



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The Third Sector Research Centre

Transcript of a speech by Kevin Brennan MP, Minister for the Third Sector, at the launch of the Third Sector Research Centre, 23 October 2008

I am very pleased to be with you today as we launch the Third Sector Research Centre. It is a tremendous achievement to get to this stage, a little over a year after we announced our intention to fund a Centre in the Third Sector Review, and I want to thank Pete and his team, and our partners at the ESRC and The Barrow Cadbury Trust, for all they have done to bring this to fruition.

And I should say that we are very pleased with the quality of the outcome. I believe the Centre we are funding, led by Professor Alcock, will be recognised as a truly a world-class institution, strengthening not only third sector research, but the sector itself.

So what does this investment say about the Government's approach to third sector research now, and about our hopes for third sector research from this point forward?

Firstly, I think it shows clearly that we are serious about research into the sector. We are committing a total of £5m to the Centre, and this is on top of other significant investments such as a national survey of the sector and the Giving Centre, to which I shall return later on. We are committed to the task of developing an evidence base on the sector, for the benefit of the sector as a whole, and for the way that evidence can generate better policy.

Secondly, we are investing in practical knowledge; a Centre which will produce and share learning of real relevance to the concerns of practitioners and policy makers.

Pete and his colleagues will want to refine the research programme over coming months, as they continue to talk to stakeholders in the sector and academia, and I look forward to the results of the scoping work which is already underway and which reports early next year. But the main building blocks are already in place.

This will be a Centre with a focus on effectiveness – on firming up the evidence of what the sector does well and how we can help it to achieve success.

In view of this, I am delighted to announce today that the ESRC will shortly launch a new competition for a third capacity-building cluster in addition to the two already announced in Lincoln and Middlesex. This will be themed around the economic impact of the sector. I find it especially appropriate in these uncertain economic times that we are expanding our ability to chart the full extent to which this sector contributes to our economy.

Beyond this, there is also work to do help us to map the sector, and to understand its nature and dynamics, and we also recognise that the Centre will need to employ some clear theoretical thinking, because the overall aim for the next five years is not simply to amass case studies, but to develop a much clearer and robust understanding of the sector and its impact.

My hope and expectation is that this will be a Centre which works with the sector, not simply on it. The Capacity Building Clusters at Middlesex and Lincoln and the new cluster on economic impact are evidence of this, with an explicit remit to extend the ability of third sector organisations to engage in quality research. But this involvement of the sector is, I know, a core value of the Centre here in Birmingham too.

And I know it will be a centre which works with and for the whole sector. Whatever part of the sector you are from, this Centre is for you: it is the Centre for community sector research, the centre for social enterprise research, the centre for voluntary sector research. As evidence of this, many of you will know that Professor Fergus Lyons will champion the cause of Social Enterprise from Birmingham Business School, and of course he also heads the Social Enterprise Capacity Building Cluster at Middlesex.

The creation of the Centre does not mean that government has simply concentrated its research interest in one place. For a start, I expect that the Centre itself will be keen to work in collaboration with others. That is Professor Alcock's reputation, and his bid for the Centre is based upon a close collaboration with Professor Mohan and his team at Southampton, and good partnerships elsewhere in the sector.

And whilst the headquarters of the Research Centre is located clearly here in Birmingham, the wider Centre venture encompasses Capacity Building Clusters, working under the overall direction of Professor Alcock, but with a remit to strike a range of partnerships, emanating out from Lincoln and Middlesex where they are based.

I know that the Centre will work in very close partnership with the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, which launched this month. We are also pleased to co-fund that centre and I look forward to the fruits of their collaboration, at a time when a clear understanding of the relationship between the economy, giving and the role and well-being of third sector organisations, has never been more important.

And of course for our own part we continue to invest in other third sector research, such as the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations and the recent research report into the profile of social enterprises entitled *Social Enterprise at the Crossroads?*

So this is a significant day. It highlights a recognition of the importance of strengthening the evidence base for the sector. Third sector research is hugely enhanced for having this Centre in place. It is something on a scale we have not had before; a concentration of expert resources to form a world class resource, which can speak with real authority, and be a real asset to the sector.

Today's launch sends out a strong message that this is an area of study that is 'on the up'. It's a message for ambitious young researchers, and for Vice Chancellors considering where to focus their resources.

It says to third sector organisations that they can – and should - contribute to the evidence base on how and when organisations like theirs really make a difference.

It will also suggest to other investors, including trusts and foundations and other government departments, that they should also invest in good quality research, here and elsewhere.

To those of you here who have hoped for a Centre of this sort for longer than you care to recall, I say, 'it's finally here!'

We have moved smartly since the announcement of intent in the Third Sector Review last summer. The Third Sector Research Centre is here, winning business recruiting staff, meeting its stakeholders and welcoming us through its doors. [A further capacity building cluster is on its way, even as the first two take shape]. I am very pleased to be here today to welcome a real step forward, and wish you, Professor Alcock, and all your staff and partners in this venture, the very best of success.

(Ends)