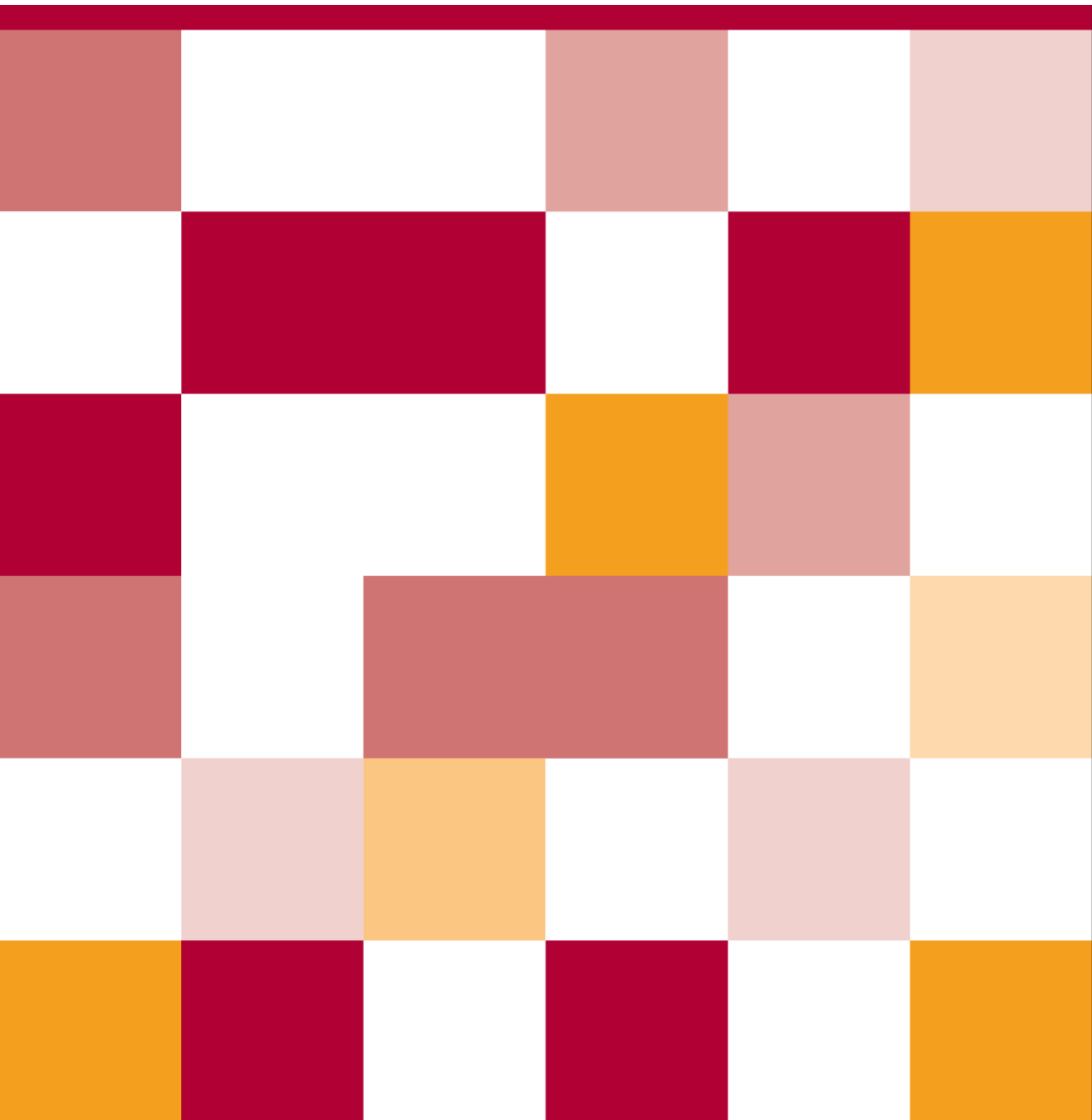




State of the Sector Panel Survey

Introduction and Panel Characteristics





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A report describing the main features of the survey methodology and the characteristics of the panel

Hazel Green
Independent Consultant

January 2009



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Introduction

1. This introductory report provides background information about the State of the Sector Panel Survey (SOSP). The survey panel consisted of about 3,600 voluntary and community sector organisations in England. It was set up by the Home Office Active Communities Directorate in 2003 and surveys were carried out annually between 2003 and 2006. During 2006, responsibility for the voluntary and community sector was transferred to the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office and the project management team was relocated to the newly set up Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG).

