

Regional Development Agencies

Contents

South West RDA.....	2
South East RDA.....	5
RDA's Combined Response.....	6
West Midlands RDA	8

South West RDA

Introduction

This response is made on behalf of South West Regional Development Agency and creating excellence the Regional Centre for Excellence. We are happy for the contents to be reproduced or quoted and attributed as required. The RDA, in partnership with the Government Office for the South West, the South West Forum and over 50 other regional organisations has already put substantial resources setting up creating excellence. Much of the work to date has been in the field of researching gaps in skills and knowledge for regeneration practitioners.

General approach, leadership and process

1. Yes, there is a real need to change culture and practices within the full range of delivery agencies. At present agencies have little awareness of each other, a poor approach to learning and development and generally feel "snowed under" - leading to the view of managers that that they are too busy "delivering" to allow time for "skilling up".

A change of culture or attitude is required throughout the development process which engenders greater trust and confidence in each other. We believe this can only arise as part of an improvement in the awareness all participants have of the work of their partners.

2. Broadly this would be appropriate as the alternatives are not really able to operate at the neighbourhood level with the kind of mandate Local Authorities have. In addition LA's either commission or deliver a wide range of local services which puts them in the pole position when it comes to improving delivery. However there is a huge need to build the capacity of local government to meet this need both in terms of skills and knowledge. ODPM, IDeA and the LGA will be crucial in this process. Areas of particular concern are:

a. Project management skills - largely absent from local authorities due to the historic decline in the size of their in-house capital programmes

b. Specific built environment skills are also absent or poor due to the above and the fact that local authorities appear unable to compete on salaries. This is problem is exacerbated by a national shortage in built environment skills, which has put pressure on salary levels.

The culture of local authorities could do with changing as well. Often there is failure to appreciate the scale of what is contemplated overall, and as a result an unwillingness to commit sufficient resources. Often when a new area based initiative is contemplated, L.A's appear unable appoint a "leader" at the right managerial level to ensure cross departmental co-operation. In addition they typically add management responsibilities onto an already overburdened job profile.

Some practitioners foresee a useful role in facilitating cross departmental work within large delivery agencies and across individual organisations.

There is also some need for co-ordination at a higher (regional) level which could encourage the sharing of knowledge, and resources between LA's and neighbourhoods and bring the work of regional organisations such as the SW Observatory, Sustainability SW and constructing excellence into play. The natural place for this to happen would be the emerging Centres of Excellence.

3a. We should be working towards a more collaborative process by which developers bring forward proposals. CABE's Design Review Panel process looks promising, but whatever we do, proposals need much wider airing prior to entering the planning process.

In addition it is important that the process by which planning authorities develop their local plans leads to a simpler, more enabling document, which identifies opportunities and options more clearly.

3b. This is a learning issue. More joint learning, inter-disciplinary learning and learning across the planning - development "gap".

3c. As in (a) this could be improved by a more collaborative, enabling, simplified local planning process which identifies development opportunities and options. Then as developers get into thinking about what to do a broad based discussion about specific schemes need to take place, where basic principles are agreed with local stakeholders.

There is a strong belief that we must move to separate the planning process from overt, day-to-day political influence. Too often schemes are rejected as a result of a change in local political landscape. This can encourage a type of nimbyism that makes the delivery of more wide ranging strategic objectives much more difficult.

Professional skills

4. Yes, there are generic skills, knowledge and behaviours that should be widely acquired. These are very well dealt with in the NRU's publication "The Learning Curve" and are divided into recognising what works, the application of knowledge, organisational skills, interpersonal skills, entrepreneurial skills and reflective behaviours.

These skills, knowledge and behaviours are useful to all those involved in developing sustainable communities.

5. No, they are increasingly getting in the way, however in reviewing professional competence/definition we must ensure we nurture the expertise that exists within professional disciplines. It would be a mistake to go for a new profession (Urbanist? Sustainable Community Developer?) as we would be likely to be creating new silos, however there does appear to be a case for broadening the definition of some professions such as planners (to include expertise in the development process) and architects (to include expertise in consultation and community planning).

6a. Not really. It is important that we include experience in the training of professionals, starting at the undergraduate level a wonderful example can be found in the work of the Rural Studio at the University of Auburn in Alabama. Other useful improvements might be around the need for a greater awareness on the part of all professionals of the work of others in the field of sustainable development.

6b. Yes, this could deliver a minimum standard of generic skills and knowledge.

6c. This could be delivered by any number of providers and could be adapted to work for non-professionals and residents. Benchmarking - perhaps IDeA, or ODPM?

7. There will always be a role for the professional institutions in setting standards. They can ensure that, in developing a broader understanding of the skills required for the development of sustainable communities, we do not lose the expertise that individual professions have developed. Professional institutions can also help promote new approaches to Continuing Professional Development which involve shadowing other professions, exchanges and joint (x disciplinary) learning. With time the skills and knowledge that are required by all working in this field should be incorporated into the standards required by each of the professional institutions.

