

VOLUNTARY SECTOR STUDIES NETWORK

Registered charity number 1114742

Annual Report and Accounts

1 August 2012 - 31 July 2013



www.vssn.org.uk

Address for official correspondence:

Executive Officer, Voluntary Sector Studies Network, VSSN Office, PO Box 7917,
Swadlincote, DE11 1ET

ANNUAL REPORT

Legal and Constitutional Details

Name of organisation:	Voluntary Sector Studies Network
Legal form:	Unincorporated charitable association governed by Constitution adopted 21 May 2003 (last amended December 2009).
Charitable status:	Registered charity in England & Wales number 1114742
Correspondent:	Sonia Liff Executive Officer PO Box 7917 Swadlincote DE11 1ET
Telephone:	07902 274161
Central e-mail:	info@vssn.org.uk
Website:	www.vssn.org.uk
Objects:	The objects of VSSN are the advancement of public education concerning the voluntary sector in the United Kingdom by: (1) the promotion and diffusion knowledge; and (2) the publication of research; and (3) encouragement of contact between workers in relevant fields of enquiry; and (4) undertaking such other activities (being charitable in law) as shall be conducive to the attainment of these objects.
Trustees:	The following people served as trustees of VSSN and members of the Steering Group (affiliations are given for information only – all Steering Group members serve as individuals):
Chair	Prof Chris Cornforth, Open University Business School (until December 2012) Colin Rochester, Birkbeck London University (from December 2012)
Secretary:	Dr Andri Soteri-Proctor, University of Birmingham (until July 2013)
Treasurer:	Prof Cathy Pharoah, CASS Business School, City University (until December 2012) Ms Meta Zimmeck, Practical Wisdom R2Z (from December 2012)

Vice Chair:	Colin Rochester, Birkbeck, University of London (until December 2012)
	Prof Chris Cornforth, Open University Business School (from December 2012)
Membership and Marketing Officer:	Dr Rob Dalziel, Healthwatch, Dudley
Annual Conference Officer	Colin Rochester, Birkbeck, University of London
Day Conference Liaison Officer:	Dr Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham
External Affairs & Journal Liaison Officer:	Prof Pete Alcock, University of Birmingham (until December 2012)
	Professor Chris Cornforth, Open University (from December 2012)
New Researchers Co-ordinators:	Dr Mike Aiken (Institute for Voluntary Action Research) and (from December 2012) Ms Anjelica Finnegan, Southampton University
Ex-officio:	Emeritus Prof Peter Halfpenny, University of Manchester
Web Officer:	David Kane, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Appointment of trustees:	<p>As of 14 May 2008, VSSN members elect up to nine trustees to serve a three-year term of office on a rolling basis, with three elected at each Annual General Meeting. The editor of <i>Voluntary Sector Review</i> serves as an ex-officio member. An additional two trustees may be co-opted. The initial terms of office are set according to the results of the Single Transferable Vote on the annual cycle of three members to be elected each year. Trustees may serve for a maximum of six consecutive years.</p> <p>Prof Pete Alcock, University of Birmingham stood down as a trustee in December 2012. Meta Zimmeck and Angelica Finnegan were elected in December 2012 and Mike Aiken and Andri Soteri-Proctor were re-elected</p>

Sub-committee:

Editorial Management Board for the *Voluntary Sector Review*

As of 2 December 2009 a sub-committee was elected to act as the Editorial Management Board (EMB) for the journal *Voluntary Sector Review*. With direction from the Steering Group, the EMB is responsible for the oversight of the journal and the appointment of the Editorial Team, including the Editor, in consultation with the publisher, The Policy Press.

