

**Evaluation of Charities Evaluation Services'
National Outcomes Programme 2006 - 2009:
Executive Summary**

Services for life

Executive Summary

Background

1. In 2002, Charities Evaluation Services (CES) designed the National Outcomes Dissemination Programme which aimed to increase the ability of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in England to set and monitor the changes, benefits or learning resulting from their work. With funding from the Community Fund (later Big Lottery Fund), CES delivered the programme during 2003-2006. This first programme was the subject of a very positive independent evaluation by Professor Rob Paton's team at the Open University Business School. A briefing on the evaluation is available from CES.
2. CES received further funding to run a second phase, the National Outcomes Programme (NOP), for three years. This began with a six month development phase in July 2006. This second phase builds on the success of the first phase and extends its focus to address the need for sustainability of the outcomes approach in the voluntary and community sector (VCS).
3. The National Outcomes Programme aimed to recruit and train a minimum of 80 Outcomes Champions from all English regions. Each Champion would then 'cascade' the training and support to at least ten frontline VCOs within their networks. The National Outcomes Programme therefore aimed to cascade training to at least 800 VCOs in total.
4. As well as increasing the pool of skilled Champions, the second phase aimed to retain a number of Champions from the National Outcomes Dissemination Programme to act as Superchamps. The second phase also made available shortened one and half day courses to reach a broader range of VCOs.
5. The National Outcomes Programme aimed:
 - To embed sources of sustainable support on outcomes monitoring within VCS generic and specialist infrastructure organisations, and to maintain them as a legacy which would endure beyond the life of the programme.
 - To enable VCOs to use an outcomes focus to an appropriate level in order to be needs-led and user-centred, thus being more effective in what they do.
 - To increase the awareness of Government, policy makers, regulators and the wider VCS concerning the practical application of outcomes monitoring, and the role of infrastructure in meeting VCOs' support needs on outcomes.

Methods of this evaluation by Tribal

6. The overarching purpose of the evaluation was to describe the NOP from the experience of key stakeholders and assess its outputs and outcomes. A range of methods were used including reviews of Champion recruitment and training materials, programme summaries and schedules and survey data from programme beneficiaries.
7. A majority of the evaluation data was collected through stakeholder interviews with CES staff, Champions, VCOs that had been trained, and with the host organisations of Champions. A series of semi structured topic guides were developed for each stakeholder group.

8. In addition to interview data the evaluation team was supplied with quantitative survey data gathered at two key stages for both Champions that received training from CES and the VCOs that received the training from the Champions.

Key Achievements

9. The evaluation identified a range of achievements of the NOP. The key achievements are listed below.

Recruitment to the NOP

- The recruitment target of 80 new Champions was exceeded with a total recruitment of 93. In addition, 12 'Superchamps' (i.e. Champions involved in the first programme from 2003-6) remained active throughout this second programme.
- The attrition rate amongst Champions was low, with 81 projected to complete the programme successfully.
- The programme successfully attracted Champions from a diverse range of organisations with good geographical coverage.

Training and other resources delivered to Champions by CES

- Champions rated the training that they received from CES very highly.
- All Champions interviewed considered the NOP Manual produced for them by CES to be a highly valued resource.
- Pre and post Champions' training data captured show after completion of the training:
 - Significant increases in understanding of outcomes (a shift from 60% before the training to 100% stating their understanding as good or very good).
 - A significant shift in the numbers of Champions using an outcomes approach within their own organisation (from 48.9% before the training to 79.5% after).
 - Significant increases in confidence in understanding what information is needed to demonstrate outcomes, how to decide a process for collecting information, how and when to use outcomes within their organisation and how to express outcomes in ways that stakeholders and partners can understand.
 - Positive shifts in responses to questions about attitudes towards outcomes.

Training delivered to frontline VCOs by Champions

- Most Champions did not report significant difficulties recruiting frontline VCOs to courses, and in some cases courses were over subscribed.
- The training target for the twelve Superchamps remaining active throughout the programme was to cascade the training to 192 VCOs. At April 2009 the running total of VCOs trained was 178 – very close to the projected target.

