

Viewfinder 6



The sixth Viewfinder provides an examination of a wide range of issues that are currently affecting the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. This includes an examination of funding, including the new Peace III programme and the challenges of building full cost recovery into contracts. This survey also examined public opinion towards the Reform of Education.

Key findings

- **Funding** should be allocated entirely on objective need (according to 67.6% of respondents).
- There is very strong support for the principles set forward by NICVA to be included in the new **Peace III programme**.
- Approximately two-thirds (64.7%) of respondents do not believe that funders make it easy to build **Full Cost Recovery** into contracts.
- Almost seven out of ten respondents believe that ensuring **board members** have up to date skills is a difficult task (68.2% of respondents).
- The proposed **end to academic selection at age 11** is viewed to be a positive development (60.6% of respondents).
- Four out of ten respondents (42.6%) are aware of the existence of a **community support plan** in their area.
- Over half of respondents (58.1%) of respondents view the summer **parades** season to be part of the culture of Northern Ireland.

Show me the money

The issue of funding in the sector is never far from the spotlight. There is often much debate about how funding is

allocated. This has included accusations that funding is not allocated on a fair and equitable basis. *Viewfinder 6* asked respondents on what basis do they believe funding is allocated to voluntary and community groups in Northern Ireland. There was a diverse response from groups.

Table 1: How is funding allocated in Northern Ireland?

	%
Entirely on objective need	13.7
Mostly on objective need	26.1
Equally on objective need and religion	27.4
Mostly on religion	20.5
Entirely on religion	12.3

Table 1 reveals that approximately one-third of respondents (32.8%) believe religion is a determining factor in how funding is allocated in Northern Ireland.

More interestingly, when respondents were asked how funding should be allocated, a clear majority (67.6%) felt that it should be allocated entirely on objective need and a further 9% felt that funding should be allocated mostly on objective need. 5.9% of respondents felt that funding should be allocated equally on objective need and religion, whereas only a minority of individuals (17.5%) felt that funding should be allocated on

the basis of religion. This finding may be a reflection of the reality that objective need knows no religious barrier. Basing funding on objective need involves directing resources and efforts towards those individuals, groups and areas objectively defined as being in greatest need. This takes account of greatest need regardless of religion.

Funding announcements relevant to the sector can often be very important to the direction of the work of many in the sector. However 75.5% of *Viewfinder 6* respondents felt that there is often a stark difference between funding announcements and the funding which reaches the ground. This could relate to communication raising expectations. For instance, the report of the Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector, *Positive Steps* (2005), announced government's commitment to the sector. It states that the government will actively approach a longer-term focused approach to programmes. Since this announcement there has been some debate over what constitutes longer term funding to the sector.

Peace III: a new funding agenda?

The financial commitment for the Peace III programme as set out in the EU budget is €200 million for 2007–2013. In addition the two governments will contribute approximately €70 million over the seven year period. As the funding available is less than the previous Peace programmes it is important that lessons are learnt from the previous programmes.

NICVA felt it was very important to work with the sector to discuss the possible design and delivery of the Peace III programme. Through consultations, seminars, discussions and experience of engagement with the processes and structures of the preceding Peace programmes, NICVA has put forward a number of recommendations for the design and delivery of the new programme.

The *Viewfinder 6* survey examined attitudes towards the main principles put forward by NICVA on the new Peace III programme. The consultations conducted by NICVA have revealed a strong conviction in the sector that the new programme should focus on peace and reconciliation. *Viewfinder 6* also found this to be the case, with 87.3% of respondents believing that it is somewhat or very important that the new Peace III programme should focus on peace and reconciliation.

In order to learn lessons and make the most effective use of the Peace III programme, it is also important to look at the success of peace programmes in other countries. Such work has revealed that focusing programmes on the wider issues of conflict and citizenship can make real, positive and lasting differences. NICVA felt this is an important principle that should be included in the new Peace III programme. The *Viewfinder 6* survey found that 83.6% of respondents felt it was either somewhat or very important to take account of the more difficult issues arising from conflict. Furthermore an overwhelming majority of respondents (92.8%) felt that the promotion of citizenship through Peace III is either somewhat or very important.

