First (2003) Skills And Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal in Sheffield. See also 'Sheffield First Partnership: Skills and Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal' case study on www.renewal.net

Community engagement

Behavioural skills issues are also reflected in responses from interviewees from CENs, residents involved in neighbourhood partnerships and workers in voluntary and community organisations. Of 50 people from these categories commenting on learning needs, nine remarked on the importance of building 'confidence to engage', nine to communications skills, eight to chairing and facilitating meetings, and seven to making presentations/ public speaking - all related skills. Several commented on the need for their organisations or networks themselves to become better at building relationships with and involving 'harder to reach' communities - a point also mentioned in relation to public agency staff.

Use of IT was mentioned by 10, project management by nine, and financial skills by eight. Forward strategies and accessing funding were raised by seven, of particular concern to those organisations continually having to manage short term funding arrangements. These findings are in line, eg, with the Skills Strategy for the Voluntary Sector (VSNTO 2004) developed as part of the 'ChangeUp' strategy Capacity Building and Infrastructure in the voluntary and community sector.

Observations about needs included various references to understanding service delivery issues, confidence to engage, dealing with conflict, and forward strategies, eg:

"With regard to the CEN reps, there is a need of training around service-delivery related skills and knowledge so that they can make more of a contribution to theme groups; also some training on how to chair meetings, how to speak up at public meetings, how to think strategically at public meetings. Also how to relate and support each other - the reps don't seem to be reporting back to their client group, so people in their individual organisations do not really understand what the CEN does or what the LSP does, and how both work together. There's also a need for training amongst the reps on how to deal with conflict within their own organisations."

LSP MANAGER

"There's a need for more information sharing and for a better knowledge of what is happening on the ground, what is happening in the areas, what commonalities there are within a particular sector and any issues that need taking forward, so that the Community Network representatives LSP can be more influential."

CEN DEVELOPMENT WORKER

"More sharing and understanding. There's a concern that resident board members might not be taken as seriously as others which we need to address. Although enormous progress has been achieved on confidence building, this process is very slow; a balance needs to be established between resident autonomy and team leadership. . .

"More work around appraisal is needed; equip people with the necessary skills to be able to take things forward beyond the lifetime of the NDC programme."

NDC MANAGER

“We need to help people at community level understand how organisations can work together and how they can contribute to maximising resources; there are language and communication skills-related issues...”

LA SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

It was also argued in Derby that some kind of formal accreditation is needed so that the skills the people have, or develop through their involvement, can be formally recognised.

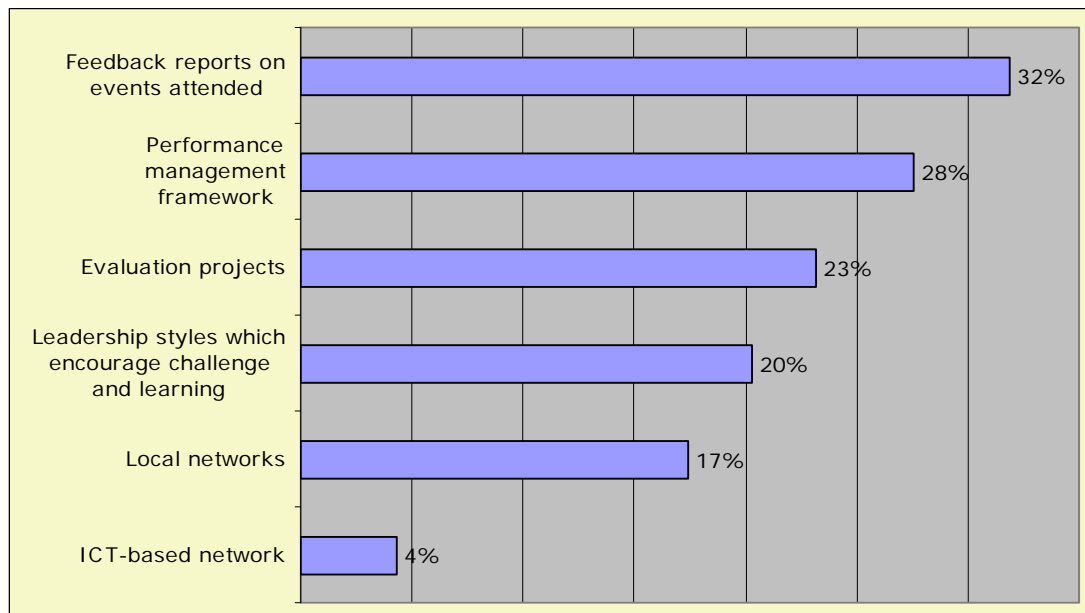
3.6 Developing a learning culture?

In most areas there is not a strong culture of learning around the work of the LSP and neighbourhood partnerships, one which would be characterised by shared awareness of needs, structured responses, and learning and reflection built in to collaborative activities.

We sought to explore about what steps were being taken to embed learning, asking interviewees what they were doing to ensure that, as partners, they were learning from experience and spreading this within the partnership. Three quarters reckoned they were doing something, and only 13% considered that they were not doing anything.

Most interviewees in the case study areas pointed to other practices they have pursued to learn from experience. Of these, 32% cited reporting on events attended; 28%, use of performance management frameworks; 23%, use of evaluation projects; 20%, leadership styles which encourage challenge and learning; and 17%, local networks (formal and informal, including the CEN itself and professional networks). Only 4% mentioned ICT-enabled networking - which is low relative to its potential for supplying real-time performance information and knowledge sharing.

Figure 9 Actions to learn from experience



N = 138

Examples of practices which interviewees have found helpful include:

- annual or bi-annual staff performance reviews (which are fairly common can easily be focused on very individual or organisational actions, but may not be very strategic). In contrast, for example, in Leicester City Council, neighbourhood renewal has been embedded in delivery strategies, through divisional service plans and into each unit's business plan - thence to staff objectives
- debriefing at team meetings (following attendance at partnership meetings or on training courses)
- annual conferences, to celebrate and review progress and identify how partners can work better together in future

The most developed 'learning culture' was to be found in Wigan, characterised by strong commitment from partnership leaders, regular space to stand back from day-to-day business to reflect and challenge thinking and practice, an emphasis on the use of evidence and 'what works', and extensive opportunities for community representatives to develop their skills and knowledge.

Wigan - towards a partnership learning culture

Learning and evidence embedded in strategy

The approach of Wigan Borough Partnership (WBP) is set out in the Community Plan published in 2002, with a principle: "*We need to think carefully about what we do - we need to look at what has worked well elsewhere and measure what we are doing ourselves to make sure we learn and improve*". The Plan sets out four steps:

- 1) Futures/ Trends - using the best available information for predict what will happen and use this to aid planning
- 2) Making sound decisions based on up-to-date knowledge, making full use of consultation and empowering people to use that knowledge
- 3) Measuring what we do using SMART targets and asking open, subjective questions to help understand the bigger issues
- 4) Review and evaluation (through annual convention and programme-specific evaluation)

There is strong commitment from the leadership of the Council to learning, both in formal ways and informally through, eg, the conduct of meetings and in how they challenge staff.

WBP commissioned a State of the Borough report and ran a 'Re-visioning' event in October 2003 as part of the process of rolling forward the Community Plan (now incorporating the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy). Thematic partnerships were fully involved in the review process as well, with the local authority chief executive playing an active role in stimulating debate on findings to a range of audiences.

The Partnership's learning plan

The Partnership has developed an evidence-based Local Action on Learning Plan, and is promoting or supporting a raft of learning activities, including work shadowing, sponsorship for community activists to pursue courses at Regen School and Salford University (Foundation Degree in Community Governance) and the Sharing Skills Programme (see Section 4.2 below)

An Induction Group was set up for WBP members from the voluntary and community sector, to help them develop their skills and knowledge, review agendas for forthcoming meetings, and review how successfully (or not) they had contributed at the previous meeting. The Group now continues in this role - though the focus is no longer 'induction' per se. Others have observed a big change in the voluntary and community sector contribution over the past 18 months: "*the reps have had a significant impact on the conduct of partnership meetings - they've helped cut across the bureaucracy, really refreshing and useful*".

The core of WBP alternates 'business' and 'creative' meetings, the latter providing opportunities for reflection, learning and a focus on improvement and future direction. These sessions are reckoned to have helped change member mindsets, in a more strategic direction: "*they've lifted our eyes up to look at the big strategic*

issues". One facilitated session brought together WBP members and Township Forum representatives to explore issues in working together at Borough-wide and Township levels, including possible tensions between ward councillors and Forum members (where clashes can arise between notions of representative and participatory democracy and different degrees of 'political' experience.). Participants recognised that this was the start of a process, given the need for extensive dialogue - they were struck by real differences in perspectives and language used. The session also helped Township Forum representatives recognise that they needed to think more creatively about the role of the Forums - as being about partnership and learning, not just lobbying and representation ("we should be seeing ourselves as learning groups... we want to learn more from others and develop our personal skills"). Evaluation has been built into the Township Programme on a continuing basis, to identify what is working and what is not, anticipate issues and identify improvement actions.

WBP have now held four annual conventions - one day events, attracting a wide range of stakeholders and providing an opportunity to review "the big issues that confront us all" and look forward. The fourth was held in February 2004. Reviewing the write-up of each convention demonstrates the progress made by the Partnership, with the latest much more focused on specific steps that partners can take to improve performance and community well-being. One interviewee who had participated in several remarked, for example, that there had been "a shift from antagonism to 'we're in this together'", while another felt that the Partnership had "progressed from being local authority-run to being a shop window for the Wigan community". They and others felt aware of milestones having been reached and passed, like the development of the Township programme.

Individual thematic partnerships have taken part in learning needs research, and run their own awaydays and conventions. This has been important, eg, in developing the new Economic Partnership which needed to go through a transformation from its predecessor, focusing much more on providing strategic leadership (rather than the operational responsibilities of its predecessor).

Taken together, these activities are reckoned to have helped ensure that the revised community strategy is significantly more robust than its predecessor: better targeted, more realistic and with more stakeholder backing.

Role of facilitation

Many of the Wigan interviewees commented on the value of facilitators in enabling them to make progress with partnership working: "The facilitators have made us think very hard about our structure, what we have to do and we've done all sorts of role plays and self questioning about how we move this thing forward". Experienced external facilitators have been used in a number of partnership contexts, while the Wigan partners have also sought to 'grow their own', eg, through in-house training in the Council and through the Sharing Skills programme for community activists. Participants on the latter have since facilitated partnership activities, like the 2004 Partnership Convention.

Some of these characteristics are evident to varying degrees in other areas, notably in Derby, where the LSP organises a City Partnership Week and an annual review meeting, using break-out groups to foster participation. There is a Chairs and Contacts Group at the hub of the partnership, run with an exploratory style, with members asking, 'how can we improve what we do and how we do it?'. There are also examples within partner organisations (eg, the City Council) of strategic thinking about learning and development internally to strengthen the agency's contribution to neighbourhood renewal.

In West Cumbria, we found many interviewees interested in how learning activities could be embedded more across the work of the LSP, though not all were convinced. Allerdale Borough Council is now leading on an initiative called Future Generation, intended to challenge community and political leaders to envision a future West Cumbria which is attractive to 18 to 30 year olds, a 'missing generation' in the area, then to prepare an Action Plan to generate that future. One interviewee characterised the approach as:

“It’s not about teaching or spoon feeding information. People have to get out, find out, bring back to the partnership... It should address the fundamental need to understand what the partnership is about.”

PROJECT MANAGER, HE

The Council itself places priority on learning and organisational development, integrating performance improvement and recruitment and retention strategies. Senior managers are benefiting from coaches from leading companies, and the Council has given priority to project management training across all departments. Staff have made changes in how they approach their work, with benefits in terms of better understanding of where individuals fit in and what’s expected of them, better risk assessment, and common language and disciplines in project management.

Organisational learning practices are better embedded in some organisations than others - and in some sectors, such as health. For example, Leicester West PCT has, for example, been involving stakeholders in planning events for the past five years. The following quotes typify some alternative views:

“We pursue training as and when. We ask the Borough Council for anything we need.”

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER

“We favour experiential learning for neighbourhood renewal, to build on individual qualifications. Decisions about training activities are taken at departmental level”

LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

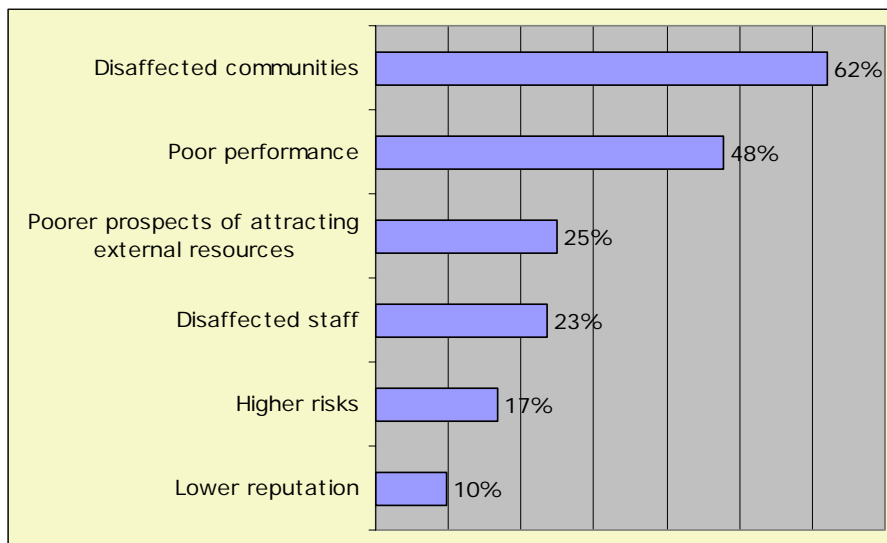
“Training in the Trust is done on a personal basis, where training required is catered for, all staff have individual assessment.”

