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Evaluation of the Welsh Assembly Government's Volunteering Grants Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Research Policy Analysis
Ymchwil Polisi Dadansoddi

An Evaluation of the Welsh Assembly Government's Volunteering Grants Programme

Report by Old Bell 3 Ltd on behalf of the Department for Social
Justice and Local Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the findings of an evaluation of the Volunteering Grants Programme commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and undertaken by Old Bell 3 Ltd.

The evaluation took place between May and August 2009 with the aim of assessing whether the three Volunteering Grants schemes administered by the WCVA on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government have, individually and as a whole, achieved their objectives and increased volunteering levels in Wales; and considering and making recommendations on the future structure of grant funding for volunteering in Wales.

The work involved reviewing key programme and project level documents and monitoring data, interviewing 50 grant recipient organisations by telephone, undertaking an in-depth follow on visit to twelve of these organisations to consult with key project staff and volunteers recruited with the help of the grants, as well as undertaking consultations with key stakeholders involved with the grants programme.

The Volunteering Grants Programme provides funding via three separate grant schemes to increase volunteering levels in Wales. The three grant programmes are:

- Millennium Volunteers (MV): a UK wide-programme with the overall aim of encouraging young people aged 16-24 years old to complete 200 hours of volunteering in a year;
- Volunteering in Wales Fund (VWF): a grant programme focused upon the recruitment and training of new volunteers from particular target groups, with funding for up to three years made available on a tapering basis;
- Wales: The Active Community (WAC): a grant programme to support and stimulate volunteering activity across four key themes – infrastructure, media and promotion, research and capacity building.

An annual grant of some £2 million is currently made available to the WCVA to administer these programmes and since April 2006 (when the WCVA was

appointed to manage the schemes) a total budget of £6.9 million has been allocated to this activity. Two of the grant programmes (VWF and MV) have been available for some considerable time and WAC was introduced in its current format in 2007. During the last financial year (2008/09) the three grant programmes collectively supported the recruitment of over 10,000 new volunteers, at a cost varying between £140 to £357 per individual volunteer across the three programmes.

The key findings of the evaluation are that:

- The three grant programmes generally support the strategic policy agenda for volunteering in Wales as set out in the Third Dimension and One Wales. Furthermore, they also fit well with the citizen engagement agenda apparent in a range of WAG policies. However there is a general lack of clarity about the broader objectives (for example, in terms of personal development of the volunteers and the delivery of services at low cost) of the Welsh Assembly Government in seeking to increase volunteering via its volunteering grants programme: this has meant it has been difficult to assess the effectiveness with which the grant programmes have achieved their objectives.
- The three grant programmes were initially established independently of each other, and whilst they appear to have met the needs of the sector over the last few years, it would now be timely to strive towards greater coherence, less duplication and a more relevant offering to the sector. By making appropriate changes the Welsh Assembly Government could secure greater flexibility and grant recipient organisations could secure greater funding security.
- Demand for one grant programme, VWF, has been significantly higher than for the other two with only a third of organisations submitting applications being successful, suggesting that the VWF grant could have benefited from a slightly greater share of funding.
- The grant programmes have led to substantial numbers of new volunteers being recruited that will go some way towards increased volunteering activity levels in Wales. Each grant programme reported generally good performance against their targets with a strong coverage of wide target groups and geographical areas, although

there are grounds for some concerns that penetration in the more populated areas, such as the South Wales Valleys, may have been less.

- Volunteers were in many cases equally driven by altruistic and personal development motivations and many volunteers were developing a wide range of skills and experiences that they could then take with them to future volunteering, study and employment opportunities.
- Some of the grant programmes were not as effective in attracting individuals with no previous experience of volunteering i.e. whilst volunteers recruited may have been a new volunteer to the project they were not genuinely new to volunteering. At the same time, increasing the volunteering contribution made by existing volunteers is a worthy target that may not have been given due consideration with the current grant programme objectives.
- The diversity of projects funded often made it difficult to develop any sort of meaningful aggregate targets or performance indicators. In moving forward, efforts to capture overall volunteer numbers and hours input which result from the programmes as a whole would increase the robustness of the data being reported.
- The overall feedback obtained from both stakeholders and grant recipient organisations suggested that the grant programmes were promoted effectively and the grant application and approval process managed efficiently by the WCVA. There is scope for some minor areas of improvement such as simplification of application forms, revisions to application timescales, reduction in administration burdens imposed upon grant recipient organisations and adopting a greater flexibility within monitoring visit arrangements.

Based on these findings, the report makes a series of eleven recommendations which focus on the need to:

- Continue the grant funding to support volunteering in Wales on at least the same level as over the last three years, but with the proportional split across the three programmes being reviewed and funding for VWF programme being proportionally increased;

- Continue to use the WCVA to manage volunteering grant schemes (insofar as procurement processes allow);
- Set common core performance indicators and targets for all volunteering grant programmes and projects;
- Provide greater clarity about the range of ultimate objectives the Welsh Assembly Government is seeking to reach through encouraging volunteering and its funding schemes;
- Continue to focus on encouraging young people to become engaged in volunteering and explore the possibility of incorporating the MV programme into GwriVol, at the same time re-naming and re-branding the MV award;
- Address the current MV application restrictions facing those unable to submit regular annual applications for this funding scheme;
- Adapt WAC and VWF grant programmes into three year rolling grant programmes with a supporting on-line application process'
- Develop a VWF three year application process and six-monthly reporting model as well as revising the current tapering model of funding;
- Consider the merits of further integration between the WAC and VWF grant programmes;
- Identify the reasons for low levels of applications from under-represented areas and develop a strategy to addresses the issues underlying these;
- Review regularly the particular demographic groups to be targeted in terms of support for volunteering.