8. It would seem so, right across the range of built environment professions and trades in both the public and private sectors. Evidence can be derived from reported difficulties in recruitment to the increase in construction costs which (it is accepted) are rising above RPI.

There is an urgent need to promote the construction industry as an attractive career to all potential entrants (but particularly school leavers). This might well include examining salary structures including remuneration for trainees.

9. They are not attractive to school leavers. There seems to be a perception that development professions are difficult, boring and not well paid compared to the perception of other career paths.

Regional Development Agencies

We can't afford to be passive here, the market is against the employer and we must actively seek out new talent and develop it. In the regeneration "sector" we are very poor at presenting ourselves to potential new professionals and trades people some participation in careers work at schools (through connexions?) and attendance at student recruitment fairs would not go amiss.

10. We may need to rebrand planning and think about the boundaries of other professions, but the main thing is to sell the sector better. The work of delivering sustainable communities is incredibly varied, with huge potential for career change/variety. Such a field ought to be able to attract new entrants and sustain the enthusiasm of its workforce like no other!

11. They do not have the full set. The generic skills (previously discussed) are not there. In the public sector for instance we appear to be very short of good project management skills. The culture of regeneration has tended to emphasise competition, "getting on and delivering" over a proper assessment of problem and appropriateness of proposed action and spend over impact.

The regional centres of excellence (RCE's) are in a very good position (and are actively researching this issue) to identify gaps in knowledge and skills and seek appropriate remedies. It is important that this national initiative is used.

12. If they are to be working face-to-face with residents they need to understand how communities work, who lives there, who works there. They need some shared knowledge about how local services are delivered. A local "common purpose" could be delivered to supply this knowledge at a very local level. Skills and techniques for community planning are in increasing demand and much of the learning about this is coming from community and voluntary sector organisations. More interchange of staff and ideas between the voluntary/community sector and the public and private sectors recommended.

13. This begs the question of time - cabinet members may be able to find the time and there is an argument that executive members should always be trained in this area. Again the providers need not be restricted. CABE is about to pilot some training for elected members of Planning Committees in this region (SW).

Other

14. No more than any other sector. The way the "market" operates suggests that putting our effort into the client side may well be the best way to effect changes in approach from the industry. In the public sector we tend to see the industry (ie the private sector bit of it) as intrinsically different when in reality similar skills are required. So addressing gaps will be similar, part of the initial training and development of staff and part of their CPD. The role of the contractor needs to be given some thought in the context of knowledge and skills. Effective delivery can be facilitated by early engagement with contractors and their supply chain to enable the best possible local buy-in and maximise opportunities for local employment and training. This behaviour could be taught as part of a generic course or within CPD.

South East RDA

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Egan Review of Skills and broadly support its proposals. We have some substantive comments on the Consultation Document and these are outlined below.

Planning to Match Supply to the Demand for Skills

There should be a greater emphasis on planning to match supply and demand for skills. The FRESA and the National Skills Strategy are beginning to address this issue. In our view it is important that the proposed Sector Skills Agreements are robust enough to generate impact. In particular, at HE level, they must be able to influence either funding or Additional Student Number allocations.

Progression and Lifelong Learning

The progression from Advanced Modern Apprenticeships to Foundation Degrees (and subsequently to teaching qualifications) should be developed to encourage good quality recruits to engage in lifelong learning, and where necessary to be able to communicate their experience to train and promote skills development in the next generation of workers within the industry.

Promotion of "Arts and Artisanhip"

Joint degrees in "Arts and Artisanhip" should be encouraged. There are many creative and performing arts graduates with excellent visualisation and manual dexterity, who cannot afford to work as artists as a full-time profession. By developing artisan skills in parallel with their artistic skills, we can promote a new generation of artists who could support themselves through well-paid part-time employment in shortage areas (such as plumbing), and we would reduce the barriers between the arts and the crafts.

Foundation Courses

The notion of a combined foundation course for all core professions has much to recommend it, as it would encourage the mindset of teamworking, but it may be unwieldy and difficult to implement fully, except perhaps in highly specialised institutions. If so, we would encourage the professions to follow the practice being developed in some health faculties where all the profession (doctors, nurses, pharmacists etc) attend joint courses in the first semester or year, but the teaching may not be totally common (para 6)

Rebranding

We feel that better market positioning of the professions is needed to demonstrate potential career paths and to tackle negative perceptions of certain roles. However, "rebranding" should be implemented with caution (para 10).

Training to Deliver Sustainable Communities

We agree that elected members and local authorities should be strongly encouraged to undertake training in delivering sustainable communities. There is much anecdotal evidence to support this need (para 13).

