



The **Constitution** Unit

Inclusiveness of Regional Chambers

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Foreword

The purpose of this report is to investigate the arrangements made by Regional Chambers to enhance their inclusiveness. Regional Chambers were set up in 1998 and 1999 with a specific requirement that representatives of business, environmental, and voluntary sector interests (amongst others) be fully involved in their proceedings. These groups have since become known as 'social and economic partners' or 'community stakeholders'. Little is known in the wider policy community about how effectively they have been included in the mainstream business of Regional Chambers. This report seeks to begin to rectify this omission.

This research was initiated by the HM Treasury Summer Placement scheme, and took place during July and August 2002. Due to the limited time available two chambers were selected as case-studies: Yorkshire and Humber, and the South East. These chambers were selected due to the difference in the size of their membership (35 in Yorkshire and Humber against 111 in the South East).

Semi-structured interviews with around a dozen respondents in each region formed the basis of the primary research. Respondents were drawn from chamber officers, social and economic partner members, and to a lesser extent from local authority members. The interviews were carried out in the context of a literature review, which attempted to trace the origins and establishment of the concepts of 'partnership' and 'inclusiveness' as they related to regional and local policy-making. The original intention had also been to trace the contribution of partner representatives to policy-making by examining previous committee minutes, but this proved to be an unworkable task: it was not possible to separate out the contribution of partner members from local authority members from written records, and the relative informality of committee proceedings meant that ideas and proposals rarely had clear origins from particular Chamber groupings.

The report is divided into three sections. The first contains the review of literature on local regeneration partnerships, and in that context examines the creation of the Regional Chambers and the involvement of stakeholders in the wider process of devolution. The second and third sections examine the Chamber structures, and experience of inclusion, in the South East and Yorkshire and Humber respectively. The conclusion draws together and evaluates the findings from the two regions.

The explicit requirement on regional chambers to extend their membership to social and economic partners is seen as their most innovative feature. This research seeks to identify how they operate, and with what impact, so that all chambers can consider possible ways of improving stakeholder engagement.

Two months before the research for this report began, the Government published its White Paper on regional government, *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions*. The White Paper requested opinions on only one topic: the question of how to involve social and economic partners in the work of an elected regional assembly. This report does not address

that question directly. The plan for this report had been written before the publication of the White Paper, and was not conceived of as a response to the White Paper. However, it is hoped that its findings will filter in to the policy-making process.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and HM Treasury in funding this work. I would also like to thank my erstwhile colleagues at ODPM for their help in searching out long-filed details and documents, in particular Phil Alker, Jonathon Edwards and Wendy Russell Barter for their comments on an early draft of the report. Thanks are also due to the interviewees in each region, both officers and members, who gave up valuable time to explain arcane points of regional functioning, and also gave valuable information about the actual functioning of the various structures. Finally, thanks are due to Professor Robert Hazell at the Constitution Unit for enabling the summer placement to take place, to Helen Daines for efficiently disentangling the necessary bureaucratic arrangements, and to Matthew Butt for organising printing and publication of the report.

Executive Summary

- The position of the social and economic partners on Regional Chambers has affinities with that of non-local authority members on local regeneration partnerships throughout the 1990s. Though there is no evidence of a direct link between the two, it is clear that similar thinking shaped both types of partnership.
- In both cases, partners from outside local authorities were frequently selected through opaque processes; they were selected sometimes to represent a particular sector and sometimes for their individual qualities; in all cases it was hoped that they would aid delivery of local strategies and bring expert knowledge of potential pitfalls and opportunities to bear on the strategy-making process.
- Partnership in Regional Chambers will take a different form from that at local authority level, as chambers have no executive or funding power: but many similar issues are recognisable.
- Two Regional Chambers were researched for this report: the South East, and Yorkshire and Humber. The former has 111 full members and the latter only 35: the former region has little regional identity whilst the latter's is amongst the strongest in England.
- The South East England Regional Assembly benefited from having no predecessor body, allowing it to fully incorporate partners from the beginning and to become the regional planning body without controversy. The Assembly makes provisions in its constitution for proportionality on committees, between the political groups, social and environmental partners, and economic partners: the latter two are treated as separate groups. Both Chambers studied made a point of not holding all meetings in local government venues and of distinguishing themselves from the regional local government association: symbolically, this emphasises that neither is a local government-driven body.
- Several partner members are elected through umbrella bodies. These groups, formed to exert influence at regional level, have been a significant feature of the

impression was that many members were 'dormant', turning up to meetings irregularly and not contributing.

- Relations between individual partner members are fundamental to the transaction of business on Chambers. Both Chambers appear to have a 'core membership', made up of individuals who are able to give considerable time to Chamber business because of the nature of their 'day jobs'. Without these reserves of time Chambers would function far less effectively. Payment of allowances for chairing committees, or for attendance, is very limited.
- The existence of multiple points of access for partner organisations is a feature of both Chambers studied. Each uses groups outside of the plenary Chamber and official committees in order to enhance inclusiveness. In the South East these are 'advisory groups', in Yorkshire and Humber they are 'Commissions'. The groups permit sectors to exercise greater influence over policy discussions which are of particular interest to them: membership is fluid and open to any organisation that can demonstrate an interest.
- Both Chambers were generally satisfied with the contribution of their structures to inclusiveness. Concerns were expressed that greater inclusion of women, black and minority ethnic groups, and the elderly and youth, was required. There was some concern in the South East that business representatives were somewhat semi-detached.
- The funding for Regional Chambers announced by the Government in March 2001 was universally welcomed, and cited as the main means through which Chambers had been able to tackle issues of inclusiveness and increase the capacity of their partner members to contribute to Chamber business.
- Partner members in both regions largely assented that they were treated as equal to local authority members in th

Introduction

The small amount of available literature on Regional Chambers has focused on studying their development and achievements since their inception in 1998-99. There have been few attempts to explain the rationale behind the particular shape in which they were created. Reasoning behind particular features of the Chambers has tended to grow, unchallenged, out of various government documents produced during that period. There is little evidence of strategic thinking behind this documentation, and hence indications of *why* the Chambers are shaped as they are are elusive.

The title of this report, *Inclusiveness of Regional Chambers*, derives from the unusual dual membership of the chambers. The presence of 'social and economic partners' alongside local government representatives in a notionally democratic body has contributed to a sense that the Chambers are local government driven, with the less familiar grouping of 'social and economic partners' being a secondary group which has been added on to existing structures and processes. Regional Chambers are expected to carry out a representative role, of a kind, at regional level: it is intuitive that, in the absence of direct elections, local government representatives should fulfil this role. But it is less clear why social and economic partners have been granted a seat at the regional table.

The origin of the concept of regional partnership appears to lie with the numerous examples of local regeneration and community-based partnerships since the late 1980s. This report therefore begins by reviewing several reports on the effectiveness of these partnerships. It focuses on how effectively the non-local government partners were included, and what organisational issues arose through efforts to include them. The report then examines the creation of the Regional Chambers in the light of the experiences of regeneration partnerships. In many ways the Regional Chambers are 'standing partnerships', including non-local authority representatives as members for similar reasons to those originally given for inclusion of such people at local level; but they have very different roles from local partnerships, and comparisons can only be drawn to a limited extent.

