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# The Third Sector European Team (3-SET) Evaluation

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# The Third Sector European Team (3-SET) Evaluation

Author(s) / company

Dyfan Powel / Wavehill

Anna Burgess / Wavehill

Sam Grunhut / Wavehill

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information, please contact:

Charlotte Guinee  
Welsh European Funding Office  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

Tel: 0300 025 0734

Email: [RME.Mailbox@gov.wales](mailto:RME.Mailbox@gov.wales)

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## Glossary

3-SET	Third Sector European Team
AIF	Active Inclusion Fund
Beneficiary	The term ‘beneficiary’ is widely used in the document to represent people or organisations that have benefitted from 3-SET support. ‘Beneficiary’ has a specific ESIF meaning, however. Technically, a beneficiary is a recipient of European funding, i.e. a project sponsor, be it public, private or voluntary, in receipt of Structural Funds for the purpose of implementing a project. However, whilst it is not strictly accurate to call other organisations benefitting from the 3-SET ‘beneficiaries’, in this context this term is, nonetheless, used for clarity. This report defines ‘beneficiaries’ as people or organisations that have benefitted from the 3-SET support.
CVC	County Voluntary Council
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
IB	Intermediary Body: The WCVA is an intermediary body and, as such, is sanctioned by the WEFO to deliver EU funds. IBs also have a key role to play in promoting and supporting partnerships. Ensuring sustainability and long-term impact depends upon developing linkages within, between and across different institutional levels.
PQASSO	Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations
SBGF	Social Business Growth Fund
TSSW	Third Sector Support Wales
WCFDP	Wales Council for Deaf People
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office

## **1. Introduction/Background**

- 1.1 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes have long been of critical support to Welsh Government policy objectives. The delivery of these funds can be (and has been) undertaken by the third sector for a number of years.
- 1.2 The Third Sector European Team (3-SET) is a 'function' or team, 'owned', run and populated by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) staff employed to carry out specific functions to provide assistance to the third sector across Wales in relation to the 2014-2020 ESIF programmes, including signposting links to other European funds such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020. Funded via Technical Assistance drawn from the four programmes, the 3-SET contributes to meeting the wider aims and objectives of each of these, namely West Wales and the Valleys, and East Wales, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF). The total cost of the service across its eight-year lifespan is projected to be £2,526,984 with £1,779,368 committed from EU Structural Funds.
- 1.3 It is expected that Wales' participation in EU-funded programmes will continue until the end of the 2014–2020 period (i.e. to 31st December 2023), despite the UK leaving the EU.
- 1.4 Support is offered to third sector organisations through providing technical advice (e.g. audits, costs, recordkeeping), helping to deliver European-funded programmes by identifying the best strategies available, acting as a 'critical friend' (e.g. with regard to business planning), and through online information sheets. Numerous training courses are also delivered. Training topics include European funding, project closure, succession planning, and budgeting. To assist the third sector in staying aware of EU funding developments, the 3-SET regularly hosts information events. Furthermore, the 3-SET advocates on behalf of the third sector by representing third sector interests and experiences and raises issues with the Welsh Government.
- 1.5 The technical advice service provided by the 3-SET builds on previous successful WCVA programmes such as the Voluntary Sector Support Service (established in 2000), although each iteration is different and has sought to address the specific objectives and aims of each funding round.

- 1.6 In its current form, 3-SET 2014–2020 has three objectives:
- 1) To **increase awareness** amongst third sector organisations of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other European programmes available in Wales.
  - 2) To **increase third sector engagement** in delivering the ESIF programmes in the 2014–2020 funding period.
  - 3) To **improve compliance rates** and reduce the risks in relation to third sector project delivery.
- 1.7 These objectives are pursued through four strands of activity:
- 1) Information and advice.
  - 2) Training and events.
  - 3) Facilitating networks and networking.
  - 4) Representing and promoting the third sector.
- 1.8 The original business plan was written in the context of Wales in the EU and with anticipated participation in successive EU-funded programmes. With Brexit imminent whilst collecting data for this report, the main focus of the 3-SET’s work also involved supporting organisations in ensuring that their activity is **sustainable in a future outside of the EU**. The 3-SET therefore refocused its operations upon issues surrounding legacy and succession whilst reducing its focus upon delivering training.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.9 Operational indicators were set during the business planning stage for the 3-SET’s work. These indicators were planned for review at the mid-term stage. Implications arising from Brexit defined much of the review, which resulted in the revision of indicators, outputs, and team structure.
- 1.10 Table 1.1 shows the revised indicators that are due to be completed between 1st September 2015 and 30th June 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> The 3-SET continues to operate under the Welsh national eligibility rules and eligible actions as defined in the relevant specific objective contained in each of the 2014-2020 operational programmes. Please see [EU Structural Funds programmes 2014 to 2020: operational programmes | GOV.WALES](#). [EU Structural Funds 2014 to 2020: compliance and eligibility guidance](#).

**Table 1.1: 3-SET full-term indicators**

<b>WEFO Core Indicator</b>	<b>Total</b>
No. of training events held	108
No. of research reports published	1
No. of dissemination events	43
No. of press releases	15
No. of e-newsletters issued	435

### **This evaluation**

- 1.11 The Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill to undertake an outcome and process evaluation of the Third Sector European Team (3-SET) in 2020. The findings of this evaluation — presented in this report — will not only inform the Welsh Government in relation to the performance of the 3-SET, but also help to inform the post-Brexit approach of the 3-SET, as well as informing 3-SET activities for the remainder of the 2014–2020 programming period and beyond.

### **Coronavirus pandemic**

- 1.12 The coronavirus pandemic has impacted on both the operation of the 3-SET and the evaluation. The 3-SET’s activities had to be delivered remotely, involving a switch to online training and networking meetings. Similarly, the evaluation data also had to be collected remotely. Due to the impact of the pandemic upon the capacity of staff within the organisations to engage in the evaluation, the response rates from organisations were slightly lower than anticipated.

### **This report**

- 1.13 This report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 2 presents the methodology employed to gather and analyse the data for this report.
  - Chapter 3 presents the findings of the research, starting with the outputs and then moving on to the impact of the 3-SET support activities upon the beneficiaries (third sector organisations in receipt of support). The findings presented in this chapter

specifically address the key research questions (as identified in the methodology section; see 2.1). Additionally, wider pertinent findings are also discussed.

- Chapter 4 outlines the process evaluation and explores the mechanics of the delivery model (including its rationale, design, delivery and future).
- Chapter 5 concludes the report by summarising the findings in relation to the key research questions and any further conclusions. Thereafter, a series of recommendations are presented that aim to inform the remaining delivery of the support and any post-3-SET planning.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The evaluation framework (co-developed with the management and key stakeholders of the 3-SET) identified the following as key research questions in order to explore the impact achieved. The conclusion of this report will examine the data and findings discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 in relation to these research questions.

### *Key research questions*

Has the 3-SET:

- 1) Successfully encouraged third sector organisations to apply for Structural Funds when they otherwise might not have?
- 2) Provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully applying for Structural Funds?
- 3) Provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully delivering Structural Funds projects?
- 4) Facilitated networking and collaboration in the third sector?
- 5) Successfully brokered relationships between the third sector, the WEFO, regional partners and/or local authorities?
- 6) Supported organisations in delivering the Cross Cutting Themes?

2.2 The following tasks were undertaken in order to collect data for analysis:

- Qualitative scoping interviews with key management and delivery staff and key stakeholders (N=7). The stakeholders were identified in consultation with the project team and the Welsh Government. These were general discussions about the 3-SET, so as to inform the evaluation research questions and methods.
- A documentation and research review. This included documentation such as the business plan and subsequent revisions, the existing Theory of Change and logic model, and relevant delivery policies and plans.
- A review of project monitoring and evaluation data collected by the 3-SET during its operations. No issues were raised in relation to the monitoring data available, which were complete up to the time of analysis.
- Delivery, management (N=7) and wider stakeholder (N=10) interviews.

- Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries<sup>2</sup> (N=52).
- An online survey of beneficiaries (N=29) and non-engaged third sector organisations (N=30).
- A workshop and discussion of findings with key stakeholders.

2.3 Monitoring data presents an objective means of measuring the activities, the progress made towards targets, and some aspects of the research questions outlined above. Specifically, the monitoring data allows for an estimation of the scale and reach of the activities. However, all questions can ultimately be distilled into a core question, namely: 'Has the third sector been supported by the 3-SET?' Ultimately, only detailed subjective data from beneficiaries can offer insight and answers to these questions. Consequently, the methodology and the analysis draw heavily from qualitative data from beneficiaries, stakeholders, and management personnel.

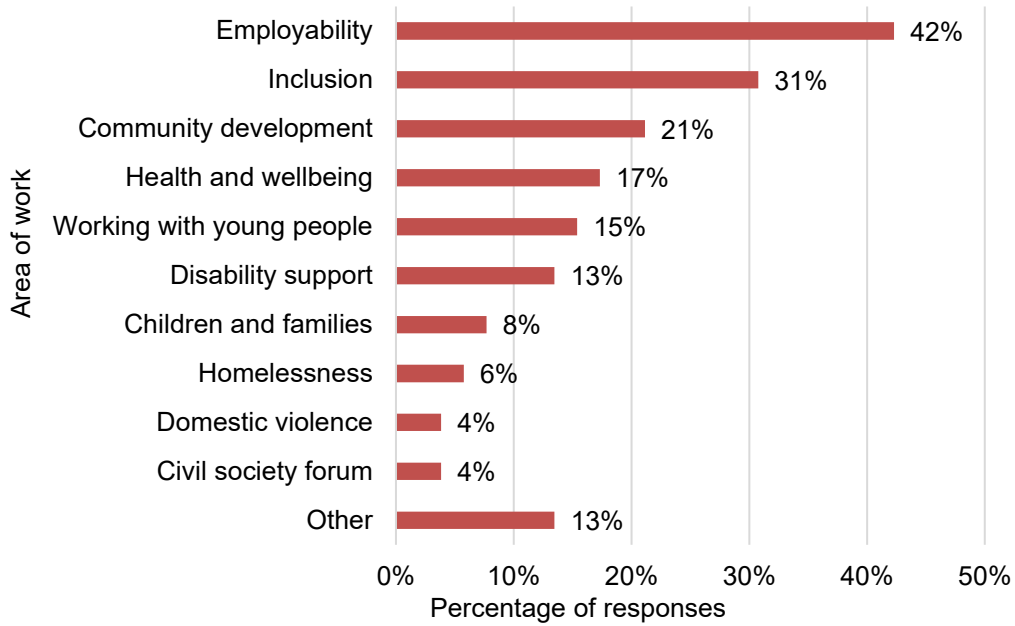
2.4 The 3-SET provided the evaluator with contact details for the 91 organisations who consented to being contacted for the evaluation and who had received substantive support, e.g. attended a training course or network event or engaged the team for advice or guidance. All 91 organisations were invited to contribute to the evaluation through a semi-structured interview. In total, 52 organisations were interviewed, and the organisations themselves nominated the suitable contributor. Therefore, this was a self-selecting sample representing 57 per cent of the consenting organisations who have received substantive support. No responses were received in some instances, whilst a lack of capacity to engage with the research characterised many of those who declined to take part. The coronavirus pandemic and staffing or capacity issues were frequently noted reasons.

2.5 Figure 2.1 below outlines the interviewees' areas of work, whilst Figure 2.2 presents the distribution of support services accessed by the sample.

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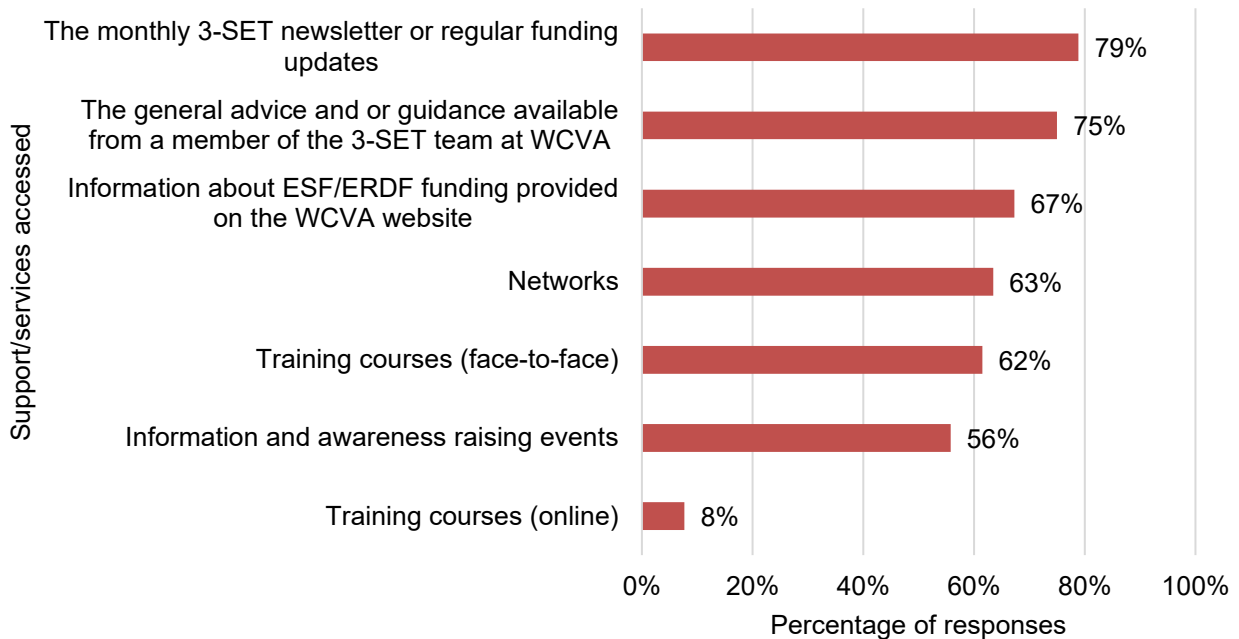
<sup>2</sup> As noted in Glossary: The term 'beneficiary' is widely used in the document to represent people or organisations that have benefitted from the 3-SET support. 'Beneficiary' has a specific ESIF meaning, however. Technically, the only 'beneficiary' is the WCVA as the organisation that received a direct funding award from the WEFO to deliver its various activities, including those of the 3-SET. However, whilst it is not strictly accurate to call other organisations or people referred to in this evaluation 'beneficiaries', in this context this term is, nonetheless, used for clarity. This report defines 'beneficiaries' as people or organisations that have benefitted from the 3-SET support.

**Figure 2.1: Interviewees' area of work**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

**Figure 2.2: Support/services accessed**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

2.6 The interviews were conducted remotely via telephone or Microsoft Teams. Recipients were given discussion guides beforehand, and the majority noted that they had prepared for the interviews, often discussing their responses with

colleagues. The discussion guide (included in Annexe B) covered a range of outcome- and process-related issues.

- 2.7 The online survey was distributed and promoted through the WCVA's mailing list. The response rate of 59 was somewhat disappointing when considering the potential size of the sample, i.e. all organisations contacted by the WCVA. The survey itself consisted of two 'branches' to elicit responses from both non-beneficiaries as well as beneficiaries. Organisations that had contributed to the research through the interviews were asked not to complete the survey. The survey also asked a series of closed and open-ended, qualitative questions, similar to those asked in the interviews.
- 2.8 The sample of 59 organisations limited the generalisability of any quantitative data that could be derived from the sample. The approach in this report has therefore been to limit the use of the survey data to qualitative responses, preferring instead to reference the qualitative data only when it starkly contrasts with the data from the beneficiary interviews or provides a unique insight. Unless otherwise and explicitly stated, all beneficiary data is drawn from the beneficiary interviews.

