

Skills Third Sector

A Framework for a Voluntary Sector National Skills Strategy 2011-2014

Consultation

1. Children England welcomes the decision of Skills Third Sector to undertake a consultation into the framework for a voluntary sector national skills strategy. It is vital to the voluntary sector that a national skills strategy can provide the framework to support a skilled workforce in the voluntary sector. It is vital that a national skills strategy can equip staff and volunteers with the skills and knowledge that are needed to undertake their role. Particularly in an environment of changing and rising demands and the need for the training and development of the workforce to be done at a low cost, cost effective, and cost neutral.
2. As the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary sector, Children England is in a unique position to represent charities that work with children, young people and families. Our members include the largest children's charities in the country through to small local groups. Our mission is to create a fairer world for children, young people and families by championing the voluntary organisations which work on their behalf. The role of the voluntary and community sector in the workforce is vital not only in directly providing and supporting social workers, but in ensuring that children and families are safe, supported and enabled to thrive.
3. This short submission does not attempt to cover each aspect of Children England's concern in relation to the National Skills strategy. Rather it sets out some of the key themes that we believe must be addressed, and we would urge the Skills Third Sector to consider these issues as part of their consultation into the National Skills strategy.
4. Children England would be very happy to assist with any further questions. We would also be willing to help Third Skills Sector to engage with the children, young people and family's voluntary sector.

5. The voluntary and community is sector is a varied sector with several challenging and rewarding careers. Careers in the sector often require and have a variety that demands aptness of response, understanding and strong communication skills. As such, the sector needs to attract and retain people with many different backgrounds - from the new graduate to mature and experienced people moving from different fields.

6. The quality of training and learning opportunities needs to be measured to ensure it is reaching standards, but at the same time needs flexibility to meet particular individual, organisational, regional, and national needs. The delivery of training and training packages needs to be consistent throughout the country. Training should be quality assured by one agency.

7. Qualifications are important in terms of ensuring standards in the workforce, but these need to be delivered in such a way that allows the maximum number of committed individuals and organisations to access them. However, given the nature of the workforce it is about the accumulation of accredited learning.

8. Flexibility thus has to be a crucial issue not only to attract a wide range of people with a range of skills and experience, but to ensure that in this current climate of contracting and reduced funding the maximum amount of people see the voluntary and community sector as a viable and flexible option as a long-term career. This however, should not undermine the need for highly skilled, well qualified applicants nor add greater confusion to the myriad of qualifications.

9. The skills have to be tied into user need and quality delivery of services. It is essential that they are achievable in terms of resources, commitment, energy, and available finance.

10. Core revenue would be required particularly with ongoing activity & costs such as salaries. Options might include:
 - i Grant funding;
 - i Fully-funded programmes;
 - i Recovering your full costs from projects and contract income;
 - i Earning unrestricted funding;
 - i Contracting with the public sector; and
 - i Social Enterprises.

- 11.** Any national frameworks or models that are to be developed should allow for regional variation and digression. As a proxy to this a national framework should help specifically in developing and retaining staff. This is also about flexibility to meet the needs of employers. There have always been challenges of the quality and consistency of training that is offered, and those qualifications that are recognised and valued across the workforce.
- 12.** A statement of collaboration could be signed by key partners / agencies to ensure integrated working within the strategy and that best practice is shared. There also needs to be simple and equitable access to funding for training
- 13.** The flipside to developing a national skills strategy is that a national framework may mean more pay - who will find the increase? An improvement in the consistency of standards and effective methods to up skill and equip the workforce with the vital skill set needed to produce positive outcomes for children and young people will increase competition for places across the workforce. There would need to be the ability to reward staff properly in the voluntary and community workforce. We cannot have good services for children on the cheap. As having established a national skills strategy we need to be able to ensure that the sector is able to retain and recruit. Wheter or not this is something the Skills Third-Sector would be able to influence on is another question.
- 14.** There is a wealth of advice, learning, expertise, training, and resources in the sector on which you can pool together but how will you know which are the most reliable and effective? Which have already been tried and tested? Some examples include:
- i Championing;
 - i Creating standards;
 - i Succession planning;
 - i Placements;
 - i National framework;
 - i Networks

There is potential for an opportunity for partnership with Children England and its members.

