



*It ain't what we do; it's the way that we do it.*  
**Learning to release your community's potential**

**A half-day consultative conference**  
**held at Learning South West on Thursday 2 December 2004**

## **Conference Report**



**This event was supported by the Government Office in the South West**

## 1 Background

The *Egan Review: skills for sustainable communities*, published in 2003, recognises that regeneration will not be achieved through improvements to the physical environment alone. For regeneration to be sustainable, the focus needs to be on the *people* in any given community. This is particularly significant to the learning and skills sector.

The *Egan Review* defines *sustainable communities* as the 'common goal':  
*Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.*

This vision is not limited to deprived areas; it is a common goal for all those concerned with building a sustainable society.

References to sustainability and sustainable development appear increasingly throughout government policy and regional strategies. This in turn raises the question, to what extent do the various arms of Government at national, regional and local level really take account of each others' actions and priorities? The conference therefore included a presentation on the Integrated Regional Strategy, *Just Connect*.

## 2 The Event

Forty delegates took part in the conference which was timed to coincide with Learning South West's Annual General Meeting. The conference sought to relate two issues:

- the implication of the *Egan Review* to the learning and skills sector
- the extent to which common concern for *sustainability* suggests policy coherence

### 2.1 Blind Date

The event began with a sketch based on the 'Blind Date' show. A student from Somerset College of Arts and Technology, Tom Lowday, volunteered to join us as a prospective 'single' while members of Learning South West staff played the roles of three 'suitors' (a learning provider, a community worker and a property developer) and of course, Cilla.

Our student posed the question:

*I want to work in the community and help to build their potential. Why should I choose your pathway to do this?*

The learning provider offered an individual learning plan plus advice and guidance so that Tom could benefit from the right national vocational qualification while the community worker suggested a spell of volunteering to gain direct, frontline experience. The property developer noted that Tom had skills that they could use right now and they could put him through college to get a qualification relevant to construction. Faced with these options Tom's response was:

*You've all got something I want. But I think you should all get out more and maybe talk to each other*

### 3 The Speakers

**3.1 Sophie Churchill**, Chief Executive of RegenWM, the West Midlands Regional Centre of Excellence gave a presentation entitled *Lefthandedness, Skills and Practice*. She echoed the Blind Date result with the reminder that Egan identifies seven components of regeneration but “it’s the integration which is missing”. Egan calls for partnership among professionals and representatives who are concerned with building sustainable communities as well more community involvement.

The reference to ‘lefhandedness’ came from *One Way Street* by Walter Benjamin:

*These are the days when no-one should rely unduly on his ‘competence’.  
Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.*

This is the key challenge facing the learning and skills sector, i.e. how to break from rigid qualifications-driven learning provision in order to survive in a “messy but exciting market place” where unconventional approaches will win the day.

The slides for Sophie’s presentation are provided under Appendix I but her final slide on implications for learning and skills provides a useful summary:

- Shadowing, multi-disciplinary learning, mentoring, coaching
- Lower focus on distance, web and e-learning
- Traditional routes broadened
- Unconventional routes targeted
- Professional institutions under pressure
- HE and FE required to be much more market-savvy
- Messy but exciting market place
- Intelligent accreditation; caution about qualifications

Fig 1. Implications for learning and skills providers (Source: RegenWM)

One message that Sophie emphasised was that there is still a need for experts in the traditional sense; the difference lies in the shared generic skills and cross-sectoral understanding that is required to plan and deliver sustainable communities.

**3.2 Hannah Hickman**, Policy Advisor for the South West Regional Assembly presented *Just Connect: The Integrated Regional Strategy and Implication for Learning and Skills*. Hannah pointed out the four-fold purpose of the Integrated Regional Strategy:

- Clear statement of objectives and outcomes for the region
- Context for other regional strategies
- Framework of policy to enable the joining up of regional strategies
- Basis for encouraging better coordination of policy delivery and action

Hannah outlined the process of developing the strategy, the main challenges facing the region and the five inter-related headline objectives of the strategy; her presentation appears under Appendix I.

