Viewfinder 10

In August 2011 the *Viewfinder 10* questionnaire was circulated to 930 NICVA member organisations generating a response rate of 38% (356 returns).

Key Findings

- Overall 58% of responding organisations have been affected by funding cuts in public expenditure.
    - For 75% of respondents whose funding had been affected, the cuts to their funding had been 20% or less.
    - For 23%, the cuts range between 21% and 60%.

- 84% of respondents currently work in collaboration with other organisations.

- The main factors motivating respondents to work collaboratively are:
    - To increase the ability to reach a wider group of service users (45%)
    - To improve service delivery (43%)
    - To access new areas of expertise (33%)
    - Increased ability to access further funding (31%)
    - To provide a better quality service (30%)

- Of those organisations working collaboratively, 77% aim to increase their current levels of collaboration.

- 46% of organisations that are not currently working collaboratively aim to so do over the coming year.

- Over the next 12 months, 55% of respondents expect staffing levels to remain unaffected.

- 17% expect to experience a decrease in staff numbers.

- In order to manage the impact of cuts in public sector funding, organisations have:
    - Examined other funding streams (48%)
    - Worked in collaboration with other organisations (34%)
    - Lobbied to keep funding (29%)
    - Increased the number of volunteers (21%)

- Just over half of respondents (53%) believe that the newly elected Northern Ireland Ministers do not have an understanding of the value of the sector.

This *Viewfinder* varies slightly from its normal format as it focuses specifically on two key themes; collaborative working and the impact of public sector cuts on the voluntary and community sector. The previous *Viewfinder* survey (September 2010) was conducted in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review and the announcement of the draft budget in December 2010 by the Northern Ireland Finance Minister. Therefore the impact of the spending cuts was still being anticipated.

This current survey was issued against an economic landscape in which cuts are beginning to take effect. For example, in September 2011 NICVA's CutsWatchNI project reported the impact of 33 public spending cuts in the voluntary and community sector, totalling over £2 million.

Collaborative working

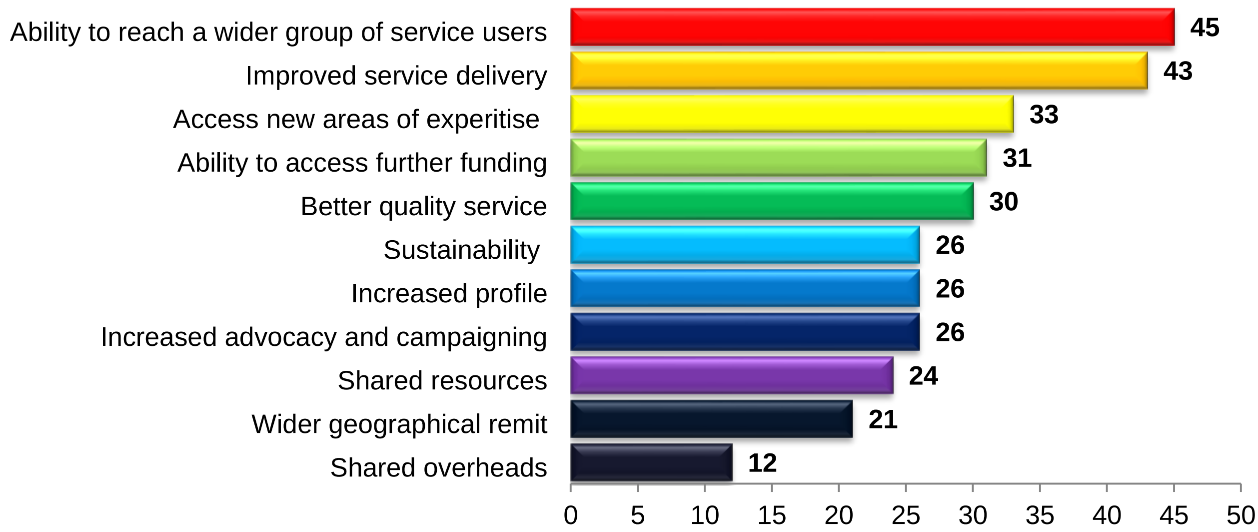
Collaborative working practices have been a theme of NICVA research over a number of years. In its Collaboration and Mergers Newsletter (2009), NICVA noted that organisations can work together in a range of ways, from the informal, as contract partners, to joint delivery of a service with a formal service level agreement to, finally, merger.

In *Viewfinder 8* (April 2008) NICVA reported that 91% of respondents believed it was essential that the voluntary and community sector works more collaboratively, and over three quarters of *Viewfinder 9* respondents (76.2%) thought that the sector should work more collaboratively. In terms of translating this view into practice, 84.7% of *Viewfinder 9*[1] respondents were collaborating with other organisations on projects, up from 80.2% in April 2008. This figure is consistent with the findings that 84% of respondents reported that they work in collaboration with other organisations.

