

# Regional agencies and area-based regeneration

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# Abbreviations

AWM	Advantage West Midlands
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EEDA	East of England Development Agency
EMDA	East Midlands Development Agency
GDP	gross domestic product
GOR	Government Office(s) for the Region(s)
NDPB	Non-departmental public body
NWDA	North West Development Agency
ONE	One North East
RDA	Regional development agency
RPG	Regional Planning Guidance
RS	Regional strategy(ies)
RSA	Regional Selective Assistance
SEEDA	South East of England Development Agency
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
SWERDA	South West of England Regional Development Agency
Y-F	Yorkshire-Forward: the Yorkshire and Humber RDA

# Executive summary

Regional development agencies (RDAs) were established as non-departmental public bodies in April 1999 with a wide remit to promote the economic wellbeing of the English regions in ways consistent with the goals of sustainable development and social inclusion. The political agenda against which their creation can be understood can be read either as an attempt to address interregional and intraregional socioeconomic disparities or as a decisive step in developing effective governance at the regional scale.

Interim findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study of regional development agencies have been based on analysis of the relatively few documents so far published by the RDAs since they were formally established in April 1999, together with an extensive schedule of interviews with relevant participants (excluding the special case of London). Those interviewed have included board members, RDA strategy officers, regional chamber representatives, senior staff in government regional offices, chair people and chief executives. Even at this very early stage, some valuable findings have begun to emerge.

## Composition

The composition of the board membership has been the issue that initially attracted most public attention. The boards have proved to be 'business-led' and many members have prior experience in public-private partnerships. Much of the early effort of the RDAs has been to establish effective working arrangements at board and executive level. Staff (varying in size from 220 to less than 100) have largely been appointed from existing agencies whose functions have been

absorbed into the RDAs, but new appointments have also been made. The logistical and administrative tasks of ensuring continuity, vigilance and effectiveness in managing the many inherited ongoing contracts have been a significant early test of the competence of the RDAs.

## Implementation

The speed with which RDAs have begun to develop economic strategies and crystallise their position in their regional area has varied. Those regions in which RDAs appear furthest developed include the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and – to a lesser extent – the North West and West and East Midlands; those in which the process remains relatively embryonic include the South East, East of England and – particularly – the South West. While the nature and capacity of pre-existing regional networks have been a significant determinant of this variation, it is not always the case that it is the most highly 'networked' regions that have moved ahead fastest. This is because in some of the 'networked' regions there has been a need for considerable inter-organisational and inter-partnership negotiation.

## Regional negotiation

One of the initial fears, that the RDAs would 'throw their weight around', has not materialised. To the cynic, this may reflect the fact that they have little weight to throw around, with wide functional remit but relatively constrained powers and limited programme funds. However, despite the occasional local difficulties, such as sensitivities about board representation from

different sub-regions and policy communities, the early phase of relationship building has been remarkably free from tension. The RDAs have been keen to find ways to carry people with them and appear acutely aware of the interests and concerns of pre-existing coalitions, seeking to use them not simply as sounding boards for pre-formed RDA strategy but as co-authors of the strategy itself. This delicate process has been helped by the strong links that exist between RDA board members and other regional organisations. The central problematic issue for this process in the long term, however, is the need to find consensus as to what constitutes a genuinely 'regional' issue.

## Regional strategies

Drawing up initial drafts of their regional economic strategies has been the most significant initial RDA task. In this, DETR guidance appears to have played an overwhelming role. The draft strategies share common features in style and content. They all speak of the challenge of information and communications technologies, of globalisation and the 'knowledge-driven economy'; they all emphasise the need for a 'flexible and adaptable' workforce; they all emphasise the key roles of innovation and enterprise; and they all make serious efforts to respond to the imperatives of sustainability and social inclusivity. Not surprisingly, they all thrum with millennial rhetoric and 'can-do' bravado. There is little that suggests variation in approach from one region to another. It would be unfair to explain this in terms of a failure of regional strategic capacity. Rather, it reflects the institutional conditions under which the RDAs have been created. They need to build and sustain partnerships, to establish consensus and to sign up regional and local stakeholders to a unifying 'vision' that lends itself to a process of strategy formulation that is relatively loose and all-encompassing from an institutional, functional and geographical point of view.

## Local regeneration

The largest RDA spending programmes are concerned with regeneration. This means that, even though their current preoccupations are with economic strategies, their core business will entail close working relationships with local regeneration agencies and partnerships. There remains much uncertainty about what this implies. Some RDA officers argue that this will be a benign and largely incremental process that tries to improve what already exists. Others argue that, for the regional tier to mean anything, regional priorities will have to be pursued and that these cannot always be coincident with local and national priorities. It remains an open question whether there will prove to be limits to the extent to which RDAs can continue to act as 'equal partners' once the strategic phase has consolidated and the delivery phase begins.

This may be especially true of the relationship between RDAs and the essentially local partnerships through which regeneration programmes are delivered. There is as yet little indication of how local sensitivities will be accommodated within the regional roles of RDAs; or of how community groups and voluntary sector bodies engaged in regeneration might be 'coordinated' through regional frameworks. Indeed, at this early stage there is some evidence that the voices of local communities have found it difficult to engage with the whole process of regional governance. One of the challenges that RDAs have yet to address therefore is how to choose, or impose, a regional dimension on the interplay of local initiatives and neighbourhood strategies. One important area of future action for RDAs may be in establishing a clearer framework for the coordination of inter- or cross-departmental funding streams. There are some tentative indications on the horizon here, for example the proposed development of a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. There is, however, a need to establish some clear levers at a regional level for determining priorities and to make links with the sub-regional, local and neighbourhood levels.



# Introduction

Regional development agencies (RDAs) were established in April 1999 with a wide remit to promote the economic wellbeing of the English regions (Table 1) in ways consistent with the goals of sustainable development and social inclusion. They have been designated lead bodies at the regional level for coordinating inward investment, raising skill levels, improving business competitiveness and for social and physical regeneration. Following their launch, the RDAs have been heavily absorbed in the tasks of developing a strategic framework for their subsequent activities, establishing an operational management system, and building links with stakeholder groups at the local and regional levels.

This report is based on two principal sources. First is the growing body of documentary evidence produced by the RDAs themselves and the various reports produced by government, regional chambers and other interested parties. Second is an extensive series of interviews held in the second half of 1999 with key players in each of the eight English regions (London having been excluded, because the formal establishment of its RDA will occur at a later date) (see Figure 1). In two of the regions – the North West and the South West – more detailed interviews followed up the views of staff responsible for local regeneration projects. In total, over fifty interviews were held. Interviewees included RDA board members and staff, senior staff in Government Offices for the Regions (GORs), local government officers and members, representatives of voluntary sector organisations, Chambers of Commerce, key regional agencies and regional stakeholders.

The report is structured both chronologically and in terms of key issues. The first three chapters

deal with the pre-operational phase and the issues that dominated the first six months of activity. While developing the unfolding nature of RDA start-up and strategy formation, these chapters also raise the initial dilemmas that emerged in the new regional governance. The final three chapters deal with the evolution of some of these issues in light of the final draft of the regional strategies. Chapter 4 presents a preliminary account and evaluation of the draft and final regional strategy documents. Chapter 5 focuses on evidence about the nascent role of RDAs in managing local regeneration. In the final chapter, the broader and thornier question of English devolution is examined as a way into the complexity of governance relations and strategic dilemmas which the RDAs face in relation to both local stakeholders and central government policy.

The announcement of RDAs represented something of a revolution in the nature of regional and sub-regional governance in England. Unlike most of the countries of continental Europe, the regional scale in England had hardly featured in the formal arrangements of the country's governance: most of the regional debate had been through essentially non-statutory bodies, such as the regional planning conferences. The evolution of a more formal regional agenda was partly a response to the European Union's espousal of regions and its channelling of its Structural Funds to regions that had developed strategic plans at a regional scale. The GORs, established exactly five years prior to the RDAs, had been a first tentative step towards some formal and purposive coordination of regional and sub-regional issues. The creation of the GORs was, however, perhaps partly an acknowledgement of the 'regional vacuum' that characterised the period before 1994.

Table 1: Geography of the English regions

Region	RDA name	Counties
North East	One North East (ONE)	Cleveland Durham Northumberland Tyne and Wear
North West	North West Development Agency (NWDA)	Cumbria Cheshire Greater Manchester Lancashire Merseyside
Yorkshire and the Humber	Yorkshire-Forward (YF)	Humberside North Yorkshire South Yorkshire West Yorkshire
West Midlands	Advantage West Midlands (AWM)	Hereford and Worcester Shropshire Staffordshire Warwickshire West Midlands
East Midlands	East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA)	Derbyshire Leicestershire Lincolnshire Northampton Nottinghamshire
Eastern Region	East of England Development Agency (EEDA)	Cambridge Norfolk Suffolk Bedfordshire Essex Hertfordshire
South West	South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA)	Avon Cornwall Devon Dorset Gloucestershire Somerset Wiltshire
South East	South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA)	Berkshire Buckinghamshire East and West Sussex Hampshire Isle of Wight Kent Oxfordshire Surrey

*Note:* The territorial boundaries of the RDAs are inherited directly from that of the Government Offices for the Regions, with one exception: the North West RDA signals the joining-up of the Government Office North West with Government Office for Merseyside.

Figure 1: English regions



The initial task of RDAs has been to develop and implement a regional strategy (RS), subsequently playing an advisory role with respect to regional economic affairs. The development of regional strategies has, practically speaking, completely dominated the early work of RDAs, which are now only just beginning to assert themselves as major players in regional economic development. (Some RDAs refer to their strategies as Regional Economic Strategies, while others emphasise the wider aim of sustainable development; for example, three RS omit the word 'economic' from their title; see Table 14.) And there is little doubt there is an important roles to be fulfilled here. According to the Deputy Prime Minister, the RDAs will:

... provide a much needed boost for higher growth across England, enabling the regions to compete both in Europe and in the global marketplace.... [They] will play a vital role in planning for sustainable economic growth in their regions, increasing prosperity, generating wealth and improving people's quality of life. (DETR Press Release 340, 31 March 1999)

Constitutionally, RDAs are non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) accountable to ministers for their policies and decisions, but controlled at the regional level by 'business-led' boards. These boards have attracted significant regional players, who serve as individuals rather than as

representatives of their respective companies or organisations. Necessarily, boards must bring together a range of experience and expertise, befitting the broad objectives of the RDAs. The purpose of an RDA is specified in the 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act as:

- to further the economic development and regeneration of its area;
- to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness in its area;
- to promote employment in its area;
- to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to this employment;
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so.

Leaving the broader issue of English devolution to one side (see Chapter 6), these five themes constitute the core basis for building institutional financial capacity around regional governance. To this end, RDAs have assumed responsibility for three existing streams of funding: the rural regeneration programmes of the Rural Development Commission; the regional and urban regeneration functions of English Partnerships; and the administration of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB, formerly the SRB Challenge Fund) from the GORs. Physical and social regeneration funding makes up 71%-90% of RDA budget (Jones, 1999; see Table 10). They are also responsible for coordinating the inward investment activities in their respective regions,

**Table 2: Planned RDA programme expenditure: DETR programmes (1998-2002) (£m)**

RDA	1998-99 estimated outturn	1999-2000 plans	2000-01 plans	2001-02 plans	% change 1999-2000 to 2001-02
North East	0.520	124.185	119.105	124.505	0.3
North West (including Merseyside)	0.327	211.649	224.069	226.929	7.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.529	146.225	160.775	164.975	12.8
West Midlands	0.384	112.096	105.116	121.316	8.2
East Midlands	0.406	55.861	59.871	57.081	2.2
Eastern	0.350	25.415	22.225	26.925	5.9
South West	0.411	70.103	59.723	51.923	-25.9
South East	0.461	62.129	59.839	91.439	47.1
London	-	246.000	264.500	274.500	11.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.388</b>	<b>1,053.663</b>	<b>1,075.223</b>	<b>1,139.593</b>	<b>8.1</b>

Source: calculated from DETR *Annual Report 1999*

although this constitutes only 1%-3% of the budgets (Jones, 1999; see Table 10). Funded primarily through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), their core programme expenditure is expected to rise from £1,054 million in 1999-2000 to £1,140 million in 2001-2 (see Table 2). (They will also inherit, subject to ongoing decisions, functional responsibilities and programme funding lines from the DTI and DfEE.) As such, the existing intra- and inter-regional distribution of funding streams such as the SRB has considerable importance in terms of the levels and pattern of total RDA spend for each region (Tables 3-5). Not surprisingly, the

future, comparative, levels of regional funding – in terms of both physical and social regeneration and RSA (Table 6) – presents a central strategic concern in terms of the direct capacity of each RDA. (The government has stated that it will take account of RDAs' regional priorities, as set out in the RS, when assessing future Regional Selective Assistance [RSA] cases – RDAs' leadership is of particular importance in terms of attracting and embedding investment in the region and developing regional supply chains; Cabinet Office, 1999.) An indication of the division of stakeholder responsibilities and RDA structures is given in Chapter 4.

**Table 3: Overview of RDA spending: indicative gross expenditure**

Region	Indicative gross expenditure (£m)	
	1999/00	2000/01
North East	121.2	132.4
North West	176.1	242.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	136.6	173.8
West Midlands	114.1	118.1
East Midlands	59.2	70.7
Eastern	31.4	31.2
South East	73.4	70.8
South West	60.1	72.1
<b>Total (excluding London)</b>	<b>772.1</b>	<b>911.7</b>

*Note:* The figures in the above table include expenditure on the three DETR regeneration programmes - Land and Property, SRB and Rural Development Programme. The figures also include the Skills Development Fund, the Competitiveness Development Fund and Inward Investment.

*Source:* Cabinet Office (1999)

**Table 4: Single Regeneration Budget 1-5: funding by region**

Government Office region	SRB 1-5 (£m)	% of England total
North East	515.2	12.1
North West	806.6	18.8
Yorkshire and the Humber	644.2	15.1
West Midlands	450.8	10.5
East Midlands	222.7	5.2
East of England	100.4	2.3
South West	127.3	3.0
South East	277.9	6.5
London	1,135.5	26.5
<b>Total (England)</b>	<b>4,280.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Cabinet Office (1999)

**Table 5: Single Regeneration Budget 1-5: funding by district type**

District type	SRB 1-5 (£m)	% of England total
Northern/Midlands industrial towns	1113.5	26.0
Older cities	851.9	19.0
Mixed urban and rural	644.4	15.1
Inner London	583.4	13.6
Shire towns	326.5	7.6
Outer London	217.9	5.8
Seaside and spa towns	100.4	5.1
New Towns and southern industrial towns	141.4	3.3
Rural districts	119.2	2.8
Affluent suburban districts	34.2	0.8
<b>Total (England)</b>	<b>4,280.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Cabinet Office (1999)

**Table 6: Regional Selective Assistance: offers accepted (1994-99)**

Region	Number	Grant (£)	New jobs	Safe-guarded jobs	New jobs as % of total
North East	1228	178,627,057	29,732	7,730	79
North West	1302	196,514,890	28,171	20,723	58
Yorkshire and the Humber	756	75,477,888	13,971	6,153	69
West Midlands	975	177,145,900	16,835	15,448	52
East Midlands	415	35,618,050	7,630	4,095	65
Eastern	150	8,366,600	1,826	1,404	57
South West	256	53,540,500	8,161	3,606	69
South East	310	32,482,589	6,617	2,326	74
London	176	16,869,430	4,289	2,009	68

Note: Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) is the primary instrument of regional industrial policy in England. RSA is a discretionary grant, awarded to firms located in Assisted Areas for investment projects that will create or safeguard jobs, and generate wider benefits for the regional economy. Through the Assisted Areas map,

RSA is targeted on areas where there are unemployed resources (land, labour), with the aim of raising the underlying competitiveness, growth and employment in economically weak areas. RSA is an important tool in attracting and retaining internationally mobile investment. (Cabinet Office, 1999, p 84)

Source: Cabinet Office (1999)

In pursuit of their objectives, RDAs will have to work with, and alongside, a range of agencies, statutory authorities and interest groups at the local and regional levels, not least the local authorities, business organisations, trade unions, community and voluntary groups, the GORs and other regeneration agencies. So, despite the fact the regional tier has traditionally been the least

developed scale of policy intervention, institutional capacity and political leverage in the UK, the RDAs find themselves joining an already crowded institutional arena. As major new players in this field, with a functional remit that overlaps with those of a plethora of existing organisations and with a brief to rationalise and coordinate policy, the RDAs are confronted with

what in many ways is a challenging task of self-determination.

The RDAs can be argued to represent an important innovation in regional governance, with potentially far-reaching implications for stakeholder groups in fields as varied as economic development, urban regeneration, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and rural development. However, as can be seen from both the agencies' wide-ranging remit and the early pronouncements of the RDA chairs, this represents more than an administrative experiment. As an exercise in *regional devolution*, power and influence will be taken, and used, in different ways in different regions. Changing variations in the regional allocation of funding will also play their part in this (Tables 2-6). As representatives of their respective regions, the RDAs will each want to develop a distinctive, deliverable and dynamic agenda. If it transpires that the RDAs are no more than pale and ineffective imitations of one another, without a distinctive *regional* vision and approach, then clearly they will have failed. Similarly, if they are perceived simply as the voice of central government *in* the regions, then they will have achieved little or nothing in terms of the empowerment of sub-national interests.

However, it can be argued that there is considerable ambiguity about the government's intentions in relation to this aspect of the RDAs' role. Right from the outset, there appear to have been two distinct elements to the agenda: one addressing economic issues and the need to increase competitiveness and to erode the disparities between and within regions, the other addressing the political issues of devolution in England. In the early days of the establishment of RDAs ministers spoke of the need to tackle 'economic devolution' and only later to follow this with 'political devolution'. And, after the somewhat bruising experience of devolution in Scotland and Wales, enthusiasm for devolution in the English regions appears to have rather fewer champions in Westminster than once was the case. While it is too early to speculate about the outcomes of this process, it does underscore the scale of the challenge facing these fledgling organisations (see Chapter 6).

In a short period of time, the RDAs have established themselves as a significant institutional presence in the English regions. They have also begun to define distinctive characters, 'styles' and modes of operation, both collectively and in their respective regions. Yet many questions remain unanswered about how RDAs will be able to galvanise and serve regional interests, how they will work with central government on the one hand and local partners on the other, and how they will function collectively as a nascent 'regional lobby'.

Drawing on a rolling review of RDA activities in their first eight months of operation and on a series of over fifty interviews with national, local and regional stakeholders – from both outside and inside the RDA system – this report focuses on the RDAs' approach to local regeneration. It analyses the RDAs' RS, explores their emergent styles of governance and probes their approaches to local regeneration, in terms of both partnership relations and substantive areas of interest. While it is too early to present conclusive arguments about the difference that RDAs will make, the report sets out both the complexity of the situation and some of the dilemmas they face. 'Potential' is an overused word in RDA circles, but in many ways the key question facing these new organisations is the extent to which they will be able to realise their potential role as major regional players and agents of devolution in the face of such emergent problems and tensions.





