

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:

REGISTER: 14/05/2024

In this webinar hosted with RBOC, Dan Neely, Community Resilience and Group Recovery Manager, Wellington Region Emergency Management Office, will share his experiences, lessons, and thoughts on societal resilience to disasters and the creation of the Community Emergency Hub model in New Zealand. <https://bit.ly/440OctJ>

Watch: 30/01/2024

This webinar focused on the principles and key features of a new approach to societal resilience based on operationalising societal resilience as a local resilience capability. <https://bit.ly/49v2cq2>

Watch: 05/02/2024

This webinar focused on the role of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations in enhancing the resilience of society to disruption. <https://bit.ly/3xytFd9>

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



Previous briefings. If this is the first briefing you have received and you'd like to access more, they can be found [here](#).

>>>>>>>> Please register at www.ambs.ac.uk/ncsr to receive future briefings <<<<<<<<<

Second National Conference on Societal Resilience

Produced by: Dr Andrew McClelland, Professor Duncan Shaw and David Powell,

University of Manchester

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The National Consortium for Societal Resilience [UK+] (NCSR+) ran its second national conference at Alliance Manchester Business School (University of Manchester, UK, 4-5 March 2024), focussed on harnessing momentum and galvanising further collaboration and action on the unique approach to societal resilience that the NCSR+ is co-developing with our partners.

The conference welcomed over 170 participants from local resilience partnerships, voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations, senior government representatives and partners from policy and practice from across the UK. The conference also embraced international delegations and participants from the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB), Nigerian Peace Corps, and The Netherlands.

Across two informative days of networking and discussion, we explored the following and more with a fantastic line-up of speakers, panellists, and session chairs:

- What it means to be a leader of societal resilience.
- Building societal resilience together as a strategic endeavour.
- How to better collaborate and partner with others.
- Future risks and partnership working in a changing context.

This briefing provides some highlights and key talking points from the conference. Its focus is especially on drawing together salient issues raised during the question and answer (Q&A) sessions and within the written feedback (i.e., on post-it notes) emerging from table discussions.

Conference participants were distributed across seventeen round tables, each of which contained a mix of representatives from different sectors. Quotations verbalised or captured in writing during these conference segments are sprinkled throughout to flavour the narrative.

This briefing is structured according to the conference sessions, which centred on:

- Leadership – Being a Leader of Societal Resilience.
- Stronger partnerships – Societal resilience is a strategic endeavour.
- Collaborating on whole-of-society – You are not alone on leading societal resilience.
- VCSE – We are a partnership – let's partner.
- The future – You'll lead societal resilience in a changing context.
- Next steps – What's next for our collaboration on societal resilience.

You can view the full conference programme on the [AMBS website](#)

Leadership – Being a Leader of Societal Resilience

Local leadership behind a national endeavour is crucial to enhancing societal resilience. But what does it take to lead on this agenda and galvanise individual and collective action?

From the Table discussions, participant feedback centred on the challenges of being a leader on societal resilience, and what leaders can do to overcome these challenges. Some highlighted challenges include:

- Divergence in language and culture among partners especially from different sectors, and between local resilience partnerships and local communities, can inhibit the building of collaborative relationships. For example, varying perspectives may emerge on who the leaders are (e.g., based on job title or their experience and capacity to influence), and how they should lead (e.g., facilitation versus command and control).
- Persistence of short-termism rather than more strategic thinking towards longer term goals that seek to integrate, coordinate, and prioritise the available resources as a collaborative endeavour. A concern remains that “people are unable to care about resilience until the moment [that it's too late]”.
- Limitations caused by a lack of resources, especially financial. Many communities are affected by the cost-of-living crisis causing an increase in need within society, while statutory agencies are simultaneously impacted by resource constraints that diminish their capacity – hence the need to collaborate, not compete on societal resilience.

Some highlighted ways of overcoming these challenges include:

- Facilitating the participation of communities so that all can play a meaningful part is critical to being a leader of societal resilience. This includes going to the community – “don't make them come to you” – and not assuming but engaging in conversations so that communities' needs and capacities are better understood.
- Connecting and building relationships with other partners and agendas locally and nationally that help to integrate the whole system and align people and politics behind a local and strategic endeavour. For example, the new Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) role within Local Resilience Forums in England could better link local resilience partnerships with community volunteers.
- Achieving partial success is better than not acting at all for want of perfection. Trade-offs may exist between bringing more partners and communities together, which takes time and resource, and working with those already engaged and willing. Starting small, achieving quick wins, and invigorating further collective action is important to maintain momentum.