The literature on local partnerships does not

This in-coming government rapidly endorsed the social inclusion agenda and the Third Sector suddenly found itself welcome in debates, discussions and policy formulation across virtually the whole array of government policy-making. . [It] also developed a number of major national policy shifts which directly encouraged a greater role for the Third Sector.⁶

Though, as many reports testify, the involvement of partners in projects has been variable in practice, all of these initiatives contributed to establishing the principle: that, for certain policies, partnership was practically and inherently preferable to government-controlled schemes. When the Labour government came to create voluntary Regional Chambers, the presence of social and economic partners, with a legitimate an interest in regional policy alongside locally-elected politicians, was no longer a foreign concept but a normalised, even fashionable one.

Involvement of non-local authority partners

If inclusiveness is one of the aims of funding bodies in setting up partnerships, two further questions arise: which stakeholders are normally included in partnerships and why, and how do those stakeholders bring benefits to the process?

In the regeneration partnerships studied by Geddes (1998), the type of partners were similar. Typically they included public sector, employers, trade unions, voluntary, and community representatives. In some cases a board would be appointed: often, according to Geddes, “[board] membership is not open but is designed to secure particular patterns of interest representation.”⁸

is the necessary time-frame for building relationships and trust to a degree that a partnership can 'work' at the local level. This implies a considerable amount of early work that appears to achieve little, and much in the way of relationship-building. This kind of work is not likely to attract resource commitment from businesses, with no identifiable benefit in early sight. This was recognised by the DETR's 1999 *Good Practice Guide* which stated that "blanket guidance that states that private sector involvement is, without exception, a good thing, is unhelpful".¹⁰

Voluntary sector representatives—also including environmental group and 'community' representatives—have two functions in partnerships, according to Government guidance. Firstly, "the level of community and voluntary activity in an area is often a gauge of the social health and spirit of that area, and as such is a vital complementary strand to the provision of decent public services and a quality environment".¹¹ Secondly, representatives of these bodies are likely to have good links with individuals in the local community, and may be as, or more, directly aware of views, feelings, and requirements of local people as local elected representatives.

Resources

Both practitioners and researchers are steadily coming to the view that partnerships, particularly at the strategic level, require some form of dedicated staff and resources.¹²

The inadequate resources available to the community and voluntary sector are seen as a major barrier to accountability. Virtually all interviewees stressed the fact that it was inadequate *financial* and *staff time* resources which were the major barriers.¹³

Local partnerships have found that a dedicated secretariat, for co-ordination of meetings and sharing of information, is vital in enabling partners to work together as intended. Members of partnerships themselves are very unlikely to be able or willing to establish such positions themselves: increasingly, grants for partnerships have allowed for the establishment of, for example, a single secretarial post. This is particularly important to secure the involvement of voluntary and community organisations. Normally these organisations have very little money or time to spare.

The need for staff and resources goes further than administration. There was often a need to develop the capacity of community and voluntary partners to actually contribute effectively.

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effective partners”.¹⁴ Few were accustomed to working together in policy development, having previously carried out an adversarial and lobbying role. There was also little experience of consulting with their ‘constituency’ in the manner of a representative.

Lessons for partnerships in Regional Chambers

This report finds a number of similarities between the experiences of partnerships in the Regional Chambers and the issues encountered by local partnerships, which will become clear below. The similarities between the two types of body are not overwhelming, however. Partnerships in the regions of England are likely to function in a very different way to those at local level, for three main reasons:

- the geographical area covered is far larger;
- Chambers do not have access to funding which is contingent on the existence of a partnership;
- regional government in England has been, and will continue to be, concerned with strategy-making and not delivering outputs: hence the contribution of partners will be in shaping the strategy, not in delivering it.

Possible effects of these differences might include:

- a less direct connection between partner members and the sectors which they represent;
- less initial incentive to create effective partnerships;
- different contributions from partners, and less importance for the concept of partners ‘signing up’ to a strategic local plan which each was then committed to help to deliver.

Since regional structures are so new to England, there has been little opportunity for analysis of regional partnership. Bridges *et al* carried out an analysis of structures adopted by RDAs in 2001. They state:

Ultimately, effective partnership working occurs when a number of criteria are met, including:

- inclusive involvement of partners;
- acknowledgement of existing partner knowledge and experience, and use as a formulation of future work;
- subsidiarity of roles where appropriate;
- exploitation of potential organisational synergies;
- development of effective and locally sensitive delivery mechanisms;
- a commitment to equal opportunities.¹⁵

¹⁴ DETR, *Local Evaluation for Regeneration Partnerships: Good Practice Guide*, 1999, p.67

¹⁵ Tom Bridges, David Edwards, John Mawson, Chris Tunnell, *Strategy Development and Partnership Working in the RDAs*, DETR, London, 2001, p.5

Fundamental to effective partnership was early involvement of partners in the development of policy. Partners were unhappy when consultation took the form of being asked for their opinion on a draft policy paper: this was perceived as too little, too late, with the existence of the paper implying that the general direction of policy had already been decided, and that the role of partners was to add value at the margins only.

Voluntary and community groups, on the other hand, were found by RDAs to suffer from similar problems to those that they suffered from with regard to local partnerships. Few had the resources or expertise to contribute effectively to strategy-making. Bridges *et al* comment also that there appeared to be little understanding by RDAs of how their skills might be used.

Fordham (1998) notes that the success of partnerships is dependent upon the commitment of, and relationships between, individuals. They argue that inter-personal relations are more fundamental than the presence of all relevant organisations in the partnership. Partnerships function, like any other organisations, through good relations between officers, not purely through a particular formal structure. Moreover, inter-personal working is easier to achieve where there is a clear rationale for the partnership. There was a tendency to appoint board-level partners by rote, because of the need to have 'a higher education representative', or because they were known to carry influence in certain forums.

Ownership

The concept of 'ownership', or 'signing up', is pivotal to understanding partnerships at all levels. This refers to a process of dialogue between partners where a consensus is achieved over a strategy: the partners may not have their ideal strategy but, feeling that their voice has been adequately heard, will agree to abide by it and use the influence of their own organisations to work in accordance with it. It is, in effect, a voluntary equivalent of the process in a democratically-elected assembly

Though this concept—that partners could reach consensus—may have always been an optimistic one, in Regional Chambers it cannot be expected to take this form, because, as suggested above, Chambers do not control the delivery functions that make the nature of the strategy of significant importance. Voluntary, community and environmental groups do not deliver policy. Business organisations differ: in the South East business representatives come from a variety of sub-regional economic partnerships, and would only be able to (theoretically) deliver in those areas (although the totality of members do cover the entire region between them). In practice, Fordham *et al* suggest that such delivery is rare:

This can happen when the relevant board member has sufficient authority and awareness to be able to secure compliance within his or her parent organisation

and to 'read' it for signs of change which are likely to affect the partnership.
Experience shows, however, that such individuals are rare.¹⁶

Haughton *et al*

territories the civic forum enjoys legitimacy but some doubts over its role. Shaw *et al* (2002) suggest:

The statutory obligation on the part of the National Assembly to engage with the economic and social partners is a groundbreaking development. The sanction of judicial review safeguards the voluntary sector stake in the policy-making process.¹⁸

The definition of 'stakeholder' is not consistent across territories. The definitions used by the Civic Forums are:¹⁹

Scotland: "Full membership of the Forum is open to any organisation which is non-statutory, non-commercial, non-political (these others can have affiliate status)."

Northern Ireland: "The Civic Forum will consist of 60 members representative of the business, trade union, voluntary and other sectors of the Northern Ireland community."

London: "The only organisations and bodies excluded from joining are local authorities and political parties since they already have a direct relationship with regional government outside civil society. Organisations representing and serving tens of thousands of Londoners have already signed up as members of the London Civic Forum... These range from highly influential pan-London bodies to grass roots community organisations."

