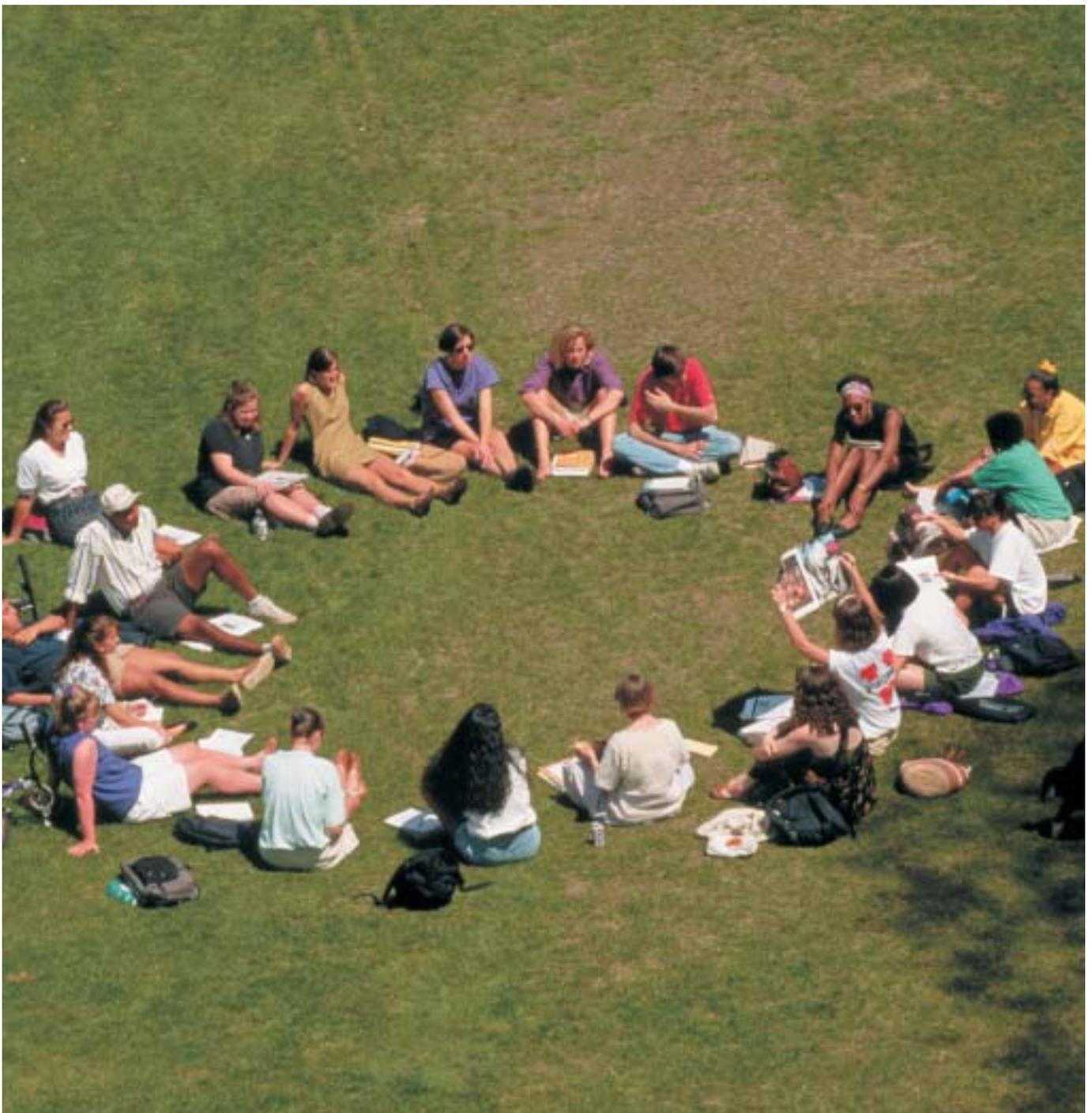


# Department for Social Development Evaluation of 'Partners for Change'

## Executive Summary

June 2004



## FOREWARD

I welcome the opportunity to present this summary evaluation report on *Partners for Change Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community sector 2001-2004*.