Learning and skills are important to all aspects of the region's development and hence the Integrated Regional Strategy. This was reflected in one of the IRS's "crunch objectives:

*to focus on raising the attainment of skills at all levels, and at all ages to improve the life chances of individuals and the long term economic prosperity of the region*

The next task will be the preparation of a delivery plan to be called *Now Connecting* and a number of key regional agencies will be responsible for steering this process.

### **3.3 Questions**

During questions, the issue of the audit trail required for projects was raised and how this places a huge burden on community groups and community-based projects. In the discussion others supported this view and pointed out how this hampers delivery.

Another question highlighted the need for learning to be made accessible to people who cannot attend full-time courses or blocks of direct training delivered in day-long chunks.

The theme that seemed to link the issues raised was that of flexibility. There was a call for policy makers and managers to recognise that people's working (and broader) lives cannot be accurately measured or defined through narrow targets. The nature of Learning and Skills Council funding linked to qualifications was seen as a particularly significant example of funding policy failing to reflect or respond to the complexity of people's lives and learning.

### **3.4 The Egan has landed**

Paul Vare of Learning South West took a few minutes to explain that the *Egan Review* goes further than earlier reports because it actually lists over a hundred occupations that are directly concerned with creating sustainable communities as well as many associated professions.

The *Egan Review* identifies generic 'sustainability skills' and recommends that learning providers "review their training programmes to ensure these include both the generic skills and an appreciation of sustainable communities." Successful delivery lies in people working together, "many of whom may not have realised in the past that they had anything to do with each other, or with sustainable communities." There will always be architects, nurses and police, etc.; the difference will be in the way that they think and work together – not *what* they do but *the way* that they do it. This will happen when people learn about each other as they acquire their job-specific skills.

The Egan Review suggests a new *National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills* as a mechanism to deliver skills across all relevant occupations. Paul questioned whether such a centre was an opportunity or a threat to learning providers in the region. Consultations on the national centre will be taking place in the near future.

## 4 The Matrix

Participants were invited to work in three groups to explore the connections between policy and practice within the learning and skills sector in relation to sustainable communities. Groups were assigned three tasks:

- (i) *Context, contributors and connections*: brainstorm all the public, private and voluntary bodies involved in generating sustainable communities and map the connections. Discuss how they interrelate e.g. through lines of policy, funding or influence.
- (ii) *Barriers and bottlenecks*: identify the issues that work against coherent sustainable community development
- (iii) *Opportunities and actions*: where possible suggest ways forward

### 4.1 Context, contributors and connections

Using 'post-it' notes, all three workshop groups brainstormed lists of agencies (see Appendix II). In attempting to arrange these they highlighted the complexity of the learning and skills field. Points noted by the different groups included:

- a lack of knowledge of each others' activities leads to a high degree of overlap
- different language is used to describe the same thing in different sectors
- competitive funding tends to heighten disunity
- people need to know the bigger picture as there are knock-on effects for others
- the 'matrix' is three-dimensional (participants placed post-it notes over each other indicating for example that they all worked with the Regional Development Agency although they didn't necessarily know about each other).

Tracing these links could be a useful assessment tool, identifying whether the relevant agencies for a given programme were being addressed (Fig 2).

