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The Great Skills Debate: Defining and Delivering the Skills Required for Community Regeneration in England

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ABSTRACT

It is now generally accepted by government, professional institutions and employers that there are severe shortages in the numbers of practitioners entering key built environment professions, and that there are deficiencies in the skills of those charged with creating Sustainable Communities and promoting community regeneration. A series of reports prepared largely by government appointees have been commissioned to both define the deficiencies and to identify possible solutions. This article reflects on the processes of defining skills and competencies in regeneration and evaluates the strategies put forward to increase the professional skills base. It examines the similarities and differences in the kinds of skills and competencies identified as being deficient and explores how these are most effectively acquired. The paper concludes by challenging some of the implicit assumptions about how learning takes place and explores the contribution of higher education in promoting the improved the acquisition of generic skills. While higher education has considerable expertise in promoting learning through undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, a much deeper cultural change might be required in order to establish learning organisations through 'situated learning'.

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Introduction

The period since the election in the United Kingdom of the Labour Government in 1997 has been one of rapid change in all aspects of policy and delivery in relation to the development of the built environment. As a result, the professions engaged in urban development have also undergone a period of expansion in numbers and in the demands placed on them to deliver increasingly complex, joined-up, strategies. The context in 1997 was that urban policy had become unduly complex and bureaucratic, because of a profusion of single-policy initiatives and funding regimes. In addition, the rapid expansion in the number of projects in the 1990s had caused a shortage of practitioners with appropriate experience of managing multi-disciplinary teams and multi-sectoral boards. One of the first acts of the new Government was to appoint the Urban Task Force under the chairmanship of the architect Richard Rogers to prepare a set of strategic objectives for the future. In 1999 the Task Force published the influential report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (Rogers, 1999). From this arose a series of White Papers and policy documents which took an increasingly inclusive and integrated perspective on the built environment. Subsequent reports and policy documents continued to raise concerns about the lack sufficient numbers, and practitioners with the right mix of skills, to deliver complex strategies such as the Sustainable Communities plan (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2003).

During the period under review, a consortium of Planning Schools and employers formed the Planning Network. In 2000 this was designated a special interest group in planning and regeneration by the Centre for Education in the Built Environment and funded to investigate the contribution of higher education to the debate about skills. This paper draws on the two reports produced by the Planning Network (2001, Bailey & McIntosh, 2004)

An underlying theme of many of these reports has been the need to address perceived skills gaps and deficiencies in those working in the relevant professions. Evidence from employers of at least 100 professions directly or indirectly involved in urban development suggested that there are severe shortages in the numbers entering the relevant professions, and that it is often difficult to recruit practitioners with the necessary skills or expertise. Thus many of the reports and policy documents go to

great lengths to define the skills and expertise that are in greatest demand. Both urban design and town planning have come under particular scrutiny. Durning and Glasson (2004) identify skills shortages and deficiencies in town planning and the government-sponsored agency, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, set up an Urban Design Skills Working Group which reported in 2001 (CABE, 2001). In addition, English Partnerships (2004), the agency responsible for reclamation of contaminated land and brownfield sites in England, commissioned its own internal review of training needs.

This paper sets out to explore some of the issues relating to urban development skills and to evaluate the recommendations put forward by the Urban Task Force, the Egan Review and others as they relate to England. Clearly there are implications for higher education whose traditional role has been to offer vocational undergraduate and postgraduate programmes designed to prepare potential practitioners for careers in what might now be seen as rather narrowly defined professional groupings. Thus Architecture, Planning, Housing, Estate Management and Transport all have recognised qualifications leading into prescribed career pathways. In most cases, the course content is often accredited by a professional institution with varying degrees of prescription as to the curriculum.

The argument being put forward in this paper is that the debate about skills deficiencies has largely been from the practitioners' perspective in that the emphasis has been on setting out lists of skills required in order to deliver government policy. Relatively little attention has been paid to how learning takes place, how skills are acquired and transferred between practitioners and which forms of learning are most effective in a complex organisational framework and rapidly changing policy context.

Before proceeding further, it is worth considering the definitions used. The word 'skills', in the sense of methods acquired through learning or practice, is very rarely defined in any of the reports referred to here and as such, the meaning is largely taken for granted. It is also often used interchangeably with capabilities, competences and attributes. There is a similar level of conceptual confusion in higher education where meanings are taken for granted, rather than clearly defined. In both teaching and urban development, skills are normally sub-divided into those which are *generic* – not

claimed by any particular profession and therefore transferable between professional contexts – and those which are *specific* to one particular professional context such as Architecture. The terms generic and specific skills will be used throughout this paper.

