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Deputy Prime Minister  
Creating sustainable communities

# *Research Report 19*

Seeking the Lessons:

Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation



Neighbourhood  
Renewal Unit

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# 1 KEY FINDINGS

The Skills and Knowledge Programme was introduced by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) to bring about a step-change in the level of skills and knowledge for all those involved in neighbourhood renewal, and to ensure that everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal has the support they need to improve neighbourhoods. A vision for this change is set out in the learning and development strategy document: The Learning Curve<sup>1</sup>. Key elements of the Programme have included:

- the Renewal.net website ([www.renewal.net](http://www.renewal.net)) designed to capture and spread knowledge of ‘what works’ in neighbourhood renewal
- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, a body of experienced practitioners available to provide technical assistance to partnerships
- Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills, a programme of short training courses tackling skills gaps at the heart of implementing neighbourhood renewal strategies
- regional networks, intended to provide networking and learning opportunities across subject, programme and local boundaries
- flexible budgets available to Government Offices to promote skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal in each region

## Skills and knowledge: critical to successful delivery

The NRU has made **very substantial progress in implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme**, with key building blocks in place to help ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the National Strategy. The Programme has become geared increasingly to the requirements of delivering performance improvement. There is **evidence of Programme impact, especially in bringing about changes in policies, practices and ways of working**, without which the Strategy will fail.

The Programme has been a **significant source of innovation** in promoting learning and the use of evidence in the neighbourhood renewal field. It also offers wider lessons and experience for approaches to building capacity for improved delivery across a wider set of policies, including the broader Sustainable Communities agenda.

The **rationale for the Programme has been borne out**, reflecting the analysis set out in NRU’s strategy document, The Learning Curve (2002). There is continuing and strong evidence of performance issues, eg, in the design of strategies (insufficiently outcomes-driven and evidence-based) and in implementation (eg, weaknesses in project management and partner accountability, and barriers to mainstreaming). There is now greater understanding of the scale of the task involved in harnessing public, private, voluntary and community sector contributions to ‘closing the gap’ for the most deprived communities, and the ways in which relevant skills and knowledge contribute. **Where such capabilities are lacking, then there are significant risks to delivery.**

<sup>1</sup> [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=265](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=265)

**The Learning Curve's vision remains a big challenge**, that of *“equipping everyone with the skills and knowledge needed for the successful delivery of neighbourhood renewal”*. Such a vision is still highly ambitious, requiring a major culture change on the part of all partners in valuing investment in skills and knowledge. It can only be done by harnessing partners' own resources to bring about the *“step change”* in skills and knowledge proposed in the National Strategy Action Plan.

Very few stakeholders interviewed or surveyed in the evaluation were able to quantify the benefits or results they had achieved through Skills and Knowledge Programme interventions. It was too early for them to judge; the nature of the Programme has been much about building capacity to deliver in future. With the focus shifting much more to supporting performance improvement, **future evaluation must give priority to identifying evidence of learning gains, changes and improvements made and how these track through to improved performance**. The main vehicle for this will be the Performance Management system which has been developed since the start of the evaluation. More systematic monitoring and evaluation is needed of Programme activities, including events, and greater use made of the findings, shared across the NRU and GOs.

## Influencing partnership plans and activities

The NRU and GOs have **helped significantly to raise the level of interest amongst LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships in skills and knowledge** for neighbourhood renewal. They have taken a wide range of initiatives to help partnerships translate this interest into action, notably through Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, GO and Regional Network events. Renewal.net has created a very substantial on-line knowledge resource for learning about 'what works' and the policy context for neighbourhood renewal.

**From a low base, there is now much more learning activity** (eg, workshops and seminars, partner induction) associated with the implementation of the National Strategy. This can be attributed to the emphasis on skills and knowledge in the National Strategy Action Plan, to NRU guidance and GO roles in providing encouragement and support. The availability of Skills and Knowledge budgets has enabled action that is likely not to have taken place otherwise, either on the same scale or reaching the same range of participants.

**Progress by many LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships has been a slow, uphill task**. Most have had individuals championing the cause of skills and knowledge, but have had to confront a variety of obstacles including the lack of a learning and performance management culture across the partnership, perceived time pressures and limits to commitment to the partnership itself by individual partner organisations. Some partnerships have benefited from advice from GOs on where to start, and in other cases NRAs have played an instrumental role. There are **signs that the introduction of Performance Management Frameworks has been making a difference** – though the real test comes in the extent to which partners successfully implement the improvement plans produced as part of these reviews.

**Most actions by partnerships have related to improving how partners work together, with less focus on tackling specific problems and working them through as partners**. This has tended to reflect their stage of maturity as partnerships, with concerns over process, direction and priorities being bigger concerns in the earlier stages of partnership development. In our fieldwork areas, we found evidence of organisational changes, process improvements and changes in personal behaviour and confidence as a consequence of

partnership learning activities, but putting mainstreaming into practice has not been a prominent theme for learning activities. However, there are indications that partnerships are now devoting more attention to gearing partners up better to deliver floor targets and other outcomes.

## Progress on skills, knowledge and behaviours

Overall, the **Skills and Knowledge programme has primarily contributed to building knowledge for neighbourhood renewal** (eg, about needs, policies, and appropriate interventions) and **less to developing critical skills and behaviours** (eg, in abilities to manage change and work together in ways which bring out the best in what each partner has to offer). On the latter, there are **key needs amongst partnership managers** in their roles as change agents, eg, skills in building partnership boards and groups, diagnosing performance issues and support techniques for performance improvement.

Typical needs which are now in sharper focus amongst a wide range of players in neighbourhood renewal include:

### Building the knowledge base

- using evidence (accessing and interpreting 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 relevant to neighbourhood renewal 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 amongst partners (and resolving tensions and conflict)
- making performance management work
- developing sustainable organisations in the voluntary and community sector (social enterprise skills)

### Changing behaviours

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

Many individuals – including many experienced ones – have taken time to adjust to what is now different (eg, with ‘mainstreaming’ rather than competitive funding the main vehicle of policy), and we found evidence that there are some who do not yet see ‘neighbourhood renewal’ as relevant to them despite their having relevant roles. There are also significant and continuing **needs for induction into neighbourhood renewal and partnerships** for a wide range of people, given the breadth of stakeholder organisations – and the typical turnover amongst individuals involved.

## Targets of learning activities

NRU and GO sponsored activities and actions within LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships have been aimed mainly at managers and partner representatives. **Less priority has been given to front-line workers and residents and their role in bringing about service improvement.**

There has been **limited attention to the needs of partnership chairs**, despite their key roles within partnerships, and the **needs of councillors have not been addressed systematically** though many have participated to a limited extent in LSP learning activities. Councillors have important roles as community leaders and, increasingly, in neighbourhood governance, and they have great scope to foster collaboration – or frustrate what could be achieved. Training provision been introduced recently within national programmes through IDeA (‘Modern Members’), to which the NRU is contributing.

The **pursuit of equality and diversity objectives has not been a strong element of the Skills and Knowledge Programme** (nationally and regionally), though, eg, targets have been set (and largely met) for some activities (eg, recruitment of NRAs from BME groups), and some specific actions have been promoted, eg, race awareness training and NRA support for Community Cohesion action plans. Feedback from our fieldwork areas suggests that equality and diversity considerations have only strongly featured in thinking on learning activities in those areas with significant BME populations.

## Influencing the supply of learning opportunities

Research evidence points to **latent demand for accredited learning** and to the need for further action to improve the supply of trained and qualified practitioners. This is warranted as a response to persisting recruitment difficulties and relatively high turnover of staff in the neighbourhood renewal field (a key issue for NDC partnerships for example). It will be a focus for the work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, and a continuing interest for the NRU in seeking to ensure that delivery of the National Strategy is not compromised by skill shortages. At GO level, action is needed to **influence future priorities of the LSC and Regional Skills Partnerships** to ensure that appropriate account is taken of skills and knowledge needs for neighbourhood renewal in their planning and resource allocation.

## Skills and Knowledge within Government

The experience of implementing the National Strategy has brought out a range of skill needs amongst civil servants, including those required to promote learning in LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships and to ensure more effective joined-up working across government. In GOs, more recent policy developments (eg, on Devolved Decision Making

and the introduction of Local Area Agreements) have highlighted skills concerning, eg, relationship management, brokering support packages for performance improvement; and advising on performance management and improvement planning, data sources and analysis. GO interviewees did not consider that as organisations GOs were very effective at capturing and sharing knowledge, especially in building the 'organisational memory'. High turnover of staff and the recruitment of staff new to neighbourhood renewal has tended to compound the problem.

**There has not been a strategic approach within the NRU and most GOs to identifying and addressing skills and knowledge needs**, nor indeed, more broadly to pursue organisational development geared to their roles in improving delivery of the NSNR. Business plans have not been converted systematically into team and personal development plans, and critical learning needs, common across key groups of staff have not typically been addressed. Skills and Knowledge budgets available to GOs from the NRU have been used by several GOs, however, to instigate cross-GO learning activities that would not otherwise have happened.

There is **scope for much more joint learning with others in the delivery chain** (both across tiers of government and vertically). This has potential to build relationships and mutual understanding, promote solutions to common problems which might not otherwise be found, and reduce delivery risks.

## Contribution of the Skills and Knowledge Programme tools

**The Skills and Knowledge tools have begun to make a significant contribution to plugging gaps which have not been met by alternative provision.** As intended, they have addressed distinct learning preferences amongst organisations and users, whereby individuals respond more positively to some forms of learning (face-to-face, on-line, seminars and workshops, etc) than to others.

## Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers

- NRAs have acted as front-line trouble shooters and capacity builders, playing an important role in support of LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships, not least in interventions with those facing particular difficulties, in breaking new ground in introducing performance management, and in strengthening community engagement.
- NRAs are the most likely of the Skills and Knowledge tools to lead to changes in strategies, projects and ways of working as a direct or indirect consequence of NRA assignments. In more than four out of five cases, partnerships we interviewed had introduced or made changes to strategies and/or projects. In three out of five cases, they had introduced or made changes to ways of working, systems or processes.
- Half the partnerships interviewed pointed directly to actual or planned improvements to services, and some to specific neighbourhood renewal outcomes, eg, in better housing and in the extent and quality of community participation. For most other respondents, it was too early for them to comment on improvements and outcomes.



- While NRAs have facilitated learning within partnerships, more could be gained, eg, through facilitation techniques and more use of evidence of what works elsewhere.
- Over two thirds of partnerships surveyed considered that they had achieved more, better or faster benefits/results than they would have without the services of an NRA.

### Renewal.net

- Renewal.net has developed as the on-line 'place to go' for knowledge about what works in neighbourhood renewal. It has developed very substantial content: case studies, overviews, policy and research documents, and 'how to' materials.
- Use of the site has increased steadily, with over 1,000 user sessions a day, projected rise to 48,000 sessions/month by March 2006. Users have been concentrated mainly amongst practitioners and researchers with core neighbourhood renewal interests (rather than more widely amongst those with thematic contributions to neighbourhood renewal – in community safety, education, economic development, etc).
- The most prominent benefits have been knowledge of 'what works' (for 62% registered users), awareness of policy and research (54%), and new ideas and opportunities (52%), followed by its use in providing validated evidence to make a case (eg, in reviewing strategies, developing projects or bidding – 25%).
- Just under 30% of these users reckoned that they could point to specific results from their use of Renewal.net, and 37% considered that it was too early to say. Of those who could identify results, two thirds cite better informed debate within their partnership and/or organisation, and just under half have found a solution to a particular problem.
- Nearly three quarters of registered users were confident that their use of Renewal.net will help them produce better neighbourhood renewal outcomes.

### Regional networks

- Regional Networks have developed as organisational vehicles to promote cross-sector networking and learning in five regions, while Government Offices in the other regions have supported networking initiatives, mainly specific to particular types of partnership (LSP, Community Empowerment Network, NDC or Neighbourhood Management partnership). In *all* regions, further development of networks is taking place in the context of the Regional Centres of Excellence, which can be expected to provide a better basis for future networking than existed when the Skills and Knowledge Programme was introduced.
- We have found consistent evidence of the value to participants of networking with peers, whether through opportunities provided by Regional Networks or in other ways (eg, through participation on Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills courses).
- There is little evidence to date of the *impact* of Regional Networks and other regional networking initiatives. Most of the Networks were formed recently and longer-established Networks have not undertaken such assessments. Our research has found evidence of gains in social capital, where Networks have brought benefits in terms of 'bridging' (helping participants make the links across sectors, with government bodies, etc) and 'bonding' (strengthening relationships and trust amongst participants).

- The Networks have also demonstrated value as independent bodies that are not the creatures of particular sectors or interest groups, and in providing a resource with dedicated ‘skills and knowledge’ expertise to identify needs, contributors and organise events.

## Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills

- The pilot courses as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme have been dedicated to filling very specific gaps in learning needs for neighbourhood renewal – confirmed by our fieldwork analysis.
- The courses have been appreciated by participants – especially for the opportunities they have provided for peer exchange and the time away from the job for reflection. Ratings for course content, facilitation, enjoyment and skills development have been high (averaging 4 on a 1-5 scale), though a minority of participants (one in six) have had concerns about course content and pitch.
- Three quarters of participants felt that they applied something useful they had learnt from their course. Most, however, felt that their course had helped them only at the margins in relation to the specific learning outcomes set out for the course they attended. ‘Cascade’ effects have not been strong, in that only 16% had passed on some of their course learning to others.
- When asked about evidence of improvements in partnership or organisational performance, or outcomes for local people, one third felt that it was too early to say, and a quarter could not identify any. Those that said they could, tended to refer back to progress in partnership working rather than (as yet) improved performance.
- Promotion of the programme has been difficult, partly because of resistance to the three day duration of each module. There are many other calls on the time of potential participants, and also other learning opportunities they may wish to pursue. We also found evidence of barriers to participating in residential training for women from some BME communities and others with care responsibilities.
- The programme is now seen by the NRU as part of the performance support package that can offered to individual partnerships tailored to their specific needs.

## Key Messages and Recommendations

### Key messages

Key messages for further progress in implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme include:

- Continue to **harness Skills and Knowledge Programme resources more closely to practical concerns in the delivery of the National Strategy**, notably around making mainstream services work better in deprived neighbourhoods and planning to achieve floor targets.

- **Build more *learning* into the Skills and Knowledge Programme itself:**
  - Give more attention to evaluation, feedback and ‘what works’ in delivering the Programme (eg, in use of facilitation techniques to foster joint working, use of evidence and faster adoption of innovation) – up, down and across the delivery chain.
  - Focus on how learning activities can most effectively promote the capture and sharing of knowledge, support culture change and contribute to improving performance.
- **Develop the strategic and influencing roles of the NRU and GOs**, working with government departments, RDAs, the Learning and Skills Council and other partners to promote and find sustainable solutions to meeting skills and knowledge needs.
  - Make the most of the connections across related policy areas, (eg, learning and skills, local government modernisation, and the voluntary and community sector role in delivery of public services)
  - Ensure that there is critical mass across the regional infrastructure for capacity building (skills development, analytical capabilities, etc) – Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery project, RCEs, Regional Observatories, etc
- **Invest in capacity within NRU and GOs to lead, influence and support performance improvement**, supporting the drive towards devolved decision-making and building on actions taken to date in mainstreaming organisational learning practices.

## Recommendations

Specific recommendations include:

### Anticipating and addressing needs

- Promote practical examples of how partnerships are managing change and developing skills, and the benefits and results they have realised.
- Review performance improvement and learning needs identified in annual performance management reviews (across all Performance Management Frameworks) to inform planning of improvement support.
- Research implementation of partnership improvement plans to learn from ‘what works’ and strengthen future delivery.
- Target Skills and Knowledge resources on partnerships where performance improvement support can make the biggest difference, involving a shift of resources towards regions with higher concentrations of LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships with furthest to travel in improving performance.
- Strengthen support for key change agents – partnership managers, chairs, NRAs – eg, through action learning, policy and practice alerts and facilitation tools.
- Pilot innovative approaches to involving front line workers and residents in service improvement.

- Further develop learning provision for councillors, bringing out critical aspects in partnership working, understanding of neighbourhood renewal and working with community representatives.

### Maximising the learning from Skills and Knowledge activities

- Build evaluation more systematically into Skills and Knowledge activities, including making better use of management information and undertaking follow up research to find out what impact the activities have had (in terms of learning applied, organisational changes and performance outcomes).

### Strategic influence

- Research and promote support from the Learning and Skills Council for skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal.
- Ensure that learning needs for neighbourhood renewal are addressed in plans of Regional Skills Partnerships and local LSC plans.
- Work with the Academy for Sustainable Skills and RCEs to develop an overall strategy for workforce development in the sustainable communities/neighbourhood renewal skills sector – including plans to address gaps in provision and qualifications.
- Ensure that the Academy for Sustainable Communities builds fully on the highly relevant experience gained by the Skills and Knowledge Programme in its future development.

### Developing capacity within government

- Develop a more strategic approach to meeting the competency requirements for effective delivery of NRU and GO roles in neighbourhood renewal, linked to business plan priorities.
- Review the ‘state of the art’ in performance improvement, drawing on experience across government, inspection bodies and the private sector.
- Provide more opportunities for joint learning and development across the delivery chain, including workshops, exchanges, placements and job shadowing.

### NRA service

- Make operational improvements to the NRA service (in, eg, earlier identification of NRA assignments; matching NRAs, partnerships and assignments; devising briefs; networking GOs, NRAs and partnerships; sharing knowledge and outputs from assignments).

- Support continuing professional development by NRAs through more briefings and workshops on policy and performance improvement, including techniques for use on assignments.

### **Renewal.net**

- Refresh strategy for the development and marketing of Renewal.net – including topic and updating priorities, regional contributions and pages, and involvement of other departments.

### **Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme**

- Explore further options for development under the Delivery Skills programme: masterclasses, action learning, and non-residential provision (while ensuring complementary approaches with regional GO plans).
- Review how to maximise the extent to which participants are likely to apply what they learn after their courses.
- Make operational improvements to programme provision (eg, in course design, use of participant experience, learning materials and administration) and marketing.

### **Regional Networks and Regional Centres of Excellence**

- Ensure the development of strong Regional Centres of Excellence as an integral part of a coherent infrastructure for skills, knowledge and capacity development at regional level, linked with related initiatives to improve quality of and access to data.
- Ensure that the experience of Regional Networks is recognised and used to the full in RCE development, building on current arrangements and ensuring productive opportunities for cross-sector networking and the development of ‘communities of practice’ which bring stakeholders together, focused on opportunities for sharing knowledge and finding ways forward on common challenges.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 'Skills and Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal' as a strategic priority

The National Strategy on Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) is very ambitious in its goals of improving the conditions of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. It aims high also in its determination to bring coherence to the activities and expenditure of large parts of government and to mobilise the energies and resources of a multitude of stakeholders, not least including residents in these communities.

The Strategy has been remarkable for its emphasis on investing in learning, skills and knowledge as key to real change on the ground. This is based on analysis of the failures of past policies and a growing understanding of the importance of learning and the use of evidence of 'what works'. The National Strategy Action Plan (2001) concluded that there needed to be a *"distinct skills and knowledge strand running throughout the Strategy"*. This has taken the form of the Skills and Knowledge Programme, a responsibility of the Skills and Knowledge Team in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU). The NRU's approach was set out in 'The Learning Curve' strategy document in 2002. Its vision is that *"everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal should be equipped with the skills and knowledge they need"*. This covers a very wide of people including residents in renewal areas, practitioners and professionals, councillors, and civil servants in Whitehall and the regions.