RDA's Combined Response

General approach, leadership and process

1. We strongly agree. There must be a change to existing culture systems and processes including, in particular, the breaking down of the strong silo mentality that exists between professions, departments and different interests groups.

2. The question assumes there is clarity about what the sustainable communities agenda is. Because of this lack of clarity there is a serious danger that the term is already becoming abused as it is used by different groups to pursue often varying and sometimes conflicting agendas. There needs to be a clear and a shared common understanding of this before the most appropriate lead role can be defined. For example, what is the extent of the sustainable community? If it is a city region, then clearly this is beyond the boundary of any one local authority, and there may be sub-regional structures in place to help to support the delivery. However sustainable communities are defined, the local authority will have a critical role to play because of their democratic accountability and statutory powers, but there may be other delivery vehicles better placed in particular circumstances to co-ordinate that delivery, e.g. urban regeneration companies.

If local authorities are to have this key role, however, an urgent need is for them to attract and retain high calibre staff, as local authorities often lack the skills and competitive salaries of private companies to be able to bring about successful regeneration.

3. The key change, which needs to be introduced and encouraged at every opportunity, is for developers to have early and meaningful discussions with those who will be affected by the proposals with the co-operation of the Local Authority and other key parties. This will not always be easy but it will serve to ensure that positions are understood and issues addressed. It is fundamental that this process is seen as being more broad than a purely development control issue within local authorities. Development control needs to be seen as part of an integral and bigger process conducted within local authorities for which a collaborative approach is essential.

Professional Skills

4. There are generic skills, knowledge and behaviours that all professions/occupations should have including respect for each other; an understanding of the development process, development finance, sustainability, environmental issues, equality issues, the democratic process, the political process, accountability issues, and the role of institutions; and specific skills in negotiation, a positive approach to problem solving, partnership working, project management, communication, mediation and mentoring. It is essential for all groups to have access to this broad range of skills to provide the context within which their specialities can then be implemented and effective collaboration achieved.

5. Whilst there is a school of thought about merging the relevant professions and occupations, this is unrealistic. What is needed is to ensure that all relevant professions and occupations have access to the broad range of skills as referred to above, as well as developing excellence in their specialities, and enabling the achievement of a broad range of disciplinary expertise. One model as to whereby this might be achieved could be having the equivalent of the PGCE (e.g. a PGCSC - Post Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Communities) for those in the development professions. i.e. to have a broad-based regeneration qualification in addition to their speciality which was common to all of the main professions. This should focus on both social policy and the built environment. For example, with teachers they get a degree in any subject then take a generic PGCE in order to prepare them for the role of teaching.

6. Quite clearly, no. There are two approaches here that are relevant. Either adopt the PGCSC type model referred to above, or undertake an approach whereby all professions have "civic" modules within them that cover the broad spectrum of regeneration skills. Cross sectoral CPD will also be essential. Consideration could be given to the establishment of a virtual Institute of Sustainable

Regional Development Agencies

Communities, to raise its profile, although it may be better to work through existing institutions to avoid any prospect of the issue being marginalised.

7. Professional Institutions and Institutes need to have a commitment to ensuring that those whom they train and those whom they recognise have access to the broad range of skills. This needs to be reflected in the qualifications which they award and future continuing professional development requirements they impose on their members. If the attitude of the Institutions is right this will help to encourage appropriate behaviour of their members.

8. Planners in particular are in short supply, evident by the problems in recruiting. More needs to be done to encourage people into planning, and this can be achieved in part by planning (as with other professions) ensuring that these skills are set in the broader range of development skills.

9. With regard to planners, this is certainly partly a product of low morale and prestige of the profession that also applies more broadly to the whole sphere of regeneration activity. Whilst people understand the value of regeneration activity they do not always see the relationship between the different skills sets and the professions to make it an attractive career path. Career paths are not clearly defined at all and this, if it is tackled effectively, will help to address the shortages. On a broader point, the issue of competition for able graduates is immense. If we are serious about attracting the best people into the development professions, then issues of competitive salaries, employment prospects, working conditions and corporate cultures needs to be addressed.

10. The re-branding approach, picking up the points in item 9, will be very helpful because inherently the whole sphere of regeneration is an area of activity where most people have an interest because it directly affects the environment in which they live. It is making that connection between a career and people's experience that should help to attract new entrants. Schools, in particular, should be targeted as they are also a focal point for parents as well as children.

11. No. As well as introducing the cross-professional training referred to in answer to question 6 for those seeking new qualifications, this approach should also be introduced for those members and officers and environmental professionals to ensure that they are equipped to handle their responsibilities effectively. In addition, an industry/public sector placement or secondment scheme is worth pursuing.

12. If "civic" modules, as described above, are introduced these should be made available to a wide range of groups outside of the core professions. The key point is to have a simple process and simple qualification and training framework with which people can identify and is widely recognised.

