

Recruiting and retaining staff is a major challenge for regeneration initiatives, many of which have been held back while they struggle to find people of sufficient calibre to fill vacancies. Recruiting locally can seem like a distant ideal, but it is an ideal worth pursuing. Workout, **New Start's** expert adviser, suggests a few ways forward.

# You just can't get the staff

**Q** Every time our neighbourhood group successfully bids for funds to pay staff and advertise in the neighbourhood we struggle to find people with the right qualifications.

For the past four years we have been involved with our local strategic partnership and have been

trying, wherever possible, to use local people to carry out our regeneration work. Unfortunately the problem is particularly bad at the more senior levels and local people are getting restive. They tell us that it is all very well 'the council' saying they are spending millions getting the residents in our

neighbourhood back to work but the only people they see benefiting from these millions are more council staff who live outside the neighbourhood and spend the first year of their job getting to know the place and the people.  
What can we do?

**A** You won't be surprised to know that you are not alone. A great deal of thought – expensive thought at that – has gone into the vexed question of how to find local people to help build their communities, but for good reason.

Firstly, by employing local people in a regeneration service, which finds jobs for local people, you are directly improving unemployment in that neighbourhood. Secondly, by deliberately employing people from what are regarded as 'sink' neighbourhoods, you are providing an example to other employers, which at least might make them less likely to reject candidates as soon as they see a particular postal code. And finally, by using regeneration money for the salaries of people from the community, the programme is increasing the opportunity for money to be spent in that community.

None of this seems to hold water with those who hold the purse strings. They point to the 'fact' that local people don't seem to apply for the jobs in the first place and when they do they don't seem to have the skills.

They also point to examples where local people have been put in charge of regeneration monies, only for the project to become beset with allegations of nepotism and poor management.

It does happen, but that does not mean it always happens. Just as it sometimes happens that local councils with a preponderance of white male councillors sometimes appoint white male regeneration managers, while still being genuinely committed to equal opportunities.

Both camps are facing very different pressures and it is not easy to see how they might accommodate one another.

But if employers understand the importance of the regeneration workforce reflecting the community, then perhaps those person



specifications might be designed slightly differently? There might even be a possibility of 'checking' the design with local groups to make sure members of that community are not excluded from applying because of the language used.

There are some jobs local residents need to 'grow into' and employers and the community can work together to identify ways to facilitate that. It will be interesting to see how many local people will be involved either as students or teachers in the proposed national centre of excellence to train regenerators.

There are some jobs which can only be done using a combination of skills and qualities drawn both from inside and outside the community. It's really not always necessary to bring these skills and qualities together by creating full time permanent jobs. It is not even always appropriate.

Of course such an approach is open to abuse. Part-time jobs replace full-time posts, temporary secondments fill what ought to be permanent vacancies

and the result is an easy recipe for regeneration on the cheap.

However, some tasks might be best undertaken by a community based voluntary organisation supported by a short-term external consultant.

Others might be job-shared between local residents and external experts to help make sure an appropriate range of skills is available to the project. A similar principle might pay a community-based mentor to support an external consultant with special experience or vice versa.

People talk about the problem of staffing for regeneration at local, national and strategic level. The School for Social Entrepreneurs, the various MAs in regeneration and the idea of a national centre of excellence will all make a long-term impact. This does not always help those at the coal face of regeneration.

Perhaps it is only when employers and the community discuss particular human resource issues together and come up with pragmatic answers that genuine progress can be made in the short term.

One difficulty is that many employers already have a permanent workforce which they need to deploy and pay for. Is it possible that

regeneration budgets can fill the gaps that appear when other budgets decline?

Perhaps that is one aspect where local strategic partnerships can work for the benefit of all. But for that to happen people must be realistic, think long term and work together.

This column is produced by **Inside Track**, an independent company that serves as a bridge between the voluntary, community, public, and private sectors. For more information visit [www.insidetrackeuro.com](http://www.insidetrackeuro.com) or email: [mick@sheldon51.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:mick@sheldon51.freeserve.co.uk)

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## next month the pace of change

Every time a new initiative comes on stream we seem to spend more and more time on the consultation and less and less time on the delivery. How can we improve the situation?