

Opportunities and Challenges for Equality & Diversity Work within the Voluntary & Community Sector: A Review of Change Up in the South West

June 2006



Introduction

Equality South West was asked by the Change Up Support Programme to undertake research in to how well equalities and diversity issues were addressed in Change Up funded work within the region.

ESW did not have the capacity to carry out thorough equality impact assessments of the Change Up programme. It was decided to equality proof a sample of work funded by Change up within the region. We looked at the work of Bristol, Cornwall and Gloucestershire consortia as they represented a good cross section of SW consortia in both urban and rural contexts. We considered initiatives that made up the workforce development, governance, volunteering and ICT strands. We also considered any specific equalities related work of the consortia.

The aim was to identify examples of good and best practice and the barriers that have prevented this happening in other areas of the Consortia's work.

Bristol

Workforce Development within Bristol focused on mapping current training provision and identification of gaps, and facilitating and supporting a network of training providers. Gaps were also identified by carrying out a skills audit of training staff within infrastructure organisations and learning opportunities offered as a result. Within the ICT strand, the Consortium worked with the University of the West of England to provide ICT health checks for infrastructure organisations and facilitate ICT developments within the Consortium; updated a directory of ICT support providers for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE); and provided an ICT information resource and helpline. In Governance there was a mapping exercise of current support, and direct support on legal and regulatory work was provided to organisations. Volunteering work centered on developing strategies

to develop the capacity to foster more volunteers and the Consortium also worked with the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations on the Drive project, targeting Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers. The Consortium had specific work developing infrastructure functions within the BME VCS and the provision of direct support to front-line organisations.

Cornwall

Cornwall consortium had a combined Workforce and Volunteer Development programme of work. This included consortium members undergoing health checks involving a mapping of existing policies and gap analysis. Common standards of practice were agreed and best practice policy guidelines were shared. There was an audit of ICT hardware and software used by consortia members. An ICT development worker was also employed to install new equipment and advise on its use. Capital grants for ICT were also awarded to frontline organisations. In Governance, the work initially focused on producing a common set of competencies and standards, and latterly the provision of direct and training. The consortium also published a Diversity toolkit giving an overview of equality legislation and promoting best practice.

Gloucestershire

Within the Workforce Development programme, Gloucestershire consortium employed a consultant to carry out health checks of Human Resources policies and practices. The consultant also trained VCS members of staff on how to carry out the health checks in order that the relevant skills remained within the sector. The ICT worked auditing consortium members' hardware and software. Members identified their long term strategic goals and capital grants were made available to develop their ICT capacity to reflect them. The five consortium members who were accredited Volunteer Centers worked together to develop models of good practice and policy guidelines. The aim of this was to work towards providing a more cohesive, effective and efficient county wide volunteer recruitment and placement service

Examples of Good Practice within the Consortia

When asked specifically about what equality work was or will be undertaken again a variety of programmes were developed or under development. We would like to highlight the following as examples of good practice.

1. Gloucester consortium organised an Equality Proofing Day of its Investment Plans. VCS organisations from each of the equality strands were invited and the event was attended by organisations representing BME communities, younger people, older people, Disabled people and Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals. The lead officer for each investment plan introduced the work and then facilitated a discussion. This enabled equalities organisations to not only find out more about the work of the consortium but also feedback comments on how to ensure this work reflects the needs of the communities they represented.
2. The Cornwall Diversity Toolkit was one of the most impressive examples of equality and diversity work identified by the research. The work was led by the two equalities infrastructure organisations within the consortium – Cornwall Disability Forum and Cornwall Race Equality Council. To ensure that the toolkit reflected fully all of equality issues, a consultation and planning day was organised. This day was attended by community and voluntary sector organisation from all six of the equality strands (e.g. age, disability, faith, gender, race and sexual orientation). A draft toolkit was produced which was then reviewed both by consortium members and a focus of group made up of VCS equalities organisations. The toolkit is a comprehensive set of resources that VCS organisations can develop their equality and diversity policy and practice. It contains specific information and guidance relevant to the Cornish context. The toolkit can also be used as an assessment model and the Consortium is currently considering ways to finance the training of external assessors to participate in a validatory process.

