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Improving poor environments:
the role of learning architectures in
developing and spreading good practice

Science Report: SC050018/SR3

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It's our job to make sure that air, land and water are looked after by everyone in today's society, so that tomorrow's generations inherit a cleaner, healthier world.

Our work includes tackling flooding and pollution incidents, reducing industry's impacts on the environment, cleaning up rivers, coastal waters and contaminated land, and improving wildlife habitats.

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Science at the Environment Agency

Science underpins the work of the Environment Agency, by providing an up to date understanding of the world about us, and helping us to develop monitoring tools and techniques to manage our environment as efficiently as possible.

The work of the Science Group is a key ingredient in the partnership between research, policy and operations that enables the Environment Agency to protect and restore our environment.

The Environment Agency's Science Group focuses on five main areas of activity:

- **Setting the agenda**: To identify the strategic science needs of the Environment Agency to inform its advisory and regulatory roles.
- **Sponsoring science**: To fund people and projects in response to the needs identified by the agenda setting.
- **Managing science**: To ensure that each project we fund is fit for purpose and that it is executed according to international scientific standards.
- **Carrying out science**: To undertake the research itself, by those best placed to do it – either by in-house Environment Agency scientists, or by contracting it out to universities, research institutes or consultancies.
- **Providing advice**: To ensure that the knowledge, tools and techniques generated by the science programme are taken up by relevant decision-makers, policy makers and operational staff.

Steve Killeen   Head of Science

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Executive summary

In November 2005 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Environment Agency commissioned Brook Lyndhurst consultants to develop a system to identify the poorest environments in England and Wales, and to design a programme for improving those areas. The resulting Improving Poor Environments (IPE) programme was designed to work through local partnerships, starting in two pathfinder areas and rolling out to a total of 60 neighbourhoods.

In working with Brook Lyndhurst to design the IPE programme the Environment Agency and Defra recognised that to ensure the effectiveness of the pathfinders, and thereafter to build an effective national programme, required a different approach to learning from conventional models based solely on guidance and disseminating good practice. In March 2006, the Environment Agency commissioned Sustainable Futures consultants to undertake a rapid review of learning approaches in the public sector, and to review the potential for the Environment Agency to use these new ways of working and learning to support the design and development of the IPE programme.

This rapid review involved a brief literature review, a series of interviews with a range of public sector organisations at local, regional and national levels in England and Wales, and interviews with Area and Regional staff in the Environment Agency. The detailed findings of the review, its analysis, implications and recommendations, are presented in the main report.

Strengthening delivery through learning approaches

The review identified a growing trend for public sector bodies to improve their performance through interactive learning approaches, especially those that enable people to reflect on and learn from their own actions and experience. This trend is particularly prevalent in situation where organisations are seeking to develop more effective partnership working, stakeholder and community engagement.

As a result, there has been a significant shift in recent years from conventional 'training' (e.g. transmission of existing technical skills and knowledge) to much more interactive 'learning' approaches (e.g. action learning, coaching, mentoring). Interactive learning is seen to be more successful in developing the new skills and attitudes required for partnership working partly because the learning methods mirror the new behaviours required (e.g. respecting and working with the cultures and knowledge of others). Furthermore, these new working situations are much more dynamic (constantly changing) and complex (involving a range of individuals, organisations and policy frameworks). In such situations, there are no 'off-the-shelf' solutions which can be learned through instruction, so innovative and effective approaches need to be developed through shared reflection on what is 'good practice' as part of everyday work.

Spreading good practice through learning approaches

The review highlighted that conventional methods of 'spreading' good practice have not worked well. There are a number of reasons for this:
- it is difficult to pass on tacit knowledge (e.g. intuitive know how), because it cannot easily be articulated and codified;

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- each local context is different; and
- people learn better when they themselves are ready to learn and change their activities, at which point they can accept new information such as lessons from elsewhere.

People tend to reinvent and adapt ideas for their own particular purposes rather than just adopting other people's blueprints without thought. Provision of information alone is not enough to change practice.

A portfolio of new learning approaches

The review found that a wide range of new interactive learning approaches are now being used (or are planned) by public sector bodies to develop and extend good practice. These include action learning, coaching and mentoring, learning protocols and whole system methods. In addition, various traditional learning methods have been recast to make them more interactive (e.g. evaluation, exemplars, induction, master classes, needs and competency assessments, visits and workshops).

Many of the bodies covered by this review were also found to be using a 'blend' of different learning approaches - orchestrating a whole range of methods and mechanisms to deliver the learning appropriate to specific circumstances. Some were going further and were not only putting together different learning methods, but also bringing together different learners - so that partners in processes were brought together to take action and learn together.

Several of the organisations reviewed were also working to extend the spread of good practice by using networks, particularly communities of practice, e-learning webs and learning networks. All these methods were also being orchestrated together by some organisations to create wider and highly connected learning architectures.

The importance of new learning approaches has been explicitly supported in various national policy frameworks, particularly the Egan Report on Skills for Sustainable Communities (ODPM, 2004), and subsequently reflected in the work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities and the regional centres of excellence.

However, implementing these new approaches is not without its challenges, both for other public sector bodies and for the Environment Agency. A particular difficulty lies in changing existing training methods and performance management systems. Such change requires top level management support, new resources and a willingness to experiment and learn as the new approaches are further developed and tailored to specific circumstances.

Using learning as a design principle for the IPE programme

The orchestration of different learning methods and partners can be seen as the beginning of an organisational infrastructure of learning - or a 'learning architecture' - that can provide a consistent overall framework for a wide range of more specific learning initiatives.

The evidence from this rapid review suggests that learning can provide a very useful framework within which design, action and review can be managed so that delivery and management are improved throughout operations. Thus, learning is not only 'fed' into programmes, or viewed purely as an 'output', or seen as parallel to the programme. Nor is learning merely 'embedded' in action. To be fully effective, learning needs to explicitly provide the overarching framework for the way in which action is designed, approached and assessed, continuously.

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A learning architecture is thus a systematic and co-ordinated effort at learning across a whole organisation, drawing on a range of learning initiatives that are tactical and aimed at specific initiatives. The idea of a learning architecture is important because:

- the promotion and facilitation of organisational learning requires its own strategy and structure, from senior champions to local infrastructures; and
- without a systematic approach to developing and harnessing the learning of people in all parts of the organisation, learning will be confined to isolated pockets and blocked by numerous barriers to transmission and exchange.

There is no standard blueprint for building a learning architecture. It needs to reflect the particular purposes and practices of the organisation together with contextual factors such as the field of work, the nature of the environmental challenges, the relationships with key partners and stakeholders, and so on. The outline of a learning architecture for the IPE programme is provided in summary below, and in detail in the full report.

A learning architecture for the IPE programme

We recommend the development of a learning architecture for the IPE programme which incorporates the following seven elements:

1. **Policy commitment.** A high level policy commitment is needed within the Environment Agency that places learning at the core of the IPE programme;

2. **National learning framework**. This specifies the way in which learning is seeded and then spread throughout the programme, starting with a limited number of pathfinder neighbourhoods, spreading to a 'second wave' of neighbourhoods and then to the remaining IPE neighbourhoods. The national learning framework should be open to adaptation, based on successive cycles of feedback from elements 4, 5 and 6 (below);

3. Support and guidance through a **national resource hub**. A national resource hub would provide consistent advisory, facilitation and research support to elements 4, 5, and 6. It could also make recommendations for the adaptation of the national learning framework based on feedback from all the different elements;

4. *Developing* good practice through a **first wave of IPE pathfinders**. This should draw on the lessons from this review (chapter 2 of main report) on using interactive learning approaches;

5. *Extending* good practice through a **second wave of IPE neighbourhoods**. This should draw on the lessons from this review (chapter 3) on using interactive learning approaches;

6. Extending good practice through the **third wave of IPE neighbourhoods**. Again, this should draw on the lessons from this review (chapter 3);

7. **Reviewing policy** based on learning from elements 2 – 6 above.

The national learning framework would facilitate, link, connect and 'hold' the various interactive learning processes described above and developed as appropriate at local and regional levels.

The design of the IPE programme remains to be finalised. However, an initial learning approach of action learning sets and learning pairs, bringing together Environment Agency staff and other local partners, is proposed as a possible learning model for supporting

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learning across the two pathfinders (see Figure 2 and section 4.4.2 of the main report). A further model (Figure 3, section 4.5.1) is offered to extend good practice beyond the pathfinders.

Conclusions and recommendations for the Environment Agency

These approaches offer significant opportunities but also challenges for the Environment Agency. The Agency starts from a relatively strong position, with staff support and enthusiasm for the new approaches, and some pilot work on social learning approaches (both identified in this review). Also, the Agency is already working with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to varying degrees in different places. However, this review found that there are three particular challenges that need to be addressed:

- There needs to be much greater clarity (internally and with external audiences) about the Environment Agency's role in partnership programmes ;

- Relevant interpersonal and political skills among Agency staff will need to be substantially strengthened; and

- There is a potential lack of resources in that the Agency does not have many staff working on the ground at local level.

The partnership approach proposed in the IPE programme will be essential in maximising good use of Environment Agency staff and other resources, as well as being the preferred government model for all local public sector investment programmes at present. However, skills and capacity for partnership working will need to be further developed.

Detailed recommendations for how the Environment Agency should build learning into the design and development of the IPE programme are given in the main report. In summary, however, it is recommended that the Environment Agency should:

- Use the pathfinder phase of the IPE programme to test and develop new ways of learning from and about partnership working;

- Fully integrate learning and action in the IPE project management system;

- Where appropriate review current Environment Agency Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure they do not undermine the new partnership working and learning approaches;

- Review and build on the existing experience of partnership working in Environment Agency Regional Strategic Units (RSUs) and Areas in developing detailed plans for the IPE programme;

- Be clear and specific about what the Environment Agency can, and cannot, offer in the IPE neighbourhoods;

- Ensure the IPE programme is underpinned by a long term commitment from relevant Environment Agency staff;

- Embed new knowledge and learning in more systematic ways through the development of networks and other integrated learning processes;

- Establish a rigorous evaluation to cover all aspects of the IPE programme, including the effectiveness of the learning infrastructure and learning methods used to develop and extend good practice, so the lessons can be captured and formulated in ways that are useful and relevant to policy-makers and others beyond the IPE programme.

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1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of research, led by Sustainable Futures, on learning processes to support the improvement of poor environments.

It sits within a wider programme of work, led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Environment Agency and others, to identify and address environmental inequalities in the UK: the Improving Poor Environments programme.

This report focuses on a rapid literature review and research survey of a range of public sector domains, to identify effective learning mechanisms for developing and spreading good practice in local partnership working.

Parallel work by Brook Lyndhurst - with local residents and service providers, on policy responses to environmental inequalities, and on the development of indicators - is the subject of accompanying reports (Brook Lyndhurst 2007b, c). A summary report (Brook Lyndhurst 2007a) is also available, which pulls together the findings of this and the other two reports.

1.1 Background and objectives

While the overall quality of the UK's environment is improving, it can vary between different areas and communities. The causes of these inequalities are often complex, long-standing and cumulative. Often these environmental problems are caused by the actions of others who do not live in the affected community.

There has been a growing interest in and recognition of the relationship between deprivation and environmental quality – there is now a large body of UK-based evidence that shows that people who are socially and economically disadvantaged often live in the worst environments.

> *Historically, the environment in Britain has not been much of a civil rights matter … but we need to address the broader debate. We need to address environmental equity* (Michael Meacher, speech as Minister for the Environment, 2002, quoted in Brook Lyndhurst (2004))

> *There has been a lack of regard for the environmental concerns of disadvantaged communities, based to a degree on the presumption that the environment is a middle class issue* (Sustainable Development Commission, 2003)

> *The environment, not just globally, but locally, in our towns and cities, is overwhelmingly an issue of concern for the poorest citizens in our communities … [who] live in the worst housing, and are most affected by traffic pollution, live closest to landfill sites and have the worst graffiti and litter problems* (Tony Blair, Prime Minister, speech to launch Defra's third annual report on sustainable development in the UK, 24 February 2003)

> *Social justice demands that we act … Locally, poor environmental quality leads to spirals of degradation, promotes fear of crime and exacerbates the decline of neighbourhoods* (Margaret Beckett, then Secretary of State for the Environment, speech to Environment Agency National Conference – Environment 2003, 28 October 2003)

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Reviews of the evidence base undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst (2004) for the ODPM Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and Lucas *et al.* (2005) for the Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN) both found the following:

- environmental inequality is a real and substantive problem within the UK;

- patterns of environmental inequality are varied and complex, cautioning against over generalisations;

- nonetheless, problems of environmental inequality afflict many of our most deprived communities;

- environmental inequality has a detrimental effect on the quality of life experienced by members of those communities;

- the causes of these environmental inequalities are often complex, long-standing and cumulative;

- in some cases not only are deprived communities disproportionately exposed to environmental risk, they are also disproportionately vulnerable to its effects.

In response, Defra and the Environment Agency proposed the development of a system for identifying 'the poorest quality environments that need most enhancement to improve people's health and quality of life' (Defra 2005: 134). In the light of this system there will be a programme of work – led by Defra, the Environment Agency and others – to address environmental inequalities.

The Environment Agency and others are already taking some action at a local level through local strategic and community planning partnerships, neighbourhood renewal and Communities First programmes. But further action is needed.

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy provides a national framework for addressing environmental inequalities committed to:

> *develop a system for identifying the poorest quality local environments which need most enhancement to improve people's health and quality of life, which can be used as a basis for encouraging all local service providers through local authorities and LSPs to focus on these areas, in consultation with the communities who live there, for example through Local Area Agreements* (Defra 2005: 134)

The Sustainable Futures work reported here will contribute to the efforts required to improve these poorest quality environments.

The aim of the IPE programme is to develop a consistent national framework that can be implemented locally, in the 60 deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales with the poorest quality environments (Brook Lyndhurst 2007a, c). As with most public sector programmes, the balance between national consistency and local flexibility is important, but also a difficult one to achieve.

The local partnership working that will be required in the IPE programme will have requirements for local flexibility that are likely to be particularly important. This is a key finding of the review of area-based initiatives (ABIs) commissioned as part of the wider set of studies for the IPE programme (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c). This research highlighted the importance of understanding local conditions, including local governance and decision making structures, and adopting a flexible and adaptable approach in working within these varying contexts.

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For the IPE programme this raises the question: how can local managers and partners best be supported at a national level to achieve the objectives of the IPE programme? As Brook Lyndhurst (2007c) argue, this requires a toolkit of support which must include not only guidance, information links and so on, but also means to support local adaptation through a process of continuous learning.

The purposes of the Sustainable Futures work were therefore agreed as follows:

1. To undertake a rapid literature review and research with organisations from a range of public sector domains, including the Environment Agency, to identify effective learning mechanisms for *developing* good practice in local partnership working.

2. To draw on this research to identify effective learning mechanisms for *spreading* good practice in local partnership working.

3. To draw on this research to identify effective mechanisms for designing national frameworks for learning.

4. In the light of 1. – 3. above, to advise Brook Lyndhurst on the learning elements of the recommendations for a programme of sustained intervention to tackle environmental disadvantage in deprived communities: the Improving Poor Environments (IPE) programme.

1.2 Methods

Research was undertaken with 12 national and local government departments and agencies during the period April to May 2006, plus regional and area Environment Agency staff, supplemented by a rapid literature review. The methods used for the research are outlined below, and the findings from the research are summarised throughout the main body of this report.

1.2.1 Government and agency interviews

Interviews were undertaken with 21 individuals in 11 national and local government departments and agencies; an analysis of a recent evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was also completed (see Appendix 1 for full list of the 12 sources). All the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with interviews usually lasting 1 - 2 hours each. Secondary data (e.g. from organisations' websites and other materials) were used to provide factual data about the organisations to supplement the information from the interviews. The organisations involved were:
*   Academy for Sustainable Communities

*   Bradford Vision

*   Creating Excellence (the South West centre of excellence for sustainable communities)

*   Department of Constitutional Affairs

*   Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government

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- National College for School Leadership

- National School of Government

- Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

- NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement

- Regen West Midlands

- RENEW North West

- Sandwell MBC.

Two broad types of organisations were selected for interview:

- Organisations with a primary focus on local, partnership based service delivery:
  - Some organisations were established for other reasons (e.g. regeneration) but have had innovative learning programmes (e.g. Communities First, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Department of Constitutional Affairs, Sandwell MBC, Wales Council for Voluntary Action).
  - Some organisations were established for other reasons (e.g. to deliver on a local community strategy), but used learning as their primary delivery method (e.g. Bradford Vision).

- Organisations with a primary focus on learning:
  - Some of the organisations had been established with core objectives related to learning to improve practice in particular fields, such as sustainable communities, health or regeneration (e.g. Academy for Sustainable Communities, Creating Excellence, the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, RENEW North West, Regen West Midlands).
  - Some of the organisations were specifically established for learning purposes (e.g. the National School of Government and Public Services Management Wales).

The aims of these interviews were to:

- identify the current principles and practice of learning throughout the range of organisations covered, including methods and approaches used, and to explore the interviewees' reflections on experience to date of these activities;

- explore the specific principles and practices of spreading learning and sharing knowledge of 'what works' in these organisations, and identify those seen by interviewees as most effective;

- explore current principles and practices of involving wider stakeholders (beyond staff) in learning with and from the organisation;

- test the concept of 'learning architectures' in providing frameworks for sharing learning and experience throughout and beyond an organisation.

Notes of all interviews were produced, analysed and the results shared among the research team and with Environment Agency project staff.

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The interviews provided very useful data on current learning methods and approaches within these organisations, especially methods to share knowledge and spread good practice. The scope and timescale of the research required a very rapid and limited review. It is therefore important to note that these interviews were essentially snapshots of current experience that cannot be taken as necessarily representative of the full range of learning methods used in relevant local and national government departments and their agencies. However, the similarities in terms of approaches and methods currently used and in development suggest clear trends in organisational learning and developing good practice, and these trends form the basis of many of the conclusions in this report.

