

**‘It has never been like this and now it is exactly the same again’:
Problems in sustaining policy innovations: The case of the Compact
in England**

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1. Introduction

Given the attractions of policy formation on the one hand and of outputs, outcomes and impacts on the other, it is easy for evaluators to overlook the process of implementation of policy initiatives, and this has been the case for the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector in England (1998). Reasons for this include difficulties in accessing documentation in the short to medium term (if at all) and the assumed tedium of the subject (and its high input-to-output ratio). As a result, then, evaluations generally concentrate on the beginnings and the ends rather than the middles. But in our recent evaluation of the Compact¹ we felt that the middle was particularly important for explaining why, after such a thrilling start, the initial impetus of the Compact was not sustained and why it has, regrettably, come full circle – or in the words of that wily social philosopher Viktor Chernomyrdin, “it has never been like this and now it is exactly the same again”.²

In carrying out our evaluation we realised that there is a need for some kind of comparative analysis of implementation or even (dare we say it!) a meta-analysis of implementation. There are some interesting comparative studies of the adoption of policy initiatives³ and systematic reviews of quantified outputs of interventions in the fields of health and education, criminal justice and social welfare in the Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations⁴, but so far as we can tell there is no definitive guidance for contextualising studies such as ours – for making a comparative analysis of the factors that helped or hindered the implementation of policy initiatives. It may be that implementation is always imperfect and that nothing ever turns out as planned, but we think that it would be useful to understand the nature and relative degree of

¹Meta Zimmeck, Colin Rochester and Bill Rushbrooke, Practical Wisdom R2Z Research Consultants, *Use it or lose it: A summative evaluation of the Compact* (Birmingham: Commission for the Compact, 2011).

²Obituary of Viktor Chernomyrdin, *The Economist*, 4 November 2010.

³See, for example, Jeremy Kendall, “The mainstreaming of the third sector into public policy in England in the late 1990s: whys and wherefores”, *Policy & Politics*, 28(4) (2000): 541-62; and John Casey, “Third sector participation and the policy process: a framework for comparative analysis”, *ibid.*, 32(2) (2004), 241-57.

⁴See also a rare and fascinating analysis of the effectiveness of different funders in targeting deprivation. Funders included central government departments, the Single Regeneration Budget, the National Lottery, the European Union (European Social Fund) and grant-making trusts. Neil Alderman, Mike Coombes, and Simon Raybould, *Mapping Funding Initiatives tackling poverty and deprivation in England: Supplementary Report* (Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2000), S17-18.

imperfection: as one of our informants suggested, the question is not whether the implementation of the Compact was a mess but whether it was a bigger mess than the implementation of other programmes.

What were the critical factors for the successful implementation of the Compact? There are a number of suggestions, mainly from abroad. For example, in his advice for the preparation of compacts, based on a cross-national review, Daimar Liiv suggested the following: a clear system for implementation and review; definition of short-term and long-term objectives; institutionalisation of co-operation through the formation of organs for co-operation and the appointment of responsible persons; provision of wide support for representatives of the not-for-profit sector including a mechanism for guaranteeing their rotation; establishment of quality standards to measure success or failure; inclusion of a mechanism for resolving disputes and disagreements; and focus on activities at local as well as national level.⁵ In their review of European “policy documents on co-operation” Nilda Bullain and Radost Toftisova set out “implementation elements” such as “a timetable covering short-term and long-term objectives, allocation of responsibilities to public institutions involved in implementation and potentially such elements as proposed monitoring and evaluation tools, provisions for review and revision, and a mechanism for settling disputes” and they stressed that “specificity here is crucial... in order to avoid creating a dead-letter agreement”.⁶ In his comparison of the implementation of the Canadian Accord with the Compact in England Peter Elson uses the Policy Implementation Framework developed by Mazmanian and Sabatier. This includes four material variables, seven structural variables and five contextual variables. He notes that, taken as a whole, material variables “reflect the core intent of the policy” and that implementation of small and well-defined policy changes are more likely to be implemented successfully than large and complex changes. He gives particular weight to structural variables - “clear and consistent objectives”, “valid causal theory” (understanding of the policy), “hierarchical integration in departments” (number of points at which the policy can be vetoed and the incentives and sanctions available to supporters of the policy), “decision rules of implementing agencies” (risk management, accountability requirements), “officials’ commitment to policy objectives”, “formal access by outsiders and independent evaluation” (participation of target-group representatives in decision-making and independent evaluations); and “adequate financial resources” - and among contextual variables to “attitudes and resources of constituency groups” and “support from legislators”.⁷ While these studies vary in how broadly or narrowly they define “implementation”, when they are triangulated, they do point to some of the most important factors.

In this paper we have focused on what we have called the “architecture of implementation”, the organisational arrangements put in place to take the Compact forward – in particular, the roles and responsibilities, resources, mechanisms for co-

⁵Daimar Liiv, “Guidelines for the Preparation of Compacts”, *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, 3(4) (2001), 11-13/15 of web-based version.

⁶Nilda Bullain and Radost Toftisova, “A Comparative Analysis of European Policies and Practices of NGO-Government Cooperation”, *ibid.*, 7(4) (2005), 3/29 of web-based version.

⁷Peter R. Elson, “Tracking the Implementation of Voluntary Sector-Government Policy Agreements: Is the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Frame?”, *ibid.* 8(4) (2006), 3-8/12 of web-based version.

ordination and leadership of those responsible for doing so. We believe that the architecture of implementation of the Compact was seriously flawed and that as a result implementation was tardy, muddled and insufficient to the extent that the Compact's initial promise – its star quality as a social policy innovation and its strong support in government and in the voluntary and community sector – was frittered away. In the end this has left the Compact as a national initiative to all intents and purposes a dead man walking.

Overall, then, the implementation of the Compact started late, bounced from pillar to post and declined in energy. Having been signed in 1998, it took until 2000 to publish the Local Compact Guidelines and hold the first Compact Annual Meeting. It took until 2003 to complete the suite of Codes of Good Practice. It took until late 2001 to task voluntary sector liaison officers with day-to-day responsibility and another year to task senior civil servants (G3 Champions) with overall responsibility for implementation in government departments. It took until 2003 to launch its flagship PR event, Compact Week. It took until 2006 to appoint the first senior official, the Commissioner for the Compact, with dedicated responsibility for oversight of the Compact and its implementation and until 2007 to establish a bespoke agency, the Commission for the Compact, to provide a home for the Commissioner and to carry out this work on a systematic basis. It took until 2003 to establish mechanisms for resolving disputes (NCVO's Compact Advocacy Programme and the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution's Compact Mediation Scheme) and until 2007 to clarify responsibility and rationalise administrative arrangements for the voluntary and community sector under Compact Voice. It took until 2008 to hold the first Local Compacts Annual Conference. It took until 2009, ten years after the first local compact was signed (and five years after the target date), officially to complete the set of local compacts (and even this begged the question of completeness).