- 15.** Workforce intelligence - Reliable information about the workforce is crucial to all those who need to understand and shape the provision of the children's and young people's workforce in the voluntary and community sector. Robust, resilient and

accessible systems for workforce data collection would need to be developed similar to the Skills for Care models - NMDS-SC and LeaRNS. The workforce intelligence needs to be valuable and relevant for partners and to reflect the changing voluntary and community sector. This would mean that STS would have to work with the strategic sector bodies and other interested parties to secure their enduring commitment to a system for workforce data collection.

16. Continuous engagement with frontline partners to provide support and to ensure comprehensive, high quality workforce data is collected. This workforce intelligence will be vital in informing evidence-based workforce planning, policy-making and investment decisions throughout the children and young people's workforce.

17. Therefore there needs to be integrated workforce planning and voluntary sector service quality and choice. At the present time the understanding of the demographics of the voluntary and community sector workforce population is inadequate and there is no supply model. This means that at this moment in time it is difficult to ensure adequate training capacity and workforce planning in a national skills strategy. The question remains whether this will be fully achieved?

18. We can, however, co-ordinate effective flexible delivery mechanisms in partnership with other organisations which could include:

- Cross-agency working;
- Backfill;
- Brokerage re: placements;
- Confidence;
- Basic's and aspirational; and
- Maximise funding opportunities.

19. To invest and develop skills in the four priority areas highlighted by STS certain skills are needed and include:

Governance

- the need to be able to distinguish between governance and management;
- maintaining proper accountability;
- Integrating the following 4 areas: strategic thinking, policy formulation, accountability, and oversight of management;
- and
- ensuring accountability and monitoring and evaluating performance.

Leadership

- co-create a purpose, vision, mission, set of core values and policy framework which enable a positive, vibrant, high quality learning environment and foster an open, responsible, sharing culture;
- able to driving the organisation forward while exercising prudent control; and
- raise standards through setting strategic direction.

Skills for business

- Leadership skills;
- Strategic Business Planning skills;
- Marketing skills;
- Sales and Customer Relationships skills;
- Communication skills;
- People Management and HR; and
- Finance and Accounting skills.

Managing volunteers

- able to develop and evaluate strategies and policies that support volunteering;
- Promote volunteering;
- Recruit and induct volunteers;
- Able to manage and develop volunteers;
- Manage yourself, your relationships and your responsibilities; and
- Provide management support for volunteering programmes.

Measuring effectiveness and impact

- Carrying out a survey using a questionnaire;
- Using routinely collected information;
- Gathering people's experiences;
- Using a reflective diary – capturing practitioners' experience;
- Producing photographs and videos as evidence;
- Measuring cost effectiveness/benefits assessing; reflecting, measuring and counting;
- Planning, decision making, and analysing; and
- Motivating and Communicating.

- 20.** We should focus on the essential especially what is legally required, what is the absolute minimum that is essential to undertake a specific task or role. Lack of resources both physical and financially mean that many organisations both small and large are often stretched. Clear and defined skills sets with legal requirements will enable any organisations to feel confident in delivering and sharing good and best practice. Ensure capacity is available to support the small organisations.
- 21.** Ongoing career development is highly important. The quality of supervision, support, leadership and management that someone in the workforce has after their initial training and throughout their careers underpins the development of their skills. Allowing the development of leaders and allowing for succession planning.
- 22.** Making routes into the profession flexible, yet ensuring consistent practice across the country needs to be mirrored with greater promotion by the relevant bodies. It is not enough to improve the clarity of entry routes into the profession for those already interested; to be part of the voluntary and community sector workforce and to develop a career the ways into it need greater promotion from the outset.
- 23.** Entry routes to the variety of careers in the sector need to be flexible but without compromising the status of the profession to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change. A framework needs to encourage both recruitment and retention.
- 24.** A National Skills Strategy needs to meet community needs and needs to participate more fully in society. The skills identified have to be linked to accredited and funded workforce development (learning and development opportunities) which need to be 'blended' to optimise take up across such a varied sector. Skills development proposals have to be costed and the funds allocated and available to these. Operationally, consideration also needs to be given to who would co-ordinate the work (i.e. infrastructure organisations) given that Skills Third-Sector is the strategic arm.

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