



report 2006



Helping to build sustainable communities

Over the past year the Board and staff of creating:excellence, the South West's centre for sustainable communities, have been working to research issues, pilot courses and promote activity to help create successful communities with skills and knowledge. This report takes you through the last year's highlights.

Sustainability is at the top of the political agenda and we must take full advantage of this to ensure that we create communities where we can live within our planet's resources and fulfil our potential.

Creating:excellence has published a detailed business plan¹ through to 2009 showing how we will help to achieve sustainable communities and we are now discussing funding for this work.

Colin Fudge

Professor Colin Fudge
Chair
Creating:excellence

List of Board Members from March 2005 to March 2006

J Crawley (South West Foundation), D Davies (South West Regional Assembly) Resigned May 05, L Farrow (White Design Associates Ltd), E Fowler (Bristol City Council), Professor C Fudge (University of the West of England), S Hewitt (Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership), P Judge (Legal Services Commission) Resigned July 2005, J Mann (RIBA Wessex), C Minett (Learning and Skills Council), C Passey (Government Office for the South West), I Piper (South West RDA), N Robertson (Cornwall Enterprise), P Vare (Learning South West), L Wagstaffe (Gloucester County Council) Joined July 05, S Keable (Devon County Council), S Wollett (South West Forum)

Footnote

1. Available on our website (www.creatingexcellence.org.uk) and from the office



Developing sustainable communities with skills and knowledge

Experience leads us to believe that the effective delivery of our objectives of increasing the size of the sustainable communities 'workforce' and improving skills within that sector require a significant culture change. We need to inspire employers to be more aware of the need to attract new talent and be more positive about staff and volunteer development. We also need to work on the quality of the learning available so that practitioners want to learn throughout their careers.

Our business plan recognises the central role local government and its partners will be making to the delivery of sustainable communities and the associated skills issues this will raise.

The last year has seen the launch of the national Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC). Early signs are that we will enjoy a fruitful working relationship, delivering their agenda at the regional level and working with them to raise relevant skills issues at the national and international level.

We have been working hard to diversify our funding base delivering contracts for the Communities and Local Government department (CLG), Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the ASC. We are also earning money from consultancy and expect this to increase in future.

To accommodate this level of contract work the Board has decided to move creating:excellence to a more traditional business model by incorporating as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Our extensive programme of work is now delivered by ten people who have shown exceptional creativity and commitment to meet our obligations and develop the scope and content of our programme.

Thanks are due to many organisations with whom we have collaborated over the past year including the Government Office for the South West, the Regional Observatory, and the South West Forum. Our principle funder, the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) stands out from the other eight RDA's in terms of the scope and extent of its support for creating:excellence, its Regional Centre of Excellence. The close working relationship we have had with the South West RDA has helped us keep our work in tune with the key regional initiatives such as The Way Ahead and the Regional Economic Strategy.

The coming year holds many challenges, not only on the funding side but also in meeting the rapidly growing expectations that our first two years' work has generated. We are however confident that with our current Board, staff team and the support of our key stakeholders, the next 12 months, though tough, will be successful and very rewarding for all concerned.



Dominic Murphy
Executive Director, creating:excellence

Learning

strategically improving skills and knowledge

Our learning programme aims to spread the word about real skills and useful knowledge for those involved in sustainable communities work. Cherida Fletcher is our Head of Learning.

We look strategically for barriers that are stopping people from creating better communities and seek learning to address these issues. In the short term this involves research, developing and piloting useful learning experiences. In the longer term our work is encouraging the development of a sustainable learning culture so that people continue to develop the generic skills, networks and partnerships to conquer future problems and create sustainable communities.