### 3. Findings: Outcomes

#### Outputs and performance against indicators

3.1 Table 3.1 below outlines the performance to date, as well as the anticipated outputs by the end of the 3-SET's lifespan and the total achieved in relation to the core indicators. The 3-SET is set to exceed its target of training events held in order to meet its dissemination and press release targets and achieve 90 per cent of its target of newsletters issued. Management personnel noted that whilst targets were reconfigured following Brexit so as to account for a reduced focus on training, there was also a knock-on impact on the utility and consequent need for as many newsletters. In light of this, a decision was made to provide fewer newsletters in agreement with the WEFO:

'We have had to change that throughout the project. We used to send out more information but we found that that was too much. There was a lot of promotion of our training courses. We went into a direction of putting out a bit less but provide more quality.' (Management Interview, 2020)

**Table 3.1: Performance of the 3-SET against indicator targets**

<b>WEFO Core Indicator</b>	<b>Target Total</b>	<b>Achieved by Q2 2020</b>	<b>Additional Anticipated by 2023</b>	<b>Total Achieved and Anticipated</b>
No. of training events held	108	89	30	119
No. of research reports published	1	0 <sup>3</sup>	1	1
No. of dissemination events	43	34	15	49
No. of press releases	15	10	5	15
No. of e-newsletters issued	435	335	100	435

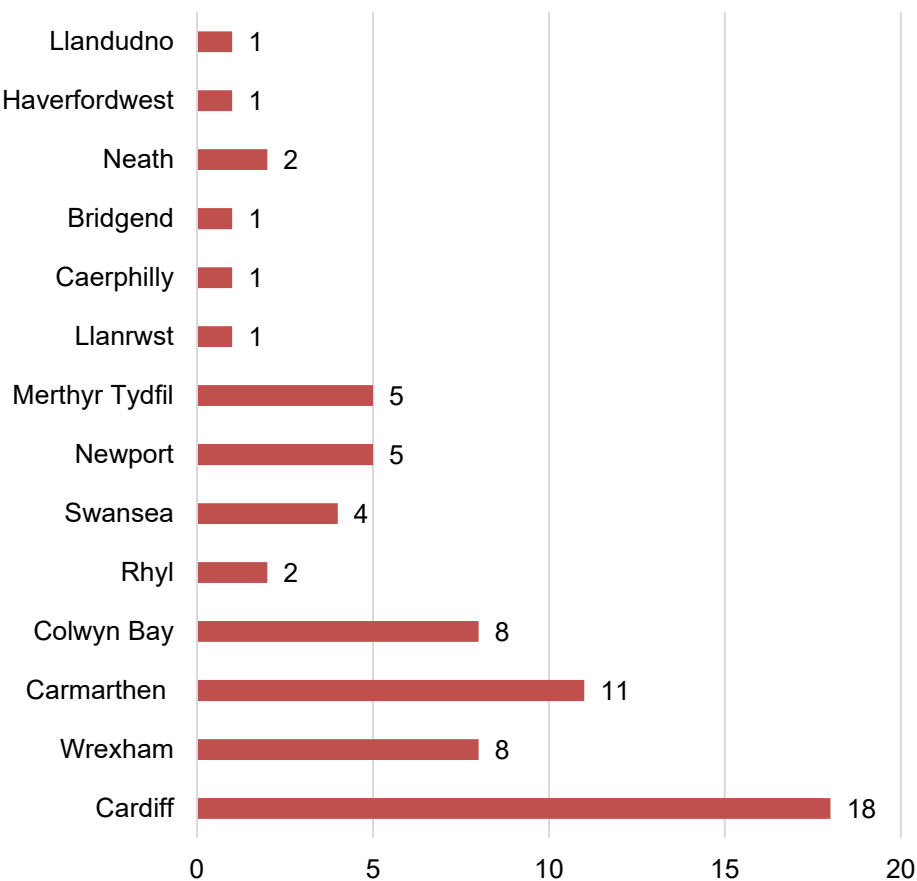
Source: The 3-SET

<sup>3</sup> A research report has been published. However, the 3-SET was part of the team coordinating the report for Empowering Communities in the Context of Brexit; as such, it was not claimed as an outcome, as the focus did not fully fall under the 3-SET's remit. Technically, it was not published as a 3-SET report. See also the 'Advocacy and policy engagement' section below.

### Training events

- 3.2 Of the 119 total achieved and anticipated training events, around half were (or are) expected to be classroom-based, whilst the other half were (or are) expected to be either webinars or online courses, with the coronavirus pandemic expected to necessitate more online delivery during 2020 and beyond.
- 3.3 Physical training events have been conducted across Wales, though the majority have been conducted in Cardiff, Carmarthen, Wrexham, and Colwyn Bay. Whilst some areas of Wales may appear to be underrepresented, the location of physical training tends to reflect the geography of the sector. Naturally, the remote events were accessible from any part of Wales.

**Figure 3.1: Location of training**



- 3.4 Training has been provided by external providers on 38 occasions. These are specialised delivery personnel or organisations.
- 3.5 The training courses have covered a range of topics. These include information and introductory events such as ‘What is European Funding’; courses based on general management, delivery, and evaluation, such as ‘Data Protection and Confidentiality’; project-specific courses such as ‘Data Collection and Integrity for Active Inclusion Projects’; and courses aimed at more general development and support of the sector, such as ‘Succession Planning’. A full list of courses and the number of times that they were delivered is available in Annexe A.

### **Dissemination events**

- 3.6 A total of 34 dissemination events have been held to date. These are outlined in Table 3.2 below. Around one third (11) of these were held in Cardiff, with the remainder located around Wales or delivered online. The events received an average attendance of 21, though specific attendance numbers varied from four to 104.

**Table 3.2: Dissemination events held**

<b>Dissemination Event</b>	<b>Number of Times Held</b>
‘Europe Matters to Wales’ – Tackling poverty and social exclusion	1
Work and Health Programme in Wales information event	2
Employability and Skills regional event	3
Gofod3 – Active Inclusion Fund workshop	1
Active Inclusion – the next chapter (regional events)	3
Active Inclusion – the next chapter (main Cardiff event)	1
The Future of Regional Development Funding Post-Brexit	4
Europe Day 2018 – SBGF and Europe	1
TSSW event: Empowering Communities in the Context of Brexit	3
Gofod3 – Empowering Communities in the Context of Brexit	1
Active Inclusion & MAP event	3
3-SET network meetings	8
Webinar: A framework for regional investment consultation	1
Regional investment consultation – roundtable focus groups	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

## **Enquiries**

- 3.7 The 3-SET also engage with beneficiaries by responding to direct enquiries. The team had responded to a total of 311 enquiries on a range of topics. However, the most common related to general enquiries (37 per cent of all enquiries), requesting information, or signposting. No single issue received frequent or many enquiries. Around nine per cent related to training events, seven per cent specifically to funding sources and issues, and four per cent to Brexit.

## **E-newsletters**

- 3.8 A total of 335 e-newsletters have been distributed, though data was available in relation to 309 of these. Almost half of these (43 per cent) were sent as part of the WCVA newsletter, whilst over one third (36 per cent) were direct funding updates. Moreover, there were around 50 newsletters in relation to specific issues or aspects of the 3-SET's remit, such as 'Erasmus+ update', 'European Funding Survey', or the promotion of a 'Consultation on Regional Investment in Wales'.

## **Advocacy and policy engagement**

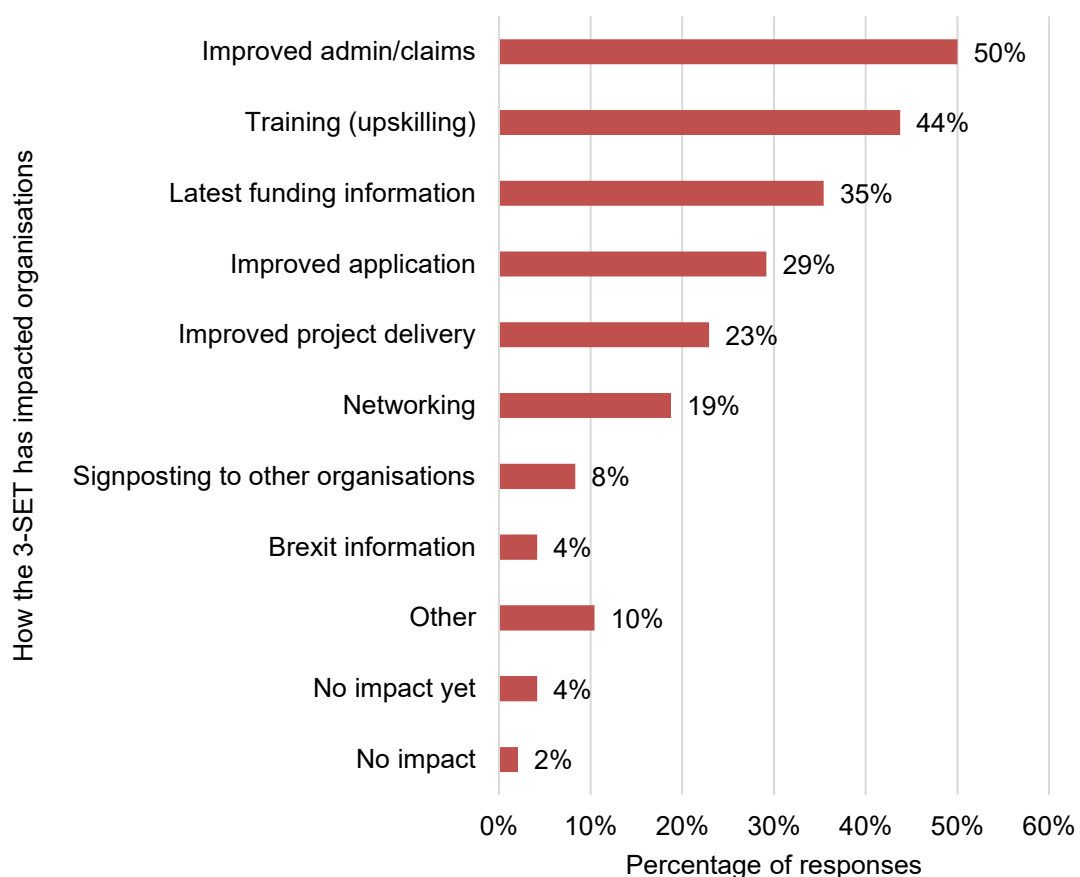
- 3.9 The 3-SET have engaged directly with the formal policymaking structures in Wales and beyond, largely through responses to consultations, the presentation of evidence to Welsh and UK committee enquiries and conducting and publishing research and evidence reports. In total, to date, the 3-SET have responded to 15 consultations or enquiries in Wales or the UK, contributed to the Secretary of State's Brexit Advisory Group, made representations to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020, and published an 'Empowering Communities in the Context of Brexit' report (WCVA, 2019). Furthermore, the 3-SET have attended and contributed to 16 formal networks ranging from transnational, Ireland–Wales networks to the Equality and Human Rights Coalition and to networks involved in the development of replacement programmes and future planning, such as the Regional Investment in Wales Steering Group (RIWSG).

## Impact

### General impact

- 3.10 The research conducted as part of this evaluation sought to evidence the impact that the activities have had upon organisations and the sector more generally.
- 3.11 When asked to discuss the impact upon themselves or their organisation, a significant majority of interviewees suggested that at least one area of their operation or organisation has been improved or developed because of the support from the 3-SET. Figure 3.2 below has categorised the interview responses. The figure indicates the areas that were identified as having been impacted by their engagement with the 3-SET. The response is as much a reflection of the sample, i.e. not all categories were relevant to every respondent. However, of note is that there are very few responses that stated 'no impact' or 'no impact yet'. In other words, the support was of some benefit to almost all who engaged with the 3-SET.

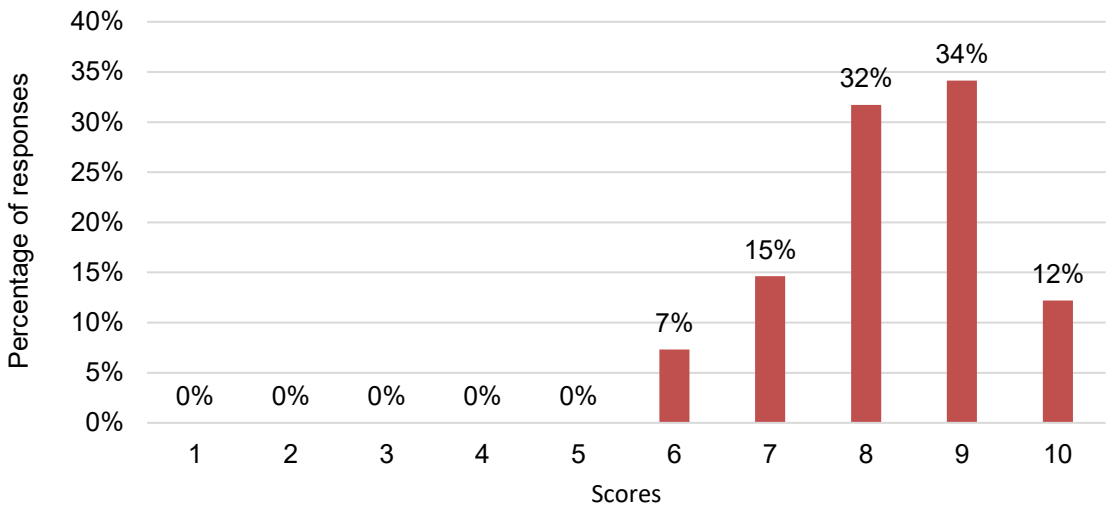
**Figure 3.2: Impact upon your organisation**



(Number of responses = 52)

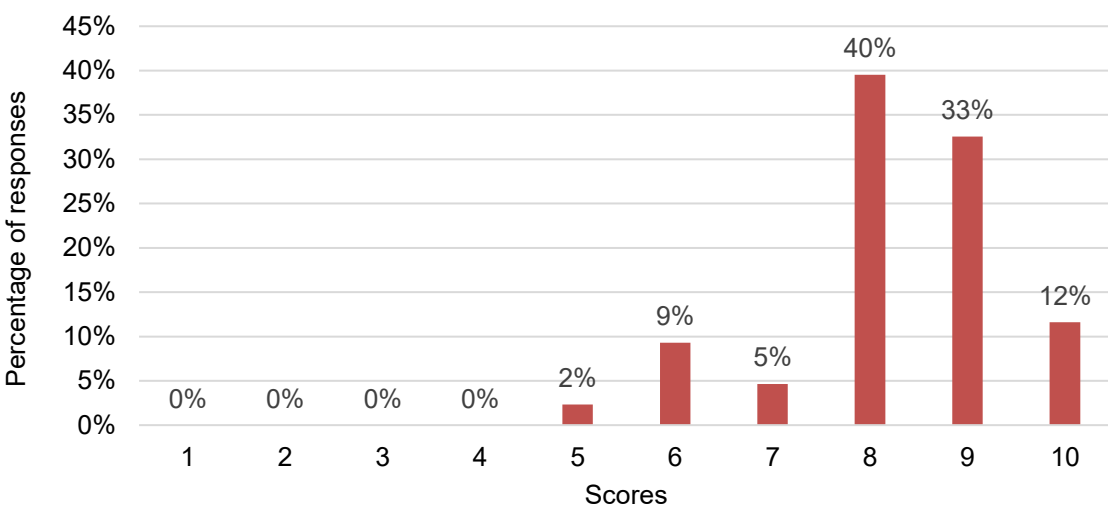
3.12 The interviews also explored the extent to which organisations had benefitted from the support. Interviewees were asked to score the benefit of the support on a scale of 1–10. Whilst a subjective measurement, it is (nonetheless) a useful heuristic, and the preponderance of scores of 8 (32 per cent), 9 (34 per cent) or 10 (12 per cent), i.e. 78 per cent of all scores, suggests that the majority of interviewees valued and saw benefit in the support received. The data is presented below for the benefit for both the organisation and the individual being interviewed.

**Figure 3.3: How much did your organisation benefit from the contact that you had with 3-SET?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

**Figure 3.4: How much did you benefit from the contact that you had with 3-SET?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.13 Comments relating to the impact reflected the positive scoring shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, and strongly suggested that beneficiaries valued the support received. Almost all identified specific aspects of their organisation or their work that have developed as a result of the support:

'[...] oh, an eight. [We] developed links and contacts with third sector organisations, promoted my organisation with people throughout the area, [and] developed my knowledge about making applications and managing a project.'  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

'Ten out of ten. I have improved my project management skills and, with the support of 3-SET, we put better reporting and monitoring processes in place.'  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.14 There was also evidence of softer skills such as confidence being supported and developed, alongside encouraging and supporting organisations to persevere with efforts to involve themselves in European funding:

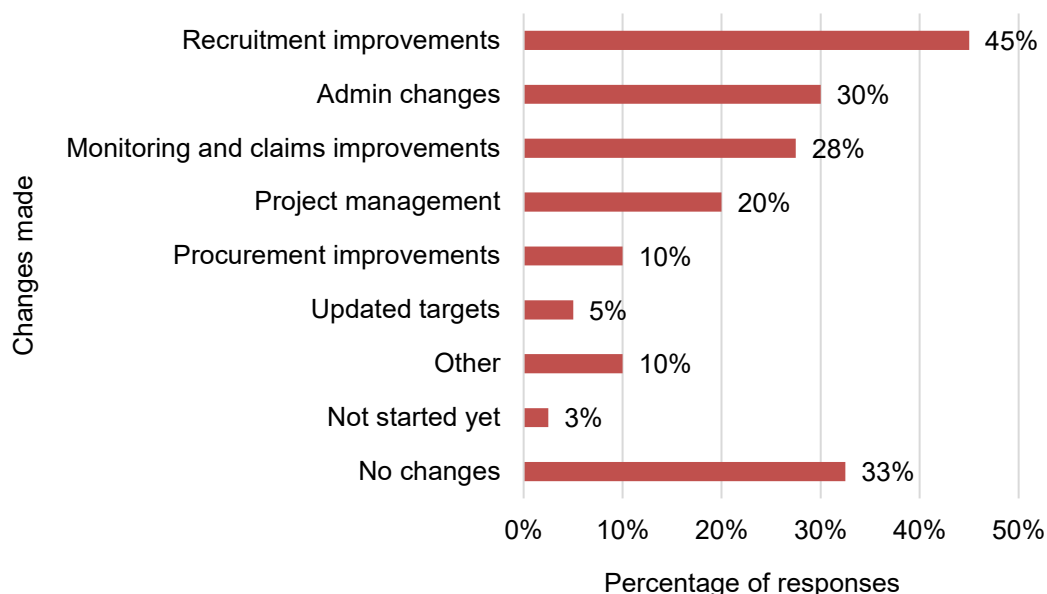
'Eight. They boosted my confidence and helped me understand the monitoring processes through training and advice from my point of contact at 3-SET.'  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

'3-SET have given us valuable guidance and kept us on track and updated training when needed. Our first ESF project failed but the lessons learned and the added benefit of 3-SET support meant that this current project has been a great success.'  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.15 Around two thirds (67 per cent) of beneficiaries interviewed also indicated specific changes that had been made to the organisations as a result of the support.