2. This report outlines the key features of the survey methodology and gives a brief summary of the main characteristics of the participating organisations. The findings from the survey are presented in a series of four analytical reports.

Aims of the research

3. The broad aim of the research was to monitor progress in meeting the Spending Review 2004 Public Service Agreement (PSA8) target of '*increasing voluntary and community sector activity, including increasing community participation, by 5% by 2006*'.

The specific objectives of the survey were twofold:

4. First, the survey aimed to assess whether voluntary and community sector activity, particularly the delivery of public services (that is, services wholly or partly funded by government), achieved a target increase of 5% between 2003 and 2006.

5. Second, the research was designed to provide descriptive information about the activities carried out by voluntary and community organisations, their funding arrangements and their relationships with clients, members, public bodies and other groups in the sector. There was particular interest in exploring the problems organisations experienced and assessing the extent to which various government initiatives helped to increase the ability of voluntary and community organisations to deliver public services. These initiatives included full cost recovery for core service contracts, improvements to IT systems resulting from increased government investment, participation in partnerships and the role of advice, support and information from infrastructure organisations in increasing successful service delivery.

Survey design

6. Initial panel recruitment took place in 2003 and the last survey was in 2006. The overall SOSP programme consisted of four different surveys each year on particular thematic areas – Activities and Funding, Engagement with collaborative and umbrella organisations, Contacts with public sector bodies, and Human Resources. Table 1 shows more detail on the content for each of these, the years to which data collected refers, and the method by which the data was gathered.

Table 1 Design of the SOSP Surveys

Survey	Years to which data refer	Method	Contents
Recruitment	On entry to panel	Electronic/paper/telephone	Registration and basic classification (including income, charitable status and activity)
Activities and Funding	2002/3 2003/4 2004/5 2005/6	Postal	Organisation structure (numbers of beneficiaries, staff, volunteers etc) Details of public sector funding
Engagement with collaborative and umbrella organisations	2002/3 2003/4 2004/5	Telephone	Bonding and engagement with beneficiaries and members Relationships with other organisations, collaborative working and mergers Membership of/affiliation to infrastructure and umbrella organisations and attitudes towards them
Contacts with public sector bodies	2002/3 2003/4 2004/5	Telephone	Type and amount of contact with government departments and public sector bodies Awareness of and involvement in the national, regional and local compacts.
Human resources	2002/3 2003/4 2004/5	Telephone	Details of employees and volunteers (e.g. terms and benefits, experience of recruitment and retention, training offered) Capital resources including IT and buildings.

7. In each year, respondents were asked to provide information about their organisation in relation to the previous financial year. The same questionnaires (with minor amendments) were administered in each of the three years with the Activities and Funding questionnaire repeated a final time in Year 4.

Sample design

8. Recruitment to the panel was targeted at non-profit making organisations primarily concerned with furthering social, environmental or cultural objectives. The aim was to include as wide a range of groups as possible. As interest was focussed on active frontline organisations in England, certain types of organisation were excluded (for example: academic and religious institutions; trade

unions, professional and business organisations; bodies which did not carry out community activities in their own right; and those based, or mainly operating, outside England).

9. Ideally, the sample would have been drawn from a complete list of all eligible organisations in England so that each sample member would have had a known probability of selection. Such a design would have been possible only if the survey had been confined to organisations registered with the Charity Commission. However, the purpose of the research was to understand the sector more broadly and how it was changing over time. It was therefore decided that, although the Panel could not be representative in statistical terms of voluntary and community organisations in England, it should as far as possible reflect the diversity of the sector so that the changing nature and experiences of different types of organisation could be explored. A target panel structure was developed consisting of a matrix of geographical location and charitable status within broad income band. The desired quota size for each cell was specified using data provided by the Charity Commission and the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). Quotas were not formally set for type of activity but this was monitored to ensure it reflected the range of activity in the sector.