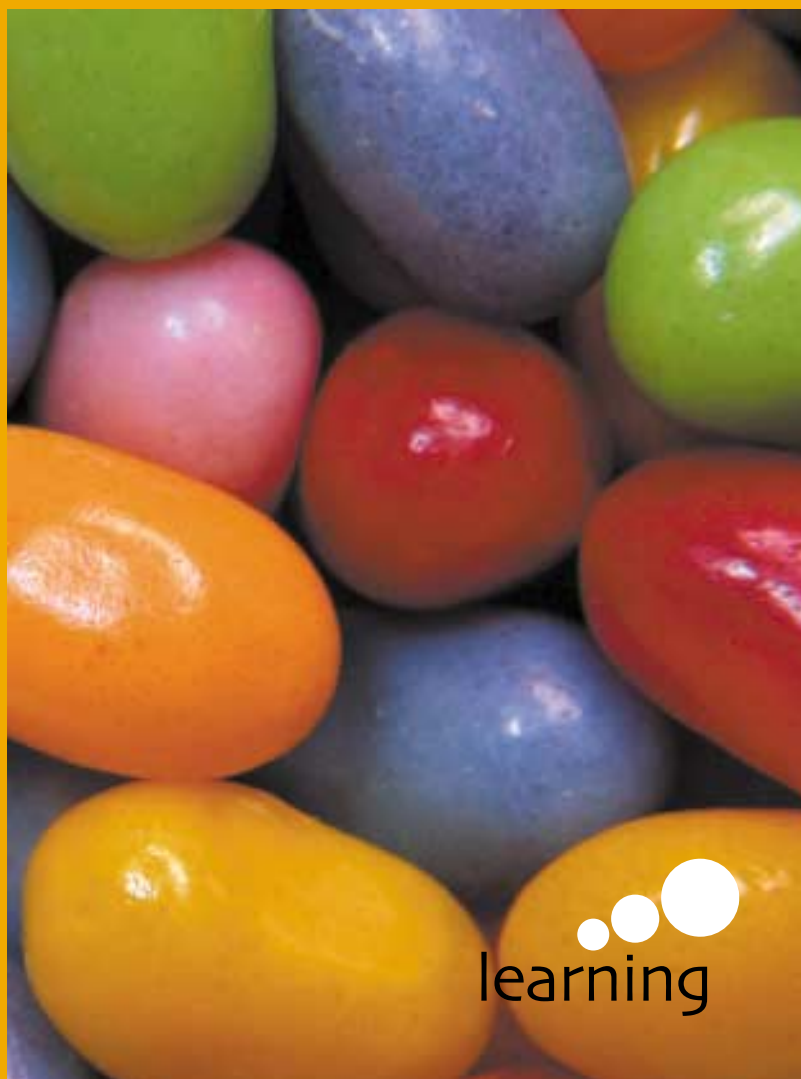
A study was commissioned to look into an earlier proposal to set up Local Learning Centres. Over 80 people attended events in Bristol and Plymouth and another 400 offered views on how learning for sustainable communities is best delivered in the region. The report concluded that sub-regional learning coordinators should be appointed to work with existing Local Learning Centres and to help raise standards and quality.

This year saw work begin with the ASC and Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Centre to develop a learning laboratory in Gloucester. Using research to identify at least 50 people who are motivated to get involved with improving their area, the laboratory aims to assess their learning needs and then provide the most appropriate learning support.

We have been developing a competency-based learning programme called 'Raising Our Game' to provide a route to accredited relevant qualifications for people working in occupations involved with creating sustainable communities. Raising Our Game was originally designed by the North West Development Agency to raise skills levels in economic development. Creating:excellence and

RENEW (North West) attracted funding from the ASC to modify the programme and make it relevant for the skills and requirements of people working in the sustainable communities' field. The programme will offer an assessment centre culminating in a Personal Development Plan, access to over 400 learning opportunities and a computer-based learning management system. Raising Our Game will be piloted in the South West and then rolled out across the country through other Regional Centres of Excellence.

It is still difficult for some organisations to cover the costs involved in their staff attending learning opportunities. Creating:excellence has put £40,000 into funds to help people working in sustainable communities' occupations in the region to attend learning events, and to sponsor high quality events that help to achieve sustainable communities.



Evidence

Facts and figures to help local projects plan and evaluate

Research and experience has shown us that some projects to improve communities have failed due to a lack of understanding of what is really happening in that area. Projects in a community need to be based on evidence of what the issues really are; only then can the right decisions be made and success or failure properly evaluated.

Between Sept 2005 and July 2006 creating:excellence, together with the South West Observatory, operated one of four national Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) pilots on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Nick Harrison and Brian Nute were recruited to carry out this project. SELD focused on improving the use of local evidence in the delivery of work to achieve sustainable communities, Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Area Agreements (LAA).

