



Dear Reader

What will you be doing 27 March 2008? Will you be pressing the button on the Joint Electronic Submission System of the ESRC before 4 pm on that Thursday? Do you intend to steer the juggernaut of a new research centre or do you just want to jump on it? Do you want to stow away or will you sulk and just get out of its way? Did anyone intend to stand in its way? Who, in the words of one of the contributors to this edition, is having memories of school discos nervously looking over their shoulder trying to spot who is talking with whom?

Well, if you are going to host the new Third Sector Research Centre, we might have some questions for you.

And to the hub of the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, we are watching with interest.

Why does the Office of the Third Sector, which "leads work across government to support a thriving third sector (voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals), enabling the sector to campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen

communities", now wish to fund two research centres?

Together with the Economic and Social Research Council it is setting out to bring "together a critical mass of research expertise, resources and intellectual leadership, ...[the centre] will support research of the highest international standing, provide top quality analysis and strengthen the evidence base on the sector and its impact, to underpin policy and practice". Top quality analysis of what?

These developments are seen by some as a possible indication of a generational shift we might be facing as is Julia Neuberger's Manifesto for Change which will be reviewed in this edition.

If a generational shift in the Voluntary and Community Sector and the research within is approaching or indeed happening this bulletin does not hold enough space and cannot do the necessary discussion justice.

We will therefore today launch a small email discussion group.

arvacgroup@tiscali.co.uk

Everyone who has comments or questions

about what is being said in this bulletin can join. You will be able to read others' comments and post your own.

If in fact a new order is becoming visible this is not the time to be silent. Welcome it if you will or question it if you must, but do not stand quietly with closed eyes as this might be dangerous when juggernauts are about. ARVAC's recent painful experiences are testimony to this.

The development and increasing importance of Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure might also be seen as an indicator of a possible shift and I am therefore now looking for contributors for our next edition which will concentrate on Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure.

I was recently asked were I stood with regard to juggernauts and I am clear about my answer: "not in their way, if I see them coming." Let's look out together.

Jurgen Grotz
(editor)

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Pete Alcock

The Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy

In November last year the Cabinet Office (Office of the Third Sector, OTS), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Carnegie Trust UK and the Scottish Government announced the establishment of a new independent research centre on Charitable Giving and Philanthropy. This followed a competitive bidding process, overseen by the ESRC, which began early in the summer and is based on ideas first mooted two years earlier in 2005, as we shall discuss in more detail later. Although it was announced last November the Centre is still not established formally at the time of writing, as negotiations around its structure and formal operation continue with the ESRC. This is still a case of 'watch this space' therefore.

Nevertheless the broad structure of the Centre is known, as are the key personnel who will be leading it. For a start it will operate on a 'hub and spokes' model, with a central hub providing leadership and co-ordination and three spokes delivering research programmes under three separate themes identified as part of the bidding process. This is a model which has been adopted by other ESRC funded centres, and can provide for a wider range of expertise and institutional commitment than might be offered by a single centre, although conversely it can also mean that the, inevitably limited, resources must be spread more thinly across these separate themes and the institutions delivering them. It will be a challenge for the Centre to square this circle, and to deliver on the policy and practice agenda expected by its government and philanthropic funders.

The Centre hub will be based at the Cass Business School at City University, which will also host one of the spokes. It will be co-directed by Professor Jenny Harrow from Cass and by Cathy Pharoah who is a visiting professor at the School, and was formerly Research

Director at the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). Key partners in the hub will be Professor Ian Bruce, Director of the Centre for Charity Effectiveness at Cass, and Karl Wilding, NCVO's Director of Research.

There are to be three spokes

Individual and Business Giving – led by Professor Charles Harvey at the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship at Strathclyde University. The programme of research here will explore the structures of individual and corporate giving, enhancing understanding of the current challenges to traditional patterns of giving as well as looking at how we recognise social returns on charitable investment.