EMB members:

Pete Alcock (Chair), University of Birmingham

Nick Acheson, University of Ulster

Margaret Harris, Aston University

Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham

Gareth Morgan, Sheffield Hallam University

Cathy Pharoah, Cass Business School, City University (Until December 2012)

James Rees, University of Birmingham (From December 2012)

Chris Cornforth (Open University) - VSSN Steering Group appointee (From December 2012)

Julia Mortimer (The Policy Press) - publisher's representative

Editorial Team:

Pete Alcock, Assistant editor

Julie Charlesworth, Policy reviews editor (until December 2012)

Peter Halfpenny, Editor

Rob Macmillan, Book review editor

Cathy Pharoah, Assistant editor (until December 2012),
Policy reviews editor (from January 2013)

Colin Rochester, Practice papers editor

Appointment of EMB:

VSSN members elect six members of the EMB on a three-year cycle, using the same rules as for the election of Steering Group members as set out in the amended constitution. The Editor, if not already an elected Steering Group member, will be appointed ex-officio to the Steering Group.

The EMB is responsible for assembling the International Advisory Board. For further information, see:

<http://www.vssn.org.uk/journal/index.htm>

Steering Group Report: activities undertaken for public benefit by the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) during the year ending 31 July 2013

Chair's Introduction

It has been another year of solid progress for VSSN. Membership numbers have held up well despite the very challenging economic circumstances. Our journal, *Voluntary Sector Review*, has continued to publish articles of a high quality on a variety of areas of interest and concern. Our new online payments system has proved its worth and we continue to benefit from the administrative support provided by Appleby Ltd. Key highlights of the year are summarised below under activities, management and organisation, and financial review.

1. The activities of VSSN

VSSN's journal, Voluntary Sector Review

VSSN's interdisciplinary journal, *Voluntary Sector Review* (VSR), published by The Policy Press, is now in its fourth year, with three issues per annum in March, July and November. A print copy is a VSSN membership benefit. VSR has been chosen as the official journal of the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP), and it is available at a substantial discount to members of the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR).

The journal is designed to appeal to a wide readership, and each issue, of around 150 pages, includes research articles, practice papers and policy reviews as well as book reviews.

In the year to 31 July 2013, the VSR's online abstracts were viewed nearly 39,000 times and full-text articles were downloaded over 3,500 times. The journal is therefore a very good route for contributors to share their work on the voluntary sector with a wide audience. The number of subscriptions has increased again this year, though all VSSN members are still strongly encouraged to persuade their institutions to take out (and continue) subscriptions to ensure the financial sustainability of the journal.

Membership of the Editorial Team rotates; this year, we record our thanks to Julie Charlesworth, whose term as policy review section editor came to an end; she was replaced by Cathy Pharoah.

The publisher implemented an online journal management system – Editorial Manager – in October 2012, which has automated much of the processing of articles, from receipt, through review, editing and revisions, to publication. Another innovation has been 'fast tracking', through which articles are made available on the IgentaConnect VSR website as soon as they have been accepted, in advance of appearing in the print version of the journal.

A new development for the next year is the inclusion of a Debate section in one issue, in which renowned scholars will respond to an article published in the journal a year earlier and the article's author will reply. There are also plans for themed issues, one of which will

draw on papers presented at the 2013 ERNOP conference.

VSSN is grateful to The Policy Press for the enthusiasm and expertise it has brought to this venture, and the resources it is devoting to making it a success.

VSR Editorial Management Board

The VSR EMB has an annual meeting in the autumn, which is linked to The Policy Press's planning timetable. As the journal is well established and the editorial processes are running smoothly, much of the work of the EMB can be done through virtual consultation via email.

The EMB has established a timetable for the replacement of editorial roles in rotation. The Practice Papers Editor will be replaced in December 2013, and a replacement Editor (or Editors) is being sought so that there can be a period of handover with the current Editor, who will retire in December 2014.

Website

The VSSN website continues to play a key role in communicating VSSN's activities. Appleby Ltd has continued regularly to update the site with the latest content, and online payments are working well and making the process of booking events and paying for membership easier for members and VSSN staff.

We are currently undertaking an upgrade of the website in order to bring the directory of members onto the site rather than hosted externally through Ning. The upgrade will also expand the range of content available on the site and make it better when viewed by mobile phone and tablet users.

Day Conferences

Two successful day conferences were held during the year, although attendances were slightly lower than usual. Nevertheless, the conferences continue to provide an important showcase for new research and reflections and to provide opportunities for networking amongst participants.

Wales Council for Voluntary Action hosted the December 2012 Day Conference at Cardiff University, in partnership with WISERD - the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods. The programme consisted of five papers on a variety of topics, including the development of a code of practice for relationship between the private and voluntary sectors, voluntary sector competition for European funding, online campaigning, the role of lunch clubs and the challenges faced by trustees of local charities. Full details can be found at: http://www.vssn.org.uk/events/day-conferences/item/342-day_conference_04-december-2012

Proceedings at the May 2013 Day Conference at London South Bank University were kicked off with a keynote review by Professor David Horton Smith, Fulbright visiting scholar, who spoke about the development of research in the voluntary and nonprofit sector. This was followed by excellent presentations on voluntary sector involvement in criminal justice,

balancing sustainability and effectiveness in the sector's role in promoting public health, and the relationship between givers and receivers in philanthropy. Full details of the day can be found at: <http://www.vssn.org.uk/events/day-conferences/item/360-day-conference-15-may-2013>

VSSN/NCVO Annual Voluntary Sector Research Conference, 2012

The Annual Research Conference, which is jointly organised by VSSN and NCVO, took place on 10 and 11 September 2011 at the University of Birmingham. It brought together academics, practitioners and policymakers with a shared interest in voluntary sector research and provided an opportunity for them to discuss new research and network.

The opening address was given by Professor Dennis Young of Georgia State University whose theme was 'A Benefits Approach to Financing Nonprofit Organizations' and more than 70 research papers were presented at the conference. They covered a wide variety of topics and themes including - among many others - challenges for governance and management; partnerships and cross-sector relationships; the impact of policy changes on the sector; volunteering; community and grassroots activity; corporate philanthropy, grant-making and individual giving; and charity law, regulation and accountability.

The conference also provided an opportunity for those who were relatively new to the research or the field to present their work in a supportive environment. These New Researchers Sessions are an established part of the event: this year was the ninth time it has been included and is described below.

New Researchers

The free New Researchers Sessions took place alongside the VSSN/NCVO Research Conference in September 2012. They provide a route for emerging scholars or new researchers in the field to share their work and mingle with delegates from the main event. VSSN also provides a New Researchers Prize, consisting of a year's free membership, for the best paper. The event was organised with the support of Matthew Hill from the Institute for Volunteering Research, who worked alongside two VSSN committee members in developing the work.

During the year work began to address some of the challenges facing the delivery of the event particularly around a lack of funding which hampered the event reaching its full potential. In particular this meant finding ways, in the context of VSSN being a small organisation, to tackle the following issues:

- Finding ways to support travel costs and accommodation for new researchers without access to institutional/academic funds
- Seeking ways to offer new researchers without funds full access to informal networking with delegates at the main conference during meal breaks and in social spaces

- Including abstracts and publicity about the New Researchers Sessions in the main conference programme to enable mutual cross-networking between the event and the main conference without placing extra financial burdens on the main conference
- Providing access for new researchers without funds to attend the main conference plenaries.

VSSN has not been able to afford the costs associated with travel expenses for speakers and chairs who are not already attending the main conference nor for the production of post-conference dissemination material such as a research report and web-based learning materials for new researchers. As such, the New Researchers Sessions, and the associated network they create, had yet to realise their full potential. To address these problems, VSSN applied to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for a grant to develop the New Researchers Sessions at the VSSN/NCVO annual research conference in September 2013 and beyond, which was successful. VSSN is grateful for the award of £4,270 which enables us to tackle the main issues.

Development questions for the future include: securing funding for future New Researchers Sessions; developing connections with similar networks in adjacent fields; considering a small mid-year one-day new researcher workshop/conference in the Spring.

A Twitter account for new researchers and the entire VSSN membership was established in July 2013 and will be co-ordinated by Anjelica Finnegan. It is hoped that the Twitter account will be a useful tool to promote VSSN events such as the New Researchers Sessions, annual conference and one-day conferences. VSSN's Twitter handle (or username) is @VSSN_uk.

Membership

At 31 July 2013 VSSN had 137 individual and 7 organisation members covering 28 individuals (compared to 140 individual and 7 organisation members covering 30 individuals in 2012), giving a total of 165 members (compared with 170 members in 2012). There is a growing, but still small, number of non-UK members. These are primarily from outside Europe – including Australia and New Zealand. This increase has been supported by our online payment system which reduces the cost of paying via other currencies. Members continue to be positive about membership in terms both of specific benefits such as the *Voluntary Sector Review*, and in the wider sense of being part of a community of people with similar interests.

The VSSN Steering Group has reviewed trends in membership and considered ways of growing membership, which has been broadly stable since 2009. However this stability in headline numbers masks quite significant changes in the numbers of members leaving and joining. Between 31 July 2012 and 31 July 2013 VSSN lost 24% of its members (34) through non-renewal and gained 31 new members. Some turnover of membership is inevitable, as people change jobs, retire, and so on, but a high level of change probably also reflects continuing difficult economic circumstances for both academics and practitioners and the organisations that employ them. In recognition of these circumstances the Steering Group decided not to increase subscription rates for another year and recognise that actively recruiting new members will always need to be part of maintaining membership. At a

strategy meeting held in June 2013 the SG discussed ways in which the public profile of VSSN could be raised, networking with other bodies could increase, and the membership offer could be kept strong.

It is reassuring to know that members are upbeat on the benefits of membership and the Steering Group is keen to ensure that this optimism is maintained. Improvements to the website, including extra functionality and a more user-friendly interface, have helped enhanced services for members and non-members. The SG has discussed various future membership and marketing matters during the year including:

- Different membership benefits for organisations and individuals, to the extent to which they are in line with what is wanted, and the value of rewarding long periods of unbroken membership
- Reasons for a relatively high turnover of members each year, asking members why they leave, offering discounts for new members, early renewal, and multi-year memberships
- Broader examination of membership fee structures balancing potential cash gains against member losses, concessions for members on lower incomes and higher fees for higher earners
- Revenues from conference and what impacts on attendance apart from cost such as location, distance to travel, competing or complementary conferences, and who attends
- VSSN public profile, exhibiting at relevant places, approaching chief officers in larger non profit research and other organisations

Finally, it is has been felt to be crucial to get member participation in thinking about the role and purpose of VSSN in the future.

Email Discussion List

There has been a slight dip in the number of people subscribing to the VSSN e-discussion list this year - falling from 522 subscribers in September 2012 to 505 subscribers as of 15 August 2013. The list, however, continues to attract both members and non-members and to provide a lively forum for debate and information sharing. Recent discussion topics have included organisational sustainability and resilience and the future of voluntary services. The list also serves as a useful resource for colleagues seeking out existing research evidence and references, contacting potential research participants, and promoting events and publications. We are grateful to all our contributors for their ongoing input and commitment.

2. The Organisation and Management of VSSN

Building Partnerships

The successful partnership with NCVO continues, particularly through VSSN's collaboration around the Annual Research Conference. Formal links are maintained with a range of other organisations, through our website, and this is an area to which more attention will be given in the future.

Steering Group meetings

The Steering Group met four times during the year. Meetings were held after both VSSN Day Conferences and after the Annual Conference and an additional meeting to discuss future strategy was convened in June, 2013. In addition, the Steering Group uses its email discussion list to progress business between meetings.

At its strategy meeting the Group agreed that it needed to raise the profile of VSSN and take a more proactive approach to its role. This would involve:

- seeking a public profile by commenting on appropriate issues of policy and practice which affected the voluntary sector research community;
- making use of social media to increase awareness of VSSN;
- using the website we have in development to promote more networking between VSSN members;
- creating more and better linkages with external bodies such as foundations and other scholarly bodies with a view to joint activity; and
- redesign the day conferences to focus on 'hot issues'; involve practitioners; and experiment with innovative formats.

Public Benefit

One of the Steering Group's main responsibilities is to ensure that VSSN pursues its stated aim as a charity of advancing education and research concerning the voluntary sector in ways that provide a benefit to the wider public. All VSSN events are widely publicised and open to all, with only modest fees to attend. Similarly our online discussion list is open to anyone to join. Furthermore, the *Voluntary Sector Review* is now an integral part of the VSSN's work and is an important vehicle in enabling research work on the voluntary sector to reach as many people as possible.

Executive Office

In May Appleby Ltd completed its three-year contract with VSSN for the provision of the Executive Office. A new contract is now in place for the next 3 years. Appleby Ltd has continued to carry out a wide range of activities including those related to membership, finances, website updates and day conferences. It also supports the VSSN Steering Group in taking forward new developments.

3. VSSN's Financial Review

The trustees have continued to prepare the accounts on a receipts and payments basis as permitted by the Charities Act 2011 and have taken account of recommendations issued by the Charity Commission for presentation of accounts on this basis.

While the income of VSSN is not sufficient to require audit or independent examination of the accounts, the trustees have conducted individual checks on the figures before approving the accounts.

Receipts and payments

During the year income from subscriptions for VSSN's membership package, which includes its journal, *Voluntary Sector Review*, and a preferential rate of registration for day seminars, declined slightly from £8,349.57 to £8,150.00. The proportion of subscriptions paid on an organisational basis increased from 15% to 18%.

During the year income from day seminars decreased by a fifth from £2,499.00 to £2,050.00, and the surplus generated by these events decreased by more than half (from £1,833.12 to £807.17), mainly due to an increase in costs of accommodation and catering. The proportion of fees paid by non-members decreased from 38% to 32%.

During the year VSSN received a grant of £2,000.00 from NCVO for work in support of the annual VSSN/NCVO research conference, and a grant of £4,270.00 from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for support of new researchers' participation in the 2013 conference and generally.

Obligations at year end

There were a number of obligations at year end. These consisted of:

- Current liabilities of £5,026.07. These included sums owed for financial year 2012-13 but not paid out before the end of that year: final payment for room hire for a meeting of the Steering Group (£96.07); the quarterly fee payable to the Executive Officer for June to August 2013 (£1,250.00); and payments to the Policy Press for the *Voluntary Sector Review* (£3,680.00).
- Other binding long-term commitments of £6,660.00. These included the fees of the Executive Officer for at least one quarter plus an additional quarter's notice period; (£2,500.00); likely expenses of the Executive Officer (£200.00); payments to the Policy Press for the *Voluntary Sector Review* (estimated) (£3,660.00); and a contingency for maintaining and upgrading VSSN's website (£300.00).
- Deferred income of £490.00. This included subscriptions for financial year 2013-14 paid in advance.

Reserves policy

VSSN has a formal reserves policy. This takes account of obligations arising from VSSN's commitment to the Policy Press for supporting the *Voluntary Sector Review* and its contract with Appleby Ltd for the services of the Executive Officer.

As at 31 July 2013 VSSN's total balance at bank was £24,747.03 of which £20,477.03 was unrestricted and £4,270.00 was restricted (grant from the ESRC to support new researchers' participation in the annual conference and generally). Allowing for current liabilities at year's end of £5,026.07, the effective balance was £19,720.96.

Allowing for other binding commitments as per VSSN's reserves policy (£6,160.00), the effective available balance at year's end was £13,560.96.

These figures mean that VSSN's current financial position is comfortable and substantially improved upon that in the previous year.

However, VSSN's financial position is determined by its capacity to attract members and to encourage attendance at its day seminars. There is, therefore, a need to continue vigorously to promote memberships (especially from among the large number of those on its web-based mailing list) and to encourage attendance at day seminars and, where possible, to seek additional funding and lower costs for those seminars.

We would like to record our thanks to Sonia Liff and her colleague at Appleby Ltd for continuing to develop VSSN's financial recording and payments systems and for the high quality of financial reporting they produce. This has been invaluable in helping VSSN increase the effectiveness of its financial planning and provide better services to members.

Approval

The trustees acknowledge their responsibilities for keeping proper accounting records for the charity, safeguarding the charity's funds from loss and preparing an Annual Report and Annual Accounts to comply with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011.

