

Networking across regeneration partnerships

A national study of regional approaches

Regeneration policy and activity is undergoing significant change with a major emphasis on improving skills and knowledge among all key sectors involved. In 2001, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Neighbourhood Renewal Unit decided to commission a national study exploring the potential contribution and value of networking among regeneration partnerships, and ways in which the existing National Network of Regeneration Partnerships might be further developed.

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Glossary

GO	<i>Government Office</i>
NSNR	<i>National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal</i>
RDA	<i>Regional Development Agency</i>
NNRP	<i>National Network of Regeneration Partnerships</i>
DTLR	<i>Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions</i>
NRU	<i>Neighbourhood Renewal Unit</i>
JRF	<i>Joseph Rowntree Foundation</i>
LSP	<i>Local Strategic Partnership</i>
NDC	<i>New Deal for Communities</i>
SRB	<i>Single Regeneration Budget</i>
RCE	<i>Regional Centre of Excellence</i>

Foreword

Recent research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's extensive work on regeneration has shed light on what circumstances favour the assimilation of knowledge and learning by regeneration practitioners.

First, it helps greatly if those expected to learn have some control over how and when they learn – in other words, some ownership of the process.

Second, it has been shown that residents and practitioners will accept lessons more readily from colleagues who belong to the same networks as they do, rather than from academics or other experts.

Third, training linked to practical outcomes, and timed to coincide with the delivery of those outcomes, is more useful than training that is unrelated to practical work.

In a word, lessons from JRF's work all reinforce the point that 'learning by doing' works, while people are resistant to absorbing good practice from academic research alone.

For the last two or three years, the JRF has been supporting the work of the small National Network of Regeneration Partnerships that has been working hard to pool the experiences of regeneration practitioners across England. This report, jointly funded by JRF and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, has sought to capture these experiences and explore the need for more robust regional and national networks.

The report reinforces the lessons outlined above about how regeneration practitioners best learn. It also stresses the need for networks that can draw in a range of different regeneration programmes and help practitioners absorb information that will be useful in delivering better neighbourhood renewal and addressing the five key themes of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (health; education and training; employment; crime; and housing/environment).

The report recommends, as a first step, regional networks drawing in those who are working on a range of different neighbourhood programmes. The researchers stress the importance of involving a range of players within those partnerships, including: residents; board members; partnership staff; and other public sector staff.

In some regions, good progress has been made in establishing regeneration networks along these lines. Other regions have made a start, while some regions have no networks specifically geared to the task of those working in regeneration.

For those regions where less progress has been made, the availability of encouragement, guidance and advice will clearly be helpful and the report recommends the establishment of a small office at national level to co-ordinate and encourage these efforts. Delivery of appropriate support will clearly have an important role in ensuring that good networks can be established across all nine English regions.

The recommendations of this report are very timely and the researchers have neatly summarised the rationale for regeneration networks and an organisational framework for their establishment in the nine English regions. The potential of these networks for supporting the valuable work of NRU's Skills and Knowledge Programme, and the work in the regions, has also been clearly outlined.

I welcome the recommendations of this report, as well as the intention to establish a steering group to help guide the work through its development phase over the next two years.

Richard Best

Director

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Summary

About the study

This report brings together the findings of a study commissioned jointly by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU), and the National Network of Regeneration Partnerships.

The study, which was undertaken by Marilyn Taylor Associates and took place over a period of 12 months from March 2001 to February 2002, explored the potential future for the National Network of Regeneration Partnerships (NNRP). The NNRP had been established in 1996 by practitioners involved in regeneration partnership schemes across the nine English regions. It had aimed to facilitate good practice exchange, provide a mechanism for consultation about programme delivery issues, and contribute to regional and national strategies and policies.

JRF had provided funding at a national level to facilitate co-ordination, but only two of the regional networks (in the North East and the North West) had achieved funding for the employment of staff to take forward organised programmes. Networks in most of the other regions were operating voluntarily or were co-ordinated by their RDAs. Their focus was correspondingly more narrow, tending to concentrate on issues of programme management and delivery.

The brief was to assess the demand for, and contribution of, the NNRP's work and potential future development. It considered the potential contribution of a regeneration practitioner network within the developing agenda of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR), and other developments and changes within regeneration policy and activity.

Regeneration policy and practice environment

The study took place at a time of change and development within the regeneration policy and practice framework. SRB partnerships were still uncertain of the impact of the transfer of responsibility for their funding to the Regional Development Agencies and the Department of Trade and Industry. Large, and important, parts of the NSNR policy initiatives (eg Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Empowerment Networks) were yet to be fully grasped or, as with the Skills and Knowledge Programme, to be developed.

The practitioners and policy agencies with whom this study has been consulting have therefore been on a considerable journey over the past 12 months. There have been marked changes of energy and interest in the potential contribution of regeneration networks, set against a developing regional policy context.

However, it is true to say that despite the considerable ‘distance travelled’ during the three main consultation periods of this study, some areas of uncertainty still remain. These can only be resolved at a regional level. Indeed, one of the study’s strongest conclusions is that any future network development can only proceed on a regionally-driven basis. There is no ‘one-size fits all’, and determining the way forward should not be through a nationally imposed model or process.

Integrated networking across programmes in the regions

Existing networking opportunities tend to be organised along ‘programme’ lines, or focused on specific sectors such as voluntary and community organisations. In turn, network co-ordination or funding is usually through the relevant programme-sponsoring body (eg RDAs for SRB schemes, GOs for New Deal for Communities, etc).

Such programme-based approaches, while clearly useful, do not capture the rich and varied opportunities for shared learning between all those engaged in social inclusion activities and action within deprived neighbourhoods. These activities cross many different funding programmes, not only SRB and NDCs, but also Surestart partnerships, health programmes, crime and disorder, and so on.

For the ‘step-change’ now desired in skills, competence and knowledge of effective practice, this study concludes that there is much to be gained from taking a more integrated approach. Developing networks across regeneration funding streams, and reaching out to the broader range of players whose contribution is so vital to successful neighbourhood regeneration, is recommended as the most effective way to support shared learning.

Actions to develop networks in the seven regions currently without strong, funded networks, should be firmly focused at regional level during the proposed development phase (see recommendations). At national level support should be provided with the broad functions of co-ordination, process and evaluation, preferably through a post or secondment into the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU).

Subject to regional progress over the coming two year period, there will remain several key issues to resolve. The most important of these is whether or not the networks can remain as inclusive, flexible, unincorporated bodies – as is the current position of the two operational networks which have achieved funding for staff (the North West Regeneration Network, and the Regeneration Exchange in the north east) – or whether they should move onto a more independent footing, with a clearly defined membership and incorporated status.

Success of the regional networks will depend crucially on their value, and the importance given to them, among the broad range of players involved in social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal; for example:

- the tasks of running the networks will require motivated people, from a very busy sector, unless they are to be co-ordinated by independent agencies (eg Regional Centres of Excellence, or contracted out) or facilitated by Government Offices or Regional Development Agencies (the latter appears unlikely); and
- securing funding for the networks will depend on their value in improving regional regeneration practice and demonstrable improvement in competence and knowledge about what works.

A national network?

Interest in the benefits to be gained in federating the regional networks on a national basis is unlikely to be clearly articulated until more networks are up and running. Policy and funding support for such a national body will depend, critically, on the contribution that the regional networks are shown to make to the Skills and Knowledge Programme, and to the improvement of regeneration practice.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Value and contribution of networking

- There is a strong interest and demand among practitioners for learning and developing knowledge about effective regeneration approaches through networking at regional levels.
- Research indicates that regeneration practitioners learn effectively, share good practice and gain important support in their work, through networking and face-to-face contact with others undertaking similar initiatives.