Charitable Giving and Social Redistribution – led by Professor John Mohan from Southampton University and Dr Ian Wilkinson from Kent University, investigating whether charitable activity might mitigate or reinforce social and economic inequalities, the relationships between funding and the distribution of resources, and the connections between donors and recipients. It will also seek to create greater understanding about how donors think about which causes they contribute to and why.

Institutionalised Giving Structures – led by Professor Jenny Harrow at Cass and Professor Stephen Osborne at Edinburgh University and exploring who creates structures of institutionalised giving and what their impact is, as well as how new forms of philanthropy can emerge and how partnerships can be developed between the state and charitable organisations to deliver on joint outcomes.

Total investment in the Centre is to be £2.5 million over 5 years. This is to be spent on carrying out high quality research and developing an evidence base on giving, with a clear steer to help third sector organisations, government and business to understand how and why individuals and businesses give. The hub in particular is expected to engage national and international stakeholders, and promote capacity building and knowledge exchange. This is an important, but challenging programme.

The Centre is a key element in the OTS's investment in the development of the research capacity on the third sector, agreed at part of the Comprehensive Spending Review and including also the Third Sector Research Centre, currently out to tender; and it has been welcomed by Phil Hope, Minister for the Third Sector. It has taken some time to develop, however. The idea for a designated location for research in the area was first outlined in the 2005 Home Office publication, *A Generous Society: Next steps on charitable giving in England*, which included the commitment to commission the creation of a new centre of excellence for charitable giving including a major programme of research and development. Following this a consultation process was undertaken which included five regional meetings in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London (2), attended by 81 people and ending in March 2007.

One of the interesting strengths of the Centre will also pose one of its greatest practical challenges. This is the co-funding from government and philanthropy in addition to the academic research support provided by the ESRC – a challenge which it is likely to share to some extent with the new Third Sector Research Centre too. Whilst ESRC funding is expected to support traditional academic investigation and dissemination, government is likely to want the Centre to contribute to a topical and dynamic policy agenda. This may provide for some tensions between the research questions to which academics and policymakers want answers; and, of course, the time frames for policy engagement and academic investigation are often rather different. In addition there are the expectations of Carnegie UK who are hopeful that the Centre will be contributing to the development of 'smarter, more effective philanthropy'. A number of stakeholders are thus looking for answers to a number of important questions; and others will watch with interest as the research programmes to investigate these are developed.

Pete Alcock is Professor of Social Policy and Administration and Head of School of Social Sciences at the University of Birmingham

Who builds Britain's Voluntary Sector Infrastructure?

What do you think? Write for our next edition!

Rob Macmillan

Centre for Third Sector Research

Background: Why a new research centre?

Plans are in place to establish a new Centre for Third Sector Research by September 2008. Just over £10m over a 5 year period is being invested in the new research centre from central government (£5m), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (£5m) and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. When placed alongside the recently established 'Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy', it is arguable that there has never before been such a consolidated attempt to develop research on and about the sector.

Discussions around strengthening research on the third sector long predate the current proposal. The ESRC, for example, has been developing a Third Sector Engagement Strategy in order to identify needs in the sector which could be addressed through social science research, establish and promote an evidence base of existing research and build research capacity within the sector.

The immediate origins of the proposal to develop the Centre for Third Sector Research lie in the 2007 'Third Sector Review', which argued that:

- It is important to build a coherent evidence base about the sector, because evidence is thought to have a persuasive value on those commissioning services and for campaigning purposes,
- the real value of the third sector's contribution is not well-evidenced or understood because: there is no central point for collecting and disseminating research about the sector as a whole, and no mechanism for bringing compelling evidence to wider attention; the third sector research community is ar-

gued to be disparate and uncoordinated, alongside a suggestion that the sector lacks a 'research culture' and an adequate research infrastructure.

Dedicated investment to establish a new research centre is proposed as the solution to this set of problems.

Focus: what will it look like?

