

NCVO – Consultation on Third Sector Research Centre

1 – In your work, what would be most useful: generic research on topics that apply to the whole sector such as volunteering, added value, and outcomes, or sub-sectoral themed research into areas such as healthcare and social care?

There is currently a dearth of research on, or which differentiates between, religious and secular organisations. This is the case both nationally and internationally; for academic and other types of research. Therefore, both generic and sub-sectional themed research would be useful. However, what is of particular importance to us is that the research results are, where appropriate, disaggregated. This would allow us, for example, to compare the role and effect of different types of organisation i.e. make comparisons between faith-based and secular third sector organisations on specific areas in which they are involved, such as healthcare. For more generic research with a broader scope, such disaggregated data/results would make clear the role and actual contribution that different types of organisation make to society in terms, for example, of volunteering and added value to outcomes of a service.

Certainly thematic research, such as looking at the role of the third sector in providing public services including education, would be useful, particularly if the results were disaggregated as above and had a longitudinal focus (i.e. they were consistently measured and published over time).

Also useful would be research on faith-based organisations that differentiates them by *how* religious they are - nominally or genuinely religiously motivated. This distinction is often not clear.

2 – Regarding the above information and evidence, where do you feel you need the most help? (Please tick 1 and feel free to explain your answer).

- Identifying or finding research evidence
- Assessing and understanding research evidence
- Utilising research evidence

As mentioned above and especially in relation to the UK, we feel there is not enough research that looks at or compares religious and secular organisations. We found this particularly when conducting our own research into public service provision through religious organisations – a policy where the Government extolled the benefits of such provision, with neither evidence to support nor (for us) to counter those assertions.

The scarcity of specific research which looks at religious and secular organisations also makes such research harder to source, locate and utilise. As a small charity, we are unable financially to subscribe to research journals. To have access to such journals would be valuable to us, so that we are able to access the most up-to-date academic research on our areas of work. In order to increase our ability to identify and find research, it would be very useful if, through the Third Sector Research Centre, we were able to access such journals for little or no cost.

3 – And if new research was required, would you need help to: (please tick all that apply and feel free to explain your answer)

- Commission research
- Carry out research yourself

Due to our small size and limited resources, both commissioning research and carrying out our own research is difficult, so assistance would be welcomed in both areas.

4 – What would help you most to increase your skills in the above areas?

In terms of commissioning new research, it would be useful to have guidance and assistance, particularly on the actual process of commissioning – how to go about it, who best to approach for specialist areas, where we could get assistance or grants for funding such research and so on.

5 – What are your views on accessibility of information and evidence that already exists? What are the barriers in accessing it? What is the best format for it to be collected in?

As mentioned in question 3, because we do not subscribe to journals and the like, we are unable to access some of the information and evidence which may be relevant to us. We do monitor closely the published information by the Government and non-Governmental organisations which is free to access and use. However, it would be useful to have a central research hub on the internet which grouped together the latest information and research from across the third sector and from other relevant organisations, categorised thematically, through which the various information could be linked to electronically. An email alert could also be useful to direct us to relevant research and information

6 – How do you think the agenda of the Third Sector Research Centre should be set?

The Research Centre should be independent. This is of particular importance if it commissions new research. In order to gain and maintain trust from the third sector, any commissioning process must be transparent and open and the choice of researcher and research area justified. The type, range and scope of the research that the Centre collects should be objective and balanced, i.e. not all generalist, or not skewed too heavily or unjustifiable to one specific area such as employment within the sector.

7 – What do you think the focus of the Third Sector Research Centre should be? Commissioning new research, pulling together what already exists in accessible format and identifying gaps or something else entirely?

The Research Centre should focus on both commissioning and pulling together and disseminating the research which already exists. It is beyond the scope of small, individual organisations such as us to commission larger scale research on the third sector, but we would be able to suggest areas for new research where we have already identified gaps.

As mentioned above, it would be very useful to have somewhere to access easily the research that already exists, and notification of what does not, so we do not waste time and resources trying to locate research.