- There are strong arguments for an integrated network among regeneration practitioners across the different funding programmes and schemes, although there is also resistance to this in some regions.
- Many different sectors need also to be involved in networking activities to address the challenges of social inclusion and neighbourhood regeneration: residents, board members, partnership staff and other public sector staff are all important partners in effective practice and have need of improved skills and knowledge.
- Networks need to ensure the provision of high quality access to improved knowledge and skills about good practice; they need to move beyond a focus on programme management issues and policy feedback, to events and learning opportunities across the varied domains of activity within social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal.

Development of regional networks

- Networks should be developed, structured and organised according to regional circumstance and requirements, not follow a prescribed model or framework.
- Integrated approaches across different programmes – supported and preferably funded by both the relevant GO and RDA, are recommended, as is the case with Regeneration Exchange in the North East.
- Sub-regional, thematic and programme-based networks should remain in existence where appropriate, but only a funded regional structure can provide holistic learning across programme and geographical boundaries.
- Relationships with Regional Centres of Excellence are vitally important, and there is considerable scope for synergy, but networking is essential to provide the face-to-face learning that practitioners especially value.
- Recommended activities for networks include events, seminars, working groups on specific domain activities; signposting and advice; visits and identification/dissemination of good practice; advising training bodies on training needs; feedback to policy-makers; supporting skills and knowledge programmes.
- If it is appropriate for membership to be formalised (which will depend on regional circumstance), an approach based on membership by independent partnership bodies is recommended, with associate membership for individuals and other organisations.

Two-year development phase

- Further network development will take place at regional level, over the next two years.
- Progress in the regions, and regular liaison and meetings between regional networks, should be assisted by a national post within the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.
- Evaluation of the contribution of networks to improving regional regional competence should form part of the development phase, overseen by a re-constituted Steering Group (comprising NRU, JRF, network practitioners, Urban Forum, GOs, RDAs, and other government departments).

Marilyn Taylor
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February 2002

1 National Network – consulting on the way forward

Background to the NNRP Feasibility Study

The National Network of Regeneration Partnerships (NNRP) was established in 1996 by practitioners involved in running Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) partnership schemes across the nine English regions. (See box for a summary of the NNRP's original aims).

NNRP: aims & objectives

- provide a vehicle for consultation with regeneration partnership practitioners;
- enable regular exchange of ideas, problems, information and experience between partnership practitioners across the regions on a regular basis;
- develop practitioners' perspectives on national and regional regeneration policies;
- identify and facilitate research relevant to the needs of regeneration practitioners.

The NNRP was based on a regionally-driven structure aiming to establish networks in all regions, co-ordinated and supported through regular national meetings of regional representatives. NNRP was aware of many other networks it could link with, as appropriate, but saw the need for a specialist network to meet the needs of senior partnership practitioners and regeneration partnerships who did not necessarily have adequate professional infrastructure support from local authority bodies and professional institutes. It therefore aspired to be a network within networks.

In 1998 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) awarded a grant to support administration of the NNRP, and to assist with progressing its development. As a condition of this funding, a report on the longer-term way forward in terms of an operational and funding framework was requested. This report (*National Network of Regeneration Partnerships: A framework for the future* produced by Linda Houston, who was acting as the NNRP Co-ordinator, and based on extensive consultations undertaken at various times during 2000) resulted in a decision that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) – through the

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit - and JRF would fund the appointment of consultants to undertake a detailed feasibility study and, subject to viability, prepare a business plan for taking forward development of both the regional and national networks.

This decision was informed by the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) with its emphasis on promoting a step change in the performance of neighbourhood regeneration partnerships. It was felt that networking among practitioners had a potentially important role to play within this context, but more detail was required on how the network should most effectively be structured, and how it should be taken forward and funded.

Feasibility study brief

A steering group (see insert) was established to oversee the process of appointing consultants through competitive tender and directing their work. The feasibility study aim was:

To explore and investigate with both national bodies and in the regions, the way forward for the NNRP and its regional networks. On the basis of the findings, and subject to viability, to produce recommendations for the functions and structure of a national network for regeneration partnerships, advise on how it should be organised and funded, and propose constitutional and staffing arrangements.

Steering group membership

DTLR/NRU (in the chair)
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
ROOM
GO representatives (2)
NNRP representatives (2)
Regional Co-ordination Unit

The changing context

The study team commenced work on the project in February 2001, at a critical point of transition and change in regeneration policy and practice. Initial consultations with practitioners and key players in the regions reflected considerable variation in the development of NNRP regional networks. Only two of the regional networks had achieved funding and had paid staff, although some were working well under voluntary arrangements, or with servicing support by the RDA.

Most importantly, there were many uncertainties about roles and needs in relation to networking among regeneration practitioners given the changing context and the raft of new initiatives coming on stream under the NSNR. Pertinent issues included:

- lack of clarity or understanding of the position of SRB partnerships following the closure of further bidding rounds and their transfer to RDAs, themselves relatively new institutional players (and before clarity on the targets to be achieved under future single-pot funding arrangements);
- the likely impact of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and partnership rationalisation;
- how the proposed Regional Centres of Excellence would be established, and what their remit/scope would be;
- a lack of understanding of the potential impact and change process being triggered by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) and its intentions to promote improved skills and knowledge among all players within the strategy (which was not developed until later in the year);
- the networking/training and information needs of the NSNR's new programmes such as New Deal for Communities (NDC) and Neighbourhood Management partnerships;
- the positioning of residents and community representatives at the heart of neighbourhood-based regeneration, the ways in which their learning and support needs would be addressed and the potential role of Community Empowerment Networks;
- the regional roles of Government Offices in taking forward key elements of the NSNR, particularly regional strategies for skills and knowledge development.

In the early consultations, the study team picked up considerable antipathy towards SRB partnerships by those engaged in the new neighbourhood renewal agendas. The tendency for SRB leadership to rest in the hands of local authority staff did not help in promoting more positive perceptions of their potential contribution to good practice approaches to community-based partnerships. The division of responsibilities between GOs and RDAs was an additional barrier to the embracing of joint networking and learning.

It was therefore important to approach the work incrementally, allowing time for these key uncertainties to work through. Consultations were undertaken in three distinct phases:

Phase 1: February to April 2001

- consultation on relevant national policy initiatives;
- consultation with GOs and RDAs in the nine regions;
- consultation with regeneration practitioners in the regions;
- examination of existing networks.

Phase 2: May to June 2001

- development of draft proposals;
- the organisation of a national consultation seminar.

Phase 3: October to December 2001

- revision of proposals following the consultation seminar;
- further consultations within the regions as in Phase 1;
- development of final recommendations.

The steering group approved this extended period of work in order that the impact of the NRU's Skills & Knowledge Programme (which were not available until Autumn 2001) could be fully incorporated into the final consultations and recommendations.

The position in the regions

The first phase of the study's consultation was to test the relevance and likely contribution of regional networks of regeneration partnerships, and potentially a federated national network.

In February 2001, when the consultations commenced, most of the existing NNRP networks (in six regions) were either RDA co-ordinated or totally voluntary through rotating responsibility. Only two networks (in the North East and North West) were funded (through SRB) and had paid staff. One region, London, had failed to obtain SRB6 funding for network development, and was not active.

Clearly, the ending of further SRB bidding would prevent other networks from pursuing this financing route and there was uncertainty regarding other potential funding sources, and/or the potential for funding through member contributions.

The position in the regions has changed considerably during the period of this feasibility study. While progress in some key developments, such as Regional Centres of Excellence, has been slow, a greater understanding of the neighbourhood renewal agenda has developed during the past year, and the impact of GO staff with specific responsibility for skills and knowledge activities is beginning to take effect.

