

TSP TRAINING PROJECT

THIRD SECTOR PARTNERSHIP TRAINING PROJECT

September 2009 – March 2010

A Report on Activity, Learning and Support Needs of the Voluntary and Social
Enterprise Sector in Argyll and Bute.

G Heritage. May, 2010.

Introduction

In 2009, the then Third Sector Partnership, (core members, Argyll Voluntary Action and ABSEN) were awarded fund through the Fairer Argyll and Bute Partnership to implement a training project offering a period of intensive training activity to the wider third sector in Argyll and Bute. It was also an opportunity to refresh the existing analysis of training needs and refine an overview of support and training requirements – in short, an opportunity to take a close look at the state of the sector in Argyll and Bute.

Due to the timescales of the funding award the project had a six month life only. The initial funding of £25,000 from FAB partnership was supplemented by a further £21,000 from LEADER, recognising the significant need and importance of training and support.

The project has enabled the TSP to report on the nature, scope and impact of training needs and skills gaps within the third sector in the county.

Prior to this project Argyll and Bute Volunteer Centre (now Argyll Voluntary Action) had conducted a training needs analysis during 2008, much of which was initially used as the basis to plan training during the life of the project. This can now be updated and the impact and future needs has now been more clearly identified and mapped through the life of this work.

It has to be noted that the core partners, ABSEN and Argyll Voluntary Action, carried out the majority of the training offered during this project. Staff from other voluntary organisations were involved where possible and 'Train the Trainer' workshops held to enhance and build on their existing skills. Since the timescale precluded recruitment and employment of trainer/facilitator, AVA and ABSEN personnel worked additional hours to ensure delivery at a level which would not be sustainable over a longer term. If, as is demonstrated, additional training is required, then not only the funding to enable this to happen but also the staffing levels need to be taken into account.

Complex and sometimes difficult issues have been raised during the life of this project and many of these concerns are addressed within this document. We therefore make a number of recommendations and will work towards a number of goals as identified in the following pages.

The Third Sector and its Workforce

Within this report, where the word 'workforce' is used we do so generically, noting that it can refer both to paid employees carrying out generic or specialist roles and to volunteers who frequently carry the same responsibilities within frontline organisations. Many organisations depend on volunteers to deliver services and recognise that it is equally essential that their volunteer workforce are as skilled as paid employees.

During this project a number of surveys were also carried out, as well as information and views collected through voluntary sector fora (where these currently exist) to establish a broad view of the sector.

Nationally, the tenuous state of skills within the third sector is well documented, and much work has been carried out over the last decade (particularly across England) to address support needs.

To highlight the importance of a skilled sector locally, we would like to quote comments from M Freeman, of the UK Workforce hub,

" skills.... is not a mutually exclusive area. The voluntary and community sector is facing continued change as wider policies change at local, regional and national levels, and many of these changes have skills implications for staff, volunteers and trustees. The move from grants to contracts, the rise of social enterprise, the full cost recovery agenda, the increase of regulation and the need to be transparent in how organisations work all have an impact on the type and level of skills the sector needs."

The Third Sector Partnership hoped that the delivery of additional skills, equitably and available without cost to organisations across the sector would herald an improved support mechanism which would strengthen the sector in Argyll and Bute. As we write, with financial constraints affecting the sector from all sides, there is much work to be carried out and we are a long way from achieving that goal.

We have, however, demonstrated very ably what can be achieved with limited strategic funding and this report evidences that impact and the learning from this project.

A Word on Quality

The core partners of the TSP – the infrastructure organisations of Argyll and Bute – currently work to PQASSO as part of their agreement with Scottish Government and are all committed to achieving EFQM standard by April 2011. This coincides with the commitment to quality and to a range of national standards (including the National Standards for Community Engagement) which underpins the way in which we work and the levels of training delivery available to third sector organisations across Argyll and Bute. For example, all AVA Volunteer Centre workshops on volunteer support and management are accredited learning from the Investing in Volunteers modules and therefore can set any organisations on the journey to achievement of Investing in Volunteers recognition.

Quality, and the ability to evidence that standards are met, is at best patchy across the voluntary and social enterprise sector in Argyll and Bute.