The rationale for the Programme was set out in 1999 in the report of Policy Action Team (PAT) 16, 'Learning Lessons', one of the task groups assigned to prepare the content of the NSNR. This highlighted a range of inter-related factors hampering successful achievement of policy objectives, including:

- poor design of strategies: neither evidence-based, outcome-driven nor prioritised
- weaknesses in implementation (eg, in project appraisal and project management)
- poor knowledge of research into 'what works' under what circumstances
- weaknesses in cross-sector and multi-agency working and in capacity within deprived communities to play a leading role in renewal
- failure of much initial training to equip professionals for work in neighbourhood renewal
- inadequate understanding amongst policy makers of realities of implementation

#### Learning for change and improvement

The Learning Curve set out 23 actions, including steps to improve the supply of relevant learning opportunities and provide incentives for bottom-up action in neighbourhood renewal areas. Prominent amongst these has been the development of a number of innovative 'tools' to address these identified needs:

- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (NRAs), a panel of experienced practitioners available to provide technical assistance to partnerships

- Renewal.net, a web-based knowledge management system to capture and spread ‘what works’ on a systematic basis
- Regional Networks, to provide stakeholders with enhanced networking and learning opportunities across subject, programme and local boundaries
- Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills, initially a programme of short courses to tackle skills gaps at the heart of implementing the National Strategy

The Learning Curve also set out the case for promoting ‘learning organisations’, recognising that there are institutional factors which affect capacity to deliver as well as individual skills and knowledge. The NRU have increasingly sought to encourage the ‘embedding’ of learning, through steps to ensure that people and organisations learn *in their normal practices*, and from sound evidence from elsewhere. Performance Management Frameworks (PMFs) have been introduced across Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. These are tools for reviewing delivery against targets and the effectiveness of partnership working processes, and are expected to drive organisational change, including the development of performance management cultures supported by action to develop critical skills and knowledge.

NRU evaluation reports (eg, on New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders) have consistently highlighted the continuing and long term nature of the challenges involved in bringing about key changes identified as imperative by the NSNR, such as leadership and joined-up working, greater agency commitment to mainstreaming, and sustained community engagement. This research has also provided further evidence of needs to develop skills and to learn from successes and failures.

## 2.2 Approach to the Evaluation

The intention behind this evaluation has been developmental, to test NRU assumptions, help shape future priorities and activity, and improve the Skills and Knowledge Programme’s effectiveness. The evaluation has sought to review how the NRU and GOs have influenced actions on the ground by partnerships and partner organisations, and the particular contributions and impact of the four Skills and Knowledge tools mentioned above.

At the heart of the evaluation model (see Appendix A) we have sought to identify and assess:

- what stimulates partnerships, organisations and individuals to pursue structured learning and development activities
- the learning gains achieved by individuals
- related changes in organisational processes
- actual and likely outcomes for communities and progress towards floor targets
- the extent to which changes can be attributed to Skills and Knowledge Programme interventions.

In order to review underlying programme assumptions and to explore potential programme improvements, we have also explored barriers and obstacles to (a) identifying and acting on learning and development needs, and (b) implementing the learning. We have not treated 'skills and knowledge' in isolation, but rather in the context of wider organisational and policy systems, involving an interplay of people, resources, incentives, cultures, expected and unexpected consequences of particular actions.

The objectives in the evaluation brief were to:

- review the extent to which the Programme is helping to address learning and development needs and to bring about change in policies and practices
- identify what is working and what is not in the delivery of the Programme, including responsiveness to users, barriers to take-up and how these may be addressed
- develop process and proxy measures of the impact of the Programme and its tools, and make an initial assessment of their likely future impact
- provide a qualitative baseline of skills and knowledge needs in neighbourhood renewal areas and amongst target groups, and provide a baseline of take-up of the tools
- review cost-effectiveness and the balance and deployment of Programme resources

In addition, we were asked to consider the roles and contributions of the NRU and Government Offices in the delivery of the Skills and Knowledge Programme – part of a wider interest in the organisational capacity needed for successful implementation of the National Strategy.

#### Evaluating the Skills and Knowledge Programme: Research Tasks

Research tasks have involved:

- 62 interviews with NRU and GO staff. These have included those with Skills and Knowledge remits, policy staff in the NRU, programme staff in the NRU and GOs, and GO Regeneration Directors)
- field work in nine LSP areas<sup>2</sup> drawn from three regions. We undertook 221 interviews with individuals 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; and established take-up of NRU/GO skills and knowledge provision, and identify barriers to progress.
- a telephone survey of 26 neighbourhood renewal partnerships on their use of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (NRAs). Between them, these partnerships had commissioned over 90 assignments
- an online survey of NRAs (50 respondents) in June 2004, plus telephone interviews with 19 NRAs who had undertaken the largest number of assignments by October 2003. (Combined, these two surveys covered 38% of all NRAs – and 80% of those who have undertaken five or more assignments)
- an online survey of registered users of Renewal.net (180 replies – 22% response rate)
- interviews with the six Regional Network Co-ordinators and several staff and steering group members
- three month-on telephone survey of 43 participants on the first run of six Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme courses (61% of the total participants)

<sup>2</sup> Basildon, Great Yarmouth, Luton (East); Bolsover, Derby, Leicester (East Midlands); Pendle, West Cumbria and Wigan (North West). These were selected in conjunction with the relevant GOs to provide a range of local challenges and experiences and to avoid overlap with other NRU research and evaluation projects involving LSPs. All are Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas except Basildon, which has a Neighbourhood Management pathfinder.



**Evaluating the Skills and Knowledge Programme: Research Tasks (continued)**

- analysis of NRU management information (eg, of 700 NRA assignments; Renewal.net web statistics and user surveys)
- desk research: scanning a wide range of policy and research literature, GO Skills and Knowledge Action Plans, LSP Learning Plans, a search for comparative evaluations, etc

Following a scoping phase, the initial interviews (eg, with GOs and Regional Network Co-ordinators) and the partnership survey on NRAs were undertaken in late 2003, to inform an interim report produced for NRU planning purposes in the run-up to the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Round (CSR). The bulk of the subsequent survey work was undertaken between February and June 2004. Individual components were designed to provide complementary forms of evidence, eg, with the area fieldwork covering non-users as well as users of Renewal.net, and exploring further cases of partnership use of NRAs.

Further details of the research components can be found in the accompanying research reports which can be downloaded from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk). These are:

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

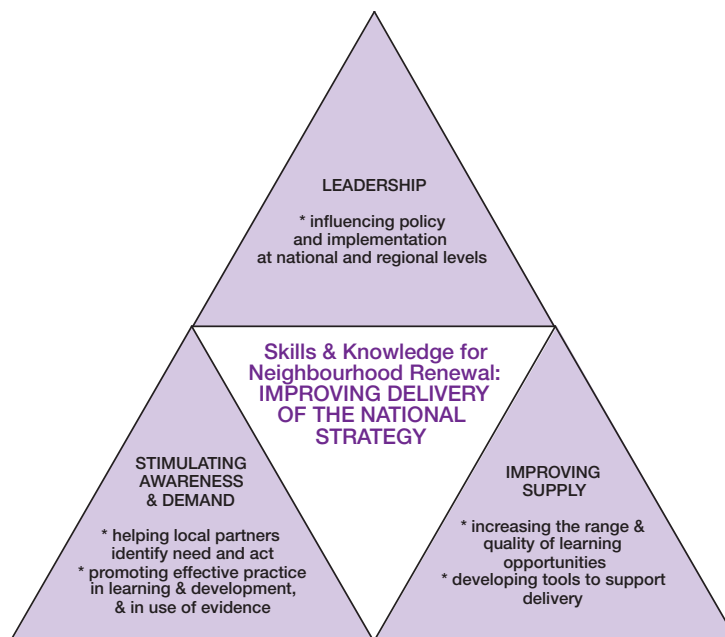
This synthesis report draws together the findings from our more detailed research reports. It proceeds to provide background on the development of the Skills and Knowledge Programme and the role of the NRU and Government Offices (GOs) in its delivery. It then reports on our area fieldwork, highlighting critical partnership, organisational and individual development needs and local responses, before considering the impact of the Skills and Knowledge Programme. This concerns the strategic influence provided by the NRU and GOs, and the contributions of the main Skills and Knowledge tools. We then draw conclusions and make recommendations for improving the delivery of the Programme.

## 3 Implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme

### 3.1 Delivering the Programme: NRU Skills and Knowledge Team

In implementing the Learning Curve action plan<sup>3</sup>, the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team has developed activities to in relation to three strategic roles (Figure 1):

Figure 1: NRU: Strategic roles on skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal



- *Leadership*: seeking to influence and support policy and programme design within NRU, ODPM, other Government Departments (OGD), GOs, national and regional stakeholders. This has included liaison with a wide range of national bodies, advising NRU programme teams, and contributing to related government initiatives such as the Egan Review of skills for sustainable communities and the subsequent development of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (the national centre for sustainable community skills)
- *Stimulating awareness, demand and take-up*: encouraging partnerships and organisations responsible for the delivery of neighbourhood renewal to identify and act on their development needs, and follow effective practice in learning and in the use of evidence
- *Improving supply*: through strategic interventions, increasing the range and quality of learning opportunities and evidence sources, and developing tools to support delivery. Actions have included the development of a framework of occupational (skills) standards and research into how providers in higher and further education are responding to needs. The NRU has also supported a number of pilot programmes, eg, on Community Leadership Training and on Community Consultancies, typically in conjunction with other government departments (OGDs – eg, Department for Education and Skills and Home Office). Training for councillors has been developed with the IDEa (the Improvement and Development Agency for local government) as part of their Modern Members Programme.

<sup>3</sup> Implementation of the Skills and Knowledge Programme is reviewed in greater detail in our Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 1, “NRU and GO Strategies and Delivery” available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

Since its outset, the content and focus of Skills and Knowledge Programme has evolved, with an increasing emphasis on support for performance improvement as LSPs grapple with the challenges of ‘closing the gap’ between outcomes in the most deprived areas and the rest of the country. Organisational – and individual – development needs have been placed in sharper focus with the introduction of Floor Target Action Planning (intended to strengthen LSP strategies for improving performance on each of the main neighbourhood renewal themes) and the Places Project (which has investigated reasons for weak performance against the floor targets). These needs have also been highlighted by the National Audit Office (NAO) report on New Deal for Communities, and the programme evaluations of NDC and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders. In 2004-05, work under the Skills and Knowledge Programme has been taken forward directly in relation to NRU Business Planning priorities. These priorities involve action with LSPs on floor targets; influencing national, regional and local agencies in making mainstream services work better in deprived neighbourhoods; and supporting GOs in driving change and ensuring that delivery is built on a firm evidence base.

The NRU Skills and Knowledge budget for 2004-05 was £5.09m, modest (1.1%) in comparison with the total allocated to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for the same year.

### 3.2 Developing the Skills and Knowledge tools

Considerable progress has been made by the Skills and Knowledge Team in implementing the Learning Curve, especially in putting in place the main initiatives referred to as Skills and Knowledge Programme ‘tools’:

- 182 experienced practitioners have been recruited as *Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers*. Over 700 projects – involving over 3,400 days support – had been commissioned by June 2004, mainly concerning partnership governance and strategy development, performance management, and overcoming barriers to collaboration and community engagement. Use of NRAs had continued to grow, and a new role, that of NRA Lead Assignment Manager, has been introduced to manage interventions with partnerships which are priorities for performance improvement support, each likely to involve a number of NRAs and other Skills and Knowledge Programme inputs.
- The *Renewal.net* website was launched in October 2002 with substantial content featuring specially researched case studies, overviews, toolkits, etc and related policy and research documents. Templates are used to ensure that the content is helpful and evidence-based, and drafts go through a common editing and quality control stage. Usage has continued to grow steadily, from 22,000 sessions/month in autumn 2003 to over 33,000/month by April/June 2004 and has been on an upward trend of 900 additional sessions every month.
- *Regional Networks* have been established in five regions with related networking opportunities promoted by GOs in the others. These Networks are playing a role in addressing needs of partnerships and individual practitioners for cross-sector learning and are placed to play a key role in the development of the new Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs), being taken forward by the NRU, the ODPM Sustainable Communities Unit and Regional Development Agencies. RCEs are charged with fostering learning across the breadth of the Sustainable Communities policy agenda, including neighbourhood renewal.

- The *Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills* programme has been developed to address critical learning needs amongst neighbourhood renewal practitioners, initially concentrating on ‘Partnership Working and Leadership’, ‘Programme Design and Delivery’, and ‘Learning from What Works’. Six three-day training modules on these topics were piloted by the contractors, *RenewalAcademy* between December 2003 and June 2004, with each topic offered at strategic and operational levels. The pilot programme has been repeated, in forms open to all partnerships and separately targeted (at NDC partnerships and at Community Empowerment Networks). *RenewalAcademy* are resourced to deliver upwards of 20 courses (or related forms of learning activity) over two years.

The NRU has sought to ensure that there is synergy in the development and use of these tools, to maximise their benefits. This thinking has come together, eg, in plans to offer packages of support for LSPs with the greatest ground to make up in harnessing partner inputs to close the gap on Floor Targets.

### 3.3 Wider NRU Contributions and Linkages

#### Other NRU Skills and Knowledge activities

The Skills and Knowledge Team has worked in conjunction with other NRU teams who have also had in a direct interest in developing skills, knowledge and capacity for neighbourhood renewal. Examples led by other NRU teams have included: the development of training, qualifications and support for neighbourhood wardens<sup>4</sup>; the creation of the National Neighbourhood Management Network; networking and training support for Business Brokers provided by the Partnership Academy at Business in the Community; and training programmes in community conflict resolution for GOs (promoted by the Community Participation Team).

The NRU has also funded grants through Community Learning Chests (CLCs) in NRF areas. These have been small awards of between £50 and £5,000 to help individuals or groups of residents play an active role in neighbourhood renewal through learning. This funding has constituted a significant part of the overall budget associated with The Learning Curve, though administered through Community Participation Team channels (and not included in the Skills and Knowledge Programme budget)<sup>5</sup>.

#### Linkages on policy and research

The Skills and Knowledge Team has maintained links with NRU policy colleagues, who are the locus for the NRU’s work with other departments in helping them meet their PSA floor targets. Typically this has involved pursuing shared interests in promoting better use of evidence, and to plugging particular knowledge gaps (eg, relating to good practice on economic development, public health and transport in the neighbourhood renewal context).

<sup>4</sup> See the Neighbourhood Wardens pages on [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk); the National Neighbourhood Management Network at [www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net](http://www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net); Partnership Academy at [www.partnershipacademy.org.uk](http://www.partnershipacademy.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> During 2004, the CLC budget became part of the NRU’s Single Community Programme (SCP), which continued to earmark funds for supporting resident involvement in neighbourhood renewal. The SCP has since been incorporated into the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, which provides more discretion to localities on how the money should be spent – and no longer earmarked for learning purposes.

There has been a close relationship with the Research and Development (R&D) Team who have been especially concerned to ensure that the learning from research and evaluation projects is transferred effectively to policymakers and practitioners, and that there are sufficient analytical skills and capacity to ensure that robust local strategies are in place. An example of collaboration between the two teams has been the development of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) programme<sup>6</sup>, being piloted in four regions to provide neighbourhood research support services. Floor Targets Interactive (the web-based system for monitoring progress towards Public Service Agreement targets. FTI at national, regional and local levels), developed by R&D, is promoted alongside Skills and Knowledge tools.

## Relevant policy developments across government

During the period of the evaluation, there have been significant, interwoven developments in policy areas related to the NSNR such as Sustainable Communities and Local Government Modernisation (ODPM) and frameworks for community capacity building ('Firm Foundations') and the voluntary sector infrastructure ('ChangeUp') (Home Office). There are capacity building elements to each, which if joined up effectively, present opportunities for more concerted impact on improving local services and impact on floor targets. At the same time these developments are part of what is a very complex policy environment to comprehend. The cross-cutting nature of neighbourhood renewal strategy – encompassing multiple fields of government policy – places huge demands on the ability of key players to keep on top of developments and understand the connections.

The subsequent development of the Skills and Knowledge Programme has taken place in the context of the Gershon<sup>7</sup> and Devolving Decision Making Reviews in 2004. These recommended that resources, decision making and accountability should be devolved to as close to the front line as possible, for greater effectiveness and efficiency savings. More flexibilities, freedoms and incentives are being built into national policies to allow local solutions to local problems, while contributing to a smaller number of national targets. Increased autonomy has been proposed for high performing agencies and partnerships, along with strengthened capacity building and intervention strategies for under-performers. There is a government commitment to improve the quality of performance data to enable effective real-time monitoring, and to spread best practice in local performance management.

## 3.4 Delivering the Programme: Government Offices

### GO roles

Within the context of The Learning Curve, GOs have had *“responsibility for driving skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal”*, as part of their wider roles in overseeing the delivery of neighbourhood renewal programmes and joining up national, regional and local policy agendas. GOs have crucial relationship management roles in working with LSPs, NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders. These require GOs both to support *and* to challenge partnerships (eg, through annual Performance Management review processes).

<sup>6</sup> SELD: [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=1573](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=1573)

<sup>7</sup> 'Releasing Resources for the Frontline' (HM Treasury 2004). Both review documents can be found at [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

These tasks are often not easy, given inherent tensions between them. Closer to point of delivery, GOs have an essential function in providing feedback to the policy centre and can play an informed role in new policy initiatives.

GOs have pursued roles on Skills and Knowledge at regional and local levels which relate to those of the NRU at national level:

- *Leadership*: influencing regional bodies (such as the RDA and Regional Assembly), GO teams and other regional stakeholders, most notably in the development of Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs) and promoting investment in skills and knowledge by local partnerships
- *Stimulating awareness, demand and take-up*: sponsoring research on needs and ways of addressing these; researching case studies of good practice; advising and encouraging partnerships on their approach to learning, development and performance improvement (directly, through NRAs or, in some regions, through grants negotiated with individual partnerships)
- *Improving supply*: providing or commissioning learning events and other networking activities; working with providers to develop new learning opportunities, routes to qualifications, etc.

## GO budgets

Each GO has negotiated a budget from the NRU, based on their annual Skills and Knowledge Action Plan (SKAP). Totalling £2.5m in 2004-05, these accounted for just under half of the NRU Skills and Knowledge budget, excluding an extra allocation to GOs for RCE development. There is a lead Skills and Knowledge manager in each GO. In some cases this is a full-time post, while in others the role is combined with other responsibilities (eg, within area teams).

Within overall Skills and Knowledge Programme priorities, there has been great scope to tailor activities to regional circumstances. In 2004-05, substantial proportions of the GO planned budgets were earmarked for RCE development (22%), networks and networking (17%) and for learning activities geared to achievement of Floor Targets (15%). Next came general learning programmes and events (10%), internal GO development (8%), Renewal.net and related good practice/knowledge management actions (8%), and learning activities relating to community engagement (7%). The regional distribution does not uniformly reflect regional need as indicated by the proxy of the regional allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) allocations to LSPs (eg, while London has 37% of LSPs in receipt of additional NRF – reflecting levels of deprivation in the city – it receives 12% of the regional Skills and Knowledge budget).

## Development of GO plans and activities

GOs have experienced a steep learning curve as they have sought to develop their Skills and Knowledge activities. The NSNR is a recent innovation, the emphasis on skills and knowledge is new for a government regeneration strategy, and GOs have not had this role (or budget) before. A few GOs have recruited externally to Skills and Knowledge posts, mainly bringing

in individuals with experience of community-based learning. No GO brought in organisational development expertise though one later funded an Audit Commission secondee to work in support of LSPs on PMF.

GOs have adopted an iterative approach in developing their Action Plans, trying out different initiatives, typically 'letting many flowers bloom'. Especially in their earlier involvement, several took a very hands-on approach in, eg, providing advice to partnerships on learning plans, organising events or researching case studies for Renewal.net. GOs have also been expected to promote the Skills and Knowledge Programme tools and commission NRA assignments in support of their involvement with individual partnerships. They have done this to varying degrees, depending on the extent to which GO staff themselves have seen the benefits of the tools for themselves. No standard approach has been adopted to such tasks.

Few GOs have had a strong sense of strategy on skills and knowledge. The content of most GO Action Plans has tended to be reactive, responding to wants rather than needs – in a situation where partnerships themselves have not been clear about what they really need. This has tended to reflect the stage that partnerships have reached in their partnership life cycles. More mature partnerships with stronger leadership focused on delivery are likely to articulate their needs better than those where partners are still working through and agreeing their priorities.

Increasingly, GO plans have shown innovation (eg, in nature of the events they support: more emphasis on active learning, less on presentation-based seminars) and become more cohesive. Following the NRU lead, they have focused more on how learning activities can contribute to the achievement of national and local targets.

Most GOs have not adopted an evidence-based approach to their Skills and Knowledge activities. They have not tended to review systematically what they have funded on Skills and Knowledge nor sought to share lessons widely. To date there has been little evaluation, with monitoring of activities limited to assessments of participant satisfaction with events (eg, on the quality of speakers and venues. Only in the West Midlands has there been any consistent effort to evaluate, and even there this has rarely involved assessment of changes made by participants and resultant outcomes. Lack of evidence across the wide range of GO skills and knowledge activities has made it difficult to draw conclusions on relative effectiveness of different approaches, and limited what could be said about the potential for replication.