3.16 The majority of interviewees (65 per cent) also reported that the changes that they had made as a result of the 3-SET support are still in place. The remainder stated that they believed that these changes would remain in place until (at least) the end of the project.

**Figure 3.5: Have you made any changes as a result of the support?**



Source: Recipient interviews (N=52)

#### *Key research questions*

3.17 The following subsections will address the six key research questions for the evaluation in turn. These questions were explicitly explored in the interviews and the online survey.

#### **Key Research Question 1: Has the 3-SET successfully encouraged third sector organisations to apply for Structural Funds when they otherwise might not have?**

3.18 There was a widespread view that the 3-SET's work had encouraged third sector organisations to apply for European funding. This was the case despite an acceptance by many that it was more difficult to apply during the current round of funding due to strategic changes.<sup>4</sup>

*The majority of interviewees (82 per cent) were of the view that the 3-SET had, to some or a great extent, encouraged them to apply. The remaining 18 per cent of interviewees noted that the decision had already been made and that no encouragement was necessary. Fourteen of the 27 who responded to the same*

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the concentration of funding through larger programmes led to opportunities for smaller organisations to be primarily involved by delivering these larger programmes, such as Active Inclusion, rather than being direct beneficiaries of funding awards. However, delivering to Active Inclusion's goals would naturally narrow the field of organisations with the skills and expertise with which to deliver.

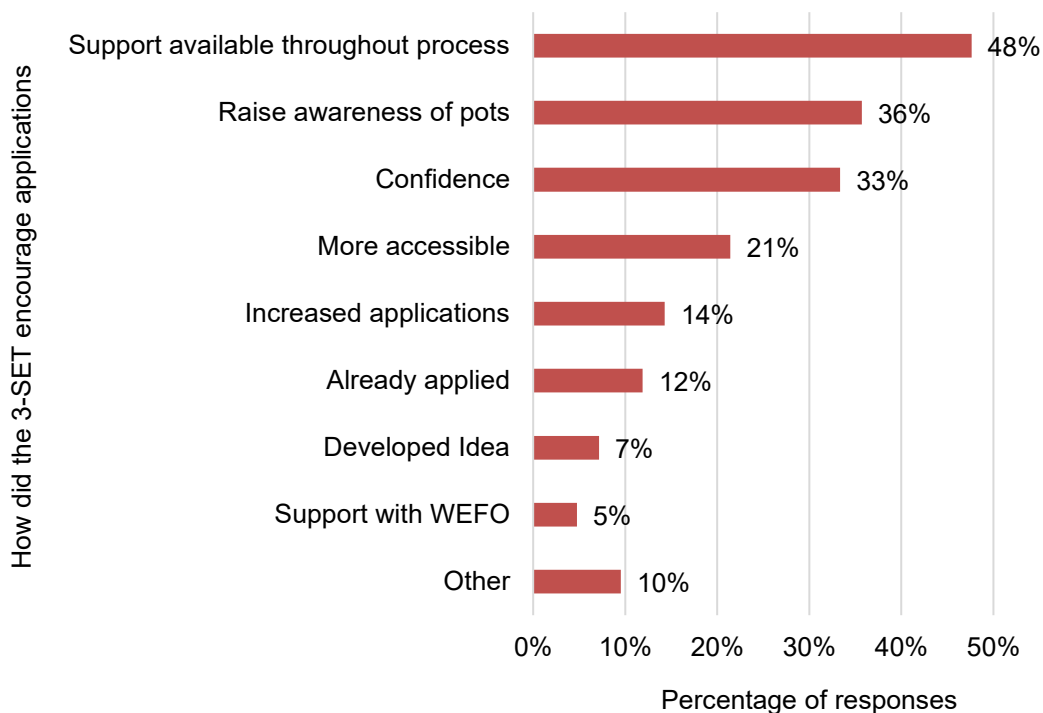
question in the online survey suggested that the 3-SET had encouraged applications, with four responses suggesting that they had not<sup>5</sup>:

‘Before 3-SET we would have been apprehensive about making a direct application for funding with WEFO. Knowing we had the support of the 3-SET team available gave us the confidence to present this project idea and apply for the funding. 3-SET helped us draft our application, and made suggestions to improve the application and better match EU requirements.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.19 Recipients identified a range of ways in which they were encouraged to apply. These are compiled in Figure 3.6 below. Almost half (48 per cent) of the interviewees referenced the support that they received throughout the process, frequently noting their confidence that the 3-SET support would be available throughout the lifespan of the application. Around one third (36 per cent) also noted the efforts to raise awareness of the funding available:

‘[They] encouraged and guided us through the whole application process. [They] explained what the funding was and how it worked and we knew they would provide advice for the application.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 3.6: How did the 3-SET encourage applications?**



<sup>5</sup> Nine responses were ‘not applicable’.

Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.20 Softer factors were also considered to be important by many, such as increasing the confidence to apply (33 per cent), with around one fifth (21 per cent) also suggesting that the 3-SET made the process more accessible:

‘3-SET raise awareness about ESF funding and explain and provide support through the application process so organisations would feel more confident about applying.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.21 Beneficiaries largely referred to the information being disseminated, often through newsletters and conferences, as the main means by which they were encouraged to apply. Moreover, a few noted the confidence developed as a consequence of the training, suggesting that the wider activities of the 3-SET do support confidence building within the sector by means of upskilling:

‘The training has given us better bid-writing skills and more collaboration opportunities to be involved in European projects. 3-SET also explained the bid-writing process very well.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.22 Stakeholders also noted that the 3-SET had proven to be successful in encouraging applications, particularly by raising the confidence of potential applicants. Information dissemination and the conferences held were identified as key factors. Other stakeholders noted the presence of new organisations applying for funding, at least in part due to the support from the 3-SET:

‘They have been incredibly successful at ensuring that third sector organisations apply. But some get frightened and they help the third sector get through that. They hold conferences and national meetings to inform them that they can help with that.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

‘Having had experience with previous programmes, [I can say that] the usual subjects are involved in applying for funds. But we’ve also seen new organisations coming into that space that previously may have disregarded European funding.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.23 These suggestions were reflected in interviews with management personnel who commonly identified similar ways in which, they believe, the 3-SET has engaged and encouraged applications:

‘Definitely. I started in [organisation’s name] and since then, what I have seen is — we already had from the previous project — we had an audience. But we had a lot of people (who have since found out about projects) who didn’t know what opportunities they had. We have been able to give even just basic information that people previously didn’t know about. There were a lot of new people who came onto our mailing lists and who came to our events.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

**Key Research Question 2: Has the 3-SET provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully applying for Structural Funds?**

3.24 Beneficiaries were also overwhelmingly of the view that the 3-SET had provided effective guidance with which to support them in successfully applying for funding. Of the interviewees, 78 per cent suggested that they had done so to some extent (10 per cent) or a greater extent (68 per cent). Nobody suggested that they had not been provided with support regarding applying for funding.<sup>6</sup> Of the 27 respondents who responded to the question in the online survey, only three suggested that the support had not helped them in their applications for funding.

3.25 Recipients commonly referred to two significant ways in which the 3-SET guidance supported their applications. Around four fifths (79 per cent) suggested that the frequent review of forms was particularly beneficial:

‘3-SET were always available to look through sections of our application and tell us how it could be improved.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.26 Over half (55 per cent) also drew particular attention to the way in which the support from 3-SET members had improved their applications. Many interviewees credited the improvements suggested with the ultimate success of their applications:

‘3-SET go through the whole application process and explain it very well. 3-SET also review your application and suggest changes to make it better.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.27 Even those who stated that they had applied before engaging noted that they had received effective guidance at later stages of the projects, evidencing the fact that

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<sup>6</sup> Twenty-two per cent felt that the question was not applicable, commonly because the individual being interviewed did not feel as though they could comment, having not been part of the application process.

even those who had been successful in their bids were willing to seek 3-SET guidance and support:

‘We had already identified and made the application before being in touch with 3-SET. They did review our funding renewal and made suggestions in how it could be improved.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

### **Key Research Question 3: Has the 3-SET provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully delivering Structural Funds projects?**

3.28 As with the guidance in relation to applications, beneficiaries were also overwhelmingly of the view that the 3-SET had provided effective guidance with which to support the delivery of their projects. Of the interviewees, 76 per cent suggested that they had done so to some extent (10 per cent) or a greater extent (66 per cent). Once more, nobody suggested that they had not provided such support.<sup>7</sup> Of the 27 respondents to the online survey, 11 respondents felt that the support had helped the delivery, whilst only four suggested that the guidance had not supported their applications; the remainder did not feel as though the question was applicable.

3.29 Beneficiaries commonly referred to four main ways in which the 3-SET guidance supported their delivery of projects. Firstly, almost nine out of 10 (87 per cent) interviewees suggested that support from the 3-SET helped them to develop their monitoring processes:

‘They helped us put procedures in place for procurement and gave us specific guidance and training around data collection, evidence recording, and making claims. And they gave us advice when we made errors or faced problems with the claims process.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.30 Secondly, around one quarter (26 per cent) suggested that the 3-SET had supported their engagement with the WEFO specifically, and, thirdly (also 26 per cent), helped them to meet the requirements expected of them whilst delivering the project. Finally, around one quarter (23 per cent) felt that the 3-SET supported and encouraged better administrative processes that ultimately enabled them to deliver

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<sup>7</sup> Twenty-four per cent felt that the question was not applicable — commonly, these respondents did not feel as though they had received support in delivering projects and, therefore, could not comment on the impact of such support.

the projects successfully. Again, the training courses (alongside informal conversations and quick enquiries) were referenced as the main means by which this support was provided:

‘They’ve provided a lot of project management guidance, also through the training. They’ve given new staff training as well for the evidence collection and claims process.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.31 However, interviewees also illustrated the effectiveness and value of the role played by the 3-SET as an intermediary between the delivery and funding organisations. Some interviewees detailed the way in which the 3-SET not only provided guidance and training, but also supported organisations in their dealings with the WEFO, as well as ensuring that the data requested by the WEFO was in turn being collected effectively by the delivery organisations:

‘Yes, they provide information, training and guidance but, more importantly, they support you with the meetings with WEFO. 3-SET ensure that you meet the funding requirements in terms of evidence, but help you adapt and adjust. For example, our cohort are very hard to reach and there are issues around eligibility, but 3-SET helped argue this with WEFO [in relation to challenges surrounding data collection].’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.32 Stakeholders were of a similar opinion, seeing the value of the 3-SET as an intermediary, supporting both delivery and funding organisations in achieving their aims:

‘I think some people see going directly to WEFO as the right way to do it and then that causes them some real problems. 3-SET avoids this and helps organisations with that.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.33 Management personnel suggested that the support that the 3-SET offers, particularly the guidance, contributes to meeting compliance requirements and, ultimately, effective delivery. The Intermediary Body (IB) was also frequently referenced as a means of facilitating this support:

‘What I know is that the IB technically are under the 3-SET structure<sup>8</sup> and they do provide support with claims, and it shows what a difference the support makes.

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<sup>8</sup> Technically, the WCVA has been delegated IB status by the WEFO as the managing authority in making funding decisions on applications to their numerous ESF aid schemes. Although the IB costs and 3-SET costs

There is a percentage — I can't remember the exact figure — which shows higher compliance rates. Also, just generally, I think over the years it has been proven that the sector is very efficient and successful in delivering these projects and I think that it shows that they can do it with the right support.' (Management Interview, 2020)

'Yes, particularly with the way we work with the IB and the role we play on behalf of them. We're the only not-for-profit of these structures that exists and we've helped organisations work through these regulations, and then disseminating guidance in an easy-to-understand way. You can't safeguard for every situation, but (from my understanding) the compliance of other organisations had definitely increased.' (Management Interview, 2020)

#### **Key Research Question 4: Has the 3-SET facilitated networking and collaboration within the third sector?**

- 3.34 Facilitating networking and collaboration is a further key aspect of the 3-SET support for organisations operating in the third sector. Nine out of 10 interviewees (90 per cent) reported that collaboration had been facilitated, with half of participants also identifying specifically that events organised by the 3-SET, alongside the network meetings for those who attended, were the primary means by which this was achieved. However, interviewees also noted that the training sessions presented further opportunities for networking, alongside the newsletter/bulletin, which raised awareness of wider projects.
- 3.35 Collaboration has involved sharing best practice between organisations, being able to review the impact of local projects and to engage with personnel delivering projects similar to theirs. The latter was particularly apparent amongst organisations delivering a common programme, such as Active Inclusion:

'We have made links with a number of partner organisations who deliver the Active Inclusion projects. The 3-SET network meetings also means we link up with organisations in different parts of Wales. We have acted as mentors to new organisations starting to deliver ESF projects for the first time. The network events hosted by 3-SET mean that third sector organisations have a platform to share information and experiences.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

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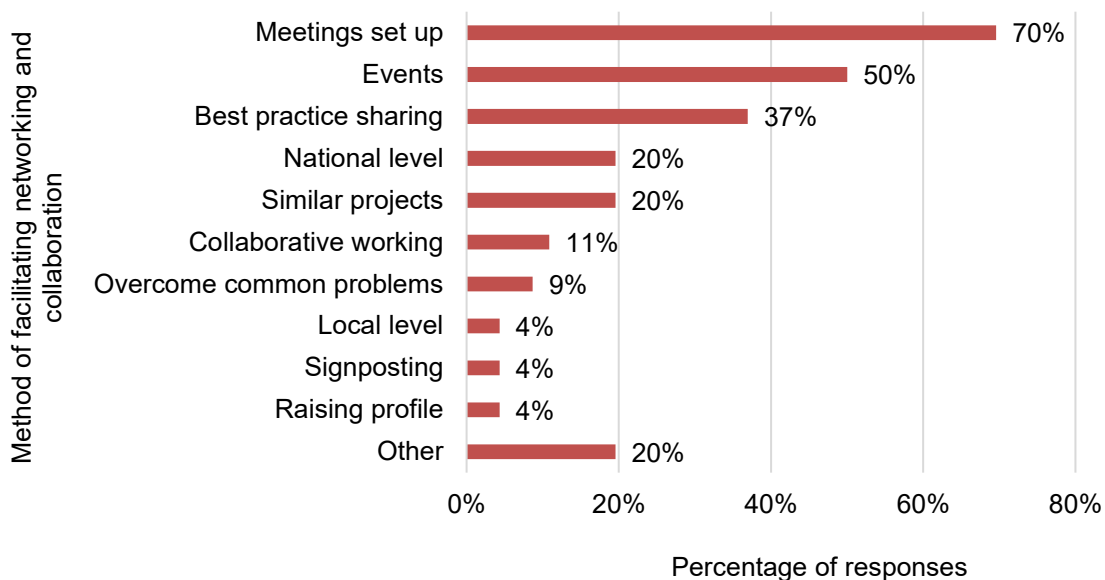
are funded by Technical Assistance (TA), the 3-SET is separate from the IB. The WCVA is the beneficiary of TA from four separate funding 'pots' to deliver their IB and 3-SET activities.

'3-SET provide a lot of networking opportunities through meetings and events. They also signpost you to other organisations who have done similar projects to get help or support [from them]. 3-SET pulls third sector organisations together to collaborate for better outcomes.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.36 Interviewees noted not only the networking benefits of these events, but also the platform and opportunities that the 3-SET provided to showcase and raise the profile of organisations:

'3-SET organise networking events and meetings to allow links to develop between third sector organisations. I was even invited to present and discuss our experiences at a WCVA information event and this really boosted the profile of our organisation.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 3.7: How has 3-SET facilitated networking and collaboration in the third sector?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.37 Stakeholders also noted that conferences and less formal opportunities afforded by means of training sessions provided opportunities for organisations to network and develop the potential to collaborate:

'Oh, yes, the fact that some have had conferences and training. [The COVID-19 pandemic] has made things different, but usually there would be lots of opportunities to learn about applications and running projects.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

**Key Research Question 5: Has the 3-SET successfully brokered relationships between the third sector, the WEFO, regional partners and/or local authorities?**

3.38 Interviews also explored the extent to which the 3-SET had brokered relationships between the third sector and wider partners. This research question, when compared to those explored above, elicited responses that were not as overwhelmingly positive. Nonetheless, over half (58 per cent) of the interviewees still felt that the 3-SET had brokered such relationships to some or a greater extent, though around one fifth (17 per cent) believed that this had been done only to a small extent. The responses suggested that more could be done to develop the relationships between the third sector and wider partners.