A second area of definition concerns the changing professional domain in which practitioners work. The expansion of the policy debate since 1997 has meant that new arenas of professional activity have opened up to which no one existing profession can lay claim. The mode of operation has also changed so that partnership-working is the usual delivery vehicle and multi-disciplinary teams in both the public and private sectors are now the norm. The Urban Task Force referred to this as promoting the urban renaissance but urban regeneration is now more common. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ODPM has adopted the phrase 'delivering sustainable communities', suggesting a fully integrated economic, social and environmental approach to urban (and rural) living. The Egan Review developed the following definition:

> 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. (Egan, 2004, p.7)

This is an exceedingly broad definition deliberately designed to embrace over 100 core and associated occupations identified by the Egan Review as engaged in creating and maintaining sustainable communities (Egan, 2004, p.53).

'Urban regeneration' is a broad catch-all description of the process of restoring old and creating new, high quality urban communities. A further variant of this is 'community regeneration', suggesting that urban regeneration is no longer solely a professional activity but that it now includes the active participation of local communities in the development and delivery of policy. Community regeneration will be used in this paper to include all aspects of professional and community-based activity.

Education implies the development of a broad understanding of a subject which might include acquiring specific skills, whereas training suggests a more limited acquisition

of particular knowledge and skills relevant to practice. Capacity building is usually applied to the process whereby participants acquire specific skills to enable them to participate in a particular project or partnership. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's report also refers to changing behaviours as part of the learning process, such as entrepreneurial and problem-solving behaviours (NRU, 2002, p.32). University courses are normally referred to as education, whereas the running of short courses for continuing professional development might be called training.

Defining and Resolving the Skills Deficit

The definition of sustainable communities quoted above reflects the broad consensus that community regeneration requires an integrated and joined-up approach to policy implementation where the professions need to work in multi-disciplinary teams. In contrast, as the Urban Task Force report points out, "only 3-4% of the graduates entering relevant urban professions each year will have undertaken….hard-edged multi-disciplinary study" (Rogers, 1999, p.161). The Task Force therefore advocated two main objectives to universities and professional institutions:

> To increase the output of the relevant specialised skills, including retraining for those that have the right professional background but who need to apply it to the task of urban regeneration; second, and critically important, to bring these skills to bear on team working in complex everyday situations. (Rogers, 1999, p.161)

To achieve this the Urban Task Force proposed a much closer working relationship between government departments, further and higher education and professional institutions. This should give rise to a strategy to improve the skills-base through changes to the National Curriculum, increasing the inter-disciplinary content of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and the setting of targets for increased provision of Continuing Professional Development training in urban development.

Because it was felt that universities 'may give too academic an emphasis, divorced from the real world' (Rogers, 1999, p.165), it was argued that a network of Regional Centres of Excellence (RCE) should be established to "act as a resource to the public, private and voluntary sector, to raise standards across the board and fill gaps in existing provision" (Rogers, 1999, p.165). They would also promote regional

innovation and good practice, co-ordinate urban development training and encourage community involvement in the regeneration process.

Consultants were appointed by the Urban Task Force to investigate the feasibility of establishing the Regional Centres (PriceWaterhouseCoppers, 1999). They traced the idea back to the Millan Report, *Renewing the regions*, (Millan, 1996) which proposed Regional Skills Agencies linked to proposed elected regional chambers. After reviewing a sample of University programmes and short courses, the consultants concluded the main deficiencies were:

- A lack of strategic planning skills;
- Little experience in generic project management;
- A lack of expertise in creating, managing and maintaining local partnership bodies;
- Undue specialisation where the development process is broken down too readily into its constituent parts;
- Too few urban property entrepreneurs to take on 'difficult' development opportunities; and
- A lack of recognition of the intrinsic importance of the urban regeneration process among regulatory bodies.

The timescale advocated by the Task Force proved unduly optimistic. The establishment of joint working between professional institutions, including at least 2000 secondments to acquire international experience, was to be in place by 2000. It was also suggested that the network of RCEs should be established by 2001. None of these targets has been achieved despite confirmation of the Task Force's recommendations in the Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000, p.51).