3. Bristol consortium approached a large number of ICT providers to update an ICT directory and specifically tried to discover which ones were aware of equalities issues and tailored their services and support to equalities groups. They asked providers supply details of how they addressed clients without English as first language, clients with accessibility requirements and to provide details of services they provided targeted at any particular equalities groups. This information will be included in the revamped directory for a wider VCS audience to aid them in making informed choices regarding their future IT development and support needs.

The Consortium ICT strand linked with the C3 project (a West of England wide project funded through the European Union's EQUAL programme) that aims to build the capacity and improve the performance of front-line organisations, with an emphasis on Equalities groups. Initial findings indicate that groups are not ready for the ICT health check at this stage. The ICT health check will be reworked to enable it to focus on smaller front-line organisations and will become an integrated part of the C3 work.

4. The Regional DRIVE (Diversity in Racial Inclusion in Volunteering for Everyone) Programme was set up to encourage the BME diverse community to have a part in the eradication of social exclusion and to promote community cohesion through active volunteering. As the lead organisation Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMVO) worked in partnership with 5 volunteer development agencies, Volunteering Bristol, Exeter Volunteer Centre, Volunteering England, Cornwall Centre for Voluntary Service and Gloucester CVS. 179 volunteers from 9 minority ethnic groups participated in the project

Challenges to Equality & Diversity Work

We identified many barriers preventing a thorough embedding of equality and diversity work within Change Up work programmes. We

did not identify any hostility or even indifference to the importance of equalities work. However there were clearly structural barriers in how Change Up funding was devised, implemented, monitored and evaluated which inhibited a best practice approach to equalities.

For many of the Consortia members interviewed the 'forming' and 'norming' process was often difficult and strained with a lack of trust amongst some. However this was often short lived with all members agreeing that the Consortia were a good idea in principle. These tensions were less apparent in Cornwall where all the infrastructure organisations had traditionally worked closely together.

Each consortium reported problems resulting from disagreements about what exactly constituted an infrastructure organisation. Many organisations wanted to join a consortium but were told they did not qualify. One of the challenges facing the consortia was deciding how to ensure appropriate equalities representation amongst their members. There was a lack of clarity about which BME organisations should be members. Consortia felt they were obliged to have local Race Equality Councils as members even when they did not deliver any infrastructure functions. It was unclear if a Race Equality Council did become a member, whether other BME organisations who did deliver infrastructure support should also become members. Other equality organisations felt that it was unfair that their community was not specifically represented on a consortium while BME did have this "privilege". However it should be noted that while there is only a small number of BME infrastructure organisations within the region, there are hardly any infrastructure organisations supporting other equalities communities.

Many consortia members agreed that the first year of Change Up was difficult in differing ways with various approaches taken to equality work. With much of year one spent agreeing the scope and resources of the work programme, there was a clear impact on the time left to deliver the work.

Significant time was spent trying to resolve some fundamental questions about the purpose and role of the Change Up programme.

Attempting to resolve these differences of opinion did deflect attention from planning and delivering the work. For example, there was a lack of clarity whether the purpose of Change Up was to strengthen infrastructure functions within the VCS or strengthen the infrastructure organisations themselves. Some infrastructure organisations felt that they would not be able to deliver enhanced support to the rest of the VCS unless they used year one funding to develop themselves. This was particularly reflects the position of many equalities infrastructure organisations who historically have received less funding than mainstream infrastructure organisations. Some of these organisations requested an investment of significant resources to help address the disparity between them and other consortium members. This would then increase their capacity to do more work in future years.