Wales: the definitions are contained within the relevant sections of the Government of Wales Act 1998, as follows:

114. The Assembly must make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations.

115. The Assembly shall carry out consultation with such organisations representative of business and such other organisations as it considers appropriate having regard to the impact of the exercise by the Assembly of its functions on the interests of business.

The definition of 'stakeholders' used in the English regions, so far as it can be established, is closest to that of London: any organisation that is not a local authority or a political party may join. However, the purpose of the Civic Forums in the four 'territories' listed above is different from that of Regional Chambers' social and economic partners. Civic Forums exist primarily as a conduit between the elected democratic institution and 'stakeholders'. They do not act as a lobbying force themselves, and do not take direct part in policy development or recommendation in the manner that social and economic partners do.

¹⁸ Keith Shaw, Lynne Humphrey, Peter O'Brien, John Tomaney, *The Engagement of Economic and Social Partners in a Directly Elected Regional Assembly for the North-East*, North-East Regional Assembly, 2002, p.56

¹⁹ Note: Each of the definitions used here comes from the website of the relevant organisation.

Agencies and having extensive rights to consultation, by regional executive agencies, on their spending plans. These powers were not, in the end, forthcoming. Regional Chambers were set up as extremely weak bodies, referred to only twice on the face of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998.²³

The 1998 Act, in setting up Regional Chambers, did not specify, on the face of the Act, anything regarding Regional Chamber memberships, merely stating that the Chamber should be “a body which is representative of those in a regional development agency's area with an interest in its work”.²⁴ Government guidance specified more explicitly the Government's expectations regarding Chambers' memberships:

The local government members should be in the majority within the chamber. We would expect non-local government members to comprise no less than 30% of the chamber. The ratio of local government to non-local government membership should not be allowed to prevent the full range of regional interests from being involved. The chamber's constitution should provide for an open process of nomination of non-local authority members, including consultation with regional partners and the opportunity for those not directly consulted to make their views known.

...The chamber's constitution should include a requirement that the regional partners should achieve an appropriate gender, ethnic and disability balance among its members. Arrangements should be made to keep this under review. Ministers will expect to see steady progress towards a position in which men and women are equally represented on regional chambers and the proportion of disabled members and members from the ethnic minorities reflects that in the adult population.

In practice, most Chambers have either used an exact split of 70:30 between local and non-local authority members, or a split of approximately 2:1. In the instance of the South East, the 2:1 split was used. Each of the 74 local authorities in the region is given one seat: hence 37 seats must be available for the non-local authority members.

The ‘social and economic partners’ were expected to be representatives of business, environment, and voluntary organisations: these categories appear to have been lifted from *A New Voice for England's Regions*, although they have not been treated as exclusive by any region. Chambers were permitted freedom to decide on who the social and economic partners would be, and how they would be selected. All of the Chambers were designated in mid-1999.

In many regions, the pre-existing regional local government association had acted as the Regional Planning Body, with the responsibility of producing Regional Planning Guidance.

²³ The Chambers were referred to at section 8 and section 18, in such a manner that their existence was entirely tied to that of the Regional Development Agencies.

²⁴ Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, s.8 (1) (a)

A further Government guidance note, Planning Policy Guidance note 11 (PPG11) recommended that this role should pass to Regional Chambers:

Given the representation of a range of regional stakeholders on each Regional Chamber, and the latter's role in relation to the RDA under the RDAs Act, it makes sense for the Chamber to take on the regional planning function. Indeed a Chamber supported by a full time regional planning, monitoring and review team would be in an ideal position to provide the necessary leadership to produce and implement an integrated spatial strategy for the region. However, the arrangements to be adopted in any particular region must be for the region to decide..... Where a Chamber does not take on this role it should still be seen by the RPB and other stakeholders as a necessary reference point in the preparation of draft RPG. The views of designated Chambers should be fully taken into account in the preparation of RPG.²⁵

Some regional local government associations have been slow to accede to this recommendation: at the time of writing only five out of eight regions have passed planning responsibilities to the Regional Chamber. Elsewhere the Chamber retains a consultative role. The planning role is the only other direct function enjoyed by Regional Chambers.

The Planning Green Paper of late 2001 proposed to give statutory planning powers to the Regional Chambers, to produce binding Regional Planning Guidance. County structure plans would no longer be produced. After protests from local government this latter provision appears to have been dropped, but county plans will still be subordinate to regional plans produced by Chambers. If legislative space can be found, these proposals will become law by mid-2003.

Few respondents attempted to make a positive case for the inclusion of partners: it appeared to be generally accepted as orthodoxy that they should be involved. It should be borne in mind that local authority members on Regional Chambers, at the same time, do not have good accountability mechanisms. They are described as 'indirectly elected', but this entails a very distant relationship with any constituency.

Overall, it appears that local authorities have broadly welcomed the presence of the social and economic partners on Regional Chambers, despite initial suspicions that their presence diluted the democratic accountability of the Chambers.²⁶ However, the reasoning as to why social and economic partners were required to be present on the Chambers—and what value they were expected to add—has never been clarified by the Government. A number of assumptions can be surmised from the literature detailed above:

- That local authority representatives alone were not sufficiently representative of a region to be solely entitled to take positions or decisions on its behalf;

²⁵ DETR, Planning Policy Guidance note 11, 2000, paragraphs 2.4—2.5.

²⁶ See Mark Sandford, *Further Steps for Regional Chambers*, Constitution Unit, 2001

- That partners have valuable experience and expertise, which adds value at the regional level. This implies, in the UK's regional structures, the level of strategic policy-making, not delivery;
- That partners were able to represent the views of their 'sector' in debates on strategic decision-making;
- That partners' involvement would aid delivery of regional strategies.
- The next two chapters analyse the practice of inclusiveness in the two case-study regions, and the findings are drawn together in the Conclusion.

body called the South East Regional Forum (SERF) was created in the late 1990s with the task of exploring how to involve partner organisations during the time in which the new Regional Chambers in the South East and East of England were replacing the previous body. In the event SERF had some influence in the writing of the constitution of what became the South East England Regional Assembly: and some of the partner members who currently sit on the Regional Assembly were involved in that process. The presence of a voice for non-local authority representatives this early in the process was undoubtedly a factor in normalising the existence of a full role for them. This contrasts with the 'late' involvement mentioned in Bridges *et al's* report on RDA partnership.

An added effect of the change in boundaries was that there was little controversy over the new Regional Chamber taking on the planning powers that had previously belonged to SERPLAN. It was the first of the Regional Chambers to do so: in other regions the partners were initially (and some are still) not permitted to vote or to take part in regional debates on planning matters. It is important to note that SERPLAN was *only* a planning organisation, and not a regional local government association in the manner of those existing in other regions. Thus the South East had an added advantage as there was no local government interest group at the regional level which stood to feel threatened by the partnership principle proposed for the Regional Chambers by government.

Procedures in SEERA

The 74 local authorities in SEERA operate under a weighted voting system. The 55 district councils have one vote each. The partner members have two votes each. The seven county councils have one vote per district council, and the 12 unitary authorities have votes according to population (see Table 1).

