



## Third sector research

Transcript of a speech by Phil Hope MP, Minister for the Third Sector, to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) annual research conference to launch the report, 'Helping out: a national survey of volunteering and national giving', 5 September 2007

Thank you very much for inviting me here tonight. It is an important event, I think, for the sector. And Stuart [Etherington, Chief Executive of NCVO]'s brief overview of the history and the length of time the research community has been developing in the third sector; I think this is really important.

It's important, not just for you and through, I have to say, the work you do, the report we are publishing today, *Helping Out*, it is important for us and it is important for the third sector, it's important for the wider government and I think it is important for the country as a whole because this agenda is getting increasingly higher up the Government's list of priorities.

Because the truth is – and I don't need to say this to you as people who research and are researchers in the sector, third sector organisations that act in every part of national life – we know they change the lives of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people across the country everyday.

And importantly, I think, the point about the third sector being able to reach the parts of the community that government can't and has been doing that for many years, is becoming increasingly apparent as we try to tackle the long-term, really difficult issues in communities, among families, is the third sector is absolutely critical, among other things, in playing that part in achieving some of those difficult challenges.

The importance of the third sector in finding and listening to those who actually find it hard to speak out for themselves, and this is something that

Gordon Brown repeats every time he talks about the third sector, is the third sector being the voice for the voiceless, being the champion of those people who are otherwise excluded.

The work you know that the sector does, and has done, for many years of being innovative; finding new ways to tackle old problems whether it's the education of autistic pupils, whether it's new ways of delivering in community transport. Lots of different, you know, right across the piece, the third sector organisations are blazing a trail that then, as it were, the state, the welfare state, then follows behind to imitate, to mainstream, to make it more available right across the board.

And I am really pleased to say that I hope you know that, that's what you research, that's what you tell us is going on out there. I think though that many people who are outside of this room, outside of the third sector actually don't know those things that frankly we probably take for granted, taken as given. It's about what it is the third sector delivers.

And I think actually, for far too long, there has been a total misunderstanding about the true value of the social, the economic role that the third sector plays.

And I think that's why Stuart's absolutely right to say this is a moment whose time has come to grasp that core idea, and to make sure that not only we know about it – those of us who have lived, grown up, have been employed, been volunteered in the sector know about – but those people outside the sector who still say to me; I was at a launch of my local Corby AGM [Annual General Meeting] CAB [Citizen's Advice Bureau] today and said what is the third sector? Is it a third class; are we a third class sector? I said to them "No." We take for granted a lot of this jargon. Ordinary folk out there, I speak as a constituency MP, this is still for them just more jargon to explain about the public, the private and the third sector and so on. But we're still having to explain to people who should know this.

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It's down for a number of reasons. Partly, it's down to lack of research itself. I hope you agree with me that there are still too few and far between the number of researchers – there is not even one at NVCO anymore – but can we fill more conference halls with researchers than we are managing to do at the moment.

And, even when an organisation can provide compelling evidence of the value of the work that it's doing, very often there is no obvious mechanism to use to bring that evidence to the attention of those people who need to see and hear it. And the result of that is the potential is for people to emulate the successes of the sector's achievements then gets lost. And that is why we get that whole reinventing of wheels problem going on too frequently.

What we don't have is a central point, and I'm really interested that there are so many researchers now here, but we don't have a central point for the collection and dissemination of research that you are doing about the sector as a whole. And therefore if you are a user, where do you go? Which website do you visit? Which organisation do you go to? Where can we get that right? And I think it's very important that we do.

If we are to have any hope of getting the message across of things that I've just been talking about, starting for me what is the glaringly obvious, that we actually do need, Stuart is right, to do is build a robust, sound, coherent evidence base of that achievement. And then we've got to publicise it, and we've got to go out there and tell it to people; make that evidence easily accessible.

Which is why I am pleased, and I'm glad you referred to this, the final report of the Third Sector Review does include the establishment of a new Third Sector Research Centre, backed by substantial government investments of £5 million.

That centre will provide funding, and focus. And not just facilitate new research though it will of course do that, but to do that job of raising the profile

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of third sector research and actually to highlight already what is already underway; what you are already doing and the evidence and the findings you are arriving at.

The Report also included a commitment to ensure that the sector can then make the most of this research. It's no good then putting it onto a shelf, it's got to then be used by the sector.

We want to encourage the expansion of the campaigning role because the evidence that you find is then the material that the third sector can then be used to shout for more: more money, more attention, greater involvement, all of that. And therefore it can have, I think, quite a far-reaching impact.

And I just want to say to you, the scope I'm thinking about, I use that word scope deliberately, is think of the changes that have happened, you mention in the last 10 years. Attitudes to disability have transformed; they're completely different in this country to where they were only a few years ago. And it is organisations like Scope that have literally achieved, I think, a complete paradigm shift in the way that we think about disability. That change is also irreversible. I know there's always struggle, there's always things to be doing about that, but the basic shift has happened.

You think about the Make Poverty History campaign in terms of attitudes to international debt relief. The Make Poverty History Campaign, and you can be critical about pop concerts and all the rest of it, believe you me, in my constituency it engaged and energised people, and it got people switched on and understanding a very simple, basic concept in a way that nothing else can do. And research and evidence that was there to back those campaigns, mobilising literally hundreds and thousands and millions of people across the world, has made and is continuing to make a huge difference.