The evaluation was carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers, and reflects an independent review of the strategy, its achievements and the progress that it represents in terms of furthering the relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector.

This Government is committed to the work of the voluntary and community sector, and as outlined in the recent cross cutting review carried out by the Treasury in 2002, Government stated its belief that the sector has a crucial role to play in the reform of public services and the reinvigoration of public life. We in Government cannot do this on our own.

In Northern Ireland we have a strong and vibrant sector, which contributes significantly to the achievement of Government's objectives, through a growing policy emphasis on partnership working, and *Partners for Change* outlined specific priorities and action points to which all Departments signed up.

It is important that we in Government take time to review how strategies are working and whether the strategies are achieving the objectives that we have set for ourselves. The findings and recommendations of this report reflect the views of many people, both inside and outside of government. The report concludes that this first phase of the Strategy has marked a clear and positive move towards a more joined up, cross – departmental approach in Government's relationship with the sector, and it identifies examples of good practice that can be built on in the next phase.

As Minister for the Department for Social Development, which has taken the lead in the development of the Strategy, I would like to acknowledge and thank all those in Departments and in the Voluntary & Community Sector who have contributed to both the development and the evaluation of the Strategy.

The Strategy sub-group of the Joint Government Voluntary and Community Sector Forum are presently considering the recommendations for the next Strategy in the evaluation report and how they can build on the strengths identified. It will be important to ensure that the next stage Strategy reflects the recommendations evolving from the work of the Task Force for Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. Allowing time for the work of the Task Force to be completed, I would hope to have a draft strategy available for consultation by March 2005.

Signed

John Spellar

Copies of the full report are available on the Department for Social Development website. [www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

## Executive Summary

### Terms of Reference

1. This is an Executive Summary of the full evaluation report on *Partners for Change: Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector 2001-2004* (hereinafter referred to as '*Partners for Change*'). The evaluation was commissioned by the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) within the Department for Social Development (DSD) and undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). The terms of reference stated that the evaluation should **report, review and make recommendations on the effectiveness of Partners for Change in:-**

1. Developing shared values and principles identified in the Compact;
2. Developing relationships between Government and the sector;
3. Facilitating improvement and good practice;
4. Achieving the four core aims<sup>1</sup>;
5. Progressing towards indicators recently developed by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI);
6. Helping promote equality of opportunity; and
7. Adding value.

### Background

2. *Partners for Change* provides a **cross-departmental mechanism** to 'operationalise' the general principles and shared values governing the relationship between Government and the community and voluntary sector<sup>2</sup> articulated in the *Compact*. It was intended to be a progression from the 1993 Strategy<sup>3</sup> as '**an action document**' designed to be amenable to measurement over the life of the Strategy.
3. The sector plays a multi-faceted role with Government, in terms of a:
  - Consulting role;
  - Building community infrastructure role; and
  - Service delivery role.
4. In addition the distinctiveness of the sector is to be found in its added value as, wherever the sector provides services, it does so in a way that involves local people, builds local networks and stimulates the development of social capital<sup>4</sup>.
5. It should be recognised, therefore, from the outset of this evaluation report, that *Partners for Change* represents a **complex set of tasks and relationships**:
  - Firstly, it is a high-level non-funded policy that attempts to co-ordinate all operational Departments in developing best practice and initiating new partnership relations with the sector; and