The Devolved Decision Making and Gershon Reviews mentioned above have placed a greater onus on GOs to work effectively with LSPs and local authorities, and especially in institutional capacity building and interventions in under-performing areas. A major task in 2005-06 is the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs)<sup>8</sup>, where GOs are expected to take a lead role in negotiating and agreeing outcomes for pilot areas. They have monitoring and evaluation roles and are expected to argue for specific ways to overcome obstacles within government to better local delivery.

<sup>8</sup> Local Area Agreements are intended to simplify funding streams, join up public services and give councils and other local delivery partners more flexibility. They are structured around three key themes: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; and health and older people.

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

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

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

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

- Culture and policy within the NRU tends to be viewed as supportive of individual staff learning, but lacks a concerted drive to build the skills and knowledge which the NRU needs as an organisation to deliver effectively. Learning and development needs which flow from organisational priorities are not built into team and personal learning plans, and there are skill gaps for many staff relating to their lack of experience in neighbourhood renewal<sup>9</sup>. The NRU has looked outward in bringing in some staff (recruits and secondees) from outside the Civil Service who do have such experience, but in turn these individuals typically have learning needs relating to working within government (eg, on resource accounting and programme design).
- Policy staff commented on the onus on them to make the running with other government departments in ensuring that NSNR objectives feature in new policy developments in these other domains. They also raised the sheer difficulty they have in finding the time to keep up with relevant policy developments and connections across neighbourhood renewal interests.
- There are concerns within and outside the NRU about how well teams communicate and present a common view to the outside world, and related comments about the need to improve cross-unit working within ODPM. The importance of recognising and strengthening 'internal customer' relationships – where teams are mutually dependent on others for successful implementation of tasks – is not always recognised.

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

- With GOs playing an increasingly pivotal role in policy delivery, not just in neighbourhood renewal but in the wider Modernising Government agenda, there are critical roles for GOs to play and associated organisational development needs. These bring about new or enhanced skill demands for many GO staff, eg, concerning: relationship management; brokering support packages (including adopting appropriate management styles to gain support from local partners); ability to advise on performance management reviews and improvement planning, and on data sources and analysis. Other broader requirements can include, eg, change management and organisational development skills, diversity awareness, and conflict resolution skills.
- Our interviews with GO staff suggested that GOs show some aspects of being learning organisations, capable of adapting effectively to new demands. As with the NRU centrally, GO policies and cultures have tended to support individual learning – though much is left to personal initiative. Interviewees in most GOs tended to feel that a defined organisational development and learning agenda is lacking (despite their organisations being accredited as Investors in People, the relevant national kitemark). There is recognition that GOs themselves need to make more and better use of evidence, and there are associated learning needs relating to data analysis and interpretation, and performance management models and methods. There are also concerns – as with the NRU – that GOs internally need to be better joined up and presenting consistent messages.
- GONE and GOWM provide particularly good examples where NR Skills and Knowledge leads have used resources in their Skills and Knowledge budgets as a lever to engage GO personnel/ training managers and other GO teams in development activities which address both NR and corporate needs. They have also anticipated strategic development needs relating to new staff tasks (such as performance management) and organised learning activities in response.
- GO interviewees did not consider that as organisations they were very effective at capturing and sharing knowledge, especially in building the 'organisational memory'. High turnover of staff and the recruitment of staff new to neighbourhood renewal has tended to compound the problem – again, an issue also for the NRU centrally.
- GOs would welcome further opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. While there are meetings which bring GO staff together, many of our GO interviewees felt that these provided limited opportunities for networking, and more advantage could be taken in organising events with explicit learning objectives.

For further details of this research, see Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 1, "NRU and GO Strategies and Delivery" available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

<sup>9</sup> A current initiative within the NRU is the implementation of the ODPM's 'Excellence in Delivery' programme. This seeks, amongst other objectives, to develop leadership, programme and project management and financial management skills – but is not geared specifically to NSNR-specific requirements or the NRU's own business plan.



## 4 Findings from the Field: Local Needs and Actions

### 4.1 Context for Local Action on Skills and Knowledge

Prior to the introduction of the National Strategy, few localities had holistic strategies targeted on improving 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 underdeveloped. 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. This was also true for government departments, national and regional agencies.

Thus many areas were starting from a low base in relation to their understanding of the issues and how 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.

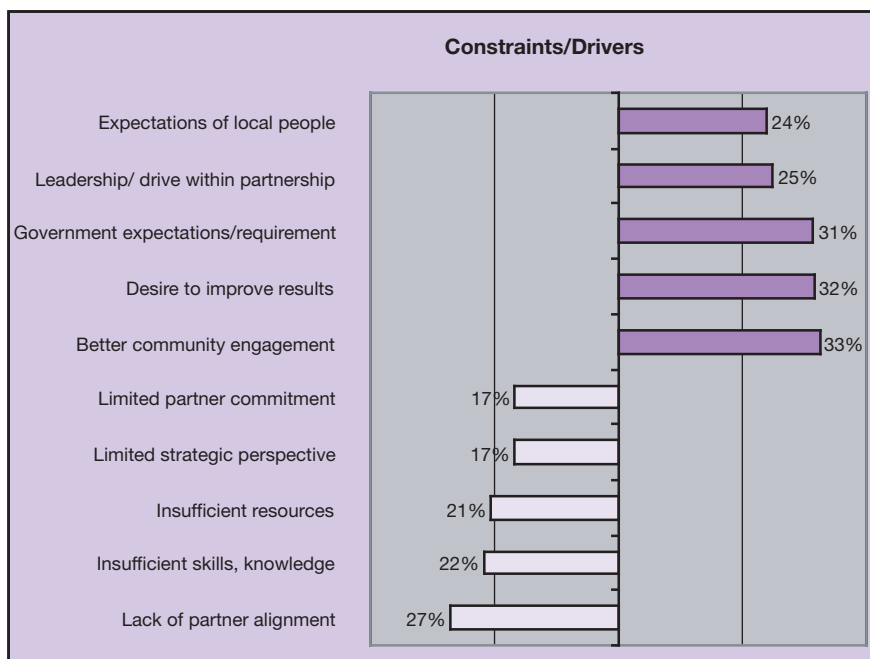
### 4.2 Critical Partnership and Individual Learning Needs

#### Learning and development needs in partnerships

In our 221 interviews in the nine fieldwork areas, we sought at the outset to establish the principal drivers behind partnership development and critical constraints on effective performance. These should relate to the main strategic learning and development issues which partners need to address – and may or may not have been identified as local priorities for action. We expected that these would potentially help explain the relative progress made in any area, and cast light on the extent to which partnerships have been influenced by the work of the NRU and GOs<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> This research has been written up in full as in Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 2, “Findings from the Field”, available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

Figure 2: Factors driving and constraining partnership development and performance



N = 221 respondents

We found that the main drivers (Figure 2) were desires to improve community engagement (raised by 33% interviewees), to improve results (32%) and to meet government requirements and expectations (31%). These were closely followed by the quality of leadership within the partnership (25%). The main constraints were identified 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%) and limited strategic perspective (17%), followed by lack of synergy between partnerships and weak consensus or vision.

Our interviews highlighted a number of inter-related development needs:

1) *Continuing needs for skills and knowledge for community leadership and partnership development*

- The survey responses tended to confirm the NRU's diagnosis in The Learning Curve, which highlighted the leadership and influencing skills needed to build stronger commitment from partner organisations. Such skills require associated knowledge about partner roles and objectives, the forces which drive them, their room for manoeuvre, etc, required to build and *sustain* robust partnerships. Successful partnership working is demanding: too easily 'collaborative inertia' can apply, with many factors tending to slow rather than speed partnership progress.
- We observed that certain learning needs relate to the particular stage of the 'partnership life cycle' – the need to understand other partners being typical of earlier stages, along with skills in working through process issues and power relationships and revisiting the vision and the added value that partners are seeking through partnership. How to promote strategic thinking – raising sights beyond parochial interests – often came through as a related need. Few interviewees (only 10%) felt that their partnerships had reached the mature and fully functioning stage – and these tended to be service delivery rather than strategic partnerships.

- The research also drew attention to the ability of councillors to provide community leadership, adjusting their styles and approach to working with partner agencies and local communities.

## 2) *Understanding 'mainstreaming'*

- While understanding of 'mainstreaming' has grown (evident in reforms many LSPs have introduced to their NRF decision-making processes), many involved 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 SRB programme (and other competitive funding regimes) has cast a long shadow, having contributed to mindsets focusing on project funding rather than strategic ways of involving stakeholders, using resources, commissioning activities, and connecting neighbourhood action with wider area partnerships and priorities. Past practices have conditioned perceptions of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund as just another funding pot for projects rather than for enabling strategic change.

## 3) *Use of evidence*

- Many Community Strategies and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies have made limited use of evidence in their development – evidence of needs, past performance, and of what has worked, both locally and further afield.
- Most areas and many individual partner organisations have not taken a systematic approach to evaluation. Most are still working through the implications of outcomes-based performance management: the need for robust baselines, shared theories of change and systems for tracking delivery and results.
- More attention is now being given to the associated data issues (though this is not necessarily seen as a skills and knowledge issue) There are associated learning needs – highlighted by the NRU's Places Project and Floor Target Action Planning – for enhanced skills and resource capacity in *interpreting* data across LSPs, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships.

## 4) *Community and business engagement*

- Many partnerships continue to search for more effective means of decision-making, involving and communicating with partners and stakeholders, not least in engaging with disadvantaged communities and with the private sector (as also highlighted in the national evaluation of the Business Broker pilot programme<sup>11</sup>.)
- 'Community engagement' continues to pose challenges for partners. These relate, eg, to: understanding and commitment amongst public agencies on the benefits of community engagement, the different forms it can take, and how best to support this; and how to strengthen the confidence and ability of community representatives to play an effective strategic role. Calls for capacity building for community representatives/activists (eg, to

<sup>11</sup> Johnstone, Johnstone, Tyler & Warnock (2005) 'Brokering Business Connections: Full evaluation report of the Business Broker Pilot Programme'  
[www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/document.asp?id=1414](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/document.asp?id=1414)

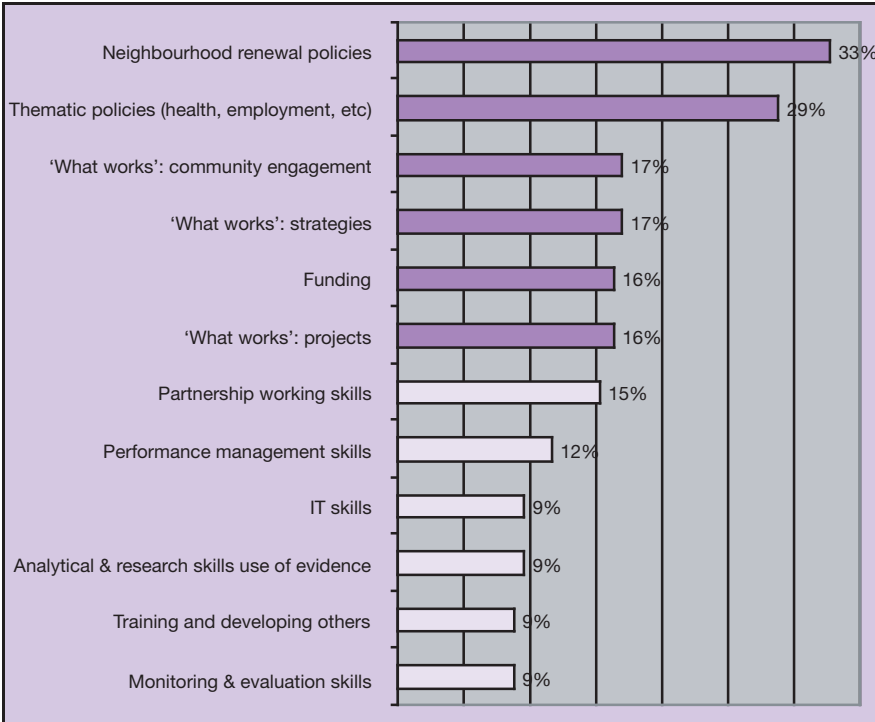
play more strategic roles) are not always paralleled by recognition of needs *within agencies* relating how to work better with local communities and voluntary organisations. There are common tensions between the roles of elected members and community representatives, especially but not only at ward level.

### Learning and development needs of individuals

Large numbers of people involved in neighbourhood renewal face new and enhanced demands – to do new things and/or do things differently – from which stem learning needs. There are significant numbers of people who have not been previously involved, or in the way now required, in strategic roles in LSPs, thematic and neighbourhood partnerships, providing community leadership, or acting in support of those who do. They typically have much to learn, and quickly – placing importance on their induction and continuing support, especially that for ‘lay’ representatives from community, voluntary and business sectors. It was not uncommon to encounter quite basic knowledge needs, concerning, eg, “*What is the LSP?*”, “*Where do I fit in?*” and/or “*How do other partnerships relate to it?*”. These issues have implications for LSP communication strategies – which many partnerships have not treated as a priority.

Many more public sector staff than previously are required to consult and work with local people and businesses as consumers and beneficiaries of services, and as partners in neighbourhood regeneration. Many residents are recruited or elected as partnership board members, or to other positions of local responsibility, without necessarily having previous experience or training to equip them for the roles they are expected to perform.

Figure 3: Personal development needs



N = 221 (interviewees in the case study areas). The blue bars are the top-rated knowledge needs, and the red striped bars are the top-rated skill needs.

Interviewees in our area fieldwork identified a wide range of personal development needs, broadly in line with those contained in the Learning Framework published in the Learning Curve (echoed by the Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities in 2004). Most frequently cited were professional development needs (Figure 3), primarily concerned with *knowledge*: keeping up to date on neighbourhood renewal policies (33%), thematic policies (29%) along with a range of interests in ‘what works’ concerning strategies, projects, community engagement and managing change. The most frequently cited personal *skill* needs related to partnership working (15%), performance management (12%), analytical skills/use of evidence (10%), use of IT (10%), monitoring and evaluation (9%), and training and developing others (9%). We note that the learning needs for many people related to what they can gain from others, especially approaches their peers have found to work, including tips, tools and techniques. There is a significant demand for information of *promising* practice as well as more proven evidence (the focus of Renewal.net).

Our investigation of individual learning and development needs highlighted the following points:

- *Influencing skills* are a critical need for many, a requirement at the heart of effective partnership working – associated with requirements to be able to put yourself in other people’s shoes and to understand the levers (motivations and constraints) which affect their priorities and bear on the decisions they take. Associated skills lie in building consensus (and knowing how to do this as quickly and robustly as possible) and in managing tensions and conflicts. These are aspects of leadership skills – relevant to many people who are not in ‘leadership’ positions within organisations as well as those who are.
- *Facilitation and chairing skills* are vital to effective partnerships, given that many partnership problems manifest themselves in group situations. This places a premium on skills and techniques for vision and consensus building, priority setting, and conflict resolution. The very nature of partnership working has remarkable potential to waste time and energy, breeding disillusion and loss of commitment, and resulting in lack of impact.
- Significant demands for *social enterprise* and associated skills (eg, in business planning, bid writing, financial management, marketing, and forward strategies) amongst many community and voluntary organisations and neighbourhood partnerships, which typically depend on programme or project funding of limited duration. Fears about the future of funding streams (eg, from RDAs and EU) have helped generate this interest.

A need for more people to develop behaviours appropriate to partnership working was a common theme throughout our research. These practices include ‘taking off your partner hat’ (ie, not pursuing a vested interest at all times); giving space for others to contribute; and acknowledging that everyone brings something valuable to the partnership table. Inappropriate behaviours can make partnership working fractious and unproductive, and make it difficult for other partners to contribute (especially those with less experience or resources).

We found that some 6% of our interviewees were pursuing or considering a course in further or higher education. 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 up obstacles relating to costs of the training (course fees and

expenses) and lack of existing provision (especially locally accessible)<sup>12</sup>. Otherwise 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%).

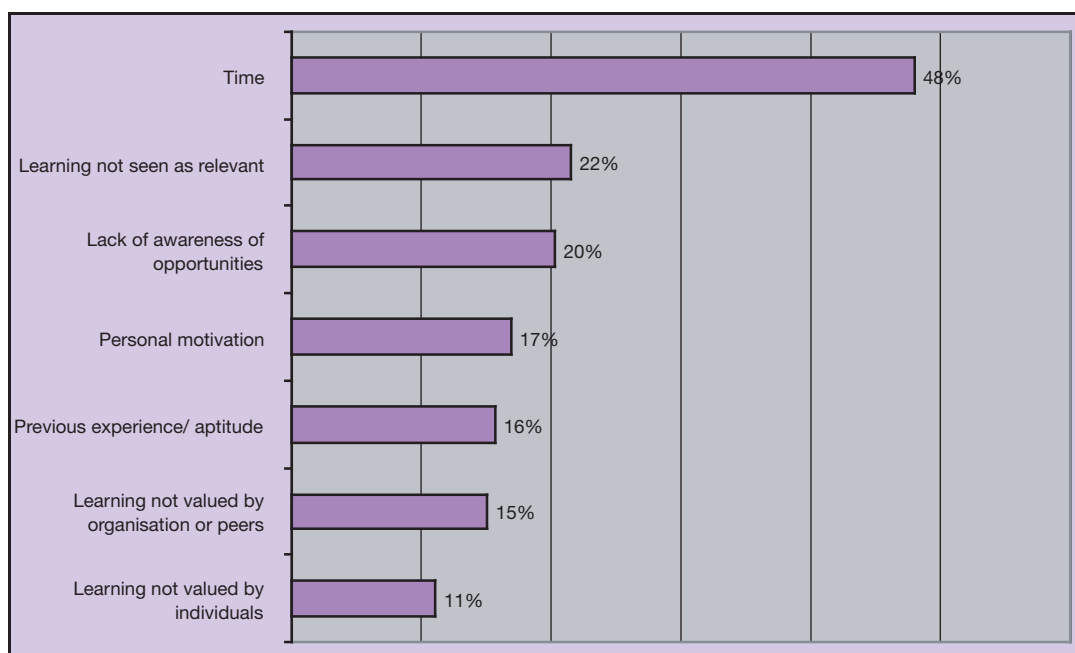
### 4.3 Barriers to Learning and Development

In taking steps to address identified learning and development needs, it is important to recognise and, where necessary, challenge obstacles. Most notable in our research were:

- the perception of partnership working as an add-on for organisations and individuals, un- (or under-) recognised in job descriptions and partner business plans. (This tendency has been reinforced by the *voluntary* basis of LSPs and of agency involvement in NDCs and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders)
- limited core resources in LSPs available to help drive the learning and development agenda
- a perspective that learning for neighbourhood renewal is not relevant to individuals or organisations (eg, we encountered several responses of the nature, “*neighbourhood renewal is not to do with my job*” – from staff in public agencies or related partnerships – like community safety)
- attitudes which reflected a view that to admit learning needs or seek evidence from elsewhere is a sign of personal weakness (illustrated by one LSP manager who said, “*I’m not too proud to look elsewhere*”)

<sup>12</sup> Action has been taken in Yorkshire and the Humber to develop an accredited learning programme, linked to the Learning Curve skills framework and offering qualifications through the Open College Network. This has been supported by GOYH and provides a good example of using Skills and Knowledge funding to address a need and join up neighbourhood renewal interests with broader regional concerns to develop organisational capacity within the voluntary and community sector.

Figure 4: Barriers to learning



Interviewees in our fieldwork areas observed the following barriers to learning (Figure 4): learning not seen as relevant (22%), limited awareness of opportunities (20%), personal motivation (17%), previous experience/aptitude (16%), and learning not valued by their organisation or by peers (15%) – and above all, time (48%). We note that in practice, ‘time’ is a synonym for priority – ranking learning and reflection lower than other more pressing work activities. We also found evidence of some diversity-related barriers (eg, child or elder care responsibilities preventing attendance at events, or opposition within some cultures to women taking part in residential training).

Time and again during the research, people – in many different roles – were apt to say, “*we don’t know what we don’t know*”, in that they felt they were grappling in the dark in working out what they should be doing. In saying this, they demonstrated an openness to learning – which was in contrast to others who were experienced and felt they had little to learn. This stresses a core need to help people anticipate and clarify their development needs, eg, during the early phases of introducing new policy initiatives – and is a task integral to the ‘leadership’ role of the NRU and GOs on Skills and Knowledge.