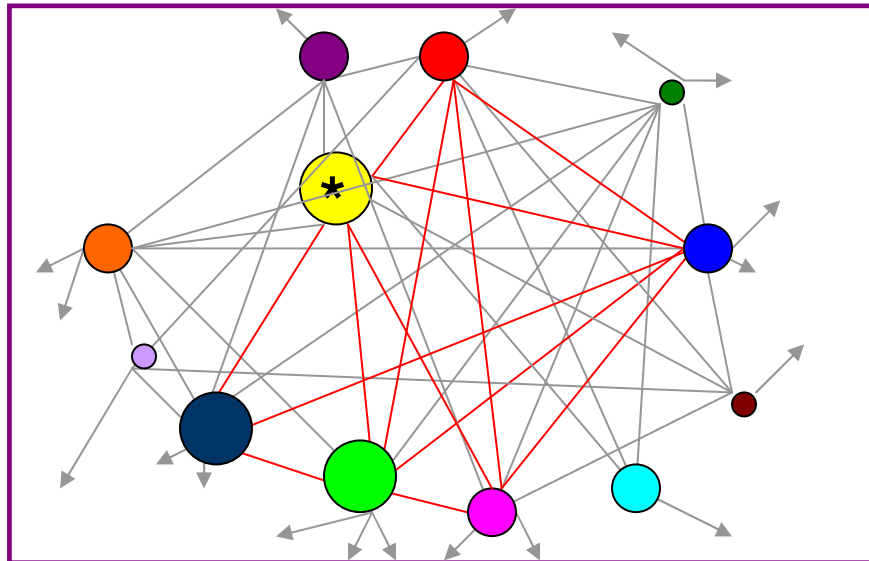


Fig. 2 The organisation (marked \*) has many links within the learning and skills web – the red lines indicate relevant links for a given project or programme.

Another way of visualising the terrain was as a series of silos, each representing a Government agency or funding stream. It is quite in order for each silo to develop its own expertise and distribute funds efficiently down the line provided that they are clearly linked by common policies, these could be seen as gantries connecting the silos (Fig 3).

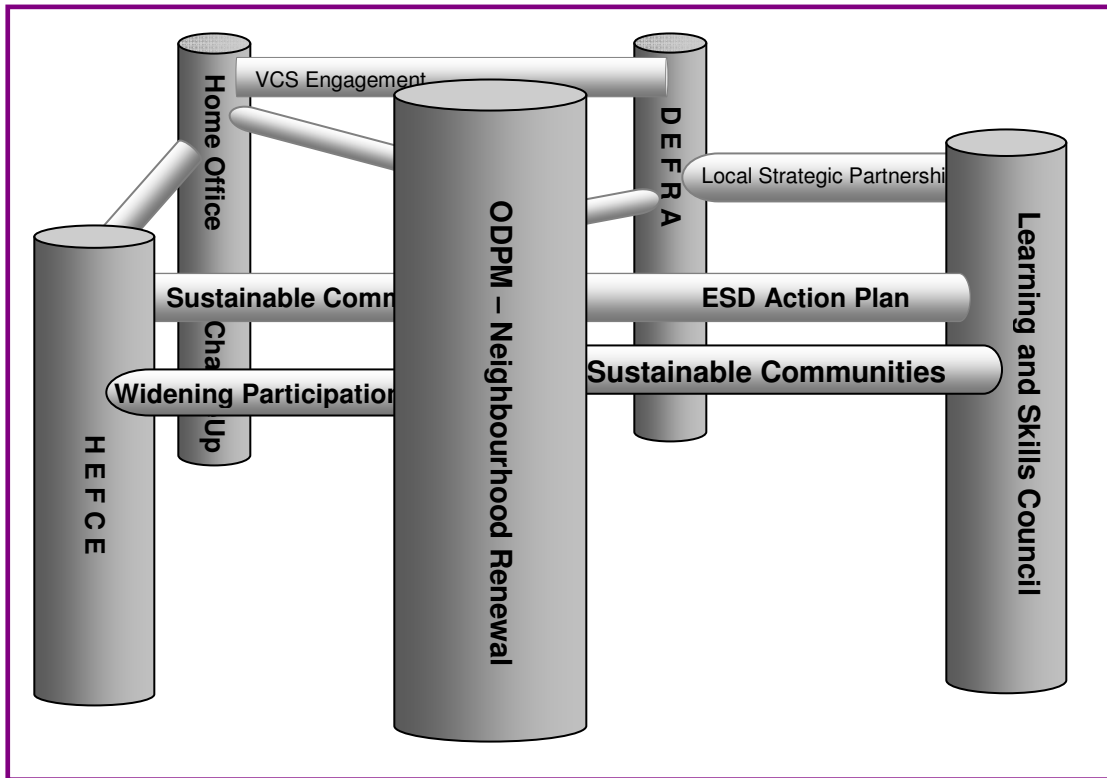


Fig. 3 Policy gantries connecting funding silos

#### 4.2 Barriers and Bottlenecks

Participants tended to identify barriers or bottlenecks in relation to Government policy although some sector-specific experience did emerge in the discussions.