1.2.2 Environment Agency interviews

13 interviews were undertaken with a mix of regional and area Environment Agency staff from the Thames and North East regions. 12 of these interviews were face-to-face; one was conducted by phone; three of these interviews were conducted jointly with David Fell of Brook Lyndhurst. Each interview took about 1 - 2 hours.

The aims of these interviews with Environment Agency staff were to explore their experience and understanding of partnership working, and the organisation's ability to deliver effective work in the context of disadvantage, diversity and a wide range of different needs.

These interviews provided detailed data that was used to fully brief the research team and Environment Agency project staff on the current experience of the Agency, and the opportunities and problems that currently existed in building learning and good practice in partnership working to tackle environmental inequality at local level.

As with the interviews with other bodies, this was not a comprehensive review of Environment Agency experience in this work, but did provide useful directions and issues for the Agency to consider in taking this work forward. The findings thus fully informed the conclusions and recommendations made in this report.

1.2.3 Literature review

A very brief literature review was undertaken to fully incorporate the relevant theoretical frameworks that underpin the research. The literature review was supplemented by drawing on the practical and research experience of the team both within and outside the Environment Agency.

The literature review briefly examined a range of materials relevant to learning approaches relevant to situations of change and complexity, and the review included:

- knowledge management literature

- material specifically on learning architectures

- trends in learning and development literature especially management learning and organisational learning including the whole system development literature

- relevant Environment Agency science reports (especially previous work by several members of the research team as part of the Joining Up project including on pathfinder projects on partnership working generally and Local Strategic Partnerships in particular).

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The literature review underpinned the design of the wider research process and informed the analysis of the research findings, leading to the conclusions and recommendations outlined below.

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2 Learning approaches to developing good practice locally

In this section we review some of the extensive range of activity across the public sector that is seeking to enable organisations, both alone and in partnership, to improve their performance through learning approaches. Much of this activity is focused on enabling adaptation: either to local context, or to a rapidly changing context, or to the demands of new ways of working thrown up by partnership, or to some combination of all of these.

From this research, a number of key themes emerge that we consider relevant to the design of the IPE programme:

- conventional training methods alone are insufficient;
- the emergence of new interactive approaches to learning;
- evidence for the effectiveness of these new interactive approaches;
- the need for learning, management and improving performance to be closely linked;
- barriers to adopting these new approaches;
- policy support for these new approaches.

2.1 Conventional training methods alone are insufficient

2.1.1 Evidence that conventional approaches are not working

Evidence for the limited effectiveness of conventional training approaches, when used on their own, is a significant finding of the research.

The NRU's Delivering Skills Programme provides one of the clearest examples of this (ODPM 2005). Six three-day residential courses were piloted, covering partnership working and leadership, programme design and delivery, and learning from what works. 70 participants from local authorities, New Deal for Community areas, Local Strategic Partnerships and community organisations attended. Although feedback on the content of the courses was good, problems were identified in the whole approach. Marketing was difficult - it was hard to get people to sign up for the courses, not least because of logistical difficulties e.g. with the length of courses and locations. And in spite of the focus on 'delivering skills', the main benefit cited by participants was 'networking', as well as learning about other people's experience and how they dealt with problems, and time for reflection on their own work. This suggests that participants needed a much more reflective and interactive approach based on their own practical experience. Moreover, although two-thirds of participants said they had changed their working practices as a result, this was slightly *lower* even than users of the www.renewal.net website - three-quarters of whom said they were confident that their use of the site would help them produce better neighbourhood renewal outcomes.

In the commercial sphere, researchers (Doz 1996; Doz and Hamel 1998) have demonstrated that the success of strategic alliances depends upon the parties being able to maintain and develop their relationship through learning and mutual adaptation over time: "The key to longevity [of Strategic Alliances]... is learning and adjustment, first to each other, and then to

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changed circumstances, if required." (Doz and Hamel: 170). These authors contrast the strategic alliances of Alza-Ciba-Geigy and GE-SNECMA to illustrate the critical importance of the quality of learning within the alliance (ibid: 169-193) Formal training is of very little help in facing the complex challenges involved:

> "Unfortunately, few managers are prepared to handle these issues. Very little in their experience – including traditional joint ventures – has provided suitable training. As a result, many alliance managers falter, procrastinate, or just burn out, and the collaborative linkages they are charged with nurturing come apart." (Doz and Hamel: xv-xvi).

This is not to say that conventional training approaches such as courses are never appropriate, but rather that they may need to be designed to focus on the benefits sought by participants as much as on delivering skills defined elsewhere. Furthermore, there is a need for much more effective evaluation of learning approaches, to understand more fully which work best in different circumstances and to achieve different purposes.

2.1.2 Why is this? – what the literature tells us

Evidence from the literature can help us to make sense of these findings. Conventional training is usually designed as the transmission of existing skills and knowledge from those that know and can do to those who don't know and can't yet do. Where tasks are routine, when the answers to problems are known, and when situations are relatively stable, then training works well. Such training deals with knowledge that can be made explicit, generalised and can be easily transmitted. We know how to train people; this is the process of *instruction*.

But where new, more flexible ways of working are required, as in many partnership situations, then tried and tested sources of knowledge may no longer be appropriate, and other sources are required. One interviewee from the National College of School Leadership expressed this as follows:

> "Traditional directions of knowledge transfer are less effective in a knowledge-intensive world. New learning cannot be gathered to the centre and disseminated. There is too much and that approach is too slow."

The increasing use of the word learning rather than training signifies the shift in practice that is required to support more flexible ways of working. It recognises that many of the challenges faced by people and organisations are not technical *puzzles* but rather *problems* or *opportunities* for which there is no right answer and no single course of action (Revans 1998: 6). Learning is not a prescribed process but a voluntary one involving cycles of action, reflection on the basis of experience, and integration of insights into existing ways of understanding and doing things. Learning deals with both the implicit and the explicit, and especially with the tacit knowledge that may be local and contextual and not easily communicated. Learning of this sort cannot be prescribed, but it can be *facilitated*.

Whilst people and organisations usually need both training and learning, the former is relatively straightforward, whilst the latter is less predictable and more challenging. Learning is concerned with "adaptive problems"– those challenges that require us to learn new skills and to work in new ways (Heifetz 1994: 10). Learning - and not training - is core to the processes of invention, innovation, personal growth and organisational development.

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Reg Revans suggests that any organism will fail unless its learning is greater than the rate of change in its environment (1998: 24). This ecological formula is emblematic of a growing view that learning is increasingly essential for survival and prosperity in a complex, rapidly changing world. The argument is that, in the 'knowledge era', the ability to learn, to absorb new knowledge and acquire new skills and capacities is a primary organisational asset (Senge 1990; Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1991; Senge et al 1994).

2.1.3   Adaptation requires organisational as well as individual learning

A further reason for the limited effectiveness of training in enabling more adaptive responses is that adaptation requires organisational as well as individual learning.

Whilst both individual and organisational learning are important and necessary, they are different in character (Argyris and Schon 1978). Individual learning is the means by which the intellectual capital of individuals is enhanced; organisational learning is the means by which social capital or organisational capacity and capability is enhanced.

This distinction is important because of the sometimes mistaken assumption – reflected in many training approaches - that organisational learning is achieved through individual learning alone. Sustainable development in an organisation or system requires both individual learning (intellectual capital) and organisational learning (organisational capacity): the learning organisation "is not brought about simply by training individuals; it can only happen as a result of *learning* at the *whole organisation level*" (Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1996: 3).

This insight is highly relevant to the IPE programme, where the ability of local managers to adapt to local conditions depends not just on their individual skills and abilities, but also:

- on the adaptability of the partnership they are working in (one source of organisational capacity); and

- on the adaptability of their own organisations, to support them in what needs doing (another source of organisational capacity).

2.2   The emergence of new interactive approaches to learning

2.2.1   A significant shift in approach from training to interactive learning

The interviews for this study provide strong evidence of a recent and significant shift in approach away from conventional training methods to deliver learning, and towards a much more interactive approach where practitioner knowledge is as important as learning brought in from outside the learning participants. This shift is very much in line with the arguments from the literature presented in the previous section. This shift seems particularly apparent where partnership working, community engagement, and the leadership required to support these are to the forefront of public sector delivery programmes, as in many area based initiatives.

The main current interactive learning approaches are described in greater detail below, and three overall trends can be identified from the research:

- A great deal of the *content* of these learning approaches is around leadership, creative thinking, public, community and stakeholder engagement, collaborative 'task working' as the basis for joint action, partnership working, and organisational development;

- Almost all the methods focus on the basic approach of 'bringing people together' in 'safe spaces' where they can reflect on their practice and learn from others (both from within the group and from outside if additional expertise is needed on a particular topic). The bringing together may be one-off (e.g. visits and study tours), over a relatively short period (e.g. action learning sets), or for longer periods (e.g. communities of practice);

- In many cases organisations are orchestrating several of these approaches together to provide a more coherent and systematic approach to learning than in the past.

2.2.2 Examples of the new interactive learning approaches

Broadly, these new interactive learning approaches can be classified into two categories. Firstly there are what can be described as 'new interactive methods' (although they have all existed for over twenty years, they have been steadily gaining ground in all sectors - private, public, community and voluntary). These include action learning, coaching, mentoring, whole systems and large group methodologies. Secondly, a range of more 'traditional approaches' have been recast to be more interactive to take account of the complexities of rapidly changing organisations and their environments. These include needs assessments, visits and study tours, induction, master classes and workshops.

Both these broad approaches seek to establish the conditions for the creation and spread of practitioner knowledge and the development of new and appropriate mindsets, especially where improvement in service delivery is dependent upon the combined actions and learning of many stakeholders.

New interactive learning methods include:

- **Action learning**. Usually people work in small groups to tackle issues or problems that are facing their organisation/partnership, and through a process of supported reflection learn from their attempts to change things (see Appendix 2).

- **Coaching**, **mentoring, shadowing and secondments.** Coaching is centred on improving task performance, usually on a one-to-one basis. Coaching aims to help a person plan their actions, carry them out and then to reflect on outcomes. Learning is about the task and about the behaviours associated with it, and often leads to the wider personal development of the person concerned. Coaching is increasingly likely to be delivered by professionals with specific training and taking a psychological approach. Mentoring can overlap with coaching but is usually undertaken by people with current or previous experience of similar roles (see Appendix 3).

- **Learning protocols**. A whole range of tools, techniques and support materials are increasingly being developed in learning networks to offer process guidance and are an essential part of the development resources for any learning hub or network (NHS 2002; Cotton 2005). The learning protocols which have been developed by the National College for School Leadership, and set out a range of options for structuring and enabling on-the-job learning, are one example (see Appendix 4).

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- **Whole systems methodologies and large group events.** These are widely used. Bradford Vision, covered in this study, has made extensive use of these methods and linked them to action learning (see Appendix 5).

Further details of ways in which each of these approaches are being applied are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Application of new interactive learning approaches across different public sector domains.

Approach	Examples
Action learning	Use of action learning was highlighted by many of the organisations in this review: ▪ The Academy of Sustainable Communities is planning action learning sets, especially for work on young people and communities; ▪ Bradford Vision developed action learning sets from an initial big event, followed by workshops that led into the formation of action learning sets; ▪ Creating Excellence already runs an action learning set for action learning facilitators, and are planning wider pilots from September 2006; ▪ The Department of Constitutional Affairs ran a pilot to test action learning, but has now shifted onto the development of a community of practice; ▪ The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) runs action learning sets ▪ The National College for School Leadership runs action learning as one of several group learning activities; ▪ Public Services Management Wales has set up a formal programme of 10 facilitated action learning sets for managers, with 8-10 participants each, working on a range of policy issues. The programme is due to be completed in September 2006, to be followed by a second cohort of participants; ▪ Wales Council for Voluntary Action is developing action learning sets to support people following formal training in participatory ways of working, especially community involvement.
Coaching, mentoring, shadowing, secondments	▪ Academy of Sustainable Communities plans secondments and mentoring. ▪ Communities First has a team that provide one-to-one support to local partnerships and local staff on regeneration issues. ▪ Creating Excellence plans shadowing, mentoring and secondments to be piloted from November 2006. ▪ IDeA run a major programme of peer mentoring and peer review through a Peer Clearing House which can access over 400 accredited people (about half are officers and half elected councillors). ▪ Public Services Management Wales is developing a tutoring and mentoring strategy and developing a coaching culture in the organisations it works with; PSMW sees this as a major growth area in the learning support they offer. ▪ The National College for School Leadership promotes peer coaching, coaching and mentoring. ▪ The National School of Government is running a pilot regeneration project which will call upon a 'faculty' of experts to guide the learning; they also bring in expertise such as business school academics to advise government on setting up new agencies. ▪ The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has a programme of NR Advisers (including residents) who provide face-to-face advice to partnerships engaged in neighbourhood renewal activity.
Learning protocols	▪ The National College of School Leadership has developed learning protocols as guides on how to proceed (e.g. in setting up action learning or planning a school visit).

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	▪ The Academy of Sustainable Communities is commissioning new research and practical learning materials for practitioners, communities and academics.
Whole group system methods and large workshops	▪ Bradford Vision developed action learning sets from an initial big event, followed by workshops that led into the formation of action learning sets; ▪ RENEW NorthWest aim to create a core leadership forum of 100 people where people can work and learn together in 'safe and sociable' ways; usually over dinner and with a high profile speaker.

The more traditional approaches to learning that have been recast to be more interactive to take account of modern complexities include the following:

- **Evaluation**. Evaluation approaches can range from 'audit' approaches (e.g. checking targets met, objectives achieved etc) to 'learning' approaches (e.g. identifying lessons for future practice, 'what works', what makes a difference etc), with varying degrees of participation from those involved in delivering and participating in the projects and programmes under review. When undertaken alongside the action (formative evaluation) as well as at the end, to review the overall outcomes of the programme (summative), evaluation can provide frameworks for those involved to reflect and learn from activities (e.g. by reviewing progress towards objectives, potential partners, external resources etc).

- **Exemplars**. Exemplars focus attention on example, case study, projects (e.g. beacon programmes, pilots etc).

- **Induction**. Induction programmes have been used by organisations for many years, but the new programmes are including sharing experience with existing staff much more.

- **Master classes**. Master classes bring highly experienced practitioners from within and outside the organisation to share their experience with those with less experience. These too are being used much more interactively, to provide an overall sharing of experience, problems and solutions, than in the past.

- **Needs / competency assessments**. Conventional training and learning needs and competency assessments are being used increasingly to help people set their own learning agendas, develop self-efficacy and encourage self-assessment - rather than these assessments only being part of bureaucratic performance management structures.

- **Visits and study tours**. These are being used to provide opportunities for those involved in partnerships and other engagement initiatives to visit initiatives elsewhere that are managing a similar set of issues and explore with them how they are addressing these; sometimes supported by the use of learning networks.

- **Workshops and other events.** Workshops in this sense are essentially interactive events, usually for a relatively small number of staff, which allow participants to work through shared problems and apply their shared experience, as well as possibly bringing in external expertise to feed into the learning.

Further details of ways in which each of these approaches are being applied in practice are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Application of recast 'traditional approaches' across different public sector domains.

Approach	Examples
Evaluation	- Creating Excellence has commissioned an evaluation framework to measure the impact of its work on the wider community, and to share the learning with the community. - The Department of Constitutional Affairs is using evaluation to capture learning on their own learning programmes, and is developing an evaluation framework to help others in government learn from their practice in engaging the public and stakeholders through shared evaluation practice. - The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit evaluation recommends that "future evaluation must give priority to identifying evidence of learning gains, changes and improvements made, and how these track through to improved performance". - RENEW NorthWest is planning an evaluation framework that will capture outcomes (especially unintended / unexpected outcomes) from learning activities and events. - Bradford Vision makes space in all meetings to 'think together'/reflect as a deliberate, conscious and linked activity to decision making and to inform the action.
Exemplars	- Bradford Vision uses 'show and tell' to share the experiences of exemplar projects. - The IDeA is linked to the government's Beacon Councils scheme (especially around Best Value). - RENEW NorthWest uses projects put forward by practitioners and partners that illustrate how barriers have been overcome to achieve project objectives; exemplars are written up and practitioners are invited to ask 'probing' questions. - The Department of Constitutional Affairs provides small grants (approx £10,000) to fund innovative engagement practice, and to share lessons.
Induction	- Academy of Sustainable Communities plans induction for the Board and staff - The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit evaluation proposes that there is a continuing need for induction into neighbourhood renewal and partnerships for a wide range of people, given the breadth of stakeholder organisations and the turnover of individuals involved.
Master classes	- RENEW NorthWest runs master classes on community engagement and on the creative industries, targeted at regeneration practitioners, partners and the Government Office - Creating Excellence has planned two master classes: one in October 2006 on transformational leadership for sustainable communities; one in January 2007 on design for health.
Needs / competency assessments	- Creating Excellence is developing a competency-based assessment framework based on the North West Development Agency's 'Raising Our Game' approach and adapting that for work on sustainable communities. Assessments will be done in cross-disciplinary ways to help break down barriers between participating professionals. This process was to be piloted in September 2006. Participants would then have access to an online menu of learning methods / opportunities that they can access, and choices would be allocated against an individual learning budget. - The National College for School Leadership uses diagnostic instruments to

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	• stimulate and support reflection and enable analysis of personal and organisational effectiveness (including a Leadership Style Inventory). • The National School of Government uses psychometrics and 360 feedback to help with 'learning about self'.
Visits and study tours	• The National School of Government organise what they call 'raids' where participants go out and meet all key service delivery people in a place, find out what they do and their issues. • The National College of School Leadership has developed 'protocols' to ensure visits are effective for learning by hosts and by visitors (see Appendix 3). • Bradford Vision use 'show and tell' to spread learning and share knowledge. • Creating Excellence is running study tours, starting with one to review plans for sustainable regeneration linked to the London Olympics 2012.
Workshops	• Academy of Sustainable Communities plans various workshops, especially for specific professional groups (e.g. surveyors). • RENEW NorthWest is planning workshops using a learning package called 'Partnership Works'. • The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit runs the NR Delivering Skills programme, which piloted six three-day courses. • Wales Council for Voluntary Action runs training workshops on participatory working methods.