TSP partners wish to see quality standards raised and recognised across the sector; not only do funders feel more comfortable with organisations able to demonstrate the levels of service they are able to deliver but much could be achieved in attracting funding to the area through a sector which values quality of service and can demonstrate that it does so. There are numerous other benefits, including those to staff and volunteers, and we would hope that the quality agenda is one supported by our partners within the FAB and CPP partnerships.

This will require some effort as organisations surveyed felt that, generally, they did not have the time or resources to devote to quality standards mark achievement and were uncertain of the benefits of doing so. Many of course, already work to standards set either legislatively or by national or umbrella organisations – although a significant number may not. It may be that it would require achievement of a quality mark to be a prerequisite of funding in order to drive up standards across Argyll and Bute.

Delivery of the Training Programme

The objective of the project was primarily the delivery of a series of training events and workshops across Argyll and Bute which was based on known demand and was available, free at point of delivery to third sector organisations and with participants expenses and care costs met where appropriate.

By the end of six months Argyll Voluntary Action and ABSEN, with input from members of the Third Sector Partnership, had delivered fifty two courses across Argyll and Bute covering areas as diverse as Mull, Helensburgh, Lochgilphead, Islay, Dalavich, Dunoon, Tiree, Oban, Campbeltown, , and Coll.

The activities carried out through this project by AVA and ABSEN staff, and by other third sector members of the TSP are summarised below:

Number of individuals trained	266
Number of organisations trained	154
Number of courses held	52
Areas where courses held	Helensburgh, Ardfern, Dunoon, Taynuilt, Isle of Mull, Oban, Isle of Coll, Isle of Tiree, Islay, Lochgilphead, Kilmun, Balloch, Kirn, Connel, Campbeltown, Garelochhead, Lismore, Craignish, Dalavich, Lochgoilhead, Strachur
Topics included	Governance, Outcomes workshops, CRBS Awareness, HR Basics, Committee Skills, Supporting and Supervising Skills, Licensing laws, First Aid, Recruitment and Interviewing, Health and Safety,

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	Motivation, Retention and Development of Volunteers, Responsibilities and liabilities of Trustees, OSCR and SORP, Finance for Non-financial Managers, Procurement Training, Money, money, money (funding advice for social enterprises) Funding Workshop for voluntary organisations,
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Courses were well received, each course was evaluated separately and feedback gathered from participants.

Notably, many courses were oversubscribed leading to some delivery running past the end of March 2010; we are very aware that there are further requests for support and training which, without this funding, cannot be met within the capacity of the Third Sector Partnership.

By the end of the project additional skills had been acquired by 275 individuals and many will be able to pass this knowledge onto others within their organisations.

It should also be noted that, over the 2009/2010 year this work and the training and support are additional to training events, workshops, bespoke training and the range of support delivered under the core activities of both Argyll Voluntary Action and ABSEN.



Explaining Full Cost Recovery

Evaluation

Third Sector Partnership core organisations work to quality standards and therefore robust evaluation of project delivery is critical – not only to evidence the work which has been carried out, but as part of an ongoing learning process, analysing and capturing the changing needs of training and support of the sector.

We used feedback, captured comments and also ensured that views from the course facilitators were collated.

The following criteria were used to evaluate each course:

- Information around type of organisation
- Extent to which content will help to develop skills and competencies in working with my organisation
- Change factors which the course will enable
- Suggestions for improvement in course content
- Knowledge level of trainers

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- Extent to which style of training suited needs
- Suggestions for improvement to training delivery
- Actions attendees are enabled to implement as a result of the course
- Further training or information attendee or organisation would find useful

We also collated information on the identity, role and responsibilities of attendees and organisational details.

Facilitators were asked to give feedback on how each course went and where other training needs were identified. This was an area which highlighted needs for bespoke support and training.

Some of the comments from the training course participants are:

- First class training
- Couldn't be improved
- Very informative
- Delivered well
- Clearly understood
- Well set out and delivered
- Excellent course
- Flexible to participants needs
- Focused training to participant needs
- Able to action immediately
- Got loads of ideas
- Will be more confident working with children
- Will assist my volunteering commitment
- Need to get others involved
- Our board needs more knowledge

The Place of Skills and Training

This work has highlighted the place and accessibility of training and skills development within the third sector in Argyll and Bute.