I don't want to be too evangelical about this but it is that level of culture shift and change that I think we should be thinking about for the third sector. Only in fact the third sector can do.

Government preaching this doesn't work because "you would say that wouldn't you because you are a Labour politician" or whatever. The people saying it from the bottom up, working in collaboration saying it, which changes culture. It doesn't just change policy, it changes culture.

So we are going to invest in capacity-building support for organisations to carry out campaigning work. We want to see more of that. I know biting the hand that feeds you can be a problem, I mean, it's my hand that gets bitten as it were, but actually it's right. Campaigning work, advocacy, standing up for the users of services, being the voice for those people who don't have a voice, is not just something we're saying because it sounds nice to do, it's actually the way you achieve change. And you know that, it's actually the way.

And you look back at movements, the trade union movement, the women's movement, the disability movement, the gay rights movement. It's because people have mobilised and campaigned and struggled for those changes. That's what I'm talking about. It's what we're trying to see happen.

It's not going to be easy and we're going to update guidance on political activities and campaigning by charities. But that is what we're talking about when we want to see this mobilisation.

So, a particular thing we are doing, and I don't know whether you did mention this Stuart, this is *Helping Out*. This is the new survey that is being published today that we've funded the research for. And it's about showing, this is the evidence base, about volunteering in the UK today. It's a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving. It looks at how many of us donate time, donate money, given in hours, given pounds and pence and what stops others from doing that giving in our society.

We've had other studies, like the *Citizenship Survey*, that allow us to see trends and changes in volunteering and this document *Helping Out* goes one stage further. It was actually commissioned by us, Government, with some

really detailed information about what we need to know about how and why people give unpaid help or give money to organisations. And I'm pleased to say it's quite heartening reading.

It does seem that people are willing to help out. 6 out of 10 people volunteered formally in the past year; around 4 out of 10 do so regularly. I think that's actually a much more optimistic snapshot than previously we might have imagined. And that's great news.

It shows that the support for volunteers is improving. 83% saying they got the help and advice they need. It says that more money is being given to charity as well. That it's collecting through tins, raffles, prizes, tickets, and so on.

81%, 8 out of 10 people have donated something to charity in the last four weeks, and the average total amount donated was £25 an adult, with almost half of respondents saying they increased the amount they donated. I have to say thanks to a rise in their own disposable income. They gave more because they had more. And obviously the charity sector went out there and got it off them. I won't say they had more because we've got a Government that has given them more but you know that argument as well.

But it also, as good research does, highlighted some challenges too. Over half of volunteers, for example, didn't know that they could gain qualifications through volunteering. And I was chatting to someone from the NCVO who does the labour force analysis.

As the former Skills Minister, next month or the month after, I'm going to go big on skills in the voluntary sector, in the third sector, because there's money out there called Train to Gain. I was responsible for launching Train to Gain. The third sector's not tapping into that and it should be tapping into that and if I get my way with my colleagues in Government, I will make sure that volunteers can tap into it as well. Bit of work to do on that one yet Stuart but we will get there.

The report also says of course that many people still feel unable to volunteer. People who are marginalised, who are outside the mainstream. Maybe people without qualifications, maybe people on low incomes. People who feel they don't 'fit in' to what, as it were, counts as volunteering.

Obviously, more work to do. We've got the Volunteering for All programme, you will know about that. That's being evaluated to address those very issues.

And that's the point really. The point about research is, as I said before, it mustn't gather dust on a shelf. It's actually informing government action. Some of that primary data that we were getting through before it got published helped us to write the Third Sector Review and we're going to continue to refer to the *Helping Out* survey that's just been published today as we roll forward.

My job description, which is called the Third Sector Review, which is that thick, and I've got to get on and, as Stuart pointed out, start to deliver it.

So, what I do hope is that the voluntary and community sector, together with the research community, so everybody together, will then make use of this information in the way, and the survey results, to read it and then go out and really promote the values and principles that we support.

So, I just want to end tonight by issuing a small challenge – I'm going to make some awards in a minute as well – I just want to say to you that, and if you haven't heard this loud and clear, I hope I'm making it loud and clear: we know, the Government knows, that we need the third sector, and that the third sector plays an absolutely vital part of the partnership for success.

We need the third sector, yes to help us evolve and improve and transform our public services so that they genuinely are focussed around the needs of the people that those services actually are provided for. We need the third sector to give pupils, patients, parents, all manner of people that use public

services in our communities a strong voice, to have advocacy and to have a real stake in those services: the schools, the hospitals.

We need actually the third sector to get across difficult messages. It's alright running a good school, a good hospital, but how can you change peoples' attitudes to diet, to exercise, to behaviour. We know those are really difficult issues that if you are going to change, transform society, we have to address. We need to be embarking on a journey together, Government and the third sector, to address the long term, the deep-seated problems that continue to affect particular families and communities that we are aware of. As well as really liberate that sense of community spirit. To make that flourish among every part of society, wherever we live, in all walks of life and all ages.

To do that, and this is the challenge, the third sector needs cold, hard facts to make that case. So it's up to you, the researchers with the third sector, to get those facts, that hard, cold case together with the right research, we then get the right evidence to put in place the right policies to achieve the kind of changes that we need to do, to make the most of your unique skills and talents to achieve the change that we all want to see, out there: changing minds, changing lives and creating a better society.

Thank you very much indeed.

(Ends)