

VOLUNTARY SECTOR STUDIES NETWORK

Registered charity number 1114742

Annual Report and Accounts

1 August 2015 - 31 July 2016



www.vssn.org.uk

Address for official correspondence:

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Sheffield S7 1FJ

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:	Beth Longstaff Executive Officer VSSN Office 289 Abbeydale Road Sheffield S7 1FJ
Telephone:	07434 680461
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	Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham
Secretary:	Robert Dalziel, Healthwatch Dudley (to December 2015) Angela Ellis Paine, University of Birmingham (from December 2015)
Treasurer:	Meta Zimmeck, Practical Wisdom R2Z
Vice Chair:	Angela Ellis Paine, University of Birmingham

Membership and Marketing Officer	Robert Dalziel, Healthwatch, Dudley (to December 2015) Loizos Carserides, Practical Wisdom R2Z (Co-opted from May 2016)
Annual Conference Officers	Mike Woolvin, University of Dundee and University of Stirling Linda Milbourne, Birkbeck, University of London (to December 2015) Chris Dayson, Sheffield Hallam University (from December 2015)
Day Conference Liaison Officer:	Meta Zimmeck, Practical Wisdom R2Z (to December 2015) Angela Ellis Paine, University of Birmingham (to December 2015) Linda Milbourne, Birkbeck, University of London (from December 2015)
External Affairs & Journal Liaison Officer:	Peter Maple, London South Bank University
New Researchers Co-ordinators:	Anjelica Finnegan, Charity Finance Group
Ex-officio:	Nick Acheson, University of Ulster
Web Officer:	David Kane, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Appointment of trustees:	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. Robert Dalziel, Health Watch Dudley stood down as a trustee in December 2015. Anjelica Finnegan, Charity Finance Group and Meta Zimmeck, Practical Wisdom R2Z were re-elected and Chris Dayson, Sheffield Hallam University was elected in December 2015.

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, University of Birmingham (to December 2015)
Nick Acheson, University of Ulster
Margaret Harris, Aston University (to December 2015)
James Rees, University of Birmingham
Chris Cornforth, Open University (Chair)
Angela Benson, University of Brighton
Tracey Coule, University of Sheffield (from December 2015)
Daiga Kamerade, University of Birmingham (from December 2015).
Julia Mortimer, The Policy Press - publisher's representative
Peter Maple, London South Bank University (ex-officio, from December 2014)

Editorial Team:

Nick Acheson, Co-editor
Bernard Harris, Co-editor
Rob Macmillan, Co-editor
Cathy Pharoah, Policy reviews editor
Mike Aiken and Linda Milbourne, Practice papers editors
James Rees, Book review 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 2016

Chair's Introduction

It has been a steady year for VSSN. Membership has continued to remain relatively stable and, while our need to redouble efforts to attract new members continues, we can be pleased that we have been able to maintain our numbers despite continuing financial pressures not only on voluntary sector organisations but also on higher education institutions. Our journal *Voluntary Sector Review* has continued to publish articles of a very high quality on a variety of areas of interest and concern to the voluntary sector and volunteering research community. Once again we have organised two excellent day conferences in May and November 2015, and collaborated with NCVO and the Institute for Volunteering Research to hold the annual research conference in September 2015. I would like to thank the members of the Steering Group for their hard work during the year and particularly Appleby Ltd for their solid and invaluable administrative support. Key highlights of the year are summarised below under the headings of activities, organisation and management, 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 sixth year, with three issues per annum. A print copy of each issue is a VSSN membership benefit. As part of our international collaborative efforts VSR is also 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 125 pages, includes research articles, practice papers and policy reviews as well as book reviews.

The journal continues to attract wide attention. Over 4,000 full-text articles were downloaded in the year to July 2016, up from 3,600 the year before. The number of online and print subscriptions remains steady. All VSSN members are strongly encouraged to persuade their institutions to take out (and continue) subscriptions to ensure the financial sustainability of the journal. Free online trial subscriptions for institutions are available from <https://policypress.co.uk/journals/subscribe#free-trials>

The journal has a twitter account: @vsrjournal, with over 350 followers. This is used to keep people informed about forthcoming content and the monthly free access articles.