Argyll Voluntary Action undertook to survey organisations through its database to augment the information collected through voluntary sector fora and through delivery of training to ascertain how organisations acknowledged and valued skills training within their organisations. Crucially we wished to identify whether organisations were funded, or felt they had the financial resources to implement a training programme budget.

The total respondent organisations through delivery of training (146) together with a further 57 online respondents jointly represented over 1,000 volunteers and over 300 paid staff.

The Place of training within your organisation

Questions and responses are given below:

Are you funded, or do you have a budget, dedicated to the training/upskilling of staff and/or volunteers?	YES	11%
	NO	83%
	DON'T KNOW	6%
Which of these are barriers to accessing training?	TIME	79%
	MONEY	86%
	GEOGRAPHY/LOCATION	62%
Which of these activities does your organisation routinely undertake?	TRUSTEE INDUCTION	38%
	VOLUNTEER INDUCTION	66%
	STAFF INDUCTION	59%
	NONE OF THESE	21%
And which in-house FURTHER training do you undertake?	TRUSTEES	4%
	VOLUNTEERS	22%
	STAFF	24%
If time, money and geography were not barriers, how would you rate accessibility to training opportunities?	HIGHLY DESIRABLE	73%
	USEFUL, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL	16%
	POSSIBLY OF INTEREST	7%
	OF NO INTEREST	2%

Despite a necessarily broadbrush approach it is clearly a real concern that, at a time when many organisations are struggling to survive most have no funds available to develop staff or volunteers and a great many have real difficulties finding the time to access training. Yet, if training is available without cost, the vast majority of organisations rate the development of volunteers and staff as highly desirable; many comments made it clear that Trustees, Directors and Managers felt the lack of wider access to training very keenly.

The uptake from this project alone underlines the sectors enthusiasm for training – it is not predominantly a lack of interest or awareness but the barriers of time, money and geography which are having the greatest impact. Conversely, these are the very factors having the greatest impact on the infrastructure organisations capacity to deliver the levels of training which the sector requires.

Recruitment and Skills issues

Additionally, some organisations highlighted the difficulties and impact lack of accessible training and support has around and relating to workforce recruitment.

The top 3 issues were as follows:

- Short term funding environment (short term employment contracts and uncertainty)
- Low skills base of staff and volunteers
- Difficulties in developing skills and training staff/volunteers to appropriate and best practice levels.

There were less difficulties with branches of national organisations where, commonly, a national training programme for new volunteers and staff is available and/or cascaded to local level. Generally it is the local groups, some quite sizable in terms of numbers of participants, turnover and workforce who are struggling despite often providing a valuable, and valued service.

These results chime precisely with a major UK wide voluntary sector research, conducted in 2007 following the Leitch review, which concluded:

- Lack of funding for training and development was cited as the main cause of underskilled employees and volunteers by (3rd sector) organisations of all sizes
- Micro and small organisations were much more likely to report a lack of time to attend or complete training

Sadly, the local picture is still in the same place. Most organisations said that it was because there is no one (volunteer or paid staff) to cover their work if they are on a training course or at a meeting. This flows directly from the exigencies of funding streams which allow no 'leeway' and are often restrictive in terms of staffing and budget heads available. Time and again, organisations have found they are able to fund project delivery staff but struggle to fund the administrative and financial support which should be available to ensure a strong organisation. Generally it is the project Managers who take on a range of duties in addition to their core project work. Frequently, small organisations feel they have much to do and little time to accomplish their primary aims.

Many organisations do recognise that having a skilled workforce can be reflected in the greater ability to attract funding, in turn affecting the sustainability of the organisation.

The impacts arising from a lack of skills can be enormous and very serious. Trustees of charities in particular, can be left exposed and at risk through a lack of training and ability to implement proper procedures and comply with legislation.



First Aid Training

Strengthening Organisations

After attending a course, most organisations were able to identify gaps in the way they worked, or in their procedures and practices – some of which would have legal implications.