LOCAL CO-ORDINATOR, NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

3.7 Consequences of not acting on learning and development needs

We asked a question about the consequences of not acting on identified learning and development needs, to gain a feel for what mattered to interviewees - that might or might not influence their commitment to action.

Figure 10 Consequences of not acting on identified learning and development needs



N = 132

Of those answering this question, the consequence of ‘disaffected communities’ was mentioned by three in five. Comments suggested that the main related risks were: failure to engage effectively; failure to demonstrate results valued by communities; or the withdrawal of community representatives. ‘Poor performance’ was identified by just under half, with contributory factors reported as weaker strategies, missed opportunities, higher staff turnover and failure to ‘bend the mainstream’ and make better use of resources.

‘Poorer prospects of attracting external resources’ was cited by 25% (mainly from voluntary and community organisations with time-limited funds), and ‘higher risks’, by 17%. Interviewees in Basildon, Bolsover and Derby were more likely to raise ‘poor performance’ as a consequence, and Great Yarmouth, Leicester and West Cumbria, ‘disaffected communities’.

The consequences were put most eloquently by people involved with Derby Derwent NDC:

“People won’t perform so well, they won’t have the confidence, won’t have the skills, there would be a higher turnover of staff. And if the skills that have been acquired can be retained alongside additional learning, by the end of the [NDC] programme they will have a very strong programme where people will leave with skills that they can take somewhere else as well.”

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TEAM MEMBER

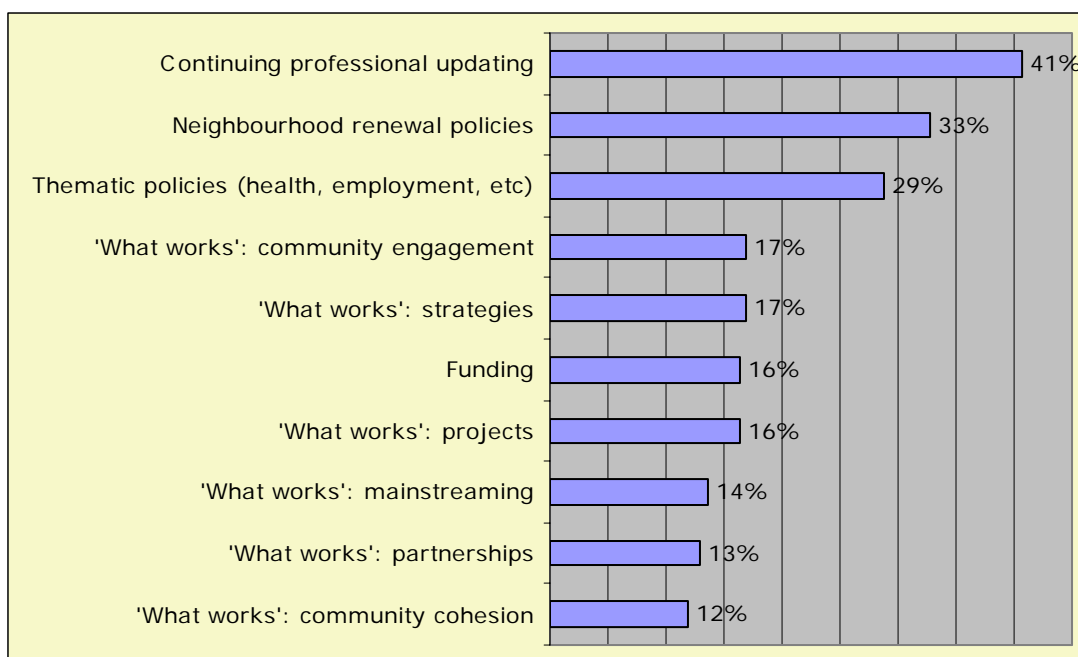
“If you don’t have the necessary skills in place there will be sustainability-related issues. When the funding runs out the community would back where it started. Projects would be commissioned without them being the best that they could be. There wouldn’t be enough lateral thinking and co-ordination between the various agencies.”

LA COUNCILLOR

3.8 Personal development needs

We asked interviewees about what they saw as their personal development *priorities*, in relation to keeping up to date with policy and ‘what works’, and the skills required for neighbourhood renewal and partnership working. Two out of five took the view that they had broad development needs best described as ‘continuing professional updating’, and a third singled out the need to keep up-to-date on neighbourhood renewal policy (Figure 11). Nearly as many (29%) commented on the need to keep up-to-date on thematic policies - eg, on community safety or employment - which affect, or contribute to, neighbourhood renewal goals. There was an appetite for greater knowledge of ‘what works’, in relation to strategies, projects, community engagement, partnership working and mainstreaming.

Figure 11 Personal development needs in relation to policy and ‘what works’



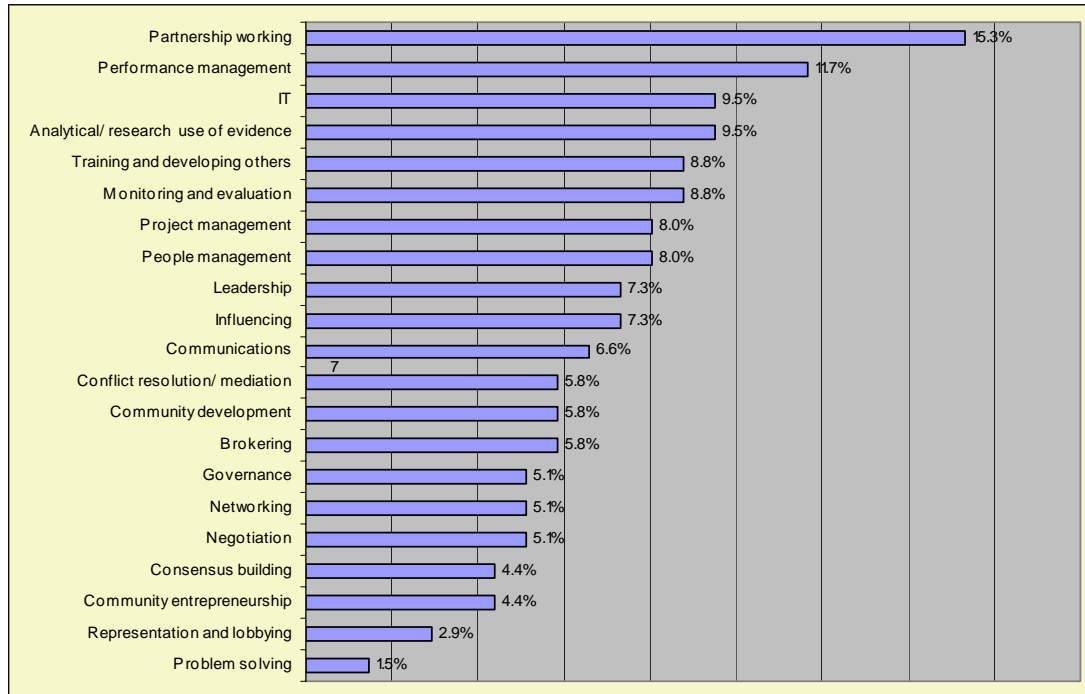
N = 177

Priorities relating to personal skill needs were many and varied (Figure 12). The most frequently mentioned topics were partnership working (15%), performance management (12%), analytical skills/ use of evidence (10%), monitoring and evaluation (10%) and training and developing others (9%). IT was also mentioned by 9%, mainly people from the voluntary and community sector. (We suspect that there are latent needs within public agencies too, given comments some interviewees made about their use of the internet which betrayed a lack of skill and confidence!) Performance management and project management skills tended to be raised most commonly by partnership staff, while community representatives were most likely to raise partnership skills as a priority. Overall, community development and neighbourhood renewal workers were most likely to identify *skill* (rather than knowledge) priorities.

We encountered some experienced individuals who felt that there was little they needed to learn, and others who maintain a thirst for learning. The latter tended to look for different ways of doing things and opportunities to think afresh. We also found several interviewees who made a point of saying, “*we don't know what we don't know*” (bringing to

mind a notion of ‘conscious incompetence’, a stage which one needs to reach before being able to progress to ‘conscious competence’).

Figure 12 Personal development priorities in relation to skills needed for neighbourhood renewal and partnership working

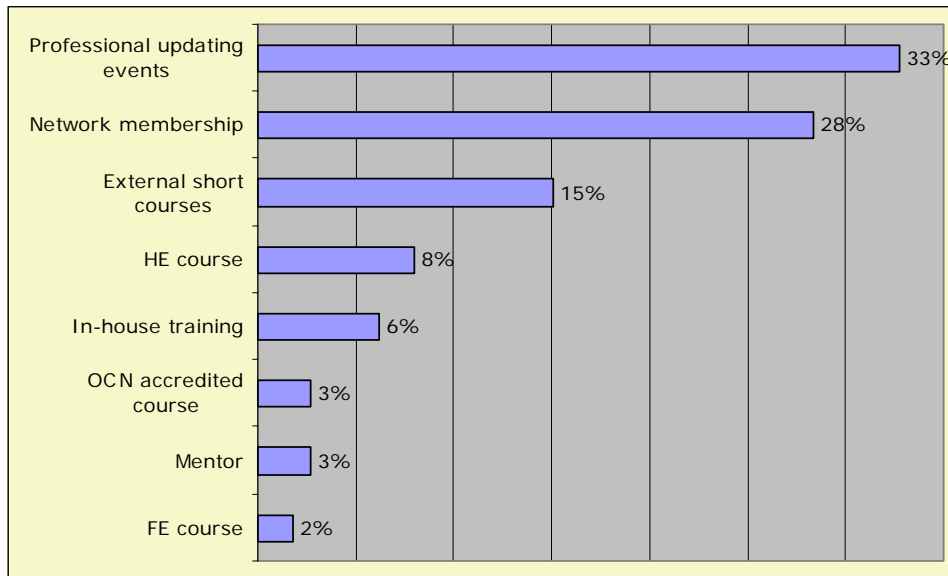


N = 137

Meeting personal development needs

Most interviewees in the area field work tend to rely on professional updating events (33%), membership of relevant professional or interest networks (28%), and external short courses (15%) (Figure 13) . We also asked about their plans and found a broadly similar pattern with a slight increase in numbers intending to pursue external short courses.

Figure 13 Actions in addressing personal development needs



N = 113

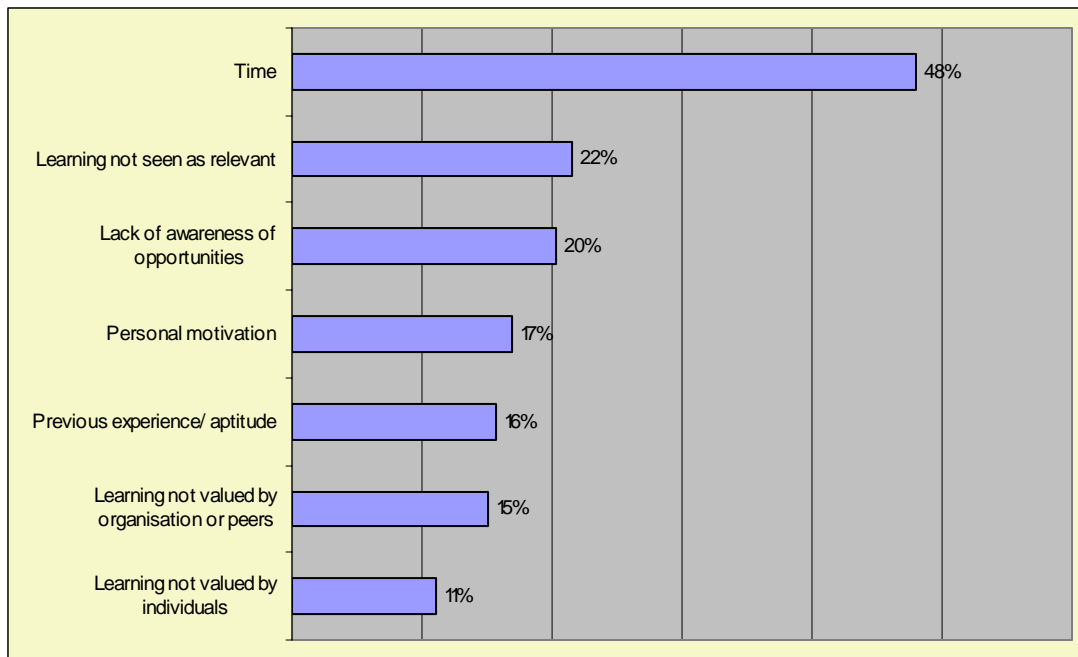
Some 6% of all the interviewees were pursuing or considering a course in FE or HE. This may underestimate the level of interest in accredited training, as other evidence points to unmet demand for qualifications amongst community representatives and activists. Related research in the North West and West Midlands has confirmed this interest, while flagging obstacles relating to costs of the training (course fees and expenses) and lack of existing provision (especially that which is locally accessible). There appears to be more interest amongst people who do not have higher qualifications; for those without, accreditation can be a powerful motivator.

3.9 Barriers to action and take-up of learning activities

Finally, in reviewing learning needs and practices, we asked interviewees about whether they had encountered barriers to people recognising and acting on learning needs or applying what they had learnt. Three quarters reckoned that they had, sometimes speaking personally, and sometimes observing barriers amongst colleagues and partners.