In all of these changes and developments, the following were the main critical factors at play:

- the diversity of local partnership initiatives and low perception of common interests/agenda between newer initiatives such as NDCs and the SRB partnerships which formed the core of existing partnership networks;
- divided constituencies between RDAs and GOs, and with some RDAs now focusing strongly on sub-regional approaches to delivery;
- the relative infancy of NSNR neighbourhood-based partnerships (most LSPs had not yet completed their Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, but 83% of those consulted in a recent survey (*Follow the Leaders, a survey of local authority approaches to community leadership*, Local Government Association, November 2001) indicated that they will be developing their community strategy at neighbourhood level;
- some were expressing concerns that there are already many networks, giving rise to uncertainties as to the added value of the proposed regeneration networks;
- concerns that the proposed networks would overlap – and potentially duplicate – Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs);
- a concern that developments should be driven regionally, appropriate to particularly regional needs and opportunities, and not imposed by a national body.

The next section of the report summarises the ways in which these concerns, or puzzles, were worked through to a set of proposals which have gained wider support and which, in some regions, are now being taken forward.

2 The contribution of regional regeneration partnership networks

Who is networking and why?

There is a natural tendency to bring regeneration practitioners together in networks according to the ‘programme’ under which they are funded, rather than groupings which relate to the ‘activities’ they are engaged in. This is understandable given the complexity of many of the funding streams. Handling the bureaucracy becomes a major concern for both funded and funder alike. People come together – or are called together – for ease of information sharing, understanding the processes required, and feeding back implementation problems to the funder. This was certainly the root of the regional SRB networks (forming the original basis of the NNRP) which the study team found in the first stage of consultation.

Networks proliferate according to their funding source, so that the study found networks for Surestart Partnerships, networking among Health Action Zones, attempts (successful in the Midlands) to network NDCs, a national network for Neighbourhood Management pilots, to name but a few.

There are also, of course, networks for specific sectors such as the regional voluntary sector and regional black and minority ethnic voluntary sector networks, the Development Trusts Association, RSLs, and so on. In addition there are networks and associations for particular professions such as town planners, housing managers, teachers and health professionals.

An effective regeneration network needs to respond to the broadening range of players now involved, moving beyond local authority staff, to encompass residents and other professionals and agencies.

Clearly networking is a fact of all our working lives.

The range of networks is a complex picture – almost as complex as the range of issues which need to be holistically tackled if neighbourhood regeneration is to achieve

sustainable success. Hence the emphasis of the NSNR Skills and Knowledge Programme is to reach beyond the confines of funding regimes, sectors, and particular professions, to focus on evidence-based strategies, outcomes, and ‘what works’. To achieve the aspirational ‘step-

change' in the skills and knowledge all players bring to bear in delivering services within deprived neighbourhoods, requires everyone to have access to quality learning and information opportunities. No one network can do it all.

Research indicates that regeneration practitioners learn effectively, share good practice and gain important support in their work, through networking and face-to-face contact with others undertaking similar initiatives. Practitioners are more likely to turn to people they know and trust for advice, and to base their views on what they directly hear and see for themselves.

It is evident from this study's consultation, and from other research* that such learning opportunities are highly valued by those involved. We found widespread, although not universal, enthusiasm among practitioners for regional networking and – in some quarters – considerable frustration that their development has not been taken forward more speedily. *(*Learning from the experience of others: policy transfer among local regeneration partnerships*, Harold Wolman and Edward C. Page, JRF 2000; *Improving networks: mapping networks used by regeneration partnerships*, a study by ROOM 2001).

In turn, networks involving those delivering on the ground provide a useful mechanism for vital feedback and commentary to policy-makers and programme sponsors. For example, the NNRP was heavily involved in consultation process around development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) and the Urban White Paper.

Integrating networking across programmes

The first recommendation of this report is that, in future, regeneration partnerships need to network across programmes. There is much benefit to be gained from networking between SRB schemes (particularly the later rounds, 4, 5 & 6) and the new NSNR initiatives (eg the 39 NDC partnerships, and neighbourhood management pilots).

The rationale is that despite the fact that partnerships are working to different funding programmes and different agencies (ie RDAs for SRB and GOs for NSNR), they share contributions to effective action on social exclusion and to knowledge about 'what works'. Similarly many of those consulted felt that networks could usefully access learning from initiatives such as Surestart, Health Action Zones, Children's Fund initiatives, and so on.

There is a need to network across programmes. Each region should consider the potential benefits of developing the existing, largely SRB-based networks, to include partnerships involved in neighbourhood-based regeneration and social inclusion.

This view has been largely supported during the consultation process. While recognising the value of programme-focused networking, it is increasingly understood that the wide range of skills and expertise relevant to effective regeneration and neighbourhood renewal are

less easily shared through such approaches. An integrated approach also offers the potential to bridge the perceived divide between ‘social’ programmes and ‘economic’ programmes (which some practitioners believe to be exacerbated by the division of GO and RDA responsibilities), and access the expertise of both GO and RDA-sponsored initiatives.

The study also considered the fact that there is now a broader range of agencies and staff who are beginning to engage with neighbourhood renewal issues, and local residents themselves play an increasingly prominent role in decision-making and action programmes. An effective network needs to respond to this broadening range of participants and their needs and to the emerging work of community empowerment networks.

The study has also concluded that networks need to expand beyond their current membership of senior programme managers, to engage a wider audience of participants. This could be done by including – within the regional network meetings and events – partnerships’ board members, and staff, and those involved from other agencies.

In addition, networks need to look ahead at the potential implications of the requirement for the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund authorities to prepare and deliver holistic strategies to meet the floor targets set for the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods across England, as indicated in Annex G of the *National Strategy Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal*. All of these initiatives require a ‘holistic’ approach across the range of ‘domains’ (health, crime, employment, skills, education, the physical environment) and are based on a fundamental principal of community partnership and empowerment.

Networks can fulfil a vital role in facilitating exchange on 'domain' issues.

In this way, regional networks can fulfil a vital role in facilitating exchange on 'domain' issues across a wide range of the people whose skills and input are now so important to successful

regeneration practice. The skills needed are no longer so weighted towards managing complex regeneration bureaucracy, but towards the equally – if not more – challenging issues of mainstreaming service improvements and working to neighbourhood-level priorities and accountabilities. Accessing learning from initiatives such as Health Action Zones, Surestart Partnerships and other social inclusion programmes to inform NDC and neighbourhood-based regeneration will bring considerable benefits to improved practices on the ground.

Networks need to expand beyond their current membership of senior programme managers, to engage a wider audience of participants.

Taking these issues into account, the discussion paper produced for the national consultation seminar held in June, described an effective regional network for regeneration practitioners as:

- having a clearly defined membership, but inclusive in approach through offering broader access to many of its services and activities;
- offering support and learning opportunities for those involved in managing or implementing area/neighbourhood regeneration/management;
- participative in the way it conducts its affairs and interacts with other relevant networks and agencies;
- responsive to identified needs on the ground;
- committed to promoting best practice and strengthening skills and competence to achieve effective outcomes.

This description has found favour in the consultations, although as the next section indicates, there are different views about the timescale for implementing some of the other recommendations such as clearly defined memberships and formalised structures.

Consultation also indicates that within these broader networks there will remain a clear need for sub-networks/meetings/events on a programme, sub-regional, or thematic basis. For example, sub-regional approaches would assist in meeting the agendas of those RDAs, which are now moving to sub-regional operations. The proposal envisages a framework which is broad enough to encompass such sub-networks or programme based meetings, many of which currently operate. However, the study team believe that the common interests and support needs across the regions, and economies of scale, make a strong case for a region-wide networking structure.

For example, Regeneration Exchange in the North East is funded by both the RDA (One North East) and GONE, with the latter funding allowing for a full-time post to support NDCs in the region. (See box for further information).