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’ but 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, or simply more pressing other things to do, nobody’s responsibility in a partnership setting to lead... The risks inherent of not treating learning and development seriously may not be fully recognised – a concern flagged by the National Audit Office (NAO) as one of four critical risks affecting the likelihood of successful delivery of the public sector modernisation agenda. We found that interviewees in our area fieldwork, when asked, were aware of such risks, citing as likely consequences disaffected communities (62%), poorer performance (48%), and poorer prospects of attracting external resources (25%).

## 4.4 Local Responses to Skills and Knowledge Needs

Our research found much evidence of progress to address these needs and challenges, though characterised in many areas by a piecemeal approach accompanied by uncertainties about what to do and who should do it. Most progress has been made where partners have taken the resourcing of the LSP more seriously and have devoted resources (people, time, money and energy) to addressing skills and knowledge needs.

In NRF areas, LSPs have been expected to develop Local Action on Learning Plans to support partnership development and capacity for neighbourhood renewal. This was related to NRU Accreditation requirements in 2002-04. When we started our fieldwork in early 2004, only one out of the eight LSP – Wigan – had both developed a plan and was already implementing it. Even there, the approach has been a staged one, starting with core partnership members and community representatives, later moving to front-line staff and service managers. Other areas had plans in various stages of development and had organised some associated learning activities.

In several of the fieldwork areas, partners had made a false start in determining what to do. It was not uncommon for an LSP to have formed a learning group to consider actions needed and draft a partnership learning plan (as encouraged by an NRU benchmark for LSP accreditation). But this did not mean that there was clarity about what the group should be doing, or about the learning and development needs to be addressed. They may have found partners unwilling to see the relevance of addressing learning and development needs, or to treat these as a priority. They may not have been sure where to start, perhaps daunted by the scale of the task or confused by the potential range of needs to be addressed. In some areas, there has been confusion about whom learning plans should address, with definitions becoming very wide and concerned with a broad adult and community learning agenda in targeted neighbourhoods.

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 more steps have been taken to strengthen partnership working and address ways of improving performance. In several of our fieldwork areas, there was a palpable sense amongst LSP partners that their partnerships had turned a corner, and with their focus now much greater on achieving results than on resolving process issues relating to how they work together.

One consequence has been greater commitment to developing partnership learning plans, and several of the fieldwork LSPs have made significant progress in the past year in both developing and implementing their plans. Derby and Leicester, for example, have created dedicated posts within their structures, have carried out more targeted needs analyses and are pursuing more active programmes of activity. In Luton, the Learning and Development Group has become the Partnership Development Group, with more authority and responsibility for overseeing performance improvement plans. In two out of our eight NRF LSP areas, little has still been done in relation to identifying and acting on development needs<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> An internal NRU review of GO LSP PMF summaries suggests that LSPs are increasingly linking learning and performance improvement actions. There are examples of LSPs which giving fresh priority to identifying and acting on skills needs, and an increasing numbers of examples of interventions tailored to improving delivery.



Despite these positive signs, it cannot be said that in most areas there is yet a strong culture of learning (or, indeed, of performance management) around the work of the LSP and neighbourhood partnerships, characterised by shared awareness of needs, structured responses, and learning and reflection built in to collaborative activities. The nearest we found to this was in Wigan. There, the original Community Strategy incorporated a number of learning-related principles which have been put into practice: maintain an *up-to-date picture of trends* and likely future scenarios; provide *opportunities for reflection* (eg, through regular LSP board sessions and annual partnership conventions); build in *review and evaluation* (eg, in developing devolved governance through the Township Programmes); and giving priority to *performance management*. Local authority leaders have played a key role in ensuring this. One outcome has been a revised Community Strategy which is better targeted, more realistic and has greater stakeholder backing.

#### How organisations and partnerships are responding – A snapshot from our fieldwork areas

##### **Needs analyses and plans**

- 33% 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. Some of these analyses were thorough (involving interviews and focus groups) while others were rudimentary (eg, participants asked in a short session during an awayday to identify their needs). 17% interviewees noted analyses within their own organisation or community of interest which considered at least in part development needs relating to neighbourhood renewal.
- Some partnerships have staff with responsibilities for learning and development (eg, Derby Derwent NDC Capacity Co-ordinator, Leicester Partnership Skills and Knowledge Manager). In undertaking their needs analysis, Derby Derwent NDC and Derby City Partnership have made direct use of the functional map developed by the NRW which sets out the range of job roles in neighbourhood renewal and associated occupational standards.

##### **Range of learning activities and participants**

- A wide range of learning interventions is being pursued (eg, coaching and mentoring, study visits, community conferences/'open space' events – big events involving all interests in the one room) 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.
- 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, front-line workers by 18%, and senior managers by 16%.

##### **Equality and diversity**

- We found that 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. Other respondents felt that they were not in a position to observe any changes or improvements.

### How organisations and partnerships are responding – A snapshot from our fieldwork areas (*continued*)

- Examples of successful interventions included:
  - training and facilitation skills for community representatives and activists through the 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 (Interlock Neighbourhood Management) and Salterbeck (West Cumbria), 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
  - workshops to support PMF reviews (in both CENs and LSPs), leading to improved dialogue and priority setting
  - 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
- Areas like 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.

Some areas have been able to find resources to support their learning plans, while others have found it very difficult. Partners in some areas have been willing to devote NRF monies, while others have not been prepared to consider using this for anything other than service delivery. Other notable sources of funding have included the NRU’s Community Empowerment Fund and Community Learning Chest (CLC) (targeted at community organisations and representatives), along with partner in-kind contributions. There were no cases in the fieldwork areas where CLC was being used in a very strategic way to support learning for neighbourhood renewal – though in Wigan CLC has been combined with other funding sources for capacity building grants and is seen as a resource for implementing the Local Action on Learning Plan.

In a few areas, the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) has been very supportive, while in others there has been little coming together on a common agenda around learning for neighbourhood renewal. In the former cases, the LLSC has acknowledged the links between the LSP interests and their own priorities for strengthening capacity to deliver learning in neighbourhood renewal areas. Though other LSC resources for adult learning have also been accessed, overall there has been a mismatch between what LSPs would like to do and what LLSCs can readily support. This is because the priority for the latter is funding training leading to qualifications, while in most cases neighbourhood renewal learning needs are better addressed by more job-specific, non-accredited learning activities.

## 5 Towards an Assessment of the Impact of the Programme

As we explained in the introduction, the evaluation has sought to review how the NRU and GOs have influenced actions on the ground by partnerships and partner organisations, and draw out the particular contributions and impact of the four main Skills and Knowledge tools: NRAs, Renewal.net, Regional Networks and the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme. At the heart of the evaluation model we have sought to assess changes attributable to Skills and Knowledge Programme interventions, and consequent improvements in organisational/partnership results and in neighbourhood renewal outcomes. In this section we first explore the extent to which the NRU and Government Offices have influenced practice and provision through their strategic leadership role on skills and knowledge, before proceeding to report on our findings for the four Skills and Knowledge tools. Section 6 which follows presents our overall conclusions and Section 7, our recommendations.

### 5.1 Strategic Leadership by NRU and Government Offices

#### Influencing practice

We conclude from the various strands of the evaluation that the NRU has succeeded in raising the level of interest within partnerships in skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal, and taken productive initiatives to help them translate this interest into action. The analysis contained in the Learning Curve remains relevant, as do many of the actions and suggestions it contains. For example, the Learning Curve promoted the concept of ‘action learning’<sup>14</sup> as being ideally geared to addressing learning needs in neighbourhood renewal. Only comparatively recently, however, has there been a growth in this kind of learning, promoted by GOs, Regional Networks or RCEs.

There is now much wider recognition of the need to develop capacity, skills and knowledge within LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships – though, as we noted previously, this is from a very low base and is still not universal. LSPs have been relatively slow to develop their work in this area, a function of the stage of their development, but there is now evidence of greater commitment to act, increasingly through making a direct connection between ‘skills and knowledge’ and ‘performance improvement’.

<sup>14</sup> “A way of learning from our actions (and from what happens to us and around us) by taking the time to question and reflect on this in order to gain insights and consider how to act in future.” (Weinstein, 1995). The term is often used loosely to relate to a range of learning activities in a work setting – through ‘learning from doing, performing, and taking action’. It may use devices such as games, simulations, role playing, etc – though with learning objectives set by participants themselves.

### Feedback from the field: influencing local actions

We asked interviewees in the fieldwork areas about the extent to which they had been influenced by the work of the NRU and their Government Office in developing their neighbourhood renewal learning activities.

- Across all interviewees, we found that over a third (38%) had been influenced by the NRU to a reasonable extent ('moderate', 'significant' or 'very significant'), and 42% by their GO. Around a third 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/GO (The proportions of partnership managers and support officers acknowledging such influence are higher at 50% for both NRU and GOs.)
- This influence was mainly through advice, guidance and ideas (55% of those influenced); through NRA support (38%); and through encouragement to invest in skills and knowledge (28%). The Learning Curve document was quoted in several significant cases as having helped to substantiate the case for local action. The nature of the GO role means that they 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, or necessarily, in relation to skills and knowledge).
- Just over a third (36%) had attended GO events. Of these, 38% reported the main benefit as improved awareness of policy developments; 32%, access to information, evidence or experience not otherwise accessible; and 31% knowledge of 'what works'. The value of networking opportunities also featured amongst reported benefits. Half had used the information gained in their partnership work and 40% had passed details onto to others. 29% felt that the GO events had led to a better informed debate within their partnership, and 20% that they had provided a solution to a particular problem or identified a way forward.
- For the future the main requests relating to what more the NRU and GOs can do to assist 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 to staff leading on implementing the partnership's learning plan, signposting to relevant learning opportunities and providers, and access to further resources. Action to help develop integrated performance management systems across partners was also raised by several partnership managers.

The NRU and GOs have exerted influence most through their funding-based relationships with NDCs, Neighbourhood Management pathfinders, CENs and LSPs in NRF areas, and through GO staff working directly with partnerships, in some cases with or through NRAs. GOs have gradually capitalised on links with related government initiatives (often with Skills and Knowledge staff making the running), and some – notably GOWM – have made efforts to develop stronger interest and commitment on the part of regional stakeholders through consulting them on the Skills and Knowledge Action Plan and involving them in commissioning activities. GOs have generally grown closer to RDAs in the joint development of RCEs, though there is still some way to go in building capacity building agendas with RDAs across common areas of interest. This is in part because several RDAs have a greater interest in capacity at sub-regional partnership level rather than LSP or neighbourhood level. There has also been common ground to build, not least in seeking to ensure that 'neighbourhood renewal' is fully a priority in RCEs alongside regeneration of the built environment.

GO staff themselves have welcomed the lead that the NRU has given on skills and knowledge, although several expressed concerns that the NRU has had unrealistic expectations of what can be delivered by partnerships on the ground within particular timescales. This point was made more generally regarding the introduction by the NRU of new policy initiatives.

Overall, GO staff feel they have made progress in their Skills and Knowledge roles through ensuring that partners in their regions are better informed about the neighbourhood renewal agenda, and in supporting individual partnerships. They consider that learning for neighbourhood renewal is increasingly seen as an important requirement, although there is still much more to do to promote this message.

## **Influencing delivery through Performance Management reviews**

The introduction of Performance Management Frameworks (PMFs) has been an important step in encouraging a stronger focus in partnerships on their progress against neighbourhood renewal outcomes and their capacity and organisation to deliver. The stress within the PMF models on evidence and the plausibility of strategic interventions has been critical, encouraging partners to reconsider the adequacy of their approach to ‘closing the gap’ on neighbourhood renewal floor targets. There has been a generally favourable response from NDCs, NMs, CENs and NRF LSPs (with many LSPs in non-NRF areas, eg, in the East and West Midlands, adopting the NRF model to bolster their efforts to improve partnership performance and accountability).

The timing of the introduction of the LSP PMF was such that, in practice, the hard work in gathering data and reviewing performance was undertaken in many areas in a relatively short space of time. This hindered the scope for partnerships to involve many people in the exercise, and importantly, to maximise the learning through joint reflection on what the data had to say. Some concerns about the ‘bureaucracy’ of the process have been raised, though this has in part depended on how the exercise has been managed locally. Support on PMF from NRAs has been widely welcomed, in helping partnerships work through potential PMF requirements and clarifying the benefits.

There have been early signs that PMF processes have been making a difference in driving improvements – including helping to shift partner perceptions and define organisational development needs better. Questions remain: for example, how much ownership is there of improvement plans across the partnership? A review of the effectiveness of PMF and improvement planning now needs to be a research priority for the NRU, to assess the extent to which PMF really is making a difference and to draw out good practice.

There is still a big job for LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships to get to grips with performance management (developing shared systems; winning partner commitment to a common approach, etc) – a challenge given greater impetus with the introduction of Local Area Agreements. In part this is a skills and knowledge issue – but other government action is needed to promote greater institutional alignment, eg, in relation to performance management and audit requirements on government departments and agencies.

## **Influencing the supply of learning opportunities for neighbourhood renewal**

Beyond the Delivery Skills programme and events promoted by Government Offices, the NRU through the Skills and Knowledge Team has not made significant inroads in improving the supply of learning opportunities. This wider aim has, however, dropped in priority as the Skills and Knowledge Programme has focused increasingly on how it can more directly support improved delivery. The Skills and Knowledge Team commissioned research (Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Renewal Training) which analysed critical job requirements

for neighbourhood renewal job roles, mapped against existing occupational standards and qualifications and identified gaps specific to neighbourhood renewal requirements. This has potential for informing future development of qualifications and learning provision. The functional map can also be used for a variety of organisational and learning purposes (eg, in drafting job descriptions, undertaking training needs analysis and personal development planning). Its level of detail, however, means that it needs to be converted into user-friendly formats.

Research by the Learning and Skills Development Agency for the NRU identified some innovative responses but overall found that needs and demand for neighbourhood renewal-related learning opportunities was not well-understood in further and higher education. A constraint has been access to funding, primarily through the Learning and Skills Council (by far the biggest public funder of learning). While the NRU and LSC have strategic objectives in common, they have different priorities – for the LSC, educational attainment by 16-19 year olds, Level 2 qualifications amongst adults and improving the quality of learning providers. Current funding arrangements strongly favour learning in relation to the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications, rather than non-accredited and short course provision which is particularly relevant to many of the needs of neighbourhood renewal practitioners. The LSC has relevant proposals which should secure funding for ‘learning for community development’, but this will not be operational until 2007.

Progress made by the NRU Neighbourhood Management and Wardens Team in developing NVQs for Neighbourhood and Street Wardens demonstrates what can be done – and also the lengthy time involved in developing and accrediting qualifications. The creation of such NVQs opens up opportunities for attracting LSC funding, and more could be made of such developments in the future, eg, in meeting needs amongst residents involved in neighbourhood renewal partnerships and front line staff. Support for staff development *within* the public sector newly features within the LSC’s annual Statement of Priorities.

The NRU now sees the development of qualifications in the neighbourhood renewal field primarily as a priority to be taken forward by the Academy for Sustainable Communities. The NRU needs, however, to take a continuing interest in this topic, to ensure that public resources are available to help fund training which goes beyond the NRU’s primary focus on learning in support of performance improvement. It is important to note that there is no overall ‘workforce development strategy’ for neighbourhood renewal (nor for ‘sustainable communities’ more broadly), analogous to those being developed by employer-led Sector Skills Councils to tackle skills and productivity needs within their sectors. Needs in relation to neighbourhood renewal must be positioned at both national and regional levels, the latter within the context of the new Regional Skills Partnerships being developed by the LSC, RDAs, Jobcentre Plus, GOs and other regional partners.

Evidence from the evaluation of NRU Community Participation Programmes<sup>15</sup> suggests that 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 has highlighted some imaginative use of CLC but overall, Community Empowerment Networks have been unclear about how best to use the funds. There has tended to be little strategic relationship between access to the funds and goals for community involvement in neighbourhood renewal.

15 Taylor, M and others (2005) Making Connections: An evaluation of the Community Participation Programmes (NRU) [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1418](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1418)

## Contribution of Individual Skills and Knowledge Tools

### 5.2 Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers

The introduction of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers has been a particular success story. Our interviews with partnerships which have made use of their services provided considerable evidence of changes that the partnerships were making or planning, with some evidence of partnership/organisational results. Interviewees were confident about the likelihood that the changes they had made would lead to, or enable, achievement of neighbourhood renewal outcomes faster, better or on a larger scale.

By June 2004, 700 assignments had been completed or were under way, undertaken by 106 NRAs – of an average duration of five days. The main types of project related to performance management (17%), strategy development (16%), community engagement (13%) and organisational development (11%). A third were for NDCs and a quarter for LSPs, with around 10% each for Neighbourhood Management pathfinders, CENs, GOs and the NRU itself<sup>16</sup>.

NRAs
<p><b>Benefits and results for partnerships</b></p> <p><i>Changes made to strategies and ways of working</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In more than four out of five cases, partnerships we interviewed had introduced or made changes to strategies and/or projects. Many examples were attributable to NRAs (eg, improved decision making and risk assessment processes, structural re-organisations, greater delegation to frontline staff, and better use of evidence in planning and project development).</li> <li>• In three out of five cases, the partnerships had introduced or made changes to ways of working, systems or processes.</li> </ul> <p><i>Gains in skills and knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two thirds had gained skills and knowledge – especially the latter, eg, on policies and ‘what works’ – along with improved disciplines (eg, in project appraisal, options appraisal and prioritisation, and in the use and presentation of evidence). However, feedback from partnerships (and from NRAs) suggests that there is scope to ensure greater learning transfer.</li> </ul> <p><i>Actual or planned improvements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of results from assignments, half of the partnerships interviewed pointed directly to actual or planned improvements to services, and some to specific neighbourhood renewal outcomes, eg, in better housing and in the extent and quality of community participation. For most other respondents, it was too early for them to comment on improvements and outcomes. And few could place any quantified measure on improvements or results.</li> <li>• Over two thirds considered that they had achieved more, better or faster benefits/ results than they would have without the services of an NRA.</li> </ul> <p><i>Other benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other reported benefits to partnerships include: impartial facilitation and brokerage; a challenge to partner positions and thinking; a greater appreciation of the ‘the bigger picture’; guidance in introducing new systems, eg, on performance management; fresh ideas and evidence of what works elsewhere; specialist expertise not found within the partnership; conflicts defused; reassurance, encouragement and confidence; and a stimulus to change, seen to have Government backing.</li> </ul>

<sup>16</sup> Examples of GO and NRU assignments have included good practice research, facilitation of network and other events, eg, on PMF and delivery of training, eg, on community conflict resolution.

## NRAs (continued)

### **Quality of the NRA service**

- NRU records show that GOs/partnerships were satisfied or very satisfied for four out of five assignments; very few assignments were rated as poor. Our survey tended to validate this pattern of assessment.
- NRAs were appreciated by the partnerships for their personal attributes, knowledge, relevant skills, independence, and the degree to which some had 'gone beyond the call' in fulfilling their brief.
- Interviews with partnerships, practitioners in our field work areas, GO staff, and NRAs themselves unearthed some concerns (about eg, approaches to some assignments appearing too theoretical; about commissioning processes and the quality of briefs in some regions; and the possible use of NRAs as an 'easy option' where action could or should be taken by the NRU or GO directly). (Further details have been provided to the NRU to inform operational improvements.)

### **Benefits from an NRU/GO perspective**

- NRU and GO interviewees reported a range of benefits from the use of NRAs which have strengthened their own contribution to delivering the National Strategy. These included:
  - the ability of NRAs to do things GOs/NRU cannot, or do not have the time/resources/ expertise to do (eg, a broker role independent of funding or performance monitoring dimensions; provision of in-depth thematic advice; short inputs of intensive support to resolve specific issues)
  - the panel of NRAs brings very substantial knowledge and experience in the delivery of neighbourhood renewal and partnership development and performance improvement
  - their role as a principal mechanism for promoting change in partnerships – and a significant help to civil servants in managing risks in programme delivery
  - a source of valuable feedback from close to the ground

For further details of this research, see Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 3, "Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors" available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

## 5.3 Regional Networks

The NRU Skills and Knowledge Team have supported the development of Regional Networks. A commitment in the Learning Curve followed research sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) which pointed to the value of the learning opportunities for practitioners provided by networking and the need for regional mechanisms to foster networking *across* sectors, programmes, professions, etc, in relation to neighbourhood renewal.