Notable barriers identified (Figure 14) were learning not seen as relevant (22%), a lack of awareness of opportunities (20%), limited personal motivation (17%), previous experience/ aptitude (16%), and learning not valued by their organisation or by peers (15%).

Figure 14 Barriers to learning



N = 153

Time and priority

Above all, time was identified as a factor by almost half (48%). We note that in practice, 'time' is a synonym for priority - ranking one activity lower than others. Many interviewees talked of their day-to-day pressures, and how an important activity such as learning and development can lose out to more urgent matters. There were cases where planned training for neighbourhood renewal had not taken place because of work commitments and illness.

Others called for action to make it easier for them to keep abreast of developments and learn:

“The available knowledge is not in a form that is easy to digest, particularly considering the time constraints resulting from having your own commitments within your own organisation. The stuff available is dense and jargonistic, there is no glossary, is not written in plain English. Documents are written in a style that residents find quite difficult to understand.”

LOCAL AUTHORITY HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

We found that commitment to joint learning was hampered by perceptions of partnership working as an 'add-on' for organisations and individuals along with a lack of recognition of partnership working in job descriptions and partner business plans. Partnership-based learning for neighbourhood renewal is then seen by some as 'an add-on to an add-on'.

“It has been on our agenda in the group for 12 months or more. It requires people to find the time to put together some information and start to share that with other people. Their day job gets in the way and they come to the meeting saying, ‘I haven’t had the chance to do

that. I'll try to do that next time'. Next time comes and they still haven't done it. So there is identified need to share understanding, share plans, strategies, targets, the whole shooting match. And no one has said, 'I need to understand how to run meetings or how to engage in this meeting, or I need more understanding of the education sector or the acronyms we use, could you sort out a training plan for me?'"

LOCAL LSC MANAGER

Attitudes towards learning

We also found evidence of a view that learning for neighbourhood renewal is not relevant to individuals or organisations, and an attitude which sees the admission of learning or seeking evidence from elsewhere as a weakness. One LSP manager commented, *"I'm not too proud to go looking..."* Some interviewees felt that learning and development was not a core business requirement, or thought that others held that view. We also uncovered attitudes like: *"I've got all the skills I need, so I don't need any training"*, *"my own organisation deals with my learning needs"*, and *"training is a diversion, it doesn't get results"*. Other concerns were expressed, for example, that word 'training' puts people off: *"We find it's better to call it 'sharing your experience'"*.

There were also comments which suggested a lack of clarity on needs and how best to tackle them, eg:

"Partnerships tend to send people on courses just in case they'll be missing out if they don't. The relevance of courses needs to be made clearer so that people aren't attending simply for the sake of attending."

CEN DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Engaging members of the community in learning for neighbourhood renewal

There were also observations that 'first things come first' in engaging local residents in learning for neighbourhood renewal:

"We've got to get the basics right before we get more people involved and learning - like sorting out the recycling bins."

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE (RURAL AREA)

"Some members of the community are not empowered enough to have the confidence to grab the opportunity to take courses, yet probably need them most."

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER

Perceptual barriers can be significant: in line with the findings of much adult learning research we encountered comments along the lines of *"the community is still scared to attend formal places of learning"* and cases where there was limited take-up of opportunities (eg, in the case of action learning sets), because prospective participants from the voluntary and community sector *"did not know the facilitator and consequently did not have confidence to attend"*.

Barriers to inclusion

Barriers to the participation of some groups were raised, factors which tend to exclude individuals because of their domestic responsibilities and/ or ethnicity. This was mentioned, for example, as a reason why people with children or other care responsibilities may be unable to attend events at particular times of day, or women from some communities may find it difficult to attend residential courses.

There were a handful of comments about the relevance of basic skills, amongst some frontline staff and community representatives. One Learning Partnership manager pointed out that basic skills training *“helps partners’ staff meet the joining up services requirements, eg. by helping them to read and write - yes, it is as basic as this”*.

Resources for learning activities

Amongst other comments were issues of access to resources, eg, where the LSP has little or no budget of its own. This also reflects priorities: if partners do not make provision, or are not creative in how they make use of resources, this may be registered as a barrier.

Sourcing learning provision

Some 12% of interviewees commented on difficulties sourcing appropriate learning provision. Their points included:

- doubts about the quality of providers (eg, the local CVS or college; also some trainers/ facilitators being seen as *“too middle class”*)
- lack of awareness of where to go for help and where to find a facilitator
- difficulty in *“getting a culture match”* on a provider of equality and diversity training

A few commented on difficulties in sourcing specific training, eg, project management in the East Midlands:

“There is a very urgent and strong need for deliverers in the Midlands. The key venues are in London, which recurrently comes up as being a major issue. People cannot afford the time and the cost to keep going down to London. Some of the London conferences are around £100, plus train fair, plus staying overnight if required and people cannot afford the time away from the job they are doing.”

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TEAM MEMBER WITH CAPACITY BUILDING RESPONSIBILITIES

This comment also raises the barrier of cost, which was seen as a significant issue in West Cumbria (because of additional distance-related costs of attending events outside the area).

Barriers to learning and change within organisations

Finally, there is a range of forces operating within partner organisations, in particular affecting the extent to which middle managers help or hinder service improvement and innovation. The following quote highlights a crucial issue in driving change:

“Middle managers are squeezed between the senior management, who are the ones who can promise whatever and sit around the table, and service managers, who have the responsibility for the delivery of services, and then you have front line staff, who are the ones delivering these services. Most of the time these people at the front end know best what kind of services are needed but it’s very difficult for them to influence any change in services because they are part of the system. Service providers stick to what is working and this is something that they are trying to break...”

“...At the same time, despite community people having a very strong commitment to neighbourhood renewal, they lack the skills and knowledge to be at the same level as other people who have been working on this for a while.”

NEIGHBOURHOOD CO-ORDINATOR

The implication of the latter point is that unless local people are better equipped to articulate needs, challenge service providers and input to service improvement strategies, the pace of change is likely to be slower than it could otherwise be. Other interviewees commented on gaps between the front-line and senior decision-makers - a situation that can lead to strategic decisions far removed from needs and the practicalities of delivery.

Organisational ‘turf’ issues come into play too. One thematic partnership manager, for example, observed a culture shift he had experienced:

“We used to have a ‘multi-agency approach’ which meant that the agencies came out of their respective bunkers, were very polite to one another for about an hour, then they went back to their bunkers and threw hand grenades at each other.”

THEMATIC PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

Other interviewees, however, suggested that such situations still existed...

There were also comments about organisational inertia (“agencies carrying on regardless”), emphasising part of the core challenge of change management in neighbourhood renewal, eg:

“The LSP business development theme continues to deliver what they were delivering anyway. The LSP may be more aware of the problems, but is it more able to solve them?”

BUSINESS LINK REPRESENTATIVE

We note too, that the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder evaluation, while stressing the value of the Pathfinders as laboratories for change, found that *“some service providers were constrained from piloting innovations...for a variety of reasons - short-termism and risk aversion, information and communication failures and a lack of capacity and inclination to manage change in different and innovative ways”*.

The nature of the barriers identified presents a marketing challenge to all those who wish to raise the priority given to skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal: to design learning activities that best meet needs - often tailored to specific, on-the-job

requirements - and to promote them effectively in compelling terms with clear benefits. Many people have had limited exposure to 'what works' in cross-sector and cross-disciplinary learning in a partnership context, and there is a need to promote successful approaches - with evidence of the difference these have made.

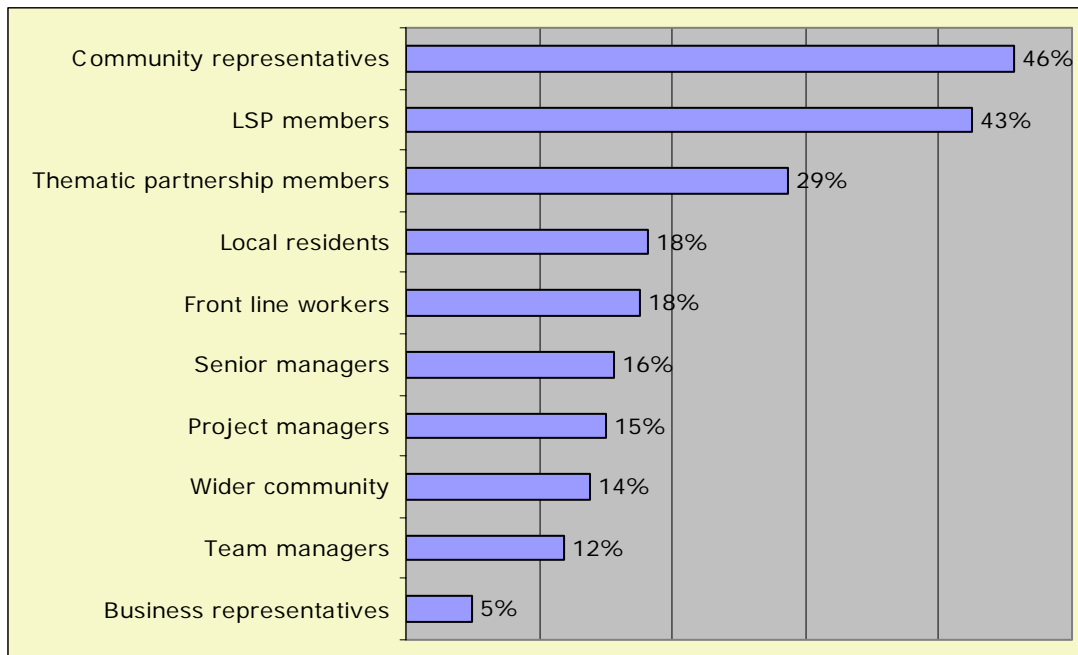
4 Addressing partnership skills and knowledge needs

4.1 Approaches to meeting needs

More than four in five of our fieldwork interviewees had taken some action to develop skills, knowledge or capacity of people in their partnership, or had taken part in such activity. Just over half had promoted or taken part in activities to build knowledge, and two in five, to develop skills relating to partnership working. A lower proportion, one in five, had promoted or taken part in activities intended to develop capacity within the partnership to achieve specific neighbourhood renewal priorities. The locus has been primarily LSPs, CENs or neighbourhood partnerships, though there were some examples specific to thematic partnerships or to service delivery projects.

The most frequent targeted groups of participants (Figure 15) in partnership learning activities have been community representatives (mentioned by 46% interviewees), LSP members (43%) and thematic partnership members (29%). Learning involving local residents was reported by 18%, front-line workers (18%) and senior managers (16%).

Figure 15 Range of participants

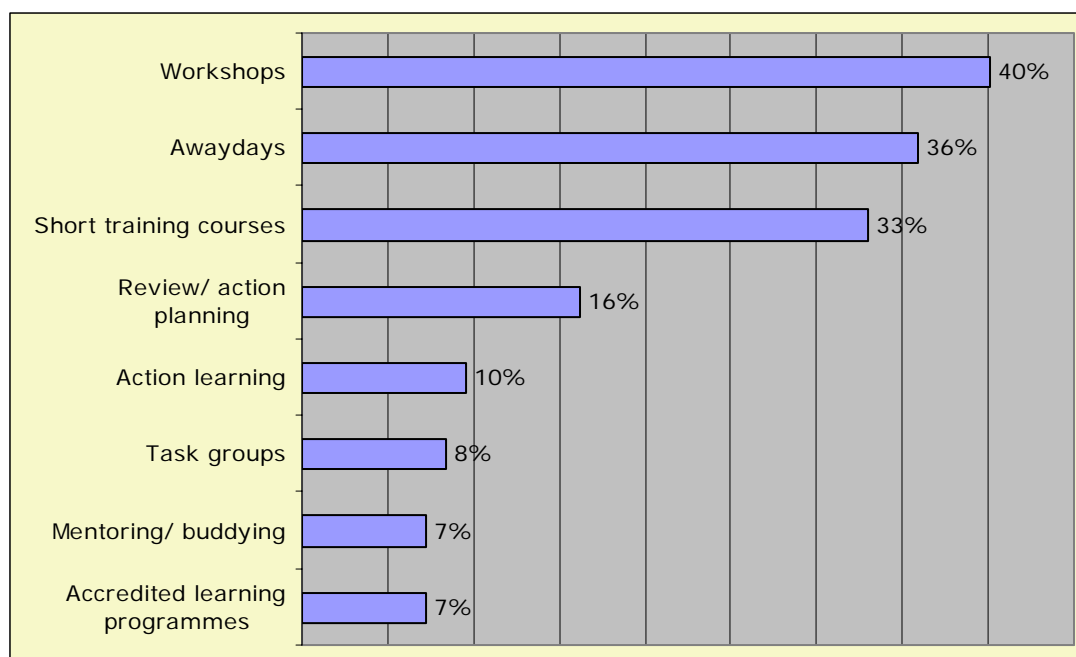


N = 160

A wide range of learning activities has been pursued (eg, coaching and mentoring, study visits, community conferences/ 'open space' events - big events involving all interests in the one room) (Figure 16) but the most common cited by interviewees were workshops (40%), partnership awaydays (36%) and short training courses (33%). Typically, however, the participation of interviewees in these had been occasional and had not involved a significant commitment of time. Some activities have been very informal, eg, ad hoc advice on financial skills within voluntary organisations, and approaches within partnerships to reviews and action planning. Some partnerships are making an effort to

make better use of skills around the partnership table, eg, drawing on marketing and PR skills in the private sector in leading task groups to develop a communications strategy.