Table 1: voting rights on SEERA

Members	Number of votes
Counties	
Surrey	11
East Sussex	5

Table 2: allocation of partners' seats on SEERA

Organisation	Means of election	Number of seats
TUC	Appointed	2
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	Appointed	1
Chambers of Commerce	Elected by umbrella body	1
Federation of Small Businesses	Appointed	1
Further Education (FE)	Chair of umbrella body	1
Higher Education (HE)	Chair of umbrella body	1
South East Economic Partnerships (SEEPS)	Elected by each of the 10 Economic Partnership boards	10
Economic partners		17
Regional Cultural Consortium	Appointed by RCC board	3
South East Forum for Sustainability (SEFS)	Elected by SEFS board	3
Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE)	Elected by RAISE members	7
<i>Black and minority ethnic</i>	<i>Part of RAISE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>CVS & regeneration</i>	<i>Part of RAISE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Health and social care</i>	<i>Part of RAISE</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Rural issues</i>	<i>Part of RAISE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Urban issues / Learning and development</i>	<i>Part of RAISE</i>	<i>1</i>
Social Housing	Appointed	1
Faith Communities	Elected	2
National Health Service	Appointed	1
Social and environmental partners		17

SEERA is unusual amongst the eight Regional Chambers in that it distinguishes between 'economic partners' and 'social and environmental' partners. In most other Chambers there exists a single group known as 'social and economic partners'. In SEERA, however, the two

the Assembly. The reasoning behind this decision was purely an assumption during the creation of the Chamber that the phrase 'social and economic partners' related to two groups of representatives. (This reflects the division in the consultation arrangements in the National Assembly for Wales.) Nor are there clear rules as to what kind of organisation should sit with which group. One respondent noted that, counter-intuitively, TUC, FE and HE representatives sat with the economic partners, and attributed this to a shared interest in skills and economic issues: whereas the NHS representative shared interests of environment, housing and regeneration with the social and environmental group.

The means of selection of members to fill these seats vary: they are shown in Table 1. The procedures of selection are gradually becoming more democratic. Early in the lives of the Regional Chambers, the members sat as individuals rather than representatives. However, SEERA's current constitution requires certain conditions of the partner members:

6.2 Assembly members will be determined by their nominating bodies, i.e. for local government members, their local authorities, and for social, environmental and economic partners, their sector-based regional groupings or networks.

6.4...Members of the Assembly will be expected to be individually accountable to their nominating constituency.

6.5 All nominating bodies must ensure that the processes through which they choose their nominees to the Assembly must be fair, open and transparent. In the case of social, environmental and economic partners, each Assembly member must be able to demonstrate their accountability to a clear and distinct constituency in the region.³⁰

SEERA has aimed to encourage and aid the partners in meeting these aims: for instance, it has funded a post, within the voluntary sector umbrella body (RAISE), dedicated to improving communication and information exchange between the 17 social and environmental partners. One of the priorities of this post is to work with the partner bodies to examine and improve their methods of selection of members.

The formal inclusion of SEPs in the shape of SEERA

The South East England Regional Assembly operates rules of proportionality on its committees. There are only four formal committee structures: these are the Executive, Healthy Region Forum, Regional Planning Committee and the Joint Europe Committee. The eight boxes at the bottom of figure 3 are known as 'Advisory Groups': their role is explained further below. The executive committee has 27 members, including one chair (Conservative) and five vice-chairs (one each from the Liberal Democrats, Labour, independents (ie non-party politicians), Economic Partners, and Social and Environmental Partners). 45 members

of SEERA do not sit on any of the committees, whilst there are 9 who sit on more than one committee.

Figure 3 : SEERA Organisation Chart

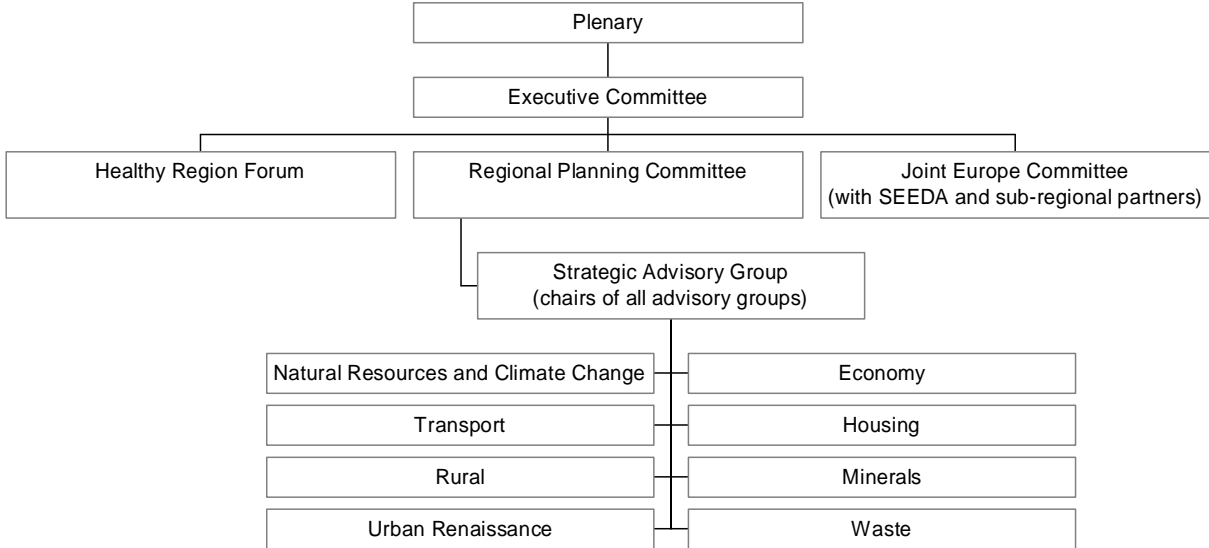
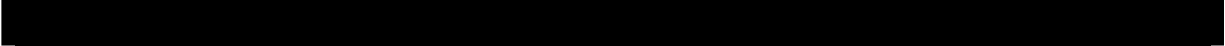


Table 4 shows the number of members from each party or group on the four main committees. This pattern of proportionality is accepted as standard within the Assembly. In Table 4, 'SEP' refers to social and environmental partners and 'EP' to economic partners.



To increase inclusiveness and to avoid the impression that the partners were secondary to

obtained. There is a staff of seven, occupying an office above that of SEERA (though the two organisations are independent). There is no membership fee for organisations wishing to join RAISE—hence small organisations are not excluded for financial reasons. There are currently some 1400 members.

RAISE selects seven of the social and environmental partners on SEERA. It has five electoral colleges (listed in Table 1), and each member must designate themselves to vote in one of those colleges. Any member may stand as a candidate in those elections. The elections are set to take place every two years, with the first having taken place in May 2002. Perhaps unsurprisingly, several of the members who had been selected in the early days of SEERA were re-elected through this process. However, the elections were contested, showing that the existence of the electoral process is permitting greater participation by partner groups.

SEFS (South East Forum for Sustainability) was set up in 1999, with the aim of co-ordinating the responses of environmental organisations toward the new regional agenda. It selects three members of the Regional Assembly. It has a smaller membership than RAISE—around 100. Many of these are multiple branches of single organisations—for instance, some 35 local branches of Friends of the Earth are members. Because of this duplication SEFS does not operate a full franchise to elect its Regional Assembly members, as it would give undue power to a small number of organisations: instead, the 12-strong Executive Committee votes for the three seats. At the most recent electi

and voting when necessary. One respondent characterised this situation with regard to a meeting attended by the author:

You had a full turnout [today] because it was election time. You had people there who hadn't a clue what was going on. They were just there to vote. That's why certain people weren't saying anything, hadn't even got the papers...or had sent along their substitutes.