2.2.3 The development of local 'infrastructures for learning'

The review for this project not only highlighted the range of new interactive and recast traditional learning approaches now in use, it also found evidence for the ways in which organisations are increasingly drawing a number of different approaches together to provide a much more coherent and systematic approach to learning than in the past (Table 3).

Table 3   Examples of how public sector organisations are orchestrating different interactive learning approaches to support better local delivery

	Action learning	Coaching and mentoring	Learning protocols	Large group events	Needs/ competency assessment	Visits and study tours
Academy of Sustainable Communities	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Bradford Vision	Yes			Yes		Yes
Creating Excellence	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)	Yes	Yes				
National College for School Leadership	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
National School of Government		Yes			Yes	Yes
Public Services Management Wales	Yes	Yes				

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This orchestration does not end with putting together different learning methods, and also incorporates bringing together different learners - so that partners in processes are brought together to take action and learn together. The Environment Agency River Basin Planning project's work on social learning found some difficulties with this, particularly as the bringing in of new partners disrupted the relationships being formed among the existing group (and they recommended a core group that continued long term, with others joining as appropriate) (Collins et al. 2005). However, other research suggests that it is possible for partners from different organisations to learn together and, moreover, that the relationship building that this joint learning can achieve is the most important single element of the learning that results (Warburton 2001)[1].

This orchestration can be seen as the beginning of an organisational or systemic infrastructure of learning - or a 'learning architecture' - that can provide a consistent overall framework for a whole range of different learning methods.

2.3 Do these new interactive approaches work better?

It is clear from the interviews that many of these learning approaches are very new to these organisations; some are still at the planning stage and have not been implemented. The exceptions are:

- peer learning and peer review in IDeA
- practitioners sharing learning across schools, especially through the National College of School Leadership
- the National School of Government brought together the long-established Civil Service Staff College and other development programmes within the Cabinet Office
- the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Skills and Knowledge programme
- the NHS, including through the relatively recent Institute for Innovation and Improvement.

All these have been operating successfully for some time, although we have found few formal evaluations. (One exception is the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit evaluation). It is clear that the reflective processes used in many of the learning practices reviewed always contain an evaluative element, with informal personal and collective 'formative' evaluation continuing throughout the learning and delivery processes, and feeding into constant improvement of delivery and performance. Some of this learning is translated directly into guidance on good practice. However, although vital to the learning and development processes internally, and useful to practitioners in similar fields, there is sometimes a missing link in the process where the evidence from the experience, and the basis for the guidance, is not fully articulated and communicated more widely (e.g. through formal evaluation reports).

From the somewhat sparse hard evidence we have found, but taking account of anecdotal feedback from the reflections of interviewees on the achievements of the learning processes, there are some strands of work that stand out as particularly successful. (This is also based on the extent to which these processes are strongly supported and the length of time they have run):

- Bradford Vision's general approach to learning as part of their mainstream delivery and decision-making processes seems to have improved performance and local working

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[1] In this case, a councillor, a council officer and a community representative all attended the Local Agenda 21 development programme together. Lone individuals were not accepted on to the programme.

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relationships, and enabled highly innovatory practices to be developed, piloted and adopted (e.g. participatory budgeting[2]).

- Communities First have found that the opportunities for people to share experiences and information "in an environment that is comfortable to them, on topics they choose" is the most successful approach they have used, as it allows people to shape their own learning. They have also found one-to-one support very successful.

- The National College of School Leadership approach to sharing knowledge through networks and communities of practice, and their 'whole school improvement' approach to focusing learning has been felt to have been working very well.

- The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Skills and Knowledge programme has worked well, especially the renewal.net website and Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (NRAs), with the regional regeneration networks offering potential. However, the evaluation does suggest that more evidence is needed of the gains in performance as a result of these processes (ODPM 2005).

In terms of specific methods and techniques that seem to have gained particular popularity and have greatest enthusiasm from those delivering them, the following stand out from the interviews:

- action learning sets
- evaluation (both in assessing the success of the learning methods used, and as a learning method itself when used to capture, translate and share learning to wider audiences)
- learning as part of mainstream activity
- master classes
- mentoring and coaching (including the use of advisers, expert groups etc)
- networks (see Section 3).

This is not to suggest that other learning methods and techniques are less successful; only that there is not sufficient evidence from this research to make that case.

2.4 Linking learning, management and improving performance

As noted in 2.1 (above) training alone does not create good practice; these new approaches work better because they integrate learning into the daily job of managing, particularly including the job of managing partnerships. There is no adequate prior training for the unpredictable and evolving challenges of partnership working, and partnership success is considered to be enhanced if learning opportunities can be created and facilitated within the lived experience. The new interactive and recast traditional learning approaches, together with the underlying learning 'mindset' that informs them, work better because they link learning, management and practice.

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[2] Participatory Budgeting (PB) programmes are innovative policy-making processes which embrace many of the features of whole systems methodologies and large group events described above. Typically, forums are held throughout the year so that citizens have the opportunity to allocate resources, prioritise broad social policies and monitor public spending.

PB originates from Brazil where it has been used in local government to confront legacies such as social exclusion and corruption by making budgetary processes transparent, open and public. Research for this project has found examples of use in Bradford, and it has also been used to some extent elsewhere in the UK (e.g. Salford and Harrow) (see Wampler 2000).

As noted above, these approaches create learning opportunities or learning 'spaces' which typically take the form of bringing people together to share their information, knowledge and know-how, and to reflect on what this means for their practice of managing. This reflects a key aspect of adult learning theory, namely, that learning in adults is as much about the re-organisation of existing knowledge as it is about acquiring new knowledge (Brookfield 1986: 29). It follows that people at work need 'time out' from their 'busyness' in order to have the chance to learn. Such learning spaces can be very informal and unplanned as in "corridor conversations" (Dixon 1997) or they can be more planned and structured as in coaching or action learning.

The evidence from the interviews supports the different sorts of knowledge and know-how that need to be brought together to improve practice and performance:

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┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ What is known           │ ─────► │ What is known           │
│ The knowledge from      │ ◄───── │ The knowledge of those  │
│ theory, research and    │        │ involved. What          │
│ best practice           │        │ practitioners know      │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
              ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │ New knowledge           │
              │ The new knowledge that  │
              │ we can create together  │
              │ through collaborative    │
              │ work                    │
              └─────────────────────────┘
```
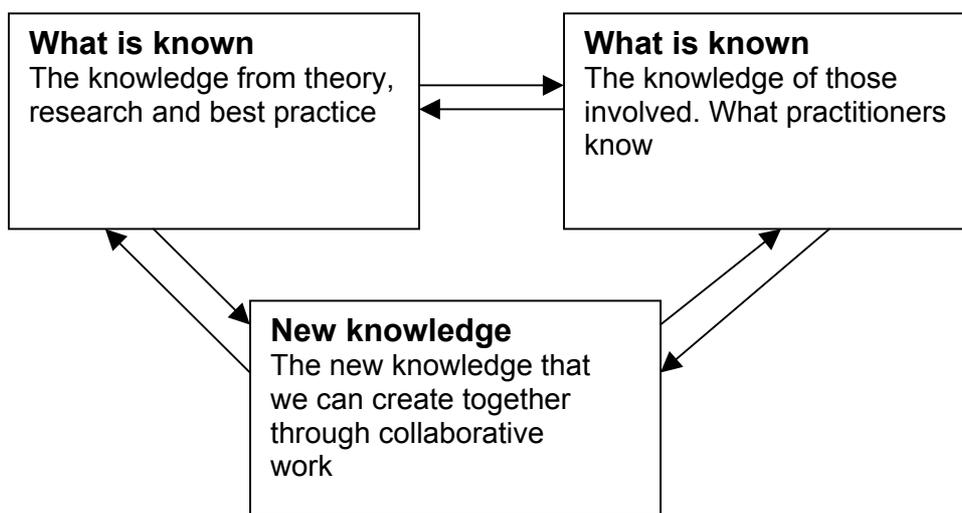
(*Adapted from Carter et al 2006*)

This analysis reflects a growing trend in public sector organisations for linking learning, management and improving performance (examples taken from the research interviews):

• Shifting learning and development spend from the top of the organisational hierarchy to the point of delivery in recognition that it is often the less qualified staff who have the greatest impact on local outcomes (e.g. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement).

▪ Learning and development approaches based on the thinking that most occupational, professional and practice development takes place not in classrooms but in working processes with other professionals, including through communities of practice, learning networks and consortia (e.g. the Department of Constitutional Affairs, IDeA, the National College of School Leadership, the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement and RENEW North West are all considering communities of practice to share learning across their networks).

▪ Learning and development spend that focuses on making an impact on wider business issues and problems rather than on training for existing jobs, which remains essential but is insufficient on its own (all the public sector bodies interviewed for this review have moved to include wider concepts of learning alongside skills training; and the Egan report (ODPM 2004) focuses on the need for 'generic' skills rather than technical knowledge in order to create sustainable communities).

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- Learning and development approaches that emphasise people learning from their own action and experience of tackling practical work tasks and problems, such as action learning (e.g. the Academy of Sustainable Communities, Bradford Vision, Creating Excellence, the Department of Constitutional Affairs, IDeA, the National College of School Leadership, Public Services Management Wales and Wales Council for Voluntary Action all run action learning sets).

- Leadership and management development programmes that recognise that leadership is 'distributed' and required at all levels of organisations and systems (James and Burgoyne 2001) (e.g. the National School of Government Leaders UK programme).

- Bringing together a 'blend' of learning and development approaches within an overarching infrastructure of learning to contribute to improved performance (again, all the organisations interviewed were using more than one learning and development approach).

The Environment Agency has begun to explore the linkages between the role of learning in improving individual and organisational performance in recent years, leading up to this current research for the IPE programme (Collins et al. 2005; Porter et al. 2006).

2.5 Barriers to adopting these new approaches

Although these newer approaches to learning, developing, sharing and transferring knowledge are used increasingly, they often sit uneasily with the ethos of some current public service management. This has been dominated in recent years by multitudinous top-down targets, plans and initiatives on the one hand, and increasing inspection and regulation on the other. There are a number of key problems that arise from this:

- The real world of improving intractable local problems is usually far more complex and involves many more stakeholders, communities and citizens than abstract centralised plans and targets allow for.
- National targets and inspection regimes pay scant regard to both the successes and problems of implementation at the local level.
- They produce workforce frustration and dissatisfaction.
- The dominant change ethos works on the assumption that the workforce (and indeed citizens) cannot be trusted to work on improvement and will resist change. These assumptions are likely to reproduce precisely these effects in self-fulfilling negative cycles. While this factor has been known and taught in management programmes for almost fifty years, it remains largely ignored by some public sector policy makers.

There are signs that some of these issues are being recognised at national government level with new policy initiatives on localism, the reduction of national targets and changes to inspection and performance measurement regimes. Given some real moves in this direction, the potential of interactive approaches to learning becomes even greater.

There are also specific barriers within the Environment Agency. The evidence from the interviews for this review suggests that, in an effort to control and standardise operational work, the organisation seeks to divide and routinise activities. Problems arise where products and services required by the outside world are no longer standard, but are needed to match specific and unique needs and contexts. Detailed guidance and conventional training approaches simply break down because they cannot deal with the complexity involved. What is now required is far greater awareness and diagnosis of situations and contexts and the ability to organise learning resources of all kinds around these.

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Although the Environment Agency has undertaken some innovatory research work on social learning as a new approach to improving performance and sharpening delivery, the emphasis in internal performance management remains on relatively rigid Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which staff see as mechanistic and stifling. KPIs and other rigid targets may be used to control and standardise operational work, by dividing and routinising activities. However, the result can be that means become ends in themselves and the focus on the bigger picture - outcomes - is lost. Of course, the Environment Agency is a publicly funded body operating in and from the public domain, so standards of regulation, the spending of money on flood risk management and so on, need to meet criteria of equitability across England and Wales.

However, as previous Environment Agency research on River Basin Planning has found "systematic coherence was being achieved at the cost of systemic understanding and practice" and staff found themselves "'chained to' preconceived ideas, often with little prospect of moving out of or beyond the confines of 'functional chimneys'" (Collins et al 2005: 32). Staff in this case were presented with a series of discrete tasks (under the PRINCE2 methodology), while not really understanding their interdependencies.

Given the importance of flexibility and adaptability to local context, identified in the research on area-based initiatives in the UK by Brook Lyndhurst (2007b), it is clear that current methods of performance management (particularly those used within the Environment Agency) may be counter-productive - promoting rigid adherence to centrally-set targets and priorities rather than encouraging responsiveness to local problems and opportunities. More flexible learning approaches may enable new working practices that incorporate both the need for the consistency in regulation, and flexibility in partnership working, that will be essential for the IPE programme.

For most of the staff interviewed it was evident that these more networked, developmental forms of learning also needed to work laterally across functional divisions and include partner staff from other bodies and community organisations.

2.6 Policy support for these new approaches

In addition to developments in practice, there is also increasing recognition of the value of new learning approaches at a national policy level. This was signalled particularly forcefully in the Egan Report on Skills for Sustainable Communities:

> 'We firmly believe that attempting to upskill professionals in isolation will not produce the outcomes we are seeking. Instead success will depend on changing the attitude, behaviour and knowledge of everyone involved … There is no quick fix - sustainable communities are a holistic long-term objective requiring a holistic approach to skills to deliver the outcome we are seeking' (ODPM 2004:13).

The Egan review indicated a step change in thinking about the skills and knowledge needed for creating sustainable communities. This has influenced not just environmental sustainability professionals, but also many others involved in regeneration and in regional and local government public service programmes more generally.

In one of the press releases announcing the results of the review, Sir John Egan is quoted as saying that

> "…we need a new approach, new skills, and new ways of working for everyone involved"(ODPM press release 2004/0096, 19 April 2004)

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The same press release announces the proposal for a new national centre (now the Academy for Sustainable Communities):

> "…to develop world class generic skill sets, including leadership, team working, communication, project management, and partnership working" (ibid)

The Deputy Prime Minister welcomed the Egan report with the following:

> "We need to learn from what works best … We need a cultural change in professional skills and training … to do this, all occupations involved in delivering sustainable communities will need to work together" (ODPM press release 2004/0097; 19 April 2004).

The Egan Report is clear that:

> "While generic skills can be introduced through some formal classroom training, we believe that more than 80% of generic skills development must be honed, practised and enhanced by working in a variety of projects, in a variety of jobs, within multi-disciplinary teams, in the public and private sectors with people who already demonstrate some or all of the skills" (ODPM 2004: 69-70).

Employers in government, local authorities and the private sector would be expected to adopt proactive approaches to on-the-job learning including:

- promoting secondments to successful teams … with a track record of delivering projects …

- using members of successful teams as mentors to instil a team working and cross-disciplinary approach.

The clear conclusion here is that different skills and knowledge are needed, which need to be developed in different ways from the conventional top-down delivery processes of past professional training and development. The interview with the Academy for Sustainable Communities shows that they are approaching this by aiming to "co-ordinate a consistent approach to learning and best practice and knowledge transfer across sustainable communities" - an approach far removed from 'delivering skills' through conventional training.

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3 The application of interactive learning approaches to spreading good practice

Across the public services, spreading good practice has proved hard to do. Selecting exemplars of 'best practice' and holding them up for others to emulate, as in the Beacons model applied to schools, NHS projects or local government, has proved less successful than hoped.

In looking at how different public sector domains are addressing this challenge, the review again found substantial evidence of interactive learning approaches being adopted to help extend good practice beyond the immediate 'local' practitioner group. In this section we:

- look at the evidence that spreading good practice has proved hard to do, and why this is the case;
- look at ways in which interactive learning approaches are being used to address this issue.

3.1 Spreading good practice has proved hard to do

Spreading good practice has proved hard to do. When Alan Milburn was the UK Secretary of State for Health, he asked the question: "Why, when this hospital can do a hip replacement (or other procedure) in x days, does that hospital take 50% longer?". This is a perfectly reasonable question; why can't one hospital (or school, or company or department etc) learn from the better practice of another?

At first sight this seems like a problem of information or simple knowledge; find the 'best practice', encapsulate it, codify it and make it available to others. Many companies have invested in knowledge management systems (and in other processes for sharing and spreading learning) to do just this (Dixon 2000). Yet, selecting exemplars of 'best practice' and holding them for others to emulate, as in the Beacons model applied to schools, NHS projects and local government, has proved less successful than hoped.

Studies of attempts to transfer 'best practice' through pilots, demonstration projects, peer reviews and Beacons suggest a problem with the underlying philosophy of these efforts:

> "Until recently the diffusion of innovation was based on simple models of benchmarking and sharing good practice. This emphasised a 'copy and paste' approach to new practices and focussed especially on explicit knowledge transfer." (Hartley 2006: 14)

A more adequate view proposes that "adaptation rather than adoption is central to the sharing of good practices." (Hartley 2006: 14). In other words we tend to re-invent and adapt ideas for our own particular purposes rather than just adopt other people's blueprints without thought:

> "In their 2004 national survey of local authority use of learning through the Beacon scheme, Rashman and Hartley found that 79% of those elected members and

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managers who had visited a Beacon Council said they had made changes in their own organisation as a direct result of the visit. The transfer of learning was an active process of grafting and transplanting, not a passive copying of best practice. For example, amongst those reporting change implementation, respondents were most likely to report that they had made a change through adapting a Beacon Council idea (63%), then most likely to report that they had accelerated an idea that they had through a Beacon visit (29%) and least likely to say that they had based their improvement closely on the Beacon Council (8%)"(Hartley 2006: 58)

This reveals the misconception present in many designs for the sharing and spread of good practice; namely, that provision of information alone is enough to change practice. Compounding this is a failure to understand the learning processes by which adults change their behaviours and practices, which (as noted in 2.4 above) typically requires just as much the reconfiguration of existing knowledge as much as an absorbing of the new.

3.2 Why is this?

Simple attempts to spread 'best practice' ignore three interrelated aspects of practice: the significance of tacit knowledge, the effect of local context and the importance of agency:

- **Tacit knowledge**. Knowledge can be said to exist on a continuum from explicit to tacit. Explicit knowledge is that which can be laid out in checklists, blueprints, tool kits, procedures and standards; whereas tacit knowledge is as famously described by Polanyi (1983) when "we know more than we can tell".   Tacit knowledge is intuitive 'know how' which can make all the difference to a diagnosis, a decision or an action but which cannot be easily explained or put into words. It is summed up in the joke of the man who came to mend the boiler: he looked at the boiler for five minutes, pulled out a hammer, tapped it in a particular spot, and it roared into life. On being questioned on his £100 fee, he said: "£5 is for my time, and £95 is for knowing where to tap the boiler!"

- **Contexts and local knowledge**. Attempts to spread good practice via the provision of information also cannot exactly fit with local contexts. The answer most often given to Alan Milburn's question is that "things are different here". Beacons-type initiatives are problematic because the knowledge (plus the accompanying tools, resources and materials) is abstracted from the context in which it was developed and created. In this process it loses vital aspects of why it makes sense.

- **Agency**. The findings from the interviews indicate that it is difficult to replicate what works in one school or hospital to another school or hospital. Centralised attempts to spread 'best practice' deprive people of the opportunity of agency. The word 'spread' is perhaps an unfortunate one; it implies someone doing something to someone else. It is okay to spread butter on bread, but people often do not like to be told how to do things and prefer to work things out for themselves. People have agency when they have "the sense that there is indeed something meaningful that they can do" (Ballard and Malnick 2006: 7-8).

    Agency and the need to start with action are two of the ten themes identified by Ballard and Malnick (2006) as crucial to sustainable behavioural change. People change their practice because they themselves have a desire to change and learn and not just because someone is doing it differently somewhere else. Action comes from a person wanting to try something new and being encouraged and supported to do so. Learning comes from adopting ideas that are 'pulled' from others 'just-in-time' - at the time when people need them in order to be able to act.

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Any system to encourage and foster the wider adoption of good ideas and practices must take these three factors of tacit knowledge, local context and agency into account. Strategies to apply existing knowledge top-down across a system can produce some gains but are unlikely to be sustained unless local capacity for action and learning is built up. People are often keen to learn what works in other settings but this requires not just dissemination but the opportunity to undertake a learning process. As Jackson notes:

> "Learning or knowledge about what works in one setting is infectious when potential users can ask questions, see the practice in context and thus have the information they need to adapt it to meet the needs in their own context." (2005: 3)

Also in the educational context, Hargreaves (2003: 80-81) sets out some of the conditions needed to support innovations in practice:

> "Innovation will not flourish among practitioners unless they have:
> * the motivation to create new professional knowledge
> * the opportunity to engage activity in innovation
> * the skills for testing the validity of new knowledge
> * the means for transferring the innovations rapidly within their school and into other schools"

Added to the individual capacity to learn and innovate, is the particular importance of the organisational contexts in which these individuals work. The organisational change management literature now emphasises the critical importance of context for adoption and sustainability. Organisational structures and processes are frequently cited as barriers to innovation and it has been long recognised that some organisations and organisational forms are more supportive and welcoming of innovation than others.

Some consensus is now emerging about which organisational forms are most likely to support practice development and innovation. Pettigrew, Ferlie and McKie (1992: 267-300), and Wilkinson and Applebee (1999: 67-90) both stress the importance of 'receptive contexts' in seeking to switch attention from the 'figure' of the change initiative to the 'ground' of the situation that is the focus of the change. Cohen and Levinthal 1990) have proposed the concept of 'absorptive capacity' to explain the quality which enables the take up and use of new ideas in organisations. In a similar vein, Bentley and Wilsdon call for more 'adaptive capacity' in the context of the development of state and public services:

> "We need systems capable of continually re-configuring themselves to create new sources of public value" (2003: 16)

Developing organisational systems to support the sharing of learning and new knowledge, with the adaptation and re-invention that this implies, is a critical role for organisational leaders. Both political and managerial leadership is called for in supporting the adoption and adaption of new practices in the public services (Hartley, 2006: 60). Whilst leaders cannot command innovations through attempts to 'copy and paste' 'best practice', they can do a great deal to create the conditions in which innovation may flourish.

3.3 Using networks to spread good practice

Interviews for this study highlighted three interactive learning approaches which are being used to spread good practice in and across organisations. These learning approaches address some of the limitations of conventional approaches to 'spreading' good practice as

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outlined above and help to extend good practice beyond the immediate 'local' practitioner group and may offer useful directions for organisational leaders to sanction and support.

- **Communities of practice**, which connect individuals working in different localities and provide a professionally facilitated collaborative framework for them to find solutions where there are common interests. Communities of practice may operate at local, regional and/or national levels.

- **e-learning webs**, to support the learning both of individuals and of communities of practice.

- **Learning networks**, which aim to facilitate learning and exchange within and between people who are working in a defined field. They offer various possibilities for connection and exchange including mailing lists, newsletters, websites, meetings, forums, seminars, conferences and learning resources.

Details of how these approaches are being applied by different public sector organisations are set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4.   Examples of how interactive learning approaches are being used to spread good practice

Approach	Examples
Communities of practice	▪ The Department of Constitutional Affairs is planning to develop a community of practice throughout central government on public/stakeholder engagement at national level. ▪ IDeA is just starting (April 2006) to connect individuals working in local government and provide a professionally facilitated collaborative framework for them to find solutions where there are common interests. They expect to operate at local, regional and national levels. They aim for local government sector knowledge to be owned and maintained through properly maintained communities and networks. ▪ The National College for School Leadership runs communities of practice alongside networks and e-learning. ▪ RENEW NorthWest has developed a Design and Heritage Club, with events, that works in some ways as a community of practice.

e-learning webs	▪ Academy of Sustainable Communities: website
	▪ Department of Constitutional Affairs:
	  ▪ the Digital Dialogue initiative with the Hansard Society, to pilot and evaluate e-democracy tools
	  ▪ weblinks to sources on public engagement
	▪ IDeA:
	  ▪ the Knowledge website
	  ▪ the Learning Pool, for e-learning within and between councils
	  ▪ the Electronic Service Delivery tool kit (ESD tool kit), which supports a community of local government practitioners to manage and improve their service delivery through peer working, knowledge sharing and online facilities for measurement, recording and reporting.
	▪ Neighbourhood Renewal Unit: renewal.net website
	▪ NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement:
	  ▪ learning and training linked to the Connecting for Health IT programme
	  ▪ webcasts of talks
	  ▪ e-learning packages e.g. by the College of Radiologists.

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Learning networks	- Communities First has a national network of nine partner organisations and also supports regional and local networks; they find it works well when "community organisations and local authorities and public bodies are talking to each other on an ongoing basis and trying to share their understanding of what's going on".
	- The National College for School Leadership promotes networking of all sorts to share learning and experience.
	- The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Knowledge and Skills Programme includes the establishment of National Regeneration Networks in six regions. The networks hold events, run workshops and visits, produce newsletters, run websites etc.
	- The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement is developing a Practice Partner Network, through which 25 or more organisations agree to act as test beds for initiatives and are contracted to spread learning.
	- The Improvement Network (www.tin.nhs.uk) is located in the NHS East Midlands area and mainly caters for people in that region. It has a website that allows members to ask questions of other members, and also offers particular features such as 'Steal with Pride' – a set of good practice ideas; 'Find a Coach' or 'Mentor' or 'Guru' (consultants and facilitators) which contain lists of preferred suppliers with contact details and brief CVs, and Tools and Techniques for service improvement and for sharing and spreading learning.
	- Wales Council for Voluntary Action supports a range of professional, practitioner, community and facilitator networks; they support facilitator networks in each county of Wales.