Working in partnership with the Government Office for the South West (GOSW), the regional intelligence community, Equality South West, the Black South West Network and various regional voluntary and community sector networks, evidence provision and support were developed. A telephone enquiry service responded to over 100 direct inquiries. Advice was offered on specific

evidence needs in particular geographic areas, and five evidence themed seminars were organised. As a result, resources to help people find and use evidence were added to the creating:excellence web site.

Initial feedback indicates that the pilot has improved local evidence use in the South West region, and the learning it has yielded has contributed to informing future support provision across the country.

The project contributed to the development of www.data4nr.net and the I-Gather sustainability appraisal tool (www.igather.org.uk); production of indicators guidance for LAAs; supporting national DCLG research into Local Regeneration Information System; representing South West views to MISC31 Cabinet Committee on data-sharing; and supporting the development of a SELD National Evidence Handbook.

Following completion of the pilot, creating:excellence has continued to take a lead on evidence related activity. This has included delivering evidence advice and guidance to Local Strategic Partnerships, and work with regional partners to improve access to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) data.



Design South West

networking, support and reviews

Through its Design South West arm, creating:excellence seeks to promote design quality in the region. In May 2006, Mark Pearson was appointed as Head of Design South West in a post that is jointly funded by CABE.

Several key objectives, to help improve design quality, outlined in 'Designing Our Environment'² have been achieved during the last 12 months. In addition, refreshed terms of reference and a new structure have been proposed for Design South West.

Our South West Regional Design Review Panel, managed by the Architecture Centre, has met 12 times to assist 32 schemes. It has reported objectively to local authorities and a wide range of promoters of projects including private developers, housing associations, and the South West RDA. English Heritage has been active in recommending the use of the panel in the region and a positive working relationship has been established with the CABE national panel.

We have collaborated with the Housing Corporation to help them establish a Design Champion's Network for Housing Associations, which has met twice. We sponsored a publication to promote and explain the initiative.

Design South West has also worked to establish a wider network for champions for both Design and the Historic Environment within Local Authorities. Funding from CABE and English Heritage helped to undertake research into the pattern of existing champions and their perceived training needs. The plan is to develop this work to support and recruit more design champions through seminars and sub-regional networking in three clusters. The Architecture Centres will act as co-ordinating 'hubs' for two of these, with creating:excellence directly supporting activity in the south east of our region.

The Architecture Centre for Devon and Cornwall was launched in June 2006 at the Royal William Yard, Plymouth during the CABE Urban Design Summer School. A Director is now in place with a strong Shadow Board. Early work includes educational activity with the Geographical Association and the ASC, specialist support for some 'live' publicly-funded projects, and the development of branding and a website for the Centre.

Footnote

2. See www.creatingexcellence.org.uk for a copy of Designing our Environment



Funding South West

Research and Networking

Funding South West works with funders and funding advisers to promote more effective use of funding resources in the Region. John Skrine is Head of Funding South West.

