

# The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+]



## What is 'The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+]'

The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+] is produced by Alliance Manchester Business School on behalf of [The National Consortium for Societal Resilience \[UK+\]](#). The briefing speaks to practitioners who work to enhance the resilience of society, including government, emergency planners, resilience officers, the voluntary sector, business, and communities. The briefing shares knowledge and good

practice on operationalising societal resilience, lessons from ongoing design and implementation work on the NCSR+ strategy to create Local Resilience Capability, and promotes events relevant to societal resilience. NCSR+ also run a [series of webinars](#) that explore how societal resilience is developed and delivered, register for upcoming and watch previous:

Watch: [25/05/2023](#)

Strengthening local resilience; This webinar will share insights from the journey through the COVID-19 pandemic years and ask what did we learn about the future of resilience.

<https://tinyurl.com/ycuru7wr>

Watch: [14/03/2023](#)

Sellafield Community Support Cell; Discusses the societal resilience work carried out by the Sellafield Community Support Cell established during COVID-19.

<https://tinyurl.com/mrxkzb83>

Watch: [16/02/2023](#)

North Yorkshire; Shares insights and lessons on societal resilience work, particularly in relation to the 'Ready for Anything' volunteer community resilience project.

<https://tinyurl.com/25vwrz4p>

Watch: [12/01/2022](#)

Fermanagh; Presents the societal resilience building activities being undertaken in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland.

<https://tinyurl.com/jj2dx9mz>

Visit our webpage [National Consortium for Societal Resilience \[UK+\]](#)



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# Bridging the gap: NCSR+ focus group on The UK Government Resilience Framework (UKNRF)

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This piece originally appeared as an [Original Thinkers blog post](#) on the Alliance Manchester Business School website.

## Three years on from the Covid crisis, David Powell and Duncan Shaw discuss ongoing efforts to make the UK a more resilient nation.

Is the UK today better protected against the threat of a future pandemic or, for that matter, a more dangerous Covid variant? Are we more insulated from the impact of climate change than we were? And are we better prepared for the huge societal impacts of rapid technological change, chronic stresses or future shocks?

As the immediate Covid-19 crisis fades into the collective memory, now seems a very opportune time to be asking these questions. The pandemic has naturally highlighted the need for a new strategic approach to strengthen resilience, and there has been a resulting flurry of activity in Whitehall. Indeed, as well as the recently published UK Government Resilience Framework we have seen the creation of a new Resilience Directorate set up in the Cabinet Office. This aims to build on the National Security Risk Assessment which considered the chronic vulnerabilities and challenges that arise from geopolitical and geo-economic shifts.

This briefing details key discussion points and reflections from an online focus group that took place on 23rd January 2023. The focus group provided a forum for members of the [National Consortium for Societal Resilience \[UK+\] \(NCSR+\)](#) to share their perspectives on the UK Government Resilience Framework.

## NCSR+ focus group: The UK Government Resilience Framework

The discussion was structured around two key questions:

1. What are the key strengths and opportunities in the Resilience Framework?
2. How can NCSR+ support local effort in realising these strengths and opportunities?

### Key discussion points:

#### ■ Looking to local, listening to national

The Consortium, which was founded last year, brings together partners from policy and practice across the UK to share insights, learn together, hear about inspiring work, and identify opportunities on how to enhance societal resilience.

Our driving goals are to enhance the UK whole of society approach to resilience so that individuals, community groups, businesses and organisations can all play a meaningful part in building the resilience of society and providing local capabilities

that can work alongside or complement official response and recovery efforts during disasters. The consortium also actively influences the national conversation on societal resilience, helping effective delivery of national and sub-national offers at the local level.

#### ■ Challenges

Critics might well argue, with some justification, that setting up these new structures is all well and good, but very little if anything has changed on the ground.

Whole of society resilience appears to be an ambition and aspiration with limited detail on how to actually achieve it. Indeed, some perceive these efforts at national government level as simply shifting responsibility for resilience to other government tiers, communities and individuals without any extra resource and ignoring budget cuts elsewhere.

Another challenge with this debate is actually a simpler one, namely that a common definition of whole of society resilience is currently lacking. This gives rise to potentially divergent interpretations of its meaning in policy and practice.