Barriers that might be addressed by Government at various levels included:

- Simplistic policy – not reflecting the complexity experienced by individuals and small organisations
- Failure to deliver on promises – raising expectations with new structures or funding streams that don't actually break the mould e.g. Change Up
- Consulting people without checking that they are informed of the issues leading to partisan or ill-informed decision-making
- Replication – this can refer to policy overlap but also to the problem of inflexibly when generic lessons are applied to contexts where the pattern does not fit

- Accountability – problems arise where there are no clear lines of responsibility
- Membership of local strategic partnerships (LSPs) – often chaired and/or dominated by council members or staff so thinking is not new

Other barriers included:

- The nature of voluntary sector funding – short-term funding with rigid policy-driven criteria diverts voluntary sector organisations from serving the real needs of their constituencies
- Restricted capacity to deliver among many of the players – often a case of on-the-job learning required
- Perceptions of others – there is a lack of trust and people often have an unfairly pessimistic view of what people are like in other organisations or sectors
- Unequal partners – partnership is often encouraged by funding criteria but while this is imposed on some groups, larger institutions (e.g. universities) may be in a position to choose *not* to partner others

#### **4.3 Opportunities and Actions**

Ten points were gathered from the discussions on the day ranging from general to very specific suggestions:

1. Open communication – network across traditional sector boundaries, build trust
2. Common interests – recognise that many of us want the same thing
3. Look out for new communities (linked to 2); there are many ways to define communities e.g. common interests or values
4. The policy process is not one-way; it can be turned on its head FROM community/interest groups to Government – look for the opportunities to do this
5. School/college/community engagement – the formal sector wants and needs partnership with ‘outside’ agencies
6. Improve funding mechanisms – funding *is* helpful but could be more flexible
7. Informal Learning – many of the sustainability skills, knowledge and attitudes may best be learned informally, an opportunity to use systems designed for the recognition of prior learning
8. Local strategic partnerships have a unique cross-sectoral, linking role, it is critical that their members understand the valuable nature of this position
9. Work through European Office
10. Recognise the continuity and consistency in our lives – if all those involved in regional agendas shared their knowledge with their personal contacts at the local level, regional understanding would be greatly enhanced.

## 5 Recommendations to the Government Office in the South West

The Government Office in the South West (GOSW) supported this conference with a view to gaining recommendations for their Skills & Knowledge Action Plan 2005/06. This section highlights discussion themes of particular relevance to GOSW.

### 5.1 Local strategic partnerships (LSPs)

The cross-sectoral nature of LSPs was highlighted as an example of 'sustainability thinking in action'. LSP members may need support in recognising their role in this light and thinking/acting in a more integrated fashion. **Support to LSP learning** is therefore recommended as a priority for the Skills & Knowledge Action Plan.

### 5.2 The Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS)

One way of identifying common interests is to **link with the IRS** which provides a policy framework to enable the joining up of regional strategies. Two possible priorities for GOSW's Skills & Knowledge Team are (i) ensure that its activities support the IRS, identifying links to its five key objectives and (ii) engage directly in the preparation *Now Connecting*, the IRS delivery plan.

### 5.3 Formal education

While generic skills development and cross-occupational training poses an internal management challenge to learning providers, this may also present an opportunity for GOSW to help **build links between educational institutions** and 'core occupations' (including LSPs). This may involve providing a 'real world' context in which to learn generic skills and/or encourage learners' participation in local democratic processes.

### 5.4 Informal learning

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is revising the national qualifications framework in an effort to cover hitherto non-accredited learning. This will include community-based learning that is often informal in nature and difficult to validate. Where possible GOSW should **support initiatives to build sustainability learning into the revised national qualifications framework**.

### 5.5 Open communication

The emphasis at the conference on linking-up, communicating and suppressing the mutual suspicion that people might have of other sectors is a reminder to all of us. GOSW is no exception and every effort should be made to **let others know** what is going on and why. Communication also involves **listening** to ensure that the policy process is informed by community/interest groups.

