



The voluntary sector and skills

Transcript of a speech by Phil Hope MP, Minister for the Third Sector at the launch of the NCVO Voluntary Sector Skills Survey and UK Voluntary Sector Workforce Almanac, 31 October 2007.

Thank you very much Stuart [Etherington, Chief Executive of NCVO [National Council of Voluntary Organisations] and thank you David [Brindle, Editor of Society Guardian].

I'm very pleased to be here this morning for the launch of these two very important pieces of research into the voluntary sector: the research into skills gaps and skills shortages and the impact on recruitment; and the Workforce Almanac, which maps the evolution of the voluntary and community sector workforce over the last 10 years.

You're right Stuart. My history in the third sector does mean I feel able to comment on this; not only because I worked for the NCVO and the National Youth Bureau as was, but also for 14 years working as a consultant in the sector not least of all looking at issues about effective management, effective recruitment, effective team working.

My experience of the sector when we set up our small co-op consultancy was that the sector contains people who have drive, who have dynamism, who have commitment and passion; that's why they joined the sector.

But in that drive, in that passion of making the world a better place, it sometimes did not pay attention to making the world a good place to work in. Over those years, a lot of equity has gone into the sector to help the sector to grow – good HR, good management systems, good performance appraisals and so on.

A small plug for a publication I wrote about performance appraisals. Still available, I think, in all good bookshops. But, it's quite interesting to write a book about performance appraisals in voluntary organisations in 1995; these things weren't a common point of view of the day and [it] was surprising to third sector bodies.

And as you say, Stuart, as Minister for Skills, prior to this job. And in fact the last thing I can remember writing was a letter to the Minister for the Third Sector saying "I'm looking forward to meeting the Minister for the Third Sector to discuss the skills strategy." I have now received that letter from myself and I got a very thorough reply.

So it's great to be working with the sector and to be doing all of this. And the sector is huge and it's huge in terms of public service delivery,

I won't stray into the detail of the research findings. I think the presenters are going to do that in a second.

But it is interesting that since 1996 the workforce of the sector has grown from 483,000 employees to 611,000 in 2005. In 1996 it was 483,000 and 611,000 in 2005. That's over 25% in 10 years. So when people talk about a thriving third sector I think the last 10 years there has been a great deal of change.

In terms of service delivery, I've been looking at what that means exactly to say that people like the St Giles Trust that I saw the working with inputs and outputs which is essential. Turning Point – you all know Victor Adebawale's crowd as it were – doing terrific work around alcohol dependency and getting back into jobs and housing.

And indeed up in Leeds I looked at a project there providing adult social care for people who have needs that can be met by a social enterprise. They set up this project and it is now supporting throughout Leeds; it started with two people and it's really helping elderly people in their own homes.

So it's great the sector itself has expanded in that way.

And the survey, as you will see, there are some very able and very professional people in its workforce. Did any of you go to the forum3 exhibition in London? There is some really great talent and people there, and we want to get more talent into the sector.

But along with success comes challenge. We can talk about skills shortages that are there in the third sector. And we see those challenges in the public sector as well as in the private sector. And crucially if we don't have people with the right skills, if we don't up-skill our own workforce – the third sector – we won't be able to carry on that change that we are pursuing.

And we actually highlighted this ourselves in the Third Sector Review which was published in July this year.

Two key issues that came out of the Review: up-skilling the third sector; and also investing in third sector research which is another key finding, which is one finding that comes out of the Almanac, is what is the evidence base? I've given you three examples of organisations doing great things but there are more.

So, on the skills issues first.

We are committed to delivering a third sector skills strategy.

At the moment, I am working with my colleagues in DIUS [Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills] and the sector to develop a programme of

actions to address skills issues.

One of those avenues we want to explore is the idea of a Workforce Development Council for the sector. And that will focus specifically on the development of skills in both the paid part of the sector but also the volunteer.

This is what makes the third sector very different: volunteers and the role that they play crucially in both managing the sector and delivering the services as well.

A particular enthusiasm of mine at the moment is the Learning and Skills Council has a pot of money called Train to Gain.

Whenever I say this, third sector organisations start writing down Train to Gain; don't write it down you should know it already. Use that pot of money.

Train to Gain will provide you, the third sector, with a skills broker, who will do a needs assessment of your organisation, look at the skills shortages and the skills gaps and then help you draw up a plan to address those needs and help you tap into Train to Gain.

And I'm currently working to make the Train to Gain budget more accessible, more directly and relevant to third sector organisations.

So those are some of the things we are doing at the moment. But even now, as it is, Train to Gain is there to skill-up the workforce. But I wanted to mention to you that it is there.

And in particular we have asked every employer in the country to sign something called the 'Skills Pledge', a commitment to their workforce.

I'd like the third sector to do that too.

And to get the skills agenda right, and we were talking about the new ways of working in the third sector, then I think it is true that we need to document and evidence what it is that you have actually achieved.

And importantly when you talk about scaling up, what the third sector delivers, what a good project is, this is a good example here, and how do you get that everywhere.

And if you're not talking about scaling up, what about scaling out? In other words not having bigger organisations but what you have is relevant to other parts of the country, and franchising out, replicating this good practice.

And I think the core restraint on that is the evidence base outcomes third sector organisations in particular reaching out to parts of the community, the most alienated, the most disadvantaged, then let's evidence base so third sector organisations can bid for, engage users and use the evidence base so commissioners can make the right decision.

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And it's one of the reasons about having the evidence base, highlighted in the Review, that we put £5 million into a pot to create a new Third Sector Research Centre. And that will provide funding, it will provide focus, to raise the profile of third sector research. So we can highlight the achievements to date, to database, but also celebrate the good things you do.

I'm pleased that this research is undertaken because I think it highlights the work that Government needs to do, and encourages the third sector itself to take actions to deal with its own workforce.

And reports like these, the Helping Out survey and the Giving Survey all provide Government with evidence of the third sector.

Thank you very much indeed.

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