Moreover these approaches are often being used in conjunction with one another. Many public service organisations are setting out to orchestrate and bring together several approaches, as illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5. Examples of public sector organisations orchestrating different learning approaches to support practice development

	Communities of practice	e-learning webs	Learning networks
Department of Constitutional Affairs	Yes	Yes	
Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)	Yes	Yes	
National College for School Leadership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit		Yes	Yes
NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement		Yes	Yes

The underlying idea which brings these new interactive approaches together is that of the network:

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"A network is a grouping of individuals, organisations and agencies organised on a non-hierarchical basis around common issues or concerns, which are pursued proactively and systematically, based on commitment and trust." (WHO 1998 in Pedler 2002)

The claimed advantages for networks are that they are resilient, flexible, decentralised structures, with a capacity of reach over a wide area, able to generate new knowledge and to learn quickly by sharing and exchange. Networks are increasingly seen as an organisational form for service delivery that also promotes innovation. They are commonly characterised by (Pedler 2002):

- Groups of people linked by common goals …
- held together primarily by *personal relationships* ..
- *ties* of mutual interest, sharing, reciprocity and trust and …
- *links* via various connecting and co-ordinating means such as meetings, conferences, newsletters, joint projects, working partnerships.
- Network *nodes* can be individuals, groups, teams or organisations and in the ..
- *spaces* or interstices spanned by these nodes and links are the potentials for learning and innovation.
- Network*s include and exclude* people, and ..
- *status and authority* is based less on formal position or qualifications and more on knowledge, usefulness, sharing and innovativeness.
- They can be in whole or in part *virtual associations* where the technology of computer networking underpins and enhances face-to-face interaction.

Networks can be facilitated but not dictated to. They need helpful facilitation and support over time based on joint goals and purposes (see Appendix 7). Networks are a basic component of learning frameworks and architectures (see sections 4 and 5 below), and there is much that can be learned from the experiences of working with network forms that can help with the creation of organisational learning systems.

Hargreaves (2003), for example, proposes the creation of a learning system where schools are connected together in networks as a way to create the conditions he cites (in 3.2 above). The National College for School Leadership is conducting a major research and development programme (*The Networked Learning Community Programme*) along these lines (see for example Mongon, D. and Farrar, M. 2006).

There are distinctive competencies and skills associated both with the development of network organisations and in terms of networking behaviour. The facilitation skills and abilities required are the same as those for developing organisational learning frameworks and architectures. They can be summed up as the ability to work with *'context-sensitive learning methodologies and processes'* - those approaches concerned not primarily with teaching or knowledge transmission but with facilitating learning in particular contexts. These aspects will be further developed in the remaining sections of this report.

4 Using learning as a design principle for the IPE programme

In previous chapters we presented evidence for the emergence of a new set of learning practices that are demonstrably effective in supporting the development and spreading of good practice in local partnership working. We also found evidence that organisations are drawing on a range of learning practices to ensure effectiveness - in effect creating local and regional 'infrastructures' of learning.

In this chapter we seek to apply these findings to the design of the Improving Poor Environments programme. Brook Lyndhurst (2007c, section 5.1) identify the need for a national 'learning infrastructure' as one of eleven design issues for the IPE programme. We argue below that learning should be one of the core design principles for the programme. To help achieve this we set out:

- some general principles in the design of national programmes of action based on a learning approach;

- application of these principles to the IPE programme;

- providing support and guidance;

- developing good practice through pathfinders[3];

- extending good practice beyond the pathfinders;

- feeding lessons from experience back into policy making.

4.1 General principles for designing programmes of action based on learning approaches

4.1.1 General principles

Previous chapters highlighted the difference between traditional approaches – in which learning as training is an 'add-on' to the day to day business of managing and action – and the new interactive approaches in which learning is seen as part and parcel of day to day management. These differences can be expressed as a series of principles, set out in Table 6.

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[3] We prefer the term 'pathfinder' to that of 'pilot'. The latter involves the testing of a particular approach, whereas the former involves testing a partial approach *and* learning from what emerges locally. In this context therefore, a pathfinder is 'co-produced' between national and local actors, and is more consistent than the term 'pilot' for what we are proposing in this chapter.

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Table 6   Two contrasting views of learning, applied to work programmes

	Traditional view	Emerging view
Principle 1	Learning as an external resource to be 'fed into' a programme of work, for example through materials or training.	Learning as a focus for the process by which those involved in the programme are facilitated to work together to build knowledge and understanding based on their day-to-day experience.
Principle 2	Learning as an output of the programme, for example from monitoring and evaluation.	Learning as part of the continuing management review of progress, problems and opportunities, locally and nationally, and which is simultaneously captured and shared with wider audiences through the use of participatory methods which closely involve partners and participants in sharing experience and in assessments of effectiveness and achievement.
Principle 3	Learning as a process running in parallel to implementation on the ground, for which time is 'taken out' of delivery and management	Learning as the process through which staff are supported and enabled to tackle delivery and management in ways that are flexible and adaptable enough to respond to changing circumstances on the ground; and through which partnership decisions are facilitated, joint action is jointly reviewed, achievements are celebrated collectively and problems tackled by partners working together.

4.1.2 Applying these principles to the design of national programmes

These principles have substantial implications for the design of national programmes. They suggest the design of a national programme framework which not only sets out the purpose and focus of the programme, but also provides for flexibility and adaptability in how this programme unfolds at both local and national levels. This implies that the framework must be capable of choreographing learning in several different ways - within local programmes of action: in the way that learning spreads between local programmes of action, and in the way that learning is fed upwards to enable adaptation of the framework itself (including influencing wider policy change).

In the specification for this research, we were invited to investigate the metaphor of a 'learning architecture' to describe this kind of approach. We explored this metaphor in some of our interviews and through a rapid literature review (Appendix 6).

Drawing on this review, and also on our own work as practitioner consultants in supporting the development of learning organisations (Pedler et al 1996) and applying 'whole systems' approaches to regeneration programmes (Wilkinson and Appelbee 1999; Attwood et al 2003), it is clear that there is no standard blueprint for building a learning architecture. It needs to reflect both the particular purposes and practices of the national programme to which it is being applied, together with contextual factors such as the field of work, the nature of the environmental challenges, the relationships with key partners and stakeholders and so on.

However, some general features can be identified that might characterise most learning architectures:

- **At strategy and policy level**
  - a national strategy and position on the value and place of learning in facilitating and improving service delivery;

  - clear commitment from national leaders who identify the 'adaptive challenges' facing the national programme and who then give these back to people to tackle, accompanied by offers of help and learning support;

  - a senior role in leading / managing the process: a Director of Learning and Innovation, or Director of Strategic Capability, or Chief Learning/Knowledge Officer;

- **At process and systems level**
  - processes for programme development, performance management, needs assessment, role profiling, succession planning etc that will deliver an overview of where individual and programme learning is needed;

  - systems and networks that facilitate learning and exchange which offer various possibilities for connection including contact lists, newsboards, websites, forums and learning resources;

- **Capacities and capabilities**
  - capacity and capability in terms of skills and knowledge of learning processes, internal and external, and the means for maintaining and building these;

  - a repertoire of learning programmes and 'context-sensitive' development approaches available as stand-alone activities, for blending or for customising in different forms for different circumstances.

4.2 Developing a learning architecture for the IPE programme

4.2.1 The basic specification for the IPE programme

A basic specification for the IPE programme is set out in the Brook Lyndhurst proposition (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.2). This comprises:

- the means of **identifying the 60 deprived neighbourhoods** in England and Wales with the poorest quality environments;
- clear guidance on **nature of the effort** that could/should be expended in these locations;
- appropriate **support materials** to facilitate the expenditure of that effort;
- an initial focus on **pathfinder locations**[4] in which the programme can be tested;
- a preliminary procedure for **rolling out** from the pathfinder locations to a wider set of locations.

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[4] Referred to in this report as 'pathfinder' neighbourhoods or 'pathfinders'

We build on this basic specification in our consideration below of how to place learning principles and practices at the heart of the programme design.

4.2.2. Incorporating learning principles into the design of the IPE programme

Traditionally (in both the Environment Agency and many other organisations), policy is translated into practice via guidance notes (of varying amounts of detail). Our work for this review suggests that in order to support effective practice, a more sophisticated process of translation is required – this may include guidance, but will also require much more than this.

'Learning architecture' is the term we are giving to framing and specifying this wider package of support. Based on our review, we suggest that a learning architecture (see Appendix 6) for the IPE programme should comprise a number of inter-related elements. These interrelationships are set out in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 Outline of a learning architecture for the IPE programme
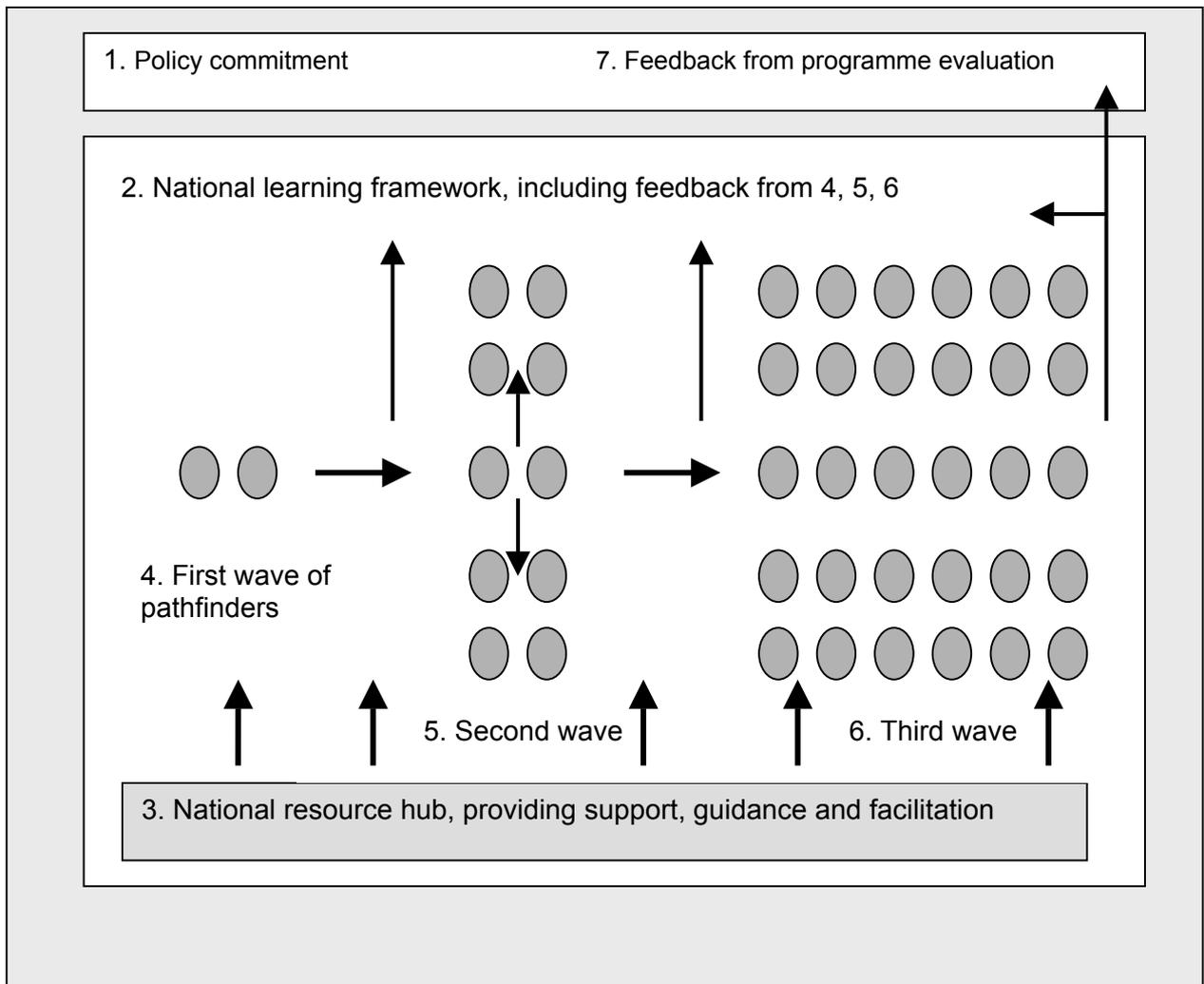
These elements are:

1. **Policy commitment.** A high level policy commitment is needed that places learning at the core of the IPE programme;

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2. **National learning framework**.   This specifies the way in which learning is seeded and then spreads throughout the programme, starting with a limited number of pathfinder neighbourhoods (element 4), spreading to a 'second wave' of neighbourhoods (element 5) and then to the remaining IPE neighbourhoods (element 6). The national learning framework should be open to adaptation, based on successive cycles of feedback from elements 4, 5 and 6 (see below);

3. Support and guidance through a **national resource hub**.   A national resource hub would provide consistent advisory, facilitation and research support to elements 4, 5, and 6. It could also make recommendations for the adaptation of the national learning framework based on feedback from these elements;

4. Developing good practice through a **first wave of IPE pathfinders**. This should draw on the lessons from chapter 2 of this report on using interactive learning approaches to develop good practice;

5. Extending good practice through a **second wave of IPE neighbourhoods**. This should draw on the lessons from chapter 3 of this report on using interactive learning approaches to spread good practice;

6. Extending good practice through the **third wave of IPE neighbourhoods**. Again, this should draw on the lessons from chapter 3 of this report;

7. **Reviewing policy** based on learning from elements 2 – 6 above.

The national learning framework would facilitate, link, connect and 'hold' the variety of interactive learning processes described above and developed as appropriate at local and regional levels (see 4.4 below).

4.3   National Resource Hub

The Brook Lyndhurst proposition identifies the need for several types of 'support materials' (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.2). These are summarised in the box overleaf.

Elements of support recommended by Brook Lyndhurst:

- **Background material**. Briefing material explaining the IPE concept and programme;

- **MOM**. The mapping tool, with appropriate documentary guidance;

- **Funding sources**. Indications of potential funding sources, together with guidelines on 'the rules' for such funding;

- **Issues**. Outlining both the IPE issues in general, as well as specifying the 'Actions' requirements;

- **Perspectives**. Summary of the kinds of language and conceptualisation used by different stakeholder groups around the IPE agenda;

- **Learning**. Access to the learning infrastructure associated with the IPE programme, so as to share and learn in an ongoing fashion;

- **Examples**. Information on illustrative examples of indicative projects;

- **Helping hands**. It is likely that, both at inception, and at points during the IPE process, some sort of 'helping hand' will be required. This may be needed to facilitate partnership dialogue, or to explain the MOM tool, and so on;

- **Institutional arrangements**. Notwithstanding the immense variability in the pattern of stakeholder interaction in different localities throughout England and Wales, the roll out of the IPE programme will require a range of co-ordinated actions by key organisations.

The evidence from this review suggests that an additional element is needed: an IPE National Resource Hub. This Hub would disseminate support and guidance, and would also create the national learning framework outlined in Figure 1 above. Overall, the role of the Hub would be to:

- provide consistent advice and guidance to help the local IPE neighbourhoods;

- be available to all partners in all the local IPE neighbourhoods;

- help facilitate and manage the pathfinders and the rollout, so that learning, design and management are closely entwined. It is critical that the Resource Hub and its networks are centrally connected to the overall project management structure. Action and learning must be seen to be interdependent;

- manage the input of learning from the experience of the IPE programme into wider policy and research processes.

The resources and support the Hub should provide are likely to include:

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- support resources such as those identified by Brook Lyndhurst (see box above), together with guidance for their use and the possibility of facilitated workshops etc;

- facilitated network meetings;

- a range of learning processes to support individual IPE areas and local/regional networks. These would include action learning, coaching and mentoring, structured visits, local learning networks, participative whole systems events and so on;

- the development of learning protocols to increase the possibilities for deeper learning about context-specific know-how – tacit knowledge. These are significant tools to move beyond the 'chance learning' of everyday conversation (see Appendix 4 for the NCSL guidance on learning protocols);

- facilitation: this could include the provision of direct facilitation services, or the support and guidance of local facilitators through action learning sets, mentoring, and the use of learning protocols.

In essence, therefore, the Hub would act both as a resource centre to, and as a facilitator for, a wider series of learning networks. In the first place it would facilitate the two pathfinders. Then, as new neighbourhoods came onto the IPE programme, they would be invited to participate in the growing national network. It is likely that early engagement in the network would speed the development and establishment of new neighbourhoods in the IPE programme.

The design of the networks would be dependent upon the emergent pattern and distribution of IPE neighbourhoods but would be available to all stakeholders involved. It is likely that there would be:

- an overall network to link to the Resource Hub;

- sub-networks that could form, possibly on a regional basis linked to government offices or Environment Agency regions;

- local networks in a single neighbourhood, or connecting neighbourhoods in the same district together for example; it is likely that these would be largely self-managed;

- a range of different learning processes employed, or made available dependent upon expressed stakeholder needs and requirements.

Evaluation of the IPE programme and its learning network processes will be important. The networks themselves should be reflective and hold review and learning as core activities. This should act as the basis of a formative and action research approach to evaluation. In this way, this approach can be an important test bed in the development of improved methods for the development and spread of good practice, as well as an important test bed for preventative, locally joined-up action through the effective co-ordination and bending of mainstream funding at the neighbourhood level.

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4.4 Developing good practice through pathfinders

4.4.1 Approach to the pathfinders

The Brook Lyndhurst proposition for the pathfinders (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.2) suggests setting up two of these over the first two years of the programme. It is expected that the Environment Agency will lead the pathfinders, continuing its current role leading the research and development on the IPE programme in partnership with government.

Brook Lyndhurst has developed a set of guiding principles for identifying the IPE locations, but they stress that:

> "…continuous attention, development and improvement will be needed if the [identification] system is to fulfil its potential, but it will always be the case that caution will be required in interpreting and using its outputs" (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 3.2)

It will therefore be essential that a learning approach is taken throughout the pathfinders to ensure that participating individuals are able to fully understand the process and can respond flexibly and confidently to local problems and opportunities.

The pathfinders have two main roles:

* starting action on the ground to improve poor environments through partnership working (phase 1);

* developing and extending good practice in partnership working to improve poor environments within a second wave of neighbourhoods (phase 2);

The complexity of the recommended organic approach to the rollout adds greater weight to suggesting selecting favourable conditions for the pathfinders, plus looking for the next 'replication and spread' neighbourhoods right from the start. Based on this, we recommend:

* getting the pathfinders operational by focusing on areas where there are existing good Environment Agency and partner organisation contacts that can be activated quickly;

* ensuring that learning / good practice can be developed, and beginning to extend that good practice after just one year, which may require a level of existing understanding and awareness of the particular problems of working on poor environments in disadvantaged areas, and of partnership working;

* that existing knowledge, held by Environment Agency staff and staff from partner agencies, should be at the heart of moving into the pathfinder neighbourhoods and perhaps also the second wave of IPE neighbourhoods. It is anticipated that IPE neighbourhoods will also start to emerge through other sources of influence and activity;

* that there needs to be existing interest in, and commitment to, these proposals by the local authority and/or the LSP;

* that it is vital that clarity about ownership and leadership roles is established early;

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- that the selection process should be a facilitated learning process which engages with key stakeholders and community groups. By this stage, the facilitation and guidance for this would come from the Resource Hub of the learning network;

- that an initial learning network connecting the two pathfinders should be designed and implemented, and the Resource Hub established. The initial funding for the IPE programme should be used to establish and fund the Hub and its networks – including their management and facilitation.

4.4.2 Supporting learning for the pathfinders

An illustrative design for how learning might be supported across the two pathfinders is set out in Figure 2. In this case we have applied a whole systems design approach to the pathfinder schemes by bringing together the stakeholders to an event at which they work together to map out an agreed set of activities and processes over time to sustain the initiative (Attwood *et al* 2003: 131-142). The stakeholders are likely to include the pathfinder projects, the Environment Agency itself and all other IPE neighbourhoods that might have an interest in learning from the pathfinders.

Figure 2.   Illustrative design for supporting learning across the two pathfinders
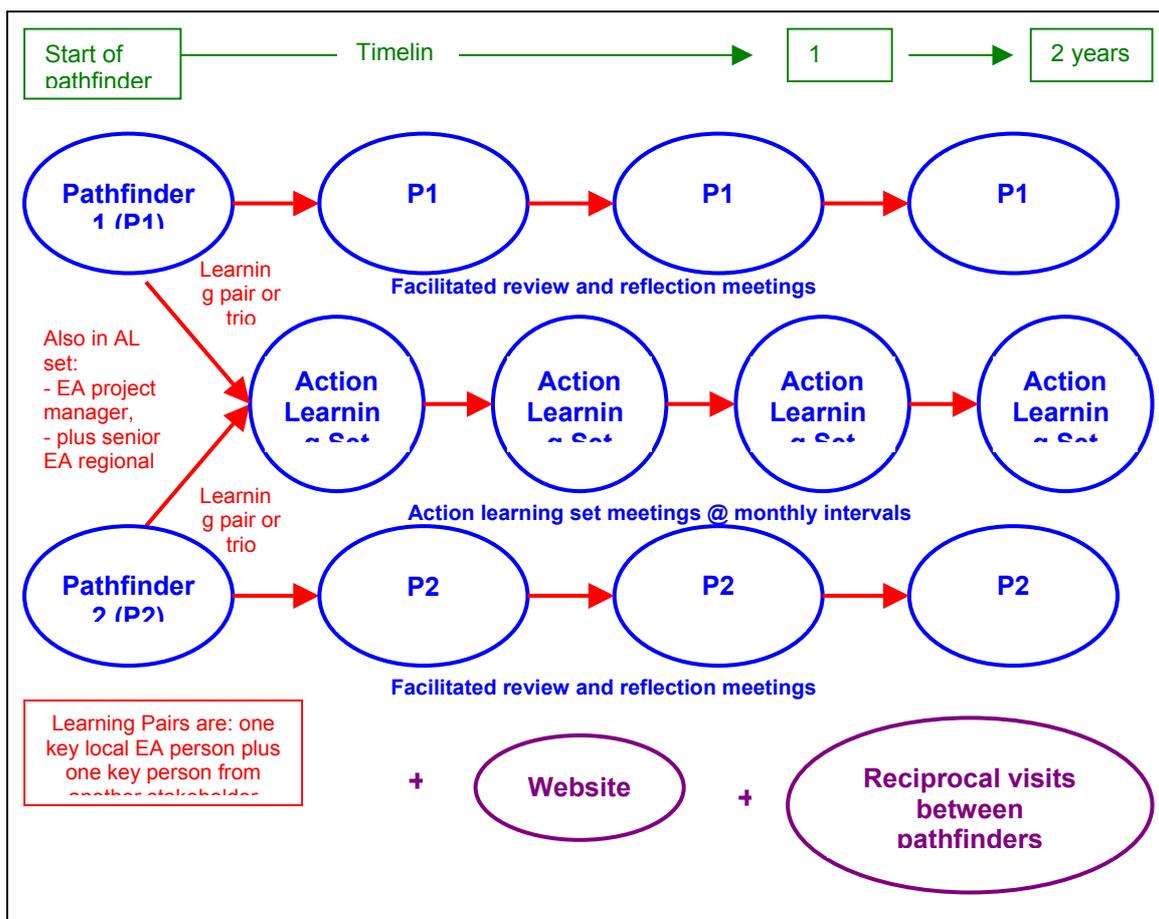
The design suggests the formation of learning pairs and action learning sets to support and sustain members in their action and learning from the pathfinders and periodic conferences to bring together a wider group to learn from those experiences and to offer

their own insights and evaluations. Other means of dissemination include websites and roadshows.

This systematic and co-ordinated design for working, learning and dissemination contrasts with highly task-focused projects where little attention is given to learning either for the project team or for a wider constituency. This example illustrates how various aspects of an appropriate tool kit, such as action learning, websites and conferences/ roadshows, can 'sit inside' such a design. Obviously there are many other appropriate learning processes such as mentoring, job shadowing, leadership networks, exchange visits and so on which might form part of other designs.

At this stage it is not clear how the pathfinders and the subsequent roll-out will be implemented, but it is expected that an 'organic' approach will be adopted through which a range of partners may work together to develop proposals. The attraction of this way forward is the potential for projects being initiated where there is interest at the local level and proactive local leadership from existing or potential social and civic entrepreneurs. On the other hand, this might be less attractive to those on the ground as there is no special funding attached to this project, with the emphasis being placed on the differentiation and bending of mainstream funding.

4.4.3 Issues for the Environment Agency in leading the pathfinders

The new ways of working and learning proposed in this report for the IPE programme will create significant opportunities but also challenges for the Environment Agency. These issues need to be tackled before and during the pathfinder phase, in the following ways:

- This review found unanimous positive support among the Environment Agency staff interviewed for this research - support for the focus on working on the poorest environments, for the partnership approach, and for the need to learn before, during and from this programme.

  This strong interest and support for the proposals is subject to a number of important considerations about implementation and follow-through. This will be a different way of working for many staff and will require senior management support, the development of new skills, and significant changes in the organisation's culture and how it measures and rewards performance.