# New forms of governance

An immediate priority for the RDAs has been the establishment of effective working arrangements at both board and executive level. While the construction of RDA boards was the issue that commanded most public attention around the time of the RDAs' launch, equally important have been the logistical and administrative tasks of maintaining continuity, vigilance and effectiveness in the management of ongoing contracts. Early mistakes made in this area might easily undermine trust and confidence in the RDAs. This chapter outlines the general stages in RDA formation, while also providing a sample of their nascent character. It highlights some differences and similarities in the institutional styles and capacities.

The pre-operational period began in autumn 1998, with the selection of the regional chairs. Eight business leaders were selected in a searching interview process managed by 'sponsorship teams' in the GORs. As with the entire selection process, the final decision had to be approved by the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (in the cabinet reshuffle of July 1999, the previous minister, Richard Caborn MP, was replaced by the Local Government Minister Hilary Armstrong MP). The next step was the appointment of approximately a dozen board members and a chief executive. Organisations and individuals in the region were invited to nominate people for a place on the board and a shortlist of between 30 and 50 was drawn up. In some regions where progress was particularly rapid, such as the North East, the chair was actively involved in this selection process. Informants were keen to emphasise the fact that interviews strictly followed Nolan procedures, with board members selected on the basis of merit, rather than their constituency. Inevitably, however, the geographical, sectoral and social

composition of the boards was a source of some tension during the initial stages.

The issue of the geographical and sectoral representativeness of RDA boards has been a sensitive one in many regions, although it is easy to exaggerate the extent of this problem. On the whole, RDA boards do not operate according to a constituency-based system, and board members often spoke of chairs being at pains to check or discount arguments based on sectional or local interests at board level. As one chair explained, "We cannot have representatives [of areas] because we are talking about a board and it doesn't matter if they all came from [the same town], so long as they are the best people.... There is far too much 'well if we're not on it we're excluded'. I think that is just petty parochialism" (RDA chairman, interview September 1999). This highlights one of the central tensions in the board formation process: that RDAs perceive a need to be connected to the 'real' needs and concerns of local communities, economic sectors and stakeholder groups and yet cannot afford to risk 'capture' by sectional or local interests. Hence most boards have sought to engage with, yet remain somewhat aloof from, such interests, a compromise that many feel to be necessary but which also places real limits on the RDA's capacity for partnership working. As one board member explained, "A regional body is better placed to try and tackle inequalities within the region than trying to get a number of vested interests to do the same" (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999).

Each board consists of a chair, a chief executive and between 11 and 13 board members; the exception is the North East with eight members (see Table 7). Board members tend to have experience in public-private partnerships,

Table 7: Composition of the RDA boards by region (including chairs)

Region	Chair	LA	PS	NDPB	VSO	Ed	TU	Rural*	Total	Male	Female	Ethnic min.	Av. age	Chief executive
North East	NDPB	2	2	1	2*	1	1	(1)	9	8	1	1	50	LA/NDPB
North West	Private	4	5	1	1	1	1	0	13	9	4	0	54	LA/NDPB
Yorkshire and Humber	Private	4	5	0	1	1	1	0	12	9	3	1	51	LA
West Midlands	Private	4	5	0	1	3	1	0	14	11	3	2	51	NDPB
East Midlands	Private	4	5	0	1*	1	1	(1)	12	8	4	0	51	DTI
Eastern	NDPB	4	5*	2	1	0	1	(1)	13	10	3	0	49	LG
South West	NDPB	4	5*	2	0	1	1	(1)	13	10	3	0?	51	Freelance (female)
South East	Private	4	6*	0	1 (ill)	1	1	(1)	13	9	4	0?	52	EP
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4?</b>	<b>51</b>	

Notes: \* The rural category is not counted in the total. Each rural representative has been placed in a separate category, eg private, VSO, and is indicated by \*.

LA = local authority; PS = private sector; NDPB = non-departmental public body; VSO = voluntary sector organisation; Ed = education; TU = trades union.

although this is less true of those from the private sector. Most members have experience in several areas, for example private sector players who have been involved in local government or work for charities. Although the selection process has tended to favour generalists, it should also be noted that most individuals have particular sectoral or territorial interests. Nationally, five RDA board members, for example, have a background in rural issues. A six-fold typology of interest representation can be outlined (see Table 7). These are as follows:

- Local authority (LA)
- Private sector (PS)
- Non-departmental public body (NDPB)
- Voluntary sector (VSO)
- Education (Ed)
- Trades union (TU)

The RDAs were conceived as business-led organisations; however, the balance of the boards favours the private sector less strongly than might have been expected. If the chairs are discounted, for example, the total number of local authority representatives is almost equal to that of the private sector (30 to 32). There is trade union representation on each RDA board, with the other members coming from non-departmental public

bodies, the voluntary sector and education. The South East is the most business-led board, with half of the active board coming from the private sector. The North East, by comparison, has two voluntary sector players in its deliberately 'lean' board (see Table 3).

The eight boards have a total of 99 members (including the chairs), with an average age of 51; 25 of the 91 non-executive board members are women (27%). All the chairs and all but one of the chief executives are men. The distribution of female board members across the regions is fairly even. Women do, however, make up a relatively high proportion of voluntary sector, local authority and education representatives (see Tables 7 and 8). The primary activity of the board members has been focused around the production of the RS document, including consultation and decision making on particular specialist themes (see Chapter 4). While forming an important public face for the RDA, and providing leadership, debate and experience in terms of the content of the RS, it is important to note that "[each] board will have to remain effective at a strategic level" (RDA board member, NWDA, interview October 1999). Board members are contracted to spend one working day per week on RDA business, although many contribute substantially more.

**Table 8: Composition of the RDA boards by interest group and gender**

Interest group	Total number of representatives	Number of women	Women as % of each group
Local authority	30	10	33
Private sector	37	7	18
Non-departmental public body	6	0	0
Trades union	8	1	12.5
Voluntary and community sector organisation	8	4	50
Education (further and higher)	9	3	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>-</b>

Nevertheless, partly by design and partly as a result of constraints on time, it is clear from research interviews that the board members have worked almost exclusively with the strategy team, chief executive and chair. As such they have remained fairly disconnected from those elements of the organisation concerned with managing the delivery of core programmes. In the initial stages it has not been clear to what extent the role of the board might evolve to consider the framework for implementation and regional governance in any detail (see Chapter 4)

In addition to the board, a staff of RDA officers was established. This typically included a dedicated group working on the RS (sometimes with seconded consultants – see Table 11) and a broader base of staff involved in maintaining the delivery of core inherited functions (such as SRB). Staff were principally brought in – often on the basis of voluntary transfer – from the joining organisations (for example English Partnerships and the SRB team of the GOR). In a typical case, for example, the regional director of English Partnerships was appointed Director of Regeneration. Along with close linkages to the GOR, this has ensured a substantial degree of continuity in the management of existing projects (for example the first five rounds of SRB programmes). In general terms, however, initial priority was given to the establishment of the strategy team, and director-level officers in other areas were generally appointed only after the majority of the consultation had taken place (ie four to six months).

The initial staff size of the RDAs ranges from 50 (in the East of England) to over 200 (in the North East). These figures primarily reflect differences in regional budget. More staff will be recruited in

light of the RS and associated implementation plans, with the full shape being established during 2000. Taken together, the budget and staff give a rough indication of the size of the institution in relation to the regional population and economy. Basic information about each region is shown in Table 9, while Table 10 details the institutional and financial capacity in terms of staff size, the estimated RDA budgets as a percentage of total GDP and spend per head of population. As noted in the introduction, differences in the direct resources of each RDA are quite marked. In two extreme cases, RDA spend per capita is £46.54 in the North East and £6.04 in East of England.

Clearly, then, no one should expect the RDA process to be a uniform one; and this variability presents some genuine challenges for the form and content of government policy and its relationship to nascent English devolution (see Chapter 6). While there are obvious geographical variations, it is clear that in every case there is a substantial gap between the level of the RDAs' direct institutional capacity and the scope of the regional processes they are charged with influencing. For example, as a percentage of GDP the RDA budget is equal to between 0.03% (South East) and 0.42% (North East) (see Chapter 4). Given the balance of powers and resources, one early dilemma is that the reach of RDAs may currently be greater than their grasp.

The starting point for the evolution of each RDA should be related not only to the relative institutional and financial resources that were inherited. The degree to which each region's institutional and informational networks were 'ready for regionalism' was clearly variable and path-dependent. In broad terms, the South West, Eastern and East Midland regions inherited the

Table 9: Basic economic information on RDAs

Region	Location of GHQ	Population (m)	Unemployment (%)	Total GDP (£m) (1996)	GDP/capita UK index	GDP/capita EU index
North East	Newcastle	2.6	9.8	28,918	81.5	83
North West	Warrington	6.9	6.3	61,650	91.0	89
Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds	5.0	8.1	48,268	91.2	88
West Midlands	Birmingham	5.3	6.8	53,249	93.8	91
East Midlands	Nottingham	4.1	6.3	41,813	96.0	94
East of England	Cambridge	5.3	5.9	22,891	95.8	94
South West	Exeter	4.8	5.2	49,097	96.0	94
South East	Guildford	7.9	3.3	229,057	103.9	101
<b>Total</b>		<b>41.9</b>		<b>629,839</b>	<b>139.7*</b>	<b>147*</b>

Notes: \* figure for London.

Source: NOS, RDA documents, Foy et al (1999); DETR (1999a); Jones (1999)

Table 10: Indicators of RDA institutional and financial capacity

Region	RDA budget* (£m)	Size of staff (expected by 2000)	RDA budget as % of GDP†	RDA budget per capita (£)	% allocated for social and physical regeneration‡	% allocated for inward investment
North East	121.2	220	0.42	46.54	88.9	1.4
North West	176	180	0.29	25.51	89.5	0.8
Yorkshire and Humber	137	155 (200)	0.28	27.40	90.5	1.0
West Midlands	114	110 (130)	0.21	21.51	88.6	1.1
East Midlands	59	120	0.14	14.39	81.6	1.7
East of England	32	50 (60-70)	0.14	6.04	71.3	2.9
South West	60	160 (170)	0.12	12.50	79.5	2.6
South East	73	70 (130)	0.03	9.24	84.6	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>772</b>		<b>0.12</b>	<b>18.38</b>		

Notes: \* this preliminary figure differs from those given by the RDAs. At present, however, it has not been possible to standardise the total spend (for programmes and running costs). For the sake of comparison, therefore, the earlier figure has been used; † (UK index = 100); ‡ additional spend is covered through running costs and so on.

Source: NOS, RDA documents; Foy et al (1999); DETR (1999a); Jones (1999)

weakest regional structure, while the North East and North West represented something more 'developed' (as with much of this discussion the issue of the South East is exceptional, in particular because of its intimate geographical and socioeconomic relationship with London). There was, however, no simple or uniform evolution from these 'starting positions'. The North East, for example, with its strong identity and long history of regional partnership, inherited a strong set of

perceptions and expectations as to the outcome of the consultation and decision-making process. Similarly, in the North West the burden of innovation was substantial. As one RDA member commented: "It is no good just to take previous strategies down off the shelf and dust them down. It is crucial that we do something really different" (NWDA, interview with key officer, August 1999). In other regions the relative absence of previous strategies and preconceptions presented the RDA

with a clearer opportunity to stamp its mark on the region. In the South West, for example, a perception that the region was 'starting from behind' (SWERDA, interview with board member November 1999) led the GOR to take very early action in creating a team to build up regional intelligence (GOSW, 1998). Leaving to one side the variable extent to which each region could claim to 'know itself', a key factor in the future development of the RDA governance system will be the availability and harmonisation of 'regional level' data. As one informant noted, however, "all the RDA chairmen have been astounded by how little data there is on the regions" (RDA chair, interview September 1999). The prioritisation of some form of regional observatory in all the final strategies is testament to the importance of this issue (see Chapter 4). Consequently, while the first six months of RDA activity have been focused on generating ideas and consensus about 'regional issues', it is clear that the variety of constraints has made this only the most preliminary of formulations.

After 1 April 1999 the RDAs became fully operational (a number of the more 'advanced' RDAs met several times in the form of a 'shadow board') and turned to the main task of producing a RS through wide consultation. In order to assist with the tasks of producing a 'state of the region' audit and the draft RS, most regions brought in a mixture of consultants and secondees to augment the organisation in particular areas of specialty (see Table 11). The strategies are considered in more detail in Chapter 4 and in the Appendix.

The initial sub-structure of each RDA has developed in response to two main influences. The first has been the management styles and structures of the joining funding streams and organisations. RDAs have inherited existing programmes and funding from the SRB and those of the Rural Development Commission, as well as the regional and urban regeneration functions of English Partnerships. The potential for restructuring these sub-groupings has been limited by the need to ensure continuity for existing programmes. The second influence has been the prioritisation of consultation and research for the RS. Most RDAs established a strategy team with links to sub-groups that had responsibility for writing particular chapters. In many cases the board members have been assigned to particular sub-groups in line with their interest or skills. These sub-groups reflect the priorities that each RDA established early on in

the process (for example, AWM has established five sub-groups that vertically integrate board members and staff: 'Business support', 'Learning and innovation', 'Regeneration, social inclusion and rural', 'Physical infrastructure and sustainability' and 'Audit'; AWM, 1999b). In an interesting example of business-style innovation, the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) has charged its board members with 'hands-on' individual responsibilities which bring their experiences and skills to bear on issues that are relatively new to them.

The RDAs' external relationships have so far been defined by the process of consultation. The nature of the stakeholder relationships is examined below (in Chapter 3), but it is useful here to outline the way the consultation process has influenced the structure of the RDAs. Given the degree to which the effective nature of RDAs depends on the consent and cooperation of other regional and sub-regional partners, it is clear that the character and scope of these relationships is paramount. A number of different approaches to consultation have been developed. In several regions (such as the West Midlands) consultation has been restricted largely to sub-regional 'umbrella' groups. This has put pressure on local interest groups to agree on both a collective representative and, increasingly, a shared regional agenda. Other regions have relied much more on wide consultation with myriad local groups. Yorkshire and the Humber, for example, developed five questions for a consultation document that was mailed to over 3,000 individuals and organisations. There has been some innovative use of the internet as a means for disseminating and gathering information. (Table 11 gives details of RDA websites.)

All the RDAs have run a variety of consultation seminars or regional roadshows, which have taken the outline RS to all parts of the territory. The content of the consultation exercises has varied according to the salient regional issues. In certain regions, for example, there have been specific consultation seminars on a given economic development theme (such as tourism in the South West), or on the needs of a geographical area (such as the former coalfield communities in the North East and East Midlands). To a large extent, the first stage of consultation was a 'validation process' for the RDA itself. It was, in short, a question of testing expectations and constructing a shared agenda at a genuinely regional scale. In the second stage of

Table 11: Production of the draft regional strategies

Region	Launch of draft regional strategy	State of the region audit and sources of data/analysis	Regional Strategy consultant	Public minutes	Website
North East	21 May: RDA brand launched but no official launch of RS. The RS has been available from May	Regional Economic Assessment and Competitiveness Strategy (1998) by GONE, etc	Regional task group established March 1998; Lee Shostack contracted from EDAA	No	www.onestrategy-northeast.co.uk
North West	2 July: linked to NWRA AGM	Independent audit by NWRA	John Glester seconded	No	www.nwda.co.uk
Yorkshire and Humber	30 July, at Chamber AGM to coincide with launch of RPG	Leeds Business School contracted for first report, January 1999	None	Yes	www.yhrda.com
West Midlands	14 July, at first formal AGM of the RA	SENAG (Combination of GOWM and WMDA)	None	No	www.advantage-westmidlands.co.uk
East Midlands	2 August: mailing and press launch with RA; EMIDA chose to maximise time for consultation.	GHK report March 1999 commissioned by GOEM; large statistical document produced with RS by EMIDA	Business Strategy Limited (London)	No	www.emda.org.uk
East of England	26 July: A 'quiet launch' to selected stakeholders	Ernst & Young Cambridge Econometrics	None	No	www.eeda.org.uk
South West	Version 1 launched 28 May: meeting at hotel with key partners	No separate document; RS was rooted in need to construct regional database	Produced by RDA with consultation	No	www.southwestengland.co.uk
South East	22 July: launched at AGM of Regional Chamber	Substantial economic profile with preparation from GOSE and RS consultants	BPP (economic) SQW (management) ERA (combined)	Yes	www.seril.co.uk

Source: Interviews and regional strategy documentation

consultation (August-September) the expectation was that partners would undertake detailed decision making in order to form the final RS and action plan. In doing this, many informants, interviewed prior to the final RS submission, stressed that the gap between regional issues and local implementation would have to be bridged in both institutional and political terms. A fundamental challenge for the 'maturation' of the RDAs, therefore, lies in the moving from a general period of consensus building to the inevitably difficult politics of action prioritisation. Moreover, the action planning and implementation process will rely on the ability of the RDA – and other regional and sub-regional actors – to coordinate practices across the existing divisions and levels of responsibility. It represents the acid test for the (re)creation of practical governance structures. The extent to which the final strategies address this challenge is assessed in Chapter 4.

Some form of ongoing consultation has also taken place among the RDAs. The eight RDA chairs meet every six weeks or so, in what have been described as highly useful and constructive sessions. Parallel meetings for the chief executives and some of the strategy directors have also taken place. There has also been a good deal of more informal sharing of ideas with respect to the RS. The draft and final versions of the RS also contain tentative suggestions for cross-boundary collaboration over specific projects, typically those concerned with infrastructure and marketing (see Chapter 4). At a more political level, the process of information and strategy sharing is showing some signs of developing into a distinctive 'regional lobby', as the RDAs are beginning to sense the potential of their *collective* voice on regional economic matters. Acting together, RDA chairs have not only been raising direct funding issues with central government, but more recently have been lobbying on questions such as interest rate policy and the 'North-South divide'. This theme raises the broader question of the trajectory and energy for political and economic devolution in the English regions. This will be taken up further in Chapter 6. The next stage in the story concerns the relationship of the RDAs to their key partners and the process of consultation.





# Constituencies and consultation

Despite an exacting initial work timetable, all of the RDAs have been anxious to open up and maintain lines of communication and consultation with other regional stakeholders. Their early development has been marked by a particular sensitivity to the interests and concerns of existing organisations, partnerships and stakeholder parties. Board members and chief executives have been playing key roles in this process, establishing contacts and broad rules of engagement with regional stakeholders. Notwithstanding occasional local difficulties – such as sensitivities around board representation for different sub-regional areas, policy communities or sectors – this early phase of relationship building has been generally free from tension. Consultation with key stakeholders has both reflected and fostered a widely felt sense of opportunity and energy in the regions. It has also perhaps typified a ‘honeymoon period’, rooted in both the bracketing-out of potentially divisive regional–local politics, and the willing suspension of disbelief.