The key inter-disciplinary skills identified by the Task Force are orientated towards the physical aspects of regeneration:

- Production of design briefs prior to development of strategic design options;
- Co-ordination of procurement methods and competitions to deliver high quality design alternatives;
- Proactive use of the planning system to secure change;
- Community involvement, in planning and implementation stages;
- Integration of physical development programmes with urban management and maintenance, and other economic and social programmes;
- The assembly of land to create meaningful development opportunities;
- Land remediation and reclamation, and ongoing environmental management;
- Project appraisal, management and finance, including strategic planning, procurement, phasing, team working, and dealing with funding bodies and financial institutions;
- Provision and financing of services and infrastructure, managing licensing and consent issues;
- Creating and managing effective arm's length delivery bodies.

The Rogers report was criticised at the time of publication for accentuating physical, design-led solutions over social and economic solutions. However, organisations sympathetic to this approach advocated more emphasis on urban design in schools, higher education and in local authority development work (see for example CABE, 2001). About the same time, a series of inter-departmental Policy Action Teams (PATs) were set up under the aegis of the Social Exclusion Unit. The recommendations of the PATs were later amalgamated into a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001).

PAT 16 took an inter-disciplinary approach to *Learning Lessons* (PAT 16, 2000). This report took the view that:

> There is a shortage of knowledge and skills in a number of the principal regeneration agencies. [This report] shows evidence…that reveals significant failure of some training providers to equip students with the skills and knowledge even to carry out their core functions well. In general, [the evidence]

> points to an absence of strategic purpose or a significant human resources problem such as poor practice skills… (PAT 16, 2000, p.22)

Moreover, many professionals had developed symptoms of 'over-skilling':

> ….too many people working in key public services….are almost over-trained, over-professionalised and departmentalised….There is a need to provide them with a much better cross-professional training so that they can work with communities in high-performing teams. (PAT 16, 2000, p.36)

The PAT 16 report includes a wide variety of recommendations about sharing knowledge and improving the interchange of staff between regeneration agencies in order to increase direct experience of deprived communities. It acknowledged that the development of new skills is not simply a matter of formal training and that new skills do not necessarily lead to changes in behaviour. It noted:

> So much learning takes place informally – new recruits, for example, quickly learn the behaviours and attitudes that are rewarded, the traditional ways of doing things and adopt the assumptions and prejudices of their colleagues. If the way people work is to be changed, better skills and training will not be enough: organisational and professional cultures will also need to be looked at. (PAT 16, 2000, p.63)

It went on to advocate a National Centre for Neighbourhood Renewal in order to promote improved skills, a knowledge management system to share best practice, research and improved leadership in the field. A regional dimension might also be established through the Government Offices or a series of regional centres accredited by the National Centre.

By the time the National Strategy Action Plan (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) had been published, the Government had decided that a National Centre would be too removed from the point of delivery at the neighbourhood level. Instead, the Action Plan advocated a 'skills and knowledge strand' running throughout the National Strategy to be managed by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and delivered through the Government Offices. For example, Local Strategic Partnerships are encouraged to develop Local Learning Development Plans.

By 2002 the NRU had been established within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and it set about two key tasks. First, an on-line knowledge management

system was established (www.renewal.net) to share experience about 'what works' in neighbourhood renewal. Second, a knowledge and skills strategy was published as *The Learning Curve* (NRU, 2002). In contrast to the Urban Task Force report, both these initiatives focused on integrating the social and economic concerns of community regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. Thus the 'knowledge areas' were identified as: worklessness; crime; education; health; reviving local economies; quality of life; and housing and the environment.

The Learning Curve also defined a learning framework broken down into the knowledge base, core skills and behaviours needed by key groups in the neighbourhood renewal process. These were defined as residents, professionals and practitioners and civil servants and policy makers (NRU, 2002, p.34-35). The report identified 23 key tasks to tackle skills deficiencies, involving all levels of government, including the Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies, Learning and Skills Councils, local authorities, and Local Strategic Partnerships.

Unlike the other reports discussed in this section, *The Learning Curve* devotes some space to how people learn rather than simply producing prescriptive lists of what they need to know. The report identifies three types of learning: formal training courses, learning through doing and learning by observing others. It suggests that formal learning needs to change in order to incorporate new knowledge and skills, learning across boundaries and by developing the learning cycle which involves action, reflection, theory and experimentation (NRU, 2002, p.36). It concludes the section by advocating the principles of the learning organisation whereby the culture of the organisation is changed so that staff build learning into everyday practices. Innovative approaches are encouraged, but these should be fully evaluated so that the experience gained is fed back into action and responses. Unfortunately, no further guidance is provided on how cultures can be changed in order to establish a learning organisation.