Six Regional Networks<sup>17</sup> have been members of a National Regeneration Networks Initiative, established in 2002 with JRF. Two were already in existence (in the North East and North West), funded by the SRB. Government Offices in the other regions have not been convinced about the merits of such a pan-regional network organisation, but have represented their region on this national group. These GOs have fostered other forms of network development in their regions through core and project funding and resources in-kind (eg, events organisation and administrative support). They have sponsored some networks of more specific kinds, eg, North West NDC Network, South Yorkshire Regeneration Network, and CEN, NDC and Neighbourhood Management networks in the West Midlands. LSP networks have been supported in most regions – though *not* as part of the Regional Network. Across these different networks, GOs have played different roles: providing grant funding and active support, commissioning providers, or running the network themselves.

17 Community Renewal Network East, London Renewal Network, Regeneration Exchange (in the North East), SEE-Regen (in the South East) and South West Regeneration Network. The sixth was the North West Regeneration Network. Its SRB funding ended in March 2004, and its role has been superseded by the development of RENEW, the Regional Centre of Excellence.



The Regional Networks are *organisations* which enable networking to take place, provide a bridge between different professional and community interests, and promote the interests of regeneration practitioners and practice within their regions. Most have aimed to undertake a set of common functions: issue-based events and working groups; facilitating support on problems facing practitioners; organising visits and face-to-face exchange; and information dissemination through newsletters and websites. In carrying out their roles they have been anxious not to duplicate those of others: their role in ‘facilitation’ or ‘advice’ has not duplicated that of NRAs, and on training, they have sought to avoid providing training directly – though they may work with others to address needs. Networks have also served as a channel for consultation (eg, on policy and programme management issues) and for promoting the interests of the regeneration sector in their region. The Networks have been encouraged to promote and develop new content for Renewal.net, and foster the involvement of NRAs in network activities. They have also been keen to develop their role in identifying and promoting ‘what works’ – and, they stress, the lessons from pitfalls and failures as well as success.

<b>Regional Networks</b>
<p><b><i>Regional focus for networking on regeneration and neighbourhood renewal</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Networks have taken time to establish their niche and profile – as actual and potential users grow to value what they provide. The majority are still very new.</li> <li>• The longer established Regional Networks have demonstrated value in providing a core resource and a focus for regeneration practice in their region and enable networking to take place. This is most evident in the North East where Regeneration Exchange has shown what is possible. At the time of the evaluation it was too early to seek evidence of the difference the newer Networks were making.</li> <li>• Thus far, Regional Networks have had varying degrees of success in providing a bridge between sectoral interests and in reaching wider ‘communities’ of neighbourhood/regeneration partnerships, voluntary and community organisations, and (to a more limited extent) front line workers and residents. They have been valued for their independence and for providing a space for debate at a regional level. There is also some evidence to suggest that participants are more open to sharing when they come together at a regional level than they are likely to be at local level (where competition for resources and local politics can come into play).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Social capital benefits</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The notion of social capital is relevant in describing the value of the Networks. They have brought benefits in terms of ‘bridging’ (helping participants make the links across sectors, with government bodies, etc) and ‘bonding’ (strengthening relationships and trust amongst participants). (We note how much networking opportunities are valued more generally by interviewees in our fieldwork areas, and by participants on the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme.) Many interviewees in the evaluation commented on or observed the extent to which networking opportunities can provide mutual support and help participants recognise that they are not operating on their own.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Quality of Network activities</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research commissioned by the Networks in the North East (by Ark19, 2003) and North West (by S. Morton Associates, 2003) found high levels of satisfaction in network events and reasonable levels in other services, especially from core users. In looking at service priorities, the North West survey found a contrast between city-based users and more rural ones: the former expressed more concern for the quality of IT access and information content, the more rural on face-to-face contact. The North East research highlighted issues regarding the take-up of services which need to be addressed continually as marketing challenges. These include awareness of services and potential benefits; practitioner ‘lack of time’ to take advantage of Network services; and fears about information overload.</li> </ul>

## Regional Networks (continued)

### **Evidence of impact**

- Our area fieldwork in the three regions provided limited data on network awareness, service take-up and impact. Few interviewees in the North West had been involved with the Regeneration Network there (it had mainly been serving SRB partnership managers), and CRNE in the East had not been formally launched by the time of our survey work. Our interviews, however, did indicate the extent to which people value networking, though most commented in relation to networks relating to their particular professional/ sectoral interests. (There has been no Regional Network in the East Midlands, and Regeneration East Midlands, the RCE, launched in late 2004, seeks to fulfill the roles of such a Network – and more.)
- An evaluation of the individual Regional Networks was not designed as part of the Skills and Knowledge Programme, given that the earlier established Networks were undertaking their own research and saw their line of accountability more to the RDAs (as their major funders rather than the NRU/GOs). We drew on this research to the extent possible, but it did little to explore the *impact* of Network activities. (We developed a framework for evaluating Regional Network activities in future as part of our project.)

### **Benefits from an NRU/GO perspective**

- Feedback from our GO interviews pointed to the value of formal networks as a dedicated resource for promoting skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal that is independent of the GO or other government agency. Several acknowledged the value in having an independent body that is not the creature of a particular sector or interest group, and a resource with the expertise to identify needs, contributors and organise events.
- Formal networks can also bring other benefits, as we found in a separate evaluation of the North West NDC Network: a ready point of contact and informal channel of communication with practitioners, opportunities for promoting collaborative projects (going beyond the networking in itself), and breaking down ‘civil servant’ stereotypes.
- The existing Networks also bring highly relevant experience to the table in the development of Regional Centres of Excellence, and provide a platform on which to build. They have also helped to target RDA and other contributions to Network resources in meeting the neighbourhood renewal learning agenda.

For further details of this research, see Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 5, “Regional Networks” available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

The benefits of the Regional Networks to date have tended to bear out their rationale, though we note that they are not the only organisations that could perform their roles. Their development has been swept up in that of the Regional Centres of Excellence which have a wider remit for developing skills for regeneration and sustainable communities in their regions. A core task for RCEs is to enable cross-sector networking, or rather ensure that it happens. The current Regional Networks, therefore, are looking to their development in this context, and may consider other viable opportunities for their development (eg, through a range of income generating projects and services).

## 5.4 Renewal.net

Renewal.net was conceived as an online ‘knowledge management system’, with goals of:

- building the knowledge base of neighbourhood renewal and plugging any major gaps
- making it easier to get hold of knowledge and to put it into practice, encouraging greater use of evidence in neighbourhood renewal.

The NRU's intention from the outset has been to give users confidence in the quality of site content, by stressing credible evidence and sound arguments; a user-friendly, practical style; a consistent format; and practical relevance to neighbourhood renewal. As content on the site grows, users are more likely to find material they are looking for, and, provided they find this helpful, are more likely to make subsequent use. There are now over 2,200 documents on the site, including 378 case studies and many overviews (four times the content uploaded to the site at its launch). This represents a substantial achievement in building the neighbourhood renewal knowledge base, bringing together in one place much newly researched content.

Renewal.net has its own dedicated search engine and regional pages. There are Discussion Forums and an e-mail service alerting users to material added to the site. It also hosts the LSP Delivery Toolkit, designed to support LSPs in *“producing credible plans, putting in place their means for delivery, and reviewing and improving existing strategies”*. This Toolkit contains tips and case study examples drawn from research into neighbourhood renewal strategies. The NRU has worked with other departments to develop Renewal.net content further, eg, toolkits on sports and on drugs. GOs have also been involved, eg, in commissioning case studies, but they have adopted different approaches, some preferring alternative ways of researching case studies.

<b>Renewal.net</b>
<p><b><i>Take-up: findings from web statistics and user surveys</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been steady growth in use of Renewal.net to over 1,000 user sessions per working day. This more than doubled between March 2003 and March 2004. A straight line trend projects 37,000 sessions/month by March 2005 and 48,000 by March 2006.</li> <li>• The largest groups of users (self-classified in Renewal.net's own user survey) are neighbourhood renewal workers (19%), local authority officers (17%) and researchers/ consultants (17%). Proportions for residents (4%) and for partnership members (6%) are lower than originally hoped.</li> <li>• 29% of users visit the site once a week or more often; and 54%, at least once a month.</li> <li>• Nearly half (48%) registered users reported greater use than a year before.</li> <li>• 86% registered users find the site useful ('moderately useful' 22%; 'useful' 46%; 'very useful' 16%)</li> <li>• Their main purposes in using the site have been to gain an overview of neighbourhood renewal (63%), learn from what has been tried before (59%), support research in neighbourhood renewal (54%) and find information on how to deal with a particular problem.</li> <li>• Renewal.net has not worked as a forum for enquiry and discussion: usage of this part of the site is low, with few postings in response to requests for information or comment.</li> <li>• Time is the biggest barrier to greater use (for 44% of registered users).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Take-up: findings from area fieldwork</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In our area fieldwork we found that only just over one third of our interviewees had used Renewal.net. Of the remainder, 45% were not aware of the site, and 22% had not had, or made time to access it. Take-up beyond people in core neighbourhood renewal and regeneration jobs was particularly low – these individuals were typically unaware of the site or had not realised that it was relevant to them.</li> <li>• More broadly, only 27% of our fieldwork interviewees reckoned that they had made 'considerable' or 'extensive' use of evidence of what works elsewhere in the past year, 37% 'some', and 23% 'occasional' – leaving 21% who had not drawn on any at all. The most common purposes in using such evidence were in developing strategies or projects (51%), generating ideas or fresh thinking (34%), reviewing strategies or projects (27%), preparing plans or bids (17%) or solving a particular problem (15%).</li> </ul>

### Benefits

- In our survey of registered users, respondents identified a range of benefits, in order of significance: knowledge of 'what works' (62%), awareness of policy and research (54%), and new ideas and opportunities (52%). Just under a quarter found Renewal.net beneficial in providing validated evidence to make a case (eg, in reviewing strategies, developing projects or bidding.)
- 35% of registered users were confident or very confident of finding on the site what they were looking for, and 47% hopeful – which suggests that still some confidence to build in what the site has to offer.
- Nearly three quarters (of respondents to Renewal.net's own user survey) considered that Renewal.net helps them take a more evidence-based approach to their work. There has been a growing trend in proportion considering that this is *strongly* the case (nearly a quarter by June 2004).
- Though we did not encounter large numbers of critical comments, there were concerns expressed in our surveys and amongst NRU and GO interviewees relating to the coverage, currency and other aspects of Renewal.net quality. To varying extents this reflected their (relative lack of) familiarity with the site though issues were raised which will affect levels of use and benefit (eg, in finding what you are looking for). There were also a few queries about the quality of the 'evidence' presented in Renewal.net – which in turn reflects the quality of the evidence base in neighbourhood renewal practice – where typically there has been limited priority to evaluation in the past.

### Actions and results

- A very large proportion of registered users – 92% – had made some use of the information they gained from the site, with over 55% passing on information to others and 44% recommending to others that they access particular Renewal.net content. Relatively few – 13% – have made contact with a case study to find out more.
- Just under 30% of these users reckoned that they could point to specific results from their use of Renewal.net, and 37% considered that it was too early to say. Of those who could identify results, two thirds cite better informed debate within their partnership and/ or organisation, and just under half have found a solution to a particular problem. Respondents were not able to quantify the results or benefits they had gained.
- Nearly three quarters of registered users were confident that their use of Renewal.net will help them produce better neighbourhood renewal outcomes. (For 13% this was 'very likely', for 60%, 'likely').
- In the absence of Renewal.net, almost half of registered users reckoned that they would have spent longer to find the same or poorer information. Only 8% felt that they would have totally failed to find the information they wanted while 22% reckoned they would have found the same information elsewhere.

For further details of this research, see Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 6, "Renewal.net" available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

## 5.5 Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme

The Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme was piloted between December 2003 and May 2004 through six three-day courses on the themes of 'Partnership Working and Leadership', 'Programme Design and Delivery', and 'Learning from What Works'. Each topic was delivered at two levels (strategic and operational). The initial topics addressed needs identified by the NRU – in broad terms corroborated by our area fieldwork as prominent learning needs and where there were gaps in training provision nationally. The programme has been delivered by the *RenewalAcademy* consortium. Each course has involved a mix of presentations and group work, with most also involving a case study site visit. They have been designed around real work experiences, with action planning built in to help participants put their learning into practice when they return to their jobs.

The pilots attracted a total of 70 participants, drawn most notably from amongst Neighbourhood Managers (14%), NDC Programme managers (14%), and LSP support officers (13%). As for organisations from which participants came, local authorities accounted for 27% and NDCs 24%, with the rest mainly drawn from LSPs and community organisations. Nearly half were educated to postgraduate level, and over 80% were graduates.

RenewalAcademy have found marketing the programme a challenge, typically finding resistance to the three day duration of the course and to non-local venues. In the words of one LSP co-ordinator, the courses have been “too far, too long, too busy” – though actual participants, as we note in the box below, have appreciated their value. In our area fieldwork, we also found evidence of barriers to participating in residential training for women from some BME communities and others with care responsibilities.

<b>Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme</b>
<p><b>Quality of the pilot programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-course ratings of course quality by participants have been very positive, especially in their enjoyment of the course (an average score of 4.3 out of 5).</li> <li>• In our follow-up survey of participants (undertaken three months after their courses), we found that more than two out of three rated the content of their course as good or excellent, though one in six regarded it as poor.</li> <li>• Comments suggested that the courses had fulfilled requirements in the NRU brief that the programme be practical, stimulating, interactive and informed by live case studies. Higher ratings tended to reflect the quality of external speakers, study visits, experienced course leaders, and group working.</li> <li>• Lower ratings reflected administrative teething problems, difficulties in pitching the content to meet the needs of participants with diverse levels of experience, and some issues concerning course design and delivery (eg, over the currency of some content and the quality of some presenters) and about pre-course administration. Those less satisfied, however, supported the aims of the programme and offered suggestions for improvement.</li> <li>• Just under a quarter wanted to go on more RenewalAcademy courses; and over half have recommended the programme to others. This can be regarded as a proxy for views on course quality.</li> </ul> <p><b>Benefits of participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For many participants the greatest gains have come from “<i>networking</i>”: getting to know their fellow participants and share their trials and tribulations. There were frequent comments about feeling less isolated in their jobs, and gaining reassurance over how they are approaching their jobs. Many felt that they are in pioneering job roles, forging a path on neighbourhood renewal for others in their locality.</li> <li>• Other reported benefits included: new contacts, time for reflection, and valuable information to pass on to others.</li> </ul> <p><b>Transfer of learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is less evidence of achievement of course learning objectives in relation to the Delivery Skills Programme brief, which sought to equip participants “<i>with practical skills to radically alter the way they work, enabling them to embed new skills and knowledge into their ongoing practice</i>”. While on completion of their course, participants rated their course ‘good’ (nearly ‘very good’ – an average score of 3.9 out of 5) for equipping them better for their role in neighbourhood renewal, we found that most participants felt that their course had helped them only ‘a bit’ (not ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’) in relation to the specific learning outcomes identified for each course. This finding raises questions about the design of the learning programmes, about the case for post-course follow-up, and about what outcomes it is realistic to expect from a three day course.</li> <li>• This said, three quarters of participants felt that they applied something useful they had learnt from their course (while a quarter had applied nothing, or very little). Examples included reappraising personal behaviours, assessing the value of personal involvement in specific partnerships, and paying consistently more attention to the use of evidence in developing and reviewing strategies and projects.</li> </ul>

## Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme (*continued*)

### ***Actions and results***

- Two thirds of participants reckoned that they had made changes to their working practices, especially in their approach to partnership working (eg, in setting up a partnership, seeking to exert influence within a partnership, or resolve a conflict). A quarter reported to changes in monitoring and evaluation practices or otherwise in their use of evidence.
- When asked about evidence of improvements in partnership or organisational performance, or outcomes for local people, one third felt that it was too early to say, and a quarter could not identify any. Those that said they could, tended to report progress in partnership working rather than (as yet) improved performance, and nothing that they could quantify.

For further details of this research, see Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation Background Report 4, "Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills" available from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

## 6 Conclusions

### 6.1 Progress and Rationale

Overall, we conclude that the NRU has made **very substantial progress in implementing the Skills and Knowledge Programme**, with key building blocks in place to help ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the National Strategy. The Programme has become geared increasingly to the requirements of delivering performance improvement. There is **evidence of Programme impact, especially in bringing about changes in policies, practices and ways of working**, without which the Strategy will fail.

The Programme has been a **significant source of innovation** in promoting learning and the use of evidence in the neighbourhood renewal field. It also offers wider lessons and experience for approaches to building capacity for improved delivery across a wider set of policies, including the broader Sustainable Communities agenda.

The **rationale for the Programme has borne out**, reflecting the analysis set out in The Learning Curve. Our own research and other NRU evaluations (eg, of LSPs, NDC and Neighbourhood Management) have provided consistent evidence highlighting performance issues relating, eg, to the design of strategies (insufficiently outcomes-driven and evidence-based), implementation weaknesses (eg, in project management and partner accountability), and preoccupations with projects rather than mainstreaming. This research has reinforced understanding of the scale of the task involved in harnessing public, private, voluntary and community sector contributions to ‘closing the gap’ for the most deprived communities, and the ways in which relevant skills and knowledge contribute. Where such capabilities are lacking, then there are significant risks to delivery.

Very few stakeholders interviewed or surveyed in the evaluation were able to quantify the benefits or results they had achieved through Skills and Knowledge Programme interventions. It was too early for them to judge; the nature of the Programme has been much about building capacity to deliver in future. With the focus shifting much more to supporting performance improvement, **future evaluation must give priority to identifying evidence of learning gains, changes and improvements made and how these track through to improved performance**. The main vehicle for this will be the Performance Management system which has been developed since the start of the evaluation. More systematic monitoring and evaluation is needed of Programme activities, including events, and greater use made of the findings, shared across the NRU and GOs.

We draw our conclusions together below under the main headings of ‘Addressing Learning and Development Needs’ and ‘Contributing to Changes in Policies and Practices’. In Section 7 we put forward our recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the Skills and Knowledge Programme.

## 6.2 Addressing Learning and Development Needs

### Addressing The Learning Curve Vision

**The Learning Curve's vision remains a big challenge**, that of *“equipping everyone with the skills and knowledge needed for the successful delivery of neighbourhood renewal”*. Such a vision remains highly ambitious, requiring a major culture change on the part of all partners in valuing investment in skills and knowledge, and it can only be done by harnessing partners' own resources to bring about the 'step change' in skills and knowledge proposed in the National Strategy Action Plan.

### Influencing partnership plans and activities

The NRU and GOs have **helped to raise the level of interest amongst LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships in skills and knowledge** for neighbourhood renewal. They have taken a wide range of initiatives to help partnerships translate this interest into action, notably through Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, GO and Regional Network events and other activities. Renewal.net has created a very substantial on-line knowledge resource for learning about 'what works' and the policy context for neighbourhood renewal, while the Delivery Skills Programme has piloted courses to meet critical needs.

**From a low base, there is now much more learning activity associated with the implementation of the National Strategy.** This can be attributed to the emphasis on skills and knowledge in the National Strategy Action Plan, to NRU guidance and GO roles in providing encouragement and support. Furthermore, the availability of Skills and Knowledge budgets has enabled action that is likely not to have taken place otherwise, either on the same scale or reaching the same range of participants.

**Progress by many LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships has been a slow, uphill task.** Most have had individuals championing the cause of skills and knowledge, but have had to confront a variety of obstacles including the lack of a learning and performance management culture across the partnership, perceived time pressures and limits to commitment by individual partner organisations to the partnership itself. Some partnerships have benefited from advice from GOs on where to start, and in other cases NRAs have played an instrumental role. There are **signs that the introduction of Performance Management Frameworks has been making a difference** – though the real test comes in the extent to which partners implement their improvement plans successfully.

**Most actions by partnerships have related to improving how partners work together, with less focus on tackling specific problems and working them through as partners.** This has tended to reflect their stage of maturity as partnerships, with concerns over process, direction and priorities being bigger concerns in the earlier stages of partnership development. Putting mainstreaming into practice has not been a prominent theme for learning activities. Again, there are indications that partnerships are now devoting more attention to activities which gear partners up better to deliver floor targets and other outcomes.