Evidence gathered by NICVA indicated that it is important that Peace III should tackle social inclusion, poverty and inequality in areas affected by conflict. *Viewfinder 6* also found that the majority of respondents (83.6%) feel it is either somewhat or very important that these issues are included in Peace III. In addition 90.2% of respondents feel that it is important that Peace III should meet the needs of excluded young people at risk of exposure to violence.

Work carried out by NICVA also revealed a desire that social capital be built into the new Peace III programme. The *Viewfinder 6* survey found that building social capital into the new Peace III is viewed to be important by 90.2% of respondents.

Through the work carried out with NICVA, organisations recognised awareness that the Peace III programme is likely to be the last Peace programme and posed the question “*if government is serious about peace building are they willing to pay for it themselves?*” The *Viewfinder 6* survey provided an unequivocal response to this issue, with some 95.8% of respondents believing that Peace III should build in systems to mainstream funding once this programme is over.

Making the most of money: Full Cost Recovery

The term ‘sustainability’ is very much in vogue in the voluntary and community sector. Funders increasingly demand organisations in the sector to demonstrate how funding is spent in an efficient and effective manner. Historically the sector has found it difficult to build in overhead costs into

funding applications. Failure to build in overhead costs leaves many organisations in the sector facing financial problems that brought into question their future sustainability. A solution to this problem was put forward in the form of full cost recovery (FCR). Under FCR, organisations in the sector and funders must ensure that contracts can reflect full costs for delivering the programme, including overhead costs.

In the *Positive Steps* report (2005), the government recognised that in order for the sector to operate effectively it should be able to include full overhead costs related to delivering contracted services. However, government placed the responsibility of ensuring that full overhead costs are included in any contracts on voluntary and community organisations to ensure full overhead costs are included in any contracts.

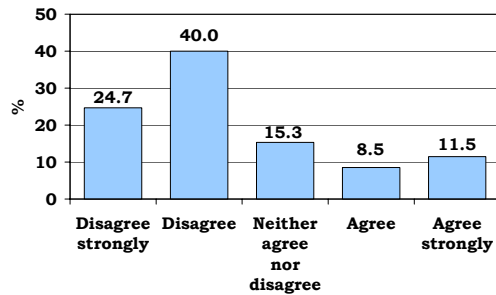
The *Viewfinder 6* survey examined the reality of FCR in the sector today. Interestingly over half (51.7%) of respondents were of the opinion that funders do not recognise the importance of FCR and 21.3% of respondents did not hold an opinion on the matter. 27% believe that funders recognise the importance of FCR.

This survey found that just over half (52.6%) of respondents know how to build FCR into funding applications. This leaves much scope for the development of skills on FCR in the sector.

The *Positive Steps* report clearly states that the sector should be able to build FCR into contract applications, however as yet this does not appear to be the case for many working in the sector. Figure 1

examines how *Viewfinder 6* respondents feel about this issue.

Figure 1: Funders make it easy to build FCR into funding applications



Only 20% of *Viewfinder 6* respondents believe that funders make it easy to build FCR into funding applications, whereas approximately two-thirds (64.7%) of respondents are of the opinion that funders do not make it easy. This survey also found that only 36.6% of respondents always build FCR into their applications.

FCR has the potential to increase the sustainability of many organisations in the sector. To date, only 39% of respondents believe that the use of FCR has had a very positive impact on their organisation.

Viewfinder 6 has indicated that to date the widespread use of FCR has not been fully embraced by the sector or by funders. The *Positive Steps* report has clearly outlined that both funders and the sector should build FCR into all contract negotiations. There is a responsibility now on the sector to work to include FCR in any future funding applications.