Figure 16 Main types of learning activity promoted



N = 167

Table 6 provides examples of learning activities under each of these headings. In addition to these, interviewees referred to learning activities geared specifically to their particular occupations.

Table 6 Illustrations of learning activities

Type of learning activity	Examples
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strategy development and review days ▪ internal team building events ▪ LSP and NDC/ neighbourhood partnership development ▪ equalities and community cohesion - what these mean for the partnership ▪ Compact development ▪ inter-agency 'Youth at Risk' programme
Short training courses/ programmes: local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SRB/ Single Pot appraisal training (eg, West Cumbria, Wigan) ▪ mediation skills ▪ communication skills ▪ presentation/ public speaking skills ▪ facilitation skills (Great Yarmouth EAZ, Leicester, Wigan) ▪ research: data gathering and running focus groups ▪ 'Introduction to Neighbourhood Renewal' courses ▪ survey skills ▪ influencing skills ▪ project management ▪ participatory appraisal
Short training courses/ programmes: non-local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme ▪ RegenSchool
Task groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NDC theme groups with project development budgets which can be used for relevant study visits and training

Type of learning activity	Examples
Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ induction handbook ▪ induction sessions (group or one-to-one)
Awaydays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ review days for members of strategic and neighbourhood partnerships
Action learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪
Accredited learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foundation Degree in Community Governance (eg, through Salford University) ▪ Managing voluntary organisations
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common Purpose ▪ visits to/ from other partnerships ▪ partners doing presentations to inform others on what they are doing ▪ work shadowing

Some of the activities like partnership induction and appraisal training relate to needs which might be expected to be common across all the areas. However, while some have attached priority to structured induction (*"We needed a system for looking after people... It's not just a case of telling people to feel at home"*), we encountered in other areas comments like:

"There was no induction. It was awful. I had to do it myself. I went to the LSP lead officer and he gave me a lot of useful information."

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER/ REPRESENTATIVE

"When I got involved in project appraisal, it was just a case someone giving me a sheet with the rules"

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

Resourcing partnership learning activities

According to interviewees, resources used for these learning activities have been a mix of partnership budget (36%), partner in-kind (32%), and 'external' funds, including NRF, Community Empowerment Fund, Community Learning Chests and the Single Regeneration Budget. Many participants - as distinct from those promoting the learning activities - were unsure about sources used.

There have been a few cases of Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding through either their Adult and Community Learning stream (typically through the local education authority) or Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (the purpose of which is primarily to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector to deliver learning opportunities for residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods). In theory, LSC funding *could* be a significant source of funding for learning to support the delivery of neighbourhood renewal objectives, but in practice this has been limited. Several interviewees noted a disjunction between neighbourhood renewal needs - primarily for informal, non-accredited and short course provision - and the LSC's priorities largely for full qualifications obtained through FE colleges and work-based learning providers. While the LSC has been working on proposals for new funding arrangements for non-accredited courses¹⁶ (including an element for 'community development' learning, relevant to neighbourhood renewal), this is not a priority for the agency (as set out in 'The Skills We Need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities', 2004).

¹⁶ This is linked to work on progression routes. LSC Leicestershire has been supporting a pilot on the national 'Recognising and recording progression and achievement' project involving Leicester College, South Leicestershire College and Leicester City Council, focused on deprived communities.

LSC funding supported partnership learning activities in West Cumbria in 2003-04, but this was not continued due to a change in local policy in the allocation of adult education budgets.

In Wigan, LSC funding has supported the Sharing Skills Programme (see 4.2 below) via the Council Education Department, seen as skilling up participants to act as champions for learning in their communities. In Pendle, a NEBSS¹⁷ course in supervisory management for community organisations run by Nelson and Colne College in 2002/03 suffered from inconsistent attendance and did not attract further funding through SRB and LSC.

In Leicester, the LSC Leicestershire has funded action learning sets organised by Voluntary Action Leicester and the posts of five Learning Development Workers (four in neighbourhood renewal priority areas, and one within the Council, working with staff in Social Services and Housing). The latter are intended as a mechanism for stimulating learner demand, and supporting community cohesion work in the city. Their task is to identify local learning needs and facilitate appropriate responses - which may include neighbourhood renewal-related action. In the LLSC's business plan for 2004-05, there are targets to have 15 such workers in place and 250 adults returning to learning. The programme is funded through LSC Adult and Community Learning and Local Intervention and Development Fund budgets, and the European Social Fund. This example of LSC funding illustrates where LSC interest in widening participation and the interest of the NRU in learning for neighbourhood renewal come together.

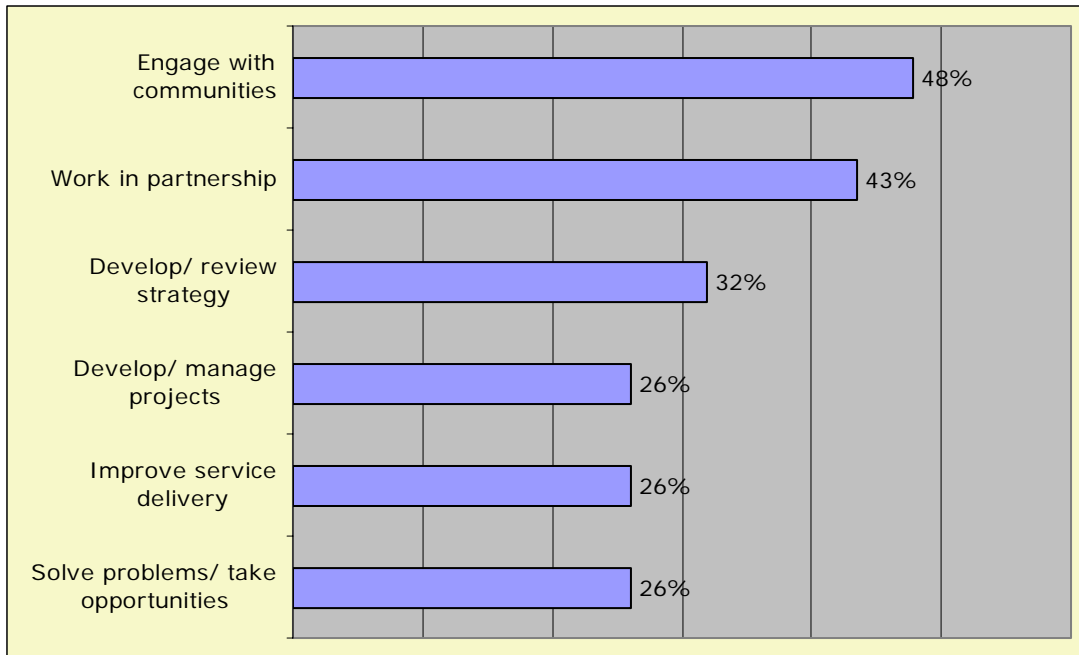
The use of Community Learning Chest has been well-embedded in the approach in Wigan but not, for example, in Leicester. In the former, partners have drawn on a range of sources to fund learning activities, seeking to make good use of partner resources and creative use of other sources. Community Learning Chest money has been put into a pot with ESF money for a skills and knowledge grants scheme administered by Douglas Valley Community (a body set up with legacy funds from Wigan City Challenge). The budget has been used to pay for specific courses (eg, in newsletter production) where a common gap has been identified, and to provide for grants for individuals to take short courses or pursue qualifications, such as the Foundation Degree in Community Governance at Salford University. Similar bursaries have been offered in Luton.

4.2 Highlighted examples of successful and innovative learning activities

Just under a third (32%) of our interviewees in the area field work were able to talk about learning activities which they regarded as particularly successful, significant or innovative in achieving partnership objectives. Of these (Figure 17), 48% of these cited engaging with communities and 44%, working in partnership, as topics where participants were now better equipped.

¹⁷ NEBSS: National Examinations Board for Supervisory Studies (now incorporated into the Institute of Leadership and Management).

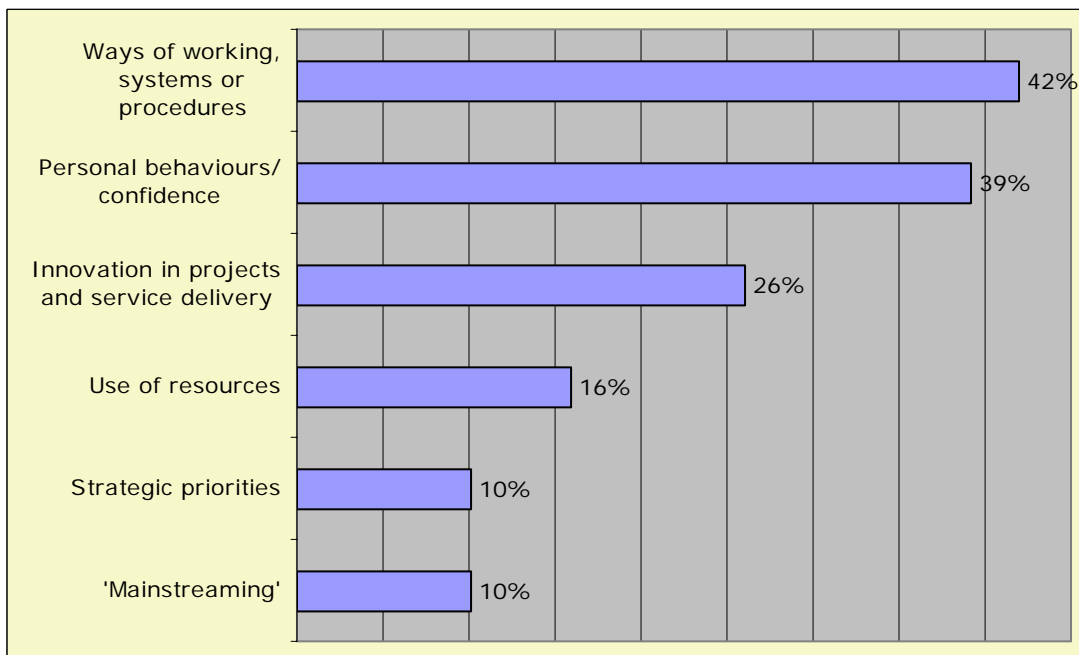
Figure 17 What can participants do now that they weren't able to do before, or do better?



N = 69

Just over two in five (42%) reckoned that partners had made changes (Figure 18) to ways of working, systems or procedures as a direct or indirect consequence of these learning activities, and 39% identified changes in personal behaviours and confidence. Changes in relation to mainstreaming or strategic priorities were lower, at 10% each. Other respondents felt that they were not in a position to observe.

Figure 18 Have partners developed or made changes relating to any of the following as a direct or indirect consequence of any of these learning activities?



N = 69 (% responding to capability question)

Interviewees responding to the capability question reckoned that they could point to associated improvements with regard to partnership or specific outcomes for local people/ communities/ businesses (45%), in service delivery (26%), and/ or in organisational performance (23%), with 13% unable to do so. We note, however, that interviewees had limited evidence to offer on these outcomes. It was rare, for example, to have evidence such as that for a council course in facilitation skills where 48% participants felt that they can now do their job better and 12 % feel it has made no difference.

Examples of successful or innovative learning activities included:

work in partnership - action by CENs

Strategic and neighbourhood action in Great Yarmouth

- Community Connections in Great Yarmouth have worked at both strategic and neighbourhood levels. On the former, they have enabled community representatives to play more effective roles in partnership meetings, helping them prepare ahead of meetings, reviewing the agenda, clarifying issues and understanding, and explaining the jargon. They have sought to ensure that representatives feel comfortable at the table, and know what questions to ask. On the latter, they have run monthly events, 'Making a Difference', for residents and community representatives. These have been basic, participatory sessions, arranged around school hours, targeting 70% 'non-traditional learners', to support them setting up community groups and promoting other community activities. The whole of Great Yarmouth now has active community groups, and some of the participants have become ready to progress to accredited training.

Accredited learning on neighbourhood renewal in Bolsover and Luton

- INVOLVE (the CEN for Bolsover) has supported a programme which aims to increase understanding of regeneration, and develop the community's role. This has involved a series of training modules, accredited at Level 3 by the Open College Network - run for the last three years. Interviewees consider that the programme has contributed to improved dialogue with some partners, eg, in the Primary Care Trust and the Police, leading in the former case to improved service delivery (eg, location better tailored to needs). A related programme, 'Empowering Local Communities' is promoted by Luton Committee for Racial Harmony (and has drawn NDC and CEF funding). The programme was run for the second time in autumn 2004 and is also accredited at Level 3. It involves one day a week for 15 weeks and covers a wide range of topics including understanding neighbourhood renewal, managing people, accessing funds, equal opportunities and good practice partnership working and community consultation.