Of those who are already working collaboratively, 77% aim to increase their current levels of collaboration, whilst 46% of organisations that are not currently working collaboratively, aim to so do over the coming year. The survey also found that there is a generally positive attitude towards collaborative working within the sector, with only 6% of respondents of the view that a focus on collaboration will have a negative effect.

[1] November 2010

Figure 1 Main reasons for working in collaboration (%)

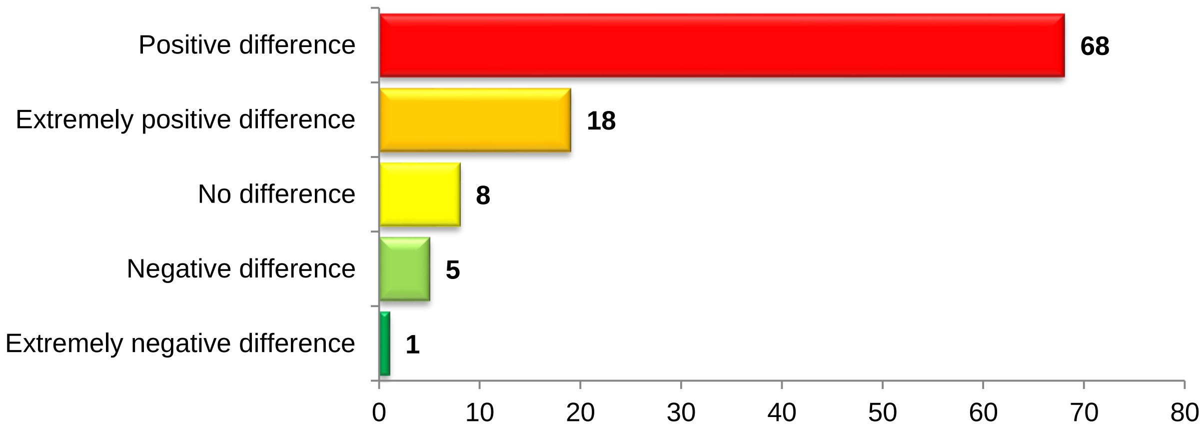


(Multiple response question)

From Figure 1 it is clear that there are many reasons for organisations to work in collaboration. The main factors motivating respondents to work collaboratively are to increase the ability to reach a wider group of service users (45%) and to improve service delivery (43%). Around a third of respondents indicated that key factors included access to new areas of expertise (33%), increased ability to access further funding (31%) and providing a better quality service (30%).

Interestingly sustainability (26%), increased advocacy and campaigning (26%), sharing resources (24%) and sharing overheads (12%), all of which might be seen as responses to difficult economic times, are amongst the least reported reasons for collaboration.

Figure 2 How will the current interest in collaboration impact the sector in the next five years?



When asked to consider the potential impact of collaboration on the sector, over the next five years, respondents were again very positive in their assessment with 86%

indicating that the impact would be either positive or very positive. 6% of respondent organisations viewed the potential impact as negative or very negative.

Table 1 Are you considering taking forward any of the following types of collaborative working in the next 12 months?

Types of collaborative working	Count	%
Networking	161	45
Joint fundraising or funding applications	119	33
Sharing training or best practice	112	31
Sharing staff or resources	74	21
Sharing premises	57	16
Formal partnership	59	17
Sharing back office services	35	10
Merger	12	3

(Multiple response question)

For almost half respondents (45%) the main type of collaborative work planned in the next year is networking, effectively building on the already existing formal and informal networks that have been evident in the voluntary and community sector for many years. 33% are planning joint fundraising or joint funding applications, which suggests a more formal collaborative approach than networking. Almost a third (31%) of respondents intend to share training and best practice with partner organisations in the same period. Sharing staff, resources or premises is being considered by around a fifth of responding organisations, whilst sharing back office services is under consideration by one in ten. A merger, the most formal type of collaboration, is being considered by 12 organisations (3%), down from 8.3% reported in Viewfinder 9.

Table 2 Are there any areas of collaborative working support that you or your organisation would benefit from in the next six months?

Types of support	Count	%
Career guidance for senior staff affected by change	81	23
Support through the legal process	74	21
One-to-one support for key staff and leaders	71	20
Facilitated discussions	73	20
Mentoring from individuals with experience of collaboration and mergers	70	20
Tailored training for senior staff and board members on collaborative working	71	20
One-day workshop on the practicalities of collaborative working	63	18
Networking with other organisations	59	17
Toolkits and advice	62	17

(Multiple response question)

Career guidance for senior staff affected by change (23%) and support through the legal process (21%) were the most popular types of support that organisations thought would be most beneficial. Overall there was a fairly consistent view from around a fifth of respondents that each of the types of support outlined would be beneficial.

Public sector cuts

Overall 58% of responding organisations have been affected by the cuts in public expenditure.