In this paper we focus on five areas where the architecture of implementation was not up to the job:

- leadership by ministers
- resourcing and commitment of the responsible government unit
- resourcing and representation of the responsible voluntary and community sector body
- powers and status of the Commission for the Compact
- mechanisms for liaison and accountability among the partners.

2. The challenge of implementation

We do not underestimate the challenge of implementing the Compact and recognise, like Elson above, that the bigger and more complex the task, the greater the risk of failure. Unlike “vertical” initiatives that are hosted by a single government body or cover a single service area or group of users, the Compact was a national “horizontal” initiative that mandated comprehensive cultural change in the ways government and the voluntary and sector worked together – “a new approach to partnership.... based on

shared values and mutual respect”⁸. Compact working required change and adaptation across the whole of government – central government departments and their agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs); government offices of the regions and regional development agencies; local authorities; the National Health Service (NHS); police forces; and fire services – and the whole of the sector (and in successive iterations this increased from the voluntary and community sector to the third sector to civil society) – from the largest national organisations to the smallest community groups. It required change and adaptation in principle and in detail, as success (or failure) is determined at every point of contact – from minister to procurement officer, from chief executive to project manager. It required change and adaptation on a sustained basis – through changes in political leadership, programmes, administrative structures, methods of operation and personnel.

Because the Compact was not time-limited and was unusually long-lived (twelve and a half years), this meant that it did not suffer the disadvantages of breakneck speed experienced by other initiatives locked into three-year (or less) spending rounds, but it also meant that it had to operate – and restate its relevance and fight for its place – in a changing and crowded policy environment.

3. Overview of implementation

The implementation of the Compact fell into a number of overlapping phases:

- agreement and roll-out of basic documentation, five Codes of Good Practice - Funding Code (2000; revised as Funding and Procurement Code 2005); Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code (2000), Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Sector Code (2001), Volunteering Code (2001; revised 2005) and Community Groups Code (2003)
- drive to establish local compacts in all local authorities (to 2006 with greatest activity in 2004-05)
- attempt to re-energise the process through introduction of Compact Plus, a fast-track for organisations engaged in public service delivery (with a streamlined version of the Compact and a champion-intercessor) (2005-06) and then through the appointment of a Commissioner, initially to implement Compact Plus and then, along with the Commission for the Compact, to act as “honest broker” and carry the work forward (2006-07)
- modernisation of the Compact under the leadership of the Commission, including extensive consultations on the future of the Compact and how it should be “refreshed” (refreshed” compact December 2009)
- attempt to secure the independent status and accountability to Parliament of the Commission (2009-10)

⁸Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP, Home Secretary, and Sir Kenneth Stowe, Chair, Voluntary and Community Sector’s Working Group on Government Relations, Joint Foreword, *Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England: Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty* (Cm4100; London: Home Office, 1998).

- winding down under the Coalition through a rushed and perfunctory “renewal” of the Compact (December 2010) and termination of the Commission (March 2011).

Between 1998 and 2007 arrangements for implementation were twin-tracked along lines initially set by the development and negotiation of the Compact. On the government side there were ministers with responsibility for the voluntary and community sector and the lead unit for the sector. On the sector side there were the responsible body for the sector and related or ancillary bodies involved in mediation/resolution of disputes. From April 2007 until the end of March 2011 arrangements were triple-tracked to include the Commission for the Compact.

4. Leadership by ministers

On the government side the most important (and highest profile) element in the architecture of implementation was the minister responsible for the voluntary and community sector and the Compact. Ministers’ primary function was to provide leadership in achieving government’s agendas for the sector, and their ability to do so depended upon their understanding of the sector and its concerns⁹, active commitment, status (and hence political clout) and time to devote to the job. Ministers’ possession of these attributes has been uneven, and their performance, in consequence, has also been uneven.

As can be seen from Table 1, from May 1997 to the present there have been eleven ministers (not counting Lord Falconer, who was for a time somewhat oddly “twinned” with Paul Boateng). Seven were based in the Home Office and four in the Cabinet Office. The average tenure for New Labour’s ministers was 15.6 months. The longest tenure was that of Fiona Mactaggart (twenty-three months); and the shortest, that of Kevin Brennan (eight months).

Table 1: Ministers for the voluntary and community sector, May 1997-2011

Name	Title	Dates of service
Alun Michael	Minister of State and Deputy Home Secretary, Home Office	May 1997-October 1998
Paul Boateng	Minister of State (and subsequently Deputy Home Secretary), Home Office	October 1998-July 2001
Lord Falconer	Minister of State, Cabinet Office	c.April 1999-June 2001
Angela Eagle	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Home Office	June 2001-May 2002
Lord Filkin	Parliamentary Undersecretary	May 2002-June 2003

⁹Although as the outgoing MP Tom Levitt noted, subject knowledge generally acted as a disqualification in making appointments: “There used to be a rule of thumb that if you knew a lot about something, people would think you had gone native and weren’t a good person to be a minister”. Quoted by Paul Jump in “Tom Levitt: get on to the new MPs”, *Third Sector Online*, 11 May 2010.

	of State, Home Office	
Fiona Mactaggart	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Home Office	June 2003-May 2005
Paul Goggins	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Home Office	May 2005-May 2006
Ed Miliband	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Cabinet Office	May 2006-June 2007
Phil Hope	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Cabinet Office	June 2007-October 2008
Kevin Brennan	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Cabinet Office	October 2008-June 2009
Angela Smith	Minister of State, Cabinet Office	June 2009-May 2010
Nick Hurd	Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, Cabinet Office	From May 2010

Alun Michael, Boateng, Mactaggart, Paul Goggins, Phil Hope and Angela Smith, who had worked in the voluntary and community sector prior to entering Parliament, had the greatest understanding of the ways that the sector thought and worked, and of these Michael, Boateng and Hope were by all accounts the most passionate in their commitment to the sector and the most energetic in promoting initiatives such as the Compact. With the exception of Michael and Boateng at the beginning and Smith towards the end (a bit of a blip), who were ministers of state (and thus in the second rank of ministers after secretaries of state), all of the rest were parliamentary undersecretaries of state (in the third rank) - “junior ministers on the way up”¹⁰ (or down). Moreover, Michael and Boateng were close to Tony Blair and instrumental in the development of and went on to play a significant role in the delivery of New Labour’s projects, but other ministers, with the exception of Ed Miliband, who is currently leader of the Labour Party, have not gone on to do greater things.

Ministers’ remits varied, and some had more time than others to devote to the sector. Home Office ministers had broad remits: Michael was responsible for criminal justice, the police and the sector (and according to his civil servants, spent far too much time on the sector); Mactaggart, for race equality, community policy and civil renewal; and Goggins, for policing, security and communities. Cabinet Office ministers – as “ministers for the third sector/civil society” had narrower, sector-specific briefs, although Hope was for a time also minister for the East Midlands; and Smith, minister for social exclusion as well as for the sector. Nick Hurd is currently responsible for the Big Society agenda, National Citizens Service, charities, volunteering, social enterprise and devolution (one of those odd-sock bits allocated to junior ministers).