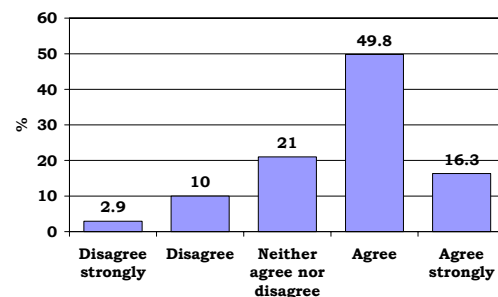
Those who lead us forward

Voluntary management committees are at the heart of the voluntary and

community sector in Northern Ireland. The term used to describe the governing body can vary depending on the organisation. Variations include the Management Committee, Board of Trustees, Board of Directors, Board of Governors, Governance Board, Council of Management, Executive Committee and the Board. For the purpose of *Viewfinder 6* the voluntary management committee was referred to as the ‘board’. Boards are made up of individuals who commit their energy and time, voluntarily, to ensure that the organisation they represent is given a sound foundation from which to develop and serve the community or individuals it intends to help.

Viewfinder 6 revealed that 79.7% of respondents feel it is important to incorporate the skills development of board members into the strategic planning process of the organisation. Ensuring a diverse balance of skills on a board is viewed to be essential to ensure that the board is always in a position to assist the organisation to progress. *Viewfinder 6* sought to examine attitudes towards the balance skills that exist on boards in the sector.

Figure 2: There is a good balance of skills on our board



As shown in Figure 2 approximately two-thirds of respondents (66.1%) feel there is a good balance of skills on their board. Only a minority (12.9%) of

respondents feel there is not a good balance of skills on their board. However one-fifth (21%) of respondents do not hold an opinion on the matter.

The *Viewfinder 6* survey found that 68.2% of respondents believe that ensuring board members have up to date skills on their board is a difficult challenge. Board members give their time voluntarily and often have many other commitments. For this reason they may not always be available for training. In only four out of every ten organisations which responded to this survey (40.9%), had board members taken part in training in the last year.

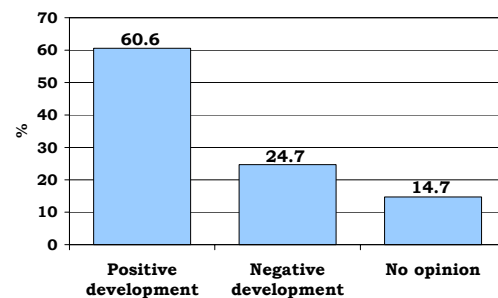
The most common reason given for board members not taking part in training is time constraints. Other reasons given for board members not taking part in training include a difficulty to source training and a lack of resources.

A better education for all children?

The 1947 Education Act for Northern Ireland made provision for academic selection at age 11. At this time academic selection was viewed as an excellent way to meet the needs of the economy. However research has shown that the experience of fifty years of this form of schooling in Northern Ireland, has benefited one social group over another. Over half of *Viewfinder 6* respondents (54.3%) believe that the 11+ selection system systematically failed children from disadvantaged backgrounds, however 24.3% of respondents do not believe this to be the case.

There has been much discussion about the reform of education in Northern Ireland, put forward by the Draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order (2006). This includes the proposed end to academic selection at age 11.

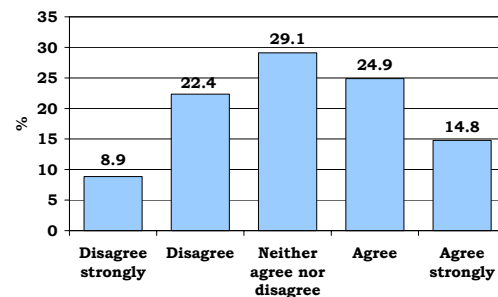
Figure 3: Opinion to the proposed end to academic selection at age 11



Almost two-thirds of all *Viewfinder 6* respondents (60.6%) believe the proposed end to academic selection at age 11 to be a positive development, with 24.7% of respondents viewing it to be a negative development.

The future of grammar schools has been one of the areas of contention with regard to the proposed reform of education. *Viewfinder 6* examined this issue.

Figure 4: The proposed changes to the education system threatens to destroy the future of grammar schools



There was a mixed response and this

may be a reflection of a feeling of uncertainty around the changes to come. However it is important to note that nothing in the draft Order challenges the future of grammar schools. They will play an important part with secondary schools and further education colleges in broadening choice for all children in both academic and vocational subjects.