3.39 Over half of the participants (59 per cent) reported that their engagement with the 3-SET had led to a relationship being brokered with their local authority. This was twice as many as had reported any relationships being brokered with other partners. The involvement of local authority personnel in the 3-SET network and the collaboration with councils on specific projects were frequently noted as the means by which these relationships were developed:

‘Yes, to a great extent, as we have met a number of local authorities, housing associations, and private training providers and developed links through the 3-SET events and meetings.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.40 Whilst particular events such as conferences were occasionally mentioned as the means by which relationships were formed or developed, alongside the 3-SET network, the majority appear to be brokered through the delivery of specific projects. This was particularly the case for organisations delivering on behalf of larger programmes:

‘Through the Active Inclusion projects, we have worked with other local authorities and a number of third sector organisations, and 3-SET helps this cooperation by hosting and arranging the network meetings.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.41 Participants also reported relationships being formed with regional partners (30 per cent), the WEFO (24 per cent), and the Welsh Government (14 per cent):

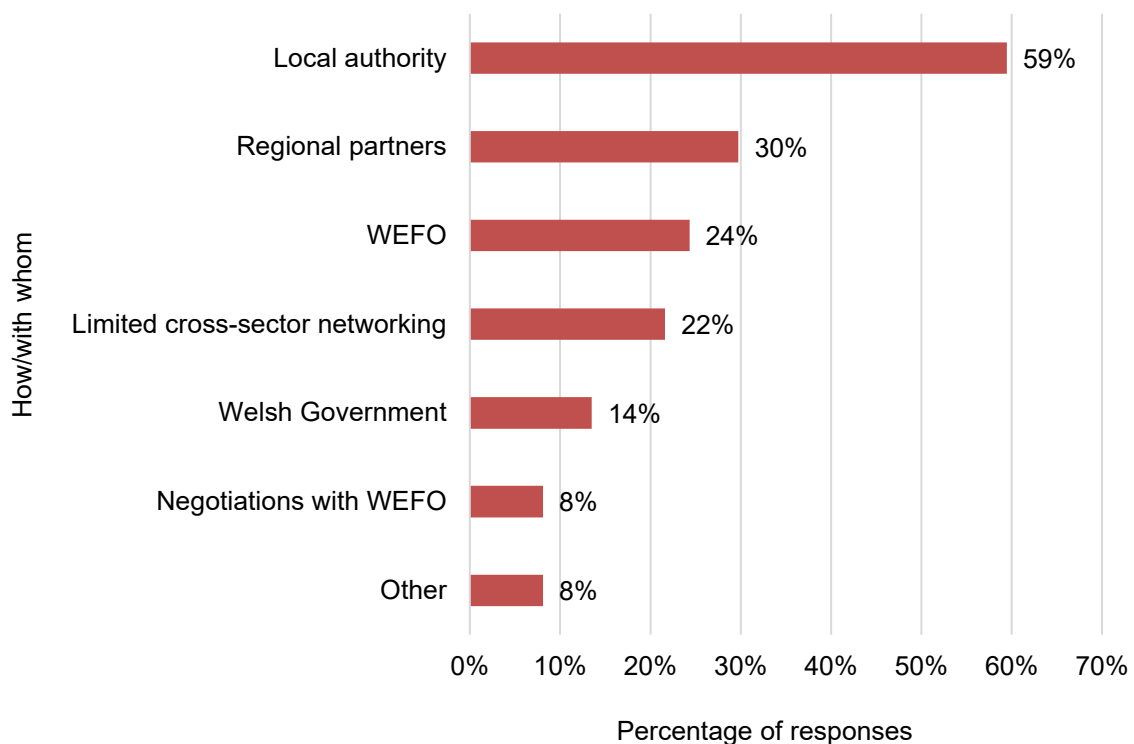
‘3-SET smoothed and facilitated our relationship with WEFO and helped us show how the initial targets set by WEFO were unrealistic. The network meetings have

representatives from the local authorities and private training providers.’  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.42 Around one fifth of the interviewees (22 per cent) noted, however, that they experienced only very limited opportunities to network with partners from outside of the third sector. A desire to build relationships beyond the third sector was expressed again by a few interviewees when they were asked what they felt to be missing from the 3-SET’s support:

‘3-SET should look to develop more links between the third sector and the local authorities. 3-SET should help develop an overarching strategy across an entire region with collaboration between the third sector, local authority, and private companies.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 3.8: How/with whom has 3-SET successfully brokered relationships between the third sector, WEFO, regional partners and/or local authorities?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.43 Stakeholders provided more detail in relation to how the 3-SET would develop and broker the relationships with wider partners. Particular attention was drawn to the European Funding Ambassadors and the manner in which information was gathered from key partners and relayed to the sector, in turn building trust and understanding:

‘They have successfully done this and I think that the work of the [European Funding Ambassadors] also focused on that relationship, meeting with regional leads and then relaying the information to the sector. That then built the relationships. The difficult bit is doing this on a local level, so they have been more successful on a national level.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.44 Stakeholders also felt that the 3-SET, by operating as an intermediary between funders and delivery organisations, added value and insight and expanded the reach of both the WCVA and the WEFO:

‘... the reach of WEFO would be an awful lot less without 3-SET. They can talk to the local authorities and to people they fund, but also how they speak regularly to third sector organisations — 3-SET add to the wider WCVA comm[unication]s [Furthermore, the] WEFO could never reach [the third sector organisations] in the same way. And people are interested in [engagement, guidance and communication] because it’s written by 3-SET, not civil servants.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.45 The 3-SET management personnel felt that brokering and developing relationships was central to their role and that they were acting as a mediating body, a ‘translator’ (Management Interview, 2020) between the sector and wider partners, particularly funders. The rolling-out of digital signatures was cited on more than one occasion as an example of how the 3-SET were able to develop compromises and solutions that suited both delivery and funding organisations:

‘This is a huge part of what 3-SET does, making stuff intelligible both ways — Brussels and policy intelligible for organisations, and organisations’ issues intelligible for policymakers. The rollout of digital signatures is a good example. It doesn’t sound much but there’s so much bureaucracy involved [in approving payments]. 3-SET could disseminate the information about digital signatures [which greatly facilitated and increased the speed at which payments could be approved and made to delivery organisations whilst so many individuals were working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic]. To be supported by 3-SET unlocks delivery and it means the third sector can be paid, and there’s an audit trail for WEFO.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

## **Key Research Question 6: Has the 3-SET supported organisations in delivering the Cross Cutting Themes?**

- 3.46 Criteria attached to the European-funded projects within the 3-SET's remit require programmes to make efforts to integrate economic, social and environmental outcomes. This is consistent with the Welsh Government's central organisational principle of sustainable development and contributing to the outcomes of the Cross Cutting Themes (CCTs). There are three CCTs:
- Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming (including the Welsh language and mainstreaming the Welsh language in Wales because of domestic legislation);
  - Sustainable development; and
  - Tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- 3.47 Several interviewees drew attention to the belief that the third sector make particularly valuable contributions in relation to the CCTs. Stakeholders in particular stated that the work being delivered by the third sector was often making vertical contributions, i.e. the projects and works being delivered were directly addressing poverty and tackling social exclusion, mainstreaming the Welsh language, or sustainable development. This is apparent from the range of programmes being delivered by the third sector, such as those relating to Active Inclusion, which explicitly seeks to tackle poverty by supporting employment and access to services.
- 3.48 The 3-SET were also of the view not only that the third sector contributed significantly to the CCTs, but also that the principles underpinning the themes were also integral to the delivery organisations themselves and their activities:
- ‘Those Cross Cutting Themes are fundamental to many organisations with which 3-SET are working. Organisations in the sector often have EDI [(i.e. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion)] and sustainability written through them like a stick of rock, so 3-SET has a great deal of commitment to and exposure to Cross Cutting Themes and those beneficiaries, so they can support delivery and refer that back to WEFO.’ (Management Interview, 2020)
- 3.49 Nonetheless, a belief remains amongst some stakeholders that evidencing contributions towards the CCTs remains a challenge, even for those organisations delivering vertically, i.e. the projects themselves were explicitly addressing the

themes. Often, management and stakeholders thought, the issue is conceptual or relates to an understanding of what CCTs are and how contributions can be evidenced, even for organisations that are delivering vertically.

3.50 The data from beneficiaries suggests that the 3-SET have supported organisations in a range of ways in relation to the CCTs. Much of the support amounts to a process of demystifying the CCTs and demonstrating or illustrating where and how the organisations could effectively and efficiently evidence their contributions. This not only reflects the issues raised by stakeholders — that organisations struggle to understand how CCTs can be evidenced — but also suggests that the 3-SET are addressing these issues.

3.51 Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of interviewees, for example, noted that the 3-SET had supported efforts to evidence their contributions. This sometimes involved introducing and exemplifying evidencing practices:

‘Originally, 3-SET looked at our application and identified the Cross Cutting Themes as a weak area and helped us improve this aspect. They helped us understand what we could do to show activities that were related to the Cross Cutting Themes and gave us exemplar activities. They helped us develop an online module for Equality and Diversity.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.52 These efforts also included engaging with experienced deliverers and further refining their evidencing practices:

‘We knew a lot about the Cross Cutting Themes already, but 3-SET reviewed our activities and suggested ways we could simplify them and still meet the funding requirements.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.53 Around half (49 per cent) of the interviewees suggested that the training courses or simply a dialogue with 3-SET officials helped to illustrate how their activities were already contributing to the CCTs. This overlaps slightly with the notion of supporting the evidencing process, though in this instance the support was more conceptual, whilst the support in evidencing as described above tended to be specific and related to the monitoring and evidence collection process:

‘3-SET have highlighted areas of the project and the activities we deliver and where they naturally align with the Cross Cutting Themes. They helped us define our targets and outcomes for the Diversity theme.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.54 Stakeholders were also of the view that the 3-SET were proactive and sought to maximise and demonstrate the contributions towards the CCTs that organisations could achieve or were already achieving:

‘It’s fundamental to the programme. What they do is look for it and promote it in people’s applications. They want to see evidence of all of them and I guess that is where they support them by reminding them of the importance. They have a consistent narrative about them.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.55 The management themselves credit a good and constructive relationship with the WEFO’s CCTs team and note their efforts to work with that team in developing the training sessions, information documentation and dissemination materials. Furthermore, the team have brought the WEFO’s CCTs team in to support training.

3.56 The WCVA also have an appointed CCTs champion, who supports the 3-SET’s work closely, notably by co-developing or delivering the training sessions:

‘We’ve got a really good relationship with WEFO’s CCT team. I’ve worked in partnership to develop the CCT module and the information sheets and classroom lessons. They’ve also done some webinars for us. It’s also good to make sure things are fit for purpose and it makes sure they get what is needed, rather than it just being a tick-box exercise.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

### **How effectively have 3-SET helped you and your organisation to prepare for the future and long term?**

3.57 With the UK’s exit from the EU, preparing third sector organisations for the future, following EU funding, has become a further and key priority for the 3-SET. The team have supported the sector both directly, through their work with organisations, and on a strategic level through their engagement with policy structured in Wales and beyond.

3.58 The direct support to organisations has been delivered without modification to the design or operational delivery of the 3-SET’s support. The content of training, guidance and networking activities has been changed. The content was changed and delivered soon after the vote to leave the EU and kept relevant to the changing situation. This suggests that the model and team are capable of pivoting the specific content towards a changing situation and a range of contexts without diminishing the impact and value of it (see below). Management personnel noted that academic and sector expertise was sought in order to ensure that the most relevant and

correct content could be delivered through the guidance, briefings, newsletters and training.

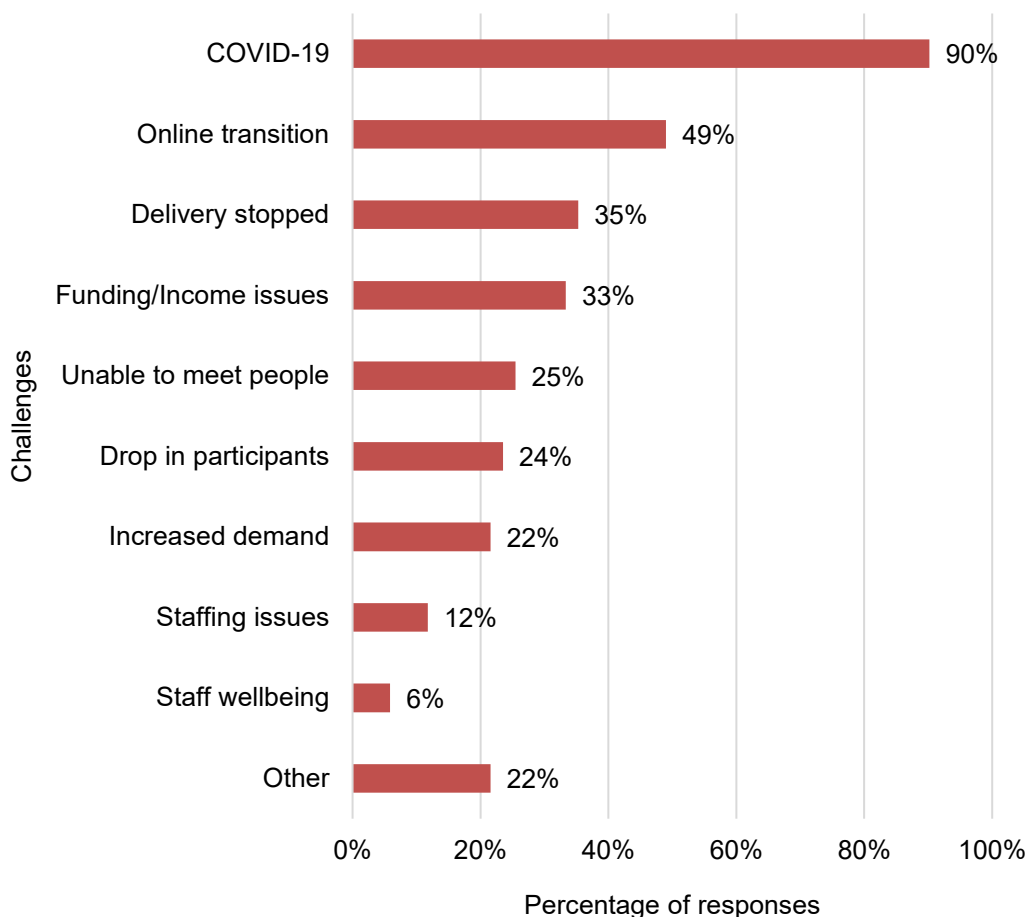
3.59 However, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is thought to have hampered efforts to support individual organisations, due to a preoccupation with operational challenges posed by lockdowns. Indeed, when asked what their key challenges were for the immediate future, 90 per cent of interview responses cited the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact as their key challenge. Whilst a range of other challenges were also cited, and are noted in Figure 3.9 below, all could be linked to (or understood as being a consequence of) the coronavirus pandemic or the lockdowns.

3.60 A particular issue was noted in relation to the need to engage digitally during the lockdowns, particularly with vulnerable individuals who are required to shield. However, these individuals may lack the equipment or skills with which to engage digitally, presenting a range of challenges to third sector organisations:

‘COVID-19. Making engagements with people who are service users is very difficult. We are getting a lot less referrals, as partner organisations are closed. There are very few volunteer placements active at the moment. We had to source tablets to maintain engagement with our cohort, as many didn’t have IT equipment.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

‘Most of my work is providing digital training to people over the age of 60 and most of them are shielding. They need face-to-face training to access digital training.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 3.9: Challenges over the short-term/immediate future**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.61 When asked to discuss their challenges and focus in the longer term, i.e. beyond the next 12 months, over four fifths (86 per cent) noted that the end of EU funding was a key challenge. What is more, around half (53 per cent) suggested that uncertainty surrounding the Shared Prosperity Fund was a further challenge. The interview data suggests that organisations are aware of the challenges of leaving the EU. However, their short-term focus is almost entirely upon the operational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is therefore a risk that organisations, due to a preoccupation with the pandemic and its impact, are, despite the support offered by the 3-SET, unable to dedicate sufficient resources towards preparing for leaving the European Union.

### **Support for future and succession planning**

3.62 The range of responses are presented in Figure 3.10 below. The main ways in which the 3-SET has supported future planning have included raising the awareness of alternative funding sources and supporting preparations for Brexit,

largely involving raising awareness and understanding the implications of it. Around two fifths (41 per cent) of organisations had not discussed these issues with the 3-SET. This latter figure may be due to the impact of the pandemic (as discussed above), or because the 3-SET have not engaged (or convinced these organisations to engage) with the topic to date.