10. Members of the panel were recruited through press advertisements and circulars in the newsletters of umbrella/infrastructure bodies. In order to rectify shortfalls in the representation of certain types of organisation, telephone calls were made to selected bodies registered with the Charity Commission who were known to have the characteristics required. About a half of the Panel was recruited from general appeals and half from a targeted approach.

Sample size

11. The overall sample size needed to be large enough to assess, with a reasonable degree of confidence, whether the PSA target of increasing voluntary and community sector activity had been met. It was estimated that the minimum sample size to meet this objective would be about 3,600. However, it was recognised that not all organisations would respond to every questionnaire and therefore the overall panel size was set at 5400 to allow for non-response. In the event, the initial sample size was increased slightly (to 5,563) in order to increase the numbers in some of the smaller subgroups¹.

12. Fieldwork on the three telephone surveys stopped when about 3,600 cases had been achieved. There was no such cut-off on the postal survey. Hence, the numbers of achieved interviews for the Activities and Funding questionnaire are larger and more variable than those for the other studies

13. At the end of each year, a refreshment exercise was undertaken to replace panel members who had dropped out and those who had failed to respond to any of the surveys in the previous year. In Years 2 and 3 additional panel members were replaced in order to reduce the problems of habituation. In these years, approximately one third of panel members were replaced. As far as possible, the new recruits were selected to mirror the dropouts in terms of size and activity.

¹ In years 2003/4 -2005/6, the sample included a small number of organisations who were recruited specifically for a study of the FutureBuilders programme. These organisations are to be analysed separately as part of an evaluation of that programme and are not included in the analyses presented in this report series.

Response rate

14. Response information can only be provided for the Activities and Funding postal questionnaire because of the fieldwork cut-off on the telephone surveys.

15. Table 2 shows the percentage of completed questionnaires returned each year. This proportion fell from 81% in the first year to 64%-69% in the three subsequent years, partly due to respondent fatigue - in the second and subsequent years, the panel included organisations which had completed at least one previous round. Since the sample was refreshed annually, each percentage relates to one year only. Considering sample attrition over the whole four-year life of the panel, just over a third (37%) of organisations in the original sample responded to at least one survey in each year (table not shown).

Table 2 Activities and Funding Survey: Response

Year to which data refer	Number of questionnaires mailed out	Number of questionnaires returned	Percentage of completed questionnaires returned
2002/3	5563	4506	81%
2003/4	5535	3708	67%
2004/5	5698	3932	69%
2005/6	5707	3652	64%

Weighting

16. As explained above, there was no information available about the characteristics of the voluntary sector as a whole. It was therefore decided that the response profile for the Activities and Funding questionnaire in Year 1 (2002/3) would act as the weighting model for all future surveys, with all sample sizes weighted to the ideal 3,600. Weights were set on an interlocking income band and region matrix. Thus, the data for each survey in each year have the same income and regional distribution as the 2002/3 Activities and Funding survey data.

Main characteristics of the panel

17. The following tables show the income, regional distribution and main characteristics of the achieved sample based on respondents to the Activities and Funding questionnaire in the final year of the survey, 2005/6. The distributions for other years are similar. Tables 3 and 4 show weighted and unweighted numbers of cases and weighted percentages. The remaining tables show weighted percentages and bases.

18. About two in five organisations (39%) were in the middle income range, with total funding of £100,000 but less than £1 million per annum. Very few organisations, 4%, had incomes of £10 million or more.