13. Once there is a common understanding of what sustainable communities are then training ought to be delivered for elected members of local authorities. The training can be provided by a range of bodies that meet assessment criteria for the quality of their provision, e.g. Universities, FE colleges and possibly even organisations that have demonstrated best practice.

Other

14. No. This is partly due to the fact that there is no shared and widely understood definition of sustainable development or what it means in practice, and therefore there is limited commitment to it. Once clarity is provided, one of the most powerful influences to focus the attention of the development industry is to influence funding mechanisms via direct grant or taxation whilst ensuring that there are no perverse impacts of introducing any one policy which mitigates against the achievement of sustainable development.

West Midlands RDA

Introductory comments

Firstly, it is worth saying what we think the Sustainable Communities policy is about in the West Midlands: such communities are achieved by concerted activity across all sectors to arrest decline, build community identity and spirit where they are lacking and provide the economic, social and environmental conditions for long term viability. Our response is not based on the idea that it is all about new communities and new build. We incorporate public services, private sector activity and voluntary and community infrastructure in our reading of what makes sustainable communities.

Secondly, it's not happy, consensual territory. There are real conflicts between players which is just about the way society and the economy is ordered. These have to be better negotiated, but we do not believe they will or even should disappear. Private sector risk is the necessary counter to public sector checks and balances.

Finally, these answers have come through round table discussions involving elected members, developers, academia and mixed sessions. People have also had the opportunity to reply to the questions separately and we have collated those responses. (More details on request).

WE AGREE with the analysis implied in your approach that there is a hierarchy of priorities:

- Leadership
- ↓ Culture
- Behaviours
- ↓ Skills and knowledge
- Change

Responses to your questions

Yes, as above - it's cultural change before skills development. But what kind of cultural change?

A commitment to:

- Value, not cost
- A can-do attitude
- Cultural sensitivity
- Partnership building
- Learning, learning, learning

We want to believe that the Local Authorities have a lead role but there has to be change. Elected members need to be given inducements to train and freed from other duties - compulsory training will kill the idea.

Leading includes giving away power and learning new ways of operating. Cross agency bodies especially Local Strategic Partnerships are key vehicles, in which the Local Authorities play an important role: they have to learn how to exercise it as influencer and catalyser.

Yes - learning and skills acquisition is desperately needed but there is no single neat solution.

It's informal as well as formal learning across the working life (eg shadowing) which is needed and it's the learning culture of a place which is as significant as the courses we go on. Crosscutting

Regional Development Agencies

learning, yes; but one crosscutting foundation course? - we are not sure. Varied career pathways reflect the diversity of regeneration itself.

The development process has massive scope for improvement.

Early, wide communication saves time and money in the long run and the role of brokers could be developed, to operate between the public and private sectors. (See Priti's story from 2013).

We have more detailed comments on the development process which can be supplied separately.

Regeneration as a professional activity should be better defined and marketed - but it still comprises specialists: we are not sure there is one profession.

Retain specialisms but transform them to serve the new and complex environment. We are not convinced we all want to become 'urbanists' - and not just because of rural colleagues!

The core skills are technical and 'softer' ones - and there are potentially many of them.

Project management is pre-eminent amongst the technical ones seen to be lacking. Softer generic competencies include:

- Robust common sense
- Knowledge of urban history and policy
- Community engagement
- Cultural sensitivity
- Partnership and strategic skills
- Lateral thinking

And we could give you many more that have come up in discussion...

And So to Your Central Question: Shaping and delivering the right skills for the future

Releasing informed, skilled risk-taking leadership with a whole set of new behaviours will allow a new culture to develop: skills will 'come right' in the context of a new, learning culture.

But recruitment of already 'exciting' people - not just trying to change the ones we've got - is an urgent practical need: we must get better able to recruit risk-taking, creative and learning young people. The professional institutions, academia, (FE and HE) need to be brought together with employers, funders and intelligence sources, to get a better handle on labour market issues.

Training providers must be challenged about their provision and we believe this is possible at regional level, where there is also a thirst to collaborate more effectively. Regional Regeneration Centres of Excellence could be charged with making this happen. RCEs can also place themselves to involve and influence elected members responsible for sustainable communities.

We would look to central government to:

- Help build intelligence about skills shortages
- Encourage professional institutions to pursue multi-disciplinary learning
- Help build the profile of regeneration as a professional activity, along with all its professional constituencies. Let's 'big up' the planners! (and others, of course).

There is much more discussion to be had. Our provisional view is that we are not enthusiastic about new central bodies defining a limited number of skills development routes, or standardised accreditation led by central government.

Regional Development Agencies

We are enthusiastic about vigorously developing regional leadership and provision for skills development, supported by government and delivered by renewed organisations.