## 6 End note

At the end, one participant commented that, "it's not worth linking up to do this unless we know what regeneration is." This brought us neatly back to the starting point: that regeneration or the 'sustainable communities' agenda is simply *a way of understanding the process of development*. It is not about fitting people or places into pre-determined patterns of development, rather it a process of providing the resources and opportunities for people's ideas to emerge and be shared so that they can realise their potential.

## Appendix I                      Text from Speakers' Slides

### ***Learning for Sustainable Communities*** **Sophie Churchill, Chief Executive, RegenWM**

*These are the days when no-one should rely unduly on his 'competence'. Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.*

**Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street***

#### **By way of introduction**

- A take on sustainability
- Egan and sustainable communities
- Implications for learning, left-handedness and practice

#### **'Sustainability': a flavour of the debate**

- Environmentally specific
- Integrating / ground-breaking
- Banal
- Obscure
- West Midlands different from South West?

#### **Egan Review on Sustainable Communities: a case study**

- Seven parts of the Egan 'wheel', even though building homes is the impetus
- It's the integration which is missing
- Generic skills are the critical ones
- Environmental protection competing with other definitions

#### **Policy coherence?**

- ODPM baby
- Really only a call to use old skills better?
- Cultural, social crisis that we aren't getting more equipped people?  
BUT...
- Generic skills are coming of age as mainstream
- Local delivery will demand policy coherence

#### **Implications for learning and skills providers**

- Shadowing, multi-disciplinary learning, mentoring, coaching
- Lower focus on distance, web and e-learning
- Traditional routes broadened
- Unconventional routes targeted
- Professional institutions under pressure
- HE and FE required to be much more market-savvy
- Messy but exciting market place
- Intelligent accreditation; caution about qualifications

## ***The Integrated Regional Strategy and the potential for learning and skills*** **Hannah Hickman, Regional Policy Manager, SW Regional Assembly**

### **Presentation Structure**

- Purpose of “Just Connect”, the South West’s Integrated Regional Strategy
- What does it say?
- Where does the learning and skills agenda fit?
- “Now Connecting”

### **Purpose**

- Clear statement of objectives and outcomes for the region
- Context for other regional strategies
- Framework of policy to enable the joining up of regional strategies
- Basis for encouraging better coordination of policy delivery and action

### **So what does *Just Connect* say?**

#### SW Challenges (1)

- The region is growing and we anticipate nearly an extra half a million people in the region by 2016
- climate change is a serious global issue already affecting the South West
- we have a significant problem with housing affordability resulting from high demand and relatively low wages
- we have high employment rates but relatively low productivity
- we have a dispersed population, which is a challenge for the effective delivery of services
- we are losing our young people and university graduates

#### SW Challenges (2)

- we are producing waste at a rate disproportionate to our population
- the environment is under pressure, exemplified by loss of and damage to natural and historic assets, increasing demands for natural resources and poor local environmental quality
- we often find it difficult to get around, because there are large distances between places, and the transport infrastructure is often inadequate
- we have marked contrasts in economic performance within the region with the widest variations in GVA/per head of any English region; and
- in stark contrast to the perceived high quality of life offered by the South West, we have significant and persistent pockets of deprivation and inequality

### **Headline Aims**

- Opportunities for the South West
- Challenges for the South West
- Outcomes we want to achieve
- Crunch objectives, requiring integrated approaches

### **Where does learning and skills fit?**

- Everywhere!
- A growing population brings... “people with skills, experiences, talents and creativity”

- Crunch objective: “to focus on raising the attainment of skills at all levels, and at all ages to improve the life chances of individuals and the long term economic prosperity of the region”
- “Now Connecting”

### **Integrated Regional Strategy**

- clear expression of the South West’s needs and aspirations to audiences within and beyond the region
- improved regional decision-making through shared understanding of regional issues
- the potential to maximise resources to the region by providing a coherent message about the region's needs and aspirations, and avoiding duplication of effort by regional bodies
- more mutual support and greater trust between organisations through sharing of ideas and responsibilities
- strength of purpose in the South West

### ***The Egan Has Landed***

**Paul Vare, Learning South West**

#### **Egan Review:**

- Some example ‘Generic Skills’
- Some example ‘Core Occupations’...
- ...and ‘Associate Occupations’

#### **on skills...**

“We recommend that organisations with responsibilities for training those who work in associated occupations review their training programmes to ensure these include both the generic skills and an appreciation of sustainable communities.”