Membership of the Editorial Team rotates; this year the new team of co-editors - Nick Acheson, University of Ulster; Bernard Harris, University of Strathclyde; and Rob Macmillan, University of Birmingham – have settled in to the task of maintaining the journal's content

and quality. They are joined in a wider editorial team by Cathy Pharoah (policy reviews editor), Mike Aiken and Linda Milbourne (practice section editors) and James Rees (book reviews editor).

VSSN is hugely grateful to The Policy Press for the expertise, enthusiasm and continued practical support it has brought to the journal, and the resources it is devoting to making it a success. An editorial assistant supports the day to day activities of the journal. This post is jointly funded by The Policy Press and VSSN, and we are indebted to Ellie Rivers in this role for her tireless work in supporting the journal.

VSR Editorial Management Board

The VSR Editorial Management Board (EMB) meets once annually, but much of its work is done through email. Chaired by Chris Cornforth (Open University), the main business of the EMB's annual meeting is to discuss reports from the editorial team and the publisher and to consider the marketing plans for the future. The EMB is also responsible for arranging the replacement of editorial roles in rotation, and maintaining the link between VSSN and the journal.

Website

The VSSN website continues to play an important role in communicating with members and facilitating the booking of events and membership payments. Regular updates are posted by the executive officers, and various small tweaks have been made to website functionality. The steering group continues to look for ways to improve the site, and welcomes suggestions and comments from members.

Day Conferences

Two successful day conferences were held during the year. The conferences continue to provide an important showcase for new research findings and reflections and to provide opportunities for networking amongst participants.

In November 2015 the day conference was held in London and chaired by Peter Maple of South Bank University (and a member of the VSSN Steering Group). The topic was *Campaigning and Advocacy: Has the Voluntary Sector lost its voice?* There was a keynote opening speech from Debra Morris, Professor of Charity Law & Politics at the University of Liverpool which provided an analysis of the law governing political activity by charities. Further papers included a report from the Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector and other accounts of the opportunities and challenges to voluntary organisations wanting to speak on behalf of beneficiaries or influence policy. Further details can be found at <http://www.vssn.org.uk/events/day-conference-london-campaigning-and-advocacy-has-the-voluntary-sector-lost-its-voice/> including links to the abstracts of the papers and the presentations.

In May 2016 the day conference was held in Sheffield and chaired by our Steering Group member Chris Dayson of Sheffield Hallam University. The theme was *'The future of*

voluntary action in unsettled times'. There was a keynote address by Pete Alcock reviewing policy and debates about the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state. He argued that the choice of between being 'in' or 'against' the state was a false dichotomy. There were three further papers on dimensions of voluntary action which addressed inter-organisational collaboration, engaging marginalised groups as volunteers in a food growing project, and the attempt of a group of funders to influence policy in relation to the value of 'early action' approaches. Further details including abstracts and presentations can be found at <http://www.vssn.org.uk/events/day-conference-spring-2016-the-future-of-voluntary-action-in-unsettled-times/>.

VSSN/NCVO Annual Voluntary Sector Research Conference, 2015

The Annual Research Conference, which is jointly organised by VSSN, NCVO and IVR, took place from on 10 and 11 September 2014 at Leeds Beckett University. 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 Julian Corner of the Lankelly Chase Foundation. It was entitled 'Critical reflection in challenging times: how can research influence policy and practice?' He discussed the limitations of research which simply aimed to put good data into poor systems and instead argued for a relational paradigm for research which would build understanding, empathy and, above all, connections. It should build our capacity to enquire rather than the imperative to know. The text of the speech is available at <http://www.vssn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015-Conference-Keynote-speech-Julian-Corner.pdf>.