Table 3 Total income, 2005/6

Total income	Number of cases (unweighted)	Number of cases (weighted)	Percentage (weighted)
Under £10,000	547	518	14
£10,000 less than £100,000	822	808	22
£100,000 less than £1m	1373	1409	39
£1m less than £10m	681	709	20
£10m or more	132	157	4
Total	3555	3600	100

19. The largest concentrations of panel members were based in London (22%) and the South East (16%).

Table 4 Region, 2005/6

Region¹	Number of cases (unweighted)	Number of cases (weighted)	Percentage (weighted)
East	377	350	10
East Midlands	306	266	7
London	638	802	22
North East	250	192	5
North West	368	430	12
South East	557	577	16
South West	430	371	10
West Midlands	311	317	9
Yorkshire & Humberside	318	295	8
Total	3555	3600	100

¹ This is the region in which the person responding for the organisation was based.

20. Nine out of ten organisations (91%) were registered with the Charity Commission and 85% were independent or stand alone bodies rather than part of a group structure or a branch of a larger organisation.

Table 5 Registration with Charity Commission and structure, 2005/6

Registration with Charity Commission	%
Registered	91
Not registered	9
Total	100
Structure	%
Independent/stand alone organisation	85
Part of a group structure	8
Branch of a larger organisation	7
Total	100
	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Base: All organisations</i>	<i>3493</i>

21. Nearly a half (47%) of panel members had fewer than five paid employees and just over a half (54%) had fewer than 20 volunteers on their books.

Table 6 Size of organisation, 2005/6

Number of employees (March 2006)	%
None	23
1-4	24
5-9	16
10-19	13
20 or more	24
Total	100
Number of volunteers (March 2006)	%
None	3
1-9	21
10-19	30
20-49	24
50-99	10
100 or more	12
Total	100
	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Base: All organisations</i>	<i>3527</i>

22. Organisations were involved in a wide range of service areas, the most common being arts and recreation (21%), social services (17%), education and research (15%) and health (12%).

Table 7 Main service area, 2005/6

Main service area	%
Arts, Culture, Sport & Recreation	21
Social Services	17
Education & Research	15
Health	12
Housing	8
Housing Associations	3
Information, Law, Crime & Civil Rights	7
Religion	4
Economic, Social & Community Development	4
Environment	3
Employment & Training	3
Transport	2
International	1
Animals	1
Total	100
	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Base: All organisations</i>	3415

23. They also offered a variety of services, including housing, health and social care (44%), advice or information (36%), training (24%) and buildings or facilities (22%).

Table 8 Types of service provided, 2005/6

Types of service provided	Percentages ¹
Housing, health, social care	44
Advice, information, research	36
Training, consultancy, volunteers	24
Buildings, facilities	22
Finance/other resources	12
Representation	5
Other	0
	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Base: All organisations</i>	3515

¹ Percentages may add to more than 100 because of multiple responses

24. Disabled people were the main clients with about a quarter of organisations (23%) providing services for this group.

Table 9 Main client groups, 2005/6

Main client groups	Percentages ¹
Children (aged under 16)	16
Young people (aged 17-18)	10
Young adults (aged 19-24)	6
Older people (aged 65 or over)	11
Disabled people	23
Ethnic minorities	9
Women	4
Asylum seekers	1
Other	50
	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>Base: All organisations</i>	<i>3455</i>

¹ Percentages may add to more than 100 because of multiple responses

Content of Analytical Reports

25. The findings from the survey are presented in four analytical reports. Their contents broadly correspond to the topics covered in the four questionnaires listed in Table I1.

- **Report 1** describes the activities carried out by the sampled organisations; the amount of funding they received from different sources and their views about the process.
- **Report 2** focuses on panel members' engagement with their clients and different forms of relationship between organisations including group structures, mergers, collaborative working and membership of infrastructure organisations.
- **Report 3** examines the extent and effectiveness of the organisations' contacts with different public sector bodies and their awareness of National, Regional and Local Compacts.
- **Report 4** considers the organisations' human and capital resources, including the skills and training of their employees and volunteers, their use of Information Technology and the suitability of their accommodation.

Technical report

26. A more detailed description of the survey design and methodology can be found in the State of the Sector panel [Technical Report](#).