PMF workshops and coaching in chairing skills in West Cumbria

- West Cumbria CEN held a PMF workshop, supported by an NRA, where the review process was seen as a simple, helpful exercise, providing "a safe framework in which to work". The exercise helped the CEN gel: it clarified issues, reaffirmed their purpose and how to move forward as a *network*. West Cumbria also organised 10 hours coaching each for two CEN representatives in chairing skills. This covered

the role of the chair; personal strengths and weaknesses; bespoke learning plans; dealing with difficult situations; discussing scenarios before meetings; reviewing what did happen, did the chosen tactics work? One in particular felt that this helped them fulfil their tasks better.

work in partnership - LSPs

Performance management and target setting

- Several of the LSPs have organised performance management and target setting workshops. In West Cumbria, for example, these were felt to have helped the Partnership prioritise - though not without some objections on the part of many community representatives who felt they had been cut out of the process. There were priority setting workshops in Bolsover and Great Yarmouth (both examples NRA-facilitated), and in Derby. Workshops have also been in Great Yarmouth (two hour sessions, held quarterly), each taking a different neighbourhood renewal theme, and involving local people and officers with strategic responsibilities from across the agencies. Interviewees reckoned that *some* of the participating agencies now understand better what 'community involvement' means.
- There have also a few floor target-related seminars including one on 'use of evidence' in West Cumbria which highlighted the need to find better ways to share information and improve access to data at smaller geographical levels

Workshops and awaydays to strengthen the partnership

- Action planning sessions as part of Derby City Partnership's Annual Review, with partners asking, 'how can we add value to each other; what are the barriers and what can we do about them?' DCP organised a planning day for the next year's thematic partnership action plans which was well-attended (65 people). Each partnership made a presentation in the morning and the afternoon concentrated on cross-cutting issues. DCP has also ran a workshop bringing together Derby City Partnership and Derby Derwent NDC, which led to mainstreaming of some approaches to community engagement
- Luton Forum, the LSP, has held awaydays for partners to review the LSP's purpose, added value and use of NRF. These events have helped ensure that directors are more aware of their responsibilities and of the skills they need to undertake their role effectively. Action planning led to an external report on the work of the partnership and organisational structures were changed as a result, including action to co-ordinate funding through a Funding Management Board and to strengthen the work of thematic partnerships.
- Bolsover ran an awayday in April 2003 which led to a review of the whole partnership structure, identified weaknesses and how to strengthen thematic partnerships and the links between them. Further progress has been made with NRA support, involving theme groups in reviewing the LSP PMF.

Action on mainstreaming in Leicester

- Informal evening gatherings to 'brainstorm' the topic of mainstreaming in Leicester (organised by LSP board member from the Institute of Directors). Participants recognised that "*we all share the same huge problems*", and began to identify potential solutions. However, they realised they needed to do more to involve local people, and home in on 'quick hits' which demonstrate what

working with communities and inter-agency collaboration can deliver, most likely in relation to crime reduction and health.

improving neighbourhood service delivery

Round table working and learning support in Basildon

- The Interlock Neighbourhood Management pathfinder in Basildon holds regular round table meetings between residents and service providers (50:50 participation), with aims of changing attitudes within the community towards service providers and attitudes within the agencies towards community engagement. These have built relationships and trust, and contributed to improvements in 'liveability' of the area, with active involvement of residents. Interlock is one of few Pathfinders to have its own learning plan (covering training, eg, in IT, project appraisal and monitoring and evaluation for neighbourhood committee members, and project management training for officers), and is reckoned by the national Neighbourhood Management programme evaluation to "have raised understanding and strategic awareness of, and commitment to, the NM initiative".

Developing Sinfyn Neighbourhood Services Link, Derby

- In Sinfyn in Derby, the neighbourhood co-ordinator organised several workshops as part of a development process associated with the development of Sinfyn Neighbourhood Services Link (see case study on Renewal.net). Initially they started with members of the Sinfyn partnership itself, then widened participation to involve middle managers across a number of public agencies. The first workshop was about neighbourhood renewal, the Derby strategy, floor targets and planning processes. Shortly after, a second workshop was held to look at partnership development, structures, and representation, seeking to promote genuine community leadership. There is now a partnership group which consists of representatives from the community and from all the service providing organisations that use the Neighbourhood Services Link (which is housed in the local library). There are also community representatives on a smaller management group and services are developing in ways which are increasing resident satisfaction.

Community mapping in Wigan

- The Hagfold Community Mapping Network in Wigan (SRB-funded) has made tangible improvements in the area and has now launched its own community charter, enabling local people to monitor the achievement of service providers against agreed targets and hold them to account if they fail. The Network has developed a Community Plan and been successful in engaging young people. There was also SRB-funded training for local residents to undertake a community survey in Westleigh. The findings of the survey subsequently influenced resource allocation decisions. A third Wigan SRB project has trained headteachers in monitoring and evaluation practice in schools, including peer comparison, leading to improved school performance.

Learning by doing through developing a Service Level Agreement (West Cumbria)

- In Salterbeck in Workington, Impact Housing's Community Development Officer in has worked with residents to develop a Service Level Agreement to improve service delivery. The approach sought to build capacity amongst residents and

empower them to take greater control. Actions were pursued (eg, drafting a Residents Association constitution, an estate business plan and community plan, and the estate agreement) in ways which helped build skills, such that the participants have become better able to organise themselves and negotiate with public agencies. They have organised twice yearly visits to residents groups elsewhere, which has encouraged them to work through difficulties on their home patch. Overall, the residents have developed their understanding of how political structures work and confidence to challenge: *“before they wouldn't say anything, or be in aggressive disagreement... now they understand the place of compromise and seek solutions”*. The local authority has successfully been held to account - which strategically it welcomes. The Chief Executive has been directly involved in negotiating the revised agreement in 2004, which now also involves the PCT and Police. Environmental improvements are evident, eg, through the implementation of a new fly tipping procedure. The revised agreement includes an action plan with timescales and responsibilities.

Training for social enterprise in Bolsover

- Capacity building training in Bolsover to enable people to understand and establish incorporated social enterprises has led to six businesses employing 20 people, creating new community facilities and providing respite services for carers of elderly people in Bolsover, supported through Derbyshire County Council. Local people have been involved, for example, in the development of Willow Tree Family Farm, Shirebrook have developed skills in needs analysis, action planning, engaging with public agencies, financial planning, and business planning.

Derby Derwent NDC

Learning and capacity building has been treated as a priority by Derby Derwent NDC, who employ a capacity building co-ordinator. They compiled a learning and skills profile of NDC board members and active residents, to identify learning needs and how to address them.

NDC activities have included:

- inductions for new board members
- workshops prior to board meetings where a member of the Derwent Community Team meets with local residents and agencies
- annual awaydays for the board
- sessions with an NRA to talk about structures, and take them through the PMF process, and with the South Manchester NDC performance manager on performance management and joint targeting
- trips for residents, agencies, theme groups and board members to other NDCs, Neighbourhood Warden projects and abroad
- places on a Foundation Degree in Community Regeneration and Development developed in partnership with Derby University and sponsorship of two people to attend RegenSchool
- Valuing Experience project (to accredit participants' prior learning, through the Open College Network) which has developed into the Community Development Learning Programme
- training on diversity and equal opportunities, how to run meetings, how to be an effective representative
- Board member training on how to carry out interviews, selection procedures, how to speak in meetings with confidence
- residential week-ends for board members to look at how they are working and what is happening
- a range of other sessions, eg, on how it feels to be an asylum seeker in the area

Interviewees remarked on how these activities had helped NDC residents and staff develop a more strategic approach and enhanced their ability to deliver successfully.

Sharing Skills, Wigan

The Sharing Skills Programme was designed to help community activists develop their abilities to plan and deliver training events, facilitate group discussion and make effective presentations pitched in the right way to particular audiences. The programme (of eight four-hour sessions) included: designing a training session; planning a training event; using PowerPoint; and facilitating group discussion. They had to make a short presentation to their fellows, and organise an event of their choosing. Later they came back to review how they had done and learn from each other's experiences. The programme was run first in 2003, and was repeated in 2004, with participants in the first phase being encouraged to act as 'buddies' for those in the second.

For some of the participants the content of the programme was all new, for others (say, who had had some management experience) the benefit was more in "*formalising what you know and putting it into practice in new ways*" - not just in running events but also more informally in the day-to-day activities. One of the interviewees from a community association described how helpful the programme had been for him personally and for his group: "*We've moved away from a culture where people just say, 'we tried that four years ago...'. We now all have the same goal, making the estate a better place. We're working more as a team, thinking more about needs rather than wants.*" One illustration was in how they had dealt with a problem of blocked alleys (a safety issue if there were a house fire): "*We didn't barge in as before, we took a structured approach, did a plan, and raised some money... We've found that councillors are now more prepared to listen, give advice - and act on it... Same with the estate manager*". He and other members of the group are now better networked. Without Sharing Skills, he felt that "*we would have pottered on, we'd wouldn't have made as much progress in improving the estate. We'd probably have made the network contacts, but we wouldn't have made the most of these, nor explored the links*".

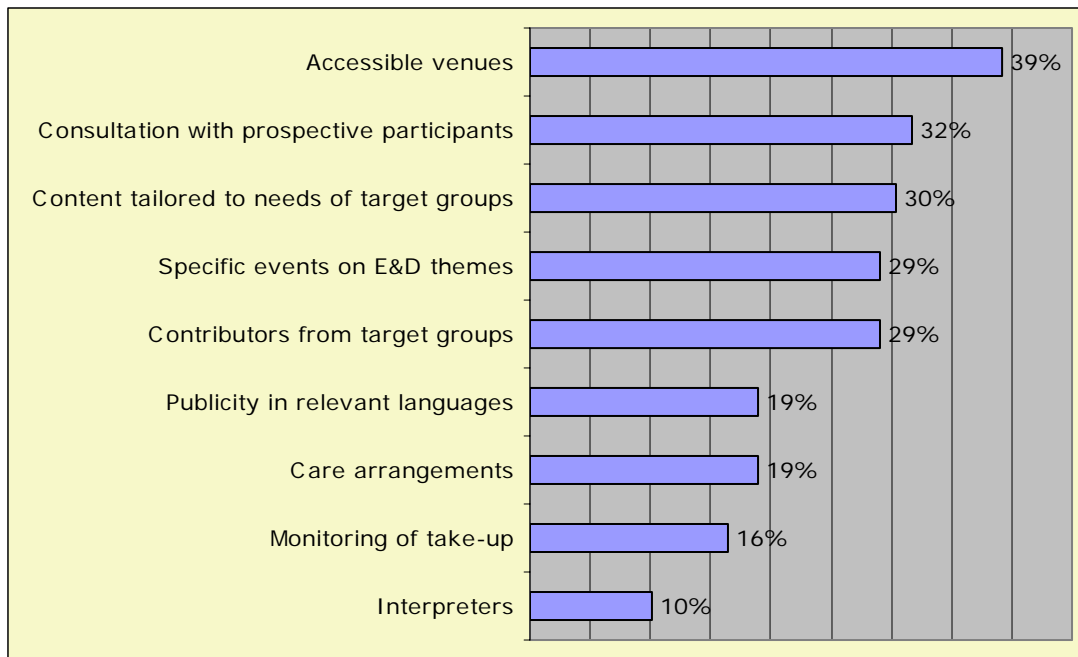
Other interviewees from public agencies remarked on how participants had become "*real evangelists for learning... infecting others*", and referred to specific benefits such as one case where the interviewee observed that a management committee members had begun to grasp the principles of 'what is it we need to do, and what do we need to learn to do it?' as a consequence of the training one participant had received.

Sharing Skills participants have been keen to develop a 'Sharing Skills Foundation' whereby they could offer their services to others and generate income for their organisations. Several were employed in this way to act as facilitators at the Wigan Borough Partnership Annual Convention in 2004.

4.3 Equality and diversity

In our fieldwork, we found that 45% interviewees responsible for learning and development interventions reckoned that their partnerships were addressing equality and diversity objectives directly, and 29% indirectly. Of those that were, the main actions noted were ensuring accessible venues (39%), consulting prospective participants about their needs and tailoring content to their needs (30%), involving contributors from target groups (29%), and running specific events on equality, diversity and community cohesion themes (29%).

Figure 19 Equality and diversity actions



N = 79

Some interviewees did not see it an issue worthy of specific consideration, or simply assumed that their learning activities were “open to all” and that this was sufficient. Others said that they cover equality and diversity issues “all the time” - for some this was fundamental to what they do:

“In every way, it totally underpins everything we do. At the beginning of every partnership meeting I stress the code of conduct and equal opportunities aspects. We are always keen to incorporate equal opportunities when people develop a new group.”

NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIP WORKER

“Both equality of opportunities and community cohesion are very central to what we do. We make provision for specific groups, through laying on interpreters, translations on the website, venues accessible for disabled people, use of computer sound facilities for visually impaired people, ensuring ethnic minority representation on management structures and so on. All the services we are planning to develop or have developed take into account both issues. It is an issue that is very much on top of our agenda.”

LOCAL AUTHORITY NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGER

Other actions included:

- provision of bursaries or travel expenses to enable people to take part
- attempting to get the pitch of training and other events right: “We’ve tried to avoid residents perceiving that things are too important or clever for them”
- arranging meeting times *“in order to make them accessible to everybody”* (though experience suggests, for example, that breakfast meetings are popular with business people, but not with people with childcare responsibilities...)

Specific activities reported by interviewees in fieldwork areas included:

- In Bolsover, partners have sought to promote learning and community cohesion through a cultural diversity forum. INVOLVE have sponsored research into community views on racial/ cultural issues, presented to the members of INVOLVE and others. This has succeeded in raising awareness of intercultural influences, and has helped bringing race and discrimination issues to prominence in local partnership working
- Leicester Counselling Centre: volunteers from BME background are fast tracked through training
- Community Connections in Great Yarmouth has trained its community development workers to target hard-to-reach groups more effectively. It has also introduced the Community Apprenticeship Programme for Minority Ethnic Groups (CAPMEG) which offers individuals and groups “the chance to share their experience and skills with each other and the wider community”. It provides them with opportunities to learn about community work and develop their community involvement skills through practical activity within their own groups or other community projects
- Luton Forum (the LSP) has organised two major sessions on equalities for all the board members. It is considering featuring different languages on its new website and in newsletters, and is re-establishing its Community Cohesion theme group
- Marsh Farm NDC in Luton has set up a thematic group to look particularly at equality issues. Sessions on equality issues for all the directors have been run
- Derby Derwent NDC has sought to raise awareness of issues locally in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, and has carried out an audit to help respond to the needs of gay and lesbian communities. It has also carried out an audit of buildings in the area to see if they meet the needs of disabled people - relevant to its choice of venues for learning events.

