



Summary of the Scottish Government Evaluation of Third Sector Interfaces



have your say

Introduction

In 2016 the Scottish Government commissioned two consultants (Blake Stevenson and Arrivo Consulting) to undertake an evaluation of both Scotland's Third Sector Interface (TSI) network and Voluntary Action Scotland (VAS).

The evaluation was twofold:

- To evaluate the role, function and effectiveness/ impact of the TSI network model and VAS;
- To explore with research participants what the future strategic direction and approach to third sector support in Scotland should be at local level.

The evaluation consisted of:

- a survey of all TSI Chief Executives and Chairs (31 of 32 areas responded);
- interviews with VAS Chief Executive and Chair;
- in-depth surveys of a random sample of 11 TSIs (FVA wasn't selected for this part);
- a non-representative survey of third sector organisations in the 11 selected areas to determine their experiences and levels of satisfaction with their TSI (603 organisations from the 11 areas responded and 102 from out with these areas also responded)
- interviews with stakeholders and Scottish Government staff
- value for money assessment.

Structures

Every TSI focuses on the four core activities (developing, representing and supporting the third sector, social enterprise and volunteering, and connecting the third sector to community planning), however TSIs are independent organisations and can decide how best they allocate resource to each of these key priorities.

TSI size and structure varies across regions but always forms one of two delivery models:

- Integrated model: A single organisation, governed by one Board of Directors (this is the model FVA adopted in 2012)
- Partnership model: At least two organisations (often more), with separate constitutions, premises/assets and Boards/Committees, working to achieve the 4 primary aims of a TSI (listed in Appendix A) and underpinned by a partnership agreement. Funding is allocated to the area, and the constituent organisations decide how it's allocated.

Findings

- TSI network model

The evaluation report looked at the strengths and weaknesses of the two structures mentioned above. FVA is a single 'integrated' TSI (10 of the 32 TSIs operate as partnerships).

"The unified structure is a significant improvement" and exhibited "new found confidence, leadership and direction" - quote from a Community Planning Partnership Manager in one of the surveys.

Below is a summary of the main findings relating to the differences in structure of a TSI:

- 82% of respondents indicated that integrated TSIs have improved their delivery to some or a great extent;
- Integrated TSIs are 'more efficient and strategic' than their partnership counterparts;
- Integrated TSIs offer better value for money – mainly due to management efficiencies, a rationalisation of back office costs and a decrease in board time.

The report showed more varied findings when it came to evaluating the partnership model TSIs. Some of the comments from survey respondents are listed below:

"We make the best use of the status quo (i.e. the partnership structure) but it doesn't feel like one entity. A single organisation or a co-located model is desirable. It would be painful to merge, but it would lead to more coherence" - Board member of a partner organisation within a partnership TSI.

"There is a real issue of identity. People don't understand the TSI structure in our area"
- A partnership TSI staff member.

"I'm not sure what support we get from the TSI, and what support is from the individual partner organisations" – a local third sector organisation.

The report lists some strengths of partnership TSIs:

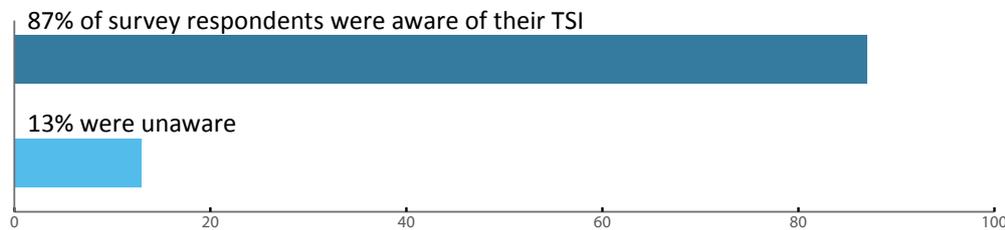
- A more equal level of prominence being given to each function e.g. volunteering, governance;
- More opportunities for cross-referral between services and closer working between partner organisations (this is in comparison to pre-TSI days rather than with integrated TSIs);
- Sharing the burden of representation and attendance at meetings.