The most recent policy document to be reviewed here is The Egan Review (2004). In 2002 Sir John Egan, President of the Confederation of British Industry, was invited to carry out an investigation of the skills requirements for those professions directly and indirectly involved in the delivery of the sustainable communities agenda. The first part of the report identifies the component parts of the agenda and discusses ways in

which it can be achieved. The second part investigates the ways in which key skills can be enhanced and sustained at an appropriate level. As with earlier reports, the report lists in some detail what it defines as generic skills necessary for delivering sustainable communities (Egan, 2004, p. 103-105). The generic skills identified in this and other reports are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Generic Skills identified in Four Reports

Urban Task Force 1999	PAT 16 2000	The Learning Curve 2002	The Egan Review 2004
Inter-disciplinary skills	Skills	Core skills	Generic skills
Production of design briefs Co-ordination of procurement methods and competitions to deliver high quality design alternatives Proactive use of the planning system Community involvement Integration of physical development programmes with others Land assembly Land remediation Project appraisal, management and finance Provision of services and infrastructure Creating and managing effective arm's length delivery bodies	Project management Team-building, leadership, management Problem-solving Finance Risk-taking Listening/learning Conflict management Accessing knowledge about 'what works' Working with communities Building skills with communities	**Residents:** Strategic skills, Performance management, Probity and stewardship, Listening, negotiation, consensus building, Conflict resolution. Confidence, Analytical, interpersonal and organisational skills. **Professionals/Practitioners:** Analysing possibilities, Strategic leadership, Management of people, Valuing diversity, Working with partners, Working with the community, Communication, Conflict resolution, Project management, Finance and budgeting, Research, monitoring, evaluation, Risk assessment and management, Mainstreaming, IT skills **Civil servants/policy makers:** Analytical skills, Ideas leadership, Communication, Networking, co-ordinating, Influencing, negotiation, brokering, Consensus building, Partnership working	Inclusive visioning Project management Leadership Thinking/brokering Team/partnership working Making it happen Process/change management Financial management and appraisal Stakeholder management Analysis, decision-making, learning from mistakes, evaluation Communication Conflict resolution Customer awareness

Source: Adapted from Rogers, 1999, PAT 16, 2000, NRU, 2002 and Egan, 2004

Many of the recommendations in the Egan Review repeat suggestions made in earlier reports such as encouraging closer collaboration between employers, professional institutions, educators and government agencies. Employers, in particular, should play a bigger part in promoting compulsory systems of accredited CPD. In addition, employers should work with others to develop a system of (on-line) occupational benchmarks and that the RCEs should play a role in disseminating good practice.

The aspect of the report receiving most attention was the proposal to establish a National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills. This should seek to "develop world class skill sets amongst all those involved in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities" (Egan, 2004, p.75). Egan argued the National Centre should:

- Provide a high profile national focus for sustainable community skills development and research;
- Work with education providers, employers, professional institutions, relevant Sector Skills Councils, RCEs, and other skills bodies to provide and promote excellence in sustainable community skills development;
- Act as a catalyst for innovation and a focus for national and international debate on sustainable community skills issues;
- Act as a resource and communications hub for individuals, organisations and communities working in the sustainable communities agenda;
- Work with others to operationalise the common goal, and to ensure its relevance to the public's requirements; and
- Research with other partners the long term environmental standards that sustainable communities should aim for, and how, in practical terms, these should be achieved. (Egan ,2004, p.76)

A working group from the Egan Review, together with staff from the NRU, was charged with investigating the feasibility and role of the new centre. This was supported by ODPM and was launched as the Academy for Sustainable Communities in Manchester in February 2005 (see www.ascskills.org.uk for more details).

The concept of a National Centre is an attractive one in that it would highlight the need for a national system of training and skills development for community

regeneration. It could also play an important role as an advocate for change at central government level and could provide an important focus for the work at regional level for the RCEs. However, its rationale might be in doubt if it becomes too divorced from action at the regional and especially the local level, where skills training is most needed. It will also need to decide how far it is involved in accrediting and badging training courses and how it addresses those areas where there is a lack of relevant training organisations or universities able to offer support in the relevant disciplines. A further challenge relates to how far it is able to bridge the fault-line in regeneration between those primarily advocating an environmental, urban design approach (such as CABE) and those favouring the social and economic approach to neighbourhood renewal and neighbourhood management.