In marked contrast with a number of previous local and regional initiatives, the RDAs have been relatively circumspect about defining and asserting their role. Few have accused them, so far at least, of ‘throwing their weight around’ or of clumsily seeking to appropriate the ‘turf’ of other organisations. Some observers point out that this approach may stem as much from necessity as choice – given that the RDAs have a wide functional remit but relatively constrained direct powers and limited programme funds – so in order to achieve anything these new agencies must work through partnership. One reason, then, why the RDAs have not been seen throwing their weight around may be because they have comparatively little ‘weight’ to throw, at least in terms of institutional capacity and resource.

Instead, they must make their presence felt through the more nebulous channels, such as the exercise of influence, the shaping of strategies and the maximisation of synergy.

Practically speaking, the strategy of most RDAs has involved throwing the consultation net as wide as possible, and identifying issues for priority action in terms of their broad, cross-constituency appeal. As one board member explained, “It is our job to unearth the commonalities between different interest groups. Lots of different sectors never meet together ... but actually if they all say the same thing, then that is where you get the regional issues. Our job is to act as the helicopter, picking up all of these key themes whilst testing as to if there is a really good opportunity of evolving something” (RDA board member, EMDA, interview August 1999). There is clearly a danger here that RDAs will develop unfocused, lowest-common-denominator approaches – a concern that their all-encompassing strategy statements have done little to dispel. Alternatively, there is a concern that some of the RDAs’ chosen ‘key issues’ will smack of tokenism, while also implicitly marginalising other concerns.

These dangers are especially acutely reflected in partnership and stakeholder relations, where the RDAs’ preferred method of operation combines working with the ‘key players’ while consulting widely. This approach has sometimes inadvertently been exclusionary. In some ways, as an experienced community development officer pointed out, there are too many ‘key players’ in a diverse region such as the South West (Community development worker, South West England, interview November 1999), with the result that voluntary and community sector voices, generally a relatively diverse and localised

stakeholder group, tend often to become marginalised in the scramble to be heard. What the voluntary and community sector typically need in this situation is support for capacity building, not as part of future funding packages, but *prior to* engagement with the RDA. As an RDA board member commented, “Before you have a group you can empower, you have to recruit your group”. While a number of the final strategies recognise the need to build strategic capacity in the voluntary and community sector, it is less clear where such support will come from.

The cost and effort of responding and adapting to the regional process has also been substantial. Many local stakeholders complained of having to reorganise their activities at the RDAs’ convenience: the price of consultation was sometimes measured in terms of drains on the resources of already-overstretched local organisations and partnerships, which some felt were being required to dance to the RDA’s tune:

“They have made enormous bureaucratic demands on us and are quite insensitive to the pressures on us. They expected us to organise roadshows ... and trips for their staff to get to know the place.” (RDA officer, SWERDA, interview November 1999)

“In terms of developing the region’s strategy, we have had absolutely no involvement whatsoever. We as officers are hugely critical of that. As front-line officers, we’ve got loads of experience and know loads of people and ... we have had no involvement in developing the strategy at all.” (Community development worker, South West England, interview November 1999)

There are numerous instances of local stakeholders creating new, sub-regional and regional partnerships of their own, essentially as a means of communicating with the RDA. Even at the level of fairly well established sub-regional areas, a great deal of preparation has gone, and will go, into meeting the RDA head on. Cumbria County Council, for example, in 1997-98 experienced a period of substantial political turmoil in order to gain consensus and position itself within the North West. Moreover, the Cumbria Economic Forum produced a detailed economic strategy in an attempt to reduce the

(perceived) risk that, as a largely rural and peripheral area, Cumbria’s voice would be marginalised by the dominance of large urban centres such as Manchester (Cumbria Economy Forum, 1998; Carlisle County Council, interview with senior councillor, October 1999). The legitimacy of an area or interest group’s regional voice is, of course, dependent on which partnerships the RDA decides to recognise. While most consultation was characterised by a rhetoric (and practice) of open-ended inclusion, it is clear that action planning requires a prioritisation of certain stakeholder interests.

The process of building a voice within the region has been especially important and difficult for the voluntary sector in some parts of the country, which traditionally has only been weakly organised at the regional level. The contrast and potential conflict between certain rural and urban areas may also be embedded in this. In the South West, for example, the best organised voluntary and community groups are based around the primary cities (Bristol and Plymouth in particular), while more rural groups tend to have less capacity. While concerns about the exclusion of certain stakeholders were voiced in all regions, there were important examples of active incorporation. In the West Midlands, for example, the RDA and GOR helped build capacity for a group to represent black community issues at a regional level. In Yorkshire and Humberside, for example, the consultation process was rooted in a very direct relationship with local organisations and individuals. Perhaps as a consequence of this practice, the overall form of intraregional relationships, particularly to sub-regions and local areas, remains rather under-formalised (for example, Yorkshire-Forward, 1999c, mentions only briefly the role of the four sub-regions and offers little detail on the nature of governance relationships; see Appendix). Alternatively, some RDAs are envisioning sub-regional partnerships as key elements in their delivery strategy. In the South West, for example, SWERDA is reorganising the management of regeneration efforts on a county-wide basis. While this type of sub-regional coordination may resemble a form of ‘rationalisation’ from the vantage point of the RDA board, some players at the local level have been dismissive of what they see as a ‘virtual reality partnership’. The danger, as one partnership member observed, is that this simply generates another set of meetings to attend, the primary function of which is negotiation and discussion, rather than action:

“... North Devon Partnership, East Devon Partnership, Plymouth, which has got a partnership. So Devon Economic Partnership is a partnership of partnerships and that is all we are saying. The only time we meet as a [whole] partnership is ... in the RDA; the rest of the time there is no point. East Devon has no relationship at all with Plymouth, it has a relationship with the neighbouring county. North Devon is completely isolated from everybody, though it does have links into North Cornwall and Somerset. Plymouth’s travel-to-work area [is different].... 20% of employment in East Cornwall is in Plymouth.... Explain to me where the boundary is!.... [The RDA has insisted on this] county-wide [approach, but] none of us know how it is going to work. *They* don’t know how it is going to work. But again, it is this obsession with the old counties.” (Member, Devon Economic Partnership, interview November 1999)

While this tension is rooted in the particular case of the South West, and the specific pattern of sub-regional working there, it does highlight a more general issue: the extent to which each RDA can forge relationships with – and coordinate as an ensemble – a variety of meaningful partnerships at different scales.

In an oft-repeated phrase, the RDAs have been keen to find ways of “carrying people with them”, their concern being to construct, or formalise, a regional coalition of interests. The pre-RDA development of these emergent regional coalitions was more developed in some areas than in others, and the nature and capacity of such extant networks has exerted a significant influence on the subsequent course and pace of RDA formation. It has not been the case, however, that the most ‘networked’ regions have moved faster and more purposefully than the rest, because in some such areas there has been a need for considerable inter-organisational and inter-partnership negotiation. While somewhat unevenly developed, regional coalitions spanning the public, private and voluntary sectors currently form a kind of penumbra around the RDAs. Most RDAs are acutely aware of the interests and concerns of such coalitions, seeking to utilise them not simply as ‘sounding boards’ for (pre-formed) RDA strategies but as ‘co-authors’ of the strategy itself. This is clearly a delicate and

complex process, particularly where RDAs have to negotiate their way around extant regional institutions and pre-existing regional strategies. For the most part, this process has been smoothed and facilitated by the strong links that exist between RDA board members and other regional organisations. In formulating their strategies, most RDAs are building on existing regional strategies, recasting these in the context of DETR guidance and board priorities.

Through their consultation and outreach activities, RDAs are also seeking to ‘manage the expectations’ of local and regional stakeholders, inviting inputs to (broadly formulated) regional strategies, allaying anxieties about jurisdictional or funding conflicts and developing trust. The imperative has been to bring other ‘significant partners’ on board with the RDAs’ emerging agenda, establishing a basis of collaborative working in the future. Particular effort has been invested in convincing local and regional stakeholders that the RDA can ‘add value’ to existing and future initiatives, rather than simply being a ‘free rider’ on the activities of others. Hence the RDAs’ language of ‘moving alongside’ local and regional partners. There is a difficult balance to strike here. The price of long-term failure, however, could be considerable. Two things seem particularly important as new partnership geometries emerge. First, clear and consensual mechanisms for moving between local and regional ‘interests’ and actors should be developed: there should not be token partnerships of partnerships. Second, in attempting to simplify the configuration of stakeholders, the imposition of an inflexible sub-regional geography risks riding roughshod over the often fluid networks of existing partnerships.

The regional chambers form a particularly important element of regional stakeholder consultation. The chambers are intended to complement the RDA, bringing a degree of local democratic accountability to the process. While participating fully in both partnership building and consultation over the nature of regional strategy, the chambers are expected to monitor and pass judgement on the performance of the RDA. Ministerial guidance on the nature of regional chambers has been (deliberately) minimal, amounting to eight lines. The recommendation that chambers should be composed of 70% local authority representation and 30% ‘non-political’ has been heeded in every case.

The size of the chamber membership varies considerably according to region, from over 100 members to less than 50 according to the region (Table 12). The Yorkshire and Humberside chamber is particularly distinctive, with a streamlined full chamber of 35 and an advisory board of eight meeting once a month. The regional chambers tend to be managed through a secretariat based at the region's Local Government Association. In most cases the staff are 'doubled up' to run both the chamber and the association. In the Yorkshire and Humberside chamber, however, a commercial manager has been seconded from the private sector along with a regional director from the GOR, to form a parallel staff for the regional assembly.

The chambers have all established a close relationship with their RDAs, with detailed and regular collaboration on the RS. The development of Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), and the need to harmonise time horizons, has also been important. The chamber has a strong remit to monitor the progress and success of the RDA. In some regions, notably the North West, the chamber has taken a strong lead in terms of the regional policy debate. The Yorkshire and Humberside chamber has pioneered the idea of a formal concordat with the RDA, signed on 13 January 1999.

Ministerial approval for the developing chambers has come through a series of formal designations, announced between 19 May and 27 July 1999 (see Table 12). The chamber budget comes from membership subscription, although financial contribution is not always a requirement for participation. At present there is no provision for additional government funding, and as such the chambers rely to a substantial degree on the resources and good will of the relevant local authorities. Despite their relatively weak institutional base, the chambers have the potential to speak for the entire region. Moreover, as the honeymoon period ends and the job of putting the regional strategy into action begins, the regional chambers may become both more vocal and more significant in their criticism (and praise) of the RDAs.

Given the somewhat uncertain trajectory of English political and economic devolution, the general development of the chambers remains unclear. In particular, the potential role of local authorities (and public sector spending) in

steering, as well as implementing, RDA strategy has rarely been confronted directly. In some regions, where the politics of regionalism are more keenly developed, it is clear that the chamber operates – at least symbolically and contestedly – as a synonym for local government. Both the general role and diversified interests of local authorities, however, have remained significantly under-specified within the mainstream RDA process. Despite the recommendation of the Urban Task Force report that local authorities should be the lead partners in achieving social and economic regeneration (UTF, 1999), the potential for fundamental interaction between RDAs and local authorities – in terms of shared decision making and shared financial commitments – has been a marginal if not silent question. (The only RS to affirm a distinctive leadership role for local authorities is that of ONE [1999c]. The SEEDA (1999c) document, for example, is much more singularly business-minded and mentions local government only in passing.)

Table 12: The Regional Chambers

Name	Date of formation and designation	Members (meets)	Sub-structure	Status of LGA organisation	Links to RDA	Staff (budget)
North East Regional Assembly	October 1998 23 June 1999	63	Executive committee of 26 working in four fora (economic, social, promotional, inclusivity)	NEALA incorporated into NEA, with staff 'doubled-up'	Concordat (GONE, ONE and NEA): due mid-August	12 (£133,000)
North West Regional Assembly	October 1998 19 May 1999	80	Policy Unit and Secretariat with four key priority groups	NWRA incorporates LGA Regional Association	Strong monitoring role, shared meetings	20 (£400,000)
Regional Chamber for Yorkshire and Humberside	20 July 1998 27 July 1999	35 (quarterly)	Advisory board of eight meet monthly	Regional Assembly continues as parallel organisation (sharing three project managers)	Formal Concordat signed 13 January 1999	five plus admin
West Midlands Regional Chamber	28 January 1999 19 May 1999	60	Plans for a large annual plenary conference	LGA central services staff doubles as WMRC secretariat, with extra	Chamber involved in RS working group	20
East Midlands Regional Assembly	17 December 1998 19 May 1999	105	Steering group of 18 with various task groups. Policy Forum set up to look at an integrated RS	No data	Close collaboration between RS group and assembly work on integrated RS	
East of England Regional Assembly	12 March 1999 21 July 1999	40 (quarterly)	No executive committee, but provision for groups. Working groups will be developed	Secretariat is run by staff doubled up from LG conference	Good links, with RA planning away day on the RS	2 (none)
South West Regional Chamber	24 April 1998 21 July 1999	115 (quarterly)	Advisory board meets every 4-6 weeks to manage regional chamber business	LGA branch continues, meeting just prior to regional chamber	Reciprocal observer status	
South East of England Regional Agency	20 January 1998 21 July 1999	111	Executive committee of 27 meeting monthly	No data	Reciprocal observer status	



# From strategy to implementation

The Regional Strategies (RS) represent the culmination of the RDAs' most significant practical task to date. The style, substance and pace of the process of strategy making – as well as the documents themselves – have varied considerably. Each RS provides some indication of the character and 'progress' being made in each region. It is important to note, however, that the general process has been a time-critical one. The boards and strategy teams became operational in April, a preliminary consultation draft of the RS was made available to ministers by July, and – after further consultation – the final versions were submitted to DETR by end of September 1999. As the formal government responses have highlighted, this was “no mean achievement” (DETR, 2000). A selective comparative analysis of the eight strategies is developed below, and an extensive summary of and commentary on each RS can be found in the Appendix. Prior to this, a general indication of the aims, scope and outcomes of the strategy-making process should be given.

According to DETR (1999b) guidance, the purpose of the RS is:

... to improve economic performance and enhance the region's competitiveness, addressing market failures which prevent sustainable development, regeneration and business growth in the region.... In developing its vision for the region the agency should seek to join up and develop links between [its areas of functional responsibility] to ensure an integrated, sustainable and cohesive approach to improving regional economic performance. (DETR, 1999a)

It is also seen as vital that the strategy should

focus on issues of regional salience, those responses that, as DETR guidance puts it, “justify action at the regional level” (DETR, 1999a).

As well as being action-orientated, regional strategies must also be seen as commensurate responses to the RDAs' mission. This has meant that RDAs have not shied away from addressing the fundamental issues facing their respective regions, even though not all of these are likely to be tractable in policy terms at the regional level. The fact that all but two of the RDA areas (London and the South East) have levels of regional GDP below the European average, and that this broad pattern has been a long-standing one, attests to the scale of the task before these new agencies (see Table 9). Correspondingly, the RDAs' vision statements are appropriately grandiose and wide-ranging (see Appendix). But like several other RDAs, Advantage West Midlands (AWM, 1999a, p 2) makes “no apologies for the ambition of [its] vision” of becoming – again, like several other RDAs – a “world class region”.

Perhaps understandably, the RS share many common features in terms of style and content. They all speak of the challenges of information and communications technologies, of globalisation and the “knowledge-driven economy”; they all emphasise the need for a “flexible and adaptable” workforce; they all emphasise the key roles of innovation and enterprise; and they all make serious efforts to respond to the imperatives of sustainability and social inclusivity. And, not surprisingly, they all bristle with millennial rhetoric and ‘can-do’ bravado.

Behind this, however, is a frequently reiterated concern that the strategies must be deliverable if they are to be credible, a concern which means that boards have had to both “think outside the

box” of inherited approaches and at the same time propose measures that are achievable. An RDA chair posed this dilemma in the following terms:

“People’s expectation of what we can achieve is enormous. It is difficult to achieve that if you look at it on a pure funding basis.... Not only have you got to produce the strategy but you actually have to deliver it at the end of the day....

Being a businessman, I am not one for producing documents that then sit on the shelf.” (RDA chair, interview August 1999)

While objects of ritual deference, most of those involved in the production of RS will candidly agree that the approach adopted has been relatively formulaic and predictable. While each is structured rather differently, both their substantive content and their mode of argument are derivative of DETR guidance, of the broad thrust of central government policy and thinking and of previous regional strategies. Less prosaically, the strategies have also been widely circulated among the RDAs themselves for commentary and mutual learning. As one RDA official explained:

“I went to a conference about two to three weeks ago at which someone from another RDA was presenting his strategy. I could lie back and close my eyes and it could have easily been ... [our] strategy. I’m sure that’s the same for all strategies across the country. A lot of people have criticised us for what they call the tippex-test: take out [region X] and put in [region Y].”

(Senior RDA officer, interview July 1999)

Crucially, all of the RS exhibit a certain omnibus quality, which means that they commit the RDAs to a whole series of parallel strategic objectives, even though many of these may be practically difficult to reconcile. A common thread, for example, is the admirable and logic concern to develop an ‘holistic’ strategy, within which the objectives of economic competitiveness and social inclusion are held side by side. This admirable but challenging objective has been a key debating point for many RDA boards. Although provisional compromises have been fashioned in the various RS, there is a residual sense in some regions that key tensions around this objective remain

unresolved. As a voluntary sector board member commented,

“We have won the hearts over [on social exclusion issues] but the minds must follow.... Politically and morally it is something that everyone on the board accepts, but on what it actually means, they are less clear.” (RDA board member, interview September 1999)

The draft RS were produced by the summer of 1999 for preliminary inspection by ministers and – most importantly – for extended consultation within each region. In fact, to varying degrees, the July draft versions were themselves the product of extensive consultation with businesses, partnership organisations and individuals in the region. The strategy-making process was driven by a dedicated strategy team, and steered by the board. Once the broad structure of the themes had been identified, most RDAs created sub-groups consisting of key board members, specialists and interested stakeholders in order to prepare a given section of the strategy. All RDAs employed external consultants to prepare either a state of the region audit or to help write the draft/final RS (Table 11). In most regions the draft RS was launched with a real fanfare to the media and stakeholders; some coordinated the launch with a regional chamber or assembly meeting. The date of public availability for the draft strategy varied between late May and early August; however, no simplistic lessons should be drawn from this (see Table 11). In the North East, for example, the developed nature of the regional agenda meant that public and media attention had been focused on the April launch. There was no official launch of the draft RS, which was available very early for consultation. Other RDAs kept their powder dry for the final version because of the difficulty of producing a strategy almost from scratch.