4.4 Partnership plans

Many of our fieldwork interviewees referred to plans (some definite, others more tentative) for further learning and development activities, broadly similar to the types described above - though in some areas involving local innovation, trying out approaches that have not been tried before. One example is the action learning project in West Cumbria mentioned earlier.

A number of plans have clearly a more strategic intent than those activities which partners have pursued previously, some prompted by PMF reviews and others associated with changes in the LSP structure (eg, in Great Yarmouth), or processes in the use of NRF. These include a board development programme (with the Institute of Directors) in Leicester - which is one area clearly moving up a gear in its commitment to learning for neighbourhood renewal, given the appointment of the Partnership’s Skills and Knowledge Manager. There was also some interest in how to make more strategic use of (what was) the Community Learning Chest, though this has been complicated by more the recent proposals for the Stronger and Safer Communities Fund, which includes the budget for the NRU’s Community Participation Programme.

Several interviewees referred to plans for implementing the findings of learning needs analyses (including three LSPs, a thematic partnership and a neighbourhood management partnership). In other areas, partners recognise that they need to undertake a proper needs assessment *for the first time*, or extend previous exercises to a broader set of neighbourhood renewal actors.

There were a few tactical suggestions or plans, eg, concerning ways of improving how meetings are run (to foster participation and maximise the learning that partnership members can gain through 'normal' partnership business), and keeping partners better informed about relevant developments (eg, on the part of individual thematic partnerships). There were proposals for more use of work shadowing, peer mentoring (for community activists), and several references to improved induction arrangements for partnership board members. Other activities aimed at community representatives have included the further development of the Sharing Skills Programme in Wigan, and workshops or courses on topics such as neighbourhood renewal, bid writing, speaking with confidence, participatory appraisal, and facilitation and chairing skills. Promotion of relevant Foundation Degrees also features in a couple of areas.

Plans of thematic partnerships or groups included strategy awaydays, an annual convention, holding regular breakfast sessions (as a means of building relationships and reviewing scope for joint action), the use of NRAs in 'skilling up' partnership members, and other joint events with an emphasis on 'learning by doing'. There were also references to community development and neighbourhood partnership activities (such as a proposed Planning for Real exercise) which could be expected to generate learning benefits.

There were relatively few reported examples of new, planned activities aimed directly at service improvement, other than, eg, actions in the context of Children and Young People's Strategies and on healthy living, focused on what neighbourhood workers can do to promote this.

5 Findings from the Field: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Developing skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal: local progress made

Our fieldwork research has found **much evidence of progress being made** to address the challenge of 'equipping everyone with the skills and knowledge needed for the successful delivery of neighbourhood renewal' (the NRU's aim in The Learning Curve), though **characterised in many areas by a piecemeal approach** accompanied by uncertainties about what to do and who should do it.

LSP areas such as Derby and Wigan show, however, what is possible with leadership and drive from within the partnership, and others like Leicester are raising their game. There is also evidence of progress and will at neighbourhood level, as shown, for example, by the Interlock Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder in Basildon, Community Connections in Great Yarmouth, Derby Derwent NDC and on the Salterbeck estate in West Cumbria.

We found across the fieldwork areas **varying degrees of commitment and activity** in building skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal - **not just between areas, but also within organisations and communities within each area**. Taking a concerted, strategic view to building skills and knowledge has largely been something very new for the organisations concerned. Time and again during the research, people - in many different roles - were apt to say or imply, "*we don't know what we don't know*". In saying this, they demonstrated an openness to learning, in contrast to others who were experienced and/ or felt they had little to learn.

In some areas, key players have not viewed learning needs as a priority. In others, there has been greater interest, but people have not been sure where to start, perhaps daunted by the scale of the task or confused by the potential range of needs to be addressed. There has sometimes been a debate about *who* learning plans should address, with definitions becoming very wide and concerned with a broad adult and community learning agenda in targeted neighbourhoods. Some early exercises to identify needs were rudimentary and not very strategic (in that they tended to relate to the needs or wants of individuals rather than needs which flow from local strategies). **More effective practice suggests asking questions like, 'what do we need to do better, or that's new as a partnership in order to achieve our goals?'** While it is important that partnership decision-makers consider these questions, they can equally be addressed by people in a wider range of roles in delivering neighbourhood renewal.

However, as LSPs have evolved and partners have gained a greater understanding of what's required for successful delivery of Community and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, **needs have become clearer and progressive steps have been taken to strengthen partnership working and improve performance**. In several of our fieldwork areas, there was a palpable sense amongst LSP partners that their partnerships had turned a corner, with the focus now much greater on achieving results than on resolving process issues relating to how they work together. The **introduction of Performance Management Frameworks for LSPs appeared to be making a**

difference. (though our fieldwork was undertaken before the PMF process in 2004 had been completed).

Overall, relatively greater progress has been made where:

- partners have taken the resourcing of the LSP more seriously
- local agencies are committed to community development and neighbourhood management as important elements of the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- the core LSP executive or co-ordinating group has been taking a particular interest in capacity and organisational development issues
- there is a learning and development sub-group with some clout, as in Leicester.

Leadership and change management skills

There remain **tricky issues for many engaged in neighbourhood renewal to negotiate, which place a premium on leadership and change management skills.**

These challenges include:

- turning round limited partner commitment and achieving greater alignment on plans and activities
- managing tensions between national targets and local targets
- overcoming narrow perspectives which inhibit collaboration and strategic thinking
- creating synergy between thematic partnerships, and between LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships

There has also been a recurring theme relating to political tensions which reflect differences of view about the relative importance of 'representative' and 'participatory' democracy. This arises where people contest rights to put forward views and take decisions. On the one hand, councillors stress their role as democratically elected representatives and on the other hand, there are people in elected, or voluntary, positions in local partnerships who expect or call for a greater say in decisions that affect their communities.

Some of the **implications for people in 'community leadership' roles** include:

- **understanding what 'leadership' means in a partnership context**, working together to craft a future and give direction jointly across the partnership (reinforcing partnership working where necessary within their own organisations or communities)
- **fostering the conditions for successful partnership** (eg, by ensuring that policies and systems within their organisations support collaboration where it is needed; championing performance improvement and practising behaviours which foster inclusive working)
- **creating a performance-oriented culture**, characterised by mutual accountability and methods which support rather than place burdens on delivery
- **helping other people learn** (needs analysis, coaching, mentoring, facilitation, etc)

Evidence from this, other NRU evaluations and from feedback from PMF exercises, reinforce the importance of understanding notions of 'learning organisations' and 'learning partnerships', of the interplay of organisational cultures, practices, incentives and barriers. Particularly important in strategic partnerships is understanding how to 'force grow' partnerships and improve performance in critical areas. This needs quite a sophisticated appreciation of partner roles and contributions, and how to bring about change in a partnership setting. We have argued that Wigan and Derby (including Derby Derwent NDC) are the furthest advanced of the fieldwork areas, and closest to exhibiting a 'learning culture'.

It is no coincidence that Wigan is the one LSP out of the nine fieldwork areas to have a 'Green' rating in 2004 on the LSP performance reviews, and the one local authority to gain an 'excellent' score from the Audit Commission on Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Of the other NRF case study areas, five were assessed by Government Offices as 'Amber' and two as 'Amber/ Red'¹⁸. These ratings are similar to the local authority CPA scores (one 'fair'; six 'good', one 'excellent').

Observations on needs

We found that there were still some basic learning needs associated with relatively early stages of the partnership life-cycle, in understanding:

- the LSP itself and its 'family' of related partnerships - with many people asking, "Where do I fit in? How can I best contribute/ influence?"
- what drives and what constrains partners (a requirement if partners are to be able to help each other achieve their goals and make the most of partnership working).

There is a challenge, especially for individuals at the hub of neighbourhood renewal-related partnerships, to do this effectively, given the breadth of ground to cover - and the limited time they have.

Overall, our **research has tended to confirm that the Neighbourhood Renewal Skills Framework set out in The Learning Curve remains a sound analysis of critical skills and knowledge requirements** (see Appendix C). Table 7 below highlights needs identified as critical by interviewees in the fieldwork areas - needs which are also reflected in the findings of other NRU evaluations (see Appendix D):

¹⁸ These ratings were a risk assessment according to these criteria: *Green*: good progress, requires refinement and systematic implementation; *Amber*: mixed progress, some aspects good but others require substantial attention; *Amber/Red*: problematical, requires substantial attention, some aspects need urgent attention

Table 7 Critical needs identified in the fieldwork

'Learning Curve' categories	Identified Needs
<i>Building the knowledge base</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ using evidence (accessing data; using evaluation to improve the evidence base and develop more robust strategies and projects) ▪ understanding 'what mainstreaming means' and what works in promoting it ▪ understanding policy developments and other factors driving and constraining partner organisations and how these inter-relate in working towards partnership outcomes
<i>Developing core skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ engaging and influencing service providers/ other partners ▪ managing complex change (including putting mainstreaming into practice) ▪ building consensus and commitment (and resolving tensions and conflict) ▪ making performance management work
<i>Changing behaviours</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ creating conditions for effective collaboration and the learning needed for performance improvement ▪ problem solving ▪ strategic thinking (including lifting sights to concentrate on what matters beyond narrow interests)

We referred above to skills for community leaders. The notion of 'leadership and change management skills' are relevant to a wide range of people - not just those in senior positions. Many people need influencing skills (including how to win support of recalcitrant partners), knowledge of techniques to use to maximise the benefits and results from partnership working, and the ability to make the case for innovation and change (not least in identifying and drawing on 'what works' elsewhere, and translating it into what is likely to work locally). We note also that some learning needs are 'conventional' ones but with a twist: project management and performance management in an inter-agency context, where there can be particular issues of systems, ownership and language.

The needs identified in The Learning Curve amongst community activists/representatives - to give them the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage effectively - are further confirmed in the fieldwork research. Many have needs in working effectively with councillors, as do many councillors with them (as noted above).

Barriers and motivations

We observed a **tendency within many organisations engaged in neighbourhood renewal to see 'skills and knowledge' as a desirable activity (at best), something 'nice to do' not a 'must do'**. There can be many reasons for this: past experience of 'learning' or 'training', lack of awareness of the difference it really can make, reluctance to try new approaches, 'I've been working in the field for twenty years so I don't have much to learn', or simply more pressing other things to do, nobody's responsibility in a partnership setting to act... The risks inherent in failing to treat learning and development seriously may not be sufficiently recognised - now flagged by the National Audit Office (NAO) as one of four critical factors affecting the likelihood of success for the public sector modernisation agenda. We did find some awareness of the likely consequences of not acting to address the learning needs they identified (notably disaffected communities and poorer performance) but this did not readily translate into people acting as champions for more and more effective approaches to building skills and knowledge.

It is essential to recognise the nature of LSPs as *voluntary associations*, and that **time (and priority) are major issues**: for some players at least, learning and development may be seen as ‘an add-on to an add-on’. The latest NDC programme evaluation report notes that “*the biggest single criticism in relation to Board operations is the time commitment*”. Partnership managers in particular may be engaged in a constant search to find more effective ways of developing board capabilities, eg, through occasional awaydays and managing board business in ways which maximise learning.

5.2 Learning activities being pursued

From a low base, there is now much more learning activity relating to neighbourhood renewal in the fieldwork areas than before. Action by partnerships has mainly related to improving how partners work together, with less focus on taking specific issues or problems and working them through as partners. **Our fieldwork found limited evidence of structured learning activities directly geared to increasing achievement of neighbourhood renewal floor targets and other outcomes.**

Actions have mainly been aimed at partnership representatives, with less priority to partnership-based action with front-line workers on service improvement and on ensuring that partnership working is a priority *within* partner organisations. Similarly, while many residents have taken part in training and development to support their roles as representatives, there has been less attention to enabling their potential role in public service improvement strategies. Where this has happened, it has been mainly through informal learning, through the course of engaging in neighbourhood management/partnership initiatives which have sought new ways of working and distinctively different relationships between local people and service providers.

Effectiveness of learning activities

Interviewees highlighted a wide range of learning activities - formal and informal - which they considered had been useful in helping them improve their partnership and their work. This has included strategy development and review workshops, short training courses, action learning, study visits, work shadowing and accredited programmes. Induction was frequently mentioned as an aid to ensuring that all partners are equipped to make an effective contribution. Just under a third of interviewees were able to talk about learning activities which they considered to be particularly successful or innovative, and of these, over 40% reckoned that partners had made changes to ways of working, systems or procedures as a direct or indirect consequence. Almost as many identified improvements in personal behaviours and confidence. Most activities have concerned how partners work together and participants’ understanding of neighbourhood renewal. There is relatively limited evidence of improvements to service delivery - other than (importantly) through specific neighbourhood management initiatives. This in part reflects the stage of development of LSPs, and may be expected to change with the increased LSP focus on delivery and performance improvement.