- Secondly, the development of *Partners for Change* was set within a mutual drive for sustainability initiated through the 'Consultation Document on Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector' (hereinafter referred to as the 'Harbison Report'). One of the key outputs of the *Harbison Report* was the establishment of the *Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector*<sup>5</sup> which recently produced *Pathways for Change*. The future direction for *Partners for Change* will be inextricably linked to the final outcomes of the work of the Task Force.
6. In setting the context for *Partners for Change* it is also relevant to briefly reflect on the link between community development and community relations. The sector has been cited as both an essential partner and a channel for the implementation of policy objectives in the *Shared Future* review being co-ordinated by OFMDFM<sup>6</sup>. The *Shared Future* consultation recognises that the sector plays a key role in developing a shared society whereby societal change is a pre-requisite to success in implementing community relations policy. Finally, in a broader sense the cross-cutting equality/Section 75 agenda in NI is relevant in that the equality agenda has necessitated enhanced levels of consultation by Government with the sector in the process of policy development. The structure of *Partners for Change*, as detailed below, encompasses both equality and new Targeting Social Need (TSN).

### Structure of *Partners for Change*

7. The *Partners for Change* Strategy sets out commitments to **194 actions** and **18 cross-cutting actions** (structured under the three themes of *Capacity Building, Resourcing the Sector and Working Together*). Whilst each Government Department developed its own sectoral strategy in line with their business needs and priorities, all Departmental strategies are **underpinned by four overarching core aims**, which are drawn from the *Programme for Government* and the *Compact*.

### Evaluation Methodology

8. The approach to undertaking the evaluation involved a **review of existing data and information** (i.e. baseline data, Departmental monitoring returns, relevant documents); and **consultations** (i.e. an update survey with the sector, regional focus groups with the sector and interviews with Departmental representatives, IDGVACD members, Joint Forum members and key stakeholders [e.g. ACOVO, CFNI and VDA<sup>7</sup>]).

## Developing the relationship between Government and the Sector

9. The research illustrated that the relationship between Government and the sector can take a variety of forms ranging from a consultative form of engagement through to contracted service delivery. There has been a trend in recent years for greater engagement between Government and the sector, and it is encouraging that the majority (54%) of sector organisations captured by the update survey felt that the level of co-operation had increased in the last few years and that the current level of co-operation is very strong (60%). That said, in view also of the qualitative findings (through focus groups, case studies and key stakeholder interviews), there was also a sense that while progress has been achieved **'there remains a long way to go'** in developing the relationship between Government and the sector.
10. The main conclusion is that *Partners for Change* is one factor amongst several others that has contributed to the development of the relationship. Furthermore isolation of its impact in this regard is difficult, particularly when the levels of awareness of the Strategy were often limited. Related to this there was an issue about the fact that the Strategy is perceived largely to be a **centralisation of existing and/or already planned activity**. Countering this view, however, is the observation that for the first time *Partners for Change* **enabled visibility of the extent and breadth of Government's relationship with the sector and offered some scope for centralised monitoring and the identification of good practice**. In effect this observation relates to the view that part of the rationale for *Partners for Change*, in the first instance, was to bring these activities together as an initial step to acknowledge and gain an overview of what was going on and how relationships were developing.

## Facilitating Improvement and Good Practice

11. Through the consultations with the sector and Government Departments there were **many examples of good practice which could be further disseminated** (detailed in the main report). However, those consulted were in general unable to state the degree to which the Strategy had directly led to good practice being implemented on the ground. Nonetheless a question was raised through the research process, which is fairly relevant *'which is most important – that people are aware of the guidance set out in the Strategy or that good practice in general is being implemented?'*. For the future there is a **need for overall awareness raising** and increased marketing and communications in respect of a future strategy that would help to pro-actively promote good practice. There is an established communications sub-group of the Joint Forum that could be tasked and supported in future to take on this challenge.

## Progress Towards Core Aims

12. The evaluation illustrated that there has been **progress towards achievement of all of the four core aims** of *Partners for Change*. However, **the extent to which much of the activity was existing and/or already planned remains a moot point**. There was also a view that the structure of *Partners for Change* was overly complicated and that there was an overlap between some of the cross-cutting themes and aims. Thus 'un-packing the structure' in terms of cross-cutting aims and themes should be a key issue for the future.