Table 13 provides an indicative content analysis of the draft regional strategies (an excellent, detailed analysis of the draft RS is provided by Nathan et al, 1999, although the documentary evidence has inevitably been superseded by the final documents). While necessarily somewhat subjective, given the multidimensional, cross-referenced and lengthy nature of the strategies, this reveals that in the final analysis most of the strategies rest on a broadly shared policy repertoire. Again, there are strong echoes here of government policy in general and DETR guidance in particular. For all the attempts to individualise



Table 13: Indicative content analysis of the draft regional strategies

	NE	NW	WM	Y & H	EM	East	SW	SE
Better policy coordination	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓			✓	✓
Business–education links	✓✓✓			✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Community regeneration	✓	✓	✓	✓✓			✓✓	✓
Developing employability	✓			✓			✓	✓✓
Disseminating best practice		✓	✓	✓				✓
Education	✓✓			✓	✓		✓	✓✓
Environmental clean-up/improvement		✓✓✓	✓✓		✓			✓
Export stimulation				✓				
Image and marketing			✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
Improving business support, etc	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Industrial clusters/networks	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓		✓✓		✓✓
Information and telecommunications	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Innovation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Integrated urban/rural development		✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓		
Inward investment promotion	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓		✓✓✓	✓
Key sectors		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• aerospace		✓✓				✓	✓	✓
• agriculture		✓	✓		✓✓	✓✓	✓	
• automotive	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
• biotechnology		✓✓			✓	✓		✓
• ceramics			✓					
• chemicals		✓✓		✓✓				✓
• creative/cultural?		✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓		✓
• electronics	✓						✓	
• engineering			✓	✓✓	✓			✓
• finance		✓✓		✓✓	✓	✓	✓	
• food		✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓
• green industries		✓✓		✓✓		✓		✓
• IT and communications	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
• medical		✓✓			✓			✓
• public sector	✓							
• property								✓
• textiles		✓		✓				
• tourism		✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Lifelong learning		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓
Lobbying for local discretion		✓✓	✓			✓?	✓	
Local targeting of policies	✓✓	✓	✓✓					✓
Monetary policy	✓	✓						✓?
Promoting adaptability	✓	✓	✓					✓
Promoting entrepreneurship	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓			✓
Quality of life and environment					✓✓		✓	✓✓
Reducing bureaucracy/red tape			✓	✓			✓	
Regional intelligence systems		✓		✓		✓✓	✓✓	✓
Research and development					✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Rural business		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓✓
Small and medium-sized enterprises	✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Social inclusion	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Sustainable development	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓				✓✓	✓
Training and skills development	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Transport improvements	✓✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓✓
Value for money		✓	✓✓					
Venture capital (seedcorn)?	✓	✓			✓✓			✓✓
Vision (in years)	10yrs	20 yrs	10 yrs	10yrs	10yrs	10 yrs	10yrs	5–10yrs
Wealth creation	✓✓	✓	✓✓					✓
Youth			✓			✓✓		

(or regionalise) the strategies, the reality – as the author of one such strategy conceded – is that they all exhibit a “standard form and content” despite concerted efforts “to personalise it and give it a wow factor” (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999). Another respondent observed wearily, “If you look at a Regional Strategy you’ll see the sections that are in all strategy documents, the phrases that are in all strategy documents, and the aspirations that are in all strategy documents” (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999).

While there have been some substantial changes in the redrafting of many strategies (see below), the general thrust of policy has been fairly uniform. It would, however, be unfair to seek to explain this situation in terms of a failure of regional capacity or inventiveness. Rather, it reflects the institutional conditions under which the RDAs have been created. The need to build and sustain partnerships, to establish consensus, and to sign up regional and local stakeholders to a unifying ‘vision’ lends itself to a process of strategy formation that is relatively loose, general and, perhaps most significantly, all-encompassing from an institutional, functional and geographical point of view. This has certainly contributed an anodyne and familiar quality to the RS. While more than simply lowest-common-denominator reports, they have an unmistakable generic quality which reflects the RDAs’ role in sampling, selecting and synthesising from existing policy repertoires at the regional and local levels, and their attempts to reproduce and rationalise these within an all-embracing vision.

Unfortunately, this search for an overarching vision may also undermine the practical utility of the strategies as guidelines for action planning and implementation. As one RDA officer conceded, “We talk about being a world class region, but to be honest I’m not sure what that means” (senior RDA officer, AWM, interview July 1999). This sort of view was fairly representative, at least in private:

“Delivering urban renaissance is a bit like trying to end world poverty, isn’t it? In a sense, therefore, it is a very political document. [We’re] trying to get people behind it... It is about developing a framework and having a unified voice for the region: pushing the region’s interests in a coherent and collective way. I think it is about setting some standards.” (RDA

board member, NWDA, interview October 1999)

“A Regional Strategy has got to be motherhood and apple-pie.... I mean, what is a strategy? More jobs and more money! If it ain’t about that it ain’t about anything. So it is the action planning that is going to be the real test and it is there that we will see the RDA succeed or fail.” (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999)

The fact that the RDAs have a wide-ranging remit but limited financial and institutional capacity means that they are likely to be persistently vulnerable to the accusation, frequently voiced in the regions already, that their reach exceeds their grasp. While, at the stage of strategy formation, bold visions and exacting targets suggest ambition and determination, there is clearly a danger that at a later stage these same visions and targets could undermine the RDAs’ legitimacy and credibility if they are not realised. Altering the GDP trajectories of lagging regions, for example, will clearly be a demanding task for organisations that for the most part have only indirect policy leverage. As one senior officer in a regional chamber explained, securing such ambitious goals, when – on his calculations – the RDAs’ annual budget amounted to just 0.3% of regional GDP, would be a singular feat, even with the support of all of the regional partners (see Table 10). Others argue that the value of RS is largely symbolic, and that in reality the expectations of delivery are more ‘realistic’. If this is the case, what really matters is how the RDAs move forward towards action planning and implementation.

This raises a whole series of practical, but none the less fundamental, operational and budgetary questions, few of which have been publicly aired as yet. As one senior officer conceded, “The strategy precedes our putting in place the structure to deliver the strategy” (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999). More controversially, however, it is clear that this interplay between strategy formation and the evolution of institutional structure is intimately related to constraints imposed by both the size of the budget and the degree of ring-fencing. The need for a single integrated budget was highlighted by a number of RDAs. One person spoke of the constraining effects of management and budgetary boundaries within the organisation:

“We are compromised by those existing boundaries and we need a much more flexible budget, preferably a single pot budget in regeneration terms. To be able to respond appropriately and strategically and not to be hampered by the inflexibility of things like different reporting arrangements, different project appraisals systems, different output definitions.” (Senior RDA officer, interview July 1999)

By late September, with the strategies approved by the regions and awaiting ministerial validation, the key decision making came to concern the geographical and sectoral priorities that are to be embedded in the action plans. The action planning phase is ongoing, and each RDA was to submit the three required plans by the end of March 2000 (as such, an assessment of the action plan drafting falls outside the scope of this report). While a few regions have already specified these targets in some detail, the majority have yet to move much beyond the stage of broad and inclusive ‘vision’ (notable exceptions would include NWDA, but also EMDA with its specific targets for 100 days).

To describe systematically and comparatively the degree and character of changes made between a draft and final RS would be a lengthy and perhaps misleading task. The strategy-making process should be understood in its particular regional perspective. Nevertheless, a number of observations can be made by way of example. First, the redrafting process enabled the RDAs to bring greater coherence and style to the documents; the ONE, NWDA and EMDA documents, for example, were transformed from working documents to ‘glossy’ format only for the final draft. Second, in cases like SWERDA – where the regional agenda was poorly developed – the draft document met with substantial criticism of certain aspects that had been included. The Yorkshire-Forward, document, for example, was criticised for its lack of specific work on sustainable development, and further material was incorporated from government papers. As such, the redrafting process was often an important way of ensuring consensus. Third, while some draft documents are basically similar in form and content to the final document, others have been substantially augmented. EMDA’s document, for example, almost doubled in length, with a lot more detail on action planning being added.

Such variations are testament to the differences in speed and process that have inevitably emerged.

A basic description of the eight final RS is given in Tables 14 and 15 and in the Appendix. Given their common foundation in the range of DETR guidance, it is unsurprising that certain themes are shared by all the strategies. AWM (1999b), for example, cites four pillars that inform the detailed aims and objectives:

- Developing a diverse and dynamic business base
- Promoting a learning and skilful region
- Creating the conditions for growth
- Regenerating communities in the West Midlands

Expressed as starkly as this, there is little to distinguish between the eight strategies. Perhaps no less surprising is the way that, to a substantial degree, the strategies draw on a sometimes-implicit interpretation of the national and international economic context. Although it falls outside the scope of this report, the policy styles and strategies that inform the regional strategies reflect in important ways a broad consensus about the place of the English regions both within Europe and in the international economy.

In response to these preliminary comments, the summary of the strategies focuses on those aspects of prioritisation, decision making and implementation that are distinctive (if not unique) to each region. While it is important to recognise each RS as an evolving framework and as the outcome of the more fundamental process of consultation, discussion and decision making this point was made repeatedly in interviews with key actors involved in the consultation process), the documents nevertheless give considerable insight into the variety of strategic formulations that the process of devolution in the English regions has enabled. In the Appendix the RS are examined under five standard categories:

- Name and title of RS
- Vision statement
- Key themes
- Strategic priorities
- Implementation and action planning

The tendency for a common rhetoric and a shared range of policy themes has already been highlighted; but a number of additional elements can be characterised briefly.

Table 14: Titles and slogans of the eight regional strategies

RDA	Title of strategy/slogan
AWM	Creating Advantage: the West Midlands Economic Strategy
EEDA	Moving Forward: a strategy for the East of England
EMDA	Prosperity through people: Economic Development Strategy for the East Midlands 2000-2010
ONE	Regional Economic Strategy for the North East: unlocking our potential
NWDA	England's North West: a strategy towards 2020
SEEDA	Building a world class region: an economic strategy for the South East of England
SWERDA	Regional Strategy for the South West of England: 2000-2010
Y-F	The Regional Economic Strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber 2000-2010: Advancing together towards a world class region

Table 15: Physical description of the final regional strategy documents

RDA	Executive summary	Report on consultation	Main report	Additional features
AWM	3 pages (in main report)	None	48 pages	Glossary; Plain English Crystal Mark for clarity
EEDA	8 pages	None	65 pages	None; action plans and consultation responses in main report; glossary
EMDA	8 pages	8 pages	48 pages	Landscape orientation and in folder
ONE	None		128 pages	None; main report contains specific sections on action planning and delivery
NWDA	3 pages (in main report)	None	68 pages	CD-ROM with copy of RS included in jewel case and plastic folder for main report
SEEDA	3 pages	3 pages	42 pages	Seven separate draft action plans pertaining to SEEDA's key programmes; enclosed in folder
SWERDA	6 pages (section 4 of 4 in folder)	None	62 pages (26 context, 16 strategy, 20 implement- ation)	Four separate documents; CD-ROM containing draft action plans, state of region report and consultation findings; landscape orientation in folder
Y-F	4 pages (in main report)	1 page (in main report)	61 pages	Annexes with baseline information, glossary, and list of assumptions

Source: Regional Strategies

A key element in the RS concerns the attitude of each RDA towards itself and its role in certain key areas. What will the actual role of the RDA be? Most elements of the strategy play down the role of the RDA in direct implementation, while insisting that the strategies belong to the region 'as a whole'. EEDA's role, for example, is understood as an essentially strategic one, including the focusing of regional priorities, coordination of activities, sharing of knowledge

and best practice, and being a lobbying voice for the region (EEDA, 1999c). The Yorkshire-Forward strategy, by comparison, provides a more detailed account of the various roles the RDA will play in specific action planning and delivery activities. Generalising from the eight strategies, it is possible to identify schematically several levels of involvement and impact that the RDAs will have:

- The RDA can be seen as a 'principal agent of

delivery', where it implements a project 'in-house' or is the lead partner (an example is SWERDA's inward investment programme).

- A strong leadership role may also be taken in terms of interpreting, lobbying and coordinating with respect to national and European policy and funding mechanisms.
- A fairly strong role may be played in terms of focusing and targeting planning or delivery mechanisms (for example in terms of community regeneration).
- Equally, the RDA can take a strategic lead in driving and coordinating the mapping and identification of resources, opportunities and needs.
- A more general role entails "developing, establishing and broadening" key priorities in partnership with other sub-regional and local bodies, but also through some degree of financial and/or institutional provision.
- At a weaker level, the strategies refer to a role in "championing, promoting, encouraging, ensuring and supporting".

Clearly the sort of activities over which the RDA can take strong leadership are dependent on its limited financial and institutional resources. As several documents make clear, the RS will succeed only through the coordinated efforts of a diversity of sub-regional and local partners who agree, refine and deliver the action plans. The minimal form of action usually involves some partnership-based review of a given theme; for example, ONE is reviewing the business support infrastructure.

The issue of leadership raises the broader theme of governance. One of the clearest implications of the RDA process has been the proliferation of a variety of partnership-based teams or action groups based around the priorities of the strategy document. After the initial consultation periods the array of sub-groupings, organised around certain sectors, interest groups or themes, have become central to the way in which the RDA develops and secures the implementation of the regional strategy. While at one level this is a necessary and important process, it raises a number of potential and general concerns. First is the fact that RDAs could encourage 'partnerships of partnerships', which add to the dense and overlapping governance structure rather than helping to simplify and rationalise it. Second, engagement in the RDA consultation and action planning process requires a substantial investment of resources by member groups, not least in terms

of attending meetings. This clearly has differential consequences for the key partnership groups. A few RDAs include specific commitments to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector, but this is difficult to achieve without the decentralisation of substantial resources. The combined effect of demanding consultation and dense patterns of partnerships was seen by some as prohibitive:

"There are more initiatives and bits of money to go for now, but there is not the time or energy to do it ... it is such a drain on us." (South West of England, Officer in Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation, interview November 1999)

Third, one consequence of the proliferation of partners and partnerships is the complexity of nested scales the RDA must oversee. For practical reasons, most RDAs will work primarily with sub-regional groups operating as an umbrella for local partners. This clearly begs the question of how local interest will be translated into regional ones and vice versa. In one sense, the nature of the RS seems to suggest that this is a consensus-bound and developing process of adjustment.

Given the emphasis on partnerships, one of the most salient gaps in most of the strategies is reference to the role of local authorities. This sits somewhat oddly with the increasing stress placed elsewhere on the key importance of local authorities in the regeneration process: by government in schemes such as New Deal for Communities or in its support for the Local Government Association New Commitment to Regeneration; or by the Urban Task Force (UTF, 1999) in its support of local government as the champion of local area regeneration. Only ONE, for example, identifies a clear leadership role for local authorities. And yet, in terms of harnessing financial and partnership resources as well as resolving potential conflicts, it is clear that local authorities could be key drivers in the process. In part this is a problem rooted in the nature of the RDAs' birth. It is, however, unclear – at least from the preoccupations of the RS – to what extent the RDA leadership is cognisant of and responsive to the lessons drawn about improving the management and coordination of area regeneration (JRF, 1999).

A full and systematic comparison of the RS is difficult for several reasons. First, the pace and character of strategy development is clearly

Table 16: Comparative assessment of the eight regional strategies

RDA	Realism	Specificity of strategy	Degree of strategic prioritisation	Extent of action planning	Joined-up delivery mechanisms	Joined-up strategy
AWM	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
EEDA	✓	✓		✓		
EMDA	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
ONE	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
NWDA	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
SEEDA	✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓		✓
SWERDA	✓	✓			✓✓	✓
Y-F	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓

Notes: ✓ = average; ✓✓ = above average; ✓✓✓ = good

*Realism:* How realistic is the strategy in its assessment of what needs to be done and, crucially, what can be done by the RDA and region as a whole? Most strategic visions assert a desire to be 'world-class', but without a realistic assessment of what the region and RDA can achieve there is a danger that elements of the strategy might read as 'wish lists'.

*Specificity of the strategy:* This criterion assesses the extent to which the details of the RS are distinctive to, and embedded in, the given region. A lack of specificity suggests a reliance on fairly generic policy ideas. Evidence of unusual or innovative policy ideas is important.

*Degree of strategic prioritisation:* Assesses the extent to which the strategy identifies a limited number of core priorities in terms of certain policy programmes and specific areas or sectors.

*Extent of action planning:* Assesses the extent to which the detail and direction of the action plan has been developed, including evidence of which partners will lead what.

*Joined-up delivery mechanisms:* Assesses evidence of a clearly defined structure for making linkages between local, sub-regional and regional partners in order to better coordinate specific programmes and deliver the RS.

*Joined-up strategy:* How holistic is the RS? The extent to which the key elements of the strategy fit together and reinforce one another. For example, is the strategy on community regeneration or sustainability conceptually and practically integrated with that on competitiveness or innovation?

variable across the regions. Second, while all strategies pay lip service to certain basic virtues – joined-up thinking, prioritisation, etc – it is clear that they must find their own blend of strategic priorities and implementation mechanisms. Indeed, one criticism that could be levelled at most of the documents is that they do not identify or develop to a substantial degree what is, or could be, distinctive about their region. Third, the RS are inherently political and performative documents, concerned with maximising consensus and securing a level of approval. In

this sense, the action-planning process and the politics of sub-regional or local implementation must be the real test of the RDA itself. With this caveat in place, it is useful to compare the RS on the basis of five criteria (Table 16):

- Realism
- Specificity of the strategy
- Degree of strategic prioritisation
- Extent of action planning
- Joined-up delivery mechanisms
- Joined-up strategy

While necessarily somewhat subjective, such a reading of the eight strategies does give an indication of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each RS. Moreover, it emphasises the fact that, while some work has been done in terms of specifying and prioritising strategies, many RDAs have a long way to go in detailing the content and mechanisms for action planning. The commonly accepted aims of contributing towards joined-up regional thinking, better coordinating delivery and sharing best practice are often stated. The strategies are, however, substantially less well developed in terms of identifying either criteria or mechanisms for promoting better regional and sub-regional working.

At a formal level, the division of responsibilities between statutory bodies may appear to be straightforward. The RDAs have inherited responsibility for decision making, funding and strategic coordination in terms of rural and urban regeneration functions (taking over SRB, English Partnerships and Rural Development Commission funding) as well as overall responsibilities for inward investment. After this, their remit is both more general – relating to the five themes of the RDA act (see Chapter 1) – and more specific – in terms of the regional priorities and projects developed. Leaving this to one side, however, there are a wide range of programmes and issues where the RDAs' lines of responsibility are less clear. The GOR, for example, remains responsible for the coordination of European funding as well as work on the New Deal for Communities and the nascent Learning and Skills Councils. Equally, the development and delivery of RPG falls outside the direct remit of the RDAs. Even with the best possible partnership mechanisms, it seems that the strategic grasp of RDAs is somewhat uneven and overlapping. There remain large areas of ambiguity about the specific locus of responsibility for particular domains.

In short, even at a regional level it is clear that, in institutional as well as strategic terms, the RDAs do not have a monopoly on the key policy domains. The formal division of responsibilities between the RDA, GOR and other stakeholders is reasonably transparent, at least to the regional level stakeholders. At the level of project delivery and action planning, however, the lines of responsibility are much more opaque. This is a particular function of the emphasis on succeeding through partnership: it is unclear with whom the buck should finally stop, although, inevitably at a

very early stage, all of the RS give some detail concerning action planning (see above). Tables 17 and 18 show some examples of the division of responsibilities for specific projects in Yorkshire-Forward and SEEDA, respectively. These provide some indication of the complexity of stakeholder relationships and the interdependency between those partnerships with a coordinating role, those with a supporting role and those charged with delivery. Although Tables 17 and 18 provide only a sample of projects, the complexity and density of relationships is clearly evident. This complex mixing of strategic, funding and implementing partners is, moreover, stretched across a variety of institutional and geographical scales, from neighbourhood to sub-regional to regional to national. Such a situation throws up the broader question of how RDAs conceptualise the development of partnership mechanisms within a regional governance structure.