At the meeting in question (attended by the author), there was a striking distinction between

ICT has come into its own due to a range of factors peculiar to the Regional Chambers. The membership of SEERA is part-time, whilst the staff is full-time. The partner members are developing sectoral constituencies which differ in fundamental ways from democratic constituencies. Their members are largely interested in single issues, and join the constituencies on that basis. And the members are professional groups, with considerable knowledge of the issues; they will also often have a strong organisational interest in influencing outcomes of regional policy, but very little time in which to actively influence that policy due to the demands of their own work. Hence ICT permits a good response rate, and the nature of the constituency means that many comments will be well-informed and useful. ICT is vital in making this process of inclusion work effectively.

It is beyond the scope of this project to evaluate how well these means of accountability work. But their existence means that there is far more scope for inclusion of opinions from a wide range of non-member partners than would otherwise be the case. In this the partners have received encouragement from SEERA's secretariat. In publications, efforts are made to publicise the existence of social and economic partner members alongside local authority members, treating the two as being of equal status.

Shaw *et al's* report on the North-East Regional Assembly of June 2002 made similar findings, noting that:

In most of the partner constituencies, however, genuine efforts were being made to develop more formalised approaches to partner appointment and accountability.... Mechanisms noted by partners include:

- partners being nominated from within the regular meetings of the umbrella bodies (albeit, in a few cases, from small regional groupings of statutory agencies);
- Regular reporting back to such meetings, often via a standing item on the meeting's agenda
- Use of e-mail bulletins within the wider sector, both to provide information and to elicit views;
- Dissemination of information on the NEA via newsletters or the holding of one-day seminars or special meetings on regional government.³⁵

Inclusion outside of plenary and formal committees

Inclusiveness and size

The majority of regional chambers are relatively large, ranging in size from 60-117. The exceptions to this rule are YHA (35 members) and East of England Regional Assembly (42 members). SEERA is the second largest of the Regional Chambers, with 111 members. It is also the largest region in England by population (8 million) and has arguably the weakest regional identity of the English regions. The size of the region was the major determinant of the large size of the assembly, due to the desire to represent each of the 74 local authorities.

Respondents varied in their attitude to the large size of SEERA. For some, the need to be properly representative of a large and diverse region outweighed the issue of size. Some partners even felt that there should be greater representation to give them more members. The tendency towards larger Chambers has been linked to the issue of inclusiveness; it was felt in some quarters that Chambers of 30-40 could not be properly 'representative of the region'.

For others, the size of the assembly was far too great for meaningful participation by all members. In part this relates to the existence of the 'core group' of members, mentioned earlier. But the sheer size of the grouping, for these respondents, made it impossible to discuss or debate issues in the plenary sessions. Even the most animated of members would be fortunate to make more than one point.

Respondents admitted that much of the 'real work' of the Assembly goes on outside both the plenary and the committees. The size of the plenary makes it impossible to hold meaningful debates: those are restricted to committees and advisory groups. The pattern of plenary meetings is generally to give approval to decisions which have already been negotiated between groups, rather than to facilitate either real or set-piece debates. One partner said:

This is clearly a political process. What happens at the plenary is high theatre....Basically, when you go into a meeting, you're rubber-stamping what has previously been agreed. Everything happens before the meetings. Some people don't like that, but we live in the real world.

This process is abetted by the sheer amount of business that the Assembly is expected to deal with in a very limited time: there are only three plenary and six Executive meetings per year. It is inevitable that political bargaining will make an appearance in such an environment, where the priority is upon making decisions as opposed to open-ended discussion. Interestingly, the majority of partner respondents did not seem to inherently object to becoming political actors; one said:

If the partners don't realise they're in a political arena, and aren't as astute as they can be on what's winnable and what isn't, what the influences are and so on, then we're not going to be particularly effective.

The same respondent stated, by way of example, that the environmental partners had made

pressing in the latter part of 2002, aware that if they spent considerable time on the current,

held office (as chairs or vice-chairs of committees), there was some feeling, though not universal, that businesses were not as involved as they might be. Indeed, one business representative appeared to confirm this approach:

The economic partners approach the whole thing with a degree of—cynicism would be too strong a word, but...it's a watching brief. You've got to be there because these buggers might do something we don't like, but you're not going to actively create a bureaucracy.

The literature on partnerships reviewed earlier indicated that business involvement in joint enterprises of any kind could be difficult to maintain. Indeed, headlines were created in the North-West in late 2001 when some business representatives walked out of the North-West Regional Assembly, citing over-bureaucratisation and ignoring of their views as reasons. Businesses, being concerned with outcomes rather than processes, will inevitably fit uneasily into a system which uses process to maintain a form of democratic accountability and inclusiveness. It is perhaps unsurprising that they should be unwilling to concern themselves with process: the representative above stated that “the social and environmental partners seem to take constitutions...far more seriously than the economic partners, whereas we operate on a much more relaxed basis.” In the North-East, Shaw *et al* report a somewhat cavalier attitude to selection and accountability in the business sector on the Regional Assembly:

Some business partners clearly acknowledged that there was a very ‘informal’ approach to nomination in their sector, with individual expressions of interest being confirmed through business networks rather than through adoption at a formal meeting.³⁷

The effects of equality of membership

Almost all of the respondents in interviews declared that SEERA treated its social and economic partners as full members in every way. Many praised the Assembly secretariat for the concerted efforts they had made to do so. The only exception to this rule is that partners are not currently allowed to stand for Chair of the Assembly—a situation which may be addressed by a current review of SEERA’s constitution (which is itself being chaired by an economic partner). In July a social and environmental partner was elected as vice-chair of the planning committee.

Partner respondents themselves believe that the benefits they bring in terms of the general debate on SEERA centre around avoiding parochialism and diluting politicisation and point-scoring. It was acknowledged by many respondents that most local authority members had kept point-scoring to a minimum. Nevertheless, the value of the partners could be felt in other ways, as described by one:

budgets, were being expected to contribute considerable time and effort to the regional agenda without compensation.

The announcement of central government funding has also largely removed the sentiment, held by some in local government, that local government should hold the predominant role in Regional Chambers, as the Chambers were funded by local government subscription payments. There had been some attempts during the setting-up of Chambers to require partner organisations to pay subscriptions also (local government subscription fees are typically in the range of £5,000-£50,000 per annum).

Attitudes of partner and local authority members

Part of the rationale for this report was a belief that the formal division in Regional Chambers between local authority and partner members is reflected in the attitudes of the

council seats (which automatically removes them from membership of the Assembly) and most of the leading social and economic partners have been re-selected.

The Yorkshire & Humber Assembly (YHA)

History

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly covers the former counties of West and South Yorkshire, Humberside (including North and North-East Lincolnshire), and North Yorkshire. Its population is 4.9 million. It contains 15 unitary authorities, one county council (North Yorkshire) and six district councils.

Yorkshire and Humber has one of the strongest regional identities amongst the eight standard regions of England. Yorkshire is, of course, a traditional county area: the regional identity extends less clearly to 'the Humber', which refers to the parts of Lincolnshire absorbed by the former county of Humberside in 1974. It also has a fairly strong tradition of joint working. It might be expected, therefore, that the problem referred to above, of a local authority body being unwilling to share power with new regional partners, would occur there. In fact, this has not been the case. Although it was not until October 2001 that full equality of membership was achieved, the intention had long been present; it had merely been subject to administrative delays.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly has a curiously chequered history. In its present form it has existed only from October 2001. At this time two previous organisations, the Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Chamber and the Regional Assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside (RAYH), were formally merged. The RAYH was the regional local government association, which had been formed in 1996 in anticipation of the then-nascent regional policy agenda. It operated a voting system which was weighted by population, and had some 50-60 sitting members, whose selection related both to representing local authorities and to regionally proportional representation for the three major political parties.