Following work completed in November 2007 to outline its scope, a specification and call for submissions to establish an independent multi-disciplinary research centre was published by ESRC on 4th January 2008. Bids to run the centre are currently being developed. The call makes it clear that the focus of the centre should be research on, with, and for the third sector, which is taken to include social enterprise as well as small voluntary and community organisations and large charities. It is expected to engage fully with the sector as a whole in developing research agendas through a commitment to the co-production of knowledge.

According to the specification, the aim is to support improvement of the sector's effectiveness in meeting its own aims and those of other stakeholders, by bringing together a *'critical mass of research expertise, resources and intellectual leadership to support research of the highest international standing, to provide top quality analysis independent of government, political party or any other vested interest, and provide the necessary evidence base to better understand key Third Sector issues and underpin policy and practice'*.

The research emphasis of the centre should be on the development of 'research of international standing'. The consultations informing the scoping work identified a number of research priorities which can be taken forward, but the specification gives a steer towards two main areas:

- *Mapping and measuring a dynamic sector*: to address a lack of systematic collection and collation of data on the whole sector (with a priority for longitudinal data), and
- *'Role and impacts of the sector'*: to research the impact and effectiveness of the sector, including an analysis of the sector's potential for delivering public services.

Surprisingly, the research centre is not based on a 'hub and spoke' model as used for the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy. The specification makes it clear that it will operate as a single centre, and bids from large consortia are not being encouraged. However, some funding is being made available separately for the development of three 'capacity building clusters' intended *'to create a new generation of high quality researchers committed to the co-production of knowledge and its application to the Third Sector'*. The clusters include funding to support collaborative doctoral studentships, research placements and research voucher schemes for the sector.

A curious parallel process

In case you were worried, then, that interest in research in, around and on the third sector was destined for decline, along comes a second dedicated research centre in a matter of months. The deadline for submission of proposals for the new Centre for Third Sector Research is at the end of March 2008, the selection process is planned for May 2008, and an announcement is due in June 2008. If, improbably, the timetable holds, the new research centre would be

due for launch in September 2008.

In the meantime, of course, potential bidders are likely to be grappling with the call for proposals. Amongst other things, this will involve trying to:

- find the time and capacity to develop bids against a deadline,
- find suitable partners to add strength to a bid (without creating a dispersed consortium),
- work out the costs (including the academic equivalent of tussling with overheads and full cost recovery), and
- identify an innovative and independently conceived programme of research which also fits the steer given by the call for proposals.

This all takes place in a context in which research institutions often compete with each other over reputations and resources for research, and which are expected to be more entrepreneurial in their approach to winning research grants. As a result potential bidders might also be looking over their shoulders at what the competition is up to. A colleague of mine likened this to a distant, even quaint, memory of school discos, with teenagers nervously eyeing up who was talking with whom.

Of course researchers in, on, and around the third sector itself might view all this with some wearying familiarity. The curious parallels between the third sector and the organisation of research? Now there's an interesting research agenda.

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John Diamond

Why the Third Sector Research Centre is an answer but not to the important question

The announcement that there is to be an ESRC funded Third Sector Research Centre and associated centres across the country would appear to be good news for the voluntary and community sector. In particular, for those (like ARVAC and its founders) who have a commitment to enhancing the research skills, expertise and capacity of the sector the establishment of such a centre should be welcomed. I would like to explore a different take on such a development and want to suggest that although it is an answer it is not one which addresses the really basic questions.

WHAT IS IT AN ANSWER TO?

In part we need to see the creation of the centre as another piece in the VCS jigsaw which has been under construction since 1997. Over the past decade there have been a number of initiatives which have – to a significant extent elevated the status of the VCS in a very crowded professional/policy development context. Whilst individuals and some agencies have been very vocal in their doubt about New Labour's commitment to the VCS it is important to remind ourselves that there have been some significant and important developments. In a sense I want to suggest that we can leave the 'success' or 'failure' of some of these initiatives to another day. And whilst I accept that some colleagues will not want to do that, stay with me whilst I remind us of some of the initiatives:

1998	Introduction of the compact between Government and the VCS in England
2002/04	Capacity builders and Future builders created
2005	Year of the volunteer
2006	Social Enterprise Action Plan

For a fuller discussion of the key points which the present Government cite as their commitment to the VCS see [The future role of the third sector in social](#)

[and economic regeneration : Final report](#) published in July 2007 by the Treasury/Cabinet Office (Cm 7189). For many reasons I commend this Report as one of those "necessary reads" to anyone who works in the VCS or who works with VCS organisations and agencies. It provides not only a clear summary of the Government's ambitions and plans for the sector but also provides a sense of the underlying assumptions which have informed these plans.