### Measuring Progress and Performance

13. The evaluation found that there was very **limited awareness of the social capital indicators** and therefore the extent of active monitoring embracing the social capital concepts was limited. On a more positive note, in some cases the type of performance indicator information, which was being collected, was quite similar to that being proposed by CENI, therefore, it may only be necessary in some cases to encourage Departments and the sector to amend their existing performance measures to reflect the ideas being presented by CENI.
14. In terms of monitoring progress, the **development of action points was viewed as a positive step because for the first time it brought together in one Strategy all of Government's intentions for the sector.** However, a number of weaknesses were identified with respect to the action points, for example, a large number of the **action points were not SMART<sup>8</sup>**. In addition it was viewed that the monitoring process was a 'score-carding' exercise which overlooked qualitative benefits of the *Strategy*. In this context it is important to highlight that *Partners for Change* is a non-funded *Strategy*, which constrained the extent to which there was additional resources to deliver additional activities.
15. One area where *Partners for Change* **delivered higher levels of added value in terms of performance was with respect to the 18 cross-cutting action points.** These were all largely in the domain of VCU with the exception of two action points relating to Section 75 and consultation practice that involved OFMDFM. The cross-cutting actions included key recommendations arising from the *Harbison Report* and access for the sector to Business Development Service courses. In summary these provide examples of the added value of *Partners for Change* and the co-operative process that underpinned it.

### Equality of Opportunity

16. The Equality/Section 75 agenda has been a major factor underlying the extent to which Government has interacted with the sector in recent years, although from a sector perspective not all of the experiences with respect to this have been positive. The research provided evidence of positive impacts in terms of promoting equality of opportunity and there was also evidence from the Departmental case studies of good practice in promoting equality of opportunity, which could be more widely disseminated. However, overall the evaluation concluded that it was **difficult to isolate the impact of *Partners for Change* from activity that was ongoing anyway and from the impact of the Section 75 legislation itself.**

**Shared Values and Principles of the Compact**

- 17. The main point to note in this respect is that the *Partners for Change Strategy* 'pulled through' the shared values, principles and intentions of the *Compact* in either the structure of the *Strategy* or the implementation arrangements. However, the research raised issues about the awareness of the *Compact* and a general sense of confusion around the structure of the *Partners for Change Strategy* and how the shared values and principles of the Compact related to the core aims and cross cutting themes of the *Strategy*. In effect there were perceptions about overlap. The **main message for the future is that simplification and greater clarity is required.**

**Added Value of Partners for Change**

- 18. Overall the research revealed that **the benefits from partnership working outweighed the costs of doing so.** The majority of those consulted felt that there had to be a future for *Partners for Change*. The table below draws on a more detailed table from the main evaluation report and aims to present examples of perceived added value drawing on the views of Government and the sector.

Views of Government	Views of the Sector
<p><i>Partners for Change</i> for the first time brought together all actions/relationships with the sector into one strategic framework.</p> <p>The process to develop <i>Partners for Change</i> raised awareness within Departments of the breadth and depth of relationships they had with the sector.</p> <p><i>Partners for Change</i> resulted in related activity (e.g. cross departmental study trips with the sector), which has enhanced the understanding of the sector within Government.</p> <p><i>Partners for Change</i> has enabled a degree of sharing of good practice across Government (e.g. through case studies), although more could be done to pro-actively disseminate some of the good practice evident through this evaluation.</p>	<p><i>Partners for Change</i> enabled an acknowledgement within Government of the scale and ability of the sector through a centralised strategy.</p> <p><i>Partners for Change</i> has helped to ensure that the sector is an inter-departmental issue and not solely within the remit of DSD/VCU.</p> <p>The sector was heavily involved in the consultation process to develop <i>Partners for Change</i> but this was not carried through to monitoring of the strategy as a whole....in broad terms the sector wants 'participation' not 'consultation'.</p> <p><i>Partners for Change</i> has given the sector a lobbying tool (i.e. checking if action points have been implemented) with Government as a whole.</p>

**Recommendations**

- 19. This evaluation raised a number of key issues and recommendations that need to be considered in taking the strategy forward, which offer scope for greater levels of value-added to be achieved in future. The recommendations are summarised in the following paragraphs under five key headings.