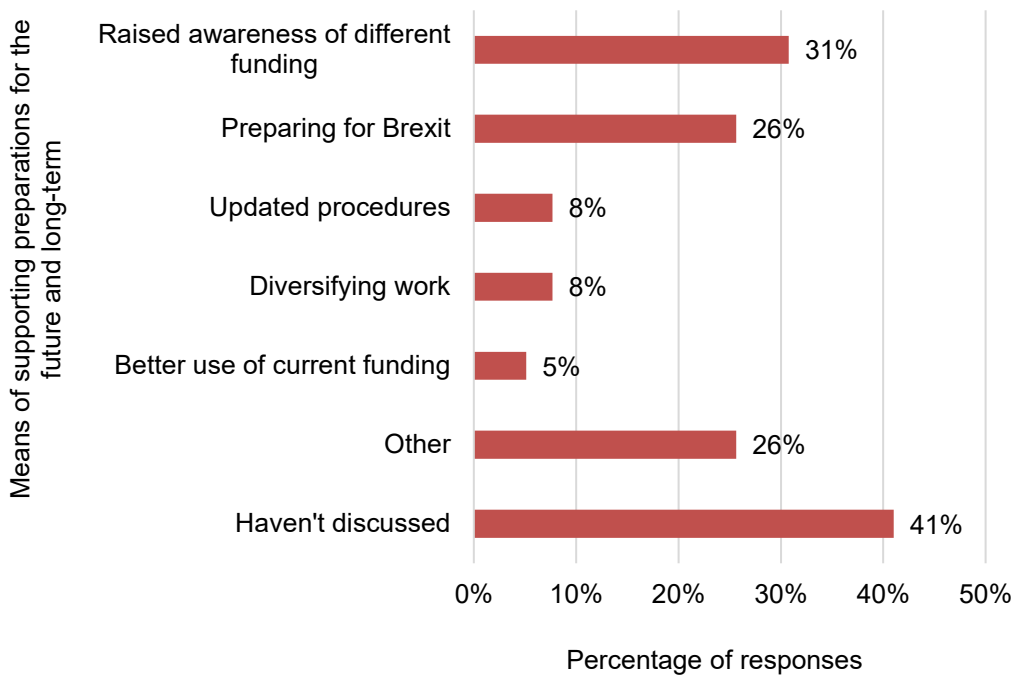
3.63 Around one quarter of responses noted some alternative form of support, though these normally related to the 3-SET signposting or recommending alternative or other support providers that were concerned with other funding opportunities:

'3-SET helped us put policies and procedures in place for managing the end of projects and also signposted us to organisations that we could approach for legacy funding. They also helped us to take a more strategic approach to avoid going from one project to another and to stop living hand to mouth in terms of project funding. We always make sure that project overlap so that there was no complete end of funding.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.64 Organisations that have engaged regularly with the 3-SET appeared to be more positive in their responses, citing the newsletters and updates that have kept them aware of the emerging and changing situation:

'You get constant interaction with 3-SET. They update with information about new funding and whatever emerges about the Shared Prosperity Fund. They have also helped us develop new project ideas that we can deliver when this ESF project ends.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 3.10: How effectively have 3-SET helped you and your organisation to prepare for the future and long term?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

3.65 The second way in which the 3-SET have supported organisations with their future is through strategic and policy engagement at the Welsh and UK levels. These interactions are unlikely to be noticed by organisations but can be traced through a review of engagement with the policy structures. These interactions and activities are discussed below.

### **Policy and strategic engagement**

3.66 The 3-SET's policy engagement aims to support the core 3-SET objectives on a wider and strategic level. This work has focused upon two core issues, namely ensuring representation for and promoting the value of third sector delivery, and ensuring the succession and legacy of European-funded third sector projects following Brexit.

3.67 The 3-SET has sought to influence and engage with established policymaking structures. These have largely included Assembly/Senedd and UK Parliamentary committees, event presentations, research publications, and Welsh or UK Government consultations (all of which are established and formal channels associated with policy development and democratic decision-making processes).

3.68 The 3-SET have engaged with these structures directly or through the WCVA. Indeed, the ability and opportunity to feed into the WCVA and — through their engagement with policy structures — magnify the impact of their insight is considered to be a key strength of the 3-SET delivery model. Being part of the wider WCVA (with almost seamless access to the wider policy and strategic engagement of the WCVA) is considered to be a key strength of the design:

‘It’s so important that the sector has a voice that is strong and is listened to. It’s work that 3-SET and WCVA have tried to push forward [...] — 3-SET in particular — [is] a good route to do that.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.69 The management team have also supported and provided supporting evidence to wider stakeholders that champion and advance the interests of the third sector at various levels of governance:

‘[...] I’ve represented Wales in Brussels. I’ve depended on the information given by 3-SET. When I talk to other voluntary organisations [...] whilst at conferences, actually at all of these opportunities, I have drawn on 3-SET expertise and, as a result of this, 3-SET and WCVA is widely known and respected across the member states. I was surprised how many know and how many were jealous of it and how people were copying it. They have been great to speak to when I needed assurance about these issues, and helping me to share practice across partners. There will be welcoming signs [and we will want] to continue engaging with them after we leave the EU.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

3.70 However, stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of these channels in relation to UK Government policy. Firstly, there was a perception that there was less awareness and understanding of the Welsh third sector in Westminster and Whitehall; secondly, there was a perception that policy could be developed ‘on a whim’ or without reference to formal submissions of evidence. This perception was not present in relation to the Welsh Government. Indeed, both management and stakeholder interviews revealed the perception that the 3-SET, particularly through the WCVA, had an effective relationship with Welsh Government personnel and that the value of the third sector was better understood.

3.71 The strategic and policy engagement of the 3-SET has also been on behalf of the third sector in general, not only the organisations supported.

### *Representing and promoting the third sector*

- 3.72 On a strategic level, the 3-SET have sought to be an advocate for third sector organisations as deliverers of strategic and public investment. In attempting to do so, they have aimed to raise the profile of the work and potential amongst funding bodies and the various levels of government, as well as seeking to make funding more accessible for the third sector. As noted, these aims have been pursued through formal policy structures.
- 3.73 Thematically, the efforts have varied. General promotion of the value and contribution, as well as the unique capacity of the third sector to deliver strategic investment, has been a consistent component of the 3-SET's policy work. In a response to the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's consultation on priorities, for example, the WCVA's response, drawing on the 3-SET's expertise and input, noted the innovative approaches and access that the third sector have in relation to disadvantaged communities and individuals:
- 'The third sector continues to play a major role in the current EU programmes by delivering a wide range of ESF projects that are providing specialist, innovative approaches to helping the most disadvantaged to overcome barriers to employment, engaging with NEETs and raising the aspirations of young people, supporting the advancement of women in employment, taking forward the digital inclusion agenda and developing the social economy in Wales.' (WCVA, 2016)
- 3.74 A further key area of focus for policy engagement has been in relation to Brexit. Such efforts have included contributing evidence to the WEFO's 'Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit' report (WEFO, 2018), as well as a WCVA publication (in partnership with the Welsh Government) entitled 'Empowering Communities in the Context of Brexit' (WCVA, 2019). The former explored the post-Brexit context (and the uncertainties posed) and recommended elements of the current arrangements that should be retained following Brexit (including a 3-SET-type technical advice and support service). The latter, meanwhile, explored how the Brexit process could impact on community services in Wales. Importantly, as the report itself notes, the need for the research and the input from the 3-SET and the WCVA was identified by the Welsh Government, suggesting a degree of trust in and reliance upon the knowledge, insight and data that the team hold in relation to the third sector (WCVA, 2019).

- 3.75 As a result of the report, the WCVA were acknowledged by the Welsh Government as having identified ‘potential impacts of Brexit on our communities, the services provided to them, and the third sector organisations that deliver many of these services’ (Hutt, 2019). In addition to this recognition, the report helped to secure support via the £50 million EU Transition Fund to develop an online portal with which to support third sector organisations.
- 3.76 Wider work in relation to Brexit has included contributions to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee; direct meetings with the Welsh Government in order to inform the Framework for Regional Investment and their Economic Recovery Strategy; and wider work through which to encourage engagement with policy structures, specifically by meeting with third sector organisations to encourage contributions to policy consultations, particularly the Framework for Regional Investment in Wales consultation.

#### *Succession and legacy*

- 3.77 Following the UK’s referendum regarding their membership of the European Union in 2016, there has been a level of uncertainty amongst the third sector in relation to future funding, succession and the legacy of the European-funded work.
- 3.78 During the earlier stages of the Brexit process the focus of policy engagement was upon raising awareness of the risks posed by Brexit. Much of this work was part of the wider representation and promotion outlined above. For example, contributions to the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee’s work leading to its report entitled ‘The Great Repeal Bill White Paper: Implications for Wales’ (NAfW, 2017) involved raising awareness of the damage likely to be inflicted upon the close relationships between the Welsh third sector and wider European networks.
- 3.79 Stakeholders also drew attention to the manner in which the 3-SET provided a voice to the sector, raising concerns and warning of risks to the sector in a period in which the wider debate surrounding Brexit was politicised:

‘3-SET has done really well in becoming a Brexit voice for the sector, which was very difficult in the early days. Anyone in receipt of public funds wasn’t allowed to campaign. I would argue it’s apolitical. Yes, it polarises politicians, so someone who can put forward the voice of the charitable sector, to lobby for them, under a cover of anonymity would have been so valuable. There was a lot of ducking for cover.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

- 3.80 More recently, the focus has shifted towards influencing efforts to inform any replacement funding programmes. This is perhaps best exemplified by its contributions to the National Assembly for Wales Finance Committee's 2018 paper entitled 'Preparations for Replacing EU Funding for Wales' (NAfW, 2018). Contributions focused on advocating the development of successor funding streams that include representation from the public, private and, importantly, third sectors: 'This will support the co-production of activities that build resilience and prosperity within Wales' most deprived communities.'
- 3.81 During consultations for reports such as the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee's 'Inquiry into the Future of Regional Policy – What Next for Wales?', both the WCVA — drawing on insight from the 3-SET — and Valleys Kids [a partner organisation] warned that despite a guarantee of post-Brexit funding, the uncertainty surrounding the form that this will take has led to apathy in terms of involvement at the project's ground level:

'There is still an awful lot of uncertainty, a lot of potential apathy to the current programme as well—because they don't necessarily want to get too involved, because they're afraid of the risks, even though the Treasury have issued a guarantee. There is still an apathy there that, 'Actually, we don't want to get involved at this present moment until we know what the future holds.'" (NAfW, 2018)

### **Common themes**

- 3.82 Constant support throughout the lifespan of the applications and projects was a common theme across interviews and responses. There is clear evidence that the 3-SET has built strong and lasting working relationships with a range of organisations, who in turn consistently turn to and trust the support provided by the 3-SET, be it for common issues such as support with applications and monitoring or for emerging and unforeseen issues thrown up by the COVID-19 pandemic:

'From [the] application stage onwards, 3-SET have been involved and provided support. They are always there to give guidance and advice when needed. Like with adapting to [COVID-19], with regards to the claims process, we had training and guidance on how to use the PDS system, which is where we log in all the information of participants and progress.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.83 The organisations interviewed also revealed a large degree of trust in the 3-SET, regardless of the frequency of their interaction. This was reflected in comments made by management staff who also noted that many organisations will return to them when seeking support or advice. This was due to the longstanding and personal relationships built over years:

‘It depends how much they engage with us. They might not regularly engage with us — they might not necessarily know it is 3-SET. Sometimes it’s not the brand they remember — it’s the people in the team. There have been really good relationships been built.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

**Counterfactual: What would organisations have done without the support of the 3-SET?**

3.84 Counterfactuals are an effective method through which the impact of an intervention or activity can be put into context. Essentially, evaluators ask if this impact could (or would) have been secured had the intervention or activity not taken place. Exploring a counterfactual ideally involves exploration of a control group (i.e. a group that had not received the support).

3.85 For this evaluation, the online survey was distributed to all third sector organisations that had contact with the WCVA in some form, regardless of whether or not they had engaged with the 3-SET. The survey received 23 responses from organisations who had not engaged with the 3-SET but had, nonetheless, delivered or applied/considered applying for European-funded projects in some form, and their responses could be seen to be a means of exploring the counterfactual.

3.86 Whilst these organisations had engaged with European funding, around half did not know enough about the 3-SET support to engage. This suggests that further or better promotion may have opened up the support to more organisations, though quantifying how many have missed out is not possible with the data available.

3.87 A minority either felt that the 3-SET did not offer relevant support or did not feel that they were in need of any support. A small minority felt that they were not eligible. Only three organisations sought alternative support, though it is unclear as to

whether this support was relevant to either European funding or any kind of support that 3-SET delivered.<sup>9</sup>

3.88 Beneficiaries were also asked to consider the alternatives to the 3-SET support. These respondents were overwhelmingly of the view that the support was vital to their accessing, applying for and delivering European funding. The consistent reasons offered related to the complexity of European funding and/or the relative lack of capacity<sup>10</sup> within third sector organisations to engage effectively with the processes. Most notable was the absence of any alternative support. There was no alternative, only to seek to access European funding alone:

‘The delivery system in England is different and, so, in Wales you need 3-SET to act as intermediary with WEFO, but in England you just contact the team direct (although the response is much slower than going to 3-SET for answers).’  
(Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

‘We work across Wales, so the engagement with the local authorities varies a great deal and they tend to be very busy. The support from 3-SET is more structured and covers more areas.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

3.89 One quarter of interviewed organisations (25 per cent) stated that they had also sought support in addition to that provided by the 3-SET. Over half of these had engaged their local authority funding advisors, whilst the others had engaged either the WEFO or private consultants. A few also approached the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services. The majority of these discussions appear to have concerned the development of ideas, whilst a few also discussed their legacy and post-EU funding possibilities.

3.90 This additional support therefore tends to fall outside of the 3-SET’s remit or support offer and does not suggest that there are any other or better sources of support than that which is provided by the 3-SET. Indeed, when asked how the 3-SET offer compares to the additional support, all respondents (13) suggested that the 3-SET support was either better or of a different kind. Moreover, respondents suggested

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<sup>9</sup> Only three organisations sought support that was not provided by the 3-SET. One did not specify what alternative support, and one attended a WCVA event about European funding in general, which may in fact have been a 3-SET event, but consequently ended their interest and engagement with European funding. The final organisation attended a Heritage Lottery Fund event in relation to a specific project, unrelated to European funding.

<sup>10</sup> Capacity would be defined as having the time, personnel, skills or experience with which to engage with the funding processes.

that the 3-SET support was, by comparison, easier to access, that the team had wider and more expert knowledge of the field, and that collaboration was more readily encouraged and fostered.

3.91 Management personnel were also of the belief that the complexity of European funding was likely to present too great a challenge for many organisations and, consequently, lead to a lack of engagement:

‘I think that the third sector would face a massive barrier if that support wasn’t there. [European funding is] so complex, you need to have some of it translated and you need to be able to interpret the language they use, which just puts people off it. Engagement in the third sector would fizzle out (apart from those who know about the heavy bureaucracy).’ (Management Interview, 2020)

## 4. Findings: Process

4.1 Process evaluations explore the mechanics and model of delivering the intervention or service in question. The aim of evaluating the process is to generate insight and learn lessons that will inform the ongoing management of the intervention or future programmes. This chapter will explore the underlying rationale for the 3-SET, its design and model of delivery as well as the experience of delivering the support to the third sector. Given the specific interest in the challenges facing the sector in the future, as well as the lessons that may be learned from the experience of the 3-SET, a section is devoted to exploring these issues.

### Rationale

4.2 Management, stakeholders and beneficiaries were consistent both in their definition of the 3-SET's rationale and in their agreement that the rationale was (and still is) a sound justification for the activities. The 3-SET is seen to provide expert, technical assistance and represent the sector. At its heart, the 3-SET plays a role as an intermediary, helping and developing the engagement between funders (specifically the WEFO) and delivery bodies in the third sector:

'The fundamental rationale is that European funding is hard to access to anyone, but particularly the third sector (who are actually well placed to deliver) [...]. I've always said we're like a translation service — take that complex regulation or piece of guidance and make it a little bit more accessible. It's not that people are stupid, but there's so much of it — it's about making clear what's relevant. That basic rationale for what we do still stands. That's relevant in whatever arena you put us in.' (Management Interview, 2020)

'The Babel fish, in this instance, 3-SET, is an important part of every ecosystem. It can be difficult for organisations to be heard in the corridors of power of the funder [...]. The funder can sometimes only speak in black and white and can't be seen to speak in grey.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.3 Some stakeholders drew attention to the benefits of a historic place for the team within the third sector. Moreover, although there have been changes to the operational focus, the rationale has remained consistent for many years and will continue to be relevant in relation to replacement or other funders following Brexit, i.e. the 3-SET rationale need not be confined to the relationship between the third sector and European funders:

'3-SET has been around for a long time in various iterations, so it's a proven model of value [...]. Objective 1 3-SET had hundreds of smaller projects directly, then we moved into a period without many direct deliverers for WEFO. It's changed to suit that, but the core thread in terms of making views heard, input into [policy] discussions, developing good practice and governance, feeding back how the sector can be more involved if regulations were changed — that's pretty common throughout.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

'In essence, it has been in existence to promote best use of European funds — this could soon be extended to other funds.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

## **Design**

- 4.4 A key strength of the 3-SET's design is its position within the WCVA, an influential, trusted and comprehensive support and advocacy body for the third sector in Wales. This was consistently recognised as being a significant strength, bringing advantages to the 3-SET itself, the WCVA, and third sector organisations.
- 4.5 Key benefits of the relationship with the WCVA relate, firstly, to the range of alternative and wider support to which the 3-SET can signpost and direct organisations. The access to the wider pools of expertise and contacts is a further strength, whilst many interviewees, including beneficiaries, drew attention to the trust held in the WCVA and the 3-SET. Finally, and as discussed in more detail below, there was a belief that the WCVA was a respected and common 'go-to' organisation for any third sector organisation, and any organisation who would approach the umbrella body for support with European-funded projects, regardless of their awareness of the 3-SET, would quickly and seamlessly be passed to the team:

'Being part of a wider organisation like WCVA has helped shape the design and delivery of the programme over the years and it instils trust. The [Intermediary Body] allows us to access other senior managers and officers. We're able to talk from experience in terms of challenges and opportunities we've encountered.' (Management Interview, 2020)

'What works really well with its setup comes from all the people who work within WCVA, because we can access their expertise. They have been around for a long time and have that knowledge of the funds that has built up over many

years. We work very closely with our colleagues within Active Inclusion and other funds across Wales — it is such valuable insight.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

‘It’s part of WCVA because they’ve been involved since Objective 1. There’s also knowledge and capacity to draw on, so it’s wider than just the 3-SET staff and structure. [3-SET staff are] not just theoretical — we know how projects work. We’re not disjointed — we use real-life examples from our experience.’  
(Management Interview, 2020)

4.6 The ability to engage with policy structures through and as part of the WCVA is also thought to have been a benefit resulting from the design. Being part of the wider WCVA (with very close and almost seamless access to the wider policy and strategic engagement of the WCVA) is considered to be a key strength of the design.