The Report provides, therefore, an important 'snapshot' of what the Government believe they have achieved and what they wish to achieve over the next three years. So, whilst I am not recommending this Report as a 'good read' because I endorse its content I am saying that to be able to put the Government's policies in context this is a necessary guide to be aware of.

The Treasury/Cabinet Office report, also, provides an important insight into two key developments which will have an impact on the sector over the next 5 years (procurement/commissioning of services and the development of the VCS workforce). Both of these policy objectives will impact on the shape, scale and ethos of the sector. We should assume that these broad policy objectives will be present beyond 2009 (and the General Election). Indeed we might want to speculate that the broader impact of the commissioning process is likely to have a serious (and long term) impact on the sector.

In my view the significance of these changes and developments overshadows the campaigning/voice role of the VCS which are discussed in the report. The scale of direct/indirect investment in the workforce development agenda and the commissioning of services outweighs the role afforded to the

sector as a 'voice' of local neighbourhoods/communities. We might expect to see a shake out or restructure of those national/regional/local 'second tier' organisations as they meet the requirements/expectations of national agencies and governmental regulations.

WHATS THE THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH CENTRE QUESTION?

The desire to create a Third Sector research centre is described in the Treaskure/Cabinet Office Report. The primary set of arguments deployed in the Report are that "there is no strong and coherent evidence base for the third sector as a whole" (para 6.2); "there is no central point for the collection and dissemination of research about the sector as a whole" that the sector lacks a 'research culture' ... (para 6.35). There are a number of references to the uncoordinated research activity across the sector and the small number of researchers seriously interested in the sector.

The advantage of establishing a Third Sector Research centre is that it will provide a strong evidence base to those who commission public services and those whose practices the sector will seek to change. And, significantly, it will promote public recognition of the value of the sector and "justify Government's increasing reliance on, and support for, the sector as a model of social and economic regeneration" (para 6.2).

The question is, therefore, one from the Government: How do we justify what we are doing and ensure the support of the sector at the same time?

In a very real sense there is nothing wrong, in principle or in practice, with the Government funding a research centre to advise on public policy and to investigate choices made to inform public policy.

But, this is not the same thing as establishing a Third Sector Research Centre which reflects the values/ethos and priorities of the sector. Partly such

a centre would be difficult to establish because of the diversity within the sector itself. But my concern here is to point to an essential set of conflicts at the very point of creating a new research centre.

The Government could have separated the issue of the need to enhance the research skills and knowledge base of the sector from its own particular set of priorities and needs. It could have allocated resources and invited proposals to establish an independent research sector or research network or it could have approached existing networks and agencies to listen to how their needs could be met. It could have sub-contracted the whole exercise to agencies which do have a track record of working with the VCS (Joseph Rowntrees for example). The risk is that the spaces for innovative and challenging practices get reduced as the trend towards conforming to the needs of those who purchase/commission services predominate. The Treasury Report is important it is setting the stage for the social enterprise/service provider model of the VCS – Third Sector – in England over the next 3 – 5 years. This represents a profound cultural, economic and political challenge (and set of changes) to practitioners and trustees across the sector. In effect the Report describes another step in the recasting of the sector which has been evident for nearly 30 years. If there are 'generational' shifts or opportunities which we should be aware of this is one of them. How things develop over the next 18 – 24 months are likely to affect all of us for sometime to come. It remains for me the wrong answer at this time.