Consortia members reported that there were differences of opinion about whether it was appropriate that BME development work should always be led by BME organisations. Some BME organisations clearly thought that they should lead this work as they had more expertise and were already working closely with frontline BME organisations in the sector. They felt that it was too early to mainstream this work. Other mainstream infrastructure organisations highlighted their own experience and expertise on equalities issues. They stated that this work should be mainstreamed particularly as one of the principles of Change Up was to rationalise infrastructure support in the sector. They also questioned the capacity of some BME organisations to lead strategic development work. The capacity issues raised were not in relation to the expertise or skills of the BME organisations but were more to do with funding crisis that would deflect them from the work.

Some Consortia members reported confusion over whom and what counted as equality work and where this would fit within the various work strands identified in their Investment Plans. There was a lack of clarity about whether resources allocated to equality and diversity work should be committed purely to Black & Minority Ethnic development or all of the equality strands (race, disability, age etc).

Members from all three consortia reported inadequate and frequently often conflicting guidance, both written and verbal, from Government Office Southwest (GOSW) on these issues. Clearer guidance may have eliminated some initial disagreements within the consortia.

There were tensions between some of the consortia and the thematic groups that were tasked to deliver equality and diversity work. The consortia and thematic groups appeared to have different, yet equally valid, expectations about who was responsible for leading some of the work and where the resources would come from. Again, these tensions appear to have arisen from the consortia and thematic groups receiving conflicting information from GOSW. Several consortia members we interviewed people we interviewed believed the situation could have been avoided and regretted the time and energy that was committed to resolve the issues.

Some members found that there was a lack of joint working at both a local and regional level which could address some of their capacity issues. Duplication of resources was highlighted with members raising the issue of lack of communication both from within each consortium and between it and the regional hub and/or the Change Up Support programme.

Consortia members who had a more urban remit experienced less difficulty in attracting organisations representing BME and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) interests for example. Some consortia members, particularly those with a more rural remit, reported that they were keen to work with front line equalities organisations within the VCS but they did not exist in their area. There did not appear to be any engagement with nascent organisations working with migrant workers – an emerging equalities issue within the region. There did not appear to be sufficient mechanisms within the monitoring processes to ensure that infrastructure organisations further develop their work to encourage greater representation of organisations from equalities communities.

A lack of evidence of the needs of equalities communities was highlighted, with some Consortia of the view that a lack of visibility of

such organisations hampered their inclusion. Despite the challenges faced, where gaps were identified efforts had been made to either seek to or work with agencies and partners and individuals from and or with experience of working with equalities communities.

Change Up did not develop the representation function within the VCS. Representation should be seen as much of an infrastructure function as providing support relating to governance, ICT or workforce development. Equalities VCS organisations often do not have the capacity to engage strategically with key local, regional and national organisations. This is particularly important for equalities organisations who often have even more insecure funding than the rest of the VCS. With public authorities soon to have statutory duties to promote disability and gender equality in addition to existing responsibilities under Race Relations Amendment Act, it is crucial that equalities VCS organisations maintain a high profile.

Capacity was mentioned by all three Consortia as one of the greatest barriers to developing equalities work under the Change Up program. Indeed many organisations reported they had limited capacity to engage properly in the entire Change Up agenda. An organisation's involvement often relied on a single individual and this inevitably led to problems when s/he was sick or left the organisation. With such limited capacity, few organisations could engage with best practice approaches to equalities work such as equality impact assessments. Some consortia members we interviewed identified that they had difficulty developing and maintaining their knowledge on equalities generally but in particular how new national and regional initiatives and legislation could affect them.

There appears to have been poor monitoring and evaluation within the Change Up programme. Some consortium members reported that this was because the culture of the VCS was not sympathetic to rigorous programme management. Others said it was due to a bureaucratic and onerous quarterly monitoring system. Others felt that because the Investment Plans were compiled in haste and at a time when consortium members were not working together totally cohesively, discussion about the aims and outcomes of the work was

sometimes fudged. It is hard to assess outcomes, or even plan work, when the original aims of the work are unclear.

It was not possible to come to a full conclusion of the impact of the Change up monitoring without adequate monitoring data. We identified very little equalities related monitoring. While consortia could report on the number of type of organisations engaged with, there was scarce monitoring of individuals. So Change Up projects may have recruited new volunteers and trustees and trained existing staff members but there was no equalities information about which communities they came from.