The ins and outs and ups and downs of the ministers responsible for the voluntary and community sector may have been typical of government’s organisation of its business and no worse than in other areas of activity (there is no evidence on this point), but some ministers rather spectacularly failed to live up to their responsibilities. For

¹⁰Matthew Little, “NEWS IN FOCUS: First step on the ladder for junior ministers on the up”, *ibid.*, 25 June 2003.

example, Eagle, who was well-known for cancelling appearances at the last minute, failed to turn up to the second annual meeting, and Smith not only perpetrated an egregious breach of the Compact by cancelling the Campaigning Research Programme shortly after awarding grants but also refused for ethical reasons to turn up to chair the tenth annual meeting.¹¹

5. Resourcing and commitment of the responsible government unit: Voluntary and Community Unit/Active Community Unit/Active Communities Directorate/Office of the Third Sector/Office of Civil Society

Ministers with responsibility for the voluntary and community sector made their “home” in the policy unit responsible for the sector, and over the years this unit underwent near-continuous organisational change. Since 1996 it has been hosted by three government departments, increased in size and restructured and rebadged in order to meet changing policy requirements. Since 1997 it has had nine heads of unit (almost as many as it has had ministers) – Howard Webber, Georgina Fletcher-Cooke, Helen Edwards, Amobi Modhu, Jitinder Kohli, Ben Jupp, Campbell Robb, Rolande Anderson and Gareth Davies. Its staff grew from 29 in Summer 1998 to 39 in Summer 1999 to 42 in March 2002 to 55 in March 2007 to 66 in September 2010.¹² It has had high levels of staff turnover, which meant that hard-won knowledge and expertise was lost and the unit was rarely at full strength. It has gone from being a small and unobtrusive unit with responsibility for liaising with the sector and administering grants programmes to a “brokerage service between government and the voluntary sector”¹³ to a “sort of meta-unit in the Government ... operating across all departments to promote the interests of the voluntary and community sector”¹⁴ to a place in the vanguard of the Big Society - “opening up public services, encouraging social action and giving more power to local communities”¹⁵.

From the early 1970s the responsible unit, the Voluntary Services Unit (VSU), was part of the Home Office. However, in May 1996 it was moved to the Department of National Heritage and renamed the Voluntary and Community Division (VCD). This surprising and ill-considered transfer was reversed after the election in May 1997 when Blair told Michael, “I want you to go to the Home Office, and the voluntary sector goes with you”¹⁶ – as did the VCD, renamed the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU). In his keynote speech to NCVO’s Annual Conference in 1999 Blair announced the expansion and

¹¹Smith was a patron of the Captive Animals’ Protection Society and declined to attend the meeting at London Zoo for ethical reasons. John Plummer, “Compact Voice questions Angela Smith’s commitment to the Compact”, *ibid.*, 29 January 2010. Instead she spoke at the Voice10 Social Enterprise Conference.

¹²VCU News, No.1 Summer 1998, 1; ACU News, No.2 Summer 1999, 1; HC Deb, 22 May 2002, vol.386, col.444W; Corin Williams, “Whitehall culture shift”, *Third Sector Online*, 28 March 2007; Office for Civil Society’s Organogram, September 2010.

¹³OPINION: HOT ISSUE – Will the Active Community Unit really act as an honest broker”, *Third Sector Online*, 5 June 2002.

¹⁴Stephen Cook, “Newsmaker: Getting to know you – Jitinder Kohli, Head of Active Communities Directorate, Home Office”, *ibid.*, 2 March 2005.

¹⁵“New leader of the Office for Civil Society”, Cabinet Office Press Release 188/10, 1 November 2010.

¹⁶Quoted by Kaye Wiggins in “Voluntary sector’s all-party parliamentary group ‘will have a stronger voice’”, *ibid.*, 29 June 2010.

strengthening of the VCU and the change of its name to the Active Community Unit (ACU).¹⁷ In May 2002, following a period without a head of unit, William Plowden's swingeing criticisms of the incoherence of policy on the sector for which the unit was obliged to carry the can¹⁸ and David Carrington's critical review of the unit's role in administering the Compact¹⁹, it was reorganised and relaunched as one of three units of the newly-formed Active Communities Directorate (ACD)²⁰. In May 2005 there was a ministerial tug of war post-election for control of the ACD's policy remits, ultimately resolved in favour of the status quo.²¹ In May 2006 the Directorate was abolished and the ACU and Charities Unit were transferred to the Cabinet Office, amalgamated and renamed the Office of the Third Sector (OTS). Following the election of the Coalition Government in May 2010 OTS was renamed the Office for Civil Society (OCS) and was managed jointly with the Social Exclusion Task Force until September when the Task Force was subsumed in OCS.

Table 2: Administrative units leading on the voluntary and community sector, May 1996-2011

Name	Department	Dates
Voluntary and Community Division	Department for National Heritage	May 1996-May 1997
Voluntary and Community Unit	Home Office	May 1997-c.April 1999
Active Community Unit	Home Office	c.April 1999-May 2002
Active Community Unit within Active Communities Directorate	Home Office	May 2002-May 2006

¹⁷"I have therefore asked Jack Straw to subsume the existing Voluntary and Community Unit into a new Active Community Unit with a substantially bigger role and higher profile.... This new unit will have a brief to work across government to coordinate the work of departments, joining up the many different things that government does. It will be outward looking, building partnerships, making things happen. It will be made up of people from outside government as well as inside. And it will raise the profile of the sector within government, providing a channel for the best ideas." [21 January 1999; text provided by NCVO for which many thanks].

¹⁸William Plowden, "Next Steps in Voluntary Action" in William Plowden (ed.), *Next steps in voluntary action: An analysis of five years of developments in the voluntary sector in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales* (London: NCVO, 2001), 23-24.

¹⁹David Carrington, *The Compact – the Challenge of Implementation* (London: Active Community Unit, Home Office, 2002), 4-8.

²⁰The others were the Charities Unit and the Civil Renewal Unit.

²¹"There was a brief flutter of excitement during the post-election reshuffle: the PM wanted to put his anti-social behaviour crusade into the same ministry as local government, along with community renewal and active citizenship. It looked like the start of bringing the whole 'community' agenda under one roof, possibly accompanied by 'civil society'. Was David Miliband's new Department of Communities and Local Government actually going to do what it said on the tin? The voluntary sector's antennae began to twitch. But it's fallen victim to an old-fashioned ministerial turf war. Charles Clarke was put out by the prospect of losing anti-social behaviour from the Home Office, where it sits alongside other policing functions, and he appears to have won the argument. The functions that might have gone with it – community safety, active citizenship, community cohesion and the voluntary and community sector – have stayed put too. We're left with the old set-up, with too many related functions spread across Whitehall." Stephen Cook, "Editorial: Ministerial turf war lets the sector down", *Third Sector Online*, 18 May 2005.