The primary concern, I think, is about how to protect the independence and diversity of the sector at a point when those values are, themselves, at risk.

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Report of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering and Manifesto for Change, January 2008

http://www.volcomm.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/0B8EC40C-C9C5-454B-B212-C8918EF543F0/0/Manifesto_final.pdf

Reviewed by Colin Rochester

“The mountains shall go into labour and a silly little mouse will be born”.⁽¹⁾ It is, I am afraid, too great a temptation for me to resist quoting this prediction of the Latin poet, Horace, as a summing up of the work of the Independent Commission on the Future of Volunteering which has recently – and belatedly – published its report in the form of a *Manifesto for Volunteering*:

This may be a little unfair but the fact remains that the *Manifesto* is ultimately a very disappointing document given the amount of effort that has gone into its ambitious programme of consultation, the extensive research it commissioned; and the deliberations of eighteen commissioners drawn from the ranks of the great and the good and chaired by the redoubtable Julia Neuberger. One looks in vain for significant new knowledge, fresh perspectives, or recommendations for radical action.

At the heart of the problem is the almost irresistible pull towards a “default” model of volunteering. It is true that the Commission suggests that “it is helpful to recognise that volunteering is a multi-faceted concept” (page 6) and quotes approvingly the framework identified by Justin Davis Smith in 2001 of “four different types of volunteer activity, categorised according to their final outcome or final purpose: mutual aid and/or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation; and advocacy or campaigning” (quoted on page 5). But, from the summary of evidence and the selection of quotes on page 9 onwards, the report focuses almost exclusively on a narrow

view of volunteering in which individuals are involved by formal organisations in the delivery of services to third parties. The value of their contribution is seen in terms of the fact that they “do more than provide extra help and fill gaps in services” by bringing “a freshness and a level of commitment that is invaluable” and a contribution that is “often distinctive and critical to how organisations are run and services are delivered”.

The report’s analysis and recommendations are thus always going to be constrained by the weight of the conventional wisdom of the major volunteer-involving organisations and the minor industry that has grown up around their concerns. The focus is on just one of the four major strands in voluntary action identified by Davis Smith – volunteering as philanthropy or service to others. Sometimes called “vertical volunteering”, this area of concern leads rapidly and ineluctably to ideas about the need to “manage” and “train” volunteers for the roles they have been assigned and to the need for structures within which these functions can be carried out. It is a far cry indeed from the kinds of “horizontal volunteering” undertaken at community level where groups of people come together to address shared needs and concerns or to undertake collective action to secure improvements in the quality of their lives and living conditions – to take just one example of the wider world of volunteering.

(1) Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus

Even within these self-imposed limitations, however, the analysis and the recommendations – with one curious exception – are banal. A small group of experienced volunteer managers could have arrived at a very similar set of prescriptions after a convivial evening in a South London pub. The manifesto calls for a “cultural change” in the way volunteering is perceived in our society based on a vision “that volunteering becomes part of the DNA of our society” and “integral to the way in which we think of ourselves and live our lives” (page 2) but is short on ideas about how to achieve this sea-change. The Commission’s recommendations that “existing events to promote volunteering be enhanced and made more effective” and that “volunteering champions” should be “established in each local authority area” may help to raise the profile of volunteering but they are neither visionary nor imaginative.

Other recommendations call for action by government; by volunteer-involving organisations and the “volunteering infrastructure”; and by employers. Employer-supported volunteering is identified as an important growth area – largely it seems as an act of faith. Government is challenged to lead by example in this area as well as setting up a mechanism to “remove unnecessary or disproportionate obstacles to volunteering and providing major new resources to improve access to volunteering for people with disabilities and other under-represented groups and to develop the volunteering infrastructure at local level. Many in the field will welcome the Commission’s concern that, while its support for volunteering is important, the Government should be careful not to interfere and should eschew “setting up new initiatives or projects”. They will, however, find this “hands-off” approach sits somewhat unhappily with the view that Government should have a responsibility for “setting the strategic direction” and that this would involve ensuring that “a cabinet minister takes responsibility for volunteering

with a cross-cutting brief across all departments”. This recommendation leaps off the page and will no doubt be the subject of some vigorous debate.