4.7 One concern arising from the close association with the WCVA related to the difficulties in delineating the support available:

‘One of the problems I would have is where 3-SET begins and ends and where WCVA begins and ends. Often I would say some of the things are WCVA activities but they’re not. [Rather, they are 3-SET activities.] What comes under what umbrella is sometimes unclear. It doesn’t matter to me. But in terms of attributing things to 3-SET, I’m not sure.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.8 However, this was not considered to be an issue if the 3-SET were not, due to the limits of its remit, able to support organisations. In such instances, and due to its knowledge and association with the WCVA, the team has been able to signpost effectively. Indeed, some stakeholders felt that the specialism and niche focus of the 3-SET enriched the wider WCVA offer without overlapping and duplicating the wider support offer:

‘WCVA has its core activities, and 3-SET are doing that, but particularly to that quite significant set of organisations around European funding. The support they do fits in with what WCVA wants to do or should be doing but can target that audience.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.9 However, stakeholders suggested that the lack of clarity regarding its remit may be a barrier to some organisations engaging with the 3-SET:

‘It’s great because the issues that people go to them with are complicated — frontline organisations need to have someone au fait with the delivering and managing. It’s just difficult if people don’t think the 3-SET advice applies to them.’  
(Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.10 As noted previously, stakeholders also felt that the 3-SET, by operating as an intermediary between funders and delivery organisations, added value and insight and expanded the reach of both the WCVA and the WEFO.

4.11 The perceived independence of the support, with no other organisations offering it and, therefore, ‘competing’ for clients, serves to ease and encourage referrals:

‘One of the really good things of working in European funding is that there’s a lot of overlap in third sector support generally, but in European funding we are the experts and we are seen as the experts in that area. There’s little conflict within our own third sector structure. There’s no competition. I’ve had this conversation with chief officers because European funding is something that we are experts in.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

4.12 The long lifespan of the 3-SET, as well as its close relationship with legacy programmes, was also seen to be a key strength. Stakeholders reflected upon the value of the long-term associations and relationships with the sector, as well as drawing attention to the manner in which a programme over a longer length of time allows for such relationships to be built:

‘I think it does that very, very well. Having long-term associations with programmes develops expertise. If it was short-term, then (obviously) people have less experience and contacts. The advantage of a long-term programme is to build depth, experience and respect. That last one is really important.’

(Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.13 Concerns, as noted above, were (nonetheless) raised in relation to the efficacy of engaging with UK policy structures. However, no organisation or individual suggested that such engagement should not take place.

4.14 Finally, in relation to its design, beneficiaries, stakeholders, and management personnel remarked upon the 3-SET’s potential to support a much wider group of organisations. However, the limiting of support to ESF- or ERDF-funded organisations is thought to have prevented the team from supporting more organisations, even when the team felt that the expertise and knowledge were there

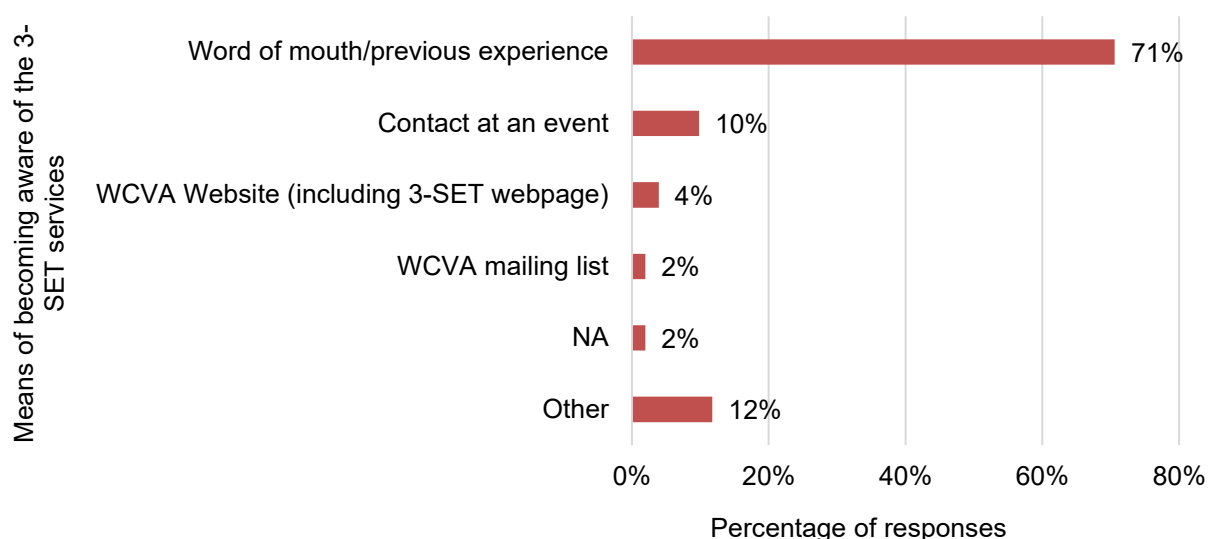
to do so. The training offer in particular was seen to appeal beyond the relevant funding streams and to a wide range of organisations.

### *Promotion and uptake*

4.15 Interviewees noted, overwhelmingly (71 per cent), that they became aware of the 3-SET support offer either through their own previous experience or on the recommendation of another organisation that had engaged with the 3-SET. The data is presented in Figure 4.1 below. It raises two possible considerations. Firstly, the experiences of organisations with the 3-SET are often positive enough to engender recommendations and frequent engagement.

4.16 Secondly, around one sixth (16 per cent) of the interviewees had become aware directly through the 3-SET's promotional efforts. This may reflect the established nature of the 3-SET and the WCVA as sources of support and/or the length of time for which the team have been active in some manifestation within the sector. There are not many organisations in the sector who are not aware that the 3-SET or the WCVA offer support to third sector organisations engaged with European funding. It may suggest a relative failure to promote the offer successfully; however, the data from the non-participating organisations did not support this, nor did any further data from stakeholders or management personnel.

**Figure 4.1: How did you become aware of the services that could be provided by 3-SET?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

4.17 There is also a belief that organisations find the support not through any promotion or experience of the 3-SET, but by approaching the WCVA — an established source of support and information for the sector — and being passed on to the team:

‘I think if a third sector organisation wants to access European funding, then WCVA is who they go to. They know WCVA is the place to go. We did a lot of work with the CVCs to make sure they understood what support 3-SET could offer.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

4.18 Management personnel also noted that they sought to accompany the promotion and encouragement with a realistic portrayal of the challenges that European funding and, consequently, compliance bring:

‘What we did do was bring that to the table with a dose of reality, explaining that European funding isn’t for everyone. The amount of projects that I saw coming through in a previous job that shouldn’t be accessing European funding that just set them up to fail — that itself helps the compliance rate. People who don’t have the structures in place and are just — not chasing the funding — but the funding isn’t set up for them. That’s when you have projects getting it seriously wrong. It’s very easy to go out there and say: “Look how great this funding is and how easy it is to access.” [But] then delivery can be a real struggle, so we’ve been working with them to understand the reality of the funding as well and that’s helped the compliance rate in the sector as well.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

#### *External impacts*

4.19 Two external factors have impacted the 3-SET offer and presented considerable risks to the organisations being supported. Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic have impacted the programme differently. Brexit has been discussed in relation to the programme design; however, with the exception of an increased focus upon supporting sustainability in a future outside of the European Union, relevant support activities could be delivered without changes to the design of the programme.

4.20 The coronavirus pandemic has necessitated a further pivot in content delivery, supporting organisations in dealing with the operational challenges outlined in the previous chapter. Operationally, the pandemic has also necessitated a switch to digital and remote provision. The data suggests that this has been successful, with very few suggestions that the provision has not worked, and indeed some

suggestion that digital provision may be more appropriate to time- and resource-limited organisations and individuals.

- 4.21 Whilst the organisations have looked to deal with the impact of the pandemic, there is a risk that the focus on developing and ensuring sustainability beyond European funding has been delayed or postponed:

‘The preparedness is key to any technical assistance programme and I think it’s been sort of impacted upon by the current [COVID-19] pandemic in terms of preparing to leave the EU, and we have only seen in recent weeks attention being moved back to these issues. They’ve been preoccupied with getting through the pandemic in terms of supporting staff and beneficiaries.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

- 4.22 Given the lost time and that the UK has left the EU in the meantime, organisations may need further support from the 3-SET to ensure that adequate preparations are made to sustain their delivery and impact after the funding comes to an end. Whilst already a priority, it may have increased in urgency due to the lost time spent on adapting to and recovering from the pandemic.

### *Management*

- 4.23 The management team are held in particularly high regard by stakeholders and organisations, as well as being respected throughout the sector for their knowledge, expertise and experience. The positive experiences that beneficiaries have in respect of engaging with the support appear to have contributed to this perception.
- 4.24 As noted previously, all output targets are expected to be met or exceeded, whilst the perception of beneficiaries and stakeholders is that the support has had an impact, and often a sustained or long-lasting impact, on the organisations:

‘We’re quite happy in terms of the business plan that was developed for the project and [with regard to] meeting the targets, we should exceed them. In terms of the networks and events we do, those have been well received and people see them as a good way to raise issues and concerns and they see us as a conduit through which they can engage with the Welsh Government.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

4.25 Interviewees frequently named individuals in the team with whom they had worked, invariably suggesting that the relationship that has been developed with members of the team is a key reason for continued engagement with, trust in and reliance upon the support offered:

‘Whenever I have needed help, they have been excellent. I get involved at conceptual stages and always just go to ask [3-SET member’s name] for anything.’ (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.26 More generally, the data suggests that the management team have developed considerable expertise and experience, as well as a powerful network of contacts, advisors and supporting experts (which is of benefit to the sector both within and beyond the context and remit of the 3-SET). This issue is explored in more detail within the ‘Future’ section below.

*What is missing from the 3-SET support?*

4.27 Beneficiaries were asked if they believed that there was anything missing from the support that the 3-SET programme offers. A large proportion of participants (45 per cent) believed that there was nothing missing and could not think of anything else that could be included. The remaining responses reflected issues that have been discussed in this report, namely the desire for more support and the facilitation of cooperation with local authorities and other organisations (20 per cent) and cross-sector collaborations (15 per cent):

‘I think 3-SET should look more at cross-referrals and encourage similar organisations to work together. We have specialist skills and knowledge that other organisations could benefit from. Third sector organisations are still very isolationist in their approach, when they should be working together, and 3-SET should play a role in breaking down these barriers.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

‘3-SET should look to develop more links between the third sector and the local authorities. 3-SET should help develop an overarching strategy across an entire region with collaboration between the third sector, local authority, and private companies.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

## Future

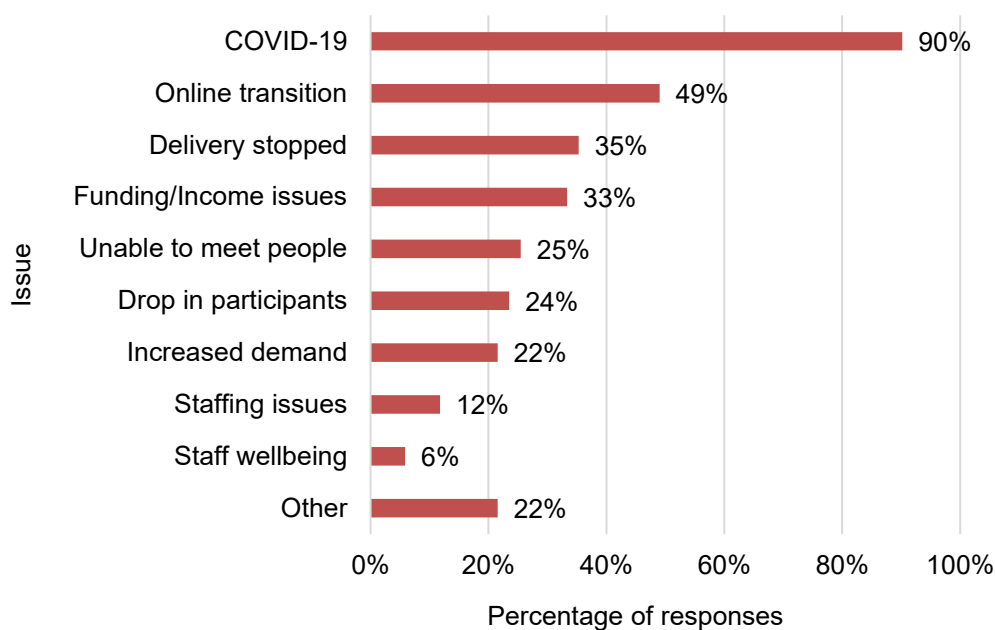
4.28 A key component of the 3-SET's work relates to sustaining — outside of the European Union — the impact and engagement of third sector organisations in delivering strategic investment. Furthermore, there was a desire that this report would explore the issue in detail, giving due consideration to the challenges faced by the sector in the short and long term, the type of support that might be required following Brexit, and the structures or models that may deliver such support.

4.29 The challenges faced by the sector following Brexit have been explored more explicitly and in greater detail in wider publications, not least those produced by the WCVA/3-SET or to which they have submitted evidence. More detail is provided in the 'Policy and strategic engagement' section above (3.67). This section will focus on the responses and discussions in interviews.

### *Challenges of the sector*

4.30 Figure 4.2 below outlines the perceived challenges facing organisations in the immediate or short term. The data strongly suggests that third sector organisations have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and that the focus of their work relates largely, if not exclusively, to meeting the operational challenges posed by the lockdowns, at the risk of not preparing adequately for the end of EU funding.

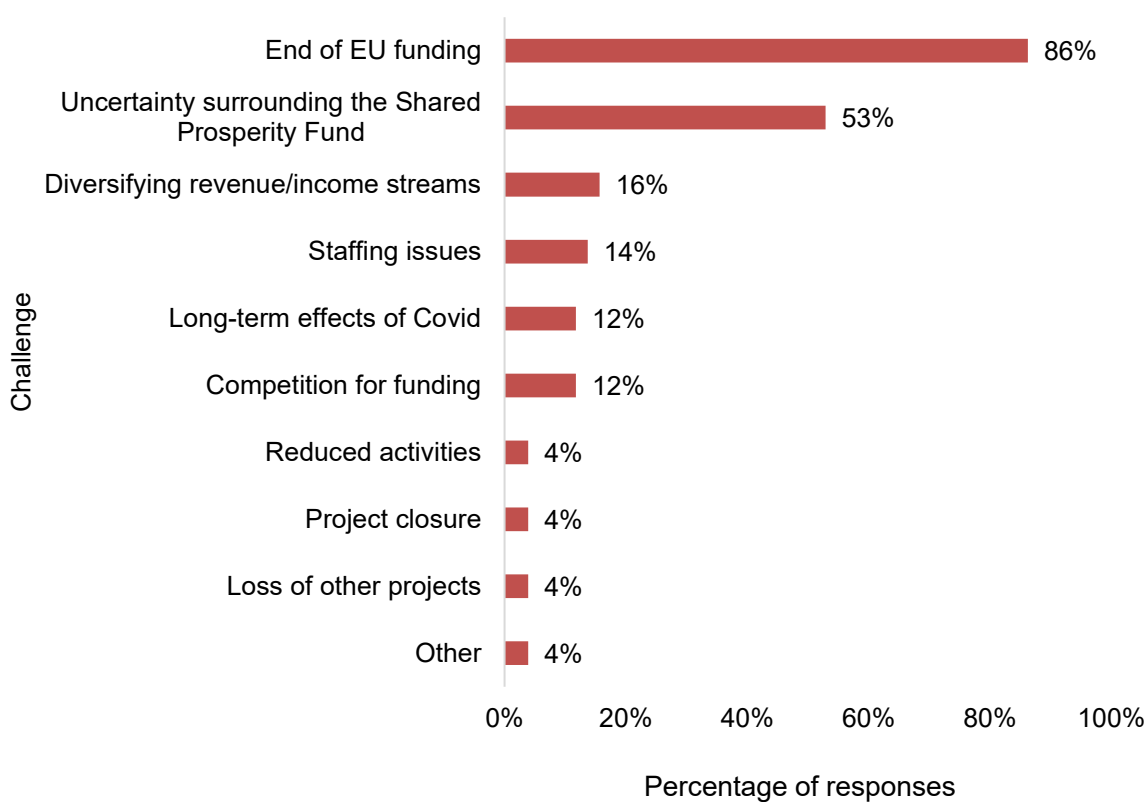
**Figure 4.2: Challenges in the short term**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

4.31 When asked to consider longer-term challenges, however (see Figure 4.3 below), organisations revealed a number of issues, many interrelated and often rooted in funding sustainability. The end of EU funding and the uncertainty surrounding accessibility of the Shared Prosperity Fund dominated responses. However, the diversification of revenue streams, competition for funding (combined 28 per cent), and staffing issues (14 per cent) could be linked to the core issue of adapting to the demise of a key revenue stream and the uncertainty surrounding possibilities for replacing the money.