Office of the Third Sector	Cabinet Office	May 2006-May 2010
Office for Civil Society	Cabinet Office	From May 2010

It is difficult to estimate exactly the nature and quantity of resources that were made available to the unit and that the unit made available for the implementation of the Compact. It appears that one person (probably not full-time) was responsible for the Compact in 1998 and two people are responsible today (both posts recently vacated). This hardly seems sufficient to the task in hand. Both Plowden and Carrington, judicious and experienced analysts of the workings of government, stated that in the critical early years (2001 and 2002, respectively) the unit was so overstretched that it was not adequately coordinating the delivery of policy initiatives for which it was responsible or carrying out its cross-cutting remit with other government departments or even managing day-to-day business and, worse, that it had through “inconsistency (even ambivalence)” lost momentum in implementing the Compact, which had already become “yesterday’s initiative”.²² It is not possible to form any firm view as to the continuation of this state of play beyond 2002, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there are still grave difficulties with prioritisation and resourcing.

6. Resourcing and representation of the responsible voluntary and community sector body: Working Group on Government Relations/Compact Working Group/Compact Voice

The voluntary and community sector’s body responsible for implementing the Compact has been chronically under-funded, and its claims to legitimacy through its representation of the sector are less well-founded than they were in the early days of its operation, when it consulted widely on the drafting of the Compact and its Codes. In addition its close (if not symbiotic) relationship with NCVO and large national infrastructure bodies has reduced its perceived relevance (and that of the Compact) to many organisations, particularly community-based organisations not interested in or involved with the delivery of public services.

The Working Group on Government Relations (WGGR) was established in June 1997. Its aim was “to establish in detail, from a voluntary and community sector perspective, the nature of the Compact, to consult with other voluntary and community organizations over its proposed content and to liaise with Government”.²³ Supported by a reference group of sixty-five (later over a hundred) organisations, it carried out a large-scale consultation by direct invitation and by snowballing (10,000 copies of the consultation document distributed; 25,000 respondents).²⁴ It then drafted the Compact and was part of the negotiations with government that secured its agreement. Once the Compact was signed, the WGGR, renamed the Compact Working Group (CWG) in December 2001, created five sub-groups, each with a detailed strategy and work plan, to develop the

²²Plowden, “Next Steps in Voluntary Action”, 23-24; Carrington, 3, 14, 26.

²³Sir Kenneth Stowe, “Professional Developments: Compact on relations between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England and Wales”, *Public Administration and Development*, 18 (1998), 519-20.

²⁴For which Stowe was justifiably proud: “I doubt if there has even been as large a consultative exercise in the voluntary sector as this”. *Ibid.*, 521.

proposed codes of good practice. Chaired by practitioners and representatives of relevant umbrella groups, these sub-groups carried out scoping consultations on the proposed contents of the codes, drafted the codes, consulted on the draft codes and then finalised the codes – a lengthy process, and the Funding and Volunteering Sub-groups repeated this process to produce revised versions of their codes. The sub-groups continued in place for a while to oversee implementation but concluded their business by 2005. From time to time the CWG created additional sub-groups for particular purposes - for example, Mediation, to explore arrangements for the establishment of a Compact Mediation Service; Communications, to promote awareness of the Compact and its own work; and Local Compacts, to promote the spread of compacts in local areas. In October 2006 CWG changed its name to Compact Voice, and in April 2007 it merged with the Compact Advocacy Programme. In order to give sufficient weight to its work on local compacts, for a time the CWG divided into two streams, National Compact Voice and Local Compact Voice, each with separate memberships, websites and web-based discussion fora.²⁵ This division ultimately proved counterproductive, and in 2009 these two streams were merged, not without controversy.²⁶

Over the years WGGR/CWG/Compact Voice has operated on a modest scale. It was initially supported by NCVO, and between 1999/2000 and 2001/02 it was funded by the Home Office at a rate sufficient for “one full time post with occasional administrative support” rising to 1.5 posts in the third year.²⁷ The first member of staff was only employed six months after the signing of the Compact. In the next two three-year rounds it was again funded by the Home Office and the Cabinet Office at a rate sufficient for four staff. In the three years to 2010/11 it was funded by the Cabinet Office at a slightly

²⁵“National Compact Voice represents national sector organisations on taking the Compact forward. National organisations include all organisations that work at a national level but does not preclude organisations that work at local as well as national level.” “Local Compact Voice represents the local sector on taking the Compact forward.” In 2008 Local Compact Voice had more members (550) than National Compact Voice (230). *Annual Sector Report 2008: A report reflecting voluntary and community sector perspectives on the Compact in 2008: Presented at the [9th] Compact Annual Review Meeting, 2nd December 2008*, 13.

²⁶In October 2009 the board of Compact Voice decided to exclude Carl Allen, chair of Local Compact Voice, on a motion of no confidence. Allen had complained publicly about Simon Blake, chair of Compact Voice, and Oliver Reichardt, head of the Compact Team: “In the complaint, Allen says Blake demanded, in front of staff, that Local Compact Voice step down from the Compact Voice board. Blake is also accused of ignoring a board decision to review the effectiveness of the Compact Users Group and introducing amendments to the new draft constitution of Compact Voice without discussion or a vote. Allen told Third Sector he had been removed because he was ‘a person of independence. I am often the lone voice at meetings.’ The Compact Voice board agreed to adopt a new constitution, which Blake said would enable it to follow good practice on governance and accountability. The constitution also provides for the establishment of a Compact users group, which Blake said ‘would provide specific expertise and advice from people who use the Compact on a day-to-day basis.’” John Plummer, “Dispute breaks out between Compact Voice and Local Compact Voice”, *Third Sector Online*, 22 October 2009. It is difficult to know whether this dispute was a matter of personalities or of principle.

²⁷*Report of the Second Annual Meeting to Review the Compact between Ministers and representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector* (London: Home Office and Compact Working Group, n.d.), 11; and *Report of the Fourth Annual Meeting to Review the Compact between Ministers and representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector* (London: Home Office and Compact Working Group, [June 2003]), 24.

higher rate (£307,627 in 2010/11 with £915,979 over the three years) at a rate sufficient for five staff. The Cabinet Office has announced that, in the light of the abolition of the Commission for the Compact, it will increase its funding to £350,000 in 2011/12 rising to £378,000 in 2014/15 – a rate sufficient for an additional two part-time staff.²⁸ These are limited resources indeed with which to tackle a substantial and complex workload, now increased by the abolition of the Commission with its fifteen staff.

A critical issue for WGGR/CWG/Compact Voice, and one which is a very large elephant in the partnership room – is that of its “representation” of the voluntary and community sector: “Compact Voice is the voice of the voluntary sector on the Compact” (so says its website). In an international context such silence is anomalous. In other countries with similar policy documents there is a recognition that “NGOs exemplify participatory democracy, but they do not exemplify representative democracy”²⁹, and there have been discussions about appropriate arrangements (see, for example, Liiv’s recommendation that “representation provisions should include basic norms about the nomination of representatives, their mandate and duties”³⁰). The new Australian Compact, with its facility for individual sign-ups, has clearly operationalised the community sector’s individualism and suspicion of “peak bodies”.³¹ In England a few local compacts – Cornwall (2010), Darlington (2004), Oldham (2009), Rochford (2008) and Slough (2005 – have gone this route.