Other recommendations aimed at the volunteering industry itself suffer from being couched in the kind of jargon that has been borrowed from the worst kind of business discourse and flogged to within an inch of any real meaning by New Labour. The local volunteering infrastructure is dismissed as “not fit for purpose” without any serious discussion of what that purpose is and how it should be addressed more effectively and the cure for the shortcomings of volunteer-involving organisations is “modernisation”. Given that the term has become short-hand for handing over public assets to the private sector or adopting a market-based model of provision, some of us might argue that this is the last thing volunteering needs.

The Commission’s vision of voluntary action as part of our social DNA is an inspiring one but it will only be achieved if we can grasp the complex realities of the much broader spectrum of activity that is volunteering and do more, much more, than continue to develop the “default” model. We need, as a society, to find ways of encouraging and sustaining diverse forms of collective action, mutual aid, participation and campaigning as well as the volunteer’s contribution to service provision, however valuable that might be.

Colin Rochester is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Voluntary and Community Activity at Roehampton University.

Justin Davis Smith and Michael Locke (editors), (2007) *Volunteering and the test of time: Essays for policy, organisation and research*. Institute for Volunteering Research: London. ISBN 978-1-906111-02-1

Reviewed by: Fiona Poland

This selection of essays from nearly ten years of the journal *Voluntary Action* demonstrates how voluntary sector research has been carving out distinctive places in public policy and in research practice. In so doing, volunteering has posed problems of definition and engagement for both. The final article, by Davis Smith describes three waves in the emergence of a voluntary action research community. The first, beginning in the 1970s, started to 'define the territory' through initiatives to bring together academic and practitioner interest groups as with the formation of ARVAC. From the 1980s, the second wave saw key UK umbrella bodies and universities commit to major studies of volunteering and the sector, establishing volunteer research professionalisation, but in the absence of real government or research council recognition. The third, continuing to the present day has been stimulated by growing interest in globalising views of social engagement such as social capital. Such interest has led to more legitimacy being conceded to the study of volunteering through mainstream government and educational programmes as with the recent launch of an Economic and Social Research Council Third sector research hub.

The work presented here reflects the ground covered, leading to a growing conceptual capacity in the sector to challenge inappropriate assumptions about volunteering. So, Lukka and Paine are able to critique the exclusivism of some Western constructs of formalised volunteering in overlooking a wider variety of volunteering through mutual support found in many BME communities or in participative youth activities. Kearney and Hustinx highlight how reciprocal and individualising processes underpin much modern volunteering to break down volunteer-'beneficiary' distinctions. However, government-led initiatives such as contracted or mandated volunteering may constrain how far such shifts in values

can be realised. Cameron distinguishes differences between church members, volunteers and paid workers in how they may relate to the management of welfare and other unpaid work by their organisation. Such variations in dominance and clarity of relationships between volunteers, paid staff and organisations can be viewed through the four models of service delivery, support role, member/activist and co-worker volunteer involvement critically conceptualised by Rochester.

Assumptions that voluntary action must always be beneficial to the growth of civil society, even in the absence of robust political structures, are called into question by Davis Smith's historical account pointing up the weaknesses in fledgling democracies such as the Spanish Second Republic and in the travails faced by present day South Africa. A fascinating case study by Sharon highlights the failures of volunteer organisations either to craft appropriate responses to the needs and safety of those spontaneously volunteering in New York following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, or to address such possibilities in planning for future events. As Lewis goes on to suggest, increasing globalisation has heightened awareness of both less and more welcome trends in volunteering from a trivialising 'voluntourism' to more organised and negotiated 'global responsibility' actions through solidarity networks and development education.