The conference included research papers and panels on the following themes:

- Civil society and democracy: new challenges and opportunities?
- Volunteering and participation in times of change: past, present and future?
- Grassroots voluntary activity in challenging times: past perspectives and new forms?
- Diversity, inequalities and the voluntary sector: uneven engagement and impacts?
- Social welfare and voluntary services: evolving relationships between civil society, the state and the market?
- Funding the future? Funding, fundraising and philanthropy in challenging times
- Voluntary sector governance and management: relationships within and across organisations
- New directions in theoretical debates and research methods: learning from diverse perspectives?

A Storify summary of tweets during the conference, the conference programme and all the paper abstracts can be found at <http://www.vssn.org.uk/events/2015-voluntary-sector-and-volunteering-research-conference/>.

New Researchers

The New Researchers Sessions (NRS) ran as a single stream in the Annual Voluntary Sector Research Conference. This important part of the conference provides a route for emerging

scholars and researchers in the field to share their work, develop a support network of their peers, and network with delegates across the conference.

This critical aspect of our work was given added impetus by the generous financial support we received from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2013 which enabled us to provide a specific channel for encouraging emerging scholars and researchers to join our community.

VSSN and NCVO also provide a New Researchers Prize of £100 for the best paper in this part of the conference. This was awarded to Palmela Witter for her paper 'Marginalising diverse voices? Working with minority interests against the tide of mainstreaming'.

The event was organised with the support of Gareth Lloyd (IVR) who worked alongside one VSSN steering group member, Anjelica Finnegan.

Membership

At 31 July 2016 VSSN had 145 individual and 5 organisational members covering 25 individuals (compared to 132 individual and 5 organisational members covering 23 individuals at the equivalent point in 2015), giving a total of 170 members (compared with 155 members in 2015). This is a welcome growth, after last year's small decline in members. There is a small number of non-UK members. Overall membership numbers are fairly stable with total number of members over the last five years only ranging from a high of 170 to a low of 155. We continue to receive positive feedback about the day and annual conferences and our journal *Voluntary Sector Review*. Debates at events are always lively suggesting participants value the benefits of being part of a community of researchers, policy makers and practitioners with shared interests.

The VSSN Steering Group is concerned to find ways to grow and retain membership. A sub-group has been formed to develop new ways of engaging members including increasing communications. The sub-group is also discussing identifying potential new members.

E-mail Discussion List

As of 31 July 2016 the VSSN discussion list had 478 subscribers, which represents a slight increase compared to the same time last year when there were 459. The list continues to attract both members and non-members and to provide a lively forum for debate and information sharing. Recent discussion topics have included the transference of the Charity Commission's web material to a .gov.uk website and the 'management' of volunteers in small, volunteer-led community organizations such as sports groups. The list also serves as a useful resource for colleagues seeking existing research evidence and references; contacting potential research participants, promoting events, publications, jobs and studentships; and building networks of colleagues researching or teaching similar topics. 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 and IVR continues, particularly through VSSN's contribution to 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 full Steering Group met formally two times during the year: immediately after the AGM and day conference in November 2015, and immediately after the day conference in May 2016. In addition, a sub-group of the Steering Group meet for one day in May 2016 to discuss plans to develop membership activities. In between meetings, the Steering Group uses its e-mail discussion list to progress business. During the year the Steering Group focused its efforts on: re-commissioned our executive officer function (see below); delivering our day conferences and annual conference; liaising with the VSR editorial board; re-doubling our efforts on building and engaging VSSN's membership base.

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

Our contract with Appleby Ltd for the provision of the Executive Office comes to an end in August 2016 (after kindly agreeing a short extension). Over the past few years Appleby Ltd has carried out a wide range of activities for VSSN including those related to membership, finances, website updates and day conferences and have provided us with an excellent service, for which we are very grateful. We would particularly like to express our gratitude to Sonia Liff and Marilyn Dunkleman for their excellent work and support for the development of VSSN over the past few years. Following the decision by Appleby Ltd not to renew the contract, the SG went through the process of commissioning new providers. We are delighted to welcome Beth Longstaff and Jane Leathley to the organisation. Beth and Jane will work together to provide the Executive Officer function for the organisation, initially from August 2016 until the end July 2019.