## Progress on skills, knowledge and behaviours

Overall, the **Skills and Knowledge programme has primarily contributed to building knowledge for neighbourhood renewal** (eg, about needs, policies, and appropriate interventions) and **less to developing skills and behaviours** (eg, in abilities to manage change and work together in ways which bring out the best in what each partner has to offer). The latter can be more difficult to effect; typically skills development can be more challenging to individuals, and can require a commitment of greater time. Action across all three fronts was stressed in The Learning Curve.

There are growing signs that more people (importantly those in partnership management positions) have come to recognise that the National Strategy is in effect a big change management project, which demands a strategic approach and often different styles of leadership, working together and implementation. This has implications, for example, for the roles within LSP core teams (the ‘delivery driver’ concept introduced by the NRU in pursuit of stronger LSP implementation), especially that of LSP managers/co-ordinators as ‘change agents’.

## Evolving needs

Learning and development needs have evolved as national and local strategies have evolved; people have gained greater experience in delivery and new requirements have been introduced by government, notably Performance Management Frameworks, placing further demands on practitioners to do new things and do things better. Since we undertook our area fieldwork, needs in relation to fostering performance cultures and undertaking robust floor target action planning have emerged all the more strongly.

Table 1 below sets out critical needs which emerged across our research and especially from the area fieldwork. There are, for example, persistent issues where people continue to grapple with what concepts like ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘community engagement’ really mean, and what this entails for changes in how people carry out their job roles and how they work together. These can be challenges for people who are well-experienced as well as those new to neighbourhood renewal.

Table 1 Critical needs identified in the fieldwork

'Learning Curve' categories	Identified Needs
<b>Building the knowledge base</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using evidence (accessing and interpreting data; using evaluation to improve the evidence base and develop more robust strategies and projects)</li> <li>• understanding ‘what mainstreaming means’ and what works in promoting it</li> <li>• understanding policy developments relevant to neighbourhood renewal and other factors driving and constraining partner organisations</li> </ul>
<b>Developing core skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engaging and influencing service providers/ other partners</li> <li>• managing complex change (including putting mainstreaming into practice)</li> <li>• building consensus and commitment amongst partners (and resolving tensions and conflict)</li> <li>• making performance management work</li> </ul>
<b>Changing behaviours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating conditions for effective collaboration and the learning needed for performance improvement</li> <li>• problem solving, including a greater propensity to seek evidence from elsewhere</li> <li>• strategic and systems thinking (understanding how all the parts fit together and lifting partner sights to concentrate on what matters beyond narrow interests)</li> </ul>

Given the cross-cutting and far-reaching nature of the pursuit of neighbourhood renewal, many more people have a role to play in neighbourhood renewal than was previously the case with regeneration policy. It is clear that many individuals – including many experienced ones – have taken time to adjust to what is now different (eg, in working where ‘mainstreaming’ rather than competitive funding is the main vehicle of policy). We also found evidence that there are some who do not yet see ‘neighbourhood renewal’ as relevant to them despite their having relevant roles, sometimes in senior posts.

There are also significant and continuing **needs for induction into neighbourhood renewal and partnerships** for a wide range of people, given the breadth of stakeholder organisations – and the typical turnover amongst individuals involved.

### Targets of learning activities

NRU and GO sponsored activities and actions within LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships have been **aimed mainly at partnership representatives, with less priority to front-line workers and residents**. While significant numbers of activist residents have taken part in training and development to support their roles as part as representatives (especially through the work of CENs), there has been less attention to enabling their potential roles in relation to improving public services. The involvement of front-line workers has depended very much on policies *within* individual partner organisations, and does not appear to have been a priority from a partnership perspective. This may be expected to change as partnerships shift their focus to delivery, though it is likely that many partnerships will welcome ideas and guidance on how to move forward.

**The needs of councillors have not been addressed systematically** though many have participated to a limited extent in partnership learning activities. This is an important topic, given the role of councillors as community leaders and the enhanced role now proposed for ward councillors in neighbourhood governance<sup>18</sup>. Councillors have great scope to set the right tone for collaboration – or frustrate what could be achieved. Only recently has training provision been introduced within national programmes through IDeA (‘Modern Members’), to which the NRU is contributing.

On a regional level, there has been reasonable provision of networking opportunities for partnership managers (mainly exclusive to specific categories of partnership – LSPs, NDCs and neighbourhood management). There has been limited attention to their *skill* needs, especially in their roles as change agents. **Current needs amongst partnership managers typically relate to a combination of leadership and change management skills**<sup>19</sup>, and can include facilitation skills to build commitment and consensus, diagnose performance issues and support techniques for performance improvement. There are also needs in relation to partnership board development, not least in (a) making meetings work more effectively, and (b) finding ways to enable speedy induction and learning on the part of individual members. Partnership managers have shown especial interest in learning from each other, from pitfalls as well as successes, and from tips and techniques. Action learning approaches are particularly relevant.

18 See, eg, ‘Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter’, ODPM 2005.

19 Eg, from work in developing the regional LSP networks in London and Yorkshire and the Humber, and the Leadership and Partnership Development Programme in the West Midlands.

While there has been growing attention to the needs of partnership managers, there has been **limited attention to the needs of partnership chairs**, despite their key roles within partnerships. Some are involved in periodic communications meetings (eg, in the North West, between the GO and NDC chairs and Chief Executives) but have not otherwise been a focus for activity.

**Prominent needs within voluntary and community organisations concern skills and knowledge for social enterprise.** Many have had to rely on short term or other uncertain funding sources, and need to secure a more viable future. Especially if such organisations are to play a bigger role in service delivery, they need to develop their ability to operate – and compete – under different procurement regimes, which have an emphasis on strategic commissioning. In supporting capacity development for this, the NRU shares an interest with the Home Office and DTI, and there is scope for greater collaboration at national and regional level in pursuing this common agenda.

### Addressing equality and diversity

The **pursuit of equality and diversity objectives has not been a strong element of the Skills and Knowledge Programme** (nationally and regionally), though, eg, targets have been set (and largely met) for some activities (eg, recruitment of BME NRAs), and some specific actions have been promoted, eg, race awareness training and NRA support for Community Cohesion action plans. Nine NRAs have been recruited with equality and diversity specialisms and seven on community cohesion.

Feedback from our fieldwork areas suggests that equality and diversity considerations have only notably featured in thinking on learning activities in some of those areas with significant BME populations (Derby, Leicester, Luton). A few interviewees described robust steps they were taking in their areas to widen participation and address obstacles to inclusion in learning activities, but generally equality and diversity issues did not feature particularly.

### Influencing the supply of learning opportunities

While longer term issues about skills shortages and access to qualifications did not come through strongly in the area fieldwork, other research evidence<sup>20</sup> points to **latent demand for accredited learning** and to the need for further action to improve the supply of trained and qualified practitioners. This is warranted as a response to persisting recruitment difficulties and relatively high turnover of staff in the neighbourhood renewal field (highlighted, for example, as a key issue for NDCs in the national programme evaluation).

Overall, influencing the supply of learning opportunities has not been treated as a high priority within the Skills and Knowledge Programme over the last year, other than through a staff contribution to the development of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, to which the baton is being passed for the future. It is, however, important that NRU continues to take an active interest, in **that achieving the longer term goals of the NSNR continues to require medium to long term action on skills supply** within the wider context of sector workforce development strategies being promoted by the Sector Skills Development Agency nationally.

<sup>20</sup> NIACE (2003) for GOWM, 'Realising the Potential: Recognising residents' achievement in neighbourhood renewal' and unpublished research by ABRA for GONW.

Part of future strategy in relation to skills supply must also be to **influence future priorities of the LSC and Regional Skills Partnerships**. Keys to this are ensuring that there are relevant qualifications in place (as developed, eg, for Neighbourhood Wardens), and ensuring that learning needs for neighbourhood renewal are recognised in strategic planning exercises (such as the LSC's Strategic Area Reviews). It will also be important to ensure that people promoting skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal are aware of relevant opportunities arising from LSC policy on funding both accredited and non-accredited learning (the latter to be covered in future under budgets expressly for 'learning for community development'). GOs as partners in Regional Skills Partnerships can also help ensure that skills needs for neighbourhood renewal (and sustainable communities more widely) feature in regional plans – which are expected to guide local LSC decision making.

## Role of Skills and Knowledge Tools in addressing needs

The Skills and Knowledge tools have begun to make a significant contribution to plugging gaps which have not been met by alternative provision. As intended, they have addressed different preferences amongst organisations and users, whereby individuals respond in different ways to different forms of learning (face-to-face, on-line, seminars and workshops, etc).

### Key points for individual tools:

#### *Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers*

- NRAs have acted as front-line trouble shooters and capacity builders, playing an important role in support of LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships, not least in interventions with those facing particular difficulties. They have been typically more directly concerned with organisational rather than individual development needs.
- Many assignments have involved helping to sort out weaknesses in partnership governance and ways of working. Other notable contributions have been to helping partnerships introduce performance management (breaking new ground) and strengthen community engagement.
- NRAs have facilitated learning within partnerships through their approach to assignments, though there is scope for more such learning transfer (eg, through including learning objectives in briefs; using specific techniques to ensure that learning is gained and more use is made of evidence of what works elsewhere).
- There are dangers that GOs and NRU could see the use of NRAs as an easy option, rather than acting directly or undertaking particular tasks internally. They must also be careful to avoid using NRAs for limited assignments where partnerships may require more substantial consultancy support.

#### *Renewal.net*

- As intended, Renewal.net has developed as the on-line 'place to go' for knowledge about what works in neighbourhood renewal. It has been well-used, and to a steadily increasing extent. It has developed very substantial content: case studies, overviews, policy and research documents, and 'how to' materials.

- Use of the site has increased steadily, with over 1,000 user sessions a day – in line with the growth of use of comparable sites. We found, however, in our surveys that there was limited reach beyond practitioners and researchers with core neighbourhood renewal interests (and even LSP managers did not appear to be heavy users). Some people in the early days did not find what they were looking for, and have made little use of Renewal.net since. They need to be encouraged back through publicity highlighting how content has grown and benefits that users have derived.
- The biggest barrier to greater use of Renewal.net is cited by interviewees as time. Many are not significant users of the Internet for work purposes.
- These findings point to the need for a continuing product development and marketing strategy which encompasses promotion of use by theme-based practitioners and demonstrates the practical benefits that users have gained.

#### *Regional networks*

- Regional Networks have developed as organisations to promote cross-sector networking and learning in five regions, while Government Offices in the other regions have supported networking initiatives, mainly specific to particular types of partnership (LSP, CEN, NDC or NM). Regional Networks have made a contribution to updating practitioner knowledge of policy and practice, especially through events on a diverse range of topics, predominantly relating to neighbourhood renewal themes, and have succeeded in bringing people together who had not previously crossed area, geographical or sectoral boundaries.
- In *all* regions, further development of networks is taking place in the context of the Regional Centres of Excellence. Given their role and resources dedicated to skills development and networking in the broader Sustainable Communities context, RCEs should provide a better basis for future networking than existed when the Skills and Knowledge Programme was introduced.
- We have found consistent evidence of the value to participants of *networking*, whether provided by Regional Networks or in other ways (eg, this was a significant benefit raised by participants on the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme). Support for networking may say something about the nature of much regeneration work, where people feel relatively isolated in their work and lacking sufficient support within their own organisations or communities.

#### *Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills*

- The pilot courses as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme have been dedicated to filling very specific gaps in learning needs for neighbourhood renewal – confirmed by our fieldwork analysis.
- The courses have been appreciated by participants – especially for the opportunities they have provided for peer exchange and the time away from the job for reflection. Ratings for course content, facilitation, enjoyment and skills development have been fairly high (averaging 4 on a 1-5 scale), though we found that a significant minority of participants (one in six) had concerns about course content and pitch.

- Promotion of the programme has been difficult, partly because of resistance to the three day duration of each module. There are many other calls on the time of potential participants, and also other learning opportunities they may wish to pursue.
- The programme is now seen by the NRU as part of the performance support package that can offered to individual partnerships tailored to their specific needs.

#### *Links between the tools*

- There have been some synergies in the use of the Skills and Knowledge tools, though not as strongly as the Skills and Knowledge Team had hoped. Renewal.net has been used by (most) NRAs – mainly for background in relation to assignments, though frequently also in drawing the attention of partnerships to experience elsewhere, eg, in reviewing thematic strategies. This role complements Renewal.net in that, in itself, the site does not guarantee the effective transfer of ‘what works’; users need to know their way around the site and how to apply what they find.
- GOs have had an important co-ordinating and marketing role to play, given their position in the delivery chain, closest to individual partnerships. There has not been a consistent approach across the GOs to promotion of the tools, and they have made little use of the neighbourhood renewal pages on their own websites for communications and marketing. A number of GOs have made use of NRAs in their own internal development, in facilitating regional events and in conducting some short research assignments.
- The Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme has also promoted Renewal.net, and provided some on-course opportunities to try it out. It has also used Renewal.net as a source for featured case studies and content for course packs. Several NRAs have been involved in course delivery.
- The Regional Networks have also publicised Renewal.net through events and newsletters, and have helped to source and research Renewal.net case studies (eg, mainstreaming case studies in the North East). They have promoted the Delivery Skills Programme and invited NRA participation in their events.

## **Skills and Knowledge within Government**

Skills and knowledge needs within government were highlighted from the outset, in the PAT ‘Learning Lessons’ report and in The Learning Curve, primarily relating to knowledge of the realities of implementing policy on the ground. The actual experience of implementing the National Strategy has brought out a wider range of skill needs, including those needed to promote learning and performance management in LSPs and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. There are also needs in relation to joining up across government: in essence, skills relating to partnership working (consensus building, influencing, etc). Problems manifest themselves in the efforts of local partners to deliver; we found repeated concerns at a local level about insufficient joining up within government. There has arguably been a tendency within government to see such issues as ‘treatable’ by traditional administrative solutions rather than by doing more at senior level to foster the conditions for partnership and using collaborative techniques in policy and project development.

**There has not been a strategic approach within the NRU and most GOs to identifying and addressing skills and knowledge needs**, nor indeed, more broadly to pursue organisational development geared to their roles in improving delivery of the NSNR. Business plans are not converted systematically into team and personal development plans, and critical learning needs, common across key groups of staff are typically not addressed. The initiative taken by GONE, for example, to prepare staff for roles in relation to performance management frameworks was relatively unusual.

The National Strategy brought new roles especially for GOs, with staff in effect being asked to act as pilots for partnerships operating in largely uncharted waters. Demands for new or enhanced skills have been increased with more recent developments, eg, in devolving decision making authority closer to the front line and the introduction of Local Area Agreements. These include skills, eg, concerning: relationship management; brokering support packages (including adopting appropriate management styles to gain support from local partners); ability to advise on performance management reviews and improvement planning, and on data sources and analysis. Other broader requirements can include, eg, change management and organisational development skills, diversity awareness, and conflict resolution skills. Relatively junior staff can find themselves in difficult and novel situations, potentially without sufficient confidence and support to provide advice or otherwise make a significant contribution.

The GONE example above is one example of how GO Skills and Knowledge budgets have been used to promote learning within the GO that would probably not otherwise have happened. Several others have now organised other learning activities which have extended internally beyond the Neighbourhood Renewal team (and occasionally involving partners). Four have also used these budgets to buy in specialist expertise (mainly in the field of community rather than organisational learning), in one case with a performance management background which proved very useful in supporting LSPs with their PMF reviews. There has been limited use of Interchange (opportunities for work placements and secondments) – though this was an approach stressed in the PAT Learning Lessons report.

GO interviewees did not consider that as organisations they were very effective at capturing and sharing knowledge, especially in building the ‘organisational memory’. High turnover of staff and the recruitment of staff new to neighbourhood renewal has tended to compound the problem, and insufficient priority has been given to their induction into the subject matter.

There is **scope for much more joint learning with others in the delivery chain** (both across tiers of government and vertically). This has potential to build relationships and mutual understanding and promote solutions to common problems which might not otherwise be found.

## 6.3 Contributing to Changes in Policies and Practices

### Influence within Government and the delivery chain

In practice, the main locus of the Skills and Knowledge Programme has been in support of NRU programme implementation, especially LSPs and NDCs, with an important, collaborative relationship with the Research and Development Division. The Skills and Knowledge Team have, for example, played an important role in the development of Performance Management Frameworks and support arrangements neighbourhood renewal partnerships, and in particular, LSPs.

Linkages with Community Participation Programmes Team and with Neighbourhood Management and Wardens Team have been less strong, with the latter pursuing its own arrangements for skills and knowledge (which in part predated the creation of the Skills and Knowledge Team). Skills and Knowledge has not been seen consistently throughout the NRU as integral to the delivery of NSNR, and links across team responsibilities have not been as strong overall as they could have been, given greater corporate backing.

There has been some joint working with the NRU Whitehall Team (who lead on NRU work with other departments), and some direct contacts with individual departments and agencies, especially with regard to the development of Renewal.net content and some briefing seminars for NRAs. But collaboration has not been strong in taking forward common agendas for skills and knowledge and promoting better use of evidence, in part because each Department has its own views and vehicles for how best to do this.

### **Influence at regional level**

Most GOs have tended to perform more of an *operational* role with regard to skills and knowledge within their regions, making use of their Skills and Knowledge budgets to support a range of ad hoc initiatives. The way the GO role has developed reflects the steep learning curve that staff have faced.

GOs have exercised a *leadership* role to a limited degree at regional level, primarily through their work with RDAs and other regional partners in the development of Regional Centres of Excellence. In this, they have sought to ensure that neighbourhood renewal interests have been kept to the fore, in a context where much attention has been focused on needs in relation to built environment professionals. Most GOs have not been exemplars in demonstrating how to develop their organisations and staff in pursuit of strategic goals.

The regional leadership role also includes action to join up across policy areas with interests in capacity building and use of evidence, with scope for critical mass and pooled resources. This has included, eg, establishing links with GO Directors of Local Government Practice and the Local Government Capacity Building Programme, exploring connections with the Home Office agenda on the voluntary and community sector, and looking to make better use of regional resources (eg, in linking RDA-sponsored Regional Observatories with RCEs). These have not been pursued, however, to the same degree across all GOs.

### **Supporting change and improvement at local level**

As we observed earlier, the work of GOs and the NRU has encouraged LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships to take more of an interest in skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal than would otherwise have been the case – though often partnerships have been unsure of where to start and have not necessarily given high priority to these activities.

In our fieldwork areas, we found evidence of organisational changes, process improvements and changes in personal behaviour and confidence, but less evidence of changes in relation to mainstreaming/strategic priorities.



There have been early signs, however, that PMF processes have begun to make a difference in partner perceptions of organisational development needs and their commitment to improvement actions. It will be important for the NRU to monitor and research the extent to which improvement plans are put into practice, and identify good practice which can be promoted more widely. Support will need to be more geographically targeted than in the past through GO Skills and Knowledge plans, better reflecting the regional spread of NRF LSPs.

## Contribution of Skills and Knowledge tools to organisational change, learning and outcomes

### Key points for individual tools

#### *Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers*

- NRAs are the most likely of the Skills and Knowledge tools to lead to changes in strategies, projects and ways of working. In more than four out of five cases, partnerships we interviewed had introduced or made changes to strategies and/or projects. And in three out of five cases, they had introduced or made changes to ways of working, systems or processes. There have been specific cases where individual or combined NRA inputs had been instrumental in turning round failing partnerships.
- Two thirds of partnerships interviewed had gained skills and knowledge – especially the latter, eg, on policies and ‘what works’. Of all the tools, use of NRAs was most likely to improve awareness of policy (66%), followed by Renewal.net (54%).
- Half the partnerships interviewed pointed directly to actual or planned improvements to services, and some to specific neighbourhood renewal outcomes, eg, in better housing and in the extent and quality of community participation. For most other respondents, it was too early for them to comment on improvements and outcomes. Few could place any quantified measure on improvements or results.
- Over two thirds considered that they had achieved more, better or faster benefits/ results than they would have without the services of an NRA.

#### *Renewal.net*

- Renewal.net is best seen as a valuable ‘knowledge store’, which has helped users take a more evidence-based approach to their work (reckoned to be the case by three quarters of users).
- The most prominent benefits were knowledge of ‘what works’ (for 62% registered users), awareness of policy and research (54%), and new ideas and opportunities (52%). Just under a quarter found Renewal.net beneficial in providing validated evidence to make a case (eg, in reviewing strategies, developing projects or bidding).
- A very large proportion of registered users (92%) had made some use of the information they gained from the site, with over 55% passing on information to others (a significantly higher rate in comparison to GO events and the Delivery Skills Programme). Relatively few (13%) had made contact with a case study to find out more.