All of these articles bear out Rochester's recognition of the need to continue to 'develop our understanding of the organisational behaviour of volunteers and the people with whom they interact in different institutional arrangements (p.58). This collection presents some important markers on the research journey towards a more confident conceptual engagement with diversity in the realisation of voluntary action.

Ceri Hutton and Stephanie Sexton (2007) *Is it Seaworthy? Assessing and Funding the Capacity of Voluntary and Community Organisations: Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF); Governance Hub; UK Workforce Hub: London.*

Reviewed by: Fiona Poland,

This discussion document is a further addition to the growing field of publications contributing ideas and definitions to support organisational capacity building in the voluntary and community sector (see reviews of MacMillan et al (2007), and Thomson and Caulier-Grice (2007), in ARVAC Bulletin No. 104). Earlier research-based reviews have highlighted the undermining effect on VCS development of a funding focus on short-term service delivery at the expense of infrastructure within a climate of uncertainty about sources and bases for infrastructure funding. This is a joint publication to promote debate on good practice, on behalf of two of the six national Hubs established through the ChangeUp initiative together with the Association of Charitable Foundations which promotes good practice in grant-making trusts. As such, it is interesting to see what elements they identify as key elements of such practice and how this may build a case for action.

This document seeks to encourage funders to appreciate the need to take organisational capacity issues into account in their relationships with the organisations that they fund and to define a good practice in funding which goes beyond short-termism, perhaps unintentionally encouraging organisations to overlook or underplay their capacity-building needs in bidding for funds. They argue that attending to capacity can be useful for ensuring the viability of funded projects and provide several detailed case studies of how this made important and constructive differences to the relationship between funders and organisations in realising useful work. They also suggest a useful framework to

help funders to build in the assessment of capacity-building issues in their discussions with organisations they may fund to include the organisation's vision and management of internal finances, risk, human resource, change and development and quality.

While the authors argue the case for funders to take capacity-building issues more seriously when considering support for organisations and they also provide guidance for assessing key areas of capacity, it remains unclear how funders might decide to use such guidance. Will they simply use the guidelines to fund organisations which can be more easily seen to have secure infrastructures and therefore as a better bet for producing successful specific project funding initiatives – reducing further the funding more smaller organisations? Or will more funders be encouraged to include well-tuned infrastructure resourcing to help guarantee the success of such specific project funding for a broader range of organisations? For the latter case to be actively supported widespread funder buy-in to the vision of a dynamic community sector needs to be more whole-heartedly accepted. This publication provides some but not all of the components of such a case to be made.

Fiona Poland is a Senior Lecturer in Therapy Research at University of East Anglia

Colin Rochester

Grounds for Optimism: ARVAC's Work Programme for 2008

Steven Howlett prefaced his Chair's report to ARVAC's AGM on 9th January by "looking forward to a time when we do not begin ... with some allusion to it being a difficult year". While 2007 had been a year of solid if modest achievement and the "green shoots of recovery" could be seen, the organisation was still fighting its way back from the body blow of losing its strategic funding from the Home Office.

There were, however, real grounds for optimism. The committee had been right in its collective belief that ARVAC as an organisation had, and has, a real purpose while using the phrase 'the future is in the past' to allude to the fact that we could survive as a membership led organisation was inspired.

ARVAC had moved forward on four fronts since the last AGM (in March 2007). In the first place "we spent some time re-shaping the board and I think this was time well spent. There is no doubt it is a strong board."

Secondly, "as we paused to re-group" we needed to "keep a minimum presence to make sure others knew that ARVAC was still a going concern. We looked at the web-site. We updated how we respond to enquiries and you will hear more in a moment about how we have put the research database online, and our plans to keep it up to date".

Thirdly, "Jurgen is doing a fantastic job producing bulletins with high quality articles. These are sent out to members and really show that ARVAC has a unique role to translate the big ideas of policy and research to a far more local and community level".

And, fourthly, we have begun again to forge links with other organisations. I have mentioned the board. Having the presence of organisations like NCVO is very important, but we are also very pleased to renew links with

CDF. We are looking to see how we can work with the Voluntary Sector Studies Network, and I think this is a very positive liaison".