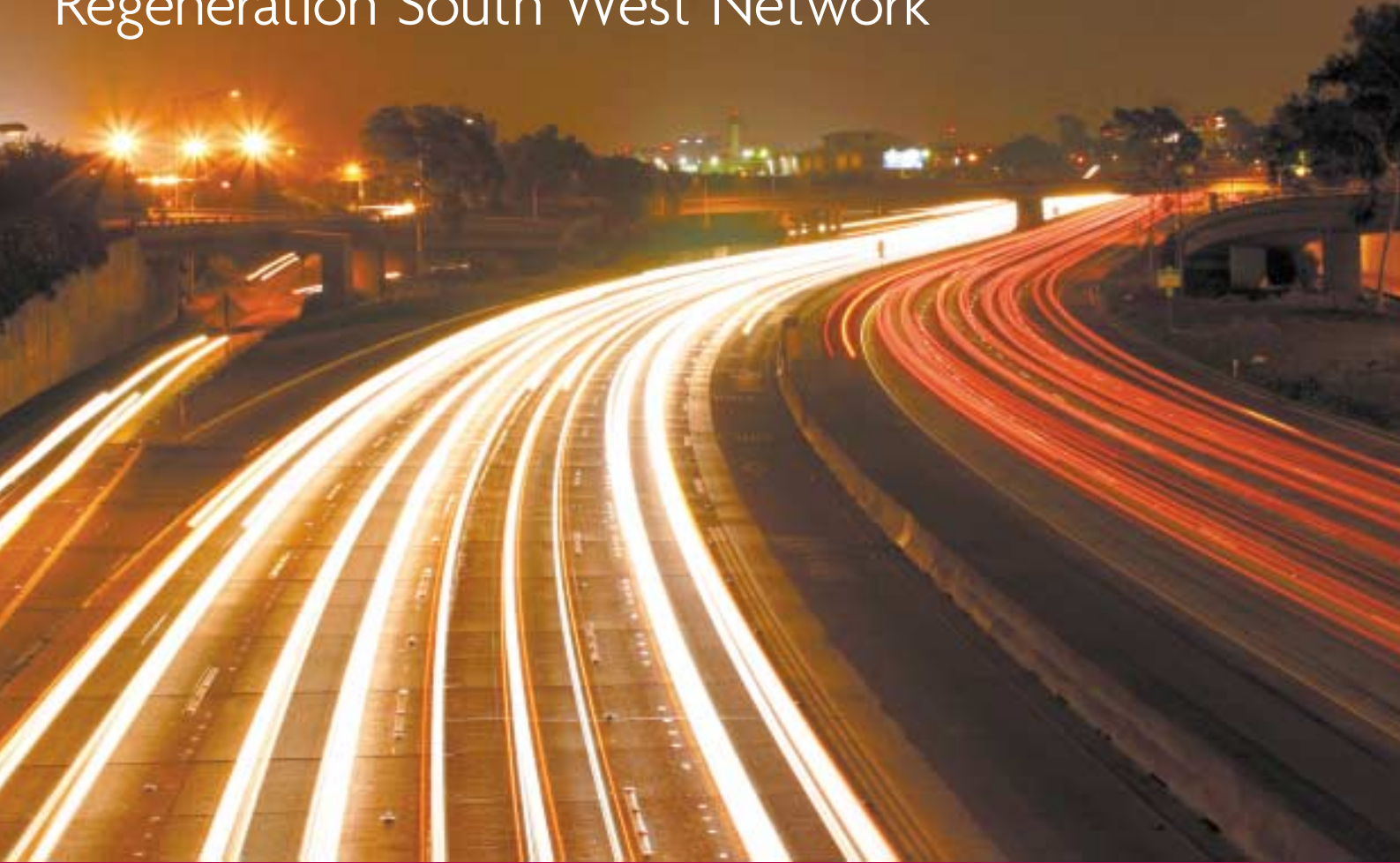
The Funding South West Advisory Group meets bi-monthly and is the hub of a small family of networks which share and further the common interests of its members. These members, reflecting the origins of the group in 2002, are professional partners in resourcing and supporting the voluntary and community sector who come from the statutory, independent and voluntary sectors.

The last year has focused on establishing and developing sub-regional networks of Funding Advice Workers across the whole region, a regional forum for these networks, and a new Funders' Forum.

Support from the Network Development Fund run by creating:excellence and the South West Foundation has been a key factor in the successful launch of Funding Advice Networks. Since May 2006 these networks cover the whole region. They offer funding advisers, an isolated group of workers, a means of networking, sharing knowledge and building skills. Through their forum, called George (also established this year), the networks can now take their agenda forward regionally. In June 2006 these networks held their first annual conference, administered by creating:excellence, and started planning for the future.

For many years most regions have had a forum for funders of the voluntary and a community sector to discuss common issues, but it is only in the past year that consistent progress has been made towards this goal in the South West. A seminar for funders and investors in the sector in March 2006 led to the formation of a steering group, which over the summer has made policy and plans. It aims to influence policy, enable networking, and improve service delivery through training.

Networking Regeneration South West Network



The Regeneration South West Network (RSWN) was established in 2003 and ran until June 2006 under the management of Kate Hathway in the South West Forum. Since this time it has come in-house to creating:excellence with a dedicated post.

The aim continues to be to provide a learning network for people involved in regeneration, renewal and creating sustainable communities.