The reports cited above all incorporate varying degrees of research into the nature and extent of the skills deficit in the field of community regeneration. They are largely written from the perspective of government and the employers of regeneration practitioners. Hence the emphasis on the shortage of entrants to vocational courses and the lack of professionals with appropriate skills to deliver the sustainable communities agenda. The Urban Task Force first highlighted the perceived shortage of those with appropriate skills and *The Learning Curve* and Egan Review went on to list the generic skills which are in greatest need. Both PAT 16 and the Egan Review proposed setting up a National Centre to promote good practice and the outlines of a learning strategy. Despite some government support (but no additional resources), by 2005 only four or five RCEs have become operational.

The broad conclusion which can be drawn from this review is that the debate about skills is biased towards the needs of employers, the assumption being that new and improved skills can be 'bolted-on' to practitioners through the establishment of a national and regional centres. Very little or nothing is said about how learning takes place, what contribution higher education and other providers can make to increasing provision, and the extent to which organisational and cultural changes are needed within the world of practice in order to reinforce the learning process. Some of these issues are addressed in the next section.

The Implications for Higher Education

The debate about teaching skills in higher education has been a long one marked by a gradual shift in understanding, from teaching skills as part of the intellectual grounding in a particular discipline to the addition of skills in the curriculum in order to enhance employability. The built environment disciplines have always been perceived as vocational subjects and have thus emphasised the need to teach skills relevant to professional practice. For example, the Royal Town Planning Institute encourages Planning Schools to incorporate defined knowledge, skills and values into accredited courses. Planning courses have also traditionally advocated the acquisition of skills for planning through a variety of modes of teaching: project-based learning, studio work, study visits, simulations of 'real world' problems and work experience placements. Quality control has been maintained through a variety of internal assessment procedures, including exams, project work, essays and dissertations. Students who pass the course are deemed to have achieved proficiency in the use of the required skills.

However, built environment disciplines are also designed to teach the broader academic skills which have become the hallmark of any undergraduate degree course. These have been defined as:

- Communication skills;
- Information management skills;
- Use of modern communication and information technologies;
- People skills (such as team and group working, ethics and recognition of diversity);
- Personal skills (time management, personal responsibility and lifelong learning).

(Fallows 1999, p.123)

In practice, these ‘academic’ skills are often perceived as overlapping with the generic skills required for professional practice and are assessed as a single skills set. These generic skills also overlay other learning outcomes and assessment criteria rarely distinguish between those skills relating to the broad educational purpose of higher education, and those considered necessary for professional practice.

There is a further level of confusion between the generic skills necessary for practice and the specialised skills which relate directly to the discipline being studied. Both generic and specialised skills tend to be incorporated into the curriculum in a number of different ways:

1. The totally embedded model: Here generic and specialised skills development takes place within the general curriculum and across the range of modules or courses offered;

2. The targeted skills model: Here the institutional position is that different subject discipline areas have naturally occurring skills development opportunities and similarly have different requirements;

3. The skills module: Here the institution has taken the decision to offer its students a specific module or course that focuses specifically on skills development;

4. The external module: Here the students are encouraged (or even required) to gain skills relevant to future employment through work experience or other extra-curricular activity (such as work-based learning or a year out in practice). (Fallows, 1999, p.124)

In vocational courses, such as those in built environment disciplines, these approaches are often interwoven using creative project-based and studio teaching methods and assessment.

Commentators on the skills debate in higher education point to growing confusion in the terminology used and the different and overlapping meanings ascribed to the terms used. In one of the few authoritative studies of skills, Bennett *et al*. (2000)

found a shifting set of ill-defined concepts being used in a series of government reports:

> For some [agencies] it was common skills, for others common learning outcomes, general skills or personal transferable skills. This problem of terminology is now endemic….a situation that is exacerbated by the remarkably short shelf-life of many of these terms…..Indeed the key skills recently advocated by the Dearing Report (1997) not only confuse because of the use of mixed vocabulary, such as key, transferable and generic, but also exemplify the lack of theoretical justification, containing a mixture of technical skills such as IT, interpersonal skills such as communication and cognitive skills such as problem-solving. (Bennett *et al*., 2000, p.11)

Bennett *et al*. argue that "the term core skills has a variety of contested meanings and therefore any study of these skills in higher education first necessitates a conceptualisation that provides both a clear and justified definition, together with a theoretical model of course provision in terms of the knowledge and skills outcomes planned for and taught" (Bennett *et al*., 2000, p.15). They contrast two models: transfer and situated learning.