The reform of education will bring with it far reaching changes to all aspects of the education system. *Viewfinder 6* respondents were questioned about how easy the proposed changes to the education are to understand. Approximately one quarter of respondents (24.2%) felt that the proposed changes are easy to understand, however 31.9% of respondents did not think they were easy to understand and a further 43.9% of respondents did not hold an opinion on the matter.

Working together: community support plans

The concept of ‘working together’ at the local council level has become increasingly ‘in vogue’. In recognition of the vital role voluntary and community organisations play in Northern Ireland community support plans have been set up in each of the council areas. These plans have their origins in the review of the district councils’ community services programme that was undertaken by the Department for Social Development (DSD) in 2000. The purposes of these plans are to enable groups to express their needs and for councils to support them. *Viewfinder 6* found that 42.6% of respondents were aware of a community support plan in their area; of the respondents who were aware of the

community support plan, 40.9% of individuals stated their organisation had been involved in the development of the community support plan.

Viewfinder 6 also found that 41% of respondents are involved in formal structures or partnerships to implement their community support plan. The Review of Public Administration (RPA) will bring about a number of changes to councils in Northern Ireland, including the introduction of community planning. This is designed to place local government, with the sector and other relevant stakeholders, at the heart of local decision-making. This will require closer working relationships between the sector and councils. Work is currently being carried out by NICVA to examine what the sector can do to prepare itself to work in this new environment.

Taking to the highway in the summer

Parades have been a feature of Northern Ireland since the 18th Century, and for many are viewed as a means of commemorating and celebrating key historical events. However following the well documented disputes around a number of parades in the mid-1990s, there was recognition of the need to ensure better management of parades that are viewed to be ‘controversial’. Since this time there has been a lot of work done with key stakeholders around the issue of parades. This can be coupled with changes in the wider environment in Northern Ireland, as we embrace a more ‘normalised’ society. It has been argued that there is somewhat of a correlation between these changes and the decline in ‘controversy’ associated with certain parades in Northern Ireland.

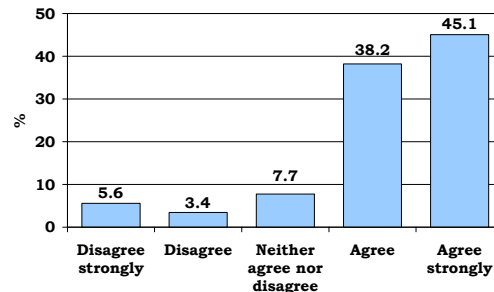
Viewfinder 6 was administered at the beginning of the summer of 2006, and it sought to examine respondents' perception of parading.

Over half of *Viewfinder 6* respondents (58.1%) view summer parades to be a part of the culture of Northern Ireland, whereas only 20% of respondents do not feel this is the case. A further 21.9% of respondents did not hold an opinion on the matter.

Community relations work in Northern Ireland has aimed to improve the perception of parades, to be something that can be viewed as inclusive to the whole community. *Viewfinder 6* found something of a split in opinion on whether this is the case. Overall 32.1% of respondents believe this work had improved the perception of parades, on the other hand 38% of respondents do not believe this to be the case and 29.9% of respondents do not hold an opinion on the matter.

Viewfinder 6 also asked respondents if they view the summer marching season as a contentious issue.

Figure 5: The summer marching season remains a contentious issue



The overwhelming majority of *Viewfinder 6* respondents (83.3%) felt at that time that the summer marching season was a contentious issue. It is important to be aware that this questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the summer marching season. This may have influenced how people answered this question.

However as we come to the end of the summer we can now look back on one of the most peaceful summer parade seasons. Community work on the ground between the two communities has a big part to play in ensuring a peaceful marching season. It is a sign of how far we have come in the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland. Without the work that goes on behind the scenes, much of the recent advances would not have been possible.

The *Viewfinder 6* survey was circulated to 881 NICVA members in June 2006 and there was a 27.2% response rate. If you would like further information about the survey or how to include questions in future *Viewfinders* contact Leann Brady as follows:

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