All the RDAs have so far emphasised the importance of letting such a system emerge from consultation, with its being “owned by the whole region”. The goals of strategic prioritisation and more effective programme coordination, however, arguably require a more unified and transparent set of mechanisms through which an RDA can relate to its local, sub-regional and national partners. Some of the RS provide a tentative indication of RDA thinking on the possible relationship between strategic themes, stakeholder relationships and institutional mechanisms. Figures 2-5 show the most illuminating examples, drawn from SWERDA, SEEDA, Yorkshire-Forward and EMDA. Perhaps the most striking aspect is how different they are. But beyond this, there is more than a little suggestion that the interrelationships between the various roles across the regional domain are based more on an expectation of informal collaborative working than on mechanisms that would clarify distinctive responsibilities. Interestingly, only EMDA's diagram (Figure 5) indicates a concern with ‘spatial’ issues in the delivery of an integrated strategy.

Table 17: Yorkshire-Forward: partnership-based responsibilities in action planning

Deliverables	Delivery mechanism	Supporting role	Lead role
Provide business support to key economic sectors	Businesses and business organisations	Regional Innovation Strategy sector group, Business Links	Yorkshire-Forward
Grow the region's exports	Businesses plus BTI and funding from EU	BTI and businesses	Yorkshire Forward
Establish a Virtual Business School	Universities with funding from DFEE and EU	Businesses, YHUA, ethnic minority group, FE colleges	Yorkshire-Forward
Increase attractiveness of the region	LA policies, Y-F funding, businesses, universities and health investments	Yorkshire-Forward YHUA, health authorities and others	Regional Assembly
Increase and retain inward investment	Local and regional aftercare programmes, Invest in Britain, Regional Supply Network	LAs and local partnerships	Yorkshire-Forward
Raise skill level of workforce	People, businesses and voluntary organisations	Yorkshire-Forward	Employers, NTOs, TECs (LSCs), HEFCE, Lifelong Learning Partnerships, etc
Develop sustainable neighbourhoods	National Neighbourhood Strategies, Social Exclusion Unit, Community Plans, Regional Housing Framework, RPG, Y-F (SRB), Community Regeneration Funding, Housing Corporations ADP, New Deal for Communities, EU, Businesses, Living Over The Shop Initiative	LAs, health bodies, education bodies, statutory criminal justice agencies, Yorkshire-Forward (in influencing role)	Local Partnerships
Regenerate the region's city and town centres	People, businesses, local partnerships, SRB funding, EU, LAs, Economic and Community Plans	Yorkshire-Forward, sub-regional partnerships, faith communities, voluntary groups, Countryside Agency	LAs
Develop the Humber Trade Zone	Private developers, local partnerships, Y-F land and property funds, EU, LA economic development plans, RPG and local plans	Humber Forum, Associated British Ports, private wharf operators, businesses, LAs, universities, Environmental Agency, etc	Yorkshire Forward
Optimise the availability of land and property	Y-F developers, LAs, RPG and local plans	Developers, LAs and local partners	Yorkshire-Forward

Source: Yorkshire-Forward (1999c)

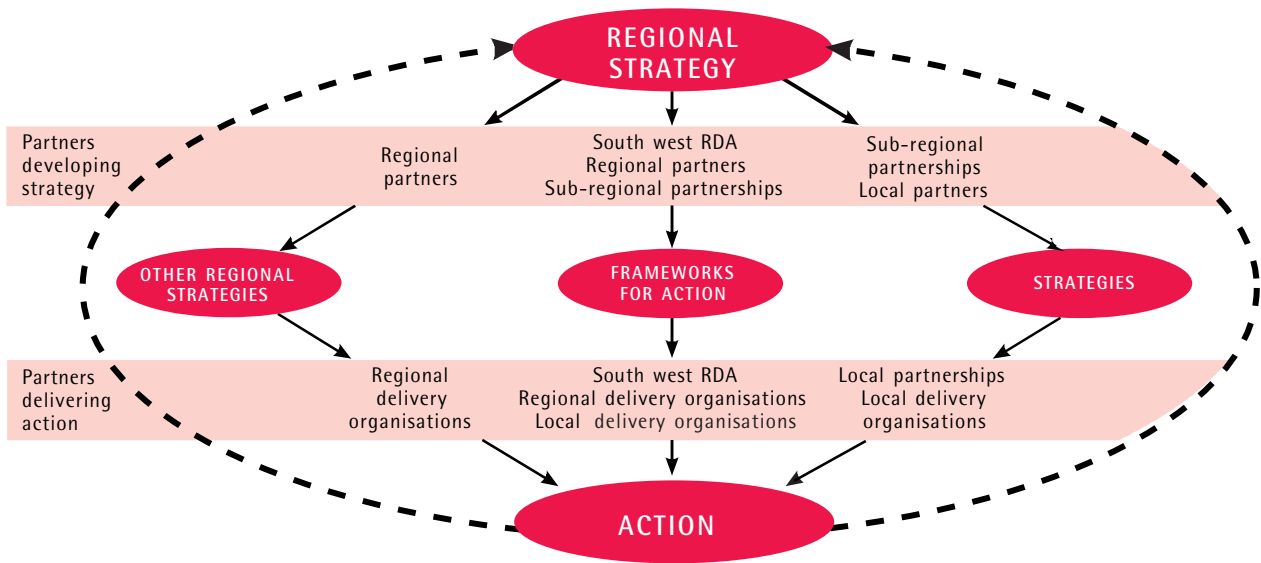


**Table 18: SEEDA: partnership-based responsibilities in action planning**

<b>Key actions</b>	<b>Urgency</b>	<b>Supporting role</b>	<b>Lead role</b>
Support transition from Business Links to Small Business Services	18 months to three years	GOSE, Business Links and SBS economic partnerships	SEEDA
Develop a regional innovation strategy	18 months to three years	Economic partnerships, SBS, LSCs, DERA, CLRC	SEEDA
Establish a regional database of sources and information	6-18 months	SBS, LCSs, GOSE, LAs	SEEDA
Commence discussions at regional level about workforce-related strategy and partnership	6-18 months	SEEDA, TUC, CBI, GOSE, employer and employee representatives	
Ensure access for young people to ITC and related skills	>3 years	SEEDA, Local Learning Partnerships, LSCs, etc	Government's National Grid for Learning initiative
Prepare and implement Local Transport Plans	<6 months		Highway Authorities and GOSE
Review funding criteria in urban development and regeneration projects (re Transport Plans)	18 months to three years		SEEDA
Establish Task Forces to address regeneration needs of East Kent, Sussex coast and Isle of Wight	18 months to three years	Regeneration Partnerships, GOSE, LAs, universities, colleges, businesses, VCS, HAs, etc	SEEDA
Focus the various national, central and European funding programmes	18 months to three years	SEEDA, LAs, GOSE, Learning and Skills Councils, SBS, English Heritage, Employment Service, TECs	
Propose Regional Cultural Strategy	18 months to three years	SEEDA, English Heritage, Arts Bodies, HLF, Arts Council, Sports Council	Regional Cultural Consortium
Promote sustainable transport systems	>3 years	LAs, Economic Partnership, transport companies, private and public sector employers	SEEDA
Prioritised programme of strategic sites for urban renaissance	18 months to three years	LAs	SEEDA

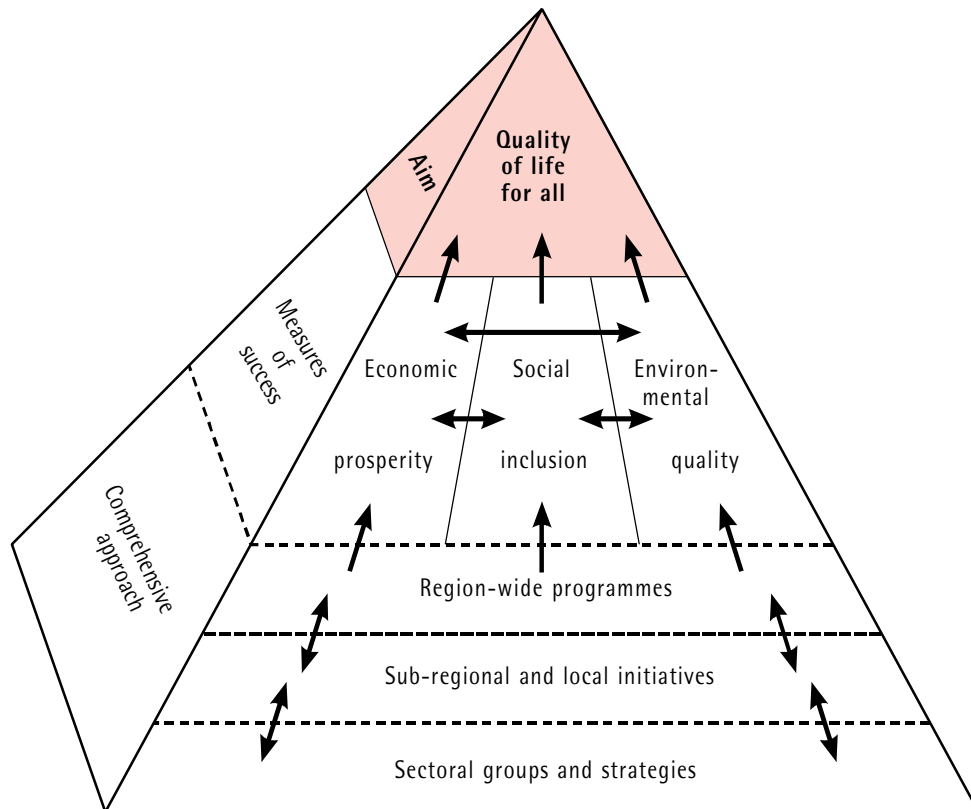
Source: SEEDA (1999c)

Figure 2: SWERDA (South West of England Regional Development Agency)



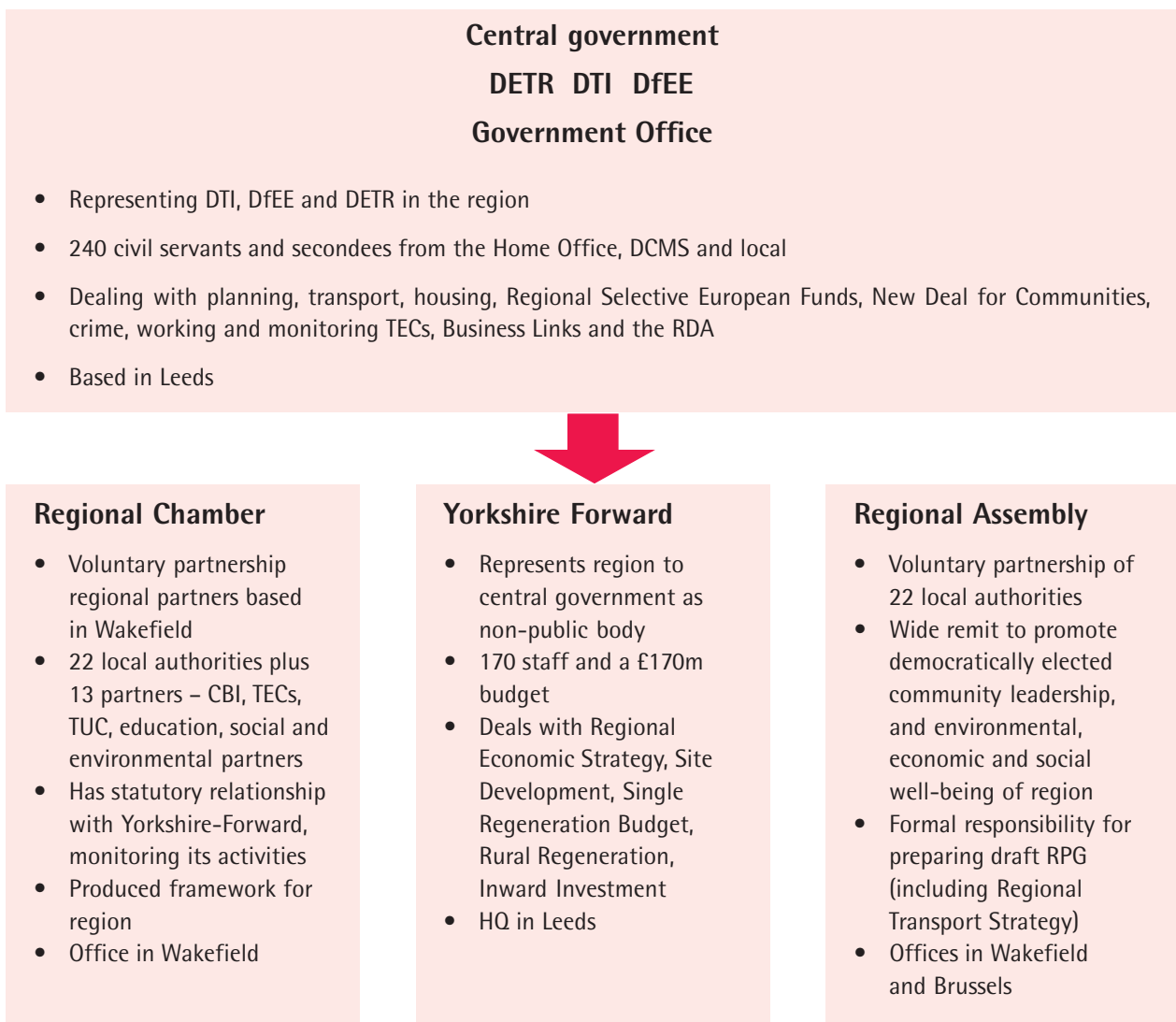
Source: SWERDA (1999c)

Figure 3: SEEDA (South East of England Development Agency)



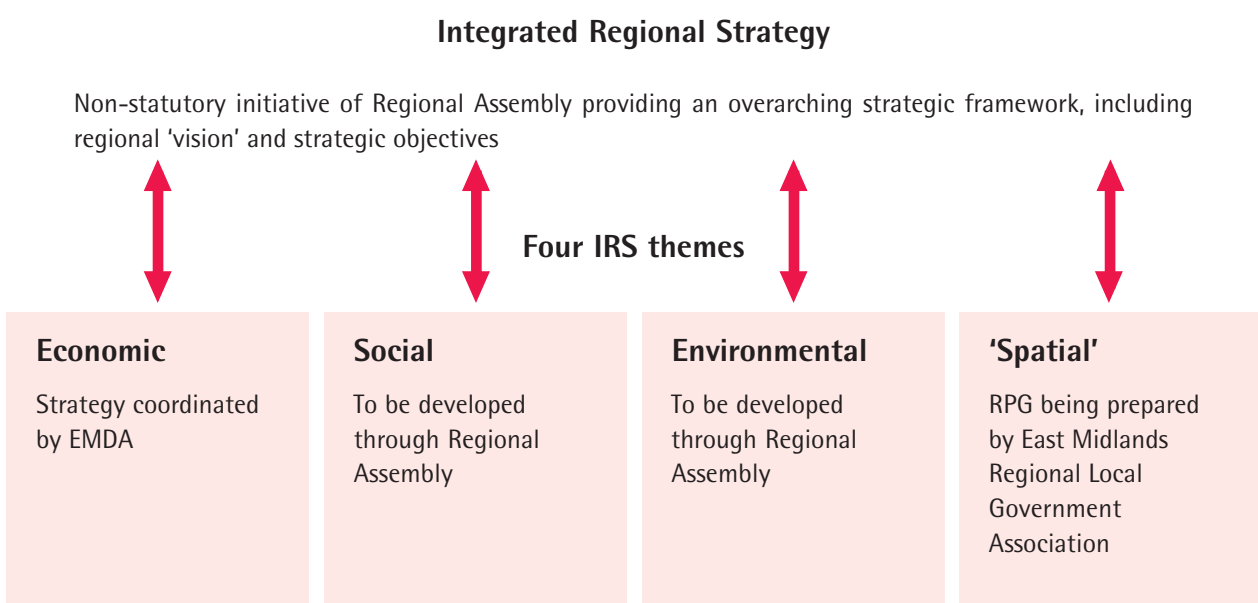
Source: SEEDA (1999c)

Figure 4: Yorkshire-Forward



Source: Yorkshire-Forward (1999c)

Figure 5: EMDA (East Midlands Development Agency)



Source: EMDA (1999b)

It is clear from this preliminary assessment that a key issue for the RDAs is the need to move from prioritisation at the general level to decision making and delivery at the level of specific action. The fact that such action planning will require further consultation with key partners makes it all the more important that the governance structure of each RDA is clarified. Of course, it is one thing to call for priorities; it is quite another to deliver them. This is because the task of prioritisation necessarily involves the confrontation of hard choices about locally – or sectorally – based funding, which have a tendency to divide, rather than unite, regional partners. The basic dilemma facing all the RDAs is how to reconcile the tasks of targeted resource allocation and strategic prioritisation – tasks that are necessarily selective and exclusionary – at the regional level alongside an inclusive and equitable approach to governance.

“The final [Strategy] document must prioritise and it should be about priorities like the airport – that is a classic one, like roads. If it is a document that simply says everyone gets everything, then it is a waste.... If there is not real prioritisation – which means not just saying yes but implicitly having to say no – unless there are some ‘nos’ in there then it will have failed.... They [the RDA] must produce a document that can stand up to that intellectual challenge.” (Senior officer, Regional Assembly, interview September 1999)

“There is a lot of flattery going on at the moment and there is nothing really to complain about yet.” (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999)

Yet this is clearly more than an intellectual challenge. All regions confront competing claims on scarce regeneration budgets, and no matter how forceful the RDAs’ initial approaches are they must all eventually confront the reality that much of the intra-regional competition for funds is effectively zero-sum. Describing one such situation, a regional stakeholder observed that the RDA chair’s initial approach of aggressively “knocking heads together” and focusing on *regional* value-added would ultimately have to be tempered in line with political “realities”:

“[The RDA chair] has talked to people, he has played devil’s advocate, he’s been brutal when people have come up with the motherhood and apple pie stuff, he’s said, ‘that’s rubbish, you can’t really believe that’. He’s really forced the debate; he’s done his stuff. But ... prioritisation is the key.... [Yet] there are clearly areas of this region that can be winners; but for some to win others have to lose.... There has to be some strategic approach and yet the political reality means that everybody has to get something out of it. This [region] is a Labour heartland ... nobody dare simply write off certain areas. It is not on the political agenda.” (Senior officer, regional assembly, interview September 1999)

“You look at our strategy and you’ve got the two major cities, you’ve got the urban areas, you’ve got the coastal towns, you’ve got the rural poverty. There ain’t a lot left. You’ve got two square miles of Cheshire that are not a priority area! That could be a criticism. I think the implementation is a lot less well worked out.... There are some priorities set out in the Regional Strategy, but they vary a lot in terms of the detail. Some are well worked out, but others are just wish lists, really.” (RDA board member, NWDA, interview October 1999)

Some commentators went as far as to say that the RDAs’ credibility and impartiality might be brought into question once the reality of their sub-regional spending allocations was revealed. As one board member conceded, this is an issue that many of the RDAs have effectively deferred: “The gap that I keep thinking about – and I’m sure someone has thought it through – is how you actually make it happen. What is the actual process for implementation? But I think that will come when we do the corporate plan. We haven’t yet got there” (RDA board member, NWDA, interview October 1999).