Activities by CENs and LSPs (especially where working hand-in-hand) have contributed significantly to progress against the goals of the NRU’s Community Participation Programme, in helping to develop:

- an effective community voice that enables communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers
- social capital (through increased confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks that hold communities together)
- capability within communities to build a common vision for neighbourhood development, and to influence and work with public agencies to improve service delivery

The **greatest reported benefits have been where the learning has been geared to what partners need to do, where individuals can see the direct relevance to them** (to their job or their communities). There were frequent references to the value of using facilitators (NRAs or others). ‘Whole system’ events (bringing together residents, officers with different levels of responsibility, etc - through annual conventions, ‘open space’ events, etc) have been considered useful in helping to develop ‘common cause’ and improve feedback between strategic decision-making and what is happening on the ground.

NRU and GO influence

We found evidence that the NRU has raised the level of interest in partner organisations in skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal, and that Skills and Knowledge programme initiatives and tools such as NRAs and Renewal.net have been welcomed (see accompanying reports on these). The tools have begun to make a significant contribution to plugging gaps which had not been met by alternative provision. As intended, they have addressed different user preferences for learning (face-to-face, on-line, seminars and workshops, etc). The advent of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) programme is an important recent development, seeking to address needs for improved data analysis and use of evidence. SELD should not only help develop relevant skills but also overcome constraints on data availability which were raised by some of our interviewees.

The big task is to embed learning and ensure that the Skills and Knowledge tools are effectively used to help people manage change and improve performance in pursuit of neighbourhood renewal objectives. As we noted above, there are some early signs that PMF processes are making a difference in partner perceptions of organisational development needs and their commitment to improvement actions.

Community Learning Chests have been an underused element of the NRU’s approach to developing skills and knowledge. The parallel evaluation of the Community Participation Programme (CPP)¹⁹ has highlighted some imaginative use of CLCs but the national picture has been that overall, Community Empowerment Networks have been unclear about how best to use the funds. In most of our fieldwork areas, there has tended to be limited strategic relationship between use of CLCs and goals for community involvement in neighbourhood renewal. There is **a need for greater promotion of effective ways in which the Community Participation Programme has been used in support of learning for neighbourhood renewal**, to encourage such activities through the new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund into which part of the CPP has been incorporated.

¹⁹ add published ref when available

There is evidence of continuing demand from the field for **NRU and GOs to continue to respond to the main requests for further assistance:**

- (i) **information and advice on ‘what works’;**
- (ii) **specific learning opportunities** (eg, on mainstreaming and LSP/CEN collaboration);
- (iii) **improved communications** (including greater consistency in advice provided); and
- (iv) **support for networking and technical assistance**, including NRAs.

There are also needs to influence other funders and join up relevant activities across agencies: eg, seeking ways of harnessing neighbourhood renewal and Home Office interests in developing the role and capacity of the voluntary and community sector. Steps to ensure that learning for neighbourhood renewal features in national and local LSC plans can influence the availability of resources in future, and it would be helpful to publicise ways in which LSC funding *can* support capacity building for neighbourhood renewal.

There is a **requirement to continue to ensure that topical needs are addressed through GO/NRU sponsored events, not just awareness raising but also providing opportunities for participative learning** - eg, not just seminars on what Local Area Agreements are about, but also practical workshops to explore the implications and assist with implementation. There may also be demands for related practical sessions, for instance, on making performance management work (culture, integrated systems, etc); rationalising and improving partnership structures; evaluating partnership working (focusing on the added value that partnership may - or may not - generate). The **evidence of Floor Target Action Planning suggests continuing need for learning activities relating to achievement of individual floor targets and improving use of evidence.**

There also remain **needs to encourage many staff in agencies and thematic partnerships to appreciate more fully the relevance of neighbourhood renewal to their jobs** (where currently they define their roles as wholly within the given field and look only to specific Government Departments on policy guidance and targets). We were struck by the extent to which this occurred. Even where there was some understanding of the neighbourhood renewal, we found many cases where it was seen as someone else’s responsibility.

5.3 Implications

Developing partnership leaders and managers

There is still a job to do in helping partnerships develop more quickly than they would otherwise do - with attention on those which have not yet progressed past their early life cycle stages of ‘forming’ and ‘frustrating’. We have stressed the implementation of the National Strategy as a big change management exercise, one which is especially demanding of key individuals expected to make it work. Unlike other areas of public service modernisation, *partnership* leaders and managers do not have direct authority, and require a very high level of influencing skills.

There are needs to **give priority both to supporting partnership improvement** (eg, through programmes of work led by NRA Lead Assignment Managers) **and to supporting the ‘change agents’** - partnership managers. The West Midlands Leadership and Partnership Development Programme is an example of a GO initiative to tackle this need, which includes coaching, action learning, and tailored digests of information relevant to their change management roles. We note **practitioner demand for tips, techniques and examples of what others have done** (especially on some of the pressing concerns to do with, eg, mainstreaming, strategic commissioning and community engagement). These needs include information, models, etc on emerging practice as well as proven ‘what works’. There is a strong interest in what’s being tried as well as what’s been proven. There are related models in specific sectors (such as in the work of the NHS Modernisation Agency) which can offer insights and materials which could be used in the neighbourhood renewal context.

Partnership chairs also play key roles. Their needs have been relatively neglected to date, other than, to an extent, amongst NDCs. Their available time is often exceptionally scarce, but this does not mean that ways should not be found of engaging them more.

Action learning approaches

There is a common, fundamental need in designing and promoting learning activities to recognise the various barriers that can prevent take-up or lead to unsuccessful events - and above all the ‘time’ barrier. **The planning of events needs to ensure that they are as compelling as possible in the content and relevance of what they have to offer.** The more learning activities are closely geared to what prospective participants need to do, the better. ‘Action learning’ approaches, stressed in *The Learning Curve*, are very appropriate, using work as a means of learning and reflection (eg, through study visits, work shadowing, devising projects to apply the skills that people have just learnt)²⁰.

There is a **potential role for the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme to develop materials and guidance to promote action learning approaches** led by partnerships locally. This could include guidance on possible steps to take, and access to off-the-shelf materials which could be used in partnership settings.

Part of the original plan for the Delivery Skills programme was to ‘train the trainers’ - people who deliver the programme locally. **Training in facilitation skills should be considered as a programme offering.**

Action learning is relevant to councillor training, and it will be important for NRU-sponsored councillor training (through IDeA) not only to address understanding of neighbourhood renewal but also how councillors handle the tensions in working with community representatives and develop their wider community leadership skills and behaviours.

²⁰ An ‘action learning set’ may be regarded as a specific form of action learning, where a group of people meet on a regular basis to pursue learning objectives they have agreed, following action learning principles. This approach has been used successfully in the LSP national evaluation and features in the National Neighbourhood Management Network programme.

Front line staff and local residents

There is a **need to promote effective ways of involving front line staff in partnership learning and development activities**, especially in promoting innovative and better solutions to challenges in improving delivery. Front line staff have not featured a great deal to date in learning activities for neighbourhood renewal, other than, say, as participants in some local neighbourhood renewal courses, or in development activities relating to specific neighbourhood management initiatives.

Similarly, there is **scope to do more to address the needs of residents involved in neighbourhood renewal**. We found good examples with extensive activities in some areas (eg, in Great Yarmouth and Derby Derwent NDC) and much less in others²¹.

Accredited learning

While longer term issues about skills shortages and access to qualifications did not come through strongly in the area fieldwork, other research evidence points to **latent demand for accredited learning and further action to improve the supply of trained and qualified practitioners**. This should be pursued as part of the development programme of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (the new national centre for sustainable community skills), given its remit to 'work with others to promote and deliver world class skills sets for everyone engaged in the sustainable communities agenda' and its role in professional qualifications and cross-disciplinary training.

Promoting 'what works' in learning for neighbourhood renewal

There are needs to **give more publicity to successful approaches to building skills and knowledge, and especially, to their results** - how they have contributed to improved delivery, or can confidently be expected to do so. There is some content already on Renewal.net (eg, from Sheffield, Derby and Sunderland), and this should be enhanced, perhaps through the medium of the LSP Delivery Toolkit. NRAs have an important role in developing and spreading good practice and in persuading partnerships to give priority to tackling skills and knowledge needs.

Future NRU programme evaluations should explore where and how structured approaches are being taken to managing change in LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships, with what results. This will help develop the evidence base and can be used to stimulate improved practices. Action learning elements have been built into the latest phase of the Neighbourhood Management programme evaluation.

²¹ An evaluation of the North West NDC Network for GONW found that there were marked differences in priority given to resident and staff development across the six NDCs. Also the 2003/04 Annual Review of the Neighbourhood Management highlighted a substantial need for pathfinders to give greater priority to learning processes involving residents and service providers.

There are **implications for GO challenge and support roles**, including the questions to ask partnerships in the context of annual performance reviews. Key questions include, “what are you going to do to manage change within your partnership?” “What gives you confidence that this will work?”. GOs themselves (given their task to help LSPs identify learning needs and access appropriate support) **need to be able to point to steps that others have taken, what has worked and what has not**. This should be addressed in the further development of performance support functions within the NRU and GOs.

Appendix A Evaluating the Skills and Knowledge Programme: Methodological Model

This Appendix briefly sets out the theory of change developed as part of the Skills and Knowledge Programme evaluation. A separate methodological paper²² describes this in greater detail.

In its simplest form (Figure A.1 below) the model highlights the need to understand, and to track the connections between:

- stimuli to individuals and organisations recognising needs for learning and information/ knowledge (1)
- processes involved in identifying and clarifying what the needs are (2)
- decisions to act on needs identified (3)
- the quality of the learning process/ service provided (4)
- individual (5) and organisational (6) influences on the likelihood of the learning being applied successfully
- outcomes for individuals: learning gains (7) and job outcomes (8)
- organisational process changes (9)
- community outcomes (10) and neighbourhood renewal outcomes (11)

The model can be used to highlight appropriate points and types of intervention, eg:

stimulating demand

- how regulatory processes and funding incentives can be used to encourage organisations and individuals to clarify and act on development needs, and make more effective use of evidence
- how improvement diagnostics can be facilitated

improving quality and take-up

- how the range, quality and accessibility of learning opportunities can be improved
- how the stock and availability of authoritative information and advice can be improved
- how these resources can be promoted more effectively

embedding learning and improvement

- how organisations and partnerships can be supported in managing changes to culture, systems and ways of working to ensure that learning is transferred effectively and brings lasting, tangible results

An understanding of organisational and partnership dynamics is important, and the notion of 'life cycles' comes into play - all the more significant where strategic partnerships and joint projects are new, as typical across much of neighbourhood renewal. Even where partnerships have been well-established, changes in participants, in policies and guidance, can and do knock performance off-track. Typically only when partnerships have moved past their formative (and often very difficult and frustrating)

²² The methodological paper also considers specific issues relating to evaluation of individual Skills and Knowledge tools: Renewal.net, Regional Networks, Learning Programmes and Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers. It contains an extensive glossary of learning/ skills and evaluation terminology to assist readers and to help guide the evaluation in a field where there may be issues over meaning and interpretation.

stages, do they have the potential to deliver real performance improvements (Tuckman 1965; EDuce & GFA, 2001) - and even where partnerships seem to be working well, there are always risks that might knock them off track (changes in policy, key individuals, etc).

Various research reports, such as the national programme evaluations on New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders, highlight such factors. The interim case study report on LSPs stresses that *“the evidence confirms that successful partnerships cannot be created at speed”*, not least because of the time required to build trust; while Shared Intelligence and BURA (2004) observed, in their National Neighbourhood Management Network Scoping Study report, signs that as LSPs mature they are developing tighter management of neighbourhood renewal funding and focus on floor targets.

