

# P R E C *i* S

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A summary series of recent research from Communities Scotland

**No 52**

## Skills and competencies for community regeneration

Regeneration is an extremely diverse and complex field of activity. Participants are drawn from many different sectors and backgrounds, including full-time professionals, local politicians, community representatives, volunteers, and business people. Their skills, knowledge and previous experience of regeneration are similarly diverse. In recent years a widespread view has emerged across the UK that more effort should be made to improve the skills and knowledge of people involved in regeneration.

This study was commissioned to obtain evidence to establish a framework setting out skills and competencies. The key findings included:

- Community regeneration currently involves people from a wide variety of professional and non-professional backgrounds.
- Most participants are involved in multiple partnerships, in multiple roles.
- There is strong agreement across sectors on the skills that are needed.
- Most people recognise a need for self-improvement in some of their skills.
- Skills can be broadly classified as strategic skills, process skills, and practical skills.
- Most agree that all are essential, especially 'process skills'; though people may find it easier to admit to deficiencies in practical skills.
- Most people have used each of the main learning methods, but would like to have more access to a range of methods.
- People are most likely to feel that they have got the relevant skills from work and life experience.
- They seem to place most value on more outside support and exchanges of experience.
- Responses to the idea of a skills framework were generally very positive. Consultees agreed that it must be used only as a flexible guide to local needs, not prescriptively.
- People undertake 'self-assessment' in different ways and for different reasons. A 'tool kit' rather than a single 'tool' was therefore seen as the most appropriate way of supporting learners in regeneration.

## Introduction

Regeneration is an extremely diverse and complex field of activity. A growing body of research has identified a need for enhanced skills for both professionals and the other sectors involved in regeneration. A fully researched and comprehensive framework of what is required has yet to be established in any part of the UK.

## Roles and skill needs

The research conducted for this study shows that the diversity of occupational and professional backgrounds that people bring to community regeneration is enormous. Regeneration involves people in all the main sectors. Working in multiple 'Partnerships' is widespread.

Survey respondents were asked about eighteen types of skill. Each skill was seen by at least half the respondents as required for their role in regeneration. The majority of skills were seen as necessary by over 75% of those surveyed. There was strong agreement across the sectors on the relevance of the skills.

84% of those surveyed identified a need for improvement in at least one type of skill, with an average of five skills identified per person. People in the four main sectors identified needs for improvement in their skills to very similar extents.

Skills can be broadly classified as strategic (for initiating and promoting change), process (for enabling change), and practical (for delivering change). Most agree that all are essential, especially 'process skills'; though people may find it easier to admit to deficiencies in practical skills.

There is widespread agreement that there should be no attempt to create a new and separate 'regeneration' profession. The process inevitably involves joining up different professions and sectors and building upon that diversity.

Skills do not exist in a vacuum. Attitudes, behaviour, mindsets, values, knowledge, power and resources are all relevant to the efficacy of skills.

## Methods of meeting need

People were most likely to emphasise 'meeting people doing similar things' as a source of their skills. Invited to comment on other sources of skills, people overwhelmingly referred to general work and life experience.

Most people were personally able to and did in practice access each of the main learning methods, from formal courses to 'meeting others'. Over three quarters would like to have more access to at least one method.

Many people prefer exchanges of experience or locally tailored provision to training courses as a means of learning. Having an outside source of support and exchanges of experience with other professions and areas are highly valued.

Consultees made positive recommendations on the wider sharing of training between agencies and professions, but many also emphasised the desirability of building the learning of skills more firmly into every day regeneration practice.

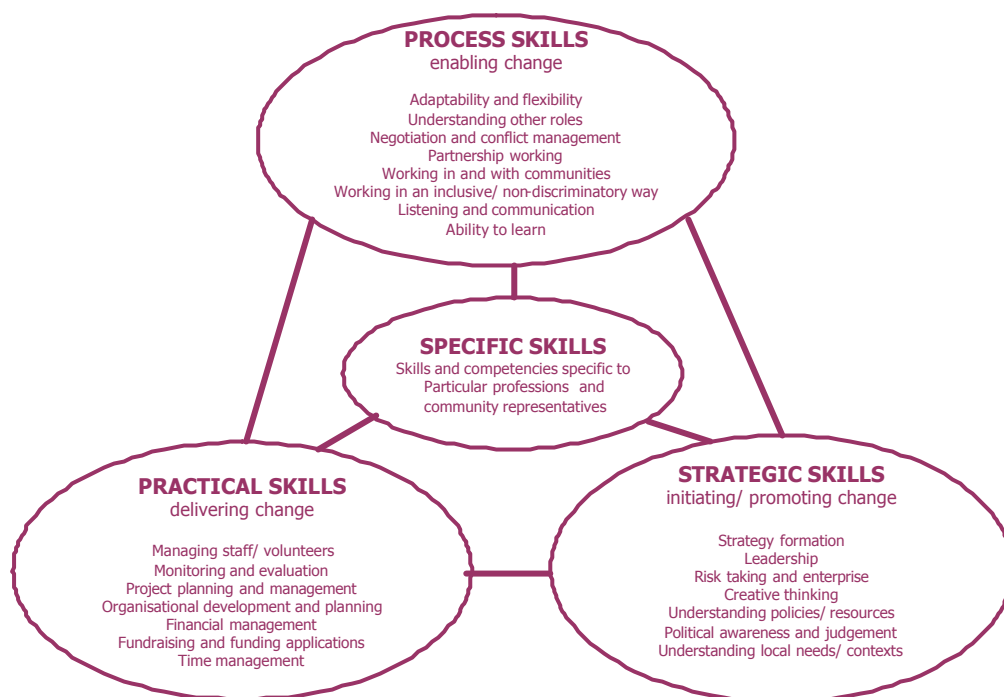
The amount of formal course provision whose primary focus is regeneration is quite limited. There is a much wider group of courses for which regeneration is a strong theme, but not the primary focus.