Some argued that RDAs should seek to remain above accusations of local favouritism by focusing their energy and resources on ‘big issues’ currently beyond the reach of – or perhaps more accurately ‘above the heads’ – local partnerships. Otherwise, there might be a danger that the RDAs’ interventions would be reduced to incremental

changes to business-as-usual. As one commentator insisted, “I want SWERDA to look at something big like that [homelessness] and deal with it. Not piss about at the edges.... At worst they add to the problem by being hopelessly civil service-like” (chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999).

There was little or no agreement, however, about what these regional ‘big issues’ might be, or indeed whether there was any difference, in principle, between a regional and a local issue. Nevertheless, some regions are confronting these questions directly. The approach that is being developed by the North of England Assembly, for example, is to test the RS against five key criteria:

1. The issue must be demonstrably regional.
2. It must truly add value.
3. It must be something that is not already being done elsewhere satisfactorily.
4. It must be capable of relating to the people out there.
5. There must be demonstrable output (senior officer, North of England Assembly, interview August 1999).

These are sensible criteria, but they are likely to be very difficult to reconcile in practice. It is this latter, most challenging, stage that the RDAs have just reached. As one board member explained,

“To look back after the first year I feel we have just broken the ice. The credibility of it all has still to be proven.... The honeymoon period has finished. We have a good executive and board and a good non-executive team. But now we have to do things ... and start delivering.” (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999)

Finally, the RS give perhaps the clearest indication of the government’s understanding of the purpose of RDAs and the means they should develop. On 13 January 2000 in Derbyshire a seminar was attended by all the RDA chairs and government ministers from the DETR, DTI, Treasury and DfEE. John Prescott welcomed the eight strategies and reaffirmed their role in “boost[ing] competitiveness and iron[ing] out wealth imbalances”:

This Government is committed to enabling all of our regions to share in Britain’s growth. There are major disparities between regions and within regions. Our strategy is not to set one region against another. It is to make sure that all our regions are firing on all cylinders. That is the key to a successful British economy. (DETR, 2000)

The response given by the government to the RDAs, however, has been fairly anodyne. In general terms, government feedback has praised certain common themes (such as the prevalence of the development of industrial clusters as a strategic priority) and certain key projects (such as AWM’s notion of a regeneration zone). Certain weaknesses have also been highlighted as points for future work (such as NWDA’s strategy for agriculture and SEEDA’s monitoring criteria). The tendency for the themes of sustainability, social inclusion and equal opportunities to be underdeveloped is also noted. Overall, however, the response of government to the strategies, and the RDAs generally, is more interesting in terms of what is played down or left unsaid. No further commitment to new resources has been made; indeed, NWDA’s explicit call for additional resources is turned down in every case (DETR, 2000). Additional resources were, however, flagged in the Budget statement in April 2000. Equally, the notion of locally or regionally differentiated tax rates – a rare example of distinctive policy thinking – is dismissed out of hand. No indication is given as to how RDAs – and any successful innovation they bring – might be further empowered within the changing policy context. Indeed, there has been little acknowledgement of the fact that some of the difficulties that the RDAs face are a result of the complex and shifting range of partnership-based initiatives in economic and social regeneration. RDAs have to shape their strategies and governance structures to a wide range of initiatives that lie beyond their direct influence. Moreover, the actual proper place of RDAs within this policy repertoire remains somewhat ambiguous. As such, some of the uncertainties and difficulties experienced by the RDAs reflect the fact that the initial guidance and context has been insufficiently sensitive to the different needs and starting points of each region.



# Managing local regeneration

The largest of the RDAs' spending programmes are concerned with regeneration (Tables 3-5, 10). This means that their 'core business' will entail close working relationships with local regeneration agencies and partnerships. As DETR guidance repeatedly emphasises, this places a premium on effective forms of partnership working between the regional and local levels, not simply as a strategic choice but as a necessity for delivery:

Partnership working is vital to engage all the necessary players in the development of a regional regeneration strategy. The Government believes that regeneration is most effective when policies and programmes fully engage the support of local communities. There are also a wide range of approaches to the regeneration of local areas which depend on community based organisations.... The Government has therefore made partnerships the main method of delivery for many of its initiatives. RDAs will wish to ensure that regeneration initiatives are compatible with, and can support the achievement of objectives in, local strategies developed as part of national initiatives. (DETR, 1999b, paras 1.4.1-1.4.2)

There are some in the RDA system who perceive this as an incremental and largely benign process. So, as one RDA officer explained, "What the RDA is trying to do is improve what is *already* there. We're not trying to re-invent the wheel" (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999). Others, however, point out that the RDAs' strategic remit is inevitably disruptive of existing patterns of funding and delivery at the local level. For the regional tier to count, they argue, regional

priorities will have to be pursued. By definition, these cannot always be entirely coincidental with local and national priorities, for all the elasticity of the RDAs' statements of strategic intent. Moreover, in several cases informants argued that RDAs had either replicated or superimposed structures on existing successful partnerships.

It is clear that most of the RDAs, along with central government itself, are anticipating a significant 'coordination dividend' by virtue of the reorganisation and rationalisation of policy at the regional level. The scale of this dividend is extremely difficult to gauge, although it is easy to exaggerate. More seriously, the practical implications of such an objective may not sit easily with the RDAs' desire to act as a 'collaborative partner' with local and regional stakeholders. In some instances, they will clearly have to make the hard choices that are characteristic of all such superordinate funding bodies. Indeed, one respondent spoke of the pressing need to 'rationalise' not only local provision but the plethora of local partnerships themselves, a task that would inevitably draw the RDAs into organisational conflicts with local-level agencies and interest groups. There may therefore be some limits to the extent to which RDAs can continue to act as 'equal partners' once the strategic phase has passed and the delivery phase has begun. And, as a business stakeholder with wide experience of regeneration funding remarked, actually delivering a coordination dividend would involve a fundamental review of inherited spending patterns and conventions of resource allocation: "until a radical approach is taken to resource management, then where do you create the slack?" (chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999).

While some see efficiency gains to be had in the very act of regional contracting, others argue that these benefits are being exaggerated:

“If SWERDA can bring all the funding streams together then it will be good, but at the moment it seems to be turning into a hugely bureaucratic organisation. But hopefully as the harmonisation works through it will become easier for applicants because they won’t have to go to English Partnerships for one bit of funding and Government Office for another bit and the Rural Development Commission for another bit. They’d just come to one organisation. But that can also have a detrimental effect because there will be less funding for organisations.” (Community development worker, South West England, interview November 1999)

Many interviewees also raised the question of appropriate methods of sub-regional resource allocation, which meets the criteria of equity as well as efficiency:

“In terms of funding streams, they must be more flexible and creative.... I would hope that the partnerships that have been set up would be more genuine than they have sometimes been.... It must genuinely involve local people and communities.... We must also gather some regional intelligence that gives us a base-line for making judgements, because that really doesn’t exist. That should include some good robust social inclusion indicators that are more than a sort of bricks-and-mortar and people-into-jobs ones.” (Director, community organisation, North West England, interview October 1999)

“In the past the money has led the scheme, but from now on the quality of the scheme must lead the way.... You cannot go the way that English Partnerships have gone for years.... It must be a bloody good scheme and it must be customer-and product-led rather than just financially led.... We need real commitment to real partnerships that are going to sit by the scheme until it has delivered. So not money-led ... but solving problems in particular areas. That

is the very challenging agenda that the RDA is there for.... English Partnerships must get off the idea of building factories and hoping someone will come along. Those days are done. I think you build for a requirement.” (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999)

In this and other respects, the RDAs are soon likely to confront some hard choices about how to effect change within the regeneration agenda, under both tight budgetary constraints and an ethos of partnership working. While DETR guidance portrays this in largely innocuous terms, imploring RDAs in addition to their direct programming activities to “cooperate with partners at regional, local and neighbourhood level in the operation of other programmes aimed at regeneration” (DETR, 1999b, para 1.2.1), the need for a more strategic and holistic focus and the parallel requirement to “make resources work harder” (DETR, 1999b, para 1.2.2) both suggest that non-trivial changes will be called for in local delivery and funding arrangements. The task of delivering change on the ground is a far cry from the visionary statements of the RDAs’ strategies, but it is through these more mundane and intractable tasks that they must prove their worth. Certainly, it seems that the RDAs are already squaring themselves for this challenge. As one respondent emphasised, this kind of phase-shift in the methodology of regeneration will be essential if the RDAs are to realise their ambitious mission; they cannot afford to act, or even to be *perceived*, as “just being another arm of government. [They have to be] more than just another arm for delivering programmes [or] just another version of Regional Planning Guidance” (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999).

One of the difficult choices that the RDAs will have to face is the balance between urban and rural interests. To date, there is little evidence that most of the RDAs have done other than recognise the competing claims of both. Again – like the government’s intention to issue separate urban and rural white papers – this may be seen as a decision deferred. Certainly, the opposing urban and rural arguments were widely rehearsed by our interviewees:

“Cities are key to the process ... when that is sorted then you can deal with what is left.... We’re not going to attack them for the sake of attacking them, but if they spend all the SRB in the countryside, then



we'll go mad!" (Chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999)

"We are one of just 11 urban authorities in a sea of ... rural and agricultural land under the Common Agricultural Policy.... Trying to convince these backwoodsmen that this is the way forward ... and trying to get the regional chamber to come up with a regional voice is going to be bloody impossible." (Council leader [Labour], South West England, interview November 1999)

"There is no way that the RDA can ignore Bristol, Swindon, Exeter, Plymouth; if it does it will fail ... but at the moment they are giving a good impression of it. I want it to work ... but it isn't right at the moment." (Member, Devon Economic Partnership, November 1999)

"There is no such thing as a bloody rural agenda, it seems to me, except in terms of those who want to have a bash at the urban agenda.... It is the urban areas that will deliver the growth in GDP ... they are the places where the greatest inequalities and social exclusion exist ... they are the ones that exhibit the greatest harm to the environment.... So the urban areas are the problem, but they are [also] ... the solution." (Council leader [Labour], South West England, interview November 1999)

Alternatively, those representing rural areas often voiced concerns about the potential monopolisation of regeneration funds by the cities. One rural council leader went as far as to accuse neighbouring urban authorities of "predatory" intentions, insisting that "similar problems [of deprivation] on a much smaller scale exist in [rural areas]" (North West England, interview November 1999). Even where urban areas were not being favoured explicitly, this interviewee explained, they were favoured implicitly by virtue of their relatively deep resources of officer capacity, lobbying power and institutional connectedness.

Some regional stakeholders believe that this need to demonstrate a new approach will necessitate relatively *dirigiste* modes of operation on the part of RDAs. According to one well placed observer,

this will call for a strong regional steer in terms of action planning and priority setting, which in turn will mean that RDAs will have to assert their role more vigorously with respect to local agencies and stakeholders:

"The process for arriving at that short-list [of priorities and action plans] is really a top-down one. It does not appear to take any account of the consultation that the RDA is going through. They have drawn up a list of ones that they think are basically winners. I can understand their need to have some early successes, they need to prove to government and the region – to Whitehall in particular – that they can make a difference with regard to budgets and high levels of commitment. But unless part of that shortlist has some kind of pilot project capacity that matches needs and opportunities, we are not going to be doing anything different. We are simply going to be shuffling the cards in the deck. We need to make sure that [doesn't] happen." (Senior officer, regional chamber, interview June 1999)

As designated lead bodies and funding agencies, the RDAs may have to confront some of the limitations to partnership working as they move towards the implementation of their regeneration agenda.

It is imperative that the RDAs do not appear domineering in their relations with local partners, but neither can they afford to be seen as subordinate or irrelevant. As one RDA strategy officer explained,

"At the end of the day, we can only make an impact and make our funds work through joint working and joint financing.... We all need to be working on the same areas." (Senior RDA officer, interview July 1999)

Yet the question of *how* RDAs add value to pre-existing initiatives is occasionally lost on existing local regeneration partnerships, which sometimes perceive the RDAs' interest as intrusive or even disruptive. Furthermore, because the energies of the key officers and the board members has inevitably been focused on the production of the strategies, the issue of implementation has been so far neglected.

Where established modes of local working are proving quite effective, there is sometimes suspicion and resentment concerning the RDAs' future intentions. In some instances the RDAs are already being accused of seeking to take credit for joined-up approaches to local regeneration when the joining up had occurred *prior* to the RDAs' inception. Some local partners felt that this would lead to unnecessary duplication – as often-informal working arrangements were replicated by the RDA – whereas others characterised the RDAs' approach as a form of appropriation:

“We have a sort of dirty cabal ... that tries to get things done. We've gradually pulled the four leaders of the local authorities into the group and others from higher and further education, trade unions, and we'd like to add more. Our partnership-based strategy is already a bit motherhood and apple-pie, but it could be developed into something very successful indeed.... [Yet] all that has to be done against a background of difficult local government funding.... Our experience of the RDA so far has been ... that it has moved into playing a rather controlling role, that it wants to be pulling the strings and making the connections and particularly to make the connections at below the level at which we work.... So far the RDA hasn't added anything to that at all.... We will deliver some flagship results and they [SWERDA] will take all the credit for that. That's OK, but I can't feel that they are aiding us in any way.... For me they are just a bloody encumbrance.” (Chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999)

There is clearly a danger that the notion of 'partnership' is reduced to a convenient euphemism for the proliferation of inter-organisational – and indeed inter-partnership – networking, negotiation and bid making. While sometimes leading to genuine efficiency gains in terms of cross-agency decision making and joint resource allocation, there is clearly a parallel risk that the capacity for decisive and focused action becomes mired in a tangled network of 'joined-up bureaucracies'. Indeed, numerous respondents commented that the capacity of RDAs to tackle both civil service departmentalism on the one hand and local duplication on the other is being seriously exaggerated. In many ways, the RDAs

find themselves trapped between these two entrenched cultures, with little practical leverage over either. As one commentator observed, “This government speaks a lot about joined-up thinking and they mean it but they haven't told the civil service yet!” (RDA board member, SWERDA, interview November 1999).

There are many local partners and delivery agencies that openly acknowledge the limitations of their locally based efforts, identifying a real need for regional support. As a local authority member explained,

“I don't think we can do it alone. We are going to need a lot of help. And that is where the RDA has got to come in. Who are they going to serve? What will be their priorities?” (Council leader [Labour], South West England, interview November 1999)

The problem that the RDAs face is that many – perhaps most – of those active in regeneration work at the local level are seeking funding without interference. Local agencies want money; they have no desire to be 'coordinated'. As a Chamber of Commerce representative explained, the RDA “seemed to miss the point entirely. We were *already* organised and we knew where we were going. All we are worried about is how the hell we get over some hurdles” (chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999).

Despite a concern that the RDAs risk “spreading themselves too thin” (senior officer, regional chamber, interview July 1999), there has been a general recognition that RDAs offer a genuine and important opportunity for improving the strategic coordination of local regeneration activities. In light of this opportunity, a number of the RDAs have been careful to manage expectations within the region by emphasising partnership and collective coordination as opposed to project-based programme delivery.

One of the key challenges in the regeneration process is how best to exploit the potential synergy across the now bewildering array of area-based initiatives that are funded through a variety of government departments and agencies, for example SRB through the RDAs; New Deal for Communities through DETR; Education Action Zones and Sure Start through DfEE; Health Action Zones through Department of Health. These are

only some of the 14 area-based government schemes that are currently being funded by government (see Table 19); and they add to the variety of other experiments that fall under the broad programme of modernising local government and of such other initiatives as the Local Government Association's New Commitment to Regeneration. A recent report from the Performance and Innovation Unit commented scathingly on this palimpsest of area-based initiatives (Cabinet Office, 2000). The government is currently beginning to develop a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, which will reflect what appears to be an increasing focus on an essentially local and neighbourhood-based approach to regeneration. While neighbourhood management is an important component of regeneration, too exclusive a focus at this scale ignores the wider processes from which deprivation and dereliction derive, and equally ignores the potential that could come from harnessing regional and sub-regional growth for the benefit of local areas.

Two issues arise from this somewhat confused context. First, as is clear from our interviews, the RDAs have as yet barely turned their minds to thinking about good practice at the neighbourhood scale of regeneration or to ways in which regional perspectives might provide the frameworks through which sub-regional, local and neighbourhood priorities might be clarified. There is a danger that government priorities and those of the RDAs will increasingly sit uneasily

together. Many of the local regeneration partnerships have looked to the RDAs to provide a framework that might clarify the respective roles and relationships of the various stakeholders – to provide a form of 'spatial architecture of regeneration'. Such frameworks could not only provide pointers to how partnership initiatives at neighbourhood, city and sub-regional scales could be managed in a coherent way, but could also address the question of how regional economic potential (through transport planning, inward investment and the like) could be harnessed to the benefit of local and neighbourhood regeneration. The interplay between spatial scales and the linkages between economic and social regeneration must lie at the heart of any coherent strategies for renewal. Second, the absence of a local and neighbourhood perspective has contributed to the frustration among community groups and the voluntary sector which either consider themselves to have been marginalised and excluded from the regional debate or perceive the RDA strategies to hold little relevance for them. A recent study by Michael Carley of 27 partnerships in Britain has underlined some of these concerns (Carley, 2000). In particular, emphasis is placed on the need for vertical as well as horizontal partnership coordination, whereby 'a chain is as strong as its weakest link'.

Finally, some tentative lessons could be drawn with regard to local regeneration issues. First, RDAs need to listen more to the local level,

**Table 19: Government area-based regeneration initiatives at the birth of RDAs**

Initiative	Lead department
Better Government for Older People	Cabinet Office
Pioneer Community Legal Service Partnership	Lord Chancellor's
Crime Reduction Strategy	Home Office
Education Action Zones	DfEE
Employment Zones (prototypes)	DfEE
Health Action Zones	Department of Health
English Sports Council Priority Area Initiative	DCMS
Local Authority Best Value (pilots)	DETR
Local Government Association New Commitment to Regeneration (pathfinders)	LGA and DETR
New Deal for Communities	DETR
New Start	DfEE
Renewal Areas	DETR
Single Regeneration Budget	DETR (now RDAs)
Sure Start	Sure Start Unit

particularly with regard to the key issues of implementation and accountability. Second, a clearer understanding of the relationship between regional and local issues needs to be developed. Third, there is a genuine desire, expressed by a range of actors at the local level, to see strong leadership in the creation of strategic priorities for the region. In short, therefore – and despite a range of limitations and problems – the RDAs must exercise courage. If it is easy to suggest that RDAs take a stronger role, it is also too early to judge them. The possibilities for genuine regional innovation in the sphere of regeneration has been somewhat prescribed by the twin demands of producing a consensual strategy and ensuring practical continuity in the delivery of existing programmes. As such, RDAs should perhaps be judged on their ability to foster, over the medium to long term, a strategic context for successful innovative thinking and the dissemination of best practice. Four core questions might serve as a litmus test for future developments:

1. Do the RDAs fill gaps in existing governance/ implementation structure and strategic perspective? Or do they replicate old problems and duplicate existing structures?
2. Are the RDAs a significant force in mediating centre–local relations? Do they overcome the tendency to centralism and produce imaginative and inclusive networks?
3. How (if at all) do the RDAs propose to develop further the capacities and structures of regional governance?
4. What part can (or should) RDAs play in mediating local and neighbourhood-level relationships?