#### ■ Opening up resilience

We welcome the ambitions in the UKNRF to broaden the focus, and to open up resilience beyond an often-narrow interpretation of working with easy to access communities and the established voluntary sector. It also marks a more supportive shift in the relationship between 'official' responses and affected communities as valuable resources (working alongside, or complementing response and recovery efforts).

A 'whole society' approach seeks to align a broader range of agendas, not least 'levelling up' but also climate change, economy, health and wellbeing, public safety and cohesion. It also requires local place-based, strategic and political leadership.

Covid recovery demonstrates that agreement and local strategy setting can be challenging for Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) at the moment. LRFs – multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services – tend to be, by nature, transactional and 'occasional' partnerships, over-reliant on willing partners, and with an explicit focus on response.

We question whether the national imperative for societal resilience is yet mirrored at local delivery level, but observe the aspiration in the UKNRF to 'strengthen leadership, accountability and integration' with great interest. We hope that central to this will be a more strategic approach to innovation, and longer-term funding for resilience.

#### ■ How the Consortium can help

So, a central question remains over who precisely should deliver resilience. Everyone agrees it needs to be at the heart of decision-making and investment. But who exactly makes those decisions, and who makes those investments?

The answer is surely that resilience is ultimately a local issue, and this is precisely where the Consortium can help bridge the gap, looking to local but listening to national, helping to ensure effective delivery of national offers at the local level.

In this context understanding the local delivery of national ambition and policy is key, and this is precisely where we believe the Consortium can directly help address some of these challenges.

Resilience has to be a whole of society endeavour which is precisely why we have brought together so many different partners from across local government, business and the voluntary sector to debate these issues.

Watch some of the highlights from the [National Conference on Societal Resilience](#) hosted by NCSR+ in March 2023 which further explored the questions and key points outlined in this briefing.

# Discussion Groups on the Strategy for Societal Resilience (1): Whole-of-society resilience or Target groups

Produced by: Dr Andrew McClelland, Professor Duncan Shaw,  
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## Purpose of Discussion Groups

The online discussion groups provide a forum for NCSR+ members to share their perspectives and learning on the key concepts and topics embedded within the emerging NCSR+ Strategy for Societal Resilience. The insights generated via these sessions will help to shape the content and language used within the final Strategy as well as the accompanying Manual for operationalising societal resilience as a Local Resilience Capability. The discussion groups also fulfil an NCSR+ commitment to deliver interactive training for consortium members on the emerging Strategy for Societal Resilience.

## First Discussion Group

The first discussion group took place on 18th January 2023 and focused on the topic *Whole-of-society resilience or Target groups [Step1]*. Thirty-one participants attended the first session, which was split into three breakout rooms moderated by the UoM team, followed by feedback during a plenary. The breakout room discussions were structured around three questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the “whole-of-society approach to resilience”?
2. What are your thoughts on a “target group” approach to resilience?
3. Need – Whose resilience do you want to strengthen first? How would you prioritise?

## Key discussion points:

- **Welcome for a whole-of-society approach, with reservations**  
Whole-of-society resilience was broadly welcomed. First, it arguably indicates a broadening focus from community resilience, which was often limited and narrowly interpreted (e.g., belief that working with the voluntary and community sector was sufficient). Second, it suggests the adoption of a “whole systems” approach, and thus the bringing together of policy agendas beyond the traditional LRF scope to enhance resilience (e.g., community cohesion, climate adaptation). But...

A common definition of whole-of-society resilience is currently lacking. This gives rise to potentially divergent interpretations of its meaning in policy and practice (and theory). Further, whole-of-society resilience appears to be an ambition and aspiration with limited detail on how to achieve it.

What agenda a whole-of-society approach serves is open to question. For example, it is perceived by some as national

government shifting responsibility for resilience to other government tiers, communities, and individuals, but without extra resource and ignoring other resource reductions.

- **A targeted approach is not mutually exclusive with a whole-of-society approach.**

A balance can be struck between supports that are aimed at everyone (e.g., the 80% who are relatively resilient), with the more resource-intensive measures targeted as those are most in need from disruptions (e.g., the 20% struggling with the sense of community or ability to prepare).

Targeting groups more in need is arguably a strategic aim within a whole-of-society approach. Indeed, addressing this group initially can provide the basis for scaling up and growing towards enhancing whole-of-society resilience.