Evidence of actions which will strengthen organisations and therefore the sector, flow from the following action comments given as feedback from the delivery of training under this project:

- We need to comply with legislation
- Our procedures need to be reviewed – urgently
- We will review/rewrite our staff contracts
- We need to develop and improve monitoring systems
- We must implement Trustee training
- We will introduce measured delivery
- We must improve communications between staff and volunteers
- We will now display policies
- We should be more proactive
- Our First Aid boxes will be updated
- We will evaluate our procedures
- We will improve our disclosure process
- We are going to look again at our recruitment process
- We will strengthen supervision of volunteers
- We will now improve our funding applications
- We are going to expand our committee
- We are going to assign a contact for volunteers

We have many more examples. Whilst much is about best practice, there are actions on evaluation and feedback sheets which clearly identified problem areas, as well as a need for additional training. Although we have a wealth of strength in our large and vibrant 3rd sector in Argyll and Bute we also have organisations with serious gaps in skills and knowledge with the potential for serious and adverse impacts on organisations, frontline services, participants and beneficiaries of services and, of course, the communities and social economy of Argyll and Bute.

The infrastructure organisations deliver training according to their resources of funding and staff; across the vast fragmented mainland and the remote islands of Argyll, the capability, knowledge and confidence of those agencies is compromised by our own funding levels which remain in most areas incompatible with need and which is inequitably distributed across the area.

Training Needs

As mentioned above delivery of this training programme has highlighted the needs of the sector and given valuable dimension to information already held by Argyll Voluntary Action and ABSEN around the needs of the sector.

From the feedback, and from survey responses it is clear that survival is uppermost in the thoughts of a majority of third sector organisations (88% expressed concerns). It is therefore, no surprise that events and workshops around finding funding, help with funding applications and linked topics were overwhelmingly oversubscribed – as a topic they remain a crucial part of the work of the infrastructure organisations and we are looking at the opportunities to link funding with the local third sector fora as a standing item.

AVA already issues email alerts across the sector but the need is refined by the deepening economic landscape and organisations who may have had success in attracting funding in the past are experiencing increasing difficulties.

First Aid and Health and Safety training, amongst other topics, reflect the concerns that the local sector has in complying with relevant good practice within their organisations, with the safety of volunteers and clients and with statutory agency requirements.

The introduction of the new Equality Act 2010, as it comes into force from October 2010 will bring additional training and awareness needs in its wake. Although there are certain elements which the Conservatives have indicated they would not implement if in Government, the major part of this Act will, at best, raise the bar in terms of levels of organisational awareness; clearly this topic will form a strand of our available training from this autumn.

By the end of the project we had identified priority training needs in the following subjects across the area which remain and which we continue to work to deliver. Courses in First Aid, however, remain the remit of those recognised provider organisations and cannot be accessed without cost by local voluntary and community groups. The speed of that delivery across the sector will be less than was possible with the additional funding, however, this analysis confirms previous analytical results from 2009 and 2008 as well as the ongoing need.

Topic/subject area priorities
Funding advice and support Skills for Management Committees Governance and Trustees responsibilities Personal Development (STEPS) Setting up a charitable organisation First Aid Developing and Managing Volunteers (IiV accredited) CRBS/Disclosure Employment issues – policies and practice Health and Safety Health and Safety in Volunteer programmes Volunteer recruitment Equality and Diversity Coping with OSCR

Beyond this are a plethora of requests covering a range of topics and we respond to these as they arise. Frequently, the individual circumstances mean that bespoke training and support is the appropriate course of action.

The portfolio of courses which the Third Sector Partnership infrastructure organisations have the capability to deliver is wide, embracing over 50 topics and is always evolving in response to changes in or new legislation – an example would be the new Equality Act 2010; changes in the funding and economic climate have steered the development of Outcomes Training workshop and the forthcoming updated Equality and Diversity workshop. Part of our remit is to keep the sector informed and updated. An example would be the debate within the Equality Act which may cause major difficulties for charitable organisations with a specific beneficiary group who do not fall under the new 'characteristics' within the Act. As counsel becomes available, we will update our own training and inform and support the sector accordingly.

SORP and OSCR Training Event



Bespoke Support and Training

We also asked organisations about their preference for delivery of support and training needs. Fifty three organisations expressed a need for one to one support, i.e. bespoke training – frequently this stems from a desire to work in a more sustainable way and highlights the diversity and individuality of the sector; many subjects as a theme can be delivered ‘across the board’ but there is much which will be specific to an organisations individual circumstances whether in the volunteering sector or organisational (constitutional) support.