It has not been possible fully to document the constitutional arrangements under which WGGR/CWG/Compact Voice operated before 2009. Firstly the constitution adopted in 2009 clarified to some extent what was seen as its “symbiotic” relationship with NCVO. Compact Voice is “an independent body”. It is “not a legal entity and operates under the aegis of NCVO”. It “works within NCVO’s objects”. “NCVO is the accountable body for funding, and provides management and organisational support to the Compact team.” “The trustees of NCVO have legal governance responsibilities for Compact Voice.” Secondly this constitution clarified the role and method of recruitment of its board. Its board consists of a chair and up to fourteen members, of whom seven are standing representatives of named national umbrella organisations and the remainder are individual members “drawn from across the voluntary and community sector as well as from the wider civil society” – in practice from the members of Compact Voice (number on website = 2,400). Members are appointed for three-year terms by the board sitting as

²⁸“Compact Voice to expand after securing new Cabinet Office funding”, *Third Sector Online*, 12 January 2011.

²⁹Bullain and Toftisova, 10/29.

³⁰Liiv, 1/15.

³¹M. Rawsthorne and F. Christian set out the findings of a small survey of community organisations in New South Wales on the subject of representation. When asked who should represent them, 49% said themselves; 41%, regional organisations; 32%, sector-based peaks; and 27%, the state-wide peak organisation that was actually negotiating the compact. When asked how consultation should take place, 62% said through specific consultation workshops; 38%, through peaks or regional organisations; 30%, through written materials and feedback; and 27%, through the state-wide peak organisation. When asked at what level consultation should take place, 74% said local; 63%, regional; and 29%, state. This shows that when the question is asked, organisations opt for direct, personal and local representation. “Government/Community Sector Compacts: ‘Real engagement’?” (Granville, NSW: Western Sydney Community Forum, 2005), 14.

a recruitment panel.³² Thus Compact Voice is currently very closely (and perhaps indistinguishably) tied to one of the largest and most thrusting umbrella bodies, which has its own distinct agenda, and it has no representative legitimacy other than through its own outreach activities, which have declined over the years, and the consultation and feedback activities (if any) of the organisations of the members of its board (number of organisations = 20,000, according to its website). This is a serious weakness and one which is increasingly debated.³³

7. Powers and status of the Commission for the Compact

The establishment of the Commission for the Compact provided an opportunity to make up for lost time, regain the momentum of the Compact's early days and remove some of the thorniest barriers to its operation. Led by an energetic Commissioner, well-resourced and with clear strategic priorities, the Commission aimed to play the role of "honest broker" between government and the voluntary and community sector and to this end endeavoured to gain greater independence and powers sufficient to deal with breaches of the Compact. However, its attempt to reposition itself was blocked by government, and it was abolished in the "cull of the quangos".

The Commission's origins lay in the failure of the government's proposed Compact Plus scheme, a pedigree summarised by one observer as "how the Compact's failings forced the appointment of a commissioner".³⁴ As the implementation of the Compact went forward, by 2004 or so it had become clear that a full set of codes and even a full set of local compacts were not sufficient to achieve the normalisation of the Compact way of working. As part of its attempt to reboot the Compact, the Home Office proposed the supplementary Compact Plus scheme. Compact Plus was targeted at "voluntary organisations bidding for public contracts"³⁵, and its aim was capacity-building. By opting in and making and sustaining certain commitments to best practice, organisations would receive a quality award or kitemark and the services of a "Champion" to smooth their path. The Champion's role was to "take the lead on strengthening the relationship between the sector and Government", which included oversight of the Compact, operation of the kitemark scheme, management of the membership (particularly the maintenance of standards) and "adjudicat[ion] on complaints and alleged breaches".³⁶ The proposals for Compact Plus went out for consultation between March and July 2005 and thereafter went underground within Whitehall, which only whetted the appetite of the sector and the specialist press for the coming of the Champion. When Compact Plus was abandoned, the idea of the Champion survived, although not so much as a lone

³²Constitution of Compact Voice, 20 October 2009.

³³See the bad-tempered comments appended to Compact Voice's website article on "Department for Communities and Local Government embeds local Compacts in guidance", 13 April 2011.

³⁴Nick Cater, "Opinion: Double, double? It's all froth and bubble", *Third Sector Online*, 1 March 2006.

³⁵Charles Clarke, Home Secretary, quoted by Stephen Cook in "Government amends two flagship policies", *ibid.*, 23 March 2005.

³⁶*Strengthening Partnerships: Next Steps for Compact: The Relationship between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector: A consultation document* (London: Active Community Unit, Home Office, 2005), 6, 47.

individual³⁷ but as the head of a Champion's unit. At the end of 2005 the Minister, Paul Goggins, announced that, although the timetable was uncertain, government would appoint an independent commissioner: "In the end we are working on a model of self-regulation here".

Arrangements for the appointment of the Commissioner and his Commission took some time, doubtless due to the manoeuvres connected with the fate of Compact Plus and other parties' jockeying for position. The first Commissioner, John Stoker, began work in September 2006; the first chief executive, Angela Sibson, in October; and the Commission itself, officially after its launch, in April 2007.³⁸ The legacy of Compact Plus had a positive side, the expectation of leadership and purposive activity - and, in particular, neutrality: "seen as neutral" by both sides, "independent from existing organisations and able to develop a distinct voice and identity; and energy, capable of making a step change from the current situation, giving real momentum to the activities proposed".³⁹ The Commission, especially with the straight-talking second Commissioner, Sir Bert Massie, at the helm, more than fulfilled this brief.

The Commission operated in a different way than OTS/OCS and Compact Voice. In the first place it was well-resourced, with grant-in-aid from OTS/OCS of £1,139,000 for 2007/08, £1,800,000 for 2008/09, £1,992,300 for 2009/10 and slightly less for 2010/11. This enabled it to employ 15 staff in all years but 2007/08, when it was in development⁴⁰ - in effect, twice the number of staff tasked with Compact work by OTS/OCS and Compact Voice. In the second place it operated with a high level of transparency and public accountability (its annual reports and accounts were public documents presented to Parliament), and its website offered a wide selection of useful information. In the third place it operated in a businesslike fashion - the whole thrust of its approach was to clarify, plan, do and then evaluate. In its "honest broker" role it was studiously even-handed in its approach to both government and the voluntary and community sector. In particular, it emphasised the sector's need to demonstrate its legitimacy in representing the interests of its users and to keep up its end of the bargain in partnership relationships.⁴¹

³⁷It was anticipated that he or she might have "a small staff team". *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁸Stoker resigned in September 2007 after just a year in post and was replaced as Commissioner by Sir Bert Massie in April 2008. Sibson left after six months and was immediately replaced as chief executive by Richard Corden. These early departures made for an unfortunate start to the work of the Commission.

³⁹*Strengthening Partnerships*, 48.