**Figure 4.3: Challenges in the longer term, beyond 12/18 months**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

4.32 Stakeholders clearly identified the uncertainty surrounding the Shared Prosperity Fund and future revenue and funding opportunities as the biggest challenge in the short and long term:

‘The unknown — the shorter- and longer-term unknown. A lot of organisations rely on European funding. European funding doesn’t make you recreate a new project every time. It’s not a lot [of funding] for government, but it reflects a substantial chunk that goes to the third sector. We need to keep the third sector’s

needs at the forefront with WEFO, Welsh Government, and the UK Government. We don't know about [COVID-19] or the longer term [following Brexit]. Post-Brexit plans are written in the sand. At this point, we expected to know what the next steps were, but (obviously) we don't. 3-SET is needed and it plays a vital role because they are in a position to help the third sector.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.33 Several stakeholders also foresaw (i.e. following the COVID-19 pandemic) a likely increase in demand for the services that third sector organisations provide, particularly in relation to employment. However, resources were likely to diminish, and fears were expressed in relation to the viability of many organisations in the meantime, not least due to the inability to fundraise effectively during the pandemic:

'Sustainability of organisations on that part of the funding. Now, with [COVID-19], we have no idea what the sector will look like going forward — how many will survive. Swansea University predict [that] 40% of mental health organisations will not survive — we don't know how much income will be lost.' (Stakeholder Interviews, 2020)

4.34 Indeed, beneficiaries also predicted an increasing demand for services, but also noted that the third sector continues to offer an existing means of meeting the increase in this demand, if adequately funded. Furthermore, some beneficiaries suggested wider funding possibilities:

'The third sector will need more support, as it faces an increase in demand caused by [COVID-19], e.g. mental health and a rise in unemployment; [therefore, the] WCVA will need to support organisations to find more funding and increase their capacity. I also think [that] more needs to be done about finding trickle-down funding for smaller charities.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

'The whole future of the third sector is very uncertain at the moment. It will depend on government priorities. I can see there being an increased focus on employability projects and WCVA/ 3-SET and the third sector could help with these by developing links between the third sector and industry and private companies.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

4.35 In discussing longer-term challenges, stakeholders frequently noted the need to replace the funding lost from the EU, but also the difficulties of doing so (when the terms of replacement funding structures are likely to be decided in Westminster):

'The uncertainty goes into what the future funding regime looks like. The massive power grab at the end of the M4 will carry on. If we get as much money as we get now, that will be an absolute miracle. The agenda will be set in London, and money will be handed to the city regions, which won't match Welsh Government priorities. The majority of our problems that lie beyond the immediate are political.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

- 4.36 A key challenge therefore appears to be a strategic and policy-related one, namely to highlight the benefits and value of the third sector as a deliverer of strategic funding in Westminster. It is unlikely that individual organisations will have the capacity to engage with policy structures whilst preoccupied with the operational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, third sector organisations will likely require further support, due to the time and resources spent while dealing with the pandemic and its implications, to understand and prepare for post-Brexit arrangements. These issues were echoed by comments from the 3-SET management:

'I think [that] in terms of understanding the implications that Brexit will have, lots of organisations are blind of the links they have to Europe and to their organisational delivery, [as well as] visibility of their ability to influence policy and legislation. Looking at more sustainable funding sources, so they are not solely running on grants, so they may be more sustainable. [COVID-19] recovery is another one, whatever that may look like. Awareness raising about what the landscape will look like [following COVID-19] and Brexit.' (Management Interview, 2020)

#### *Support needs*

- 4.37 The support, in drawing on the comments from management and stakeholders, will likely be strategic and operational. Firstly, the case for ensuring that the Welsh third sector has access to replacement funding, particularly the Shared Prosperity Fund, will likely require championing through the relevant policy structures. The 3-SET have, as noted above, already begun this work.
- 4.38 Secondly, it is likely that practical support, guidance and training will need to be provided to third sector organisations to develop their awareness, understanding, and capacity to access any replacement funding. These objectives closely resemble what the 3-SET already offer in relation to European funding.

4.39 Management personnel also identified further and more specific support needed in order to assist the transition to new ways of working, including enhanced digital provision support and assistance in achieving more financially sustainable positions.

4.40 Beneficiaries also discussed their perceived support needs for the future. Unsurprisingly, preparing for and replacing European funding were most common (33 per cent), alongside related issues such as the need for more information on the Shared Prosperity Fund (25 per cent). Other support, such as staff training (29 per cent), and a range of specific, capacity-related issues were also prevalent. Only 15 per cent of respondents noted that they did not foresee any support needs in the future. The prevalences of the different responses are presented in Figure 4.4 below:

‘Help securing new funding and preparing for the post-EU funding situation. Help with the transition to the Shared Prosperity Fund.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

‘Maintain the current support and training offer. More of our staff will need training on the claims process and we need more training to improve staff capabilities and their ability to be used in multiple roles.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

**Figure 4.4: What elements of the 3-SET support are needed in future?**



Source: Beneficiary interviews (N=52)

## *Structure*

4.41 Finally, interviewees' views on the structure or model that could deliver the support were explored. Generally, there was wide agreement that some form of platform or structure was required in order to deliver continued support to organisations. Many comments also noted the need for a trusted source of support and information:

'There will always be a need for a sector platform that has the expertise to draw down the various bits of information, has the expertise to engage with partners, and has the capacity to learn from previous experiences and campaign for improvements, and third sector organisations who are struggling will be desperate for a trustworthy opinion.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.42 A significant majority of beneficiaries (87 per cent)<sup>11</sup> noted that there was a justification for some form of the 3-SET support. The majority of these suggested that a very similar model, only in relation to the replacement funding structures, was needed. Staff in particular were highlighted as having a key role to play in managing the support, the transition to the new structures, or both:

'3-SET is definitely needed to manage the transition to the Shared Prosperity Fund. The 3-SET staff have the knowledge and experience of helping organisations. Help new organisations go through the process.' (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

4.43 Stakeholders also expressed a belief that a similar platform would be needed in the future, too, primarily to support engagement with any replacement funding structures:

' [...]. I think [that the] 3-SET [is suitable], because of its membership links and its ability to deliver and disseminate. New programmes will lead to uncertainty, and the process of managing programmes may be different [...]. Organisations will be desperate for some kind of 3-SET service.' (Stakeholder Interview, 2020)

4.44 Management personnel also suggested that there would be an ongoing need for support of the kind delivered by the 3-SET within the third sector:

'Yes, definitely. From my experience, it is definitely a valuable resource for the sector. It is so good to see how successful the sector can be with this type of

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<sup>11</sup> The remaining respondents either did not express a view or suggested that some form of the 3-SET support might be needed, rather than definitely needed.

support. This success would only grow if 3-SET could support across funding streams. Even without European funding, there will be other funding that organisations, particularly small ones, will need help with. The links we have with Welsh Government and our knowledge of sector needs are so, so important and this will only become more important in the next few years in the Brexit and [COVID-19] context.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

‘I think it’s proved that the third sector can successfully manage EU support [funding] if they can access the right guidance. That [support] offer should be grounded around building resilience for the sector, but also adapting and responding to what the sector needs. Yeah, that’s a justification of why it should continue.’ (Management Interview, 2020)

4.45 Some beneficiaries suggested, however, that any such structure may have a greater role in coordinating consortia to increase delivery capacity:

‘There is always going to [be] a need for support and guidance with projects. I think [that] 3-SET will need to do more to bring organisations together and create consortiums to deliver larger-scale projects.’ (Beneficiary Interview, 2020)

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 This chapter will conclude the report by addressing the core research questions directly, addressing broader and additional findings that emerged during the analysis, before presenting recommendations for consideration. The chapter will present the findings of the outcome evaluation first, followed by the process evaluation.
- 5.2 The evidence and data examined for this report suggest that the 3-SET have been, and are likely to continue to prove to be, an effective, impactful, valued and needed service for the third sector in Wales. What is more, there is a case to be made that its contribution in the final few years may prove to be most valuable in relation to the future, in preparing organisations to access replacement funding structures and to lobby for the sector and its access to replacement investment structures on a strategic and policy level.

### *Outcome evaluation*

- 5.3 The monitoring data suggests that the 3-SET has been making good progress towards its performance indicators. Management staff anticipate meeting or exceeding the targets by the end of the programme. The only exception is the number of e-newsletters due to a deliberate decision (agreed with the WEFO) to share fewer but more detailed newsletters, tailored to the emerging issues such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.4 The distribution of physical events has reflected the geography of the sector, and no complaints were received or relayed to the evaluation team in relation to the location of events and training courses.
- 5.5 The team have also responded to 311 enquiries from the sector and responded or contributed to 15 policy consultations or enquiries in Wales or the UK. The 3-SET have also attended and contributed to 16 formal networks, as it sought to promote and support the sector on a strategic and policy level.

### *General impact*

- 5.6 A significant majority of interviewees suggested that at least one area of their operation or organisation has been improved or developed because of the support from the 3-SET. The data suggested that a range of positive changes had been made within the organisations as a result of the support, including upskilling,

improved compliance and claims, better applications, and being more informed and networked. Scoring for the impact, though subjective, was consistently high, nonetheless.

5.7 Beneficiaries also spoke of softer but valuable impacts such as improved confidence in engaging with and meeting the requirements of European funding.

5.8 The majority of interviewees also suggested that the changes were permanent or that they would remain in place until (at least) the end of the project's lifespan.

*Has the 3-SET successfully encouraged third sector organisations to apply for Structural Funds when they otherwise might not have?*

5.9 The data strongly suggests that the 3-SET encourages organisations to apply for funds when uncertain. Very few interviewees noted that the 3-SET had not done so, which may relate to a deliberate attempt on behalf of the team to instil realistic expectations regarding the compliance requirements of European funding; in other words, whilst (ideally) organisations would apply, the 3-SET believe that some organisations are not always well placed and that the correct decision would be not to apply.

5.10 Beneficiaries suggested that the 3-SET encouraged their applications in a number of ways, most notably by offering and providing constant support throughout the application process, by raising awareness of the funding and their requirements, and by increasing the confidence of potential applicants.

5.11 The information disseminated through the newsletters and events constituted the main ways in which interviewees felt encouraged, alongside a smaller number of organisations who felt as though they had been well supported and encouraged within specific training sessions (such as those improving bid-writing skills).

*Has the 3-SET provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully applying for Structural Funds?*

5.12 Beneficiaries were also of the view that the 3-SET had provided effective guidance with which to support them in successfully applying for funding. Indeed, nobody suggested that the 3-SET had not supported them to some extent, with the majority believing that they had done so to a great extent.

5.13 Interviewees felt that an ongoing review of application forms and documentation was the main way in which the team had supported them, alongside the

improvements suggested during the process. The support with forms continued into later stages of the projects, supporting the renewal of funding as well as initial applications.

*Has the 3-SET provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations in successfully delivering Structural Funds projects?*

- 5.14 Beneficiaries were also overwhelmingly of the view that the 3-SET had provided effective guidance with which to support the delivery of their projects. The majority believed that the 3-SET had supported them to a great extent, whilst nobody suggested that they had failed to provide useful support when sought.
- 5.15 The 3-SET supported a significant number of organisations by improving monitoring and compliance procedures, a further and key objective of the 3-SET business plan. Furthermore, the team facilitated and supported direct engagement with the WEFO, frequently negotiating the compliance requirements so as to satisfy both the WEFO's and organisations' concerns.
- 5.16 Indeed, the role of intermediary, i.e. between the organisations and the funder, was a valued role perceived to have been accomplished well. The team were believed to have been able to 'translate' the funding and delivery organisations' requirements to each other.

*Has the 3-SET facilitated networking and collaboration in the third sector?*

- 5.17 A significant majority of organisations suggested that the team had facilitated networking and collaboration within the third sector. The 3-SET and events were seen to be the main ways in which this was facilitated. However, many beneficiaries also noted the potential networking opportunities that training events offered.
- 5.18 Meanwhile, organisations delivering on behalf of larger projects, such as Active Inclusion, were particularly positive in relation to the opportunities to network and collaborate.

*Has the 3-SET successfully brokered relationships between the third sector, the WEFO, regional partners and/or local authorities?*

- 5.19 Over half of the interviewees felt that the 3-SET had brokered such relationships to some or a greater extent, though the responses were not as overwhelmingly positive as in relation to the research questions outlined above.

5.20 Events were occasionally mentioned as a means by which relationships were formed or developed; however, the majority appear to be brokered through the delivery of projects. This was particularly the case for organisations delivering on behalf of larger programmes. The data also suggests that ambassadors and the sharing of information and good practice also fostered trust and understanding that supported the brokering of relationships less directly.

5.21 Although relationships with local authorities were most commonly established, organisations, nonetheless, expressed a desire for more links to be developed with councils. Moreover, organisations expressed a desire to engage with partners outside of the third sector, as well as to engage in more collaborative work in the future. Some beneficiaries also identified future funding opportunities such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, and a desire to engage in collaboration with other organisations, or even to create consortia through which to deliver larger-scale projects.

*Has the 3-SET supported organisations in delivering the Cross Cutting Themes?*

5.22 The data suggests that the work being delivered by the third sector often makes a vertical contribution to the CCTs, i.e. the projects and work being delivered directly address the themes. This was felt, on the one hand, to be a particular strength of third sector delivery, but also an area that the sector has historically found to be challenging to evidence.

5.23 The data from beneficiaries suggests, however, that the 3-SET have worked to address these shortcomings. The interview data strongly suggests that the 3-SET have supported organisations in a range of ways in relation to the CCTs. Much of the support amounts to a process of demystifying the CCTs and demonstrating or illustrating where and how the organisations could effectively and efficiently evidence their contributions.

5.24 Training courses and direct support from the CCTs champion within the team were thought to be the means by which this support was best delivered. The proactivity of the team and the champion in engaging with organisations in relation to the CCTs was also highlighted as being an effective practice.

5.25 Meanwhile, the 3-SET itself credits a good relationship with the WEFO CCTs team as a key factor in its success. Indeed, the team has drawn on WEFO expertise and personnel to communicate and engage directly with the sector on the issue.

*How effectively have 3-SET helped you and your organisation to prepare for the future and long term?*

- 5.26 Whilst supporting organisations in planning for the future and sustaining the impact of their work beyond the funding, the context surrounding this changed following Britain's decision to leave the EU. Future planning from that point onwards would need to consider replacing European funding, not a continuation or development of programmes. The uncertainty surrounding both the terms of departure from the EU and the possible replacement funding structure has presented further challenges.
- 5.27 However, the pace at which the content of training, guidance and networking activities was changed and delivered soon after the vote to leave the EU suggests that the 3-SET was successfully able to pivot its focus towards an emerging priority. The team drew on expert advice to keep the sector informed of ongoing developments and their implications for the sector, largely through their newsletters.
- 5.28 Direct support to organisations, meanwhile, could be delivered through the training, events and guidance, as well as in a more bespoke manner through direct enquiries. The 3-SET has concurrently sought to influence the policy structures in Wales and the UK in order to promote the value of the sector and its capacity to deliver strategic investment in communities. The team has also sought to present evidence and influence the development of policy and structures that will be replacing European funding.
- 5.29 Whilst support has been delivered, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is thought to have hampered or delayed organisations' efforts to engage with the challenges posed by the end of European funding. Organisations themselves indicated that they are preoccupied with the operational challenges posed by the pandemic and that preparing for Brexit and its funding implications is (by now) a long-term goal.
- 5.30 The 3-SET has demonstrated its ability to disseminate relevant and current information and guidance, alongside policy and strategic-level engagement to promote and support the sector and its future. However, there is a risk that organisations themselves have not had the opportunity or capacity, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to move as quickly or as far in preparing for the end of European funding. Moreover, whilst the 3-SET has encouraged organisations to present evidence and engage with formal policy forums and structures, the capacity

to do so whilst engaging with the challenges of the pandemic has likely been diminished. The value and importance of the 3-SET's policy engagement are likely to be increased as a result of this.

#### *Policy engagement*

- 5.31 The 3-SET are actively promoting the value and the current and potential contribution of the sector in relation to strategic investment. These efforts are directed at formal policy structures in Wales and the UK. Submissions of evidence and responses to consultations constitute the bulk of this work, but the team have also been active in a number of networks, published research, and worked with other partners consistently. The 3-SET also feed into WCVA submissions and policy engagement work, multiplying their own impact whilst strengthening that of the WCVA.
- 5.32 The work has focused on two main issues, namely ensuring representation for and promoting the value of third sector delivery, and ensuring the succession and legacy of European-funded third sector projects following Brexit.
- 5.33 Measuring the impact of these efforts is particularly difficult, though the prominence of submissions within published reports, the extensive network membership, and the manner in which the Welsh Government have turned to the team to support research suggest that in Wales the team's messages are being heard and considered.
- 5.34 Stakeholders were less confident in relation to the engagement with UK policy structures, suggesting that less familiarity with the sector within Westminster and Whitehall may be a challenge. Stakeholders expressed the perception that policy could be developed 'on a whim' or without reference to formal submissions of evidence. The latter of these issues is beyond the 3-SET's control.

#### *Common themes*

- 5.35 Further and common themes were identified in the data. Most notably, the strong and lasting working relationships with a range of organisations are thought to have encouraged engagement and trust in the support provided by the 3-SET.