The work of Regeneration Exchange demonstrates the considerable benefits to be gained from an integrated regional network, funded by both the RDA and the GO, able to support and develop shared learning and good practice exchange. Such regional networks can also effectively engage and link with other networks which have key contributions to offer in promoting effective practice. For example, in several regions, the regional voluntary sector networks are already involved in taking forward wider regeneration partnership networking (see Appendix 1 for details).

What should the networks do?

The potential value of the proposed networks under investigation in this study is inextricably entwined with the NRU's interest in supporting activities which promote skills and knowledge among the wide range of individuals and professions now involved in neighbourhood regeneration. Government Offices prepare clear plans each year setting out regional priorities for skills and knowledge work and how they might be addressed. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), as part of their local neighbourhood renewal strategies, prepare local action on learning plans identifying learning needs within their areas.

In addition, there has been a £10 million increase to Community Chest funding in order to help promote residents' and community groups' access to learning and skills development. (See box for the main elements of the NRU's Skills & Knowledge Programme, within which the contribution of networking among regeneration partnerships is given recognition. See www.neighbourhood.dltr.gov.uk/skills/index.htm for access to relevant reports and updates on the NRU's Skills and Knowledge Programme).

Also of relevance in the context of what actions networks should undertake are proposals to establish Regional Centres of Excellence. These were first proposed in the Urban White Paper *Our towns and cities: the future – delivering an urban renaissance* and similarly endorsed in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. With RDAs leading their development, proposals vary across the regions. Some have focused on primarily on ‘physical’ renewal issues, while others are taking a holistic approach embracing social regeneration (see Appendix 1 summarising regional positions for an up-to-date picture of RCEs).

In either case, there is arguably a need for a strong representational voice from regeneration partnerships in order that provision and activities by RCEs can reflect needs on the ground. There are also many areas where a joint approach could be beneficial, such as the provision of information through web sites, and so on.

The approach being taken in the South West is of interest here. The RDA and GOSW are taking a joint approach to development of their RCE, and are exploring a model through which they would bring together the existing RDA-serviced SRB network with the social inclusion network supported by the GO, to form one strand of the work of the RCE, and badged under its auspices.

Taking account of these factors, and of the views obtained during this study’s consultation phases, the following are recommended as appropriate actions and activities for regional networks, depending of course on specific regional circumstances in each case. They all received support during the regional consultations:

Skills and knowledge support:

- issue-based events and working groups;
- support on the operation of funding programmes;
- providing support on problems facing practitioners;
- organising visits and face-to-face exchange;
- support/advice to partnerships experiencing difficulty;
- information dissemination through newsletter/web site (noted potential link with Centres of Excellence);
- providing advice/signposting services;
- advice on training to appropriate bodies;
- assisting NRU with content for their knowledge management web system;
- assisting in identifying face-to-face advisers (eg for regional panels of advisers).

Regeneration Exchange: the regional network in the North East

Vision statement:

“To increase the capacity of regeneration partnerships, partner groups and agencies to deliver initiatives more effectively through developing networks and structures for sharing information, exchanging skills and promoting good practice.”

Over the past year, the project’s main activities have included:

- organising seven seminars and events;
- provision of information and advice; signposting and dissemination service (since establishing their new database in July 2001, 153 phone and email requests have been logged);
- organising four fact-finding study visits;
- supporting ten capacity building initiatives with community and voluntary groups (including BECON, Voices Sunderland and the Princes Trust);
- providing support to New Deal for Communities Partnerships Network, including three meetings for the NDC residents panel;
- facilitating a housing best practice seminar for NDC partnerships;
- co-working and liaison with regional and national organisations on regeneration themes;
- supporting community groups and individuals as intermediary body on Community Champions Awards Scheme (54 awards processed);
- bi-monthly newsletters distributed to 500+ contacts
- establishing three working groups on specific themes;
- starting development of website: www.regenerationexchange.org;
- partnered in discussions with GO North East to support establishment of Regional Panel of Advisers.

Regeneration Exchange operates under the auspices of Sunderland City Council through SRB funding arrangements. It has offices in both Sunderland and Middlesbrough. It is managed through a steering group of 15 members (includes primarily local authority senior SRB practitioners, NDC (four in the region) and two voluntary sector; GO and RDA also attend.

Regeneration Exchange is jointly funded by both GO *North East* (from their NDC budget) and One Northeast (the RDA) through SRB.

There is no formal membership structure. Mailing list of direct contacts is currently over 500.

NRU actions to promote skills and knowledge

- developing the capacity to provide reliable 'good practice' information on-line, covering all aspects of neighbourhood renewal
- providing good quality face-to-face advice to help people apply good practice information, and to encourage less formal sharing of knowledge of what works and what doesn't (eg regional panels of advisers)
- promoting better networking between individuals and groups involved in neighbourhood renewal
- promoting more evidence-based practice
- developing a learning and development strategy for neighbourhood renewal
- understanding and promoting core competencies needed by the different partners and sectors engaged in neighbourhood renewal
- residents consultancy (currently funding six pilot schemes)
- Community Learning Chests (from April 2002)

See www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/skills/index.htm for access to relevant reports and updates on the NRU's Skills and Knowledge Programme

Consultation/representation:

- trouble-shooting on programmes;
- being a vehicle for feedback and consultation on regional/national policy issues;
- advice to other bodies (eg regional centres of excellence).

Actions which received less support, or which were rejected (mainly because of concerns about duplication) included:

- direct provision of training;
- production of 'tool-kits' and 'how-to' guides;
- kite-marking/best practice evaluation;
- commissioning of research.

It is also apparent that regional networks can contribute effectively to some

It is beneficial to GOs to be able to subcontract out some of the tasks required to deliver skills and knowledge programmes, such as regional panels of advisers.

of the other tasks facing GOs in development of regional skills and knowledge programmes. For example, Regeneration Exchange in the North East is working with their Government Office on establishing the regional panel of advisers.

Membership

While the proposed regional networks should aim to be inclusive in their approach, the consultation proposals put forward in June 2001 recommended that they also needed focus in order to grow strong, representative and to add most value. It was suggested that they would benefit from the ‘authority’ that a clearly defined membership allows (also vital for delivering responsive services, and for enabling accountable organisational and management structures).

It has proved extremely difficult to be prescriptive about which type of organisations should be eligible for membership of a network focused on integrated approaches to area-based regeneration. There is no one way to regenerate an area. Everyone is dealing increasingly with fuzzy sets and boundaries where initiatives are more or less area-based, more or less holistic, more or less engaged in partnership working and so on.

The study team therefore explored whether there was preference for membership by individual, or by partnership bodies themselves. Preference was for the latter, because consultations indicated that what was most required was a form of ‘association’ for regeneration partnerships, rather than a ‘professional body’ for practitioners. There has been much debate recently about the lack of a professional body for regeneration practitioners, but the wide-range of professions, skills and competencies involved in regeneration, and the critical role of residents’ involvement, have militated against support for such professionalisation.

So the study team recommended a two tier approach:

- a **core membership** of regeneration partnership bodies, co-ordinating or delivering an area or neighbourhood-based multi-issue (ie holistic) regeneration or management programmes; and
- an **associate membership** of organisations or individuals involved in delivering projects as part of area/neighbourhood-based regeneration or management programmes

However, regional consultation indicated reluctance to move to strict definitions of membership. There were concerns that the recommendations for core and associate membership might jeopardise an inclusive approach. Those involved in promoting active networks are keenest on reaching a wide spread of beneficiaries in order to promote maximum opportunities for learning and practice-exchange.

Formal membership

Recommended by the Study Team, but felt to be unhelpful in the short-term by those consulted; the priority is to first establish effective networks in all the regions; but recognised as an important stage in future development.

Incorporation

Consultees also felt this to be unnecessary in the short-term, but the Study Teams advises that this may become important for networks if they receive funding as 'hosting' arrangements for staff and accommodation may not necessarily be available.