- Low levels of use of Renewal.net discussion forums have indicated that Renewal.net has not been effective in promoting electronic networking (which was a successful feature of the earlier DTLR-sponsored Regen.net site). This is likely to have been a missed opportunity to promote on-line ‘communities of practice’ associated with Renewal.net.
- Just under 30% of these users reckoned that they could point to specific results from their use of Renewal.net, and 37% considered that it was too early to say. Of those who could identify results, two thirds cite better informed debate within their partnership and/or organisation, and just under half have found a solution to a particular problem. Respondents were not able to quantify the results or benefits they had gained.
- Nearly three quarters of registered users were confident that their use of Renewal.net will help them produce better neighbourhood renewal outcomes. (For 13% this was ‘very likely’, for 60%, ‘likely’).
- In the absence of Renewal.net, almost half of registered users reckoned that they would have spent longer to find the same or poorer information. Only 8% felt that they would have totally failed to find the information they wanted while 22% reckoned they would have found the same information elsewhere.

#### *Regional Networks*

- There is little evidence to date of the *impact* of Regional Networks and other regional networking initiatives, partly because most of the Networks were formed recently.
- The longer established Regeneration Exchange in the North East has shown what is possible, eg, demonstrating value in providing a core resource and a focus for regeneration practice in their region and enable networking to take place. It has generated social capital, in bringing benefits in terms of ‘bridging’ (helping participants make the links across sectors, with government bodies, etc) and ‘bonding’ (strengthening relationships and trust amongst participants).
- The network-related research that investigated impact furthest – into the North West NDC Network<sup>21</sup> – found evidence of such gains and transfer of learning amongst participants (mainly NDC residents), but few cases of changes and improvements made as a result of network participation. However, it has provided a vehicle for NDC collaboration on projects, eg, in enabling access to government and Football Association funding.
- The networks have also offered GOs/NRU with a point of contact and informal channel of communication with practitioners, and opportunities for promoting collaborative projects. They have provided value in being an independent body that is not the creature of a particular sector or interest group, and a resource with the expertise to identify needs, contributors and organise events.

#### *Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme*

- The main benefits for participants on the pilot Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme courses stemmed from networking/learning from each other, new contacts and the time afforded for reflection.

<sup>21</sup> D. Johnstone (2004), Evaluation of North West NDC Network (for NDC Network and GONW).

- Three quarters of participants felt that they applied something useful they had learnt from their course (though a quarter had applied nothing, or very little). Most, however, felt that their course had helped them only at the margins in relation to the specific learning outcomes set out for the course they attended. ‘Cascade’ effects have not been strong in the extent to which participants said they had passed on their course learning to others.
- Next after NRAs, the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme was most likely to lead to changes in partnership working. Two thirds of participants reckoned that they had made changes, especially in their approach, eg, in setting up a partnership, seeking to exert influence within a partnership, or resolving a conflict. A quarter reported changes in monitoring and evaluation practices or otherwise in their use of evidence.
- When asked about evidence of improvements in partnership or organisational performance, or outcomes for local people, one third felt that it was too early to say, and a quarter could not identify any. Those that said they could, tended to refer back to progress in partnership working rather than (as yet) improved performance.

## Likely future take-up and impact

There is considerable scope for the contributions of the Skills and Knowledge tools to continue to rise, in part subject to implementation of our recommendations set out in Section 7. The nature of the tools are such that benefits and impact can be expected over an extended period of time rather than translating immediately into improved performance. This should continue to be addressed in future evaluation.

More broadly within the Skills and Knowledge Programme, in order to maximise programme benefits and contribution to outcomes, there is a need to give higher priority to evaluation and making fuller use of management information (eg, on NRA assignments). In GOs particularly, there has been an approach to date of ‘letting many flowers bloom’. While this has encouraged innovation, not enough attention has been devoted to assessing the value of skills and knowledge initiatives (including follow up investigations of their impact), learning from them, and where relevant, scaling up successful pilots. Also, in planning new activities, the question must constantly be asked: how will this contribute to improving performance and building lasting skills?

## Future contributions of individual tools

### *Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers*

- The use and impact of NRAs is likely to continue to grow, given their role as the tool most closely geared to helping partnerships bring about performance improvement, and act as independent brokers where partnerships face the greatest obstacles to effective collaboration.
- A substantial proportion of NRA assignments have had a ‘fire fighting’ quality, with NRAs being commissioned when partnership problems have become deep-seated. There is scope for earlier diagnosis of needs and more strategic interventions, including ones which are designed to break new ground. The introduction of NRA Lead Assignment Managers should enable more strategic interventions.

- There is great scope to involve NRAs in a range of ways in delivering the National Strategy, building on occasional practice bringing together NRAs, NRU and GO staff, eg, in reviewing the introduction of Performance Management Frameworks in LSPs.
- More can be done to develop the skills of NRAs – they bring particular expertise, but not necessarily *all* the skills and knowledge needed to fulfil particular assignments. Part of the responsibility for continuing professional development rests with NRAs individually, part with the NRU and GOs.

#### *Renewal.net*

- Renewal.net has been showing a straight line trend in growth, projecting 37,000 sessions/month by March 2005 and 48,000 by March 2006. Our research provides some confidence that the growth will continue, though we point out that there are risks that need to be addressed. It is essential to continue to meet user needs (eg, for emerging practice, tips and techniques as well as validated case studies), keep content up-to-date, and find new ways of generating use of the site.
- Low levels of awareness beyond the core neighbourhood renewal demands a fresh approach to promotion, linking with other government departments and professional groupings across the neighbourhood renewal themes.

#### *Regional Networks and Regional Centres of Excellence*

- The primary focus in the future for ODPM will be the new Academy for Sustainable Communities and the Regional Centres of Excellence – recognising that there is scope for the existing Regional Networks to develop either as part of the RCE or as a key supplier/ ‘delivery partner’ (as proposed in the North East).
- RCEs and Regional Networks can provide a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and knowledge creation provided that they develop a reputation for quality. There are current questions about their longer term funding and sustainability, requiring their development as social enterprises. Networks have been able to offer inclusive services thanks to core and projects funding to date. In future, it is likely that Networks and RCEs will have to charge for more services and events – in which case they may need to find resources to cross-subsidise participants from the voluntary and community sector for whom cost can be a significant barrier to participation.
- The concept of ‘communities of practice’ is relevant to future thinking about maximising the learning benefits from networks<sup>22</sup>, mobilising practitioner interest in finding better solutions to common problems and challenges. A good example of a relevant development is the North East LSP Learning Network which has brought together LSP managers and/or ‘learning champions’ from most of NRF LSPs to work together to share ideas and approaches to promoting learning, including learning around performance management.

<sup>22</sup> “A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger 2002).

### *Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills*

- The Programme has so far scratched the surface in terms of numbers of potential participants. There is also potential to expand provision on a commercial basis, eg, through shorter courses and masterclasses, and thus reach more people. Bursary funding could be sought to ensure inclusive participation.
- The resources of the Programme can be deployed in support of individual partnerships – but it too early to say what contribution this may make. It is essential that such involvement is based on diagnosis of need and tailored provision, most probably in bite-sized chunks which fit partnership tasks.
- In course design, more attention is needed on how to maximise the learning benefits of the courses, such that participants are more likely subsequently to report learning gained, put into practice and passed on to others.

More, generally, to maximise future effectiveness, there is a need to build marketing thinking more fully into Skills and Knowledge and related NRU activities. There needs to be a keener ‘customer focus’ (understanding the needs, preferences and expectations of consumers of Skills and Knowledge initiatives) and the wider ‘market place’ of learning opportunities relevant to neighbourhood renewal. Particularly in the case of courses and other events, it is important to recognise how skills and knowledge activities compete for people’s attention and time and must stand out. There is a need to concentrate on how to make events, Renewal.net and other activities more *compelling* – eg, through the sheer quality of event programmes and organisation quality; in promoting the direct benefits that people can gain in their day-to-day work or in tackling big problems; making reports and guidance available in forms which require use of Renewal.net to access selected materials and guidance.

# 7 Recommendations for Increasing Effectiveness

## 7.1 Principles behind the Recommendations

There are several principles and recommendations which should be addressed across the Skills and Knowledge Programme in NRU and GOs, and which underpin further recommendations, specific to individual Skills and Knowledge tools and activities, which follow:

Keys to further progress are:

- Continue to **harness Skills and Knowledge Programme resources more closely to practical concerns in the delivery of the National Strategy**, notably around making mainstream services work better in deprived neighbourhoods and planning to achieve floor targets.
  - Maintain a strategic focus, seeking the greatest leverage and impact.
  - Target resources on partnerships where performance improvement support can make the biggest difference.
  - Build on the evidence and lessons to date. Ask, how can we hasten the speed of change – within local partnerships, between and across tiers of government?
  - Strengthen the capabilities of change agents within partnerships (managers, co-ordinators, chairs and champions) and community leadership skills.
  - Develop the ‘art of performance support’ within the NRU, GOs and NRAs.
- **Build more *learning* into the Skills and Knowledge Programme itself:**
  - Give more attention to evaluation, feedback and ‘what works’ (eg, in use of facilitation techniques to foster joint working, use of evidence and faster adoption of innovation) – up, down and across the delivery chain.
  - Focus on how learning activities can most effectively promote the capture and sharing of knowledge, support culture change and contribute to improving performance.
- **Develop the strategic and influencing roles of the NRU and GOs**, working with government departments, RDAs, the Learning and Skills Council and other partners to promote and find sustainable solutions to meeting skills and knowledge needs.
  - Make the most of the connections across related policy areas, (eg, learning and skills, local government modernisation, and the voluntary and community sector role in delivery of public services)
  - Ensure that there is critical mass across the regional infrastructure for capacity building (skills development, analytical capabilities, etc) – Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery project, RCEs, Observatories, etc

- Influence the work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities in addressing workforce development needs in the broad regeneration occupational sector.

- **Invest in capacity within NRU and GOs to lead, influence and support performance improvement**, supporting the drive towards devolved decision-making and building on actions taken to date in mainstreaming organisational learning practices.

The recommendations that follow are the principal, more strategic recommendations to emerge from the evaluation. There are more specific recommendations regarding individual components of the Programme contained in the accompanying research reports, eg, on NRAs and the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme.

## 7.2 Recommendations for improving delivery of the Programme

### A Anticipating and addressing needs

	Recommendation	Action by?
A.1	Ensure a systematic approach to anticipating learning and development needs associated with the implementation of new policy initiatives and guidance building on recent practice in organising joint NRU/GO/NRA events (eg, on introducing PMF)	NRU with GOsA.2
A.2	Review performance improvement and learning needs identified in annual performance management reviews (across all PMFs) to inform planning of improvement support	NRU with GOs
A.3	Research implementation of partnership improvement plans to learn from ‘what works’ and strengthen future delivery	NRU
A.4	Help equip key change agents (partnership managers, chairs, NRAs) with the tools they need (eg, developing skills in effecting change in a partnership setting; providing alerts to policy developments which affect key partner motivations and room for manoeuvre)	NRU, GOs, Renewal Academy and delivery agents
A.5	Review and capture national and regional experience in how best to address 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)	NRU, GOs, NRAs, Renewal Academy
A.6	Further develop learning provision for councillors, Further develop learning provision for councillors, bringing out critical aspects in partnership working, understanding of neighbourhood renewal and working with community representatives	NRU, IDeA
A.7	Support learning initiatives to involve front line workers and residents in service improvement	NRU, GOs
A.8	Build equality and diversity more firmly into programme planning, in relation to priorities, content and promotion	NRU, GOs, Renewal Academy

## B Maximising the learning from Skills and Knowledge activities

	Recommendation	Action by?
<b>B.1</b>	Make more and better use of Skills and Knowledge Programme monitoring data	NRU, GOs
<b>B.2</b>	Build evaluation systematically into Skills and Knowledge activities, including follow up enquiry to find out what impact the activities have had (in terms of learning applied, organisational changes and performance outcomes)	NRU, GOs
<b>B.3</b>	Seek to learn from related sectors (eg, Health on public service improvement; private sector on customer-led service improvement; Small Business Service on sharing and developing knowledge within the supply chain)	NRU
<b>B.4</b>	Promote practical examples of how partnerships are managing change and developing skills, and the benefits and results they have realised	NRU, GOs

## C Strategic influence

	Recommendation	Action by?
<b>C.1</b>	Research and promote support from the Learning and Skills Council for skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal	NRU
<b>C.2</b>	Maximise the linkages with related national and regional capacity building initiatives/ programmes (eg, RDAs, ODPM Local Government Capacity Building Programme, Home Office Active Community Unit)	NRU, GOs
<b>C.3</b>	Ensure that learning needs for neighbourhood renewal are addressed in plans of Regional Skills Partnerships and local LSC plans	GOs
<b>C.4</b>	Strengthen the use of NRU and GO websites for communications purposes (including signposting) and keep content and links up to date	NRU, GO



## D Developing capacity within Government

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

## Recommendations on Skills and Knowledge Tools

### E NRA service

	Recommendation	Action by?
E.1	Make operational improvements to the NRA service (as detailed in separate NRA evaluation report – eg, in earlier identification of NRA assignments; matching NRAs, partnerships and assignments; devising briefs; networking GOs, NRAs and partnerships; improving communications)	NRU, GOs
E.2	Ensure that the potential learning from NRA assignments is maximised by partnerships, GOs, NRU and NRAs (eg, through building learning objectives into assignment briefs, conduct of assignments; greater sharing of project outputs and exchange of experience across related assignments)	NRU, GOs
E.3	Support continuing professional development by NRAs through more briefings and workshops on policy and performance improvement, including techniques for use on assignments	NRU, OGDs

## F Renewal.net

	Recommendation	Action by?
F.1	Refresh strategy for the development and marketing of Renewal.net – including topic and updating priorities, regional contributions and pages	NRU
F.2	Develop a promotional plan to highlight what Renewal.net now has to offer and the benefits – including its relevance beyond people in core neighbourhood renewal jobs (eg, through sectoral networks/information channels)	NRU
F.3	Make more of what Renewal.net can offer in meeting user needs (eg, for emerging practice/ innovations in key areas, as well as researched ‘what works’). Include examples of successful approaches to learning and change management	NRU
F.4	Strengthen commitment of other parties (OGDs, GOs, RCEs) to Renewal.net development and use. REWORD	NRU

## G Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme

	Recommendation	Action by?
G.1	Review how to maximise the extent to which participants are likely to apply what they learn after their courses	NRU, Renewal Academy
G.2	Explore further options for development under the Delivery Skills programme: masterclasses, action learning, and non-residential provision, and blended learning (combining different forms of learning to make more of a package) – while ensuring complementary approaches with regional plans)	NRU, Renewal Academy
G.3	Make operational improvements to programme provision (eg, in course design, use of participant experience, learning materials and administration) and marketing	Renewal Academy

## H Regional Networks, RCEs & Academy for Sustainable Communities

	Recommendation	Action by?
H.1	Ensure the development of strong Regional Centres of Excellence as part of a coherent infrastructure for skills, knowledge and capacity development at regional level, linked with related initiatives to improve quality of and access to evidence/data	NRU, GOs, Academy for Sustainable Communities
H.2	Build on Regional Network experience in promoting cross-sector networking opportunities and others based on communities of practice, bringing together participants focused on particular issues and learning needs	RCEs, Regional Networks
H.3	Work with the Academy for Sustainable Communities and RCEs to develop an overall strategy for workforce development in the sustainable communities/ neighbourhood renewal skills sector – including action to address gaps in provision and qualifications	NRU, 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 paper<sup>23</sup> 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

<sup>23</sup> 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. Available from [educe@educe.co.uk](mailto:educe@educe.co.uk).

### *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.

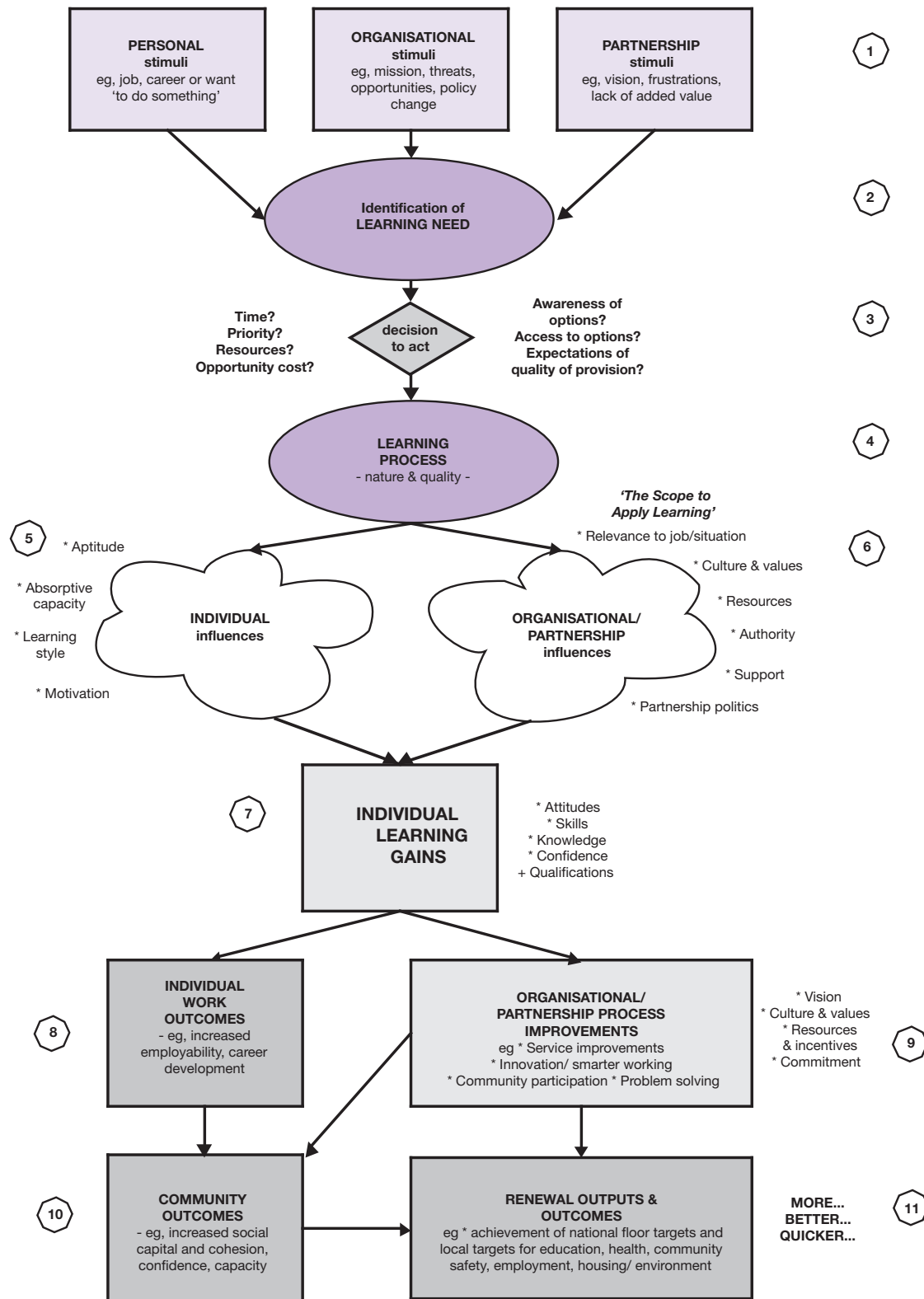
An understanding of organisational and partnership dynamics is important, and the notion of 'life cycles' comes into play – all the more significant where strategic partnerships and joint projects are new, as typical across much of neighbourhood renewal. Even where partnerships have been well-established, 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) 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/

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



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.

We have applied this approach to relevant elements of our research, including surveys of neighbourhood renewal partnerships on their use of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers, Renewal.net users and participants on the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme. It also informed our interviews with NRU and GO staff and with Regional Network Co-ordinators.