Next Steps: A Programme for 2008

The meeting agreed that, during 2008, ARVAC should aim, on the one hand, to build on its existing work and, on the other, to develop additional activities. This would involve:

Updating and Maintaining the Community Research Database: A major achievement of 2007 was to make available on line ARVAC's database of some 3,000 entries covering reports and publications emanating from community organisations;

institutional and academic research; relevant policy briefing, guidebooks and directories; research in progress; and 'how to research'. During 2008 we will bring the entries up-to-date and put in place the system needed to keep it current and ensure it as widely available as possible.

Maintaining and Developing the ARVAC Bulletin: three issues were published during 2007 under the excellent and energetic editorship of Jurgen Grotz. A further three are scheduled for 2008. As well as continuing to feature the valuable articles and book reviews of the earlier issues, they will draw on the monitoring systems we will develop for maintaining the database and add a larger number of short news items of current developments and new publications in community research.

Re-launching 'Community Research – Getting Started': this is an excellent guide to the practice of community research which is still in demand. During 2008 we intend to give it a modest face-lift (it does not need substantial rewriting or revision) and negotiate with interested parties new arrangements for its dissemination.

Training the Trainers: as well as disseminating the publication ARVAC will try during the coming year to run one or more "training the trainers" course or courses drawing on the experience of our Community Research Projects to help equip consultants and those who work in second tier organisations of various kinds to support people in community sector organisations who want to carry out original research.

Developing the Website as a Networking Tool: in order to address ARVAC's aim "to encourage and facilitate networking between people undertaking work in this field" we will establish one or more web-based discussion forums.

Reinstating an Annual Conference: clearly, ARVAC does not have the capacity to organise a programme of events but it ought to try to arrange at least one conference in 2008 – which could be combined with the AGM.

Continuing Development of Governance Pages: Governance Pages is a web-based resource aimed at the trustees of small community-based groups and those who

work with them. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and undertaken by Kevin Nunan on behalf of ARVAC it provides information, advice and access to resources. We will continue to develop the site and market it during 2008.

A Stronger Board

In order to implement this programme, ARVAC will need three kinds of resource: one or more members of the committee (or the wider membership) to take ownership of the piece of work; access to technical or administrative support; and some money.

Tackling these in reverse order, ARVAC has a modest financial reserve available to find some at least of this programme; we have plenty of ideas about where to get expertise; and, as a result of the AGM, the board has been further strengthened which provides increased confidence that we can make some significant progress in 2008.

The following additional members were elected to the board at the meeting: Louisa Hernandez (Islington Voluntary Action Council); Anastasia Mihailidou (Surrey Community Action); and Meta Zimmeck (Independent Researcher).

Colin Rochester is the Company Secretary of ARVAC and Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Voluntary and Community Activity at Roehampton University.

How permanent is Voluntary Sector Infrastructure?

What do you think? Write for our next edition!

ARVACGROUP@TISCALI.CO.UK

With this edition of the bulletin we launch an email discussion forum to encourage debate about issues raised within it. Everyone who has comments or questions about what is said within this bulletin can join. You will be able to read others' comments and post your own. Given the topic of this edition we are particularly interested in 'questions' for the new research centres which will inform the debate about research in the voluntary and community sector.

The forum is free and open to any reader of the bulletin. The forum will exclusively deal with discussion and not bombard you with general postings.

To join simply email ARVACGROUP@TISCALI.CO.UK.



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promoting effective community action
through research

About ARVAC

ARVAC (The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) was established in 1978. It is a membership organisation and acts as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations.

We believe that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in creating and sustaining healthy communities, and that research plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness of those organisations involved in voluntary and community action.

We want to hear from you:

Please send us:

- News items
- Details of new publications, resources or websites
- Information about research in progress
- Meetings or events you would like us to publicise
- Comments or opinion pieces you would like to share with other ARVAC members

by e-mail to
j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk