

Supporting a Stronger Civil Society

Chwarae Teg Consultation Response

January 2011

Introduction

Chwarae Teg promotes, supports and develops the role of women in the Welsh economy. Established in 1992, we do this by raising awareness of the positive contribution women make to economy and society and sensitising Welsh Assembly Government strategy and policy to the barriers confronting women who wish to fully participate in the labour market.

The persistency of occupational segregation, the over representation of women amongst the working poor, the under-utilisation of women's skills, the gender pay gap, the lack of women in senior and management level positions and the limited number of women in decision making roles presents a challenge to Welsh policy and practice.

Funded by the **Welsh Assembly Government** to provide expert advice to Ministers and policy-makers on these matters, Chwarae Teg also designs and manages significant projects that support women's participation in, and the development of, the Welsh economy. This has included working with women entrepreneurs and encouraging early stage enterprises in addition to providing pre-employment training for economically inactive women in their communities.

Our current project, **AGILE NATION: New ways of working in the 21st century**¹ provides bespoke, accredited management training to equip women to progress into decision-making and leadership roles. We also work directly with employers, referral agencies and training providers to support the design of gender sensitive employment and training programmes. Chwarae Teg is a partnership organisation and we work with organisations from all sectors.

¹ Funded by European Social Fund and Welsh Assembly Government 2008 - 2014

Opening Statement

Chwarae Teg welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on how the Government can support a “stronger civil society”. We believe that the voluntary, or third, sector is a very important part of our society, with many organisations delivering vital frontline services and working with those who are most marginalised. Chwarae Teg has taken the opportunity afforded by this Consultation to discuss the key issues with our members’ forum and those contributions have been included in this response.

“410,000 [people in Wales] would identify themselves as a volunteer if you asked them”

(WCVA, 2010)

We believe that the vision for a “Big Society” is very positive and would like to see individuals become more involved in their communities. Currently, 1,130,000 people in Wales give their time to help 3rd Sector organisations in Wales each year.² Whilst these volunteers carry out extremely valuable work, there is an abundance of un-tapped potential within our communities which could be mobilised for the greater good. However, we know that, particularly in these difficult times, many individuals and businesses are struggling to cope with the pressures they are under. In particular, it is women who are likely to feel the need to spread their time even more thinly across work, family and community life. Already,

“The volunteer and employed workforce [in the 3rd sector] is predominantly female”

(WCVA, 2010)

‘the volunteer and employed workforce [in the 3rd sector] is predominantly female’³. In building the “civil society”, Chwarae Teg considers it to be critically important to increase the number of men who are engaged with voluntary organisations.

If the Big Society is to be successful, the Government must ensure that the correct infrastructure is in place to support it. We believe there are several potential risks associated with the “civil society”:

- 1) Organisations will need different levels of support depending on their size
- 2) Services may suffer if they are delivered purely by volunteers
- 3) Service provision may be inconsistent if carried out by volunteers as there may be several individuals carrying out one full-time role
- 4) There are also likely to be greater training needs due to a high turnover of staff or participation of individuals from marginalised groups

² WCVA (2010) Third Sector Statistical Resource 2011, Cardiff, WCVA

³ Ibid.

- 5) There may be issues around accountability if services are delivered by non-public organisations

Finally, 3rd sector organisations are already struggling to meet demand for services with reduced budgets caused by public sector cuts. The Government's vision of a Big Society cannot be achieved without these organisations, many of which may have limited capacity throughout 2011. Many will struggle to deliver services, bid for funding, become more sustainable and support this aim.

Consultation Questions

1. How can online services for frontline groups be improved?

Online support is useful for frontline groups because it means that information is easily accessible. However, providing information online through a wide range of sources can create confusion as users must identify which sources are the most reliable. In addition, there are many areas, particularly in Wales, where broadband services are unreliable or even non-existent. A significant proportion of the population is excluded from digital services and this should not prevent them from accessing information, advice and guidance. Online information can also create challenges in the provision of information that is relevant at a local level - the very point at which services are delivered. Where information is provided online, steps must be taken to ensure it is accessible for all users. Finally, it must be recognised that there will still be a need for face-to-face support. Online services cannot replace personal support that meets individual need.

2. What can Government do to forge more effective links and transfer skills between small civil society organisations and businesses or larger charities?

The Government can encourage the private sector to forge links with voluntary organisations as a way to meet their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Employers could lead volunteering schemes which loan specialist expertise to help voluntary organisations to grow. The Government should promote the benefits of such schemes to the private sector and encourage more organisations to get involved. They should also ensure that smaller voluntary groups do not miss out on the opportunity to benefit from private sector expertise. The Government could play a major role in forging good relationships between the sectors, possibly through the creation of partnerships. Another initiative which may be of use in facilitating the transfer of skills across the sectors is time-banking. In this type of initiative, individuals earn credits when they give their time which can later be "spent" on a service or skill that they need. This model could be applied to facilitate cross sector skills sharing.

3. How could brokerage of pro bono support be improved?

Chwarae Teg believes it would be useful to identify the key areas of need and provide targeted support based on these. Support may also be offered to employers to help them develop their CSR policies.

4. What support might your organisation need to become more resilient?

Many organisations need support to identify which areas they should focus on. Now, more than ever, organisations are under pressure to deliver services and have very little resource left to spend on development. Furthermore, funding has become increasingly project

based, leaving little funding for the core services which support frontline services. Many organisations might benefit from training on the tendering process or business development to help them identify other ways to bring in funding.

5. What do you think should be the priorities for a bursary fund?

If the bursary fund is delivered strategically, it could be very useful to the sector. However, it is important to make sure that any support meets local needs. The fund may be aligned to sector priorities or focus on helping voluntary organisations to become more enterprising.

6. How could any bursary fund be delivered simply and fairly?

Again, we believe that it is important to consider local need in line with regional and national priorities in order to deliver the bursary scheme fairly. Close monitoring and evaluation of such a fund for equality, transparency and probity is also a pre-requisite.

7. How could consolidation grants help ensure the sustainability and efficiency of infrastructure services?

We are aware that organisations need, where possible, to work together to deliver better, more consistent services. Organisations providing support also need to collaborate to make sure they are providing consistent, reliable support that meets demand. However, it should also be recognised that third sector organisations have in many cases developed to meet very specific individual needs. Combining organisations run the risk of losing these priorities. If grants are used as a mechanism to facilitate consolidation, attention must be paid to what outcomes can realistically be achieved within the timescales allocated. Relationships take time to build. Partnerships between organisations are no different. It is important to be realistic about the outcomes expected of these consolidation grants.

8. Are there ways that expert intervention can support areas which are lacking social capital to improve local relationships and develop a stronger civil society?

It is useful to look at local initiatives that have built social capital and learn from them. Case studies and best practice could be shared through online resources. Much of the development work will need to be carried out at a local level by those already working in the community. In Wales, there are currently, 9,425 organisations operating in the voluntary sector.⁴ These organisations need to begin working collaboratively with each other and with other sectors. Social enterprises may also provide opportunities to find new ways of building partnerships and social capital. For example, in Wales the Top 20 social enterprises include housing associations, farmer's co-operatives and Glas Cymru/Dwr Cymru, the leading water company⁵.

9. How can central Government best work with national infrastructure to support and deliver the Big Society?

Consultation on this question closed on 25th November.

10. Do you have further suggestions or comments on how the Office for Civil Society can help frontline groups become more efficient and effective?

As a devolved administration, Wales has a commitment to support the Third Sector and procedures and opportunities to regularly meet with Ministers. The benefit of direct consultation and inter-action provides the Welsh Assembly Government with an insight into issues affecting the Third Sector in Wales.

A similar structure could be developed for England. This would bring the Office for Civil Society closer to the Third Sector and influence future policy debates.

Final Comment

As a Third Sector organisation working closely with private, public and voluntary bodies, Chwarae Teg welcomes the commitment to collaborate more closely in the vision to improve communities as well as building social and professional capital.

As an organisation committed to the economic development of women, we would expect

⁴ WCVA (2010) Third Sector Statistical Resource 2011, Cardiff, WCVA

⁵ Welsh Assembly Government (2009) Mapping social enterprise activity in Wales: Understanding in order to Influence, Cardiff, Welsh Assembly Government



appropriate equality impact assessments to be carried out to ensure that any new initiatives are fully inclusive and meet the needs of women and other under-represented groups.

Chwarae Teg would also like to see an increase in the number of women in decision-making roles and recommend that investment in training and development be a priority to ensure that those leading the way in the new civil society are fully representative of their communities.

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