- In addition to the training target, Superchamps delivered a short course to a total of 295 individuals.
- The training target for new Champions was to deliver a two day training course to a minimum of ten VCOs with an overall programme target of 800 VCOs trained. Responses to date from 51 of the 81 Champions shows 552 organisations have been trained. Providing responses from the remaining Champions show comparable numbers, the NOP will meet or exceed this target.
- Superchamps have validated improvements to the training manual. Both Superchamps and new Champions successfully implemented the short course and follow-up support was provided to over one third of VCOs. There is evidence of Superchamps providing extended follow-up support.

Support to Champions from CES

- Champions valued the support they received from the NOP team.
- The CES learning and networking events were considered valuable.

Embedding an outcomes approach

- Champions have used their learning to implement an outcomes approach within their own organisations. Some were at an early stage and starting to use the outcomes triangle, and disseminating learning across their organisations. Others had developed the approach further and changed monitoring systems and operational frameworks (such as supervision and project management systems), reviewed strategic aims, operational policy and altered the focus of annual reports.
- Champions reported that learning from the programme had helped to develop relationships with their own funders. They reported *“more confidence”* and that the knowledge they had gained had *“helped access grants”*. One Champion is advising a funding body on how to incorporate the outcomes approach into their tender documents. A sense of partnership learning and development is evident in these approaches. Another reported that the training *“has helped open a door into statutory sector funding. CES have a good profile in this area which has really helped.”*
- Both Champions and VCOs provided examples of how VCOs taking part in the programme had begun to use their learning to implement an outcomes focus within their own organisations. Most were at an early stage of implementation but some had begun to see the benefits which included improved relationships with funders. VCOs were optimistic about the way that an outcomes approach would continue to develop within their own organisations.

VCO perspectives

- VCOs consistently reported that they had had very positive experiences of the training provide by Champions trained by CES.
- Pre and post VCO training data captured show after completion of the training:
 - Increase in knowledge of outcomes (shift from 59.3% to 72.8% stating their knowledge as “a lot” or “a fair bit”).

- Very significant increases in understanding of outcomes (shift from 16.4% before the training to 94.5% stating their understanding as “good” or “very good”).
- A significant shift in the numbers of VCOs using an outcomes approach within their own organisation (from 34.5% before the training to 74.5%).
- Significant increases in confidence in understanding what information is needed to demonstrate outcomes, how to decide a process for collecting information, how and when to use outcomes within their organisation and how to express outcomes in ways that stakeholders and partners can understand.
- Positive shifts in responses to questions about attitudes towards outcomes.

Host perspectives

10. By ‘hosts’ we mean the infrastructure organisations that employ the development workers who have been trained as Champions by CES.
 - Hosts were very positive about their experiences of the NOP. It has been a highly valued initiative that has brought tangible benefits and attracted interest from the services they support.
 - Hosts identified compatibility between the programme and their own strategic organisational needs and aspirations.
 - They reported using the outcomes approach to clarify their own objectives, to run work programmes and projects and to offer structured supervision to staff in relation to the outcomes they were working towards.
 - Hosts valued having a person within their organisations with specific outcomes knowledge.
 - Six of the eleven Hosts reported more secure funding arrangements for their organisations based on the outcomes approach.
 - The programme has enabled some Host organisations to develop outcomes focused project management and staff supervision frameworks which have helped to embed the approach throughout their organisation.
 - Host organisations also reported developing an outcomes focus in the communities they support by acting as specialist outcome knowledge hubs which has allowed NOP specialist knowledge to cascade nationally through strategic operations and networks.
 - There has been a positive assessment of the programme by Hosts for their own organisational needs. There are examples of organisational learning resulting in more secure funding and enhanced outcome infrastructures in their organisations and among the communities they support by their acting as specialist outcome knowledge hubs.