Conclusion

As the move towards a greater role in providing services from within the voluntary and community sector increases so must the sector be able to ensure it has the relevant experience and knowledge as well as the capacity to ensure that the legal framework that covers equality and diversity is adhered to. Likewise there is a need to increase the knowledge base of the public sector to appreciate the work of the VCS and to establish a much closer working relationship built on a shared sense of purpose in tackling inequalities from within and external to their specific sectors.

Despite the difficulties there is evidence of good practice across all three Consortia. The development of an equality and diversity toolkit and importantly the inclusion and involvement of members of equalities communities through out the development stage has been highlighted. Similarly specific initiatives to increase the numbers of volunteers from equalities communities have been implemented. Gloucester's decision to bring together local equalities organisations to check their Investment Plans was also very positive. {Insert something about Bristol ICT work}. The three consortia also worked very positively with CEMVO to develop volunteering opportunities for BME communities.

Considering the difficulties and delays the consortia experienced while they came together and planned their work, it is not surprising

that there was not much time left to deliver some of the work. It was good to find that all three consortia had worked through these initial problems and were progressing more equalities related work for 2006/7 and beyond.

However, there are clearly steps which Capacity Builders and the consortia themselves can take to improve work on equality and diversity issues.

Recommendations

Capacity Builders

- Provide unequivocal guidance on what constitutes an infrastructure organisation and which organisations should be members of the Consortia.
- Provide clearer guidelines and ongoing support to assist consortia members in meeting their equalities and diversity objectives. This guidance should clarify if BME development work should be seen as a priority or whether programmes benefiting other equalities organisations and communities (Disabled, LGBT, women etc) should be seen as equally important.
- Stipulate that all programmes funded in future need to work with front-line equalities VCS organisations and monitor progress.
- Future investment in community development programmes for both rural & urban engagement of equalities communities.
- Encourage development of representation functions from within infrastructure organisations.
- Greater emphasis and investment in equality proofing and Equalities Impact Assessing the VCS – consortia may need additional funding to require this to happen

- Fund a policy officer that can advise on the impact of national and regional equalities policies and initiatives on the VCS.
- Facilitate better communication between regional hubs and thematic groups and consortia

Consortia

- Further training on equalities and diversity to be embedded into the culture of all consortia members.
- Better coordination & communication within and between Consortia & Change Up.
- Further engagement of equalities communities and VCS organisations.
- Introduce proper monitoring of how/if work increases participation of members of equalities communities in VCS
- More work equality impact assessing programmes of work and working with partners to improve their progress on equalities
- Need for increased collaboration with the public sector and sharing of good practice.

Appendix 1: List of Consortia Members Interviewed During Research.

Bristol

Avon & Bristol Law Centre
2 Moon Street
Stokes Croft
Bristol
BS2 8QE
0117 924 8662

Volunteering Bristol
Royal Oak House
Royal Oak Avenue
Bristol
BS1 4GB
0117 989 7733

Black Development Agency
5 Russell Town Avenue
Redfield
Bristol
BS5 9LT
0117 9396645

Voscur
The CREATE Centre
Smeaton Road
Bristol
BS1 6XN
0117 909 9949

Cornwall

Cornwall Centre for Volunteers
Heron House
Newham Quay
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 2DP
01872 242374

Cornwall Rural Community
Council
9A River Street
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 2SQ
01872 273952

Cornwall Race Equality Council
PO BOX 89
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 1ZD
01637 852410

East Cornwall CVS
2a Fore Street
Mount Folly
Bodmin
PL31 2HQ
01208 75799

Gloucestershire

Connecting Communities
177 Barton Street
Gloucester
GL1 4HY
01452 308448

Gloucester CVS
75-81 Eastgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1PN
01452 332424

Forest Voluntary Action Forum
Belle Vue Centre
Cinderford
Gloucestershire
GL14 2AB
01594 822073