Some highlights from the Q&A include:

- Leaders of societal resilience should get out and be proactive in their communities. Important when working with local communities is to recognise that hierarchical leadership does not translate well – “circular leadership”, with everyone deemed

as equals and working towards a shared vision for action, is preferable.

- Striking a balance between the tried and tested and the need for innovative practice is critical for leaders of societal resilience. The former can lead to “easy wins”, while the latter can help to push the boundaries of practice in generating learning and developing adaptive capacity.
- Practicing self-care should also be prioritised as leaders often pursue survival over personal resilience. Among the activities that can contribute to this are developing peer support networks, trustful relationships – “people around who are looking out for you” – and remembering to “celebrate the small victories”.

Stronger partnerships – Societal resilience is a strategic endeavour

Societal resilience is a strategic endeavour that requires trusted relationships to enable collaboration and strategic coordination. How can stronger strategic relationships be forged before a disruption so that partners are ready to activate in response and recovery?

From the Table discussions, participant feedback centred on who should be engaged and how in developing a strategy on societal resilience. Some highlights include:

- Welcoming the shift from community resilience to societal resilience with a greater emphasis on whole system and collaborative working to ensure that individuals, community groups, organisations, and networks can all play a meaningful part in building the resilience of society.
- Recognising that many local resilience partnerships do not yet have a societal resilience strategy in place. Challenges to their creation include that some partners and communities are currently missing from the discussion, or they are not yet informed enough to engage. Aligning the people and politics behind this endeavour thus remains essential.
- Further support is needed to help different partners including businesses and VCSEs to think more strategically about the opportunities to enhance societal resilience and improve their capacity to engage in this collaborative endeavour.

Some highlights from the Q&A include:

- Behaviour change is needed among some resilience partners to progress the societal resilience agenda. Better value for money is a persuasive argument that can help to shift mindsets – save money by doing something together now rather than waiting and things becoming more expensive later. Addressing trade-offs and the fear of change/loss is also important.
- How to measure improvements in societal resilience remains an ongoing challenge. With whole-of-society resilience also about “hearts and minds”, it is recognised that not everything can be measured. Likewise, co-designing key performance indicators with communities is important to achieve buy in and ensure what is locally important is included and not just top-down measures.
- Fostering the skills and capabilities required to deliver societal resilience initiatives demands long-term investment by central government. Among the focal points to enabling the national ambition on societal resilience to be achieved is ensuring a more diverse civil service to implement the agenda with agility and creativity and involving young people throughout.

Collaborating on whole-of-society – You are not alone on leading societal resilience

Forming meaningful collaborations to enhance performance are central to the local delivery of the national ambition on societal resilience.

From the table discussions, participant feedback centred on how we can better understand community needs during disruption, and who can help us to do so. Some highlights include:

- “Don’t assume!” – important that local resilience partnerships ask communities what they need rather than providing what they think communities need. Community engagement programmes and getting out into the community can build shared understanding and language and help in finding ways to give people back a sense of agency after disruption.
- Create strong relationships before a disruption occurs so that essential community infrastructure and preparedness can be activated when needed – “don’t parachute in and expect people to respond – need to [firstly] establish trust”. Having an expandable core group of partners and knowing how and when to draw on additional resources (targeted and appropriate), are key.
- Broadening the selection of representative voices within resilience partnerships. For example, chambers of commerce offer links into business networks, while arts and heritage, farming, and education are among the sectors that can help to pinpoint community needs.

Some highlights from the Q&A include:

- Importance of a systems approach to leading in complex and multi-hazard environments. New tools to understand and anticipate long term trends include Artificial Intelligence (AI), which can game-play and visualise different scenarios and policy choices in the context of disruption(s).
- Collective leadership is needed from both the strategic level (e.g., central government) and “bottom-up” communities. As the primary “bearers of risk”, community perspectives are fundamental to enhancing societal resilience, but there are “limits to how resilient people can be”. Government must provide the necessary scaffolding and support longer-term.
- Charity shops provide an everyday touchpoint for many local communities to VCSE organisations and are vital to understanding their needs. This includes those not currently relying on the services of VCSEs and who might be able to offer support during disruption.