Statistics

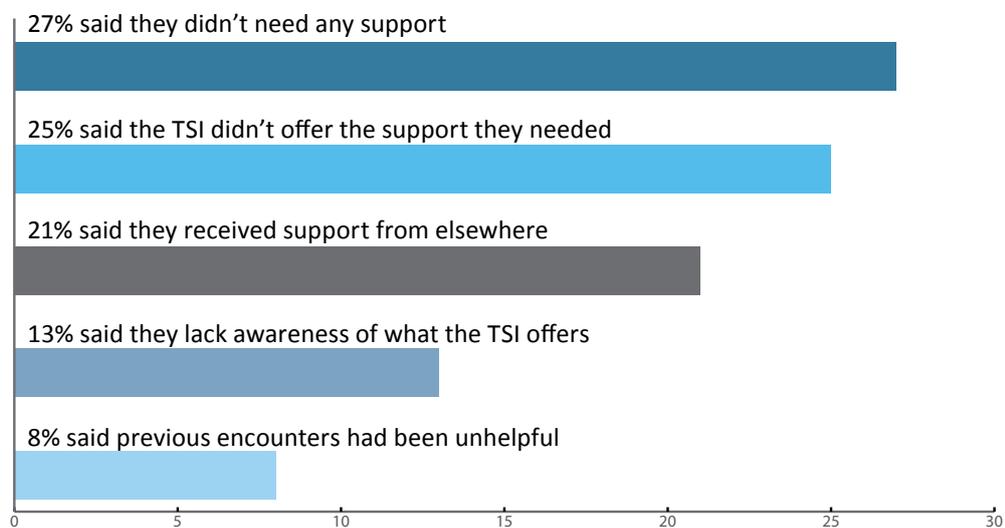
It's clear that in most areas, third sector organisations enjoy a very positive relationship with their local TSI, but in certain areas there isn't the same level of consistency and trust in what the TSI can deliver. In some instances, organisations use TSI services regularly and in others there's little or no contact, and often support is only requested when a crisis occurs.

Meeting the needs of the third sector

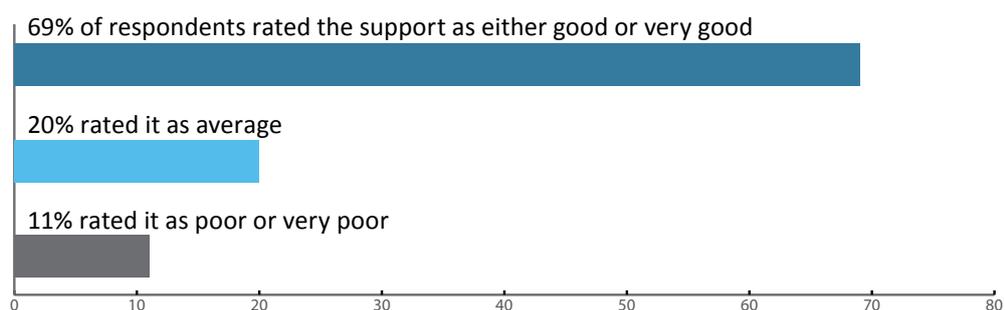
Awareness of TSIs



189 (of 705) respondents hadn't engaged with their TSI for the following reasons:



Quality of support on offer



The TSI Network

Connecting with others

Broadly speaking, larger third sector organisations (nationals and those with income > £500k p.a.) use the TSI to connect with and influence community planning, gather intelligence and to engage with other third sector organisations, through forums, e-bulletins, training sessions etc. Typically smaller organisations utilise their TSI for practical support e.g. help with funding applications, volunteer recruitment and drafting constitutions as well as support general service delivery.

How effective is VAS in fulfilling its role as the intermediary body for the TSI network?

Voluntary Action Scotland (VAS) was formed in 2009 to support the TSI network. The evaluation report focuses quite heavily on the governance and activities carried out by VAS and makes recommendations about how this should develop and improve.

The main findings included:

- The quality of support offered by VAS is inconsistent and hasn't addressed all of a TSIs' needs;
- VAS hasn't achieved 'positioning' and credibility to carry out the role of champion;
- The structure, leadership and governance of the organisation needs reviewing;
- While VAS is still young, and maybe not yet fulfilled its core functions, there is consensus that a national intermediary body is required.

Summary

Overall, the evaluation report found that TSIs are effective in delivering their four key functions, but there's a degree of inconsistency across areas.

Generally, the integrated model provides a more efficient and robust service to third sector organisations. TSIs play a pivotal role in connecting the sector to community planning, helping charities and community groups with governance issues and supporting organisations to recruit, retain and develop volunteers.

TSI's differ in size and resources, and can often deliver specific project activity. The extent to which TSIs level in additional funding varies, but in some areas it can supplement existing activity effectively. The review of third sector infrastructure support in Scotland is ongoing and will also incorporate other national intermediaries e.g. SCVO, DTAS, Volunteer Scotland, Senscot etc.

Further Reading

The full report is on our website:

www.fifevoluntaryaction.org.uk/downloads/TSIreview2017.pdf

Read more about what FVA has been doing over the past year:

www.fifevoluntaryaction.org.uk/news.asp?id=8645



have your say

During May there's an opportunity to have your say on local third sector support, as well as national third sector support in Scotland, as part of an exercise FVA is conducting which will be fed into a Scottish Government review of Scotland's third sector infrastructure support agencies.

Take part in the survey to tell us what local third sector support you'd like to see in Fife: www.fifevoluntaryaction.org.uk/news.asp?id=8644.

Some survey participants will be invited to focussed workshops to explore some of the suggestions in more detail. The workshops will be held at the end of May.