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# Appendix C Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation: Glossary

*\* = ODPM definitions ('Assessing the Impact of Spatial Interventions')*

<b>Absorptive capacity</b>	An individual's – or organisation's – ability to take in and apply new knowledge – in part a function of their existing level of knowledge.
<b>Accreditation (1)</b> <i>(of learning by individuals)</i>	Formal recognition that individuals have shown evidence of performance which meets specified standards.
<b>Accreditation (2)</b> <i>(relating to learning provision)</i>	The process of endorsing qualifications from awarding/examining bodies which meet National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) or awarding body-specific criteria.
<b>Action learning</b>	A way of learning from our actions (and from what happens to us and around us) by taking the time to question and reflect on this in order to gain insights and consider how to act in future (Weinstein, 1995)
<b>Action learning set</b>	A group of people who meet on a regular basis to pursue learning objectives they have agreed, following action learning principles.
<b>Active learning</b>	A process of learning new ideas, skills and attitudes through what we do at work or in other behavioural situations. It is about learning from doing, performing, and taking action. It may use devices such as games, simulations, role playing, etc.
<b>Activities</b>	The actions, processes or services undertaken in order to achieve specific project outputs.
<b>Additionality*</b>	An impact arising from an intervention is additional if it would not have occurred in the absence of the intervention. It is the extent to which a policy objective is undertaken on a larger scale, takes place at all, or earlier, or within a specific designated area, as a result of public sector intervention.
<b>Assessment</b>	The process of obtaining sufficient reliable and valid evidence about individual competence and making judgements of that evidence using explicit (predetermined) criteria.
<b>Attitude</b>	A disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing (idea, object, person, situation) that influences their choice of action and response.
<b>Baseline (1)*</b>	A description of conditions existing at a point in time against which subsequent changes can be detected through monitoring. A baseline study is also required in order to establish what the conditions would be if development were not to take place.

<b>Baseline (2)</b> <i>(learning)</i>	Valid and reliable information about the intended learner population used to ascertain differences between learners' performances before and after a learning activity.
<b>Behaviour (1)</b>	The way in which a person acts or conducts her/himself in response to a particular situation or stimulus.
<b>Behaviour (2)</b> <i>(learning)</i>	Any observable and measurable process or activity which a learner is expected to exhibit after training. (This is a common use in the design of learning provision.)
<b>Benchmark*</b>	A comparative value used in setting targets for appraisal and evaluation.
<b>Benchmarking</b>	Process of investigation and discovery, involving methods for comparing organisational performance against specific standards or other organisations, and developing improvement plans. Three main types can be identified: <i>process</i> benchmarking (comparing discrete work processes and operating systems); performance benchmarking (comparing <i>performance</i> on service delivery); and <i>strategic</i> benchmarking (comparing organisational strategies)
<b>Bending*</b>	The process of altering mainstream programmes in order to meet floor targets in deprived areas, as in “bending main programmes”.
<b>Benefits*</b>	The positive direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional consequences of an intervention.
<b>Capacity building (1)</b>	<p>“Development work that strengthens the ability of community organisations and groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultation and planning, manage community projects and take part in partnerships and community enterprises.</p> <p>“It includes aspects of training, organisational and personal development and resource building, organised in a planned and self-conscious manner, reflecting the principles of empowerment and equality” <i>Skinner (1997) “Building Community Strengths: A Resource Book on Capacity Building” CDF</i></p> <p>Note: ‘Capacity building’ needs may also relate to other organisations and interests in relation to their ability to contribute fully in a partnership setting.</p>

<b>Capacity building (2)</b>	<p>Activities to ensure that VCOs and local communities have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realise their full potential. It concerns removing barriers to involvement; and investing to maximise their distinctive contribution to achieving community well-being. Aspects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational capacity (about the ability within VCOs to achieve their goals)</li> <li>• Technical capacity to deliver specific services (eg, in social services or learning)</li> <li>• Infrastructure capacity (relating to the ability of support or representative organisations for the VCS)</li> <li>• Community capacity (about skills and leadership within communities to achieve their goals)</li> </ul> <p><i>(Definition based on that used in the Cross-Cutting Review of the Voluntary Sector)</i></p>
<b>Coach</b>	A person who instructs, demonstrates, directs, and prompts learners.
<b>Cognitive skills</b>	Skills primarily involving thinking, reasoning and the use of knowledge (DfES)
<b>Collaborative learning</b>	It involves learners working together in small groups to develop their own answer through interaction and reaching consensus, not necessarily a known answer. Monitoring the groups or correcting “wrong” impressions is not the role of the trainer since there is no authority on what the answer should be.
<b>Community of interest</b>	Groups of people whose members have common needs or characteristics (such as ethnic origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation or interest) as opposed to communities defined geographically
<b>Community of place</b>	People living (or working) in specific localities who share common needs relating to this location
<b>Community of practice</b>	A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis. <i>(Wenger 2002)</i>
<b>Community cohesion</b>	<p>Term relating to communities where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities</li> <li>• the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued</li> <li>• those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities</li> </ul>



- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods (*Source: Home Office*)

<b>Community development</b>	A process of building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. ( <i>Strategic Framework for Community Development Standing Conference for Community Development 2001</i> )
<b>Community sector</b>	Informal groups or networks formed run by people to pursue common interests or tackle joint problems
<b>Competence</b>	see <i>Occupational Competence</i>
<b>Competency</b>	An underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective or superior performance. This refers to specific behaviour and may be expressed as a motive, trait, skill, aspect or self image, social role or body of knowledge which is applied. (Widely used in American and UK literature on management training, and is a different concept to occupational competence.)
<b>Cost effectiveness analysis*</b>	Comparison of the costs of alternative ways of producing the same or similar outputs that are not given a monetary value.
<b>Counterfactual*</b>	The ‘reference case’ or counterfactual is a statement of what would have happened without policy intervention or if the policy intervention had taken a different (but specified) form.
<b>Course</b>	A complete integrated series of learning sessions or modules which are identified by a common theme and designed to progress the knowledge, skills or understanding of participants.
<b>Deadweight*</b>	Expenditure to promote a desired activity that would in fact have occurred without the expenditure. Within the additionality framework these are the outputs that would arise under the basecase/counterfactual.
<b>Development</b> <i>(learning context)</i>	Enabling people to acquire new horizons, technologies, or viewpoints through learning activities. It is distinguished from training by being concerned with the growth of an individual’s capacities, rather than closely focused on a specific present or future job.
<b>Displacement*</b>	The degree to which an increase in productive capacity promoted by government policy is offset by reductions in productive capacity elsewhere. Within the additionality framework it is the proportion of the project outputs accounted for by reduced outputs elsewhere in the target area.

<b>Distance travelled*</b>	The progress a beneficiary makes towards harder outcomes as a result of the intervention. [The term is commonly used in adult learning, where soft skills are developed and qualifications are not directly sought as an outcome of the learning.]
<b>Economy*</b>	Relates to the cost of inputs being consumed. Economy measures can be used to indicate whether the right price was paid to acquire the necessary inputs.
<b>Effectiveness*</b>	The extent to which outputs achieve the desired outcomes. Effectiveness measures are concerned with the strength of the relationship between a given intervention and outcomes.
<b>Efficiency*</b>	Represents the relationship between outputs and inputs. Efficiency is the ratio of output to input.
<b>Element of Competence</b>	The smallest statement that can be assessed as part of a framework of occupational standards (a sub-division of a unit of competence). An element must be stated with a high degree of precision to avoid ambiguity and includes performance criteria to indicate the standard to which the element needs to be demonstrated. It should describe outcomes which are the sole responsibility of an individual to achieve.
<b>Employability</b>	Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (eg, personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. <i>(Institute of Employment Studies for DfES)</i>
<b>Evidence-based practice</b>	The conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in planning, deciding, doing and reviewing.
<b>Floor target</b>	A target set for government departments and agencies which relate to reducing gaps in outcomes (in absolute or relative terms) between the poorest areas and the rest of the country.
<b>Functional analysis</b>	An analytical, system-based process used to develop occupational standards in the form of units and elements of competence. It is used to analyse whole occupations in terms of outcomes and the purposes of work activities, rather than specific activities, procedures and methods. It was developed to provide a methodology to identify occupational standards. Its strength lies in a top-down, broad view taken in analysing the purpose and outcomes of work activity rather than detailing current activities found in tasks or jobs.

<b>Generic skill</b>	Skills can be used across a range of different occupational groups ( <i>DfES</i> )
<b>Impact*</b>	The consequences of an activity.
<b>Inclusive working</b>	Involving all stakeholders on whose participation the success of a strategy or project depends. This involvement may take a wide range of forms.
<b>Innovation</b>	A discontinuous or step change which is something completely new to the organisation/partnership.
<b>Inputs</b>	Resources consumed in delivering a specific activity/project.
<b>Institutional failure*</b>	A problem associated with public sector delivery of goods and services as opposed to market delivery.
<b>Intervention*</b>	The activity of government through policies, programmes and projects but also involving regulation and fiscal measures.
<b>Joining up</b>	Collaborating, co-ordinating, co-operating or integrating to improve service quality and outcomes
<b>Key skills</b>	A subset of generic skills: communication; problem solving; team working; IT skills; application of number; improving learning and performance ( <i>DfES</i> )
<b>Knowledge</b>	The sum of what is known: a body of truths, principles, and information. Knowledge may be explicit: that which is written down, recorded or codified in some manner; or tacit: understanding how to do things.
<b>Knowledge management</b>	“Any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in organisations” ( <i>Scarborough et al 1999</i> ). This definition may be extended beyond organisational boundaries to communities and networks.
<b>Knowledge management system</b>	An content framework (typically on-line), intended to enable access to knowledge resources using an internet browsers (This may be closed to an organisation, open to a wider membership/registered users, or open to all).
<b>Knowledge network</b>	A combination of persons (or organisations) usually dispersed over a number of geographically separate sites, with appropriate communications technology.
<b>Knowledge sharing</b>	“The systematic capture of knowledge from research and experience; organisation and storage of knowledge and information for easy access; and transfer/ dissemination of knowledge, often as a two-way exchange.” ( <i>World Bank</i> )

<b>Leadership</b>	Skills and behaviours which create a sense of vision, motivate teams of people and lead them through change, and encourage innovation and continuous improvement in services and ways of working. <i>(Based on Council or Excellence in Management and Leadership)</i>
<b>Leakage</b>	The extent to which the activity proposed benefits people outside the target area or group.
<b>Learning</b> <i>(as a process)</i>	“Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve an increase in skills, knowledge, understanding, values and the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and a desire to learn more.” <i>(Campaign for Learning)</i>
<b>Learning (gain)</b> <i>(as an outcome)</i>	A distinct enhancement of an individual’s skills, knowledge or behaviour that can be measured, achieved through some combination of study, instruction, guided experience and/ or reinforced practice.
<b>Learning curve</b>	A curve reflecting the rate of improvement in performing a new task as a learner practices and uses her newly acquired skills
<b>Learning event</b>	Any activity designed to promote learning by participants (eg, seminar, workshop, coaching session).
<b>Learning objective</b>	A statement of what the learners will be expected to understand or be able to do when they have completed a specified course of instruction. It prescribes the conditions, behaviour (action), and standard of task performance for the training setting.
<b>Learning organisation</b>	“An organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin 1998)
<b>Learning providers</b>	Organisations providing opportunities for individuals to gain skills, knowledge and qualifications.
<b>Learning style</b>	An individual’s preference for learning in a particular way. These may be characterised relating to Kolb’s model as ‘activist’ (having an experience), ‘reflector’ (reviewing experience), ‘theorist’ (concluding from experience), ‘pragmatist’ (planning the next steps). Successful application of learning tends to require all four styles, and individuals may have weaknesses to counter (eg, for reflection over doing).
<b>Leverage</b>	The additional money that a programme causes others to contribute.

**Mainstreaming**

“Influencing ‘mainstream services’ to make them work better in deprived neighbourhoods, by shaping and resourcing them for the task, and making them focus explicitly on the places and people most in need of their support.” (*ODPM PSA1 Delivery Plan*). This may involve a number of distinct processes:

- *Bending* (re-allocating) of mainstream resources – changing spending patterns to target the most deprived areas;
- *Focusing* policy on deprived areas, for example through legislative change or challenging floor targets;
- *Reshaping* services to reflect local needs, for example by removing any organisational designs which prevent deprived areas receiving an increased level of support, or through more effective targeting of services, or improving access;
- *Joining up* of services, programmes and targets, for example through inter-departmental action and multi-agency delivery;

Mainstreaming may involve a conscious attempt to *learn from what works practice*, including from pathfinder projects, locally or further afield.

**Market failure\***

Anything that may prevent product or factor markets from operating freely, adjusting quickly, or that restricts the information available to producers, consumers or suppliers of resources. Examples include institutional constraints, monopoly or restricted competition, and externalities.

**Mentor**

Someone who acts as a guide, adviser and/or counsellor at various stages in someone’s career, or specifically in relation to preparing for a qualification.

**Milestones**

Key events with dates, marking stages in the progress of a project or programme.

**Module**

A stand-alone ‘learning’ unit that is designed to satisfy one or more learning objectives, which may be combined with other modules for learning and qualifications purposes.

**Monitoring**

Regular collection and analysis of input, output and outcome data, along with information concerning the problems being tackled.

**Needs analysis**

A method used to determine training and development needs by reviewing work tasks, identifying performance factors and objectives, and defining learning objectives and recommendations.

**Network**

Mechanism for debate, exchange, learning, consultation, and networking. Membership may be open or closed; its agenda is typically set by network; activities may range from very formal to very informal.

<b>Network advantage</b>	“Joint value creation by all members within the network (moving beyond the sharing of information to the aggregation and creation of new knowledge)” (Creech & Willard, 2001)
<b>Networking</b>	Establishing, maintaining and using a broad network of contacts in order to keep a pulse on ideas, developments in policy and practice, what makes people tick, opportunities and potential mutual benefits.
<b>Occupational competence</b>	The ability to perform whole work roles to the standards expected in employment in real working situations (DfES definition). There are many definitions of competence ranging from a simplistic view about the ability and willingness to perform a task to the more holistic approach which encompasses to manage the many components of the job or role within complex social and work contexts. Confusion occurs because the term often carries connotations of a minimal level of ability rather than best practice.
<b>Occupational standard</b>	The level of performance required for the successful achievement of work expectations. Occupational standards are intended to specify best practice in a particular employment sector. Standards are expressed in the form of elements of competence, their associated performance criteria and range statements.
<b>On the job training</b>	Formal training for developing the skills and knowledge to perform a job, undertaken in the actual work environment.
<b>Organisational development</b>	Processes involved in developing the effectiveness of an organisation – and its people – to meet organisational goals.
<b>Outcomes*</b>	The influence that the strategy has on the various domains (within the dimensions of environment, social and economic – quality of life conditions). [Outcomes relate to strategic objectives, which define the end results of activities pursued through the strategy.]
<b>Outcome</b> <i>(Standard of Competence statement)</i>	A term which describes the result of work activity rather than the activities or tasks which lead to the result. There are tangible and intangible outcomes. An intangible outcome is the result of a cognitive or interactive process, eg, a decision. A tangible outcome would be the physical result of an activity – a product. Outcomes do not have to be tangible, physical products; they describe results, not activities. Occupational standards are phrased as outcomes to accommodate changing methods and activities.
<b>Outputs</b>	The direct, concrete product of a project’s inputs and activities.
<b>Performance criteria</b>	The criteria which specify the standard of performance necessary for the successful achievement of a standard. Performance criteria are developed by identifying the critical outcomes which demonstrate that a standard has been achieved. They are to be used as indicators to judge competence and provide an essential link to assessment processes.

<b>Performance evidence</b> <i>(learning context)</i>	Evidence that the individual can achieve a standard, meeting all the specified performance criteria, essential in assessing competence. Performance evidence may be naturally occurring or the product of assessment methods such as simulations or assignments.
<b>Performance management</b>	Systematic process of monitoring the results of activities; collecting and analysing performance information to track progress toward planning results; using performance information to inform decision-making and resource allocation; and communicating results achieved, or not attained, to advance organisational learning and promote accountability.
<b>Performance Management Framework (PMF)</b>	Assessment framework to enable reviews of how well neighbourhood renewal partnerships are succeeding, in relation to achieving targets and outcomes and putting processes into practice which will enable continuous improvement.
<b>Personal attributes</b>	The characteristics employers say they most often look for when recruiting or promoting staff, such as motivation, judgement, leadership and initiative. <i>(DfES)</i>
<b>Programme*</b>	A given policy intervention (or group of interventions) usually involving public expenditure.
<b>Programme logic*</b>	The set of hypotheses about the intervention in terms of cause and effect – linking objectives, inputs, resources, activities, outputs and outcomes.
<b>Progression routes</b>	Pathways which allow individuals to move on to further learning and employment opportunities, as a result of accredited or non-accredited learning.
<b>Project*</b>	A discrete, one-off, form of activity or expenditure.
<b>Quality</b>	The ability of a service, product, structure or process to meet customer/user requirements. It is sometimes defined in terms of ‘fitness for purpose’
<b>Rationale*</b>	The justification of a policy intervention in terms of the market [or institutional] failures it aims to correct, and how it is designed to correct them.
<b>Regeneration*</b>	The holistic process of reversing economic, social and physical decay in areas where it has reached a stage when market forces alone will not suffice.
<b>Renewal*</b>	Improvement in the situation of the most disadvantaged places and their communities, including the level and quality of the services they receive. Renewal objectives may be wide ranging but will seek to deliver improved work and business opportunities, improved residential attractiveness and improved public services.
<b>Resources*</b>	The financial resources, in-kind contributions and time inputs made to each aspect of the strategy’s implementation.

<b>Skill</b>	The ability to perform a task to a pre-defined standard of competence, acquired through formal and/or informal learning and through practice. ( <i>DfES Skillsbase</i> )
<b>Skill gap</b>	Occurs where significant proportion of a workforce (in an organisation or sector) are reported as lacking proficiency. ( <i>DfES</i> )
<b>Skill shortage</b>	Occurs where organisations experience recruitment difficulties, focusing in particular on hard-to-fill vacancies. ( <i>DfES</i> ) These may relate to skill gaps on the part of job applicants, but may also relate to levels of pay and conditions of employment on offer in comparison with other employers and to employer recruitment practices.
<b>SMART*</b>	Criteria for defining objectives – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound.
<b>Social capital*</b>	<p>“The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships and values that govern interaction between people and contribute to economic and social development” <i>OECD (1998)</i></p> <p>There are three types:</p> <p><i>Bonding</i> social capital relates to close connections between people and is characterised by strong bonds, eg, amongst people in a family or work team (reckoned to be helpful ‘getting by’ in life)</p> <p><i>Bridging</i> social capital relates to more distant connections between people and is characterised by weaker, but more cross-cutting ties, eg, with business associates, friends and acquaintances, and friends of friends (reckoned to be good for ‘getting ahead’)</p> <p><i>Linking</i> social capital relates to connections with people in positions of power and is characterised by relations between those within a hierarchy where there are differing levels of power (reckoned to be good for accessing support from formal institutions) (ONS)</p>
<b>Social exclusion</b>	An inability (of individuals) to participate in economic, social and political and cultural life, alienation and distance from mainstream society; not the same as poverty, although often associated with being poor. The process through which individuals and groups are excluded from participation in the society in which they live.
<b>Soft outcomes*</b>	Outcomes which cannot be easily measured (not that cannot be predicted). Judgement on achievement can be subjective.
<b>Soft skills</b>	Skills needed to perform jobs where job requirements are defined in terms of expected outcomes, but the process(es) to achieve the outcomes may vary widely. This usually an area of performance that does not have a definite beginning and end (i.e., counseling, supervising, and managing).



<b>Substitution*</b>	The situation in which an organisation substitutes one activity for a similar activity (such as recruiting a different job applicant) to take advantage of government assistance.
<b>Sustainable development</b>	Activity which achieves mutually reinforcing economic, social and environmental benefits without compromising the needs of future generations.
<b>Systems thinking</b>	An holistic approach to analysis that focuses on the way that a system's constituent parts interrelate, on how systems work over time and function within the context of larger systems.
<b>Training</b>	Learning that is provided in order to improve performance on the present job.
<b>Theory of change*</b>	A approach based on a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes and contexts of an intervention.
<b>Unit of Competence</b>	A unit of competence is a group of related elements of competence which have credibility as a recognised unit of achievement in an occupational sector. A unit is the smallest grouping of standards which is acceptable for separate accreditation within a qualification. A unit may be described as the point at which the individual becomes responsible for the outcome described.
<b>Value for Money (VFM)*</b>	Relationship between the resources consumed and the outcomes achieved. In procurement terms it is the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose to meet user requirements).