Ford Village Hall

OSCR are questioning a Trust Deed drawn up many years ago when the original hall was built. This appointed as Trustees two Council (then Argyll) officers and one Chief Constable as Trustees in 1963; these people are no longer around and since no further Trustees have been appointed the persons currently running the hall on a day to day voluntary basis potentially have no powers. Now wishing to sell the hall and land they are locked in debate with OSCR who contend that the current committee cannot sell the land.

Although by no means unique this type of support request raises serious questions,

can only be dealt with as a bespoke piece of work, and is time consuming. It does, however, have a major impact on the local community and support and understanding is needed to resolve the issue. There is also a clear training need for those currently involved with management of the hall.

Clearly, this level of bespoke support and training is more time consuming and therefore more costly. It does not bode well, at a time when Scottish Government is reducing core funding to the third sector generally, and with areas having a largely rural and dispersed demography likely to be the greatest losers, for the future support structures working for Argyll and Bute voluntary and social enterprise sector.

Time and Type of support

Training duration preferences	
Workshops – weekday daytimes	61%
Workshops – weekday evenings	23%
Weekend	8%
Whole day	26%
Half day (2 – 3 hours max)	71%
Level of training preferred	
One to one organisation support/training	68%
Within workshop/training event	44%
Calendar training programmes, preset topics	38%
Ability to request as need arises	77%

Organisations were able to make more than one choice on time and levels as their own availability may include more than one option. The need for access to services outside work hours is clear and a driver in at least one AVA office instigating Saturday opening. One to one support to individual organisations was also valued and scored highly with respondents.

There is additional survey work to be undertaken around these themes which we plan to commence August 2010.

We asked people what they thought should be our priorities for the future of infrastructure support, the top 3 priorities were:

- Improving funding and financial stability (*we want to know you will still be here*)
- Providing better services (*greater visibility, support on specific issues*)
- Increasing your influence

Qualities of good infrastructure support services were indicated as follows:

- Flexible and responsive
- Convenient and easy to access
- Effective at getting third sector voices heard by decision makers
- Good quality and reliable
- Open and transparent

With all Third Sector Partnership core members committed to working to PQASSO, and progressing to EFQM quality mark assurance of consistent quality standards in delivery across services is visible to all stakeholders.

Within the limits of capacity both organisations respond to enquiries timeously and appropriately; over this last year AVA alone has received over 11,000 enquiries.

Training support services are to be maintained within capacity but working together through the partnership and with other support services there needs to be a removal of any duplication. The training calendar made possible through this project proved popular not only with recipients of training and support but enquiries were received from a range of national organisations and agencies all of whom were keen to input into the calendar and to check that courses or workshops did not overlap or clash – in reality this meant a better service for Argyll and Bute's third sector. It is therefore, regrettable that the calendar facility is not funded to continue.

Future of support and training in Argyll and Bute

1. Impact of the Recession

The recession and current economic climate is widely seen as a threat. Less money around means all organisations will be chasing less. Funders are becoming more tight and inflexible about what they will fund – if they are funding at all – some have already effectively closed their doors. Over 60% of organisations believe there will be a squeeze on their overheads, meaning that funders will be less likely to fund on a Full Cost Recovery basis (particularly the grant making Trusts). One effect is the amount of time and effort having to be put into making more numerous funding bids – sometimes impacting on frontline services. The national Government steer towards infrastructure organisations generating their own income through selling services is unlikely to work well in this climate, when the client base is itself, struggling to survive.

A potential benefit of the recession could be a rise in availability of volunteers although this is uncertain. There is an equal likelihood of an increased demand on services by those affected by recession in terms of employment, well-being and health related needs.

2. Policy Developments

The Third Sector Partnership, and its core infrastructure members, are in the process of a transitional year. Not only is this year important for the development of the interface with expectations from local Community Planning Partnership as well as Scottish Government which will undoubtedly increase the workload for core staff, but we are looking at a future where cuts have been signalled effective from April 2011 to our core funding. We have additional challenges to ensure that what funding remains is equitable distributed across Argyll and Bute – a challenge first laid out by Cllr Dick Walsh in May 2008.