Formally the Chamber and RAYH were separate bodies. In practice RAYH took the lead in most regional matters and administered funding which was available from local authority subscriptions. It consulted the social and economic partner groups—in effect consulting the Chamber—for all major decisions.

The lead-up to the merger was preceded by 6-8 months of organisational uncertainty which delayed progress on a number of fronts. The merger changed relatively little with regard to the organisational structures at officer level. At member level, however, it marked the acceptance of the social and economic partners as full members with voting rights. They were also accepted as full members for the purposes of planning issues. The 22 local authority representatives are the leaders of the 22 local authorities. The political parties are obliged to inform the Assembly plenary if they have carried out pre-meeting caucusing to come to an agreed position on any issue.

Procedures and members

The YHA has a very small number of full members: 35 in all. These are supplemented by a number of 'associate members' or observers, from various statutory authorities, who have the right to speak but not to vote. The constitution of YHA provides for the partner representation shown in Table 5. Both the groups and the number of representatives are specified, though the constituents of each group are not defined. The means of allocation of numbers to each sector is clearer than that in the South East; as only 14 places are available, most organisations are only entitled to one seat. The three business seats are normally taken by the CBI, Chamber of Commerce, and the Federation of Small Businesses—hence seeking to achieve a rounded representation of business interests.

5. Observers: these will include the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward), the Environment Agency, and any other organisations that from time to time the Assembly may determine.⁴⁰

At present there is one associate member—South Yorkshire Police—and two other observer organisations in addition to the three specified in the constitution: a Parish Councils representative and one from the Countryside Agency. It should also be mentioned that one seat is currently being held vacant for a representative of black and minority ethnic groups (which will increase the number of SEPs to 15 when appointed). There have been difficulties in finding an appropriate person to fill this seat.⁴¹

The membership of YHA owes a good deal to initiatives and decisions taken in 1996-97, before the advent of Regional Chambers. RAYH, as it then was, had been taking its own steps toward greater inclusiveness at this time:

We had grown that organisation [the early RAYH] to include a wider range of

also chair of the board of the Regional Forum (not a paid employee), and was elected unopposed.

YHA has given more limited resources so far to encourage members to improve accountability and reporting back to sectoral constituencies. An expanded programme is being developed, which will relate both to members of the plenary and of the five Commissions. Pressure has also come from the sectors themselves, in particular those, such as the environmental sector, which value new influence available to them through involvement in decision-making. An example of this phenomenon is YHA's environmental representation. At first, the single seat on RAYH for 'environmental interests' was held by an officer of the Environment Agency. It was felt by the wider sector—including many small voluntary organisations—that it was anomalous for an officer from a statutory body to represent the variety of groups within the environmental 'family', quite aside from the apparent conflict of interest in allowing membership to a statutory executive agency. This point was made very forcefully by a number of voluntary environmental groups. Although the EA representative did hold a series of feedback meetings, the person was inevitably constrained in their views due to their employment: this impression was heightened when CPRE audited the member's performance at meetings.

In response, a Regional Environmental Forum (REF) was set up in late 2000. It now has 23 members from a variety of NGOs, statutory and voluntary organisations. Its aim initially was to obtain a seat for environmental NGOs on the Chamber. However, the Assembly secretariat had itself come to the conclusion that representation of environmental interests via the Environment Agency was unsatisfactory. The opportunity of the merger was taken to reallocate the seat to a member to be elected by the REF. The Environment Agency itself has joined the REF and contributes as it sees fit: it also has observer status on YHA, alongside police, health authority and Government Office representatives.

The Yorkshire & Humber REF, as a new umbrella body, shares characteristics of the umbrella bodies in the South East. It has received £40,000 from YHA (a share of the Regional Chambers fund), £30,000 from Yorkshire Forward (the regional development agency) and £5,000 from GOYH (the Government Office for Yorkshire & Humberside). With this money it employs 1.5 staff, who act as a secretariat to the REF and who also write a Regional Environmental Enhancement Strategy. This strategy has no statutory force but acts as a policy document for the REF, with which they hope to influence RPG and the regional Sustainable Development Framework.

Other examples include the representative of rural interests, who was initially invited on to the Regional Chamber from the Yorkshire Rural Community Council (YRCC). This is one of two rural community councils in the region: the Humberside area has its own, but it is far smaller than the YRCC. This appointment was seen as the most immediate and appropriate way of involving the rural sector. Efforts were then made to create a constituency for the representative: biannual meetings were held, and regular reports put into the quarterly

Communication between members and ‘constituencies’

The cascading process takes place, in YHA, largely amongst the same types of members amongst whom it is most prominent in the South East. These are the environmental, voluntary, and rural sectors. They are the sectors most typified by large numbers of small organisations, who value umbrella organisations as means of achieving an influence over regional policy which has rarely been forthcoming in the past, and who therefore have the most to gain by developing a ‘sectoral constituency’ with the associated accountability and legitimacy. Umbrella bodies which can claim to represent, even if imperfectly, the voice of voluntary organisations within a region may thereby be able to wield considerable influence which was not available before their existence.

Examples of cascading in the YHA include the Yorkshire & Humber Regional Forum, which is “a network of networks”. There are 300 member organisations, each of which receive regular e-mail communications and monthly newsletters from the Assembly representative. In turn, some of these members are themselves membership organisations. They in turn pass on information from YHA, and feed comments back from their members to the representative. Occasionally requests for information are received from the ‘constituency’, which, if they cannot be answered, are forwarded on to YHA staff. The Forum holds two conferences per year, consisting of plenary debates and subject workshops.

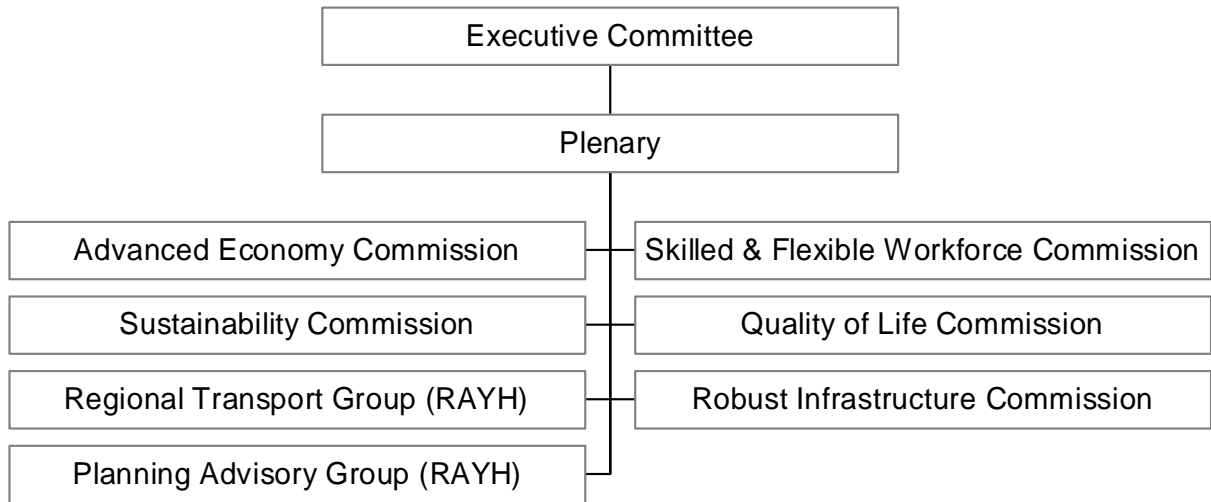
This research was not able to determine whether or not the means for consultation of sectoral constituencies are effective or not. By comparison with the local authority members (and with MPs and councillors in local authorities), however, the arrangements are likely to be effective. This is for the reasons stated above in the chapter on the South East. These constituencies are small, and consist of constituents who have a direct and professional interest in regional policy matters. They therefore have more time and inclination than the average member of the public to make their opinions known, and they also have more opportunity because of the regular consultation by e-mail.