## Process evaluation

- 5.36 The rationale of the 3-SET has remained relatively consistent. The need for a platform or structure that can mediate between delivery and funding bodies has remained constant and is likely to be needed in the future. Moreover, the role of ‘translating’ compliance requirements for the sector and communicating the delivery practicalities to the funder serves to support and add value to both, as well as encouraging good project management, delivery and compliance. Despite two significant external factors, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, the rationale, at its core, remains justified.
- 5.37 The 3-SET has benefitted from previous iterations and a legacy of interaction and building relationships with the sector. Such consistency is a key strength of the design. However, the extended timeframe has given the team further opportunities to establish and build relationships with the sector, as well as to tailor and develop the support over the years.
- 5.38 A further key benefit of the design is the 3-SET’s place within the WCVA. The 3-SET is widely thought to add value and contribute knowledge and understanding to the wider WCVA. The WCVA also magnify the strategic and policy engagement of the 3-SET. Organisations in the third sector frequently see the WCVA as a first port of call when seeking support, and passing organisations on to the 3-SET support if eligible is a seamless process. The team are also able to draw on the wider expertise and experience of WCVA staff.
- 5.39 A minor drawback to the relationship with the WCVA relates to the challenge that some organisations have in delineating the 3-SET’s remit and range of support offered. As noted, however, the ease with which organisations can be passed on to the WCVA or signposted to wider support if ineligible for the 3-SET’s offer largely overshadows this drawback.
- 5.40 The perceived independence of the support and as effectively the sole provider of this type of support, with no other organisations ‘competing’ for clients, is a further perceived benefit of the design.
- 5.41 Whilst the Brexit vote changed the context and urged the team to increase its focus upon future planning, the operational delivery model was not changed. The content of information, guidance, training and events could be changed without modifying the model.

- 5.42 The only significant change to the operational plan came as a result of an internal review of the demand for training, as well as a decision to offer fewer but more bespoke training courses. This suggests that an effective internal evaluation cycle operates, even within a model that has proven to be effective, impactful and flexible.
- 5.43 A key limitation appears to be the tight remit and limit to the range of organisations eligible for the support. The data suggested that the 3-SET was well placed to support a wider group of organisations, and would attract more to their training events in particular, were it not for the remit. There may be a justification for expanding the scope and remit, however, given the team's engagement to date with the development of replacement funding, and that supporting organisations in adapting to Brexit and the replacement structures will benefit all organisations in the sector, not merely those who have directly received European funding.

#### *Delivery*

- 5.44 The promotion of the 3-SET support appears to be most successful and common through word of mouth and as a result of previous experience. Only a minority of organisations stated that they had become aware of the services through events, the website or the mailing list.
- 5.45 This may reflect the established nature of the team within the sector and that they and/or the WCVA are a common starting point for any organisation seeking support. However, the data, coupled with the suggestion that some who did not engage with the 3-SET were not aware of the service, suggests that the promotion of the service could be more effective. Whether or not reform at this stage justifies the resource cost and the effort at this stage of the 3-SET's lifespan will likely require further research and consideration.

#### *Management*

- 5.46 The management team were widely credited with the effective and impactful delivery of support to the sector. What is more, they are held in high regard by organisations and stakeholders for their practical and technical expertise, professionalism, and experience. The good and personal relationships developed over the years emerge as a key factor that engenders trust in the team.
- 5.47 The management personnel have demonstrated that an effective internal evaluation cycle is at work within the team, seeking to improve and develop the support offer throughout the lifespan of the 3-SET.

5.48 More generally, the team have developed considerable technical and practical expertise and experience, alongside a powerful and extensive network of contacts, advisors, and supporting experts, all of which enrich and add value to the support offer.

### **Future**

5.49 The sector faces a range of challenges over the coming years, though organisations appeared to be preoccupied with meeting the operational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns in the short term. They were, nonetheless, aware that the challenge posed by the end of EU funding was a significant one, albeit something that has been understood to be a longer-term challenge, to address after the pandemic.

5.50 Stakeholders, meanwhile, suggested that the challenges of sustaining funding and delivery were more immediate, whilst organisations were also likely to see an increase in demand for services, coupled with diminishing revenue from fundraising activities.

5.51 There appears to be a risk, therefore, that third sector organisations, due largely to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, do not have the capacity to engage in legacy and future planning effectively, and may require additional support over the short to medium term. The 3-SET may make a valuable contribution over the final few years of delivery in this respect.

5.52 In looking to the future, organisations and stakeholders were clear in their view that the kind of technical and advocacy support provided by the 3-SET in relation to European funding is likely to be needed in relation to any, and particularly large, funding structures that replace the ESIF, likely the Shared Prosperity Fund. The initial period will likely be particularly key in ensuring accessibility of the funds.

5.53 Depending on the form that the Shared Prosperity Fund takes, the 3-SET may have a role in preparing the ground for such a support platform and in exploring alternative delivery models for the sector, such as establishing consortia to apply and deliver the replacement funding. Furthermore, it is very likely that future strategic investment will be aligned with the regional framework developed in Wales, as well as the City/Growth Deals. Therefore, any potential national platform will likely require a degree of subsidiarity and a regional operation.

5.54 Moreover, highlighting the benefits and value of the Welsh third sector as a deliverer of strategic funding amongst policymakers in Westminster and Whitehall also emerges as a key, accompanying challenge. It is unlikely that individual organisations will have the capacity to engage with these policy structures whilst being preoccupied with the operational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 3-SET policy engagement therefore increases in value and importance as the replacement funding is developed.

### *Structure*

5.55 The data suggests that there will be a need and demand for a similar support platform providing technical assistance akin to the 3-SET after the end of European funding. The exact form and structure of this platform should be designed with the support needs of the sector and the experience of the 3-SET in mind. It is likely that a platform will be most needed to support engagement with large, structural investment programmes that may replace European funding in the future. It's most valuable contribution will likely lie in a) supporting the third sector in accessing the funding, and b) continuing with the impactful technical assistance that has enabled the third sector to successfully apply, deliver and add value to strategic investment programmes.

5.56 However, access to the funds will be a key challenge for the third sector. A precursory challenge, therefore, will be to make the case for the Welsh third sector as deliverers of strategic investment, as well as to impress upon policymakers the need to design any funding structures with the Welsh third sector and its capacity and needs in mind.

## **Recommendations**

5.57 **Recommendation 1:** The data suggested that organisations primarily engage with the 3-SET as a result of previous experience or of word of mouth. However, the data also suggests that some organisations that did not engage with the 3-SET were not aware of the service. There is the possibility that promotion of the service could be more effective in engaging those who are not aware of the service. Whether or not the resource available justifies a significant effort to review and reform practices at this stage of the 3-SET's lifespan will likely require further research and consideration. The 3-SET should consider exploring the feasibility and possible methods of promoting the service more effectively.

- 5.58 **Recommendation 2:** Although relationships with the local authorities were the most common to be established, organisations (nonetheless) expressed a desire for more links to be developed with councils. Relationships were most commonly brokered through the 3-SET network and events or as a result of collaboration through delivery. The 3-SET should explore opportunities to bring organisations into contact with local authorities more frequently. This may be considered alongside Recommendations 3 and 4, as well as any efforts to scope the potential for consortia bidding for funding in the future.
- 5.59 **Recommendation 3:** Organisations expressed a desire to engage with partners outside of the third sector, and to engage in more collaborative work in the future. In exploring possibilities of consortia bidding, and in combination with Recommendations 2 and 4, the 3-SET should explore opportunities to involve partners from outside of the sector. This may be pursued at the scoping stage associated with exploring and developing consortium bids, and by drawing on the wider networks of stakeholders that local authorities have.
- 5.60 **Recommendation 4:** Some beneficiaries identified future funding opportunities such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, as well as a desire to engage in collaboration with other organisations, or even to create consortia through which to deliver larger-scale projects. Much depends on the form, criteria and accessibility of any replacement funding programmes. However, to support future planning and sustainability within the sector, the 3-SET should consider exploring and beginning the preliminary work of scoping and bringing potential partners together to collaborate on bids for funding. The 3-SET may wish to involve partners from outside of the sector to strengthen and add value to future bids. See also Recommendations 2 and 3.
- 5.61 **Recommendation 5:** There is a widespread perception that the 3-SET has the capacity to support more organisations, particularly through training events, were it not limited to supporting ESIF-funded projects. There may be a justification, however, given the team's engagement to date with the development of replacement funding, that supporting organisations in adapting to Brexit and the replacement structures both satisfies the 3-SET's objectives and widens the organisations to whom the support relates. The 3-SET should explore ways in which its work in relation to replacement funding can be of benefit to organisations beyond those in receipt of this round of ESIF funding.

- 5.62 **Recommendation 6:** There is the risk that third sector organisations have not had the opportunity or capacity, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to move as quickly or as far in preparing for the end of European funding. It is likely, therefore, that organisations will require additional support in order to move quickly towards a more sustainable position when funding comes to an end. The 3-SET should seek to assess the progress made within the sector in preparing for the end of European funding, as well as the additional support needs that organisations may now have.
- 5.63 **Recommendation 7:** Whilst the 3-SET has encouraged third sector organisations to present evidence and engage with formal policy forums and structures, their capacity to do so whilst engaging with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic has likely been diminished. The value and importance of the 3-SET's policy engagement have likely increased as a result of this. Moreover, the perception that UK policy can be developed 'on a whim' or without reference to formal submissions of evidence, if accurate, suggests that the efforts to raise awareness of the value that the Welsh third sector adds to the delivery of strategic investment become more important. The 3-SET should consider viewing the promotion of the Welsh third sector, its needs and requirements, its capacity to deliver projects related to strategic investment programmes, and the added value and reach that it offers as a priority for its remaining years. The emerging replacement funding structures should be considered a priority 'target' for this promotion, and securing access to the funding for the Welsh third sector should be a measure of success.
- 5.64 **Recommendation 8:** There is a widespread view that a platform similar to the 3-SET, offering technical assistance and promoting the Welsh third sector, will be required in the future, particularly in the context of large strategic investment structures. Depending on the form that structures such as the Shared Prosperity Fund take, the 3-SET should consider its role in preparing the ground for such a support platform. This may involve identifying the training and guidance support likely to be needed; brokering relationships that may lead to applications (see Recommendations 2, 3 and 4); identifying ways in which the expertise and experience of the 3-SET can be made accessible in the future; and exploring alternative delivery models for the sector, such as establishing consortia and/or fostering collaboration.

5.65 **Recommendation 9:** As noted, there is a widespread view that a platform offering technical assistance and promoting the Welsh third sector will be required in the future. The Welsh Government, if seeking to develop such a platform, should consider the 3-SET and its expertise, experience, established reputation, success, and impact as a means of adding value to any new platform. Moreover, although wider considerations are at play, such as the regional dimension to economic and strategic planning, the rationale and design of the 3-SET, nonetheless, constitute a proven and effective model with which to deliver technical assistance and promote the sector.

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## Annexe A

**Table A.1: Full list of training events delivered or planned**

<b>Training Course</b>	<b>Number of Instances</b>
State Aid Training	2
Brexit – Implications for the Voluntary Sector in Wales	2
What is European Funding	2
Working Transnationally	1
Active Inclusion – What Is Supported Employment?	1
Measuring Soft Outcomes	4
Managing an EU Funded Project	4
Erasmus+	1
Financial Management of an EU Funded Project	4
PQASSO	1
Data Protection and Confidentiality	6
Engaging with your Target Audience	3
What is Transnational Funding?	1
Succession Planning	1
WEFO Workshop: CCTs and Monitoring & Evaluation	2
Ireland Wales Programme	1
Introduction to Tendering	1
Cross Cutting Themes Online Course	5
Effective Engagement	2
Match Funding (Online)	2
An Introduction to ETC	1
Data Collection and Integrity for Active Inclusion Projects	1
Project Closure (Welsh)	3
Writing a Successful Fundraising Strategy	0
Introduction to Procurement (Webinar)	1
Introduction to Procurement (Online)	1
EU Funding and the Third Sector: Past Successes and Present Opportunities	0
What Can SGBF Do for You?	0
How to Write an Evaluation Specification	0
How to Put a Budget Together for your EU Funded Project (Online)	4
Marketing your European Funded Project	0
Audit for Active Inclusion Projects	1
Introduction to Horizon 2020	0
Safeguarding your Project Participants and Volunteers	1
Managing an Active Inclusion Fund Project	7
The Future of Regional Policy Post Brexit	1
WEFO CCTs Webinar	1

<b>Training Course</b>	<b>Number of Instances</b>
Introduction to the GDPR	0
Introduction to Interreg NWE	1
Data Protection and GDPR for STEM Cymru (Bespoke)	1
GDPR for EU Funded Projects	3
Managing an ESF Project	5
Introduction to the European Solidarity Corps	1
Measuring Positive Outcomes	3
Managing an ESF Project – Bespoke for WCFDP	1
Introduction to Safeguarding for AIF Staff Members	1
Cross Cutting Themes – Bespoke for Aneurin Leisure	1
Cross Cutting Themes – Bespoke for Bridges into Work	1
AIF Information Sessions	4
Disability Confident Scheme	1
Kickstart Webinar	1
EUSS Webinar	2
Data Cymru Webinar	1
Digital Communities Wales Webinar	1
Facilitating Online	3
Income Generation Health Checks	1

## Annexe B

### Discussion Guide

1. Please introduce yourself and your role
2. What **involvement**, if any, have you / your organisation had with ESF/ERDF funding in Wales since 2014?
  - a. *We are a lead sponsor or a joint sponsor for an ESF/ERDF project that has been approved by WEFO*
  - b. *We are delivering a service / activity that is funded by a ESF/ERDF – who are you delivering for? [3-SET are not allowed to support RDP]*
  - c. *We have considered/are considering an application for funding through ESF/ERDF*
  - d. *We are delivering activity through another source of European Funding (e.g. RDP, Erasmus, Ireland Wales, Horizon2020 etc)*
  - e. *Other (please specify)*

### Engaging with 3-SET

3. **How did you become aware** of the services that could be provided by 3-SET?
  - a. *WCVA Website (including 3-SET webpage)*
  - b. *WCVA mailing list/newsletter (including 3-SET newsletter/funding bulletin)*
  - c. *Contact at an event (please provide detail)*
  - d. *Other mailing list/newsletter (please provide detail)*
  - e. *Word of mouth/previous experience*
  - f. *Referral (please provide detail)*
  - g. *Other*
4. **Why did you engage** with 3-SET and how easy/difficult was it?
  - a. *Were you considering getting involved in ESF/ERDF funding?*
  - b. *Were you preparing the application for funding / business plan?*
  - c. *Were you setting-up the project (designing management procedures, etc.)?*
  - d. *Were you delivering a project?*
  - e. *Were you closing down the project?*
  - f. *Something else?*
5. What 3-SET support/services have you **engaged with or used**? (Tick all that apply)
  - a. *The general advice and or guidance available from a member of the 3-SET team at WCVA*
  - b. *Training courses (online)*
  - c. *Training courses (face-to-face)*
  - d. *Networks (3-SET)*
  - e. *Information and awareness raising events hosted by 3-SET*
  - f. *Information about ESF/ERDF funding provided on the WCVA website*
  - g. *The monthly 3-SET newsletter or regular funding updates*

*h. Other (please specify...)*

## **Impact**

6. What **impact** has the support had upon you or your organisation?
  - a. Have you made any changes as a result of the support?*
  - b. How long-lasting are these changes?*
  
7. Thinking about the support you've received from 3-SET, on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very substantially), how **much did you and/or your organisation benefit** from the contact that you have had with 3-SET?
  - a. You personally?
  - b. Your organisation?
  
8. How effectively have 3-SET helped you and your organisation to **prepare for the future and long-term**?
  - a. What specific actions have been most important?*
  
9. How does 3-SET support the delivery of the **Cross Cutting Themes**?
  
10. In your experience, **to what extent** has 3-SET;
  - a. Successfully encouraged third sector organisations to apply for Structural Funds when they otherwise might not have?*
  - b. Provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations to successfully apply for Structural Funds?*
  - c. Provided clear and effective guidance that has supported third sector organisations to successfully deliver Structural fund projects?*
  - d. Facilitated networking and collaboration in the third sector?*
  - e. Successfully brokered relationships between the third sector, WEFO, regional partners and/or local authorities?*

## **General and wider considerations**

11. Is there something that you feel has been **missing from what 3-SET** has been offering or **anything else** you would like to see in terms of support in the future?
  
12. Have you accessed **any other services or support** other than 3-SET, in relation to becoming involved in ESF/ERDF since 2014?
  - a. If Yes, what support?
  - b. How well do 3-SET activities and support fit and/or compare with these?

## **The Future**

13. What are the **challenges** facing your organisation? (*Please consider challenges in delivering publicly funded projects; securing support and training; any other challenges*)
  - a. Over the next 6-18 months?*
  - b. In the longer term, beyond 12/18 months?*

What **elements of the 3-SET** support will you need in the future?

c. *Over the next 6-18 months?*

14. What **other support** do you feel you will need?

d. *Over the next 6-18 months?*

e. *In the longer term, beyond 12/18 months?*

15. What other **lessons can be learned** from the 3-SET's experience?

f. *What lessons from this type of **structure**?*

g. *What lessons from this type of **support**?*

h. *Thinking about the current public health measures in response to **Covid-19**, is there learning that should be considered in future?*

i. *Thinking of public policy in the future, what role does, should or could the third sector play – and what support will likely be required to do so?*

16. Will a need / justification exist in the future for any **continuation of (some form of) the 3-SET** project?

j. *To support the sector generally?*

k. *To support the delivery of Shared Prosperity Fund or any other Welsh or UK Government strategic objectives?*

17. Do you have anything to add on an issue we've discussed or would you like to raise an issue we have not discussed?

**Thank you for your time**