⁴⁰*Commission for the Compact. Annual Report and Accounts 2008-09 Presented to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 6(2)(b) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 (Audit of Non-profit-making Companies) Order 2009 Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 9 June 2009 (HC536; London: The Stationery Office, 2009)*, 38, 33; *Commission for the Compact. Annual Report and Accounts 2009-10 Presented to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 6(2)(b) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 (Audit of Non-profit-making Companies) Order 2009 Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 19 July 2010 (HC198; London: The Stationery Office, 2010)*, 42-43.

⁴¹Sir Bert was prepared to rattle a few cages: "If we want the statutory sector to take the Compact seriously, then so must the third sector.... I am told the sector cannot sign up because it comprises thousands of independent organisations and there is no collective body. There is truth in that. But it is no reason why organisations should not choose to sign up and declare that publicly. So here is a challenge. Let us encourage the major third sector organisations to commit themselves to conforming to the

The Commission carried out an extensive programme of work, including the three linked rounds of consultation and drafting that produced the refreshed Compact, practitioner-based work (expert advice, face-to-face support) with government bodies and voluntary and community organisations in Compact-based working; and practitioner-focused and fundamental research, particularly the Baseline Study, which for the first time since 2000 attempted to gather evidence about Compact-working in central government bodies.⁴²

Although “the Commission existed to be an independent focus for the application of knowledge and expertise in ways that result in more effective partnerships between government and the third sector”⁴³, it had to live with the tensions between its expectations of “independence” and government’s funding and ultimate political control.

The Commission was a non-departmental public body sponsored by OTS/OCS. It was also a company limited by guarantee. It had one member, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (currently Lord Strathclyde, Leader of the House of Lords), and it was governed by a board of directors, including the Commissioner, the chief executive and three non-executive directors. Its independence was, therefore, provisional – or in the words of Richard Corden, its chief executive, “We’re independent because we’ve been instructed to be by government”⁴⁴. In order to resolve this contradiction and to fulfil the promise first indicated in the Deakin Report for “a strengthened, single source of coherent thought and expertise” within central government to be monitored by a parliamentary select committee⁴⁵ and indeed in the proposals for Compact Plus, the Commission decided that it would be appropriate to regularise its status. It gave its aspirations a trial run in Tom Levitt’s Commission for the Compact Bill (a 10-minute Bill presented on 19 May 2009), which would have established it as a “permanent, independent, statutory body” with a duty to report to Parliament. Unfortunately this Bill was merely an indication of intent, and Levitt’s comment – that “successive ministers have allowed the Commission full operational independence, but there is no guarantee that future ministers would do the same” – proved only too true.⁴⁶

Compact.” “Sir Bert Massie challenges charities to commit to the Compact”, *Third Sector Online*, 2 October 2009.

⁴²nfpSynergy and Digital Public, *Compact Baseline Survey 2009/10: A study of the levels of awareness, knowledge, understanding and use of the Compact among Government and Non Departmental Public Bodies* (Birmingham: Commission for the Compact).

⁴³Commission for the Compact, *Commission for the Compact Business Plan: Summary 2007/08* (Birmingham: Commission for the Compact, 2007), 5.

⁴⁴Quoted by Matthew Little in “Little at Large: Charity spring challenge by MSP who ate all the pies”, *Third Sector Online*, 17 September 2008.

⁴⁵*Meeting the challenge of change: voluntary action into the 21st century: The Report of the Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector* (London: Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector/NCVO, 1996), 123-29.

⁴⁶HC Deb, 19 May 2009, vol.510, col.1346.

8. Mechanisms for liaison and accountability

Boundaries

When there were only government and the voluntary and community sector in play, boundaries were, on the whole, reasonably clear, although there is little indication of critical thinking about this, particularly by government. It is worth noting that the allocation of responsibilities between three rather than two parties seems to have implied a diminished role for Compact Voice. It is also worth noting that there were no arrangements for resolving disputes among the parties. When push came to shove, OTS/OCS simply used *force majeure*.

Day-to-day working

Information about arrangements for day-to-day working within, between and among each of the parties is difficult to come by and consists more of an understanding that such arrangements were in place than how they worked in practice. The following is not an inclusive or necessarily accurate list.

Within government

Ministers: As part of the negotiation of the original Compact there was a Ministerial Group chaired by a minister from the Home Office and including ministers from the departments most likely to be involved with voluntary and community organisations. It is not known whether and to what extent this group still meets, although it is known that responsible ministers on occasions have had bilateral meetings with their counterparts in other departments to discuss specific issues.

Liaison officers: The first voluntary sector liaison officers (VSLOs) first met in October 2001, and since that time they have evolved from VSLOs to voluntary and community sector liaison officers (VCSLOs), third sector liaison officers (TSLOs) and now civil society liaison officers (CSLOs). They meet on a quarterly basis to share information and provide mutual support. It would appear that their work for the Compact has been reasonably successful, although it has been hampered by other calls on their time, issues of seniority and high turnover.

Champions: These are senior civil servants appointed in each department to push government's agenda for the sector, including the Compact. It would appear that their work has been variable, outstanding in some departments and perfunctory in others. It is not known how active they are at this time.

The Commission's Baseline Study, based on a web-based survey of a small sample of liaison officers and others (not unnaturally) showed relatively high levels of awareness of the Compact but disappointingly low levels of implementation, especially of the Codes – not much progress after ten years.

Table 3: Baseline Study: respondents' awareness of the Compact and Codes, 2009, by government departments and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) (%)

	Implemented	Looked at it	Aware but not implemented or looked at	Not aware
Compact				
All	28	45	18	9
Government departments	30	48	16	6
NDPBs	26	40	19	14
Codes				
BME				
All	9	41	23	27
Government departments	10	39	25	26
NDPBs	9	44	19	28
Community Groups				
All	11	39	20	29
Government departments	9	38	24	28
NDPBs	14	40	14	32
Volunteering				
All	13	41	21	24
Government departments	9	46	24	20
NDPBs	19	33	18	30
Funding & Procurement				
All	20	36	21	22
Government departments	18	36	25	20
NDPBs	23	35	16	25
Consultation & Policy Appraisal				
All	19	34	20	25
Government departments	18	35	24	23
NDPBs	21	33	14	28

Base: All respondents; N = 137

It is worth noting that operationalising the Compact by including references to it in official documentation was a minority pursuit – only 43 percent of respondents did so – 23

percent in strategic partnership documents (the obvious showcase), 18 percent in grant funding agreements, and 12 percent in both contracts and other documents.⁴⁷

Within the sector

As noted above, WGGR/CWG/Compact Voice has operated on the basis of its declared representation of the sector, which was more solidly grounded in earlier years than recently. Because it has so poorly documented its activities for public consumption, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive picture of the ways in which it has provided information/gathered feedback from individuals and organisations in the sector. Its outreach activities include the following: organising/speaking at meetings with umbrella groups and front-line organisations; carrying out an annual survey (to 2006 and possibly afterwards) of organisations in the sector (poor quality so not particularly useful, ostensibly replaced by focus groups and web-based fora); carrying out consultations - for example, on the creation and revision of the Codes, the sector's independence and, most notably on the refreshment and revision of the Compact (respondents not listed); organising a group of regional leaders and local champions; and "continued dialogue". Over time its documented activities (number of items of information distributed, meetings/presentations, etc) seem to have diminished to the point where its activities seem more "virtual" than actual.