Summary of Achievements

11. The NOP, and its predecessor programme from CES, have made an impressive and significant contribution to the field of outcomes monitoring in the voluntary

and community sector. The programmes had trained a total of 2,200 personnel from 1,400 VCOs by April 2009.

12. The NOP has delivered a large scale programme of training and support to VCOs and developed a pool of highly skilled and motivated Champions. This has been done using an innovative cascade approach and well designed training materials and delivery approaches. The sheer scale of the programme reflects the skill, enthusiasm and commitment of the CES team, Champions involved in delivery and recognition by VCOs and hosts organisations of the value of outcomes monitoring.
13. Process statistics indicate the spread and number of Champions and VCOs trained, and qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate positive improvements in their knowledge, understanding and use of the outcomes approach. The host organisations of Champions similarly report use of the approach in project and strategic activities.
14. There have been additional benefits accrued through the programme including the successful production of short one day and half day courses.
15. More widely, the programme has raised awareness of the role and importance of outcomes monitoring, contributing to establishing this as part of the mainstream agenda for VCOs, Primary Care Trusts, Local Authorities and wider policy makers.

Sustainability

16. Positive markers were identified in the activities of Champions, VCOs and host organisations for the sustainability of the NOP. Champions have used the outcomes approach within their own organisations for strategic and operational policy development, and to help enhance relationships with funders, and supporting the supervision of staff.
17. Some VCO national funding bodies are aiming to introduce the outcomes approach into their grant giving processes in order to describe and report on the impact of those grants. Host organisations also reported developing an outcomes infrastructure in the communities they support by acting as specialist outcome knowledge hubs. One has adopted a strategic approach by ensuring each regional co-ordinator has access to a Champion.
18. These findings support the conclusion that the NOP has successfully embedded sources of sustainable support for outcomes monitoring in voluntary and community sector generic and specialist infrastructure organisations, and has maintained them as a legacy. This has been achieved by significant shifts towards outcomes focused approaches for the development of aims, objectives and policy also the development of organisational and monitoring infrastructures which will enable the approach to endure beyond the life of the project.
19. There has been significant success in building sustainability into the programme through the effective structure and reach of the programme, solid training materials and commitment of individuals and organisations involved at all levels. It is however acknowledged that competing priorities can serve to deflect efforts. Funding at the current level for a further one to two years is desirable in order to completely embed outcomes monitoring into mainstream activity and ensure it has a permanent place on the policy agenda.

Recommendations

20. The findings from this evaluation indicate the following recommendations:
 - That funding should be made available to enable CES undertake a piece of formal reflection and development work to agree plans for the long term sustainability of the NOP legacy.
 - That funding should be made available to CES to ensure that the achievements and learning from the NOP are prepared as briefings for dissemination to the sector to share success and to act as a mechanism to promote sustainability.
 - That CES, using the modest funds already secured from Capacitybuilders should establish regional support networks to provide a range of different support mechanisms for Champions including email and face to face contact.
 - That CES recruit more Superchamps ensuring at least two in each region and that these staff are at the heart of plans to develop regional support networks.
 - That future use of the short course, subject to resources being available, should be accompanied by a quantitative evaluation similar to that conducted for the full two day course.
 - That CES review its training materials for cultural sensitivity particularly as it reaches increasingly diverse communities.
 - That CES continues to develop its bank of case studies drawing on the experience of Champions.

Conclusions

21. In conclusion the NOP has delivered a robust programme of training and support that Champions and VCOs have praised and valued highly. Evaluation data have tracked a series of intermediate outcomes achieved by CES and its partners, which indicate that the programme's cascade approach to developing capacity in the voluntary and community sector has been very successful. The NOP has played a unique and valuable role in raising awareness and placing outcomes monitoring on the policy agenda.
22. The programme has successfully embedded sources of sustainable support for outcomes monitoring and leaves an important legacy which is expected to endure beyond the duration of the programme. However, further funding to support one to two more terms of implementation at the current level would be valuable in order to completely embed outcomes monitoring into mainstream activity and ensure it has a permanent place on the policy agenda.