Federation

The consultation response was unanimously in favour of a federated national structure, with the nine regional networks to form the membership of a national network; however, it was felt premature to pursue such an approach until regional networks are more generally established.

The current, relative fluidity and accessibility of the networks is viewed as a major factor in achieving this. Referring to 'beneficiaries' is preferred, rather than the concept of 'members'. Therefore there is still reluctance to move towards more formal membership structures and incorporation, unless this becomes absolutely necessary to achieve future funding, or to improve effectiveness. The time and difficulty involved in such development would, it is felt, detract from the currently more important task, in their view, of achieving a strong regional profile and large active participant base.

The 'sector' of regeneration partnerships at neighbourhood level (over and above SRB) is relatively young and relatively unknown. There may be a variety of organisational 'types'. This raised questions in the minds of some of the stakeholders consulted as to whether another *formal* organisation is really required, even though the consultation indicated widespread support for the value of networking and shared learning. Many felt that the currently adopted, more flexible approach allows for maximum co-operation and involvement with other networks, such as regional voluntary sector bodies, etc. It also allows for the development of clearer relationships with RCEs as these themselves move forward into implementation.

The issue of membership definition therefore remains unresolved, pending further work on the issue among practitioners at regional level. The consensus view was that membership definition may become more

important as networks become more developed, and take on a more defined role.

If and when this happens, the study team recommends that core membership by independent neighbourhood regeneration partnership organisations (the option which found most favour during consultation) would be the most appropriate. It targets a key sector which does not currently have access to a network, or voice, specifically geared to its needs and tasks. It is also a sector which will grow and further develop as focus shifts to neighbourhood regeneration strategies and neighbourhood management approaches.

Finally, a number of consultees raised the question of membership by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The recommendation above, if adopted, would preclude LSP membership, but include the partnership bodies that were delivering under LSP strategies. However, this issue is likely to require further consideration at regional levels as part of the next stages of development (see section 3).

Organisational structures

None of the existing regional networks are legally incorporated. The original consultation proposals suggested that it would be preferable for the networks to be formally constituted, particularly if they were to receive funding directly in their own right.

Furthermore, if networks were intending to take on their own administrative and employment responsibilities then there should preferably be some form of incorporation in order to protect the liability of management committee members. Because of their genesis under SRB programmes, the two funded networks (in the North East and North West) are 'hosted' under existing SRB accountable bodies (local authorities). While such arrangements are administratively attractive, if the networks were to develop as outlined above, the study team concluded that such arrangements were not advisable in the long-term.

Incorporation may therefore become necessary; and indeed may be advisable at a relatively early stage for networks establishing in the other regions where SRB-hosting arrangements will not apply. However, the different regional circumstances will offer different solutions and the study consultation indicates that regeneration practitioners need, and want, more time to consider the issue in the light of developments over the next year or so.

Federating nationally

In considering proposals for a national representative structure for the networks, the consultation response was unanimously in favour of a federated structure, with the nine regional networks to form the membership. However, there were concerns that forming the national structure before networks have been properly established in the majority of the regions could lead to a centralised/top down approach.

The initial priority should be facilitation of strong networks in all regions. Consideration of the functions of the national body should take place at a later stage when it can be regionally driven and the implications of changes to regeneration funding and approaches currently underway are more fully understood.

The strong desire on the part of nearly everyone for a regionally-driven approach was one of the strongest aspects to emerge from the consultations. While it was accepted that it will be useful for regional network representatives to meet together regularly on a national basis, it

Nearly everyone consulted stressed the necessity for network development to be regionally-driven; any top down or nationally-imposed approach would be resisted.

was felt that these arrangements should remain informal for the time being.

There were therefore concerns raised in relation to the study team's original proposal regarding the provision of

support to the regions through a small national development team. The preference is for a 'light' central touch (described as a hand-holding role by one GO officer) with the main drivers clearly owned at regional level.

Taking these views into account, the next section of this report examines proposals for a development phase, concentrated on establishing strong networks in all nine regions.

3 Recommendations for the development phase

The current regional position

Only two regions currently have established, funded networks in operation:

- North East
- North West

However, as indicated in Section 3, enthusiasm for the value of networking among regeneration partnerships has grown during the period of this study, largely as a result of NSNR skills and knowledge approaches in the GOs. Network development is under active consideration in a further three regions (the South East is currently out to tender on a detailed feasibility study):

- South East
- East
- South West

There are three further regions where there is some support for network development, with further consultation/discussion taking place – although at the current time there is uncertainty about the degree of priority which network development might take and its relationship to other initiatives such as RCEs and other networks:

- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire & Humberside

In London there have been practical difficulties in taking a network initiative forward – largely due to the complexity of the London situation, the later development of the RDA's role in comparison to other regions, and the scale of activity given the large number of SRBs, NRF authorities and NDCs within the capital. GO London is currently exploring the potential value of commencing with networking activity for the ten NDC partnerships and recently commissioned an independent study of their training needs.

The Appendix Table at the end of this report provides a summary of the current position in all nine regions as at the end of February 2002.

Funding for networks

The North East and the North West are clearly in the strongest position currently. Their networks have funding for paid staff. Securing paid staff able to take forward development of the networks moves networks into a very different scale, and quality, of activity, and provides considerable impetus to network development.

Regeneration Exchange in the North East is particularly strong at the current time, given the broad range of activities under its remit (encompassing SRB, NDC, a range of community-based regeneration activities and involvement in the regional panel of advisers).

It would not be appropriate for this study to recommend levels of funding for regional networks as requirements will depend on the level of staffing, activity and hosting arrangements. Also, regions face a number of options for their development: eg through consultancy, through the provision of servicing support, or through grant or contract provision. As a guide, Regeneration Exchange operates on an budget of approximately £140,000 (three full time staff); the North West Regeneration Network on approximately £100,000 (two full time staff).

At regional level, potential funders remain primarily GOs and RDAs. Elsewhere in this report, the case is made for joint support to regional networking by both agencies in the regions. However, several RDAs report difficulties with accessing revenue funds at the current time – and are dealing with other priorities. GOs are less constrained, and some are considering utilising resources under their skills and knowledge programme to take forward network development support.

Joint support, and preferably funding, by both GOs and RDAs is recommended for integrated regeneration networks across SRB and neighbourhood renewal.

Consultees' views on the potential for membership contributions to provide income to networks were based on the reactions against implementing firm membership criteria in the immediate future (see previous

section, pages 22-24). Therefore there was limited support for membership charges and they were perceived as detracting from the primary aim of attracting widespread involvement and a wide range of network beneficiaries.

The scope for further funding, or contributions to network activities, from other resources available for skills and learning (eg LSP learning plans, Community Chests etc.) is not immediately clear given the newness of these approaches. There is a range of agencies (local authorities being but one) who could potentially benefit from the existence of an effective regional regeneration network, and who might consider contributions in the future, possibly as part of local learning plans.

Similarly, in some regions, the network's contribution to the work – or in some instances the structures – of regional centres of excellence may be a route to funding, either directly or on a contracting basis.

The study team advises that in nearly all instances, the issues of formal incorporation and accountability will be pertinent to funding options, particularly those based on contracting arrangements. Despite practitioners' reluctance to address this issue at this time, circumstances may well dictate that the matter is considered further at an early stage in regional network development or feasibility studies.

Supporting regional development

The study consultation indicates different levels of support for network development to take place at regional level at this time, with their structure and focus to be firmly determined by each region's circumstances and requirements.

It appears that there is certainty of network development activity across three regions over the coming period (plus on-going development in the two regions with funded networks established), and potential in a further three, provided current uncertainties can be addressed.

Network development involves GOs, RDAs and other key regional players such as existing voluntary sector regional bodies, in joint feasibility and planning studies. Those regions which are furthest ahead in thinking through development requirements, are intending to let consultancy contracts to drive the process forward (eg the South East).