Over the last year RSWN worked in partnership with South West Foundation to establish a successful £50,000 Network Development Fund to facilitate the

development of networks useful to those involved in sustainable communities' activity.

The network has worked hard to provide numerous learning and networking opportunities which reflect both skills needs on the ground and developments in national policy which affect network members. Over the financial year 2005 to 2006 RSWN learning events were attended by over 830 participants. Topics covered included evaluation, leadership, public speaking, running successful events, networking, and making social inclusion work.

Marketing - getting the message across

In the past year, creating:excellence has worked with other organisations, nationally and regionally, to promote skills and knowledge in sustainable communities and to encourage more people to consider careers in this area. Alice Hindle heads up marketing activity for the organisation.

We sponsored and helped publish a national guide to careers in sustainable communities and a guide to the work of the regional centres of excellence

As well as holding our own learning events, we have sponsored four other events in the South West which fitted with our objectives and helped us to reach a wider audience. We have created a set of new banner stands which are used at events to help explain our learning, funding, design and evidence activity.

Staff members have regularly spoken, and taken workshops, at events both within the region and nationally.

The creating:excellence web site www.creatingexcellence.org.uk is constantly evolving and our networks continue to attract new members at a healthy rate. We have been able to use our web network to attract people to learning events and our web newsletter reaches over 900 people.

There are now 425 members of our Regenerators United network, compared to 300 a year ago. Creating regular opportunities for these people to meet, virtually or in person, to swap ideas, discuss their work, and grow their skills, form a big part of our networking and marketing plans over the next year.

Accounts for creating:excellence

Summary Financial Report

For the year ending 31st March 2006

Creating:excellence received grant income of £689,579 from South West Regional Development Agency and from the Government Office and other income of £61,755.

This income was expended on running the business at East Reach House in Taunton including £338,305 programme of work, £246,711 salaries, £163,705 office costs leaving a surplus at year end of £2,613.

Summary of Results		£
Total incoming resources		751,334
Total outgoing resources		-748,721
Retained surplus carried forward at 31st March 2006		2,613

Balance Sheet at 31st March 2006		£	£
Fixed Assets			29,585
Current Assets	216,993		
Creditors	-227,233		
Net Current Liabilities			-10,240
			19,345

Represented by:-			
Deferred Grants			16,732
Reserves			2,613
			19,345

Record of Achievements 2005/6

Over the past year creating:excellence has commissioned research, held numerous events, piloted courses, created publications, and developed its website, to help improve the skills and knowledge of people working to make sustainable communities a reality. Here are some of the highlights from the past year.

Courses: Real Ways of Learning

A programme of the real ways of learning experiences has been organised to increase people's confidence to promote such learning activities within their own organisations. The programme expects to reach around 400 people.

Course: Project Cycle Management (PCM) – Sept and Oct 05

Two courses were held in the region using Logical Frameworks (LogFrames), the process to be used in future for European funding streams. 22 people attended the two day courses and we will continue to run PCM courses.

Course: Key Areas Training – Apr and May 06

Around 45 officers from Swindon Borough Council and East Devon District Council's Planning and Development teams attended two learning sessions around the development process, negotiation skills, and the economics of good design and sustainable construction. The successful programme will be piloted again in the South East and in the East Midlands for potential national roll out.

Regional Conference: creating:communities – Oct 05

Over 170 people attended a two-day conference with plenaries and workshops focusing on the eight themes that the Government has identified as being essential for the creation of sustainable communities.

Conference: Evaluation – a question of thought! – Nov 05

75 people attended this regional conference led by UK experts. The day showed how evaluation can be used to help develop staff and projects, and looked at gathering evidence for mainstreaming.

Conference: The What, Why, When and Wow of Local Area Agreements – Dec 05

Over 100 people attended this conference to raise awareness of, and involvement in, Local Area Agreements. Speakers included Sir Mike Pitt (Swindon Borough Council), Jane Henderson (IDeA), Helen Hughes (IDeA) and Hazel Stutley (Peninsula Strategic Health Authority).

Conference: By George! Now we're Talking

Funding Advisers met in June 2006 to celebrate the establishment of their networks and discuss the results of research into funding advice.