(Certain elements of these questions were suggested by Paul Benneworth [CURDS] in a presentation given 16 November 1999, at the third conference on RDAs at the Local Economic Policy Unit, London.)

The latter two issues, however, raise the fundamental question of how vulnerable both RDAs and their strategies are to political change. In particular, there is the question of English devolution and the ambivalent state of regionalism under New Labour. It also remains an open question whether there will prove to be limits to the extent to which RDAs can continue to act as ‘equal partners’ once the strategic phase has consolidated and the delivery phase begins. This may be especially true of the relationship between RDAs and the essentially local

partnerships through which regeneration programmes are delivered. There is as yet little indication of how local sensitivities will be accommodated within the regional roles of RDAs, or of how community groups and voluntary sector bodies engaged in regeneration might be ‘coordinated’ through regional frameworks. Indeed, at this early stage there is some evidence that the voices of local communities have found it difficult to engage with the whole process of regional governance.

One of the challenges that RDAs have therefore yet to address is how to choose, or to impose, a regional dimension on the interplay of local initiatives and neighbourhood strategies. One important area of future action for RDAs may be in establishing a clearer framework for the coordination of inter- or cross-departmental funding streams. There are some tentative indications on the horizon here. The proposed development of a National Strategy for Neighbourhood, for example, could benefit from being filtered through a regional scale of strategic decision making and coordination. There is, however, a need to establish some clear levers at a regional level for determining priorities and in order to make links with the sub-regional, local and neighbourhood levels. Some indication of the lead from government may also materialise in the proposed Urban White Paper whose publication is currently planned for later in 2000. Equally, the government’s comprehensive spending review may help to provide a clearer map of the funding streams targeted at regeneration. A team led by Treasury permanent secretary Andrew Turnbull is considering possible ways to better coordinate spending programmes. A chief aim of this is to ensure that regeneration practitioners at the local level “will be spared the ‘overwhelming, overlapping and confusing’ array of initiatives, action zones, partnerships, bidding rounds with different cycles and different appraisals” (Downer, 2000, p 5). A possible forum for the dissemination of best practice may come with the establishment of a National Centre for Neighbourhood Renewal, with a small group of regeneration experts working from the centre. Quite how this mechanism might support or be integrated with the regional level remains unclear.

# The devolution question

It should come as no surprise that the principle of devolution has widespread support in the regions, particularly among those individuals and organisations close to the RDAs' sphere of influence. But at the same time, these would-be regional stakeholders tend to have a very strong sense of the complexities and contradictions of different forms of regional devolution, not least because, as partners in a range of extant *local* regeneration initiatives, they are acutely conscious of the risks of duplication and in-fighting. Such risks are especially acute, many regional observers note, in situations when "the jam is being spread very thinly": the strictly circumscribed resource base of the RDAs means that inter-locality competition for scarce funds is a constant threat. If there is optimism in the regions about the future potential of RDAs in the context of devolution, it is a form of optimism strongly tinged with realism. So, according to one well-placed national policy advocate, debates around the future of RDAs tend to "focus on the *potential* [because] we are at the beginning of a very long road" (policy analyst and advocate, economic development organisation, interview November 1999). Hence the extremely commonplace blend, across virtually all sectors of the regeneration community in all parts of the country, of public support and private scepticism with respect to the RDA project.

While the RDAs have been welcomed, even their most ardent supporters – and in some ways *especially* their most ardent supporters – concede that serious restrictions on funding and powers exist:

"There is consensus among many Labour [council] members up and down the country [that devolution of the regions is a positive development].... The difficulty is

[finding] the mechanism to set it up so that it can deliver what we want. My main caveat on that is the restriction on resources. Nevertheless [the RDA] has got to be a starting point. I'm pleased it has happened." (Council leader [Labour], North West England, interview November 1999)

"Some see this as much more than a resource issue, but it is one which raises more searching questions about the government's commitment to genuine regional devolution in England. The regionalisation issue is a sort of bone with barely any scraps of meat on it, thrown to us to shut us up and keep us busy whilst the government conducts a very centralised agenda.... While I have no cause to be against them, I find the process that they have gone through, and the approach they have taken, nauseatingly centralist and largely a product of the civil service mind.... There are summaries of plans for all the eight [regions] and they are all the same; they could be for anywhere. That sort of co-opt is driven by the government's unreasonable requirements for RDAs to hit target dates to fit with their [central government's] political ambition.... So generally I think they [RDAs] have been born amongst broken glass." (Chief executive, business organisation, South West England, interview November 1999)

According to one seasoned observer in the North East, entrenched patterns of decision making and resource allocation would not be easily 're-scaled' to the regional level:

“A real issue is how geared up are we in local government and elsewhere to think and act regionally. How able is a councillor in the Tees Valley to recognise the problems of rural Northumberland?... It all comes down to whether people can think regionally. Nationally, no problem. Locally, no problem. Sub-regionally, no problem. But ... we don't do things regionally here. Not yet.” (Senior local authority officer, North East England, interview August 1999)

A similar concern was expressed by an RDA chair:

“We should be block funded – same as Scotland – and we should have the ability to vary [spending] from one year to another on a three-year rolling budget.... Because if you've got a land and property budget like we have [with anticipated receipts of £10 million] ... I've got to make all that by the 31st March. If I can actually delay something for three months and get another £1 million, shouldn't I be able to do that?” (RDA chair, interview August 1999)

Alternatively, some perceive a reluctance among the RDAs to challenge central government direction. According to one business sector stakeholder, “although this is not all their fault, they do all seem to have taken the same line – oh, we must do as government says and we wouldn't dare argue with them – instead of saying to government: are you serious, or are we playing a game?” (chief executive, business, South West England, interview November 1999).

Ultimately, of course, the answer to such a question lies in the still ambiguous attitude of central government to English devolution and the purpose of regional policy:

“How much they [central government] devolve power and how much they don't will rely on how the RDAs perform. But also once you've let the cat out of the bag, and you've got Scotland and Wales, maybe you can't put it back anyway.... It is clearly important to have a regional voice in order to try and influence how resources are distributed in the UK. But there is a real question in all of this about the role of central government, because if

you do nothing and let the market rule it seems to me that the South East will just suck everything away in terms of quality of life, mortgages and so on. If you don't have any regional policy other than the one we've got I'm not sure it can work. So there has got to be a role for central government.” (RDA board member, North West England, interview October 1999)

To the extent that there is anxiety about the future role of RDAs, this is often connected to fears that these ambitious agencies will seek to ‘draw up’ resources and influence from local organisations if they fail in their attempts to ‘draw down’ powers from central government. RDA board members are clearly acutely aware of these concerns, and are often at pains to address them directly. According to one RDA chair, for example, his organisation would have to demonstrate its added value, rather than assume a privileged or protected position:

“We should be run like a business. We shouldn't be here as a right. We should be here because we are producing what our region wants us to do.... I think everybody realises it [the RDA] is filling a hole. The people who are the most nervous about it are the people who think that we are there to do something *to* them – local authorities in particular. I think a few are uncomfortable because they see us as sucking powers away from them. But actually we should be sucking powers out of Whitehall for the regions. We do get a great deal of control ... frenzy from the centre, I mean we can't fart without asking for permission.” (Interview September 1999)

But the reality surely is that RDAs are more officer-led than most board members are prepared to concede:

“What I can't see is where is the board's input into all of this?... There is a discontinuity between what happens at the board and what happens in practice in the RDA.... We [the board] don't get any say on staffing or structure, we get told what is happening.... The big picture is in the strategy, but transforming that picture into reality is not a conversation that is happening at board level. There is

discussion at the working group level about that, but the board which is supposed to be the all-seeing eye is not performing that function. We're getting hit with project approvals and ... squabbling about whether its bloody Plymouth or Poole ... its classic distraction." (RDA board member, South West England, interview November 1999)

If both political and economic devolution is allowed to run a full course, then greater decision-making capacities and financial resources must be transferred to the regions along with responsibilities for good governance and growth. At present the RDAs face a real problem of meeting high expectations with fairly limited financial and institutional resources. There is a regional deficit in terms of democratic accountability, the direction of financial resources and the coordination of institutional forms and practices. The high level of achievement that is expected both of, and by, the RDAs is not limited to a simple quantity of aggregate economic growth (ie in terms of relative GDP). Rather, to a greater or lesser extent the RDAs are implicated in securing social and economic development in a qualitatively different manner. The common philosophy is neatly captured by Alex Stephenson, chair of AWM:

[AWM must join two fundamental principles by] creating wealth through enterprise and providing access to opportunity for all ... our region has to be more competitive but we also need greater social and economic cohesiveness ... [we will] build an economy which is more competitive but also more inclusive and sustainable. (AWM, 1999b, pp 2-3)

This is clearly an ambitious aim, and no matter how much good will is generated within their regions, it is clear that some of the powers and resources needed to undertake this task lie beyond them. Three issues in particular are important, though they remain largely unaddressed. First, the underlying intentions of government with respect to devolution remain rather ambiguous. Second, the role of local authorities and the position of RDAs in mediating centre-local tensions is unclear, not least because the policy context and balance of general powers and resources is so complex. Third, government has confirmed the role of the South East as a

decisive point for determining national and regional economic policy. The issue of the South East goes to the heart of potential tensions at both an interregional and a regional-national level. The SEEDA strategy asserts that the further stimulation of growth in the region will benefit the country as a whole. Such an attitude not only raises the complex issue of the accepted mode of regional-national economic development, but also signals a point at which the regional agenda intersects with distinctively national policy problems. It impinges, for example on broad national debates about the geography of housing development and urban planning (see Breheny and Hall, 1996), as well as debates about fisco-financial instruments such as interest rates.

In conclusion, then, the context within which RDAs have emerged is characterised by a considerable degree of uncertainty, fluidity and ambiguity. Moreover, there are definite limits to interregional partnership working as a basis for resolving these strategic dilemmas. An unambiguous lead from government, with regard to the future role of RDAs and their relationship to local stakeholders, is an important next step. The trajectory of the regionalism must be defined.





# Conclusion

In an important sense, the RDAs are still in their ‘honeymoon period’. As new regional and local partners and as not-insignificant funding bodies, they clearly have an important future role to play, but at this very early stage they have had few opportunities to make significant decisions. Certainly, a set of RS has been produced, but in their very nature these tend to be somewhat general and all-encompassing in scope. While in broad terms they may provide a strategic context for the RDAs’ subsequent operational decisions, less charitably it is difficult to see what they exclude. While some define initial priorities, because the philosophy behind the regional strategies is one of inclusivity, perhaps it should not be surprising that they are anything but restrictive. Practically speaking, the RDAs’ priorities are more likely to be defined by their early *actions* – particularly concerning the sequencing of interventions and the identification of flagship initiatives – than in prescriptive strategies or directive implementation plans. As one of the principal authors of an RDA strategy document conceded, the RS “*is very bland and it is very universalist*”, covering similar issues and even using similar language to those produced by other regions. The critical difference, he went on to insist, would come in the implementation phase: “We’re not going to be scared about making tough decisions. We do realise that we’re going to have to make choices. We can’t please all of the people, and we can’t do everything at once” (senior RDA officer, interview July 1999).

It is clear from our interviews that the principle of regional strategic thinking embodied in the creation of RDAs has been widely welcomed in the regions. There is also a widespread recognition that many of the final strategy documents have begun to move somewhat towards harder-edged views in comparison with

the initial draft documents. However, it seems equally clear that many regional stakeholders are reserving judgement on the performance of the RDAs; and that those judgements – and the conflicting interests that are inherent between regional and local voices – will begin to sharpen once the strategies of the RDAs begin to crystallise into action plans and the phase of implementing priorities. While the RDAs have been in their honeymoon phase, it has been possible to create and maintain the sensitively crafted harmony of relations between local and the regional players. Part of this has been because strategies have been essentially inclusive. Part has been because it has been possible to avoid the need to define what are regional and what are local issues. The danger that the RDAs face in moving towards implementation is that the regional consensus will come under intense pressure as hard decisions have to be made. The RDAs may be squeezed between the two scales. At the scale of the localities and sub-regions, there may be resentment over the perception of interference in what are seen as locally owned and locally implemented regeneration schemes and resources: resentments that could previously have been targeted at central government or at government regional offices. At the national scale, there may be continuing or increasing reluctance on the part of politicians and civil servants alike to relinquish control to regional bodies. Certainly, there is some evidence of this in the government’s formal response to the RS of the RDAs.

If the regional agenda is to be translated into a harder-edged reality, much of the onus appears to rest with the signals that come from central government. For example, it could resolve some of the ambiguities about the powers of the RDAs in respect of the critical dimension of the skills

agenda. It could provide a clearer national framework on some of the cross-regional issues that affect regional strategies such as East–West transport links and, most importantly, investment pressures in the South East. It could express its greater readiness to devolve control with respect to issues such as creating a single budget for the RDAs. It could flag its readiness to move forward the timetable for creating statutory regional chambers. So long as the government’s championing of the regional agenda is ambiguous and uncertain, the danger remains that the RDAs will be caught in the pincers of the local and national.

It is clearly important not to rush to judgement on the RDAs. They have not yet celebrated their first anniversary, and during their brief existence they have achieved much by way of establishing structures, creating a regional presence and producing regional strategies. Their board members have only recently turned their minds to issues of resource allocation and to the next challenging phase of action plans and implementation. However, between the vision and the action may well come the shadow. In the terminology of Scottish lawyers, the case for RDAs must as yet remain non-proven.

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# Appendix: Regional strategy documents

## East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA)

Prosperity through people: Economic development strategy for the East Midlands 2000-2010

### *Vision statement*

"By 2010, the East Midlands will be one of Europe's top 20 regions. It will be a place where people want to live, work and invest because of our vibrant economy, our healthy, safe, diverse and inclusive communities [and] our quality environment."

### *Key themes*

- Excellence in learning and skills: a learning region with priority to ICT
- Enterprise and innovation: identifying opportunities and leadership for businesses
- ICT revolution: e-business, development of infrastructure and access
- Creating a climate for investment: image boosting, inward investment, quality of urban and rural environment
- Developing sustainable communities: an integrated approach to regeneration

### *Strategic priorities (examples)*

- East Midlands Learning Business Partnership
- East Midlands University for food
- East Midlands Observatory
- Plan for new Venture Capital Fund
- Challenger Learning Centre in Leicester as part of tourism, culture and sport
- Launch of East Midlands Planning Charter
- Woodlands development, linked to economic and community development in National Forest, Sherwood Forest, Greenwood Community Forest
- Rural and Urban Action Plans
- Partnership of five major cities to respond to Urban Task Force Report
- Master-plan for northern coalfields regeneration
- To fuse inherited funding in a single flexible investment resource

### *Implementation and action planning*

The development of action planning is divided into three time horizons. 26 project objectives are identified for the first 100 days. EMDA is usually the lead partner in these 100-day commitments. Many involve consultation or the review of frameworks, but some are more concrete, eg to secure one major site for inward investment. Less detailed aspirations for two and five years are also given. Sub-regional strategies will be developed by existing partnerships in light of the EMDA document; however, no detail of these is given. In recognition that such sub-regional linkages are at an early stage, EMDA will provide capacity-building support to help deliver regional priorities at the local level and – eventually – through accreditation of delivery partners. A short section on measurement indicators identifies the need to improve EMDA's performance on GDP per capita and unemployment.

### *Distinctive features*

- 100-day commitments
- Possible accreditation of sub-regional partnerships
- Independent sustainability appraisal by Entec

## Advantage West Midlands (AWM)

### Creating advantage: The West Midlands economic strategy

#### *Vision statement*

"Within ten years, the West Midlands will be recognised as a premier European location in which to live, work, invest and to visit, regarded internationally as world-class, and the most successful region in creating wealth to the advantage of all its citizens."

#### *Key themes*

AMW identifies two strategic principles: (1) investment in the future (especially in skills and ICT infrastructure) and (2) regeneration of communities. These form the basis for four pillars:

- Developing a diverse and dynamic business base
- Promoting a learning and skilful region
- Creating the conditions for growth
- Regenerating communities in the West Midlands

Each pillar entails two core aims (a total of eight). These provide the basis for both strategy assessment and the development of strategic priorities.

#### *Strategic priorities*

- Innovation is at the core of the strategy and is touchstone for action planning
- Key economic sectors for further support: motor industry and component suppliers; ceramics and engineering
- Key emergent sectors for development: food and drink; engineering; design; medical technology; tourism, leisure and the creative industries
- To create an holistic framework "in which frameworks policies can be effectively 'joined up' to meet local needs"
- To address social deprivation through 'direct links' with wealth creation, eg making existing opportunities more accessible and creating zones that match opportunity and need
- To retain and attract skilled scientists, engineers and technicians
- To increase awareness of and links between key centres of business, technological and educational/academic excellence
- To develop innovative new second-generation ICTs through creation of a high-technology cluster based on existing companies, engineering and design facilities and centres of academic and technical excellence in central/south-eastern section of the region
- To link this through development of infrastructure and physical and technological communications
- To investigate developing a 'high technology business cluster'
- To improve access to finance (especially risk capital to SMEs)
- To promote a culture of lifelong learning and continuous improvement in skills
- Transport: to build the Birmingham Northern Relief Road, upgrade the West Coast Mainline, and improve local public transport
- Strategic planning: to continue with RPG commitments to target inward investment and improve land available
- To target resources at communities and individuals suffering poverty and social exclusion; to identify a number of sub-regional regeneration zones which build on opportunities to invest and target resources (from local public sector, central government and Europe) to most effectively meet need
- To foster partnerships between public, private, voluntary and community sectors

#### *Implementation and action planning*

The partnership between AWM and the West Midlands Regional Chamber provides the basis for developing action plans. This governance process is conceptualised in terms of evolution from the two strategic principles with sub-groups based on the four pillars. Each pillar sub-group will by the end of March 2000 identify appropriate prioritised actions as well as the financial and partnership-based logistics for delivery. The role for AWM equally entails that "AWM will provide a regional strategic viewpoint and contact for specific action". The action programme identifies between 3 and 12 early actions for each core aim. Business-led 'growth task groups' will be established to develop key sectors. A brief section on frameworks sets out fairly standard accounts of sustainable development, innovation culture, urban-rural linkages and equal opportunities.

## East of England Development Agency (EEDA)

### Moving forward: A strategy for the East of England: 1999-2000

#### *Vision statement*

"To make the East of England a world-class economy, renowned for its knowledge base, the creativity and enterprise of its people and the quality of life of all who live and work here."