The steering group which has overseen this study, is keen to ensure that continued support is available during this time. There will be common issues to address and a need to ensure continued learning and sharing across the regions. They have therefore committed themselves to a two year development phase. The aim of this phase would be:

- to facilitate support and help to those involved in developing regional networks;
- to maintain an overview of how networks are developing in the regions;
- to support national meetings of regional network representatives;
- to evaluate network's contribution to the Skills and Knowledge Programme in the regions;
- on the basis of progress and experience over the two years and the evaluation results, to consider future development and funding options, including the potential for a national network.

The study team recommended that this next phase would benefit from worker support. The NRU is therefore considering recruitment, or secondment, to a two year post to provide assistance with network development in the regions, helping to maintain momentum, and ensure that progress is evaluated. This post would also service regular national meetings of regional representatives, and undertake evaluation of the development phase as actions are taken forward in the regions. (See box for details.) Location of this function within the NRU is proposed in order to ensure maximum synergy with development of the skills and knowledge programme and ease of liaison across regions.

The work of the development phase will be overseen by a reconstituted steering group comprising:

Development phase steering group

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit:	2 reps
Department for Trade & Industry:	1 rep
Joseph Rowntree Foundation:	1 rep
Urban Forum:	1 rep
Regional Networks:	4 reps
Government Offices:	1 rep
Regional Development Agencies:	1 rep
Regional Co-ordination Unit:	papers only
Urban Policy Unit:	papers only

Establishing a quality framework

The study team originally proposed incremental development of networks across all nine regions over a three year time span, and within this plan, suggested that there should be early development of a 'quality standards framework' under which networks would seek registration, or badging.

Regeneration partnerships: development co-ordination

Main purpose of assignment:

To work with regeneration practitioners, Government Offices and RDAs in the English regions to support the development of regionally-based regeneration partnership networks as part of promoting Skills and Knowledge under the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

1. To work alongside those who are working to establish funded regeneration partnerships in their regions. Advice may be required on:
 - appropriate documentation;
 - staffing and budgets;
 - approaches taken in other regions;
 - issues of membership and incorporation;
 - network ‘hosting’ or interim management arrangements;
 - activities and good practice exchange;
 - appropriate targets and evaluation of impact.
2. To maintain contact with GOs, RDAs, regeneration partnerships and RCEs as appropriate within those regions who are not immediately involved in network development.
3. To liaise with existing funded networks in the North East and North West, particularly in relation to issues of management, funding, membership, activities, and role within Skills and Knowledge programme.
4. To co-ordinate and service national meetings of representatives from the regions on a quarterly basis.
5. To co-ordinate and service meetings of the steering group, providing regular reports on network development progress.
6. To produce an evaluation framework to assess, annually, in partnership with GOs and RDAs, the regional networks’ contribution to the regional skills and knowledge programmes.
7. To produce and circulate to all relevant parties a quarterly report of regional progress and network activities.
8. To co-ordinate an annual conference for regional networks and their funders/stakeholders (which may form part of the National Regeneration Convention).
9. To work, in partnership with regional networks, on options for future funding and development, including the potential for federation as a national network.
10. To maintain familiarity with skills and knowledge activities both nationally and across the regions, other associated networks, and the needs of regeneration partnerships generally.
11. To undertake any other tasks as required by the steering group.

This suggestion was made in response to concern, evident among many of the potential funding bodies, that the networks must be able to demonstrate their value to the skills and knowledge programme. The concern was that they should not become predominantly networks for people to deal with scheme bureaucracy, or for lobbying policy makers.

This concern remains. However, responses to the proposals regarding a quality standards framework were not positively received among practitioners. There were fears that such an approach indicated a top-down approach when what is required, in their view, is a regionally-driven approach. Not all networks will be established in the same way, under the same organisational arrangements, or necessarily carry out the same tasks.

The primary conclusion of the study is that there is sufficient support for the contribution of regional networks to propose further development, but not – at present – to establish a national network under a federated system. Therefore, it is not appropriate for the study team to put forward a standard model for delivery, organisational systems, or quality standard. Each network will take its own approach, as determined by regional circumstances.

However, the quality and focus of the networks will remain an issue. Early consideration of these matters is recommended as part of the evaluation work proposed for the national development support worker (see above) which will need to establish key criteria for assessing the contribution of networks to skills and knowledge programmes in their regions. It is anticipated that such criteria would need to include, as a minimum, issues such as:

- numbers of people attending events;
- the range of people attending events (eg residents, staff, board members etc.);
- the types of events held and range of issues addressed;
- qualitative feedback on the nature and usefulness of learning achieved;
- the impact of learning on actual working practice.

Development phase outcomes

The study team were originally tasked with recommending a framework for establishing a national network, based on nine regional networks. As consultation progressed, it became clear that those in the regions wished to proceed more slowly, and, furthermore, to ensure that regional networks were established according to regional circumstance, and not on a

prescribed national model. The study team concludes that, given regional variation, particularly on issues such as the role of other networks, approaches on regional centres of excellence and so on, that a regionally-driven process is the only appropriate way forward.

This means that the nature, degree of formalisation and relationship with other organisations is likely to vary region by region and, correspondingly, that tightly drawn outcomes are hard to define. In the light of this we propose the following overall set of outcomes from the development phase:

- there will be active, integrated regeneration partnership networks in all nine regions, as appropriate, by the end of the two-year period;
- an evaluation of their contribution to Skills & Knowledge programmes, will have been undertaken, preferably based on a quality standards framework;
- they will have made an identifiable contribution to raising the skills and knowledge levels of participants in regeneration in those regions;
- a decision will have been reached on the potential for a federated national network for regeneration partnerships.

Appendix 1
(Regional position
summary at February
2002)

Existing SRB/NDC networks	Funding	Staff
<p>NORTH EAST</p> <p>Regeneration Exchange</p>	<p>RDA funding comes through SRB under the auspices of Sunderland. GO also fund under NDC budget (£30k pa for 3 yrs). Both GO and RDA very positive towards Network and importance of their joint involvement. GO contracting to establish Regional Panels of Advisers.</p>	<p>1 f/t Co-ordinator; 1 p/t admin; 1 f/t Development Worker for NDC</p>
<p>LONDON</p> <p>No Network currently meeting.</p>	<p>SRB6 bid not successful</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>SOUTH WEST</p> <p>SRB network co-ordinated by the RDA Social Inclusion Network co-ordinated by GOSW.</p>	<p>–</p>	<p>–</p>

Current focus and activities	General observations
<p>The Steering Group has 15 members (includes primarily local authority senior SRB practitioners, NDC (4 in the region; 2 regularly attend) and 2 vol. sector; GO and RDA also attend.</p> <p>There is no formal membership structure. Mailing list currently over 500, but contacts increasing rapidly as events programme develops.</p> <p>Activities include partnership networking and feedback meetings, a wide-ranging programme of events, many of which are focussed at community members and organisations, project visits, a newsletter, and sub-groups working on particular issues such as “best value in regeneration”. Also used for general advice and help (by telephone).</p> <p>Website: www.regenerationexchange.org</p>	<p>This is the most developed network, with secure funding, regular programme of activities, newsletter and strong local profile. There appears to be an emphasis on community development approaches and attention to community capacity building.</p> <p>Events and services are provided free of charge, and often in response to demand. Charging felt to be potentially exclusionary and might lead to loss of credibility with communities.</p> <p>Unusually, the Network has also been given responsibility by GO for distribution of some of their Community Champions funding in recognition of the strong contacts being formed with grassroots community organisations.</p> <p>More recently GO is working with RE to support Regional Panels of Advisers and may sub-contract this activity to them.</p> <p>Regional Centre of Excellence at early stages of enquiry.</p>
<p>There are some sub-regional initiatives in relation to networking and GOL considering potential value of a networking for the 10 London NDCs. Neighbourhood management initiatives and Community Empowerment Networks.</p>	<p>Representatives from the London Development Agency and GOLondon generally positive in their views about the benefits of a network for practitioners covering both NDC, SRB and other initiatives but complexity and scale of London situation obstructing development currently. LDA commissioned study on Regional Centre of Excellence, potentially to be delivered by a consortium of organisations, with 4 key roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing understanding of skills set required by the full spectrum of regeneration professionals and matching supply; - acting as hub to a network of regeneration agencies; - referral service for advice/guidance; - collation and dissemination of best practice.
<p>GO and RDA working jointly on proposals to develop a network for all regeneration initiatives as part of proposals to establish a Regional Centre of Excellence. Practitioners from both the existing RDA-serviced SRB meetings, and the regional Social Inclusion Forum would be initial focus for new network. Meeting in March to discuss and develop further.</p>	<p>The largest, and most rural of the regions. Only two NDCs, two NM pathfinders and four NRF areas. RDA have new Towns and Coastal Cities initiative.</p>