## Development of framework

The response from consultees to the idea of a framework of the skills required for community regeneration was generally very positive. Their reasons for valuing and potentially using a framework were very varied. They agreed that a framework must be used only as a flexible guide to local needs and not prescriptively.

The proposed framework in Figure A is based upon survey responses, previous research, the views of consultees and other relevant frameworks. Few if any of the skills are unique to 'regeneration', although all are widely accepted as needed by those involved. The framework is based upon the three main types of skill, with the skills and

Figure A



competencies that are specific to particular professions or to community representatives placed at the centre of this triangle. These overlap with the other skills to varying extents for people from every type of background and for every individual.

For each type of skill, the framework lists a variety of things that a person should be able to do if they have skills of this kind. It also suggests the type of roles and tasks for which each skill may be needed. These might very well be added to, depending upon the local situation. It would be premature to be unduly prescriptive in defining different levels of 'regeneration' skills.

The Scottish Centre for Regeneration wishes to make available tools that will allow people to assess for themselves their need for improvement in the skills in this framework. The feasibility of this was investigated.

Initial tests were carried out including individual self- assessment, facilitated group settings with people from a variety of backgrounds, and an exercise in assessing

the overall strengths and weaknesses of a partnership. People's methods and purposes for 'self-assessment' vary. Consultees emphasised the desirability of allowing adaptation to local circumstances. A single all-purpose tool is neither desirable nor feasible. The most valuable device would be a pack of tools and guidance on assessment based around the framework.

Tests demonstrated an active interest in the material, and a virtual absence of any desire to classify any of the suggested skills as 'not relevant' to personal needs. There was some evidence that working in groups, and especially concentrating on a specific regeneration initiative or context, encourages people to acknowledge and explore their skill needs.

### The way forward

It is recommended that Communities Scotland should adopt the framework . It should use it to guide its own priorities for developing skills and should recommend it to training providers, professional bodies and regeneration agencies for their use and development.

There is scope for improvement across the full range of skills identified, and this may require a joint effort to enhance provision across the spectrum of training and learning methods.

Particular emphasis should be placed upon the development of experiential learning, including on-the-job, context-specific, and practical project-based learning, and methods for people to learn from each other's experience.

Sharing of learning opportunities - between organisations; between professional bodies; and between community representatives, employed staff and other sectors - should be encouraged.

The techniques for recognising skills needs and understanding how to match them to provision also need to be improved.

Regeneration initiatives should be encouraged to carry out, and repeat, reviews of the skills that they have available and need, and the mechanisms needed to enhance them, using the framework.

Community Planning Partnerships could potentially play a key role in assessing the local need for and availability of regeneration skills and co-ordinating learning opportunities.

### **About the study**

The study and the development of the framework was carried out by a team based in the Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, led by Ivan Turok and with major contributions from Peter Taylor, Duncan Kirkpatrick and Adam Rosengard.

Research methods included an updating of previous literature reviews and surveys of training providers; and interviews and focus group meetings with national organisations. However a central aim was to provide a solid evidence base for a skills framework through a survey reaching as

wide as was practical. A postal survey, followed up by telephone interviews and focus group meetings, was carried out in five local authority areas.

This study surveyed a wide range of people in Scotland. Participants were asked to highlight the skills that were important to their role and indicate whether they felt these skills need improving. The study also consulted individuals on how these skills might be enhanced.

The evidence was used to establish a framework setting out the skills and competencies that people may require to make an effective contribution to community regeneration (see Figure A). This framework has been refined through a further consultation period. It can be used in a variety of different ways, but does not claim to be a blueprint specifying what everyone must have. Some experiments in using assessment tools based on the framework have already been undertaken, with successful results.

### **Related Communities Scotland research**

*Coherent Diversity – towards a picture of inter-disciplinary training for community regeneration and social inclusion in Scotland*, Communities Scotland, Precis 37 and Report 31.

*Coherent Diversity – A Literature Review: inter-disciplinary training for community regeneration and social inclusion in Scotland*, Communities Scotland, Precis 38 and Report 32.

### **Further information**

Further information and copies of the report can be obtained from Jim Carruth, jim.carruth@communitiesScotland.gov.uk or by telephone, 0141 314 0021. The report is also available on our website, www.communitiesScotland.gov.uk.

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