*(i) Planning the new strategy*

- **The ongoing relevance of the Compact as a 'backdrop' for a future strategy;** it is perceived that the shared values and principles of the *Compact* will remain valid and a future strategy should acknowledge this. In order for this to be achieved there is a need for increased awareness of the *Compact* which could be addressed as part of an overall pro-active marketing and communications campaign for a future strategy;
- **Outcome driven strategy;** the evaluation highlighted that *Partners for Change* was perceived as a first phase strategy, however, there is a need now to get to 'another stage of measurement' which is more outcome focused. This would suggest a need to focus on a smaller number of big impacts and outcomes and ensure that a future document does not read like 'a catalogue of actions', which is a perception that has been quoted with respect to the current strategy;
- **Overarching dimension;** this evaluation suggested '*that the actions were driving the strategy, rather than vice versa*'. There needs to be consideration of the 'over-arching' and strategic dimension, informed by wider developments, particularly the outcomes of the work of the *Task Force* and the outcomes of the *Shared Future* review. The evaluation has identified that there is a need to more clearly connect '*community development*' and '*community-relations*' in a future strategy. It is recommended that there is a formal linkage between any future *Partners for Change* strategy sub-group and the proposed independent body appointed to take forward the actions set out in the *Shared Future* review. Alternatively an OFMDFM representative on the Joint Forum could provide an insight into the latest developments with the *Shared Future* review;
- **Simplification;** the evaluation found that there was generally confusion between the cross cutting themes and core aims in *Partners for Change*, compounded by the shared values and principles of the *Compact* which underlie the *Partners for Change* strategy. It is recommended that a subsequent *Strategy* should have one overall aim specified and a small number of strategic objectives, linked to the over-arching picture referred to above, and each of the Departments could then develop their actions around these objectives, where appropriate. It may be the case that some Departments have actions under each of the strategic objectives whereas others may only have actions under some of the objectives, where appropriate. Finally some consideration could be given to renaming the strategy in future to give it a clear identity or 'brand' distinct from other initiatives (e.g. *Pathways for Change*); and

- **Ownership of a future Strategy;** the evaluation has found that there was a feeling of '*them and us*' with respect to the current *Strategy* and the fact that all the action points were directed towards Government Departments reinforced this. Realistically a future strategy is likely to be led by Government co-ordinated through DSD/VCU, however, if there was a greater degree of involvement of the sector in ongoing monitoring of the strategy this could assist in facilitating more of a shared sense of ownership. This would tie-in with the recurrent theme within this evaluation that the sector wishes to be engaged beyond the planning stage (i.e. '*participation beyond consultation*'). In addition in discussion of ownership there may be a need in future to broaden the Government dimension to include Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), particularly given that the remit of the *Compact* extended beyond the core Departmental perspective and offers scope for gains in terms of a shared sense of ownership.

(ii) *Developing action points*

- **Proportionality;** it is recommended that actions and outputs linked to each Department could be proportional to the extent of each Department's relationship with the sector and the degree to which these relationships are well-established (i.e. mature) or less established. Balancing this a future strategy should not lose sight of the value of a focus on those Departments, which have limited current contact with the sector to encourage the development of their relationship in future. In addition all the actions for each Department should fully incorporate the relevant activity within respective Agencies / NDPBs; and
- **Central co-ordination and quality assurance;** the initial development of action points, via bilateral meetings with key voluntary and community sector representatives, linked to outputs and outcomes should be centrally coordinated and quality assured (for consistency) by DSD/VCU (with assistance from the Strategy Sub Group) and potentially the Joint Forum. A structured checklist could be developed so that actions are appropriate to the *Strategy*. The checklist could ensure that each action fits within at least one of the strategic objectives; there is no duplication of actions; and that actions are measurable. Following the quality assurance of all action points, they could then be presented to the Joint Forum for 'sign off' / acceptance.