Existing SRB/NDC networks	Funding	Staff
<p>WEST MIDLANDS</p> <p>SRB Network</p> <p>NDC Network (East & West Midlands)</p>	<p>Neither the SRB or NDC networks are funded by GO, or RDA</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>Meetings organised by SRB partnership members on a rotational basis and all other activities voluntary.</p>
<p>EAST MIDLANDS</p> <p>SRB Network</p> <p>NDC Network (East & West Midlands)</p>	<p>Not RDA funded. GO sympathetic but not clear on level of demand</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>Derby City currently act as secretariat</p>
<p>YORKS & HUMBER</p> <p>SRB network</p>	<p>No funding. RDA more interested in sub-regional than regional approaches.</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>Meetings organised by SRB partnership members on a rotational basis.</p>

Current focus and activities	General observations
<p>Network members mainly larger local authority SRB managers.</p> <p>Previously quarterly meetings, but becoming more irregular as some key players have moved on. Issues cover mainly feedback and discussion/info exchange with RDA and broad strategic regeneration issues.</p> <p>GOWM supports, in tandem with GOEM, a network for NDCs in the East & West Midlands which meets bi-monthly and which is very community/resident focused. This network not positive at suggestion of contact with SRB Network (which residents see as a very different programme, very bureaucratic and local authority focused).</p>	<p>Key players in the WM SRB network have moved on during the period of our enquiries and there does not appear to be a strong champion at the present time.</p> <p>GOWM is calling a meeting in April of interested parties to consider the implications of the feasibility work and seek views on the approach to be taken as appropriate for the region.</p> <p>RDA has commissioned a feasibility study into establishing a Regional Centre of Excellence. The brief indicates that the intention is to develop a broad-based Centre to provide a sustained, co-ordinated approach towards supporting the professional development and skills of regeneration practitioners and promoting exchange of best practice.</p>
<p>SRB Network meets quarterly and is broadly representative of large and small programmes. Mainly detailed discussion on SRB issues, and broader regeneration issues (eg presentation from Braunstone NDC).</p> <p>GOEM supports, in tandem with GOWM, at network for NDCs in the East & West Midlands – see above</p>	<p>SRB network keen to move forward; no funding from GO or RDA at present. ENGAGE, the regional voluntary/community sector network is actively involved.</p> <p>RDA has commissioned Regional Centre of Excellence feasibility study.</p>
<p>Exchange of information/discussion about regeneration policies, programmes and strategies. Practitioners now seeking to broaden the network, and some NDC partnerships have been attending.</p>	<p>RDA now focused on sub-regional agenda.</p> <p>GO staff working on Skills & Knowledge issues are new to position and will be considering network potential in the light of this report.</p> <p>There is still practitioner enthusiasm to secure funding for the network, but frustration at the lack of progress and continued uncertainty.</p> <p>Yorkshire Forward conducting feasibility study on Regional Centre of Excellence.</p>

Existing SRB/NDC networks	Funding	Staff
<p>EAST OF ENGLAND</p> <p>SRB network</p>	<p>Not funded.</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>EEDA has organised on an as-and-when basis.</p>
<p>NORTH WEST</p> <p>SRB network</p> <p>NDC network (for six NDCs)</p>	<p>Budget of £320k over 3 years (£250k from SRB6).</p> <p>Each NDC takes responsibility to host meetings in rotation.</p> <p>GONW has offered to pay for 0.5 network co-ordinator.</p>	<p>1 f/t Co-ordinator; 1 f/t admin (tba);</p> <p>Staff are line managed through Wigan MBC and accountable to Management Group.</p>
<p>SOUTH EAST</p> <p>No networks currently.</p>	<p>GOSE and SEEDA are keen to explore establishing a network for the South East and have jointly agreed a consultancy brief (currently out to tender) to further the scope, remit and organisational arrangements.</p>	<p>—</p>

Current focus and activities	General observations
<p>The primary focus has been information exchange between SRB officers, development of good practice and 2-way exchange with RDA. It is anticipated that this will become sub-set of the proposed Social Inclusion Network.</p> <p>A Steering Group which includes GOEast, EEDA, COVER (voluntary sector) and representatives of SRB and Community Forums, has been established to develop a regional Social Inclusion Network, and funding for development phase is being explored.</p>	<p>The region is large and diverse, with very rural and isolated communities (similar to South West). 40+ SRB partnerships and two NRF and NDC areas.</p> <p>Initial proposal for Regional Centre of Excellence covering South East, London and East Region did not meet local needs. Alternative approaches being explored.</p>
<p>The RDA initially championed the development of this network for SRB partnerships. It changed its name just prior to the Launch conference held in April 2001 and has subsequently reviewed its priorities. Main themes are training, dissemination of good practice, raising profile of regeneration within the region. Produces newsletter.</p> <p>Management Group comprises 12 members, two from each of the five sub-regions (counties), RDA and host SRB.</p> <p>NDC Network includes both staff and community members (they meet separately in the morning and then together for lunch and pm session).</p>	<p>Region covers five counties and includes both remote rural communities and major conurbations. It includes six NDCs and over 100 SRB partnerships.</p> <p>The RDA is committed to establishing a Regional Centre of Excellence and has funded development work based at Salford University. The business plan is currently under review and the potential of EU matched funding is being re-visited.</p> <p>Regional NDC network valued but without central resource there are ongoing difficulties with respect to overall direction as well as consistency and continuity.</p>
<p>GO used to run a forum for the 70 SRB partnerships up until two years ago when responsibility transferred to SEEDA.</p> <p>There is a seven year, £5.2M SRB6 community development and training network for a range of South East organisations engaged in regeneration, including universities, local authorities, community and voluntary organisations, health authority, et al.</p> <p>There are two NDCs in the region, and four NRF authorities (two overlapping with NDC). So again, as with East of England, the infrastructure costs of establishing a network for such a small group of initiatives are too high, hence joint GOSE/SEEDA support for a wider practitioner network.</p>	<p>Report on Regional Centre of Excellence recently submitted. Concentrating on established professionals and universities and physical development. Not in conflict with proposed practitioner network; linkages will need to be established.</p>

Appendix 2

June consultation seminar

Key consultation questions and seminar responses

Morning workshops

(In the morning participants were split into separated groups: practitioners, and administrators/policy, eg GOs and RDAs; in the afternoon, the workshop groups were mixed).

1. Feedback on proposed functions/activities

- (a) Broadly okay, but concerns about the suggested development of kite-marking/best practice assessment (see 4 below).
- (b) Broad consensus that networks should not attempt to be training providers, but certainly should play a strong role in advice to such providers.
- (c) Some concerns that too many activities had been suggested; important to prioritise (up to regions).
- (d) Acknowledgement that the funders will have views on priority activities.
- (e) Overlap with emerging Centres of Excellence was noted, particularly issues like web sites/information, training, networking events, etc.