- The Environment Agency has already started to develop and pilot work using social learning methods. For example, the Joining Up Thames Pathfinder project explored ways of learning based on sharing experiences of working with stakeholders (Porter *et al.* 2006); and the River Basin Planning social learning project has explored the use of social learning to understand the complexity of the policy and process landscape and to develop a 'model' of river basin planning (Collins *et al* 2005).

- The Environment Agency has also been working with LSPs to increase the priority LSPs give to environmental issues, and subsequently, in the development of local Sustainable Community Strategies.

  For the Environment Agency, priority has been given to LSPs according to where the Agency can most benefit the environment and disadvantaged communities (Environment Agency 2006). Therefore, through the experience of staff working with these partnerships, there is considerable knowledge within and outside the Agency about where favourable

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starting conditions exist for improving poor environments, particularly in deprived areas. This knowledge needs to be pooled through a reflective process and to be part of the selection process for IPE neighbourhoods, along with LSP and neighbourhood voices.

Most Environment Agency staff interviewed saw the role of the local authority as crucial and a key determinant in their links with LSPs, leading on to consideration of how the Agency might work in IPE areas. It therefore seems appropriate that the IPE programme builds on these links, including prioritising work with these LSPs. Staff have considerable knowledge about where there are pressing and identified 'poor environment' issues to work on that link to economic and social deprivation.

A good starting point (suggested by one interviewee) would be to draw together all the people in an Environment Agency region who have LSP liaison roles for a half-day reflective session where they could pool their knowledge and learn from these experiences. This knowledge could then be used to identify early LSP partners to initiate IPE areas, and those where more energy needs to be spent on raising awareness and 'readiness' levels.

There are three overarching challenges for the Environment Agency in taking the IPE programme forward: a possible current lack of clarity about the Environment Agency's role in these sorts of programmes, the potential lack of skills among staff, and lack of resources. Each of these is covered below.

- **Importance of clarity of Environment Agency role**. A number of Agency staff, especially those closer to the ground, thought it would be important to be clear from the start about the specific skills and strengths that the Environment Agency could contribute. The Agency has little or no responsibility for, or resources allocated toward, the remediation of many of the environmental issues identified by Brook Lyndhurst as indicators for IPE areas. For instance it does not have any direct authority in matters of noise control or diffuse air pollution. It has powers to deal with the worst fly tipping offenders – the big, bad and nasty – but most falls to local authorities. It has little or no resources to deal with contaminated land sites and seeks to work with local authorities and developers to take action on these. It does however have experience of raising money from other sources for special projects (especially flood-related).

  However, although special funds can assist in some cases, progress in improving poor environments will in the main be achieved through bending mainstream programme funding. This may cause problems for the Environment Agency. Staff who are involved on the ground will need to be clear what the organisation has the ability to do – and **not** do – while at the same time seeking to influence and advise on overall improvement. This is likely to be as important at the local and neighbourhood levels at the district, regional and national levels.

  On the ground, staff are going to be dealing with partner workers / professionals who have a great deal of local involvement and knowledge. They will also be meeting local residents who may have a lot to say about local conditions. In addition they may face high and unrealistic expectations about what the Environment Agency can and should do.

  However, Environment Agency staff at area and regional levels have become very adept at making the right connections into local professional networks between key people, both other professionals and community activists, and understanding the world through their eyes. They can also pull in other integrated and cross-cutting strands of the Environment Agency's work and will be able to contribute high added value. Through this they will enhance the organisation's public credibility allowing it to increase its positive environmental impacts further.

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In this way, Environment Agency staff can become respected advisers and facilitators by linking environmental outcomes to support social and economic priorities.   However, for some staff this will require the development of new awareness and skills that are well beyond the scope of the types of procedural guidance normally provided to Agency staff about new programmes.

A number of senior people in the Environment Agency see a very important emerging new role for the Agency at the regional level and that there are key links between this and local joined-up working. From their perspective, the Agency should be seeking to make the connections between air quality, transport, contamination, flood risk etc and their impacts on health, regeneration and so on. Essentially, this means understanding the agendas and priorities of other key strategic bodies. The Environment Agency needs to be able to tell coherent stories so that others can see how environmental concerns and issues impact on their work. This needs to be put in health terms for health authorities and trusts, in strategic planning and people terms for local authorities, in economic terms for those in regeneration and so on. It also means engaging fully in the big regional strategic issues: for example the Olympic preparations and the Mayor's strategic plan in London; and in the Stockton – Middlesbrough corridor regeneration plans on Teesside. All of which requires understanding and engaging with complex regional and local governance structures and networks.

This shift, to a greater role for the Environment Agency as strategic influencer and partnership worker, necessitates moving away from a remote position of expert adviser or advocate, to an engaged player with others in focusing on the improvement of people's lives. Good regulation and enforcement plays an important role in this context. It is also a means to a greater end. For example, greatly improved river water quality and reduced air pollution on Teesside now allow more time and attention to be put into these bigger arenas to get greater environmental and other benefits for whole populations.

This has significant implications for the way the Environment Agency works internally as well as externally. Many interviewees for this review saw the organisation as working in strict silos within functional departments and within an often rigid hierarchy. Working in the new ways proposed in the IPE programme (especially partnership working) depends on being able to bring all the resources of the organisation to bear on particular thematic issues, whether at the neighbourhood, district or catchment levels. Some staff within the Environment Agency already see that the Agency's effectiveness and credibility are crucially determined by its ability to work much more in these cross-cutting ways – both externally and internally.

This new strategic approach is very different from the way the Environment Agency has often worked in the past. There are four imperatives underlying this new approach:

- to engage (not consult) with all relevant stakeholders early – 'ahead of the game';

- to understand the world through their eyes, agendas and priorities;

- to tell coherent and joined-up environmental narratives that relate to these issues as seen by the outside world – rather than from the internal territorial maps within the Environment Agency;

- to bring all the organisation's resources and expertise to bear on key strategic issues in an integrated way.

Given both improved standards of regulation and smarter regulation, the big gains in moving towards 'better places for people' will be achieved through better strategic joined-up working. This is the big challenge, and where the Environment Agency can have its greatest influence. It is likely to be where it can also build its credibility which will in turn increase its leverage to achieve bigger sustainable environmental goals. This suggests that understanding, leading and managing these dilemmas needs to be understood much more widely within the Environment Agency. The evidence suggests that overall awareness of this need is low, although it seems more staff are seeing this increasingly clearly.

- **Potential lack of skills among staff**. The staff interviewed for this research provided strong feedback that they understood the importance of relationships to achieve local outcomes, and the relevance of different types of learning to build these interpersonal and political skills alongside their existing functional technical knowledge. Staff were also well aware that these new ways of working and learning were currently counter-cultural in the Environment Agency.

- **Lack of resources**. Environment Agency staff are relatively thin on the ground compared with many other public sector workers. Quite apart from the demands of their work roles, this is a further factor that means it is unrealistic for staff to undertake community development directly, although they should be skilled at tapping into and relating to networks of professionals and in communities that already exist.

The way forward that emerges strongly from this research is to develop and begin the new ways of partnership working on local environmental improvement activities and the learning at the same time, especially with some support and coaching both from other learners and from those who already have these skills. This will require a new strategic role for the Environment Agency, as outlined above, which requires a much greater focus on partnership working and wider engagement activities with communities and other stakeholders.

Essentially, staff need learning processes and ways of meeting that provide higher interpersonal levels of trust and safe spaces in which to learn in new ways about new ways of working. It is understood that these more networked, developmental forms of learning need to work laterally across functional divisions of the Environment Agency, and to include partner staff from other bodies and community organisations.

Through these learning processes, staff and partners would develop new awareness, learning, knowledge and skills – many of the softer interpersonal kind. This would also be the means for fast-tracking knowledge and information about innovation in support of IPE projects and much else. Staff also need to feel clear senior management support for these new ways of working so that when they do try new approaches on the ground, they can rely on effective encouragement and support for this work from senior managers.

The findings from these recent discussions with Environment Agency staff echo the earlier findings of the Environment Agency's Joining Up Thames Pathfinder Project (Porter *et al.* 2006).

It is therefore proposed that the Environment Agency should consider the following to increase its skills and capacity for partnership working to improve poor environments:

- It should use the pathfinder phase of the IPE programme to improve its own ability and readiness to engage in and support this work. From time to time an identified 'diagonal slice' of senior/top managers should engage with the learning network through facilitated

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meetings. This would help to inform internal organisational changes. This is the vertical dimension of organisational learning referred to earlier.

- There should be a project management structure that has the formal authority to support these new ways of working and crucially to link IPE outcomes to both internal learning processes and with wider networks, to avoid fragmenting and isolating the potential for learning across the organisation from projects of this kind which would impede project effectiveness as well as replication and spread. To ensure the integration of learning and action, it would be advisable to have two senior management champions (e.g. a regional manager and an area manager).

- The Environment Agency should review the impact of its current KPIs. This review needs to recognise and take into account the dilemmas of managing the requirement for common standards across England and Wales for some functions, while needing innovative, holistic outcomes for partnership working in context-sensitive and specific locations at the same time. This dilemma about requirements for both standardisation **and** context-specific innovation exists across all public services. The NCSL and the whole school improvement movement offer an interesting insight into dealing with their equivalent.

- The Environment Agency's Regional Strategic Units (RSUs) and Areas have a key role to play, linking these ways of integrated working on the ground to their cross-cutting work with government regions. Their 'readiness' for supporting IPE areas and similar work on the ground, and connecting this back into these bigger agendas, should be reviewed.

- The Environment Agency must be clear and specific about what it can, and cannot, contribute to the IPE neighbourhoods, and what it has to offer to its partnerships. In effect, it is hoping to influence other stakeholders to adjust and bend their spending. Therefore, it needs to be prepared to act similarly.

- Within a more supportive overall framework, there needs to be a long-term commitment and involvement on the ground from appropriate Environment Agency staff.

4.4 Extending good practice beyond the initial pathfinders

4.5.1 Approach

The proposition is for a total of 60 IPE locations in England and Wales to be identified and supported (including the two pathfinders). It is expected that the rollout will start sometime during the second year of the pathfinders, so the pathfinders will need to have begun to develop some learning that can be extended more widely. Again, a learning approach will need to be at the centre of the rollout process, so that new IPE areas can link into the experience beginning to emerge from those involved in the pathfinders and subsequent neighbourhoods.

The main objectives of the rollout of the IPE programme are to:

- increase improvements to poor environments through partnership working in more areas;
- extend good practice beyond the pathfinders;
- continue to draw lessons from practice through monitoring and evaluation (see 4.6).

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The lead agency for the rollout therefore needs to be:

- a delivery agency, because the learning model focuses on close links between operations and learning
- a national agency, to develop national learning structures, especially at the beginning with the pathfinders and then supporting the rollout
- able to build very directly on the learning and evaluation from the pathfinders.

It is therefore suggested that, given the Environment Agency's role in leading the research and development of the IPE programme to date (in partnership with government), and the centrality of the learning and development approach to rolling out the programme overall, the Environment Agency should also lead the extension to the other 58 neighbourhoods. However if the Environment Agency did lead the rollout of the IPE programme, this could have significant internal learning and development implications for the Agency, as well as the obvious resource implications, as outlined in section 4.4.3.

In broad terms, and informed by the MOM tool, the roll out will require co-ordinated effort in four dimensions:

- **top down** - by central government issuing new guidance on sustainable community strategies, inviting local authorities / LSPs / local service providers / communities to broaden their focus and approach, to include a wider mix of environmental issues (in addition to local environmental quality or 'doorstep' issues);

- **bottom up** – by local authorities / LSPs / local service providers/ communities responding to this guidance, and engaging local partners in this response

- **laterally** – by the Environment Agency head, regional and area offices jointly taking a view of the poorest quality environments and engaging with local partners and communities accordingly

- **laterally** - through engagement with other agencies and organisations with both a national and a regional / local presence (e.g. Natural England, Groundwork, the Wildlife Trusts, as well as Government Offices, Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts and, potentially, Regional Development Agencies).

Such an approach will not be entirely 'clean', but offers the prospect of a more consensual approach to 'designation'. In effect, against a background set by national guidance and data, regional and then local partnerships will be engaged in the process of identifying those areas most needing structured intervention to address environmental inequalities.

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Figure 3. Illustrative design for networking and spreading learning across the whole system of IPE projects

Regional and Area learning processes developed and designed from the Pathfinder experience (learning)

Pathfinder learning process (see Figure 2)

Regional and Area learning processes coming on stream

Network meetings/ whole system events/ facilitated visits (etc) – planned and designed according to need
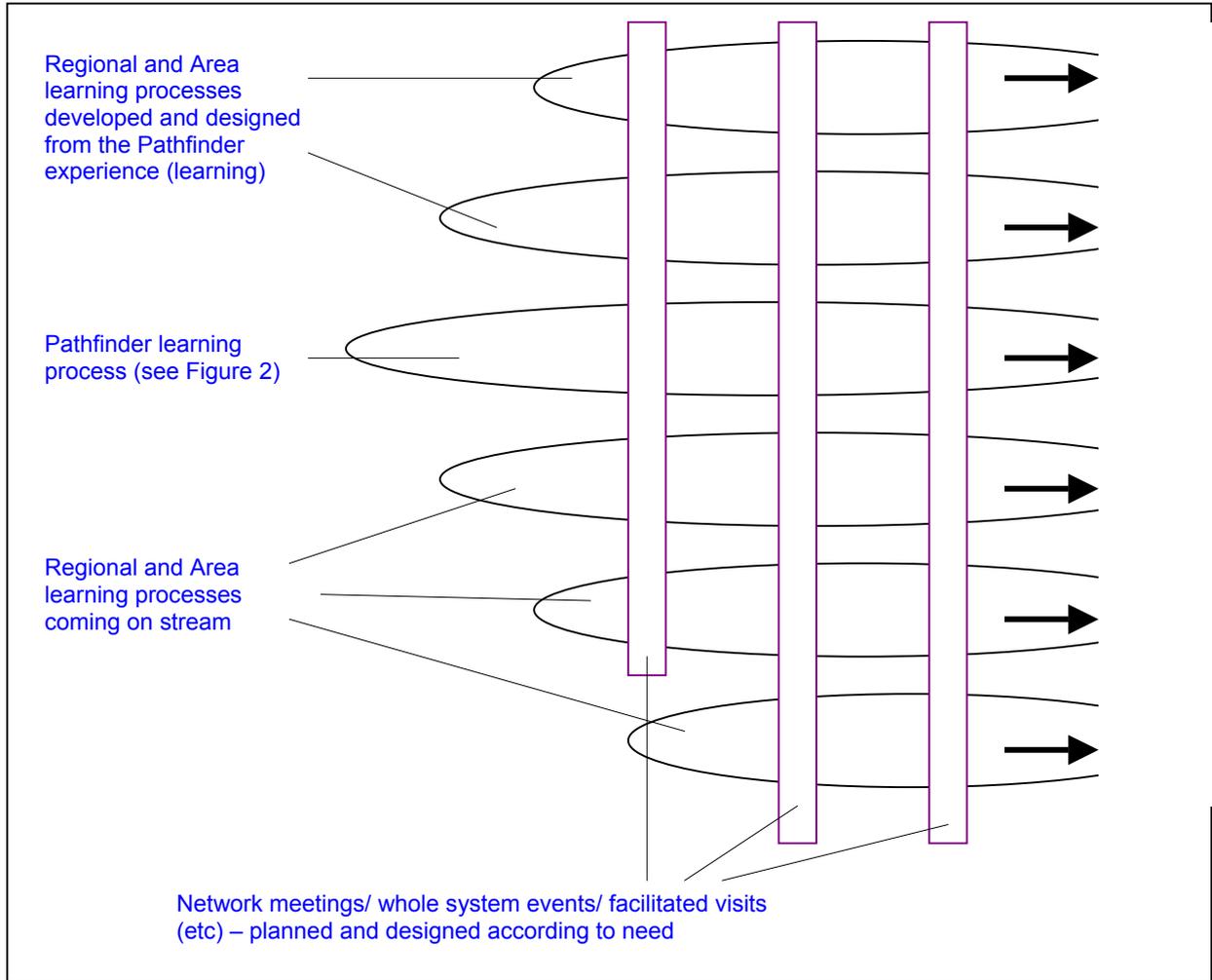
The learning design for the rollout should follow similar principles to that for the pathfinders, but with the emphasis on methods and approaches that are best suited to extending (rather than only developing) good practice (see chapter 3). An illustrative design for how learning might be supported in both 'waves' of the rollout is shown in Figure 3 above.

4.5.2 Issues for the Environment Agency

The Environment Agency will face similar issues of extending good practice to those arising from the two pathfinders, as identified in section 4.4.3. Some of these issues will need to be resolved during the pathfinder phase but others are likely to take longer to resolve and may be ongoing, so mechanisms need to be found to deal with these in the longer term.

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4.5.3 Opportunities identified in the review research

During the research process for this review, several of the interviewees in other public sector bodies expressed particular interest in the IPE programme, and are willing to be involved in some form. In order that these very useful contacts and resources are fed into the next stages of the programme, they are outlined below:

- Jo Webb, of the Yorkshire and Humberside office of the IDeA, would welcome the opportunity to work with the Environment Agency on these projects.

- Cherida Fletcher, Head of Learning at Creating Excellence (the South West England centre of excellence for sustainable communities) expressed her willingness and interest in working with the Environment Agency on this programme, and offered her experience in working with communities on sustainable development and environmental projects.

- Linden Riley, Director of Neighbourhoods and Environment at Sandwell MBC, was willing to offer any help she could from her experience of 'neighbourhood tasking' (collective prioritisation with local people and local agencies).

4.5 Feeding lessons from experience back into policy making

The Brook Lyndhurst research provides clear lessons from the area-based initiatives already undertaken by government and others in the UK (Brook Lyndhurst 2006c). However, it is instructive that such a review had to be undertaken for this IPE programme, rather than such material, or knowledgeable people and organisations, already being in existence and easily accessible.

It is therefore proposed that the IPE programme builds in an element of learning beyond the initial three levels of participants in the programme: the local practitioners/ participants in the pilots, those directly supporting that development, and those involved in the rolled out programme. Consideration also needs to be given to how learning can be managed and distilled into forms that can be used by policy-makers so they can learn from the experience of the IPE programme as it progresses, rather than just at the end.

This will therefore require another sphere of learning involving an additional group of participants (e.g. policy-makers, researchers etc) and the development of data / evidence, possibly based on more formal monitoring and evaluation to test the effectiveness of the learning architecture and the individual learning approaches - as well as the environmental, economic and social impacts on the ground - of the pilots and the rolled out programme.

To meet these principles, it is expected that more formal monitoring and evaluation will be needed (alongside the contextual learning to develop and extend good practice) to test the effectiveness of the IPE programme in delivering both improvements to poor environments through a partnership approach, and the effectiveness of the learning infrastructure and approaches used. This will enable lessons to be articulated and shared with wider audiences, particularly policy and research audiences.

At present, these audiences and the most relevant policy areas to this work at present may include (although this changes constantly):

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- policy groups in the Environment Agency, Defra, DCLG, Welsh Assembly Government etc to extend learning about policy innovation;

- the revision by national government of performance assessment frameworks for local government (especially the development of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework, or whatever replaces it);

- the continued development of LSPs, and the need to continue to increase the priority of environmental issues in order to contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies (including through influencing the forthcoming guidance on SCSs);

- the continuing development and application of Local Area Agreements;

- the new Cleaner Safer Greener Communities agenda and its increased priority on liveability in deprived areas since its move to the Community Renewal and Liveability Division of the Department of Communities and Local Government;

- Defra work on natural resources based on an ecosystems approach;

- whatever emerges as the model for support for community sustainable development action under the Community Action 2020 programme of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy;

National policy issues of this type change almost daily, so effort will need to be continued to ensure that the findings from the IPE programme feed into the most appropriate policy areas (and associated research work) as the programme progresses.

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5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This report has summarised the findings from a rapid review of the potential of 'learning architectures' to contribute to the Improving Poor Environments (IPE) programme.

In summary, it has concluded:

- There is a growing body of knowledge, and some useful experience (including within the Environment Agency) of social learning methods that go beyond (but will include) skills development, to create the settings in which people can share experience to develop and extend good practice for local partnership working

  Much of this experience is still at a very early stage, but this review shows it exists in some particularly relevant organisations for the IPE programme - such as the Academy for Sustainable Communities, Communities First, the IDeA, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Creating Excellence - the South West centre of excellence for sustainable development, RENEW North West, and Regen West Midlands. These are only examples of where such learning methods may already be being used. They operate from regional to national levels, and some of them are already keen to link with the IPE programme (see 4.5.3).

- Different mechanisms and methods may be needed for learning that helps develop good practice, extend good practice, and feed good practice into future policy development.

  The essential finding from this review is that an overarching infrastructure or 'architecture' is needed to enable those managing the IPE programme to 'blend' the various learning approaches appropriate to this programme together in a design that provides both national consistency and local flexibility.

- A 'learning architecture' for the IPE programme, that would provide such a national infrastructure, should be made up of the following elements:

  - Guidance and support through a central resource hub;
  - Developing good practice through two pathfinder projects;
  - Extending good practice through the process for rolling out the IPE programme from the pathfinders;
  - A method for ensuring that the learning from the programme overall feeds back into the national learning framework and into future policy development and research agendas.