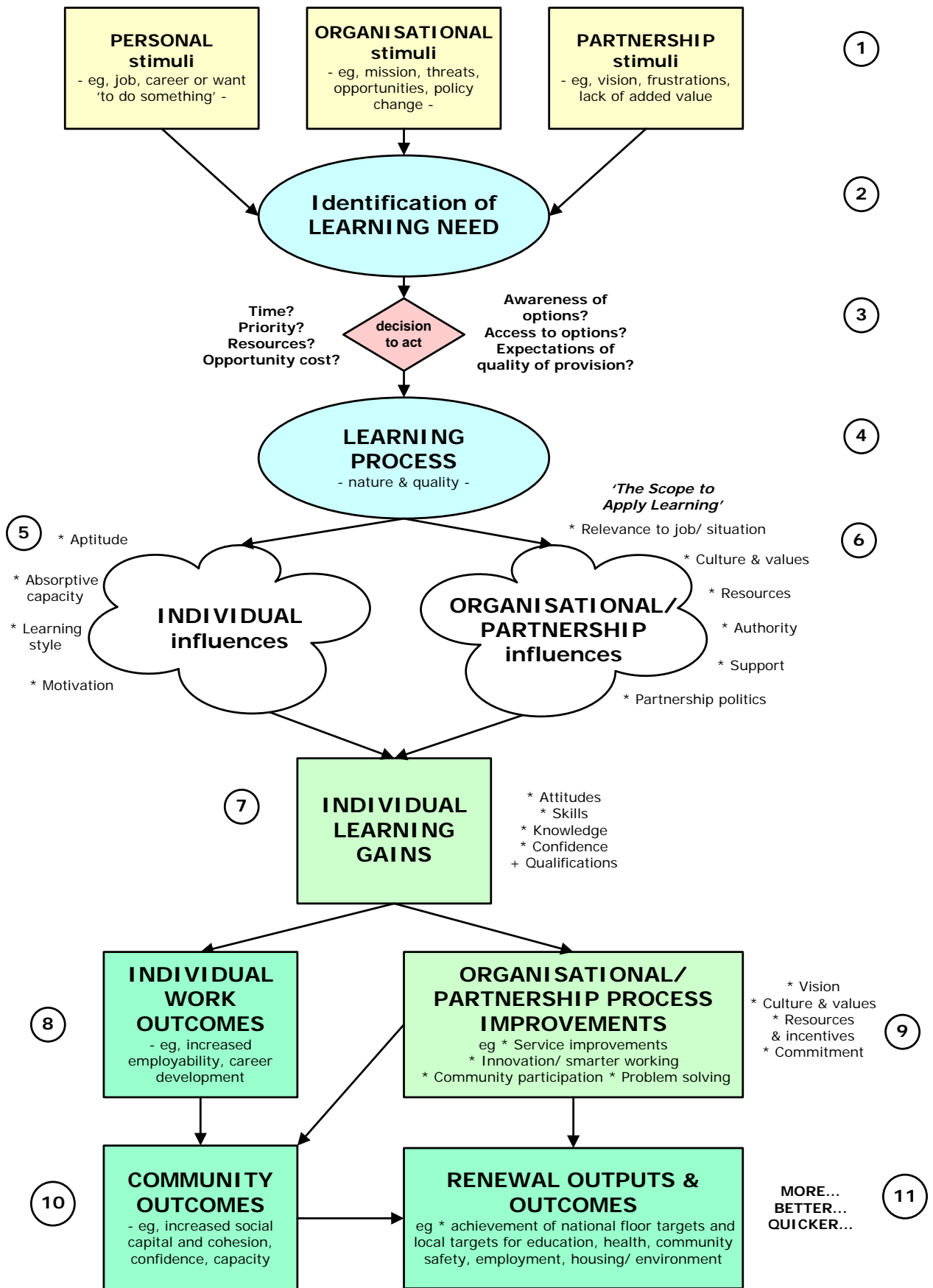
It is common that monitoring of learning and development within organisations concentrates on activity and satisfaction measures (Tamkin et al, 2003). Take professional development courses, for example: typically, feedback is sought by the organisers on the quality of the learning event (with questions about speakers, exercises, venue, etc) at the time of the event. It is not common for the impact of the training to be evaluated systematically, though there are management practices in some organisations where progress in applying learning is reviewed as part of personal appraisal systems - a practice in principle encouraged by part of the Investors in People standard. Assessment of the use of knowledge management websites is often through analysis of web statistics, which generally provide only limited information on users.

What this evaluation model brings out is a need to look closely at:

- learning gains by individuals - applied in their place of work or community
- the extent to which skills and knowledge is transferred (eg, by individuals or advisers), including how learning is ‘captured’ by organisations/ partnerships
- changes made by organisations/ partnerships to:
 - ◆ strategies and projects
 - ◆ services
 - ◆ processes, systems and ways of working
- associated improvements in:
 - ◆ service delivery
 - ◆ partnership/ organisational performance
 - ◆ specific outcomes for local communities
- neighbourhood renewal outcomes, and the extent to which these outcomes can be attributed to Skills and Knowledge Programme activities.

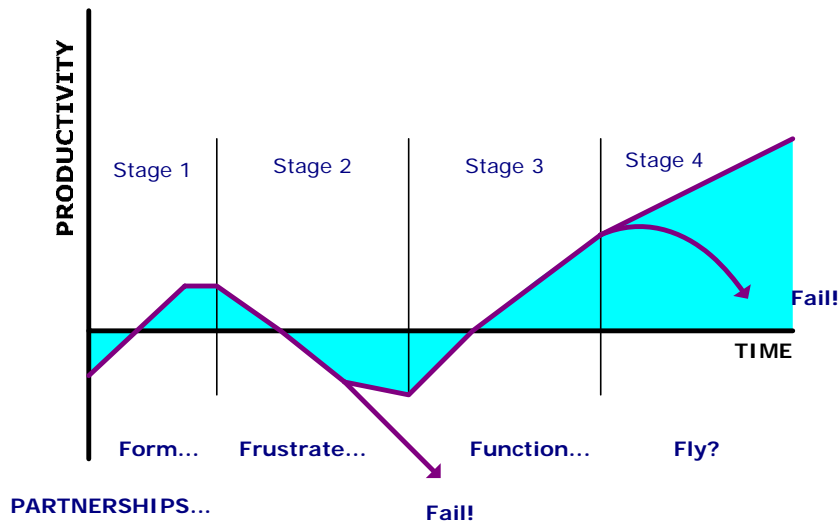
The rationale for the significant investment being made by the government lies in the expected contribution of the Programme to the achievement of neighbourhood renewal targets, and must ultimately be judged against that.

Figure A.1 Learning for Neighbourhood Renewal: Processes and Influences



Appendix B Partnership Life Cycle

It is helpful to think of partnerships going through a series of stages, during which particular tactics are most appropriate to ensuring partnership progress and success. These are similar to the stages that any team is likely to go through, as people come together to achieve common goals.



Typical characteristics of each stage:

1 Forming

- common cause, arising from shared interests, opportunities, threats
- early enthusiasm: new challenge, new relationships
- exploring what's needed, what's possible
- nature of commitments unclear

2 Frustration

- partners feel "in a fog"
- disputes or tension over priorities and methods
- individuals questioning purpose of the partnership and reasons for being there
- hidden agendas influencing what partners do
- doubts about what each other brings to the party
- partners competing for credit and control

3 Functioning

- renewed vision and focus
- progress through joint project teams
- partners talk in terms of "we" not "you"
- clear roles and responsibilities

- full accountability to each other for actions

4 Flying

- successful achievement of partnership goals
- shared leadership
- partners changing what they do and how they do it to achieve partnership objectives
- trust and mutual respect
- partnership priorities central to partner activities

5 Failing

- disengagement
- lack of commitment
- recurrent tensions
- breakdown or frittering away of relationships

If you're at this stage...	consider...
1. Forming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ create opportunities for people to get to know each other ▪ encourage partners to focus on a common vision, the difference they want to make together ▪ define tasks and tangible outcomes ▪ shepherd the process of building the partnership agenda - including through use of research ▪ ensure neutral meeting ground
2. Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ revisit the common ground - allow time to redefine issues, purpose, etc ▪ maximise opportunities for practical involvement ▪ implement actions which demonstrate progress ("little victories") ▪ encourage open expression and constructive disagreement ▪ clarify benefits to individual partners ▪ promote mutual appreciation of what each other can contribute ▪ fix the problem, not the blame
3. Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agree clear objectives, milestones, responsibilities, success measures ▪ establish principles/ protocols for collaboration ▪ encourage shared leadership and accountability ▪ develop common methods and quality standards ▪ seek learning consciously through cross-partner project teams, joint training and reviewing activities
4. Flying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ anticipate future challenges and build partner capacity to respond ▪ take stock of how well the group is performing ▪ keep working at communications ▪ avoid any unnecessary partnership working ▪ ask: does the partnership still serve its purpose? ▪ ensure that all partners are getting the benefits they expect ▪ continue to celebrate success
5. Failing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ go back to Stage 1?

The Partnership Life Cycle in Practice

Some partnerships may never get beyond this Stage 2 of Frustration, and may skip directly to Stage 5 - Failing (the downward arrows on the graph). This is where the partnership disintegrates, eg, for want of a sufficient common cause, changes in people involved or a failure to work at partnership.

Partnerships must work through the life cycle stages in order to function with greatest effectiveness (or “fly”.) Even in the best partnerships, there can be a tendency to falter and perhaps fail, unless the partners continue to work at relationships and ensure that the partnership delivers sufficient benefits (overall and for individual partners).

Quite often, partnerships find themselves in a “crossover” zone between Frustration and Functioning. In these cases, partners may have a heightened sense of the partnership failings, and may doubt the point of the partnership. Radical action may be needed to get the partnership on track, refocusing on the partnership potential and vision, benefits and some early wins to build confidence and commitment.

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Appendix C Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Framework

Audience	Building the knowledge base	Developing skills	Changing behaviours
Civil servants and policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognise and work with alternative approaches to neighbourhood decline and 'what works' ▪ Use the many sources of knowledge including residents and practitioner experience in addition to academic knowledge ▪ Understand why different approaches have succeeded or failed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analytical skills ▪ Ideas leadership ▪ Communication ▪ Networking ▪ Brokering ▪ Influencing ▪ Negotiating ▪ Consensus building ▪ Partnership working <p><i>(all of these across central government policy boundaries)</i></p>	<p><i>The behaviours needed to make a difference to the outcomes of the neighbourhood renewal programme are common to all groups</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entrepreneurial and problem solving behaviours ▪ Adopting innovative ways of tackling social problems ▪ Challenging traditional ways of working ▪ Bringing together ideas, resources and people to instigate change ▪ Spotting opportunities and making use of under-used resources ▪ Taking calculated risks ▪ Tolerating the possibility of failure ▪ Responding to a problem with a clear outcome in mind ▪ A 'can do' philosophy
Residents	<p>Shape and use the knowledge base:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share experience of successful and less successful neighbourhood renewal to shape the knowledge base ▪ Participate in the analysis of the local situation and use knowledge and good practice to improve the neighbourhood 	<p>Community leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic skills to establish the vision and priorities ▪ Organisational performance management ▪ Probity and stewardship of resources ▪ Listening ▪ Negotiation ▪ Consensus building, mediation ▪ Conflict resolution and management ▪ Communication <p>Community expert</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confidence to share their experience ▪ Confidence to articulate their hopes, fears and aspirations <p>Emerging practitioner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership ▪ Partnership working ▪ Problem-solving ▪ Communication ▪ Negotiating ▪ Influencing ▪ Facilitating ▪ Networking ▪ Conflict resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluating the effectiveness of what is being done ▪ Constantly revisit the relationship of inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes ▪ Explore the reasons for success ▪ Develop the confidence to investigate and learn from failure <p>Reflective behaviours</p>

Audience	Building the knowledge base	Developing skills	Changing behaviours
<p>Professionals and practitioners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse The use of evidence of what works to analyse the causes of deprivation and decline ▪ Synthesise knowledge from specific themes and create opportunities to work together with people from other backgrounds ▪ Design solutions to solve problems that draw on a comprehensive knowledge of the options and possibilities 	<p>Analytical skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysing problems, creating opportunities, designing solutions <p>Interpersonal skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic leadership and vision ▪ Management of people ▪ Valuing of diversity ▪ Working with partners ▪ Working with the community ▪ Communication ▪ Consensus building, mediation ▪ Conflict resolution and management <p>Organisational Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project Management ▪ Finance and budgeting ▪ Monitoring and evaluation ▪ Risk assessment and management ▪ Research ▪ IT skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entrepreneurial and problem solving behaviours (as above)

Source: The Learning Curve (2002)

Appendix D Research findings relating to Skills and Knowledge needs

New Deal for Communities	Neighbourhood Management	Collaboration & Co-ordination in Area-Based Initiatives	LSPs & Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies	Places Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ relatively high turnover of staff, board members and activists, and recruitment difficulties (NDC) ▪ skill gaps (eg, around health and education) which affect the ability of NDC partnerships to drive forward plans ▪ development needs amongst board members (eg, on working with BME communities; strategy development; use of evidence; financial and project management) ▪ insufficient use of the existing evidence base ▪ limited understanding of what 'mainstreaming' means and putting it into practice ▪ severe demands on all involved in making community engagement work (exacerbated by different expectations and messages from different parts of central government) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ nature of pathfinders as laboratories for collaborative learning ▪ need for partnership boards to become more strategic and develop their leadership role ▪ need to deepen and broaden resident engagement ▪ improve skills in collating and using local data ▪ continuing need to develop skills for 'mainstreaming', engaging with and influencing service providers, and for evaluation, learning and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ importance of getting the conditions right for effective collaboration (such as building ownership amongst partners; adequate resources and systems; sufficiently long time horizons; and a willingness to learn) ▪ need to counter 'organisational inflexibility' and its root causes ▪ absence of adequate evaluation processes such that it is difficult to establish what really works and why ▪ understanding the nature of power, leadership, and how to effect successful outcomes in partnership working ▪ institutional and capacity barriers for Government Offices playing a full role in integrating national government policies, and thus in facilitating local joined-up working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lack of systematic analysis of the causes of deprivation and limited evidence of partners working these through and drawing on 'what works' in developing Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies ▪ need to manage significant, complex change, involving 'joining up, mainstreaming and rationalisation' (with little progress as yet in shifting priorities or altering mainstream behaviour; and under-developed relationships between NRU-sponsored neighbourhood renewal pathfinders and LSPs) ▪ time taken to build successful partnerships ▪ need for 'capacity building' across all sectors (not just the voluntary and community sector) ▪ gaining wider and deeper ownership of the LSP and its strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ need for culture change and organisational development, working towards greater sharing of power, joint decision-making, ▪ limited recognition within some partner organisations of where neighbourhood renewal fits with their won agendas and objectives ▪ how to manage processes to rationalise partnerships and strengthen links between LSPs and thematic/ area partnerships ▪ breakdowns in trust and dialogue inhibiting partnership working ▪ scope for greater partnership working between mainstream and other service providers ▪ need for greater analytical resources, and strategic capacity at LSP level to make effective use of evidence and analysis ▪ failure to embed evaluation practices in improving strategies

Sources: Lawless, P et al (2004) NDC National Evaluation Annual Report 2003/04; SQW Ltd et al (2004) Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme National Evaluation: Annual Review 2003/04 (Final Report); Stewart, M et al (2002) Collaboration and Co-ordination in Area-Based Initiatives; Russell, H et al (2004) Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies: Document Analysis and Review Summary Report; Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004) Places Project - Interim Research Report (unpublished)