#### *Key themes*

- Become the innovation capital of Europe
- Foster world-class business through identification of key sectors and clusters with high-growth potential
- Improve the level and range of skills and create a culture of lifelong learning
- Develop a world-class competitive infrastructure
- Create a high-quality environment, including natural resource and environmental management
- Promote a thriving rural economy and sustain rural communities
- Tackle social exclusion
- Develop a world-class profile and image for the East of England

#### *Strategic priorities*

- EDA identifies nine key sectors that are of strategic significance:
  - ICT;
  - life sciences;
  - media and cultural industries;
  - financial and business services;
  - agriculture and food processing;
  - tourism, leisure and heritage;
  - automotive manufacturing and R&D;
  - high-technology manufacturing and advanced engineering;
  - transport gateways, including air and sea ports
- Foster the expansion of an innovation culture through, for example, the RITTS (Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Strategy) programme
- Create a single regional planning body (with the regional assembly)
- Improve regional data through creation of a Regional Observatory, and (for example) improve the quality of labour market information, the knowledge of intraregional development patterns and regional intelligence about social exclusion
- Increase and prioritise use of UK and EU funding for tackling social exclusion

Business-led sector groups will establish action plans involving large and small companies and encouraging sector development. In particular, EEDA will "sustain, exploit and extend" the significant clusters in life sciences, ICT and electronics, particularly the 'knowledge cluster' in the Cambridge area. Details on environment and rural economy are fairly minimal.

#### *Implementation and action planning*

EEDA's role is understood as an essentially strategic one, including the focusing of regional priorities, coordination of activities, sharing of knowledge and best practice, and being a lobbying voice for the region. The key stakeholders for each element of the strategy are identified; for example, the core innovation and technology strategy identifies 13 key stakeholders. Emphasis is on establishing a knowledge base from which action plans can be developed. Nine core 'state of the region' indicators are identified, but the overall implementation section is very slight. The action planning section identifies milestones for each of the strategic priorities, the majority of which relate to the review of existing knowledge, consultation with partners and preparation of new plan. An exception is the Regional Venture Capital Fund.

#### *Distinctive features*

- The aim of establishing a Regional Observatory as the basis for increasing and coordinating information and intelligence about the East of England.
- Sixteen inset case studies focusing on businesses, partnerships and projects in the region.
- Proposed Centre of Excellence for Enterprise and possible Regional Business Mentoring Network.
- A one-page section on sustainable development which was added to the draft: this simply reflects the rhetoric behind the government document, *A better quality of life: A strategy for sustainable development in the UK*

## North West Development Agency (NWDA)

### England's North West: A strategy towards 2020

#### *Vision statement*

"By 2010, the North East of England will be a vibrant, self reliant and outward looking Region with the aspiration, ambition and confidence to unlock the potential of all its people."

#### *Key themes*

- Investing in business and ideas: develop world-class clusters to maximise employment and growth potential; accelerate new business development; and encourage excellence in existing business
- Investing in people and communities: develop skills for all; deliver urban renaissance; tackle social exclusion
- Investing in infrastructure: secure clear physical plans, strengthen strategic communications; support regional culture and sports infrastructure
- Investing in image and environment: project a positive image; restore the environmental deficit; promote quality design and energy conservation.

#### *Strategic priorities (examples)*

- Seven emerging sectors are targeted: environmental technologies; life sciences; medical equipment and technology; financial and professional services; tourism; computer software; creative industries, media, advertising and public relations
- Seven established sectors will be encouraged: chemicals; textiles; aerospace; mechanical and engineering; energy; automotive; food and drink
- To establish a Regional Intelligence Unit and a Regional Venture Capital Fund
- To regenerate Liverpool City Centre and East Manchester through new Urban Regeneration Companies, and to establish a vision for Furness and West Cumbria
- To develop a shortlist of key and strategic sites for infrastructural investment: 16 projects are cited in principle
- To create a sustainable tourism strategy for Cumbria
- To focus on the potential for using fiscal policy to creatively meet aims: eg special capital allowances to SMEs in below-average GDP localities, use of council tax instruments to encourage occupation of second homes in rural areas by local people
- To stress health as a key indicator and driver
- To improve access to eight named areas

#### *Implementation and action planning*

NWDA role will involve leadership, creation of better value from its own spending programmes and lobbying government with regard to key policies and priorities.

Eight guiding principles are set including familiar ones such as ICT and lifelong learning, but also a key notion of linking the development of opportunity with areas of need. NWDA emphasises the need for coordination and integration but does not specify how or when the RDA will act as a catalyst for joined-up thinking. In this sense it is clearly a document of intent. Nevertheless, it is clear that direct control over regional regeneration funds will be the an important lever. Some specific forms of collaboration are highlighted, particularly with the Regional Assembly with regard to RPG and a shortlist of strategic sites. Detailed action plans are not included, but 30 key programmes are sketched in terms of the key partners. NWDA will lead on seven and play a partner role to specified leaders in the rest.

#### *Distinctive features*

- Identification of Regeneration Priority Areas
- Identification of a large number of action points for each theme

NWDA take a strong line on resources, suggesting discussions with government about fiscal policy and resource: "If the North West is to fulfil its potential and maximise its contribution to the wealth of the nation, Government will need to re-allocate resources" (NWDA, 1999b, p 6). NWDA has perhaps the most creative suggestions about how to address the lack of resources and to secure positive knock-on effects for communities. While the basic content and length of the RS remained much the same, the final strategy is substantially more coherent and better written than the draft. The NDWA strategy is one of only three that omit the term 'economic'.



## South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA)

### Building a world class region: Towards an economic strategy for the South East of England

#### *Vision statement*

"The South East of England has the potential to be a world-class region. A successful South East will also stimulate wealth creation in neighbouring regions and hence across the country. We should be one of the top ten regions in Europe – perhaps the world."

#### *Key themes*

Seven key themes form the basis for 34 strategic priorities:

- World-class business: e-commerce, globally competitive sectors, etc
- World-class learning: culture of lifelong learning, development of managers, raising achievement levels
- World-class workforce: partnerships between employees, trade unions, etc
- World-class transport: increase in sustainability and accessibility, link to London and national economy
- World-class environment: support sustainable development, raise quality of practice and prioritise strengths in environmental technologies and services
- World-class communities and urban renaissance: support sustainable and strategic regeneration, encourage local communities and voluntary sector
- World-class rural economy

#### *Examples of strategic objectives*

- Establish a network of 25-30 Enterprise Hubs by 2005: a wired region
- Establish Regional Skills Research Unit
- Set up early warning system to monitor vulnerability of employment sectors
- Invest in East-West rail linkages and access from South Coast to Channel Tunnel
- Regenerate East Kent, Sussex coast and Isle of Wight
- Prepare area investment frameworks at local level to focus partners and national, central and European funding programmes
- Create a land assembly fund to coordinate urban regeneration schemes
- Target the delivery of training advice to rural firms

#### *Implementation and action planning*

A framework for change is set out detailing three key drivers for international competitiveness (ICT, innovation, etc): sketching links between planning and sustainable development; highlighting the crucial relationship with London and possible links to other RDAs; and identifying the benefits and partnership mechanisms for the European dimension. The report contains seven separate draft action plans indicating key objectives, key partners, time horizon and estimated cost. This includes dozens of objectives, with particularly well developed detail for community and urban renaissance and world-class business. The strategy mentions a role for sub-regional, county and local level involvement, both in reviewing their own strategies and in contributing to action planning. The key mechanism for linking scales seems to be the Area Investment Framework, although no geographical specifics are given. Business involvement will also take place through sectoral strategies.

#### *Distinctive features*

The Chairman's introduction is particularly distinctive and forceful. It is couched in strong language decrying the complacency and failure of the South-East (SE) to invest in its potential and develop competitiveness. The potential for the SE as a competitive world-class region is seen as of unique benefit for neighbouring regions and the UK as a whole. The absence of substantial changes between draft and final strategy reflects the broader perception that SEEDA has actually kept a fairly low profile.

## One North East (ONE)

### Unlocking our potential: Regional economic strategy for the North East

#### *Vision statement*

"By 2010, the North East of England will be a vibrant, self reliant and outward looking region with the aspiration, ambition and confidence to unlock the potential of all its people."

#### *Key themes*

- Create wealth by building a diversified knowledge-driven economy
- Place university and colleges at the heart of this economy and enable knowledge transfer
- Establish a new entrepreneurial culture
- Build an adaptable, highly skilled workforce
- Meet 21st-century transport, communication and property needs
- Accelerate the renaissance of the North East
- Strong emphasis is put upon the principles of sustainable development: "promoting economic growth and employment, social progress, environmental improvement and the prudent use of natural resources"

#### *Strategic priorities*

Within the six main themes, a variety of priorities are identified and a few examples can be given from each. The strategy is based on the identification and development of key clusters with a call on all partners to recognise and invest in such 'hot spots'. The criteria for identifying and developing clusters are summarised in terms of prioritising 'knowledge-driven industries' within the strategic framework.

Eleven basic sectoral clusters are identified: high and low-volume manufacturing; process industries; chemicals; food and drink (including agriculture); life sciences; transaction services; bespoke services; tourism, heritage, leisure, culture and sport; logistics; public authorities; and voluntary organisations. These 11 clusters serve as the basis for developing partnership-based cooperation and strategic planning. Each cluster development team will draw up action plans by October 2000.

Additional economic priorities include "inspiring all employers to invest in continuous improvement" and an emphasis on information communications technologies as a way to access global markets, share knowledge and develop clusters. A new entrepreneurial culture will be fostered through the creation of a simple accessible business support network along with improved linkages between firms, universities/colleges and communities.

A Regional Investment Fund is planned to complement the new Regional Venture Capital Fund and to fill gaps in business funding. There is a specific commitment to producing 200 high-growth companies by 2010 and to creating an international trade centre. Alongside the usual emphasis on improving educational attainment, skill levels and lifelong learning, the strategy sets out basic programme indicators that directly address issues of economic exclusion. The idea of a Regional Inclusion Plan, linked to urban and rural community regeneration, is highlighted.

The emphasis on education includes production of 'economic compacts' pledging universities and colleges to "increase participation in learning, accelerate knowledge transfer and use academic resources to build better communities."

Development in public transport will include a 'through ticketing system'. Development of freight transport will include creation of freight villages with 'Free Zone' status. A regional strategy for the six seaports will be developed to encourage sea freight.

The strategy for regenerating urban and regional communities emphasises the need to establish local regeneration frameworks (LRFs) that balance the leadership role of local authorities with empowered communities and key service providers. The institutional and economic importance of the public sector is highlighted. Partnership with the voluntary sector will be coordinated through recognition of VONNE (Voluntary Organisations Network North East) and sub-regional relationships at local development partnership level (see below).

### *Implementation and action planning*

The governance and implementation structure is based on four sub-regions. Each takes forward an existing economic development partnership that will revise sub-regional strategies and form an umbrella for the local development partnerships:

- Tees Valley Joint Strategy Committee
- County Durham Economic Development Partnership
- Northumberland Strategic Partnership
- Tyne and Wear Local Development Partnership.

These four sub-regions form the basis for local development partnerships that must identify and sustain a set of LRFs. The boundaries of these LRFs will develop in response to specific types of area, such as rural or coalfield, rather than necessarily mapping on to existing local authorities. The LRFs will establish the context for small area and local-level action programmes. The four sub-regions have well established structures for decision making, and the report includes some clear sub-regional priorities, including rural and former coalfield priorities in Northumberland.

Basic action planning and strategic development is also divided among numerous 'teams', which combine RDA officers and interested and expert partners within the region. In transport, for example, the Logistics Development Cluster Team will be responsible for review.

In a comparatively sophisticated manner, ONE distinguish two types of initiative that are needed to achieve sustainable and balanced increases in regional GDP: (1) high value-added forms of investment which create high per-job contributions to GDP, and (2) labour-intensive forms of business which match the region's existing skills capabilities. This dual, distinct, imperative to both increase per capita GDP and increase rate of workforce participation is perhaps evidence that ONE's strategy is comparatively well developed.

A number of established flagship projects in cities and large towns are prioritised, including Middlesbrough town centre and a food port in South Tees. A similar flagship approach is planned for rural areas, coastal areas and former mining communities.

### *Distinctive features*

The draft strategy met with strong support and as such the change between draft and final strategy has been minimal. The report contains a strong analysis of the North East in wider economic, policy and strategic context. This includes substantial emphasis on the importance of the European Union for the North East and an assessment of current economic forecasts. The report contains clear indications of how, and against what, the six priorities should be measured. The ONE strategy provides substantial information about economic and social activity in the North East, including 47 inset 'case studies', with details of a remarkable range of companies, partnerships and community organisations. Good coverage of the criteria for prioritisation are given. A five-page summary of objectives and actions ends the document.

## South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA)

### Regional strategy for the South West of England: 2000-2010

#### *Vision statement*

"The vision of the South West of England is of a region where people and place combine as the springboard for success. The region will be:

- A technologically advanced and innovative region for all people and in all sectors
- A place with an adaptable and highly skilled workforce
- A place where customer needs are met and exceeded
- A region where business and individuals capitalise on the creative use of the environment to deliver competitive advantage"

The overall mission is "to improve the competitive position of the South West of England within the EU and internationally in order to increase substantially prosperity for the region and all its people".

#### *Strategic priorities*

The basic strategy identifies three complementary strategic objectives through which to 'increase prosperity':

- Improving business competitiveness
- Addressing social and economic imbalances
- Improving regional coherence

These are in turn shaped or 'coloured' by four strategic drivers which attempt to distinguish the South West: environment, innovation and technology, skills and learning, and partnership. Of these four, the emphasis on the quality of the environment is perhaps the most distinctive.

Sectoral prioritisation was achieved using PEAR analysis (Promote, Encourage, Accept or Reject), although there is no explicit reference to what has been rejected. Seven sectors, having the best potential, will be promoted:

- Advance engineering (including aerospace, automotive and medical devices)
- Customer marketing services (including direct marketing)
- Environmental technologies
- Food and drink (including agriculture)
- Information and communication technologies
- Leisure and tourism
- Marine technologies

Three sectors will be encouraged: biotechnology, financial services and printing/packaging. It is unclear, however, what this prioritisation and encouragement will actually entail. Will SWERDA's financial, decision making and strategic resources be spread across all named sectors, or will resources be focused on those areas or firms that offer the best overall result with respect to the RDA strategic drivers?

#### *Implementation and action planning*

The governance structure for SWERDA is orientated around seven sub-regional partnerships, which are mapped on the old county boundaries:

- West of England Strategic Partnership (WESP)
- Gloucestershire Development Agency (GDA)
- Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Partnership
- Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Economic Partnership (BDPEP)
- Devon Economic Partnership
- Somerset Economic Partnership
- Cornwall Economic and Tourism Forum

These partnerships are charged with creating agreement about sub-regional priorities and steering locally designed solutions within the context of the regional strategy. Within the shared framework of the RS, each sub-region will develop its own strategy by April 2000. Aside from the seven sub-regional partnerships, the implementation section mentions the need to develop cross-boundary linkages between certain sub-regions and non-SWERDA areas. As several informants acknowledged, almost nothing practical has been done to develop this beyond rhetoric.

The SWERDA strategy is rather thin on practical examples of prioritised and well conceived action planning. Examples of definite action include: a regional innovation fund and relay centre for SEMs. The role of SWERDA in delivery of each of three action plans is outlined, but the plans are themselves very sketchy. No clear indication of the framework for improving or developing regeneration programmes is given.

#### *Distinctive features*

- A clear lead is given on SWERDA's core values and operating principles
- A CD-ROM with base-line information is included with the strategy
- Spatial issues are considered with respect to the role of the principle urban areas in driving the regional economy and the importance of rural and market town areas
- Establishment of a Regional Observatory is cited as a key objective

## Yorkshire-Forward (Y-F): Yorkshire and Humber Regional Development Agency

Advancing together: Towards a world-class economy. The regional economic strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber, 2000-2010

### *Vision statement*

"Yorkshire and the Humber will be a world-class, prosperous region that is sustainable, has empowered partnerships and communities, has a culture of enterprise and creativity, is self-reliant, has ladders of opportunity for all, and has a strong, positive identity."

### *Key objectives*

- Promote the growth of key economic sectors to enhance competitiveness
- Achieve higher business birth and survival rates
- Attract and retain more investment through better marketing and 'product' orientation
- Radically improve the development and application of education, learning and skills, particularly high-quality vocational skills
- Implement targeted community-based regeneration programmes, particularly for deprived, ethnic, young and excluded communities in urban and rural areas including the former coalfields
- Get the best out of the region's physical assets and conserve and enhance its environmental assets

### *Strategic priorities*

Y-F asserts the importance of focusing both discretionary funding and statutory resources on key priorities for action: "The region must do the 'important few things well'". The priorities set out for 2000-2 include:

- Build links with neighbouring RDAs, particularly around projects for developing transport infrastructure and place marketing
- Increase the effectiveness and inclusiveness of local partnerships to develop and deliver community-based regeneration
- Establish strategic development and trade zones, particularly Humber Trade Zone and Dearne Valley Development Zone, and develop market towns as centres of rural enterprise
- Create a Virtual Regional Intelligence Unit
- Improve Leeds-Sheffield rail links
- Establish a new venture capital fund, especially for amounts up to £250,000
- Further the linkages between the RDA and Regional Chamber, including a joint pledge to the region's people
- Develop the e-business region

### *Implementation and action planning*

The governance structure is complicated and rather unclear. The action-oriented strategy is guided by diagram layering objectives and key themes, such as sustainability, geographical adaptation and social inclusion. However, no detail is given about the mechanisms to link the RDA to local partnerships. Likewise, the sub-regional partnerships are mentioned only briefly, in terms of creating four action plans for:

- the Humber Forum
- the South Yorkshire Forum
- the North Yorkshire Economic Development Forum
- West Yorkshire Partners

A footnote argues that the sub-regions will be reviewed following government's decision on boundaries for Learning and Skills Councils. This might be seen to demonstrate the difficulty of creating a regional governance structure in the context of fast changing and uncertain central government policy. However, the minimal reference to sub-regional structures is fairly distinctive to Y-F.

For each of the six main objectives, a set of tables specifies the delivery mechanisms, milestones and lead partners for 35 core initiatives. Y-F's role is stated as:

- a lead role in 16 core initiatives (eg in allocating regeneration funds)
- an influencing role in 12 (eg on health and transport)
- a supporting role in 7 (eg advising on post-16 learning)

Regional action plans will be established for key objectives and for sub-regions. Specific priorities for 2000–2 are set out (see above). A brief indication of review indicators is given.

### *Distinctive features*

- Comparatively strong affirmation of the role of the Regional Chamber
- Detailed SWOT analysis of the economy and state of the region
- A six-fold pledge by Y-F to people and businesses
- A table showing how strategic themes in the RPG fit with key parts of the strategy
- The role of cross-boundary (inter-RDA) linkages, highlighted briefly in terms of developing the Trans-Pennine corridor (with NWDA) and North American marketing (with ONE and NWDA)