VCSE – We are a partnership – let’s partner

This interactive workshop was led by the VCS Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) and addressed how VCSE organisations and local resilience partnerships can form meaningful partnerships that work for all involved to enhance societal resilience.

From the table discussions, participant feedback centred on the following questions:

- What does an ideal network of partnerships and partners look like in your future?
- How do you make it a meaningful partnership together?
- What is your current landscape and how does it differ?
- Using the groups’ painted future as your ‘North Star’, list specific actions to get you closer to the picture you’ve painted.

Some highlights include:

- Ideal partnership working entails having clarity over its purpose and value to partners so that trust and resourcing can be sustained over the longer-term. Aligning around goals and values and acting together to develop a shared understanding of language, capabilities, and skills, can help to create a partnership 'North Star'.
- Centring evaluation and performance measurement on social impact and delivering better outcomes for communities – not just key indicators concerning risks – can make partnership working more meaningful. Lessons from public health, for example, on social prescribing, and what some businesses are doing on corporate social responsibility, can provide useful insights.
- Training and exercising together more frequently between resilience partnerships and VCSEs can ensure that partnership working is not only during disruption. Early engagement can include developing exercise scenarios and priority setting their outcomes. This would provide vital opportunities for knowledge sharing, mutual learning, and relationship building between sectors.

The future – You'll lead societal resilience in a changing context

Societal resilience is enhanced by hyper-local systems to help people and places to adapt and advance in a changing environment. But how can we future proof and what does the future look like on risks and societal resilience?

From the table discussions, participant feedback centred on how we can address future risks, what adaptive capacity look likes, and how to build it within communities. Some highlights include:

- Working with trusted partners is critical to the ability to support and extend capacity to meet community need and demand during disruption. Continuous adaptation is already part of the everyday experience of VCSE organisations and this ability to improvise can be beneficial to local resilience partnerships in developing adaptive capacity.
- Language remains a barrier to working with communities to build their adaptive capacity. Threats and risks are concepts used to frame many activities within the context of local resilience partnerships, and these often do not translate well and can be off putting outside of these settings.
- Create flexible systems that will adapt to any disruption. This can be a capabilities-based approach where society's skills, knowledge, and willingness to get involved are combined to complement response organisations. The flexibility should encourage systems to react quickly, take care of each other, identify needs and offers of support, and work across response/recovery and into ongoing resilience.

With thanks to the Conference sponsors:



Some highlights from the Q&A include:

- Encouraging communities to think about what they want the future to look like and their vision for it is one means of engaging with future risks amid present difficulties such as the cost-of-living crisis. Focusing on how to develop adaptive capacities rather than over-emphasising risks is another way to productively engage already challenged communities.
- Important to distinguish between chronic versus other forms of risk and the different audiences being engaged. For example, the continuous approach to assess and monitor chronic risks contrasts with that taken for the national risk register which is more concerned with the likelihood of impacts occurring. The former is more aimed at policymakers.
- Conversations on the future proofing of societal resilience can usefully engage with the creative industries. This might be especially pertinent to thinking imaginatively about the future and engaging more communities, businesses and others currently missing around the table, in creative ways such as through storytelling.

Next steps – What's next for our collaboration on societal resilience

Our collective efforts are making a difference through the work of the NCSR+. But much more can be done to maintain momentum and galvanise further collaboration and action to ensure that all can play a meaningful part in building the resilience of our society.

This is an opportune moment, considering continuing pressures on public services and budgets, to collaborate strategically as partners in societal resilience and to embrace local community responses as a valuable resource.

The NCSR+ will continue to play its part in translating the national ambition on societal resilience into action by local resilience partnerships that will help people and places to adapt and advance in a changing environment.

To this end, we have begun preparations for the 3rd National Conference on Societal Resilience - pencil Manchester, 10-11 March 2025 into your diaries.

Watch some of the highlights from the [Second National Conference on Societal Resilience](#)