- The IPE 'learning architecture' cannot be separated from the overall operation (delivery and management) of the IPE programme. The design of the action and the learning needs not only to be undertaken together, but the action needs to be designed around a learning model because the only way that an IPE programme can be effective and sustainable is if it builds learning into its management and delivery (to 'sharpen delivery') and contributes to wider understanding of partnership processes and cumulative environmental impacts of

and on poor environments. The IPE programme is as much about developing and extending good practice in partnership working as it is about improving poor environments.

A stand-alone programme to improve poor environments is likely to be short-lived and of very limited influence. A programme to improve poor environments based on a learning model that supports and builds partnerships is likely to be sustainable in the long term, and have significant influence on future policy and research agendas as the lessons will be able to be fed into those processes as the programme progresses.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings (see chapters 2 and 3) and analysis (see chapter 4) of this rapid review have led to a series of proposals throughout this report. These are summarised below.

We have not attempted at this stage to design a detailed learning architecture for this project for two reasons:

- A design 'off the shelf' would be a contradiction of the basic principles that action and learning need to be context specific. However, some basic principles and guidelines can and have been identified (see section 4).

- There are many different options and possibilities on the table at the moment in terms of how IPE pathfinders should be initiated and what they would cover on the ground. During the short time of this study, this range of possibilities has been opening up, rather than moving towards a focus and conclusion.

However, this review has identified the likely essential features of a learning architecture and the general principles under which it should operate. The following recommendations cover general design issues for an overarching learning architecture for the IPE programme, providing support and guidance, developing good practice through the pilots, extending good practice, the role of the Environment Agency, and wider implications.

5.2.1 General design issues

The Brook Lyndhurst proposition for the IPE programme identifies a set of design issues for the programme overall. This includes the need for a:

"Learning infrastructure. For both the short term transfer from a pathfinder phase to a wide programme of intervention, as well as the longer term maintenance of expertise and capacity, the IPE programme needs a bespoke learning infrastructure in place" (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.1).

However, we now propose the following slight re-wording, as follows:

Recommendation 1

The 'learning infrastructure' design issue in the Brook Lyndhurst proposition for the IPE programme should be reformulated as 'learning and management'. Learning needs to explicitly provide the overarching framework for the way in which action is designed, approached and assessed, continuously.

As outlined in chapter 4, without the support of an adaptive management approach, that is, a management approach which is embedded in some kind of continuous learning framework,

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developing and extending good practice in this new area of partnership working is likely to be difficult. In other words, some kind of infrastructure for learning and management needs to underpin the whole IPE programme. The recommended shape of this infrastructure is set out in the recommendations below.

5.2.2 Providing support and guidance

The final recommendations from Brook Lyndhurst propose that the IPE programme should include initial guidance and support from government, and identify the need for several types of support materials (section 4.3). Building on this, we propose the following:

Recommendation 2

A programme of support and guidance should be established through a <u>centrally located resource hub</u> of learning support for the IPE programme (see section 4.3 for details), and resources made available to support this.

This resource hub should be available to any local authority district that wanted to develop an IPE initiative and would provide:

- advice on the development of learning support to an IPE initiative, drawing on the relevant section of the government guidance;

- facilitation support, either directly, or through the facilitation and guidance of local facilitators through action learning sets, mentoring and the use of learning protocols.

The location of this resource hub is for further discussion, but it needs to be very closely allied to the overall management and direction of the IPE programme as a whole as it will need to draw together learning and experience from practice on the ground as well as facilitating further learning.

5.2.3 Demonstrating good practice through pathfinders

The Brook Lyndhurst proposition includes that the IPE programme should be initiated through two pathfinders. These are intended to act as demonstration projects for good practice, through a process of 'learning by doing'. It is suggested that the pathfinders will be determined 'centrally' through consideration of a number of factors including:

- evidence provided from analysis of the indicator set;
- evidence from the case study research undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst;
- interest from regional and local Environment Agency partners;
- assessment of 'on the ground' capacity;
- input from the IPE Advisory Group.

It is expected that the Environment Agency will play a key initiating role in these first two IPE pathfinders.

The Environment Agency has already prioritised the LSPs it works with as part of its 'Creating a better place' strategy. These have been selected according to where the Environment Agency can most benefit the environment and disadvantaged communities. Therefore, through the experience of staff working with these partnerships, there is considerable

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knowledge within and outside the Agency about where favourable starting conditions for improving poor environments exist, particularly in deprived areas.

This knowledge needs to be pooled through a reflective process which will contribute to the selection process. The complexity of the recommended organic approach suggests a further reason for selecting favourable conditions for the pathfinders, and looking for the next 'replication and spread' areas right from the start. Based on this analysis, we recommend that:

Recommendation 3

A programme of developing good practice with the pathfinders should be established. This should include a range of learning processes to support IPE initiatives, such as action learning, coaching and mentoring, structured visits, local learning networks, and participative whole systems events (see section 4.4 for details). The existing knowledge, held by Environment Agency staff and staff from other agencies they are working with, should be at the heart of moving into the pathfinder projects.

This will also require the following to be in place:

- Existing interest in, and commitment to, these proposals by the local authority and/or the LSP.

- Clarity about ownership and leadership roles is established early.

- A facilitated learning process which engages with key stakeholders and community groups to undertake the selection process for the pathfinders (and the eventual rollout). The facilitation and guidance for this would come from the resource hub of the IPE programme.

- An initial learning network connecting the two pathfinders should be designed and implemented, and the national resource hub established.

5.2.4 Extending good practice

The final element of Brook Lyndhurst's recommendations comprises an ongoing process for establishing further IPE initiatives and spreading good practice. In their final recommendations Brook Lyndhurst state that:

"Propositions for the roll-out of the IPE programme are, inevitably, less well developed at this stage. In broad terms, and assuming the IPE involves targeted effort in 60 locations around England and Wales, a background set by national guidance and data will enable regional and then local partnerships to engage in the process of identifying those areas most needing structured intervention to address environmental inequalities.

In broad terms, this process could/should take about a year, during which time the two pilots will have had the opportunity to test the proposed support material, and initiate the proposed learning infrastructure. The intention would therefore be to roll out to a wider group of disadvantaged areas during the second year of the pathfinders" (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.2).

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Recommendation 4

A programme of extending good practice between the pathfinders and then to support the rollout should be established. This will include the development of learning protocols and other methods to increase the possibilities for deeper learning about context-specific know-how (tacit knowledge), and the development of learning networks as a means to support learning between IPE initiatives, and thereby extend good practice (see section 4.5 for details).

Recommendation 5

As new IPE areas are selected and initiated, they should be invited to participate in the wider IPE learning network in order to speed the development and establishment of new IPE areas. The design of the wider network should be dependent upon the emergent pattern and distribution of IPE areas but it is critical that the resource hub and its networks are centrally connected to the overall project management structure. Action and learning must be, and must be seen to be, interdependent.

It is likely that there should be:

- an overall network to link to the resource hub;

- sub-networks that could form on say a regional basis (e.g. government offices or Environment Agency regions);

- local networks in a single neighbourhood, or connecting neighbourhoods in the same district together; it is likely that these would be largely self-managed;

- a range of different learning processes employed, or made available, dependent upon expressed stakeholder needs and requirements.

The learning network(s) would be available to all stakeholders involved throughout the hierarchy of levels.

5.2.5 The role of the Environment Agency

The Environment Agency's role will in part be determined by the relative roles agreed between the Environment Agency, Defra and other government departments and agencies. We recommend that, however the 'strength' of this role evolves, there are certain tasks that the Environment Agency needs to undertake.

Recommendation 6

The Environment Agency should:

a) **Use the pathfinder phase to improve its own ability and readiness to engage in and support this work.**

   From time to time an identified 'diagonal slice' of senior/top managers should engage with the learning network through facilitated meetings. This would help to inform any internal organisational changes that might be required.

b) **Establish a project management structure that has the formal authority to support these new ways of working and to link IPE outcomes to both internal learning processes and with wider networks.**

   This will avoid fragmenting and isolating the potential for learning across the organisation from projects of this kind which will impede project effectiveness as well as replication and spread. To ensure the integration of learning and action, it would be advisable to have two senior management champions (e.g. a regional manager and an area manager).

c) **Review the impact of its current KPIs on local partnership working.**

   This review needs to recognise and take into account the dilemmas of managing the requirement for common standards across England and Wales for some functions, while needing innovative holistic outcomes for partnership working in context-sensitive and specific locations at the same time.

d) **Review the 'readiness' of the Regional Strategic Units (RSUs) and Areas for supporting IPE locations and similar work on the ground and connecting this back into the bigger agendas.**

   The RSUs and Areas have a key role to play, linking these ways of integrated working on the ground to their cross-cutting work with government regions.

e) **Develop a clear and specific position on what it can and cannot contribute to the IPE programme, and what is has to offer to its partnerships.**

   In effect, the Environment Agency is hoping to influence other stakeholders to adjust and bend their spending. Therefore, it needs to be prepared to act similarly.

f) **Ensure a long-term commitment and involvement on the ground from appropriate Environment Agency staff.**

g) **Make use of the knowledge that already exists across the Environment Agency, together with that of local partners.**

   It is evident that this knowledge exists, but it currently appears disconnected and networks do not exist for bringing this together. Mapping this knowledge with a view to networking it would be a good first step.

h) **Create new knowledge and learning in more systematic and systemic ways through the development of networks and other learning processes linked to existing**

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knowledge and experience and required performance outcomes (e.g. through shadowing, mentoring and secondments).

5.2.6 Policy lessons from good practice

The IPE programme's approach to working and learning in partnership offers the opportunity to test some of the new working and learning methods that are beginning to emerge across the public sector, especially within organisations working on partnership for sustainable development. It could also provide a model of innovation in policy development - a new kind of policy instrument.

Brook Lyndhurst recommend the following approach:

> "*Monitoring and Review.* Finally, there is no doubt that the IPE programme will (a) need careful monitoring and evaluation as it rolls forward, and (b) offers excellent opportunities for (participatory) research so as to continue the development of our collective understanding of 'cumulative environmental disadvantage' and the methods we may have at our disposal to address those disadvantages." (Brook Lyndhurst 2007c, section 5.1).

However, this does not take into account the potential to feed experience from the programme into future practice improvement more widely than the IPE programme, or into future policy development. For example, the IPE programme could act as an important test bed in the development of improved methods for the development and extension of good practice across government. It could also act as an important test bed for preventative, locally joined-up action through the effective co-ordination and bending of mainstream funding at the neighbourhood level.

We therefore propose:

Recommendation 7

A rigorous formative evaluation (i.e. during the programme's life) should be undertaken to cover all aspects of the programme: the environmental, social and economic impacts on the ground, the cumulative environmental impacts, and the effectiveness of the learning infrastructure and learning methods used to develop and extend good practice. This will enable lessons to be captured and formulated in ways that are useful and relevant to policy-makers, researchers and others beyond the IPE programme.

This will require a robust evaluation programme that will operate alongside, and be closely embedded in, the learning approaches through which participants are sharing and developing their own practice. The networks themselves will be reflective and hold review and learning as core activities and this be an essential element of the formative and action research approach to evaluation. However, a more formal assessment is also likely to be needed so that lessons can be drawn out and distilled into forms that can be used by policy-makers, researchers and others, so they can learn from the experience of the IPE programme as it progresses, rather than only at the end.

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Appendix 1. Details of interviews

1. Public sector domain interviews

Academy for Sustainable Communities:
- Gill Taylor, Chief Executive Officer.

Bradford Vision:
- Elaine Appelbee. Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Creating Excellence (the South West centre of excellence for sustainable communities):
- Cherida Fletcher, Head of Learning.

Department of Constitutional Affairs:
- Ian Johnson, Democratic Engagement Branch (head of branch)
- Elspeth Rainbow, Democratic Engagement Branch.

Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) for local government:
- Steve Dale, Head of Knowledge Management
- Jo Webb, Yorkshire and Humberside IDeA.

National College for School Leadership:
- David Jackson, Director of the Networked Learning Group and co-leader of the Networked Learning Communities initiative
- Alison Kelly, senior programme manager for the Leadership Programme
- Gaynor Smith, consultant and facilitator.

National School of Government:
- Professor Sue Richards, Director of Strategic Capability
- Adrian Robinson, Centre for Strategic Leadership and sustainable development specialist at the NSG.

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit:
- No interview was undertaken as it was felt to be a better use of limited time to review the recent very full evaluation of the NRU's Knowledge and Skills Programme (ODPM 2005).

NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement:
- Simone Jordan, Director of Learning.

Regen West Midlands:
- Louise Rowland, Head of Development

RENEW North West:
- Hazel Catt, Head of Operations and Skills

Sandwell MBC:
- Linden Riley, Director of Neighbourhoods and Environment.

2. Environment Agency interviews

Interviews were undertaken with Environment Agency staff in the Thames and North East regions, as follows:

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11 May 2006, King's Meadow House, Reading
Liz Baldwin
Paul Hudson
Peter Quarmby
Adrian Young
Ann Symonds
A.N. Other

12 May 2006, Millbank, London
Clive Coley

16 May 2006, Rivers House, Leeds
Jatiner Singh
Bridget Butler

25 May 2006, Millbank, London
Robert Runcie

29 May 2006, Thirsk Office, North Yorkshire
Craig McGarvey

David Nummey (Thames Region) was also interviewed by telephone.

Appendix 2. Action learning

"Action learning is a method for individual and organisational development. Working in small groups, people tackle important organisational issues or problems and learn from their attempts to change things." (Pedler 1996: 13). Action learning is both a specific methodology and a general approach that makes learning integral to, and inseparable from, working: "There is no learning without action, and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning" (Revans 1998: 10).

It is important to note that action learning takes a different approach to conventional project management. Learning is not an add-on or something that happens in parallel to the 'work'; it is part of the 'work' itself. This means that an action learning approach is fundamental to how the core objectives of any project are achieved, and implies a built-in evaluation process that tests progress on goals and purposes as the work unfolds.

For Carley and Christie (2000), action learning is: "…the means by which organisations can deal with rapid and complex change which causes process outcomes and organisational objectives to be mismatched." They go on to summarise the differences between bureaucratic approaches to innovation and change, and action learning strategies as presented below in Table A1:

Table A1: Differences between bureaucratic approaches to innovation and change, and action learning strategies

Traditional bureaucratic approaches, characterised by:	Action learning strategies, characterised by:
Atomistic logic	Contextual logic
Hierarchical connections	Lateral connections
Centralised procedures	Decentralised authority
Formalised procedures	Low formalisation
Rigid structures	Flexible / adaptive structure
Division of labour	Teamwork
Compartmentalised knowledge	Integrated knowledge

This distinction resonates with that of Checkland and Winter (2003) between hard and soft systems thinking. 'Hard' systems represent the conventional wisdom generated from practice and focused on product, using linear and reductionist approaches to delivery; soft systems are non-linear and holistic, and focus on processes.

'Soft' systems and action learning methodologies place emphasis not only on solving puzzles but also on learning what needs to be done in situations that are 'messy', with unclear objectives, different constituencies or stakeholders with conflicting aims, and needing leadership and vision as well as hard analysis and design. In these 'no right answer' situations, practitioners work with sophisticated processes of "reflection-in-action" or thinking on one's feet and acting on the basis of emergent understandings (Schon 1983).

In terms of the facilitation of the overall action learning approach, there are a range of relevant and 'context-sensitive' learning processes available. These are discussed at length in Attwood *et al.* (2002: 111-183)

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Appendix 3. Coaching and mentoring

Coaching

There has been a very big increase in the amount of coaching being undertaken in organisations of all kinds in recent years. A frequent reason given for this growth has been the increasing pressure at all levels to achieve results and targets in ever more complex, uncertain and changing conditions. There is a high premium on implementation leading to concrete and measurable results. With this also comes a recognition that each manager's situation is specific to a unique context and that each brings their own individual strengths and weaknesses to their role.

There are many definitions of coaching. Two examples are:

"Coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction. It invariably involves growth and change, whether that is in perspective, attitude or behaviour." (Bluckert 2006).

"The coach works with clients to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their lives and careers through focussed learning. The coach's sole aim is to work with the client to achieve all the client's potential - as defined by the client" (Rogers 2005)

Kilburg (2000) also talks about the use of "a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance..."

Most definitions focus on improving work and career performance while acknowledging that this is likely to involve associated personal development and growth. This often involves changes in outlook and mindsets as well as behaviours. This may well involve the need to make a greater or changing sense of meaning (meaning making) about work and linked roles.

Roberts and Jarrett (in Brunning 2006) describe coaching as a 'burgeoning industry'. They state that:

"A recent survey undertaken for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development of its thousands of members revealed that 95% of firms were using some kind of coaching and mentoring, at a cost of at least £15 million a year. The growth rate is staggering......about 40% a year. In the corporate world executives are using coaching to manage the pressures and loneliness at the top, increased competitive stress, and greater expectations from external bodies such as regulators and analysts.....the situation in the public sector is similar."

No doubt, a good deal of this rapid growth can be put down to yet another management fad of the moment. While the growth rate is likely to flatten or decline somewhat, coaching does address the requirement for performance improvement while taking into account the very real issues of specific and unique contexts and the inter and intra personal issues that go with implementing change.

The consolidation of coaching as a longer-term, mainstream method of individual, corporate and partnership improvement is likely to be shaped by two strong trends already growing rapidly. These are the rapid development of accredited coaching training and performance and the aim of many organisations, public and private to develop 'coaching cultures' in order to create and maintain high performance and competitive advantage. The latter introduces coaching as a line management activity.

There have been a number of key strands that have informed the growth of coaching and competences in coaches. Central to these are ideas and models from sports coaching, psychological models including psychodynamic, cognitive, behavioural, humanistic and existential perspectives, and making use of the knowledge of those with current and recent relevant experience. Some coaching companies and coaches rely substantially on the latter preferring to rely on 'old hands' and existing wisdom. Others point out that falling into the old traps of 'talk and tell' methods, and a failure to elicit the real concerns and mental maps of clients, will produce little real effective change. They argue the need for 'psychological mindedness' in coaches who can work with 'the inner, as well as the outer game' (Bluckert 2006, Gallwey 2003). From this perspective, effective coaches are highly developed in coaching methods and insights and are not required to have parallel work experience to that of their clients. Indeed such experience can get in the way of delivering effectiveness.

Mentoring