Generally, the importance of communication to the Regional Chambers cannot be underestimated. Very few people are aware of the existence of Regional Chambers, let alone knowing what their role is. As Chambers have no executive powers and relatively small budgets, concerns of inclusiveness and equality are *comparatively* far more significant within them than within a more powerful regional government such as the National Assembly for Wales. A determination to include all parts of the regional community in policy-making can be a major plank of policy in a Regional Chamber.

Formal inclusion in YHA

Figure 6 shows the structure of the YHA constituencies.

Figure 5 : YHA Committee Structures



The five 'commissions' shown in the lower boxes in figure 6 were set up early on in the life of the previous Regional Assembly, RAYH. They matched five priority areas that had been identified in the region's Integrated Regional Strategy, *Advancing Together into the New*

sector. . You've got the churches. I'm not sure how much direct interest RPG has [for them].

As the plenary can meet only some six times per year, for a few hours at a time, members are pressured into considering high-level policy in very little detail. This was abetted by the fact that the 22 local authority representatives are leaders of their respective councils. Hence none hold a specialist portfolio (for instance, transport, or environment), with the associated problem identified in partnership literature: though possessing power to take decisions, they do not necessarily possess the appropriate expertise. By contrast, the officer quoted above identified the YHA commissions as the point at which 'the work gets done': "In the commissions, debates can be had about particular policies, particular initiatives, technical matters."

The potential for *actual* participation by SEPs, as opposed to mere presence, therefore may be more limited than the structure indicates. The YHA is, in this regard, an enabling

Some of the SEP members, or their organisations, are also represented on the commissions. Members of the commissions are not considered to have a representative role: like their counterparts on SEERA they are a top-down model of inclusion, chosen for their knowledge and usefulness to the Assembly. Efforts are made to ensure that the commissions represent all points of view: no sectors are excluded because of unwelcome views. Membership is fluid: in effect, everybody on a slowly-expanding list is invited to Commission meetings, but not all regularly turn up.

The commissions clearly resemble SEERA's advisory groups in their structure. They are not as clearly a top-down form of inclusion as SEERA's groups, as they were not set up with the explicit remit of advising on planning matters, but are tasked with wider discussions and recommendations.

YHA has appointed three new policy managers to drive forward changes in the influence and role of the Commissions. Latterly, although each Commission has had a work programme, links between them and the YHA plenary have been very thin. The Commissions have in effect reported to officers: hence their contribution to policy-making has been somewhat stilted. Each of the Commissions will also have a small executive, with responsibility to drive forward the commission's work programme. Up till now their work has been largely reactive: for instance, the Robust Infrastructure Commission has been concerned with producing RPG, and the Advanced Economy Commission with monitoring the Regional Economic Development Strategy.

Two development officers will be appointed to keep the membership under review, invite extra members where the Commissions are seen to be lacking, or to obtain the correct *individual* from a given organisation that is represented. It is hoped to obtain a clearer pattern of representation: for example, a given sector which is represented on the YHA plenary should also be represented on each Commission, so that the sector can harmonise its views and thus maximise its influence.

One officer stated that the majority of detailed work was carried out in the Commissions: in a similar role to the advisory groups of SEERA, these bodies produced detailed recommendations to be passed to the plenary assembly. However, elected members are permitted to, and do, serve on the Commissions: there are aims to increase the contribution of elected members to the commissions.

Inclusion and size

The issue of size has already been raised in the context of inclusiveness, with a suggestion implicit that, in order to be inclusive, Chambers ought to be larger rather than smaller. This would be justifiable if the work of Chambers took place solely through their members in plenary sessions. However, one of the findings of this research is that that is not the case: indeed, the truth is the reverse. Most of the fundamental work of the Chambers, including

the two case-studies, takes place outside plenary debates: either in committee discussions, or through officers.

One officer suggested that the YHA plenary was a very poor occasion in which to try to hold debates. However, this was taken as an accepted fact: it was related as much to the part-time nature of the assembly membership as to the size. Part-time, unpaid members, meeting six times per year, are likely to be reliant upon briefings produced by the YHA. And agendas are typically tight, with no time available for extended debate.

Groups outside inclusion structures

The smaller size of the YHA membership suggests that inclusion would be less comprehensive than in the South East. The large commissions obviate this problem to a certain extent. Nevertheless, overall perceptions of inclusiveness correlate considerably with those in the South East. Many of the concerns about excluded groups found in the South East were shared in Yorkshire and Humber, though they take slightly different form. The opinion of respondents was that the spread of representation on YHA was approximately right.

In this regard, respondents' views on which groups still remained to be included more effectively were notable. None believed that social, environmental, or economic groups still suffered from being left out. In many cases these groups have spent years campaigning 'from the outside' for policy change, and respond enthusiastically to invitations to the 'inside'.

The research found far less concern than was evident in SEERA that business had not become properly engaged in regional activities. Business representatives have three seats on YHA: one of these is dedicated to the Federation of Small Businesses, expanding representation from the CBI and Chamber of Commerce. Business interests are also represented by the LSC representative, who is also vice-chair of YHA, and who runs a venture capital company in his 'day job'. The Chamber of Commerce representative chairs a Commission, and the CBI representative chaired the first YHA scrutiny panel.

Two respondents were sceptical of the degree to which business had been engaged. Both stated that, whilst formally obtaining business representation on the Assembly was straightforward, representatives often came from umbrella organisations like the CBI or Institute of Directors, or the Federation of Small Businesses. These bodies were felt to have only a limited 'constituency'. The representatives were also typically not 'practising' businesspeople, who, it was believed, would not have the time to take part in regional meetings. It was supposed that representatives, as opposed to practitioners, would be less in touch with business's views and needs. At the same time, there was a feeling that the business representatives had not contributed as much as they might have: in part this was attributed to a strong aversion to styles of operation that resemble local government, as with the South East.

These feelings were compounded by the fact that local authorities were (and still are) paying subscriptions to the Regional Chambers, whilst partner organisations never have. Early attempts were made to oblige partner members to pay subscriptions in some regions, but these were abandoned after the Government indicated that it did not wish to see partners excluded because of inability to pay subscrip

representatives from regional organisations were appointed on the basis of ability to commit their time. Though the Chamber did ensure a variety of representation, there was little attempt to use any form of election or electoral college.

Two respondents believed that the SEPs did not uniformly function as a bloc. Despite being united to some degree by the common interest of not being local politicians, and in having their own pre-meetings and relationships with the YHA secretariat, there was also some feeling of a divide similar to the one which is formalised in the South East, between 'economic' and 'social/environmental' partners: one respondent claimed "the rural community, the voluntary bodies, environment, we tend to stick together. Then the business element sticks together."

