



Evidence Base Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities

Sustainable Communities: Research Summary Number 2, 2004

Introduction

In February 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister launched the Sustainable Communities Plan.¹ It addresses a broad range of issues for creating and maintaining sustainable communities, from protecting the countryside and tackling deprivation and social exclusion to improving liveability in urban areas.

In April 2003, Sir John Egan was asked by the Deputy Prime Minister to consider the skills needed to help deliver the vision and aims of the Sustainable Communities Plan. In order to support this review, Ernst & Young were commissioned to assess existing evidence on the number of people in occupations core to the Sustainable Communities Plan.

Due to the short timescales involved, the research considered only a limited range of occupations and sources. The report will also assist in the future development of ODPM work on skills for SCs.

Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of the study were to:

- ◆ Identify the existing knowledge and estimates of the number of people in core occupations needed to deliver sustainable communities.
- ◆ Identify and assess the robustness of the evidence base on which existing estimates are made.
- ◆ Identify and prioritise any gaps in existing knowledge on the core occupations necessary to deliver sustainable communities and make recommendations as to how existing knowledge and estimates might be improved.

This involved assessing evidence on the currently available pool of skills, the likely level of demand on the 'core' occupations in the future, and identifying areas where there is a lack of available data from which to draw robust conclusions.

Three main sources of information were used: the Office of National Statistics (ONS); professional institutions and industry bodies; and third-party reports. Interviews with six organisations involved in the implementation of sustainable communities were also conducted to validate the research findings and identify key issues.

¹ *Sustainable Communities: building for the future*, ODPM 2003, available gratis from ODPM Publications, see Further Information on page 4 for address.

Core Occupations

The research focused on 'core' occupations relevant for the delivery of sustainable communities. A list of groups with similar occupational themes was developed from work already undertaken by the Egan Review of Skills. The groups were:

1. Professional and vocational occupations (including architecture, engineering, planning and surveying).
2. Environmental and social occupations.
3. Central and Local Government occupations (covering those occupations responsible for decision making, implementation and regulation).
4. Economic occupations.
5. Voluntary occupations.
6. Educational occupations.

Although these categories are relatively distinct, there are overlaps between them (for example, environmental engineering, housing surveyors, urban design and planning). Additional occupations, outside the scope of this research, may also be involved in the delivery of sustainable communities.

Key Findings

Demand

In 2001/2, the value of work done by construction professional services firms was estimated at £12.3bn. This does not include the impact of the Sustainable Communities Plan, particularly at regional and sub-regional levels.

The research found no data available which could be readily used to help estimate what additional level of activity the existing workforce could absorb nor what incremental demand for vocational and non-vocational trained people will be created by the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Plan. Overall, there is an absence of demand data for the core occupations. More work is required to assess the demand likely to be created by the Sustainable Communities Plan.

Current Supply

Across the core occupations, there are currently about 1.3 million individuals with the potential skills to be involved in the delivery of sustainable communities. Of these, approximately 350,000 are members of professional bodies, trade associations and societies aligned with the delivery of sustainable communities.

Future Supply

There has been a declining trend in the number of applications for general engineering, civil engineering, and mechanical engineering undergraduate degree courses. At the same time, the age structure of some professions (eg. town planning, civil engineering, building services engineering) indicates a large number

of members may retire over the next decade. This trend is not common to all core occupations. Both the surveying and architectural professions are experiencing a relatively steady number of students applying for courses.

Specific Shortages

Quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that supply shortages are emerging in the following occupations:

- ◆ Civil and structural engineers
- ◆ Town planners
- ◆ Transport planners and engineers
- ◆ Conservation officers

Approximately half of Chartered Civil Engineers are expected to retire in the next 10 years whilst numbers applying to study civil engineering at university continue to fall, down 56% between 1994 and 2002. Civil, structural, transport and highway engineers are amongst those specified by the Home Office as occupations with 'acute shortages'. Although there is evidence of increasing numbers entering Planning, there is also evidence of increased demand and a shortfall in supply.

Quality of data

Data quality and availability vary quite markedly and, in particular, there is a lack of reliable data at local level.

The collection and analysis of data was limited by the structure of statistics available from the principal data sources. There are definitional issues and much of the data is provided through self-reporting. Membership of professional institutions is generally not mandatory and therefore membership numbers are likely to be less than the numbers actively involved in certain occupations. Individuals may also be members of more than one institution and so some double counting can occur.

There is a paucity of data on the supply of non-vocational occupations, and there is a deficit of information relating to the geographical mobility of the core occupations. Organisations often use their own regional definitions and this makes comparison difficult.

Many third party reports are based on small sample sizes that are unrepresentative. In some cases research methodologies were found to be lacking in rigour. There is therefore a risk that relatively weak sources of information can become perceived fact or accepted wisdom.

Summary of Recommendations

In developing the evidence base for further work on skills for sustainable communities, the Report recommends that ODPM consider the following recommendations. These are given in proposed order of priority.

- ◆ Instigating further research to establish current and future demand for the core occupations due to the Sustainable Communities Plan. This should include audits of the core occupations within Central and Local Government. It should also consider the impact of the implementation of the Sustainable Communities Plan (including the phasing of work, scale of projects, and method of procurement) on the current system.

- ◆ Working in partnership with the agents of delivery (such as Local Authorities, Regional Development Agencies, etc) to undertake a series of sample audits. The aim being to establish the potential impact of implementing the Sustainable Communities Plan within a defined area. The sample areas chosen should reflect the differences in scale, labour markets, demographics and proposed schemes to understand the potential impact on those responsible for delivery.
- ◆ Evaluating the output from current industry research activity. The aim being to understand its potential significance in the skills requirements for the development of sustainable communities.
- ◆ Working in partnership with existing organisations and initiatives in the built environment sector which are already addressing current and future skills needs in the sector. The focus being to harness the benefit of current initiatives and minimise duplication of activity.
- ◆ Undertaking research into the degree of geographic mobility both of individual professionals and companies.
- ◆ Working in partnership with the professional bodies to establish a common taxonomy for the recording of professional bodies data. Further, ODPM and the professional bodies should increase the scope of their research effort to focus on information most relevant to the delivery of sustainable communities.
- ◆ Undertaking further research to assess the number of graduates entering the built environment professions and other occupations relevant for the delivery of sustainable communities. This should also focus on the distribution of graduates from these courses into the working environment.

Further Information

Further information is contained in the full report *Evidence Base Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities* ISBN 1851126996, £15 available from:

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The Evidence Base Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities is available via the ODPM website: www.odpm.gov.uk/communities

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