This Annual Report has been prepared to comply with the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008, taking advantage of simplifications available to non-auditable charities. It was approved by the trustees (Steering Group) on 28 November 2013 and signed on their behalf by:

Signature: 
Colin Rochester (Chair)

Date: 

Signature: 
Meta Zimmeck (Treasurer)

Date: 

VSSN ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2012/2013

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

	01/08/12-31/07/13	01/08/11-31/07/12
	£	£
Receipts		
Grants and donations	6,270.00	2,750.00
Seminar fees - members	1,390.00	1,540.00
Seminar fees - non-members	660.00	959.00
Member subscriptions	6,710.00	7,089.57
Organisational member subscriptions	1,440.00	1,260.00
Total receipts	16,470.00	13,598.57
Payments		
Expenses of VSSN events	1,242.83	665.88
Publications expenses [Note 4]	2,600.00	2,600.00
Publications supplement [Note 4]	850.00	1,010.00
Website development and hosting	264.00	1,296.61
Committee expenses [Note 1]	92.78	59.10
Executive officer – fees [Note 2]	4,500.00	4,500.00
Executive officer – expenses [Note 1]	218.85	200.90
Database and software	0.00	24.00
Equipment (table banner, stand, etc.)	48.02	75.00
Publicity	55.05	0.00
WorldPay (fee processing)	251.96	72.64
Total payments	10,123.49	10,504.13
SURPLUS	6,346.51	3,094.44
Balance brought forward from previous year	18,400.52	15,306.08
Balance carried forward to next year	24,747.03	18,400.52

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	01/08/12-31/07/13	01/08/11-31/07/12
	(£)	(£)
Monetary assets		
Unity Trust Bank current account	24,747.03	18,400.52
Total monetary assets	24,747.03	18,400.52
Represented by monetary funds		
Unrestricted funds	20,477.03	18,400.52
Restricted funds	4,270.00	0.00
Total monetary funds	24,747.03	18,400.52
Non-monetary assets and liabilities	0.00	0.00
NON-MONETARY ASSETS [Note 3]		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
<i>Miscellaneous creditors at year end</i>		
Expenses payable at year end	-96.07	-103.07
Executive officer services payable for June-August	-1,250.00	-1,180.25
Amounts payable to Policy Press for VSR	-3,680.00	-3,450.00
<i>Total miscellaneous creditors</i>	-5,026.07	-4,733.32
Deferred income: Subscriptions received in advance	-490.00	-60.00
OTHER BINDING COMMITMENTS AT YEAR END		
Executive office contract commitments [Note 2]	-2,500.00	-2,360.00
Executive officer expenses	-200.00	-200.00
Minimum obligation for VSR [Note 4]	-2,600.00	-2,600.00
Estimated supplementary obligation for VSR [Note 4]	-1,060.00	1,100.00
Web expenditure	-300.00	-300.00
<i>Total other commitments</i>	-6,660.00	-6,560.00
Total current liabilities and provisions	-12,176.07	-11,353.32
NET ASSETS AND NON-MONETARY	12,570.96	7,047.20

Notes to the Accounts

1. Members of the Steering Group or their institutions normally meet their own travel expenses when attending meetings of the Steering Group held on the same day as VSSN's day seminars and the annual conference. VSSN pays the travel expenses of the Executive Officer to day seminars and the annual conference.
2. VSSN has contracted with Appleby Ltd to provide the role of Executive Officer. The first contract was for a fee of £4,500.00 per annum for three years between June 2010 to July 2013 (subject to three months' notice by either party). The second contract was for a fee of £5,000.00 from June 2013 to July 2014, £5,150.00 from June 2014 to July 2015 and £5,304 from June 2015 to July 2016 (subject to three months' notice by either party).
3. VSSN has some fixed assets in the form of banner stands and a table stand, but as these personalised to VSSN they do not have any disposal value to show on the Statement of Assets and Liabilities.
4. VSSN's contract with the Policy Press for the publication of the *Voluntary Sector Review* specifies two payments, the first a basic payment of £2,600.00 per year ("minimum obligation") and the second a payment based on the number and income category of VSSN's members ("supplementary obligation"). The former is fixed and the second is variable. Payments are made in arrears.