#### **on delivery...**

Not training in isolation but...

“...success will lie in changing the behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of everyone involved, many of whom may not have realised in the past that they had anything to do with each other, or with sustainable communities.”

National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills: *Threat or opportunity?*

## Appendix II

## List of Participants

| Name              | Organisation   |
|-------------------|--|
| Shirley Arayan    | Director<br><b>Norton Radstock College</b>   |
| Jim Austin        | Head of ACET<br><b>Gloucestershire County Council</b>  |
| Nigel Benton      | Network Development Manager<br><b>Western Training Providers</b>   |
| Emily Bird        | Skills and Learning Manager - Lifelong Learning and Information<br><b>South West Regional Development Agency</b> |
| Pam Brookes       | Senior Manager<br><b>Wiltshire Youth Development Service</b>   |
| Jonquil Brooks    | Principal<br><b>East Devon College</b>   |
| Kerin Burke       | Skills for Life Project Manager<br><b>Learning South West</b>  |
| Rupert Butler     | Governor<br><b>Axe Valley Community College (and FSB)</b>  |
| Nick Cashin       | Regional Projects Manager<br><b>Learning South West</b>  |
| Sophie Churchill  | Chief Executive<br><b>Regen WM</b>   |
| Louise Cox        | Acting Regional Development Manager<br><b>Groundworks</b>  |
| Wendy Cranston    | Testbed Learning Community Project<br><b>Exeter Learning City</b>  |
| Mary-Jane Edwards | Co-ordinator<br><b>South West Planning Aid</b>   |
| Sandie Ferrar     | Director of Operations<br><b>Business Link Somerset</b>  |
| Sue Gibbs         | Skills Adviser<br><b>Bridgwater College</b>  |
| David Gladstone   | <b>Training Learning Consultancy Ltd</b>   |
| Betty Gray        | Governor<br><b>Plymouth College of FE</b>  |
| Peter Harding     | Community Services Manager<br><b>Community Council of Devon</b>  |
| Kate Hathaway     | Manager<br><b>Regeneration South West Network</b>  |
| Hannah Hickman    | Regional Policy Manager<br><b>SW Regional Assembly</b>   |
| Paula Jones       | Regional Professional Development Manager and Deputy Chief Executive<br><b>Learning South West</b>               |
| Angela Kerr       | Project Manager<br><b>VISTA (Voluntary Sector Training Alliance)</b>   |
| Lesley Kinsley    | Development Manager (Statutory)<br><b>Soil Association</b>   |
| Steve Lay         | Group Manager : Adult Learning and Leisure<br><b>Somerset County Council</b>                                     |
| Tom Lowday        | Student  |

| Name             | Organisation  |
|------------------|---|
|                  | <b>Somerset College of Arts and Technology</b>                                |
| Yvonne Mackeson  | Link Co-ordinator<br><b>Somerset College of Arts and Technology</b>           |
| Sean Mackney     | Head of Secretariat<br><b>HERDA – SW</b>                                      |
| Liz McGrath      | Chief Executive<br><b>Learning South West</b>                                 |
| Gunnar Moran     | Skills and Knowledge Adviser<br><b>Government Office for the South West</b>   |
| Liz O'Hara       | Training Services Manager<br><b>Careerfinder Ltd</b>                          |
| Ned Seabrook     | Manager<br><b>Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Lifelong Learning Partnership</b> |
| Hannah Sinkie    | Acting Projects Manager<br><b>Bridgwater College</b>                          |
| Julian Slade     | <b>Slade Design and Marketing</b>   |
| Mike Timmins     | <b>VOSCUR</b>   |
| Paul Vare        | Regional Developments Manager<br><b>Learning South West</b>                   |
| Lesley Wagstaffe | Co-ordinator<br><b>Gloucestershire Learning Partnership</b>                   |
| Steve Wheeler    | Chair of Trustees<br><b>The Evaluation Trust</b>                              |
| David Wood       | <b>LSW Board of Directors</b>   |