The first, the transfer model, is currently the dominant one in higher education. This assumes that skills transfer easily, or automatically, from education to the working environment. Unfortunately, whilst intuitively attractive, evidence suggests that the transfer of skills from one context to another rarely happens (Perkins and Salmon, 1994). The alternative model is situated learning which argues that "much of what is learned is specific to the situation in which it is learned, that is, the nature of the situation and circumstances in which knowledge is acquired is likely to influence the subsequent deployment of that knowledge in other situations and settings" (Bennett *et al.*, 2000, p.16). They go on to argue that, from this perspective, a far greater understanding of the social, cultural and technical context in which learning takes place is essential:

> In summary, the interpretation of the problem of transfer from this point of view is that the search is not for how knowledge or skills are transported 'whole' from one setting to another, but for how learning and performance in one setting prepares one to learn the rules, habits and knowledge appropriate to a new setting'. (Bennett *et al.*, 2000, p.16-17)

The implications of this for built environment disciplines are far-reaching since most educators tend to adopt the intuitive, transfer model whereby the acquisition of skills in the classroom or studio can be relatively easily transferred into the workplace. In contrast, the situated learning model outlined above suggests that students will have great difficulty in applying skills learned in the university and will need to acquire a good working knowledge of the organisational context before new skills can be acquired.

There may be significant differences here between the structure and content of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. There is a strong case for increasing the content of undergraduate courses with work-based learning and 'live' projects. With part-time postgraduate students, it may be that closer links with their employer can provide fruitful opportunities to combine situated learning from the work place with reflections on practice in an academic environment. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on CPD and in-house training may suggest recognition of the fact that more effective learning takes in specific working environments.

Conclusions

The reports reviewed in this article all point to the conclusion that a watershed has been reached in the education and training of those involved in community regeneration. All have highlighted in various ways the shortage of skilled practitioners entering the field and the absence of effective training mechanisms to ensure that an adequate number of practitioners are available to deliver the sustainable communities agenda. The point has been reached where there is a danger that demands made by the policy context outpace the supply of practitioners. In addition, it has been noted that the dominant solutions put forward to the skills deficit is more integrated, inter-disciplinary education in universities and a national, and regional centres able to match the demands for training and skill enhancement with new forms of supply.

Yet both PAT 16 and *The Learning Curve* included references to the need to challenge organisational and professional cultures so that new forms of informal learning become embedded in everyday practice. However, neither report proposed ways of taking this fruitful area of the skills debate further. Instead, the new national or regional centres have been proposed with very little indication of how they can

impact on professional custom and practice. In this respect, the reports have been repetitive and implementation has been very slow.

The built environment professions have been urged to increase recruitment and to break out of their traditional approach to course design by encouraging multi-disciplinary courses to reflect changes already evident in professional practice. Universities are equally outdated in their provision of courses, the majority of which reflect long-established divisions of technical responsibility. Ways need to be found to encourage more integrated approaches to the built environment. While many high quality, integrated modules and courses are offered with inter-disciplinary elements, most still socialize students into a particular professional 'world view', such as Architecture, Planning or Estate Management. In a limited number of cases joint awards are offered, involving accreditation by more than one professional body.

The discussion of educational philosophies of skills development revealed considerable confusion in that the debate in higher education lacks agreed definitions and intellectual rigour. The theory of situated learning suggests that the learning process needs to be grounded in a thorough understanding of the social, cultural and policy context and that more effective learning takes place informally through knowledge transfer, learning by example and informal mechanisms such as work shadowing and mentoring.

It was noted earlier that the reports discussed here were silent about how learning takes place and the role that employers might play in encouraging staff to acquire and enhance new skills. Perhaps one of the key roles to be played by the national Academy and the RCEs should be to define criteria for accrediting employers and partnership bodies as learning organisations. But there are very few models of what a learning organisation in this context could or should be. In a recent survey of skills and recruitment, *Regeneration & Renewal* (2004) found that 70 per cent of respondents said that uncompetitive salaries were a major block to recruitment and 54 per cent identified the lack of permanent posts as a major barrier to the recruitment of people with the right skills. This suggests there may be more fundamental reasons why insufficient highly skilled practitioners are attracted to the built environment professions. One of the unspoken messages coming from the reports reviewed in this

paper is that employers no longer consider it their role to develop the skills of their staff. This has been largely passed over to universities and now the RCEs. If, as academic sources suggest, learning is more effective in the work context, the regeneration 'industry' should reclaim this responsibility and work closely with universities and other agencies to deliver new and innovative training packages.

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