3. VSSN's Financial Review

The trustees have prepared the accounts on a receipts and payments basis as permitted by the Charities Act 2011 and have done so in accordance with the 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 financial year, following increases in the rates for VSSN's membership package, which includes its journal, *Voluntary Sector Review*, and a preferential rate of registration for day conferences, total membership subscriptions were £9,450.00 (up from £8,950.00 in the previous financial year). Subscriptions from organizational members remained the same (£1,050.00).

During the financial year fees from day conferences were £3,200.00 (up from £2,090.00). The day conference held in London, which had significantly higher costs than any previous conference, made a loss, while that held in Sheffield, made a surplus, in large part due to Sheffield Hallam University's generous provision of free accommodation. Overall, then, and taking into account the deposit for the London conference paid in the previous financial year, the two day conferences generated a surplus of £910.80, which was slightly larger than that generated in the previous year (£794.71).

From a financial point of view there are a number of challenges in continuing the series of day conferences, especially in London, where costs are high (and increasing). These include difficulties in securing free or cheap accommodation at universities or indeed anywhere else and the marketization of catering; the decision to price conferences according to anticipated actual costs rather than on a standard basis; and the challenges of balancing increasing registration fees with stable or even decreasing numbers of attendees.

During the year VSSN received a grant of £2,000 from NCVO for work in support of the annual VSSN/NCVO/IVR research conference.

VSSN continued to support the work of new researchers. It received a grant of £540.00 from NCVO (monies paid to VSSN but not claimed by NCVO and so foregone). At year end it held restricted funds for use in furthering the activities of new researchers of £1,282.21, including £542.21 from the grant from the Economic and Social Research Council, £200.00 from the grant from NCVO for the Campbell Adamson Prize and £540.00 from NCVO's recent grant. There have been issues re the financial control of these monies, which will need to be resolved in future.

At the end of the financial year the balance at bank was £25,133.69 compared to £18,434.32 in the previous year. A substantial part of the difference between these two

figures was due to timing of payments, particularly for *Voluntary Sector Review* (payments for two years in the previous financial year and no payments in this financial year).

Obligations at year end

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

- Current liabilities of £5,681.30: £1,461.30 for the fee and expenses of the Executive Officer for June to August 2016; £500 for the fee of the Editorial Assistant and £3,720.00 for publication of the *Voluntary Sector Review*.
- Other binding long-term commitments of £7,150.00: the fee of the Executive Officer for at least one quarter plus an additional quarter's notice period; (£2,650.00); likely expenses of the Executive Officer (£200.00); one-half of the fee of the Editorial Assistant (£500.00); payments to the Policy Press for publication of the *Voluntary Sector Review* (estimated £3,700.00); and expenditure on the website (estimated £100).

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 for services as Executive Officer with Appleby Ltd in the current financial year and with Beth Longstaff and Jane Leathley in future financial years.

As at 31 July 2016 VSSN's total balance at bank was £25,133.69 of which £23,851.48 was unrestricted and £1,282.21 was restricted (see above). Allowing for current liabilities at year's end of £5,681.30 the effective balance was £19,452.39.

Allowing for other binding commitments as per VSSN's reserves policy (£7,150.00), the effective available balance at year's end was £12,302.39 (£3,603.92 more than in the previous year).

These figures mean that VSSN's current financial position is comfortable. However, its financial position is determined by its capacity to attract members and to encourage attendance at its day conferences. 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 conferences and, where possible, to seek additional funding and lower costs for those conferences.