The terms coaching and mentoring are often seen as very similar or even the same. While there can be overlap there are also some very real differences. According to Rogers (2005) the word mentor "comes from the Greek myth of the king who asked Mentor, an older, wiser man, to look after his son during the king's absence". Mentoring usually carries this implication. Thus it is close to the 'old hand' approach above. Undoubtedly mentoring can be very successful, especially if the pairing is well chosen and complementary.

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Appendix 4. National College for School Leadership (NCSL) Protocols

1. Characteristics of NCSL protocols

- **They assume that colleagues gather together with a purpose,** and that is to learn.

- **They provide a clear organisational framework** for learning. The activity and each stage within it are explicit and clearly defined.

- **They segment the elements of a conversation** or discussion, the boundaries of which are otherwise blurred. For instance they make clear the differences between talking and listening, between describing and judging, or between proposing and giving feedback.

- **They require a discipline of the participants**, which is to "constrain behaviour in order to enhance experience". Many of them have strict rules, a required order and specific time frames.

- **They draw upon the contribution of the 'experts' in the group**, who are the practitioners. The knowledge that each participant brings forms the content and substance of the process.

- **The process requires facilitation**. It requires that someone is responsible for ensuring that the group abides by the rules of the protocol.

- **A facilitator can be appointed from the group or from outside of it.** At times an external facilitator may provide the experienced hand to guide a newly formed group through the initial stages of its life.

- **There must be group agreement on the facilitator and the facilitation**. This is not about one person exercising control, but granting one person the guardianship of the process.

   "At its heart facilitation is about promoting participation, ensuring equity and building trust." (McDonald et al, quoted in Carter et al 2006).

- **They seek to reveal the gaps in our learning**. They deliberately move the focus of the learning activity into the areas of our uncertainty, of choice and intuitive judgements, in order to find the areas for new learning.

- **They rely upon an atmosphere of trust** in which colleagues can speak openly and honestly.

- **The participants commit to reach understanding together.**

- **There is complete equity of voice, contribution and benefit.**

- **They open up practice**, making it transparent.

- **The focus is continually upon student learning**. The learning activities are designed for teachers. The purpose of the learning is ultimately to improve the quality of student learning.

- **They require an enquiring stance** from which everything is open to question and questioning is the norm.

- **There is a commitment to action**, which accompanies the discovery of new or reconstituted meaning. The process is designed for action.

- **This is not a process for refining delivery**, for better operationalisation, though that may be an outcome: it is much more an interrogation of practice which seeks innovative ways to perform differently.

- **Reflection is an essential part** of the learning process. This may be undertaken individually or with others, may be expressed in written form or in spoken language.

    "….reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations". (Boud et al, 1985: 19)

- **Reflection, individual and shared, is an ever-present attitude** as well as a particular activity.

- **They open individual practice to critique** by fellow professionals. This inclusion of some level of cognitive dissonance encourages a deeper analysis and consideration of what may be habitual practice.

- **An atmosphere of trust is essential** if the levels of disclosure required in order for practice to be re-formed and transformed are to be reached.

- **Repetition and practice are required** for the full benefits of the processes to be experienced. These are not events, but habitual ways of learning. The more practised the participants the deeper the learning.

    "According to research in cognitive psychology, teacher learning is an organic process rather than an accumulation of acts and discrete pieces of information. For teachers to assimilate new ideas into their knowledge base they need opportunities to pose questions, view situations from multiple perspectives, examine their personal beliefs and assumptions, and experiment with new approaches." (Langer et al, 2003: 27)

- **They offer a transferable form of learning**. The way that we learn as leaders or teachers is a formula that, once it has been experienced and learned, can be used with other teachers and students.

- **It is a way for professional educators to own and to take command of their own learning**. By combining that intimate knowledge only known to practitioners with what can be learned from outside expertise, a future direction is defined by those who will lead it. Development is not driven from the outside, from external initiatives or requirements, but from the considered wisdom of the practitioners.

- **It is a collaborative learning model** which offers the isolated practitioner attempting to improve his or her practice a co-operative group of fellow professionals with whom to engage in order to challenge and assist their own and each others' learning and development.

Action learning sets, appreciative inquiry and study groups are some examples of well established and proven protocols for learning which are used in the NCSL programme.

2. Example of a protocol for a structured visit

Intervisitations (OCEA 1996) are structured visits, with a clear, defined focus, that support the host headteacher in pursuing specific lines of enquiry. For example, a headteacher enquiring into the extent to which the school's statement about values was manifest in day-to-day life might invite trusted peers to observe and give evidence-based feedback which would lead to further development. These intervisitations form part of the learning commitment of the New Visions programme.

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It is critically important that these are seen as part of the collaborative enquiry which is central to the programme. They are not simply 'school visits'. It is therefore essential that the people engaged in the intervisitations establish and agree clear purposes and protocols within a framework as shown below.

Format for visits
- each host to set the agenda for the visit: the issue they want to enquire into, and want visitors to look at
- two visitors to come together to the school
- purposes and protocols to be agreed by the three people in advance
- feedback on the visit to be shared and processed by the three people on the day of the visit
- review of intervisitation methodology to be processed later
- visits to be reciprocal.

Table A1: Roles for visits

For the visitor	For the host	For the group
- to build mutual trust	- to decide the focus of the visit	- to decide the trios for the visits
- to listen attentively	- to lead discussion on the format of the visit	- to spend sufficient time in open discussion of the methodology
- to engage in dialogue	- to inform staff and students about the forthcoming visit	- to agree the particular focus for each intervisitation and ensure that it is understood by all
- to avoid chipping in with anecdotes	- to be challenged	- to allow sufficient time to discuss each aspect of the intervisitation, e.g. the purpose, the activities to be undertaken, the arrangements for feedback and the preparations required by the host and the visitor (such as the information required about the school's context, the management structure diagram, the names of staff involved
- to challenge	- to hear the positives	- to have complete transparency with no hidden agendas
- to illuminate issues	- to reflect on outcomes	- to adhere to agreed protocols
- to celebrate issues	- to use comments to initiate discussion with own staff	- to inspire honest, sensitive, empathetic, respectful, challenging, non-threatening, constructive, focused, well-prepared, stimulating, supportive, confidential processes that encourage mutual learning
- to learn together and be aware of the possibility of learning about own context	- to build mutual trust	

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▪ to have a commitment to confidentiality		
▪ to keep to the agreed focus		
▪ to be honest, yet sensitive		
▪ to make observations based on evidence		
▪ not to make judgements		
▪ to pose insightful questions		
▪ to provide feedback before leaving		
▪ not to disturb or disrupt the rules and procedures of the school but to respect them		

Table A2: Specific actions for visits

Host	Visitors
Be clear about purpose.	Be clear about purpose – prepare questions and logistical arrangements with visiting partner.
Send map, directions. Prepare programme, timetable.	
Inform staff about visit and purpose. Arrange for appropriate information to be available.	
Arrange for relevant witnesses, if relevant, to be available. Ensure that they are properly briefed.	Be clear with witnesses about purposes of discussion. Allow witnesses to lead.
Arrange for refreshments/lunch.	
Allow time for group to construct knowledge together at end of day – feedback, synthesis etc.	Synthesise as a group. Feedback – - questioning - conceptual, not judgemental Follow up for own learning?

Following visits:
Whole group to review the process.

Appendix 5. Whole Systems Methodologies and Large Group Events

Whole systems methodologies have emerged from the insights and understandings of systems analysis and thinking. Here, the emphasis is on the understanding of the relation between 'the parts' and 'the whole' of organisations and institutions and their environments. These also include for instance, social and economic systems. Systems writers also refer to natural, human and engineered systems. Systems are perceived as complex, changing and dynamic. To develop and/or move a system in a desired direction is equally a complex issue, where people can exercise their own agency within it. Jake Chapman has written an excellent introductory booklet about these ideas and their relevance to government and governance called *Systems failure: Why governments must learn to think differently* (Chapman 2002).

There are two other important ideas underpinning systems thinking. The first of these is that the whole is usually more than the sum of the parts. This gives rise to the concept of a system having 'emergent' properties. To give a very simple example, a bicycle - an engineered system - is more than the components that make it up. They need to be assembled in a particular way to produce the emergent properties of a bicycle. The second is that because human and natural systems are complex and 'living', changing them is often a matter of trial and error to some degree at least. This requires an assessment or diagnosis of how the system operates now, a widely shared vision of a desired direction, and feedback and learning about steps taken towards this direction.

The practical implication is that there are likely to be many ways to produce a desired change within this framework. In systems terminology this is called the principle of 'equifinality', the equivalent of 'many ways to skin a cat' in everyday speech. The significance of this is that it runs counter to the rather Utopian idea in classical management theory of there being 'one best way' to achieve change or improvement. For simple problems this may well be true. But systems thinking does provide insights into why so many top-down organisational blueprints for change become so difficult or impossible to implement. The prescribed solution is too simplistic to cope with the complexity of the whole. There are currently various prominent implementation problems of this sort across UK government and statutory institutions.

Whole systems methodologies have their antecedents before the Second World War, but developed largely during the 1950s and 1960s. They have been in use ever since and have had a surge in popularity and usage in the 1990s. In the immediate post-war days there was a creative mix between the work at the Tavistock Institute in London on group formation and development and the work of Kurt Lewin and others in the USA with a strong interest in action research. For the best history of this and the emergence of the main ideas and methods see *Discovering Common Ground* (Weisbord 1992).

In many respects, whole systems methodologies follow the principles of classical organisational development (OD) theory and practice with an emphasis on initial contracting, diagnosis, vision building, developing and implementing change processes, review and evaluation. But classic OD theory tends to neglect the complexity and dynamic nature of so many human systems, and so more emphasis is needed on bringing the 'whole system'

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together. Opportunities need to be sought to bring as many parts of the system and stakeholders together, both to diagnose the system and to develop shared visions for a desired better state. Without finding ways of 'bringing the whole system into the room together' there is just not sufficient knowledge available about the current state of things or a widely shared and understood vision of the future to create change capable of being implemented.

Large Group Events are a particular way of doing this. They can involve a relatively small number of people but some approaches have brought a thousand or more together. It is common to involve from 60 to 250 people. Usually there is a design process that involves say a dozen people from 'across the whole system' to develop the structure to hold together these highly participative events. They are very different from conventional conferences. In the language of large events, 'everybody is on the pitch playing rather than in the stands watching'. With good planning, they can be very successful. The greater problem is usually keeping the momentum going longer term. This is more so in managerial environments driven by large numbers of often competing targets where the quest for top-down blueprints is often seen as the quickest way to achieve short-term results.

For an account of the range of methodologies and large group events see Bunker and Alban (1997). In *Leading Change; a guide to whole systems working*, Attwood et al (2003) provide a detailed account of applying these methods to organisations and partnerships based particularly on UK experience and the contexts of public, private, community and voluntary sector change agendas.

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Appendix 6. What is a learning architecture?

The term 'learning architecture' was used in the brief for this research to encapsulate the potential need for an overarching learning framework for the IPE programme. The research for this review examined the concept of 'learning architectures' both in the literature review and interviews. It found that 'learning architecture' can be defined as:

> "The way an organisation promotes and structures learning, both individual and organisational" (Wilhelm 2005: 9).

The use of the term 'architecture' implies a more systematic and co-ordinated effort at learning than is found in many organisations, where learning initiatives are typically tactical and aimed at specific initiatives or individuals. As learning becomes more central to organisational effectiveness and to the delivery of organisational goals and services, the organisation of learning itself becomes more important.   The idea of a learning architecture is important because:

- the promotion and facilitation of individual and organisational learning requires its own strategy and structure, from senior champions to local infrastructures;

- without a systematic approach to developing and harnessing the learning of people in all parts of the organisation, learning will be confined to isolated pockets and blocked by numerous boundaries and barriers to transmission and exchange.

An organisational learning architecture is not a training system that 'pushes' prescribed learning but a structure that enables people at all levels and in all parts to 'pull' the learning they want, when they want it. Ideally, it should be: "The minimally sufficient infrastructure that allows employees at all levels to pull what they need from the system to accomplish their personal and professional goals." (Jusela 2005: 77).

The idea of an organisational learning architecture has been developing for at least 50 years, from the early days of organisational development, through change management and the learning organisation, to current concerns with knowledge management and intelligent systems design. The external interviews for this research showed that the term 'learning architecture' is not in general use but is of potential interest as a term to describe the increasingly sophisticated, systematic and systems-wide efforts at learning and sharing good practice.

The advocates of the 'learning organisation' have used the notion of a learning *infrastructure* to describe what is needed: "Infrastructure is the means through which an organisation makes available resources to support people in their work. Just as an architect and contractor of a house must develop mechanisms to get the right building materials and bring them to the site, builders of learning organisations must develop and improve infrastructural mechanisms so that people have the resources they need: time, management support, money, information, ready contact with colleagues and more." (Senge et al 1994: 32).   Similarly, Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1996: 122-135) use the term 'enabling structures' to describe systems that provide development opportunities and learning spaces to enable people to be adaptable, flexible and responsive to the challenges facing them.

Currently the idea of learning architectures is most used in the fields of intelligent systems and knowledge and information management. Much of this is driven by advances in

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communications and learning technologies, especially the internet, and the proliferating options for communication and learning in increasingly complex environments, sometimes known as 'information architectures'. Here the search is for systems that couple problem solving and learning, and for architectures of components that can be configured in different ways. Businesses and IT-enabled organisations are seeking the optimum solutions from the various platforms, applications, content-production tools, training products and learning processes and activities that are available. Learning architecture is the term used to represent this flexible structure of components and systems. (Plaza et al 1993; Trondsen et al 2005).

The idea of a learning architecture can both draw upon and draw together these earlier efforts, and integrate them with corporate and business strategies. It requires the dynamic engagement of leaders and employees at all levels in both individual and organisational learning. As Dixon (1994: 5) points out, the purpose is to employ: "the intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group and system level to continuously transform the organisation in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to its stakeholders."

This makes it plain that the aim of a learning architecture is to serve the ends and purposes of any organisation as defined by all its internal and external stakeholders. Individual and organisational learning drive the sharing and pooling of knowledge within and without the organisation and thereby improve its functioning. Organisational leaders are not usually interested in learning per se; what they are recognising is that learning – and the organisation of learning – is how major improvements in service delivery and performance are brought about.

Although the term 'learning architecture' was not widely used (or necessarily liked) by the respondents in this research, it may be useful as a way of describing the sort of framework for linking learning processes to individual and organisational performance that is required for the IPE programme.

In its simplest terms, a learning architecture consists of a number of learning processes linked together coherently and designed to meet the specific purposes and structures of a major change programme and its outcomes. It needs to be integral to the project management itself. Learning is rooted in action towards outcomes. 'Sober reflection' on action produces new action and subsequent new learning.

If this learning dimension is simply tacked onto a project or programme, rather than being integral to it, the danger is that it will collapse into a training requirement, with all the limitations to that approach identified in this research (see Chapter 2).

Learning architectures have to be designed in relation to specific circumstances needing specific outcomes. Further, as the nature of the new learning processes is collaborative and collective, the design process for a learning architecture must also be collaborative (i.e. involving partners and/or stakeholders). Without this collaboration (which need not be onerous), the learning processes created will not have the 'buy-in' / ownership essential to make them work.

Appendix 7 Guidelines for facilitators of networks

Key guidelines for the facilitation of networks include:

- *First, connect what exists*: don't build the new before you know what is already there. Agencies can play a valuable role by mapping and linking up existing networks which might not be aware or connected with one another to create 'networks of networks'.

- *Animation*: networks need animateurs as search and boundary-crossing activities need to be encouraged; "an experienced and competent collaboration manager, facilitator or convenor is an essential asset" (Huxham and Vangen 2000: 800).

- *Preparation and start-up*: the start-up phase is crucial. Successful alliances are "highly evolutionary and (go) through a sequence of interactive cycles of learning, re-evaluation and re-adjustment" but only if the initial conditions have been good, including agreements on purpose, common goals, leadership and governance arrangements (Doz 1992: 55; Doz and Hamel 1998).

- *Encourage self-organisation:* self-interest is a powerful incentive for activity in networks and whilst they must be in balance with community interests, the more power and resources devolved to the nodes and the more rich connections that take place without the centre, the greater will be the self-organisation, the emergence of new repertoires and innovations and the evolution of the network itself (Pascale, Millemann and Goija 2000: 6; 130).

- *Avoid 'contrived collegiality'*: It is easy for agencies to fall into the trap of what Hargreaves (1994) has called "contrived collegiality" where compulsion, administrative control and centralised design replace the spontaneity, discretionary and above all voluntary engagement which gives network relationships their energy and creativity.

- *Facilitate leadership, governance and accountability arrangements*: where multiple organisations and agencies own or sponsor the network, it is vital to achieve some unity and horizontal integration at the top. This may take the form of partnership boards, host or lead organisations, conveners, co-ordinators or more informal arrangements, but they must be able to represent the whole.

- *Simple rules*: are one of the clues to self-organisation and adaptability in complex systems. Having a lack of rules or having too many of them or applying them with too much rigidity seems to inhibit activity. Having a few simple rules encourages engagement and innovation (Pettigrew and Fenton 2000: 99).

- *Learning from differences, diversity and conflict*: differences between services, levels, large and small, public and private, voluntary and statutory, urban and rural, resident and professional etc are principal sources for learning and innovation.

  The best networks get beyond formal information sharing and move on to exploring differences and especially the experiences, feelings and values that inform what worked and why but which are often kept private. When there is real honesty about differences, conflicts of purpose and interest are likely to surface. it helps to negotiate

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common interest from a recognition of this difference, diversity and potential conflicts, starting by inviting people to be clear about their aims and open about their differences. To acknowledge mistakes, fears and fallibilities needs a willingness to risk and trust, but in turn this level of engagement also generates that trust.

Source: Pedler, M. (2002) *Networked organisations: A strategic overview,* London: NHS Health Development Agency.

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List of abbreviations

ABI   Area-Based Initiative

DCLG   Department of Communities and Local Government

Defra   Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

IDeA   Improvement and Development Agency for local government

IPE   Improving Poor Environments programme

KPI   Key Performance Indicator

LSP   Local Strategic Partnership

MBC   Metropolitan Borough Council

MOM   Multi-Overlay Mapping tool

NCSL   National College of School Leadership

NHS   National Health Service

NRU   Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

ODPM   Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

PCT   Primary Care Trust

RSU   Regional Strategic Unit

SCS   Sustainable Community Strategy

SHA   Strategic Health Authority

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