Challenges for the sector, and relevant to the quality issue, are the shift for the sector in outcomes in both commissioning and in assessing the impact of services. This too is a culture change for all involved and up-skilling of the sector in how to express its impact effectively – particularly around the so-called 'softer outcomes' – is important to its future success.

In response, Argyll Voluntary Action has added dedicated outcomes training to its range of available workshops.

Along with all other local authorities, Argyll and Bute Council is facing similar economic constraints; it follows therefore, that we share resources and skills wherever possible to maximise resources at a time when financial resources are at best hard pressed, and in some areas cease to be available.

We have a clear signal that commissioning and procurement is to become a future path for many services which the sector currently provides and this brings its own set of training needs. More hitherto voluntary and community groups may become social enterprises and the sector as a whole has opportunities through commissioning to demonstrate what they can deliver. Undoubtedly this will be a key driver in the development and sustainability of the sector. The future of grant funding within a broader commissioning approach, is felt to be unclear at present and a focus of concern for the third sector. Whilst commissioning and some grant funding may provide opportunities the sector also has worries about potentially destructive competition from larger/national organisations.

3. Legal and Governance

New legal structures are becoming available to voluntary and community groups with the introduction of SCIO's which will impact on the demand for infrastructure support. With changes in company law it is likely a number of organisations will seek to change their legal identity and need to understand their new responsibilities and powers. There is some unease around this with a possibly larger than average number of organisations in Argyll and Bute having Trustee boards or committees who remain unaware or out of date in their understanding of current liabilities and responsibilities of Trustees.

Within the current climate not only changes, mergers but also some organisations winding up will require help and support to handle liabilities of Trustees, TUPE issues or redundancies.

In Conclusion

This project has demonstrated quite unequivocally the demand and need within the third sector for targeted and appropriate training. Most courses have been full and oversubscribed which means that additional courses have run to satisfy the demand. The Partnership was also able to respond quickly to new and changing demand and to run new courses as evidence demonstrated a clear need following a change in legislation. The social value from this project, therefore, far exceeds its original remit and targets.

The plan was to deliver 30 courses and upskill 100 individuals; ultimately we delivered 52 courses and new skills were gained by 266 individuals drawn from 154 voluntary, community and social enterprise groups.

We have been able to update our training needs analysis and the feedback has confirmed that our delivery and style suits the greater majority of participants. A substantial number of courses were delivered during evenings and weekends, again in response to need.

The following learning points arise or are confirmed through delivery of this project.

- Training workshops of short duration – 2 – 3 hours are most popular, and fit with constraints of participating organisations
- One to one organisational support is highly valued and should be available to the sector
- The ability to request training and support on an ad hoc basis according to need is wanted by the majority of organisations
- Evenings and weekend support and training requests are significant, if not a majority and should continue to be provided.
- There are concerns around governance issues for a number of organisations and frequently these come to light at a time of crisis, response from infrastructure organisations can be critical to ameliorate difficulties. A relatively low 38% of organisations were confident in their ability to induct Trustees, majority did not offer this.
- The capacity of Argyll and Bute Social Enterprise Network and Argyll Voluntary Action may be sustainable with current levels of funding but future cuts will impact on frontline services ability to access support
- Quality issues are reflected in 83% of vcs organisations having no available budget dedicated to upskilling staff and volunteers

- Money and time are a greater barrier than geography to accessibility of training support; local offices and contacts were appreciated and well used.

If Argyll and Bute is to take its place with a leading third sector then provision of support and training is a prerequisite, as is devoting time and energy to promoting quality and good governance. We have a very strong and vibrant third sector but it is feeling the effects of recession and cutbacks and nervous of future prospects. To attract external funding there is a need to raise the quality bar and this is a place for infrastructure organisations to play a central role.

There is a clear steer to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of infrastructure support for third sector organisations; the Third Sector Partnership accords entirely with this view and is prepared to rise to the challenge, but it does require the resources to do so. Additional funding such as through this project demonstrate very ably the capability of the Partnership, we must work to ensure the capacity is equitable across Argyll and Bute and resourced accordingly.

Finally, the TSP confirms its role in enabling the third sector to thrive and to grow in its contribution to our local society, environment and economy.