We would like to record our thanks to Sonia Liff and Marilyn Dunkleman at Appleby Ltd for continuing to develop and manage 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 the non-auditable charities. It was approved by the trustees (Steering Group) on 22nd November 2016 and signed on their behalf by:

Rob Macmillan (Chair)

Meta Zimmeck (Treasurer)

VSSN ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

	2015-16	2014-15
	£	£
Receipts		
Grants and donations	2,540.00	2,000.00
Share of surplus June 2014 day conference	0.00	111.25
Conference fees - members	2,210.00	1,250.00
Conference fees - non-members	990.00	840.00
Member subscriptions	8,400.00	7,900.00
Organisational member subscriptions	1,050.00	1,050.00
Reimbursement of publications officer fees	500.00	0.00
Total receipts	15,690.00	13,151.25
Payments		
Expenses of VSSN events	1,564.20	1,900.11
Publications expenses [Note 4]	0.00	5,200.00
Publications supplement [Note 4]	0.00	1,970.00
Editorial assistant – fee [Note 5]	1,000.00	1,100.00
Website development and hosting	0.00	71.86
Committee expenses [Note 1]	176.45	408.69
Executive officer – fees [Note 2]	5,304.00	6,400.00
Executive officer – expenses [Note 1]	294.20	478.10
Database and software	148.19	0.00
Equipment (table banner, stand, etc.	0.00	0.00
Publicity	22.80	0.00
New Researchers events costs	100.00	1,504.00
WorldPay (fee processing)	380.79	303.45
Total payments	8,990.63	19,336.21
SURPLUS	6,669.37	-6,184.96
Balance brought forward from previous year	18,434.32	24,619.28
Balance carried forward to next year	25,133.69	18,434.32

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	£	2014-15 £
Monetary assets		
Unity Trust Bank current account	25,133.69	18,434.32
Total monetary assets	25,133.69	18,434.32
Represented by monetary funds		
Unrestricted funds	23,851.48	17,592.11
Restricted funds	1,282.21	842.21
Total monetary funds	25,133.69	18,434.32
Non-monetary assets and liabilities		0.00
NON-MONETARY ASSETS [Note 3]		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
<i>Miscellaneous creditors at year end</i>		
Executive officer expenses payable at year end	-135.30	0.00
Executive officer services payable at year end	-1,326.00	-1,493.85
VSR editorial assistant services payable at year end	-500.00	0.00
Amounts payable to Policy Press for VSR [Note 4]	-3,720.00	0.00
<i>Total miscellaneous creditors</i>	-5,681.30	-1,493.85
<i>Deferred income: Subscriptions received in advance</i>	0.00	-565.00
OTHER BINDING COMMITMENTS AT YEAR END		
Executive office contract commitments [Note 2]	-2,650.00	-2,652.00
Executive officer expenses	-200.00	-200.00
VSR editorial assistant services	-500.00	-500.00
Minimum obligation for VSR [Note 4]	-2,600.00	-2,600.00
Estimated supplementary obligation for VSR [Note 4]	-1,100.00	-900.00
Web expenditure	-100.00	-100.00
Venue for day conference	0.00	-725.00
<i>Total other commitments</i>	-7,150.00	-7,677.00

Total current liabilities and provisions	-12,831.30	-9,735.85
NET ASSETS AND NON-MONETARY	12,302.39	8,698.47

Notes to the Accounts

1. In most cases members of the Steering Group or their institutions meet travel expenses when attending meetings of the Steering Group held on the same day as VSSN's day conferences and the annual conference. However, in some cases VSSN reimburses members without support for such travel. It also pays the travel expenses of the Executive Officer to day conferences and the annual conference.
2. VSSN contracted with Appleby Ltd to provide the role of Executive Officer between June 2010 and July 2016. The contract fee in 2015-16 was £5,304. Following an open tender exercise VSSN contracted with Beth Longstaff and Jane Leathley to provide this role from 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2019 (subject to three months' notice by either party) for a fee of £5,300 per annum.
3. VSSN has some fixed assets in the form of banner stands and a table stand, but as these are 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'). Due to the timing of invoicing by The Policy Press payments may not be made in the financial years in which they become due.
5. VSSN has agreed with the Policy Press to share the fee (£1,000 per year) of the editorial assistant of the *Voluntary Sector Review*. The fee for 2013-14 was paid by the Policy Press, which invoiced VSSN for its half of the fee plus VAT. The fees for 2014-15 and 2015-16 were paid by VSSN, which invoiced the Policy Press for its half of the fee. VSSN will continue this arrangement in subsequent years.