Master class: 'Whole System Working' - Sept 2005

Professor Danny Burns lead a master class on 'Whole System Working' for 17 senior officers from Bristol City Council, Government Office for the South West (GOSW), The Bristol Partnership, and South West Regional Development Agency (RDA).

Seminars: Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery

Five specialist themed evidence seminars were delivered between Sept 05 and Jul 06 to over 200 professionals from across the region.

Seminars: Fresh Perspectives on Sustainable Communities – Apr and Jul 06

Two lunch time seminars saw high level guest speakers challenging the existing perspectives of their audience.

Action Learning Set: Making Social Inclusion Work – Mar to May 06

This action learning set focused on issues and developing skills to improve work in social inclusion.

Events: Funders' Seminars

Popular seminars on full cost recovery enabled funders to understand and apply new principles aimed at providing fairer funding for voluntary and community groups.

Events: SELD support for other events

The SELD team ran workshops in, and contributed to a further eleven events both regionally and nationally reaching 600 professionals.

Events: Speaking with Impact – Oct/Nov 05

Training to improve public speaking was held in Gloucestershire and Devon.

Events: Essential Evaluation – Jan/Feb 06

Events on evaluation techniques were held in Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire and Devon.

Events: Meaningful Meetings, Effective Events – Mar 06

Practical learning opportunities focusing on better meetings and events were held in Gloucestershire and Devon

Events: Networking or Not Working? – May/Jun 06

Network development surgeries were organised in Somerset and Cornwall.

Events: Essential Leadership Skills – Jul 06

A day long workshop in Somerset saw people addressing their leadership skills.

Publication: Real Ways of Learning

Launched at our Regional Conference in Oct 2005, it describes the range of learning experiences that people can access through creating:excellence. These include Action Learning Sets, Mentoring, Networking, Shadowing, Project Visits, Study Tours, and Multi-disciplinary Learning.

Publication: Design Review Panel Leaflet

A leaflet explaining the Design Review Panel is available at www.designsouthwest.org.uk.

Publication: Housing Association Design Champions

We sponsored and assisted with the publication of a brochure to promote design champions in Housing Associations.

Publications: Funding Advice – What difference does it make?

The results of the research into funding advice were published in various formats to show the positive difference that good funding advice can make to the health of the voluntary and community sector.

Publications: Explaining the Funding Networks

Leaflets have been produced to explain and help promote the Funding South West, George and the Funders' Forum.

Publication: Celebrating the Regeneration South West Network

A publication was produced to celebrate the work of this network at the point of its administrative transition into creating:excellence. This was issued as an insert in New Start magazine in the South West and sent to network members.

Publication: Making Places Work

Creating:excellence sponsored and contributed to this guide, to careers in regeneration and sustainable communities, which formed part of the ethical careers guide.

Publication: Regional Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Communities

Creating:excellence managed the production of this leaflet explaining the work of England's regional centres of excellence.

Publication: Business Plan 2006-9

A comprehensive and detailed business plan has been produced. This is available at www.creatingexcellence.org.uk.

Networking: Funding Adviser Networks

Funding Adviser Networks have been successfully established across the South West and they have a forum called 'George' which represents their views on a regional basis.

Networking: Funders Forum

A network for Funders has been established as a regional forum.

Research: Learning for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP)

Research was commissioned to report on the learning support requirements of LSPs. Creating:excellence is now working in partnership across the region to develop a programme to deliver the learning support identified.

Research: Design and Historic Environment Champions

We commissioned research by the Architecture Centre to locate Design or Historic Environment Champions in Local Authorities, and to assess their broad skill levels.

Research: Assessing the importance of good funding advice

Research commissioned by Funding South West explored models of funding advice provision in the region, providing evidence of the value, in cash and non-cash terms, of funding advice linked to capacity building, and the patchy nature of its provision in the region.

Website: Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery pages

The team developed dedicated web pages (www.seldsw.org.uk) with 23 evidence resources and good practice examples.

Consultancy: SELD Assignments

SELD carried out assignments in Bristol, Bournemouth and North Somerset supporting Neighbourhood Renewal, Neighbourhood Management, Local Economic Growth Initiative and Local Area Agreement delivery.

Consultancy: South West Design Review Panel

This has met 12 times to review 32 schemes.



creating:excellence
the south west centre for sustainable communities

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