Table 3 Extent of funding cuts

Extent of funding cut	%	Extent of funding cut	%
1-10%	60	51-60%	4
11-20%	15	61-70%	1
21-30%	12	71-80%	0
31-40%	4	81-90%	1
41-50%	3	91-100%	1

(*Total greater than 100 due to rounding)

For 75% of respondents whose funding had been affected, the cuts to their funding had been 20% or less, whilst for 23% the cuts range between 21% and 60%. Clearly the indication from Table 3 is that the majority of cuts tend to be up to 10%.

Table 4 Do you expect your staff levels to increase or decrease over the next 12 months?

	Count	SOSVI %	SOSV %
Stay the same	189	55	26.6
Increase	59	17	54.8
Decrease	59	17	5.6
Don't know	36	11	13
Total	**343**	**100**	**100**

The anticipated impact of the funding cuts on staffing levels over the next 12 months is highlighted in Table 4. For over half of respondents (55%), staffing levels should remain unaffected over the forthcoming period, indicating that the majority of respondent organisations consider their current position to be fairly robust. This figure is a considerable increase to that reported in *State of the Sector V* (SOSV). Also 17% of respondents expected to see an increase in staffing levels over the next 12 months, a reduction from 54.8% in the previous survey. Conversely, 17% expect to experience a decrease in staff numbers, nearly three times higher than previously. Just over one in ten organisations was unsure of staffing levels in the coming year.

Table 5 What measures have you taken in your organisation to manage the impact of public sector cuts?

Measures taken	%
Examined other funding streams	48
Worked in collaboration with other organisations	34
Lobbied to keep funding	29
Increased number of volunteers	21
Reduced services	19
Reduced staff hours	15
Redundancies	10
Closed services	6
No measures to date	6
Reduction in service users	5
Considered or have undertaken a merger	5
Closed Organisation	0

(Multiple response question)

In order to manage the cuts in public expenditure, almost half of responding organisations have examined other funding streams, over a third have worked in collaboration with another organisation, and just under a third have lobbied to keep funding. Noteworthy is the fact that over one in five organisations intends to increase its number of volunteers. In terms of identifying the impact on the services delivered by organisations, the survey highlighted a reduction of services (19%), reduced staff hours (15%), redundancies (10%) and services closed (6%).

In addition to the impact of public sector cuts on funding, organisations were asked about the impact of the cuts on contracts. 16% of responding organisations have been affected by the cuts in public sector contracts.

Table 6 What measures have you taken in your organisation to manage the impact of cuts in public sector contracts?

Measures taken	%
Examined other funding streams	29
Lobbied to keep funding	19
Worked in collaboration with other organisations	17
Reduced services	14
Increased number of volunteers	13
Reduced staff hours	10
Redundancies	7
Reduction in service users	4
Closed services	3
No measures to date	3
Considered or have undertaken a merger	2
Closed organisation	0.3

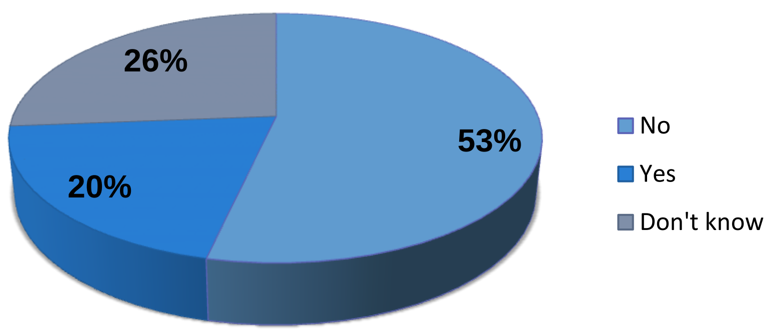
In order to manage the reduction in public sector contracts, almost one third of responding organisations have examined other funding streams, just under a fifth have lobbied to keep funding and 17% have worked in collaboration with other organisations. Again the increase in the use of volunteers is evident with 13% of organisations indicating their intention.

In terms of identifying the impact on the services delivered by organisations as a result of contract losses, the survey highlighted reduced staff hours (10%), redundancies (7%), a reduction of service users (4%) and services closed (3%). A further 3% have taken no measures at all to address the reduction in contracts whilst 2% have progressed towards a merger. One organisation closed as a result of the cuts in public sector contracts.

As a final question in the *Viewfinder* survey, respondents were asked if they believed that the newly elected Northern Ireland ministers have an understanding of the value of the voluntary and community sector.

Just over half (53%) believe they do not understand the value of the sector, with just over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicating that they do.

Figure 3 Do you believe that the newly elected NI ministers have an understanding of the value of the voluntary and community sector?



If you would like further information on any of the themes discussed in *Viewfinder 10*, please contact Stephen Bloomer or Ciaran Hughes at:

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NICVA would like to thank everyone who took part in this survey. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.