- **Finding appropriate language is difficult, but crucial.**

Reservations were expressed around the use of the language of “target groups” and “vulnerability”. In part, this reflected concerns over the impression given of a top-down approach (e.g., targeted by whom), and the dislike that many people and communities have of being characterised by others as vulnerable (e.g., disability does not automatically equate to vulnerability). Thus, care is needed in how we classify and engage with communities so that they are approached in a considered way.

Other terms such as “priority group” may be preferable.

- **Questions over how resilience building efforts will be integrated and sustained.**

It remains unclear as to how efforts towards broadening the resilience agenda can be effectively integrated and led across the landscape of national / sub-national organizations, LRFs, and hyper-local communities of type/place/need.

The capacity of resilience partners to support societal resilience is also presently challenged given their own resource constraints and was seen as a possible constraining factor in pursuing a whole-of-society approach.

- **Who and how to target remains a critical challenge.**

Although the community risk register was seen as a good starting point from where to strengthen resilience, it was recognised that in-depth knowledge of communities is patchy. The easy approach is to target the easy to reach groups, yet it is often the harder to reach groups that are most in need and least easy to contact. A dilemma is thus apparent between pragmatically starting with groups in need that already working with or seeking out the harder to reach.

To better target need, participants suggested, among other groups, working with the equalities sector, voluntary sector panels (i.e., in LRFs), and community wider partners.

# Discussion Groups on the Strategy for Societal Resilience (2): Identifying target groups

*Produced by: Dr Andrew McClelland, Professor Duncan Shaw, David Powell and Róisín Jordan, University of Manchester*  
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## Second Discussion Group

The second discussion group took place on 7th February 2023 and focused on Identifying target groups [Step1]. Fifteen participants attended the session, which was moderated by the UoM team.

The discussion was structured around two questions:

1. Offer – Who should you work with to support your target groups?
2. What is / who has?
  - Capability (skills, knowledge, insight)
  - Capacity (resource, information, and assets)
  - Infrastructure (communication, supervision, integration)

## Key discussion points:

### ■ Motivation and willingness to also engage an important factor.

Not every person or group is willing or motivated to engage with societal resilience activities even when they have the capability, capacity, and the infrastructure in place. Some communities are “disengaged”. Breaking down barriers is important so that all people and groups recognise the value of their prospective contribution.

### ■ Fostering relationships via capacity building and adapting ways of working.

Building the capacity of community partners is difficult but essential to addressing identified gaps and reaching underserved priority groups. Larger funded organizations typically have the capability, capacity, and infrastructure already in place. However, raising the capacity levels of other perhaps less obvious groups is possible by working with organizations such as Communities Prepared, who offer training and learning opportunities.

Further, rather than expecting community partners to work in “an emergency planning kind of way”, LRFs should adapt their own practices in ways that groups are familiar and comfortable with. Willingness to do so would help build trust and longer-term relationships.

### ■ Make friends in advance of a disruption.

Approaches to communities are often made in the context of recent experience of disruptions (e.g., setting up a community resilience group after flooding). However, building relationships with communities in advance of disruptions is preferable, but attempting to do so raises difficult questions over how to make the relevance of societal resilience appealing to communities. Again, it is critical to engage communities on their own terms, thus recognising that the issues important to them are not necessarily those highly prioritised by LRFs or based around resilience to disruptions.

### ■ Getting traction within communities through an asset-based approach.

The utility of building relationships with communities through an asset-based community development approach was underlined. In short, rather than focusing on risks, this approach seeks to identify and build upon what communities already have and use daily. A key question for LRFs therefore is how to help communities to use their existing assets in the context of a disruption?

Examples given by participants of an asset-based approach that have gained traction recently include Resilience Hubs where communities lead conversations and activities at a pace they are happy with. Among other things, this has helped to support informal relationship building.

### ■ Challenges remain over how to support those lacking agency.

Difficulties remain in supporting those “at-risk” and vulnerable communities with limited agency (e.g., some communities don’t have public buildings or similar assets upon which to capitalise).

It is also open to question whether it is a realistic expectation that every community can be prepared in advance of a disruption. Careful thought should be given as to how LRFs can support such communities when disruptions occur.