Individual officers were praised for their efforts, early on, to include social and economic partners. To some extent, the knowledge that the legitimacy of the Chambers in the eyes of the Government depended on inclusiveness aided this. Nevertheless, the routine practice of inclusiveness was vital. One officer in YHA in particular was singled out by two respondents:

A lot of it is down to her. She's been absolutely brilliant from the very beginning, very inclusive.... She's been extraordinarily good at pulling together—'oh you are coming, you have done this, you will be all right...oh go on, do this'—very much a personal thing. And [this was important] particularly at the beginning, when a lot of us thought it was a good idea but didn't quite know why we were there.

Conclusions

The way ahead for inclusion

The two Regional Chambers used as case studies in this research have practised inclusion effectively in a number of ways. Their record indicates that lessons have been learned, albeit indirectly, from the experiences of local partnerships through the 1990s. In structural terms, there is much to commend in the progress of both YHA and SEERA.

There has been little prior research on the forms that inclusion takes in the Regional Chambers. However, a number of observations can be made about the process. These come with a health warning: they relate solely to the two Chambers that have been studied and are not necessarily generalisable. It is also important to note that none of the Chambers are finished articles: they are still developing, growing capacity through their central government funding, and adopting a critical stance to their own performance. However, this report points towards some phenomena which may be observable in other regions when efforts towards inclusiveness are made.

1. The two Chambers studied are very reliant on the flexibility and commitment of certain individuals to function effectively. Many partners who sat as Chamber members did so by virtue of flexible working arrangements in their 'day job', and many were appointed largely through being present and willing to undertake the job. This is a similar pattern to that found in regeneration partnerships. These people are 'core members': their characters and inclinations exert considerable influence over the direction of the Chamber, distinct from their roles as representatives. Relationships between them, similarly, are fundamental in the actual progress of Chamber business.

This point was also raised by Shaw *et al* in relation to the North-East. Whereas electoral colleges and partners' seats may permit a wider range of representatives on the Chamber membership, inclusiveness is diluted if a small group of those individuals takes charge of the Chamber.

It is very difficult to research the impact of regional stakeholders as a whole (i.e. those outside the Assembly membership) on Chamber policy, because they contribute through personal or electronic contacts. But it is perhaps inevitable that, in quasi-governmental structures of this kind, opportunities exist for control of power by small groups—although there is nothing in the current research to suggest that this happens now.

2. The structures through which partners are enabled to be included within Regional Chambers have implications about the purpose of the partner organisations. Fundamentally, are the partners expected to contribute only in their area of expertise or to feed in on all regional debates if they so choose? If partners want to, or should, contribute mainly as experts, this points towards their contributions being concentrated in advisory groups or commissions—in other words, subject committees of some form; and conversely, it points towards a smaller presence on the plenary assembly. This research indicates that partners generally choose to contribute only on their area of expertise. In practice most partners find that most regional

policies have implications for their 'subject' and thus contribute fairly frequently. The joint approach under development in Yorkshire and Humber appears to be a logical response to this dual concern: partner members will be able to contribute at both levels and will be supported in building their capacity to do so.

Most partners in practice see their representative role and their communication of expertise as one and the same. That view is facilitated by the nature of partners' constituencies. Their constituents are their constituents because they share the partner representatives' expert knowledge and interest; thus to represent their constituents' views *is* to influence regional policy via their expertise.

There are strong parallels between the partner members and members of the House of Lords. Peers sit part-time, rarely contribute on subjects that they are not expert upon, and are welcomed by many commentators for providing a more civilised and knowledgeable source of debate than that of the House of Commons. Peers also have the ability to speak or vote on any matter of government, though they frequently choose not to.

Most partners interviewed were strongly of the opinion that the value of their role lay in their ability to contribute to the business of the Regional Chambers at all levels. In this regard, many were very sceptical about the

If one's working within an elected organisation.... We have a map to know how to resolve conflict, and to take decisions that are binding.

However, in a Regional Chamber no such 'map' exists. And this is complicated by the tendency of Chambers to avoid controversial matters and to seek consensus at every opportunity. The author witnessed this tendency at the YHA's annual general meeting in July 2002, where strenuous efforts were made to prevent a discussion on the YHA's response to the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice*, becoming heated.

Ownership has other more practical uses, however, as expressed by another officer:

A number of the partners who we involve in our work, if you were to consciously exclude them from the process...might want to come up to the public examination of RPG and object to everything in it.... By incorporating them in the actual working...[we are] trying to see if some consensus can be achieved that can take on board their concerns.

5. The Chambers studied have made a success of using ICT for communication and discussion, perhaps more so than many other parts of government. E-mail groups are, by necessity, used as the fundamental means of inclusion of a wider group of stakeholders than is available for membership. This has been a commendable, and organic, development. There is another aspect to good communications, however. Chambers aim to exercise regional influence, and influence comes through awareness of their existence and role. Communicating their existence, purpose, and priorities is therefore a priority for the Regional Chambers. SEERA in particular has prioritised communicating its existence and basic information (business, meeting dates, documents) to as great a degree as possible. Making information available is regarded as a vital part of inclusiveness.
6. Symbolic steps away from local government practice have been found to be valuable means of convincing partner members of the seriousness of inclusion. These include using non-local government venues for meetings; moving away from local government terminology in constitutional and procedural documents; and preventing delay of debates through tactics derived from local government. The two Chambers studied have made good progress in this stepping-away, and other Chambers should consider adopting their practices.
7. It was noted in the introduction that the lack of funding available to Regional Chambers might reduce the incentive to create working partnerships. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case: the Chambers studied function very effectively as partnerships. It appears on the face of it

to give up their power so easily.

The limited powers of the Chambers may also ease the various constitutional oddities: the appointment of members to advisory groups on the basis of expertise is an example. Bridges *et al* report that similar processes on RDA advisory groups created considerable disquiet.⁴³ RDAs have much spending power; hence whether or not an organisation is included in decision-making is a much more salient issue.

Resources are key to the inclusion of social and economic partners. An enormous difference in effectiveness can be made by paying for a single person as secretarial support to a partner grouping. This is a similar conclusion to that drawn by literature on regeneration partnerships; the effect of the support was disproportionately greater than the expenditure on it.

8. Many partner respondents implied that procedures and debates in Regional Chambers marked something of a 'different kind of politics'. Partners had refused to accept political point-scoring and rhetoric as inevitable components of policy-making, and those tendencies had now

of regional government. Whilst arguments can be made for elected assemblies having more members, it is not clear that the current arrangements promote diversity in more than a symbolic fashion. Having a wide range of members is only valuable if those members all contribute to Chamber business.

On the other hand the very small membership of YHA may bring its own problems, in that most partner constituencies have only one representative on the full assembly, leading either to a limited opportunity to contribute or to that person being continually obliged to stand up for their own sector's interests to the exclusion of other issues. What is more promising is a dual approach with inclusion taking place both at plenary and commission level of the kind underway in YHA.

5. Stronger action could be taken on supporting sectoral constituencies and duties of reporting back to them, particularly on those members who have so far shown less enthusiasm for duties of representation and accountability.

Otherwise, all Chambers could be encouraged to follow the lead of the South East and Yorkshire and Humber on 'cascading', full voting rights, greater use of committees, and encouragement of sectoral constituencies. For the latter, introduction of funding from sources that are not time-limited would be helpful. Due to the limited responsibilities available to Regional Chambers, recommendations such as these will be able to have only a limited effect. But in the context of the powers of the Chambers they can improve performance significantly.

The general trend, in SEERA, YHA and elsewhere, has been away from permitting full membership to statutory representatives. This has coincided with the gradual growth of

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Glossary of acronyms

Acronym	Description
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