(iii) *Measuring the impact of a future strategy*

- **SMART outcome focused strategic objectives;** there is a need to ensure that the *Strategy* has SMART strategic objectives linked to an over-arching aim as discussed above;
- **Involvement of both sector and Government in monitoring and related funding implications;** the sector generally has not been sufficiently involved in monitoring. For the future this is an area that the Joint Forum (or a working sub-group of the Joint Forum such as the Working Group responsible for validating and monitoring) could be more practically involved in;

- **Capturing social capital outcomes;** there is a real need for ongoing awareness raising and practical training within Government and the sector with respect to the measurement of social capital outcomes which could imply investment upfront. In fact, Departmental and sector representatives could attend joint training courses in monitoring, which would facilitate networking, partnership building opportunities and again a shared sense of ownership for the strategy; *and*
- **Securing buy-in to performance measurement system;** *there is a need for widespread buy-in to a new performance measurement system, both by those who appraise community based projects in Government (e.g. Departmental economists) and individuals in Government who contract with the sector for service delivery. Given that the concept of social capital is intrinsically linked to the social economy it is important that DSD/VCU maximise the benefits of their membership of the Inter-Departmental Forum convened by DETI for the Social Economy.*

(iv) *Publicising the strategy and disseminating information*

- **Promotion;** a key issue throughout the evaluation was the 'patchy' awareness of *Partners for Change* (and the *Compact*). For the future there is more that could be done to both initially promote the *Strategy* and the good practice that exists. This could be achieved through both regular Joint Forum good practice sessions and through cross Departmental training and awareness raising activity. In a broader sense there is a need for an overall marketing and communications strategy in respect of a future *Strategy* that would help to pro-actively promote good practice, not just amongst Departments and the sector, but also the wider public; and
- **Dissemination of information;** linked to the topic of promotion there are dissemination issues across and within Government. There is a further need to ensure that information is disseminated to the level of operational staff in Departments who are tasked with implementing actions. From the sector perspective greater use could be made of the sector and geographic network bodies to ensure widespread dissemination.

(v) *Future investment*

- **Future investment;** the discussions above in terms of the enhanced monitoring requirements and need for active promotion and marketing suggest, that unlike the current *Strategy*, which was not additionally funded, there will be a degree of investment required for the development, implementation, monitoring and promotion of a future strategy.

*Electronic copies of the full report are available on the DSD website ([www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)) and hard copies are available by contacting Lorraine Walls at DSD (Telephone 028 90 829396).*

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The four core aims in the *Partners for Change* Strategy are Shaping Policy Development; Building Community, Promoting Active Citizenship and Targeting Disadvantage.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter the terms 'sector' refers to the breadth of community and voluntary sector funded activity.

<sup>3</sup> *1993 Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary Sector and for Community Development in Northern Ireland*.

<sup>4</sup> Social capital refers to the connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from them. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value and that the interaction within them enables individuals to build communities, to commit themselves to a shared sense of purpose, and to knit the social fabric that is necessary for sustainable development. Social capital is now being used, by way of example, by the World Bank with respect to economic and societal development - in that it is argued that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable.

<sup>5</sup> Other outputs were the Funders' Forum bringing together main statutory and private funders of the sector; a Funding Database to capture Government funding to the voluntary and community sector; and the development of a set of social capital indicators that could be used to measure the "added value" of voluntary and community based activity.

<sup>6</sup> OFMFD – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

<sup>7</sup> IDGVACD – Inter-Departmental Group on Voluntary Activity and Community Development, ACOVO – Association of Chief Executive Officers; CFNI – Community Foundation Northern Ireland; and VDA – Volunteer Development Agency.

<sup>8</sup> SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