2. Feedback on proposed membership/constituency

- (a) Support for a practitioner-based network, but care is needed on the perceived danger of local authority staff dominance arising from existing SRB arrangements. Support for membership involving all board players, especially residents – ie it must not only be for professional, paid staff.
- (b) Broadly accepted that “partnership” membership is right, but some concerns that the proposed membership criteria are too prescriptive and might miss other important partnerships and regeneration activities. The “associate” membership option which allows for this, potentially undermines the proposed “inclusive” ethos as it implies some sort of hierarchy. Correspondingly, it was recognised that with too much “inclusivity”, the process would become unmanageable.
- (c) Some felt that the “associate” option was too complex. Need more clarity on how exactly core members will benefit; what will they get that associates don’t? Important to achieve wide buy-in to associate membership if it is to be the mechanism through which a wider net of beneficiaries are drawn in. How will associate membership be made an attractive option?

- (d) Some queried whether formal membership is needed; perhaps more appropriate to speak of “beneficiaries”. However, it was broadly accepted that if the networks are moving to independence, and the employment of staff, then a formal membership (of a carefully defined constituency) becomes necessary.
- (e) Many expressed concerns about the problems of one network for very large regions and felt that sub-regional approach may have to be further explored. In one workshop, it was even suggested that networks should be formed along LSP boundaries.
- (f) Also views expressed that who/what should form the membership is best defined at regional level, not nationally imposed.
- (g) Acknowledgement that funders will have views about who the members/beneficiaries should be.
- (h) In one workshop, it was suggested that LSPs should be allowed to be members, particularly perhaps those not eligible for NRF but still struggling to address problem neighbourhoods. Others, however, were not supportive of this, particularly because of local authority domination and the need for an emphasis on practitioners.
- (i) Some concerns expressed about the viability of charging membership fees. Acknowledged that “buy-in” important, but could be a barrier to membership.
- (j) Some felt the emphasis on membership definition was inappropriate where regional networks are struggling to form. The key driver should be the network’s “activities”, through which the membership would emerge.

3. Feedback on proposals for independence and formal incorporation

- (a) Advantages of current hosting arrangements acknowledged (ie free to get on with job and not worry about organisational issues etc.) but general support for the desirability of moving to independence. It was suggested the most important thing is to get the networks set-up, and then move to the formalities of incorporation.
- (b) Support for independence stemmed mainly from delegates’ acknowledgement that members must feel confident that it is “safe” to open-up about effectiveness and problems being encountered.
- (c) Also advantages for staff in terms of perception; if they are local authority staff there may be issues about accountability/freedom to act.

Delegate list (in alphabetical order by first name)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
Andrew D'Ath	Tyne Wear Partnership
Angela Hammond	Government Office for the South East
Anne Geary	Neighbourhood Renewal Team Government Office for the South West
Betty Wheallans	Regeneration Exchange
Brian Gash	Gloucestershire Drugs Initiative
Caroline Bond	Urban Forum
Charlotte O'Connor	Radford & Hyson Green NDC
David Harper	East Midlands Development Agency
David Rayner	Urban Policy Unit, DTLR
Denise Anderton	Hull City Vision
Diane Burrige	Cityside Regeneration
Dominic Murphy	Senior Policy Adviser, NRU
Eileen Macdonald	Government Office for the South East
Emma Watson	Weston-super-Mare Regeneration Partnership
Emmanuel Ohajah	Hyena Ltd
Graham Duncan	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, DTLR
James Blake	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, DTLR
Jan Anderson	DETR Urban Policy Unit
John Low	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Katharine Woods	London Development Agency
Malcolm Kennedy	Northwest Development Agency
Margaret Cross	Government Office for the North West
Marie Duffield	Government Office for the West Midlands
Melanie Alker	Government Office for the East Midlands
Nike Shadiya	Regional Co-ordination Unit
Pat Tempany	South East England Development Agency
Paul Weiss	Tilbury PORT I & II Partnership
Pauline Davis	Radford & Hyson Green NDC
Peggotty Hutton	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, DTLR
Robin Thompson	Renaissance London
Roger Vaughan	South West RDA
Simon Slater	Forum for the Future
Stephen Hewitt	Hartcliffe & Withywood Community Partnership
Stuart Green	Owton Rossmere Partnership
Sue Hay	NHS Executive Eastern
Sue Hendrick	Luton Dunstable Partnership
Sue Rees	Neighbourhood Renewal Team Government Office for the South West
Sufrana Ismail	North West Regeneration Network
Tim Pain	Sunderland
Tom Smyth	Government Office for the North East

- (d) Some concerns that if funding for the networks comes principally through government agencies (RDAs/GOs) that the networks may not be perceived as independent.

4. Feedback on potential contribution of the networks to regeneration skills development/best practice exchange

- (a) It would be helpful for the networks to encourage the sharing of mistakes, and acknowledge the differences between areas (ie what works in one neighbourhood won't necessarily work elsewhere).
- (b) Support for the desirability of a practitioner-based network contributing to regional expertise to support and assist policy-makers.
- (c) Important for the networks to offer ways of working on specific issues, bringing people together on specific regeneration programmes, activities etc.
- (d) Inevitably, concerns expressed about duplication with other networks. Again, it was suggested that a flexible approach was needed, recognising that different networks are stronger in (or exist in) some regions and not others, resulting in different requirements.
- (e) Ditto overlap with Regional Centres of Excellence where the approach taken by these new bodies appears to be very varied across the regions.

Afternoon workshops

1. Feedback on options for a federated structure

- (a) Delegates favoured the option whereby membership of the national structure is through the 9 regional networks, rather than by individual partnership members. No support was expressed for the membership option by individual partnerships.

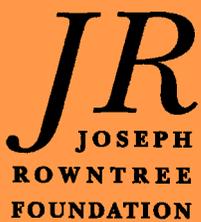
2. Feedback on proposed functions/activities of the National Network Body

- (a) Overall, the activities proposed in the consultation report were felt to be appropriate, particularly representation of key issues at national level/feedback etc. However, another workshop queried the advantage of one national voice over nine regional ones.
- (b) Those areas where there was less agreement included information dissemination (being done by others?), the provision of training, commissioning research (too expensive), benchmarking and development of "how to" guides (being done by others?).

- (c) There was support for the cross-regional networking/exchange that a national grouping would allow for, as good practice on key issues is not always available within individual regions.
- (d) National or regionally-grouped events based on specific “themes” might help the smaller regions, eg where there are only 2 or 3 NDC partnerships.
- (e) Some felt the menu of activities too broad (aspirational) for the staffing level proposed. Priorities must be driven by the regions.

3. Feedback on network development options

- (a) There was broad consensus that the regional networks should drive the national body, not the other way round. Therefore there were concerns about the proposed development timetable given that the networks were weak/non-existent in some regions. The priority should be facilitation of strong networks in all regions, and then move to consider the agenda/functions of the national body, otherwise the national agenda could be driven by the stronger regions.
- (b) Concerns were expressed about capacity/interest in taking responsibility for establishing a network in some regions. Considerable development work is required and the priority should be making help available to get regional networks established so that the national network development can be regionally driven and regionally responsive. Establishing the national body should not therefore be the main priority at this stage. What is needed was described by one workshop as a “babysitting service”, helping regional networks to grow strong.
- (c) Proposals for quality standards for the formal recognition of regional networks raised concerns focused mainly on standards being “imposed” nationally, rather than agreed regionally. It was recognised that a quality standard of some sort is helpful in obtaining funding, but the process must be organic and recognise regional circumstance.



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