Among parties

Liaison between and among the various parties seems to be on a relatively standard basis – quarterly bilaterals between any two and trilaterals among all three, with quarterly monitoring reports submitted by WGGR/CWP/Compact and the Commission to the responsible unit. In the past there have been annual awaydays in order to foster partnership working and strategic planning. These arrangements were subjected to considerable stress during the refreshment and revision of the Compact and after announcement of the abolition of the Commission.

Arrangements for overall coordination and control: Compact Annual Meetings

The only method for joint scrutiny of the development and implementation of the Compact is the annual meeting. The original Compact stated: "As part of the process of making the Compact work, there will be an annual meeting between the Government and representatives of the voluntary and community sector to review the operation of the Compact and its development. The report of that meeting will be published and placed in the Library of the Houses of Parliament" (para.16). The intention clearly was that on a regular basis both government and the sector would report on progress, discuss problems arising, engage in strategic planning and agree the annual plans discussed above. At the first annual meeting in May 2000 the joint chairs stressed the importance of the occasion. Paul Boateng said that this was "an important milestone in the development of the Compact and the relationship between Government and the Sector", and Sir Kenneth Stowe "endorsed [his] remarks and agreed that it was important that

⁴⁷ *Compact Baseline Survey*, 75; Figure 28, 76.

the meeting should not only reflect on what had been achieved so far, but should also look forward to what must be done to secure further the implementation of the Compact in the year ahead”.⁴⁸ These expectations for the jointness, significance and usefulness of Compact annual meetings over the years have not always been met, and indeed the trajectory of these meetings in terms of their administration, content, published outputs and attendance can be seen as an illustration of the undermining of the Compact as a joint endeavour and a meaningful partnership.

The organisation and management of annual meetings reflects their underlying importance and use. As Table 4 shows, there were variations in the timetabling of these meetings – large gaps (May 2000 to October 2001, May 2004 to November 2005, December 2008 to February 2010), a short gap (October 2001 to April 2002), and no date set for the overdue eleventh meeting. There were attempts to keep to an annual cycle, whether April/May or November/December, and, most recently, to harmonise the annual meeting with the government funding cycle. In terms of the location of these meetings there was a curious drift away from the political centre (Parliament, major Whitehall venues) to a somewhat frivolous periphery (Tate Modern and the London Zoo, which prompted the animal-loving minister’s boycott). There are presentational benefits to predictability (for example, Volunteers’ Week) and a location with gravitas, and later annual meetings seem to have forfeited these.

Table 4: Compact Annual Meetings

Meeting	Date	Venue	Total number of attendees
First	9 May 2000	Committee Room 17, House of Commons	24
Second	29 October 2001	Committee Room 7, House of Commons	29
Third	29 April 2002	Committee Room 7, House of Commons	30
Fourth	28 April 2003	Moses Room, House of Lords	85
Fifth	5 May 2004	Attlee Suite, Portcullis House	91
Sixth	30 November 2005	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Westminster	56
Seventh	22 November 2006	Central Hall, Westminster	75
Eighth	13 December 2007	Church House, Westminster	101
Ninth	2 December 2008	Tate Modern	93
Tenth	1 February 2010	London Zoo	91
Eleventh	Not scheduled		

Despite expectations that the annual meetings would afford opportunities for joint scrutiny and joint planning, they have gradually degenerated into PR events in which the

⁴⁸ *Annual Meeting Between Government and Representatives of the Voluntary and Community Sector to Review the Operation and Development of the Compact* (downloaded from Home Office’s website), 5/7.

main actors perform separately rather than act together. The initial agendas of the meetings included consideration of a progress report from government, a progress report from the sector and any additional topical papers, followed by an open discussion mainly about the annual plan, which was agreed subject to any changes mandated by the meeting. The salience of the annual meetings for discussing and agreeing the annual plan gradually diminished and has now disappeared altogether. In the early meetings there were lively discussions about the annual plan, some of which were structured around the specific activities or targets in the plan. However, at the seventh annual meeting agreement of the plan became perfunctory: “Ed Miliband [the Minister] and Sir Christopher Kelly [chair of Compact Voice] both welcomed the comments and confirmed that they would be built into the action plan or by separate action with the relevant partners”.⁴⁹ At the eighth annual meeting the agreement of the annual plan was the job of hidden hands: “Phil Hope [the Minister] welcomed the L[ocal] G[overnment] A[ssociation]’s offer to work with the Commission for the Compact on some of the issues. A more detailed implementation plan will be developed to deliver it, which will take account of the discussion at the meeting”.⁵⁰ The ninth and tenth annual meetings were organised around speeches and focus groups with no discussion whatsoever of the plans.

This gradual diminution of meaningful content and the removal of responsibility for agreement of the annual plans was reflected in the published reports. Originally there was one report which followed a standard format - progress reports from both government and the sector, minutes of the meetings, a list of attendees and somewhat later commendations for outstanding work. The sixth and subsequent reports did not include progress reports, and CWG/Compact Voice published their own progress reports separately. The ninth and tenth reports showcased speeches and reported back on focus groups. It should be added that OCS decided to refrain from publishing the tenth report (seen in draft) due to the change in government, although it has for the first time since the fifth meeting published its own progress report (albeit entirely anodyne). Thus reportage has gone from straightforward descriptions of business meetings to selected highlights to no report at all.

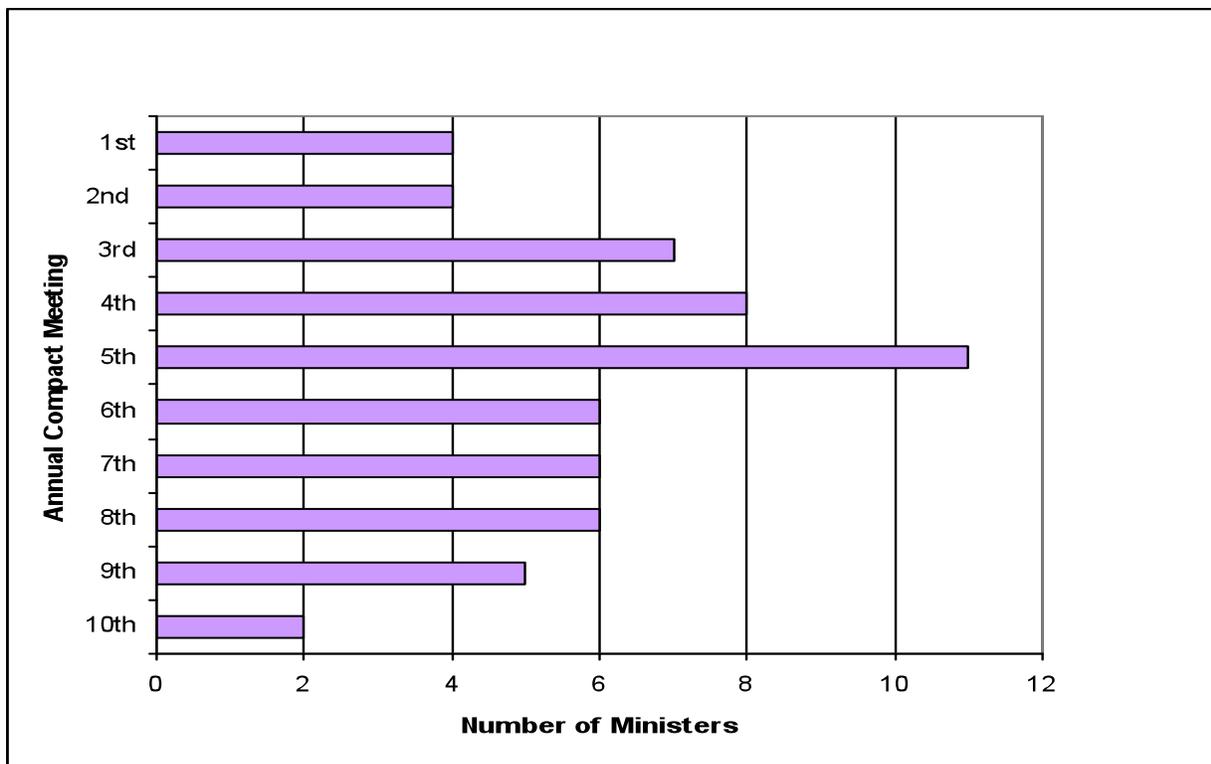
Finally an examination of those who attended these meetings suggests the fragility of interest in the Compact. Excluding journalists, researchers and observers, four hundred individuals attended the ten meetings. Forty-one ministers did so. Of these 28 or 68 percent attended only once. However, stalwarts like Alun Michael (DEFRA) and Paul Boateng (Home Office and HM Treasury) attended four times; and Baroness Andrews (Communities and Local Government) and Ivan Lewis (Department for Education and Science and HM Treasury), three times. As Figure 1 shows, ministers’ attendance peaked at the fifth meeting, and attendance at the tenth meeting was the lowest ever, a pathetic two. One hundred and eighty-six civil servants attended. Of these 136 or 73 per

⁴⁹*Report to Parliament of the Seventh Annual Meeting to Review the Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector* (London: Cabinet Office and Compact Voice, March 2007), 23.

⁵⁰*Report to Parliament of the Eighth Annual Meeting to Review the Compact on Relations Between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector* (Birmingham and London: Commission for the Compact, Compact Voice, Cabinet Office and Local Government Association, March 2008), 19.

cent attended only once, 30 or 16 percent twice and 20 or 11 percent between three and six times. The top departments represented by civil servants were the Home Office, including ACU (27 attendances), CLG (19), Cabinet Office including OCS (14), HM Revenue & Customs (11), Department of Health and Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (10 each), and HM Treasury and Department for Culture, Media & Sport (9 each). One hundred and thirty-three people from the sector attended, mainly as members of WGGR/ CWG/Compact Voice. Of these 86 or 65% attended only once, 25 or 19 percent and 22 or 17 percent between three and ten times (Carl Allen, Stuart Etherington and Christopher Spence attended seven meetings and the faithful Paul Barasi of WGGR/ CWG/Compact Voice attended all ten). Finally 32 people from local government, mainly representatives of the Local Government Association (LGA), attended. Of these 22 or 69 percent attended only once, 9 or 28 percent attended twice and one, Sir Jeremy Beecham, attended seven times. On average ministers attended 1.5 meetings; civil servants, 1.4; people from the sector, 1.7; and people from local government, 1.5. These figures indicate that, aside from a small number of dedicated individuals, most of those involved in the Compact project were passing through rather than there for the long haul, and this is particularly the case for civil servants.

Figure 1: Number of ministers who attended Compact annual meetings



9. Conclusion

In our view the architecture of implementation of the Compact, which was a high-profile innovation aimed at comprehensive culture change in the ways that government and the voluntary and community sector worked together, was one of the main reasons why the

Compact lost momentum and has now failed as a national policy initiative. These include:

- **Lack of consistent and effective leadership by ministers.** The ability of ministers to provide consistent and effective leadership in achieving the government's agenda for the sector was constrained by the short time most of them held the post; the extent to which they had responsibilities other than the Compact; the depth of their knowledge or their interest in the sector; the degree of political influence they could exert; and the level of their political skills.
- **The inadequacy of the resourcing and commitment of the responsible government unit.** What in 1998 was the VCU and is currently the OCS has experienced continuous change and has had almost as many heads as it has had ministers. In the early years of the Compact it was completely overstretched and, although its staffing has been increased, so too has the scale of its responsibilities. It has not been able to devote sufficient staff resources to work on the Compact.
- **The inadequacy of the resourcing and representation of the responsible voluntary and community sector body.** Funding for the Secretariat of the WGGR/CWG/Compact Voice was very modest to begin with and is still very modest. The abolition of the Commission for the Compact has led to a small increase in funding, but this is not enough to compensate for the absence of the Commission. There are serious questions about Compact Voice's ability to represent the sector and its independence from NCVO on the one hand and OCS (which provides its funds) on the other, and these have undermined its credibility.
- **The weakness of mechanisms for liaison and accountability.** The original means of liaison between government and the sector was the annual meeting. Over the years the function, status and value of these occasions has changed for the worse. While the system of appointing liaison offices appears to have been reasonably successful, the performance of the higher-level departmental champions has varied a great deal. Regular meetings between OTS/OCS and Compact Voice (and the Commission while it existed) were important but did not replace more representative gatherings.
- **The limitations in the powers and status of the Commission for the Compact.** The Commission was hamstrung by its lack of authority – it sought the power to investigate breaches and demand papers – and lack of independence from OTS/OCS. It needed to be formally constituted and to report to a parliamentary committee rather than to ministers (who could be and were in breach of the Compact on more than one occasion). It also needed a clearer statement of its role and functions – particularly with regard to boundaries with Compact voice, which were a cause of friction.

We believe that, had appropriate and well-resourced administrative structures been put in place and had leadership from both government and the sector been consistent and

effective from the beginning, it might have been possible to maintain the momentum of the Compact. As it was, the development and operation of the architecture was too tardy, too muddled and too insufficient to ensure the success of the Compact.

In summing up his views on what the Compact had achieved, one of our respondents echoed the sentiments of Viktor Chernomyrdin: “This is the best you can expect? Because it’s always messy... stuff in this relationship anyway. Or are we really saying, where have we got to after 13 years? Isn’t it still like Day 1, putting the clock back? Has it got the achievements that can be proved? So that if you brought them in for a rough audit and you really were saying, OK, so what have you achieved in this period? There wouldn’t be a great deal.”