

VOLUNTARY SECTOR STUDIES NETWORK

Registered charity number 1114742

Annual Report and Accounts

1 August 2019 - 31 July 2020



Address for official correspondence:

Executive Officer, Voluntary Sector Studies Network

VSSN Office, 11 Commonside, Crowle, North Lincolnshire DN17 4EX

www.vssn.org.uk

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 November 2018)
Charitable status:	Registered charity in England & Wales number 1114742
Correspondent:	Ann Hindley Executive Officer VSSN Office 11 Commonsides Crowle, North Lincolnshire DN17 4EX
Telephone:	01724 710819
Central e-mail:	execofficer@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 of 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 between August 2019 and July 2020. Affiliations are given for information only; all Steering Group members serve as individuals.

Co-Chairs	Jane Cullingworth, University of Glasgow Angela Ellis Paine, University of Birmingham
Secretary	
Treasurer	Carolyn Cordery, Aston University
Membership and Marketing Officer	Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University
Annual Conference Officers	Chris Dayson, Sheffield Hallam University Angela Ellis Paine, University of Birmingham Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University
Day Conference Liaison Officers	Ali Body, University of Kent Linda Milbourne, Birkbeck (until Nov 2019) Jurgen Grotz, IVR (from Nov 2019)
Partnership Events	Ali Body, University of Kent Vita Terry, IVAR
External Affairs & Journal Liaison Officer	Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University
New Researchers	Jane Cullingworth, University of Glasgow
Ex-officio (VSR)	Rob Macmillan, Sheffield Hallam University (until Nov 2019) James Rees, Wolverhampton University (from Nov 2019)
Web Officer	Chris Damm, Sheffield Hallam University
Development Grants	Vita Terry

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 a maximum of three elected at each Annual General Meeting. A member of the Editorial Management Board of *Voluntary Sector Review* 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.

Sub-committee:**Editorial Management Board (EMB) for the *Voluntary Sector Review***

As of 2nd 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(s), in consultation with the publisher, The Policy Press.

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. A member of the EMB is appointed ex-officio to the Steering Group.

The EMB is responsible for assembling the International Advisory Board.

EMB members:	<p>Chair: Daiga Kamerāde, University of Salford (until January 2020)</p> <p>Féilim Ó Hadhmaill, University College Cork (from January 2020)</p> <p>Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University (VSSN SG representative)</p> <p>Mike Hemmings, York St John University (until August 2020)</p> <p>Eddy Hogg, University of Kent</p> <p>Rita Mano, University of Haifa</p> <p>Joanne Vincett, Liverpool John Moores University (social media lead)</p> <p>Publisher's representative: Julia Mortimer, The Policy Press</p>
Editorial Team:	<p>Main Editors: Carl Milofsky (Managing Editor) (from Jan 2019), James Rees (from Jan 2019), Daiga Kamerāde (from January 2020)</p> <p>Editorial Assistant: Lina Hinh (from April 2020)</p> <p>Policy and Practice editors: Alison Body (from January 2020), Chris Dayson (from January 2020)</p> <p>Book review editor: Eddy Hogg (from January 2020)</p> <p>For Policy Press: Julia Mortimer (Assistant Director), Edwina Thorn (Journals Executive), Rebecca Megson (Marketing contact) Heather Gibson (Journal Assistant)</p> <p>Regional Associate Editors: Georg von Schnurbein; Lili Wang</p>

Steering Group Report: activities undertaken for public benefit by the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) during the year ending 31 July 2020

1. Co-Chairs' Report

2020 has been a year of incredible turmoil. At the beginning of our reporting period, back in August 2019, it would have been impossible to imagine how much would have changed in the world just one year later. COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on individuals, communities, and on many voluntary organisations. VSSN has not been unscathed: events have been cancelled, or moved online, our income has been adversely affected and we were concerned that our membership might also be affected as universities were impacted by the pandemic. We remain, however, an optimistic, adaptive and resilient network: we have shifted the ways in which we work and bring people together, and indeed have learnt that in doing so we have been able to reach new and more diverse audiences. While we look forward to being able to revert to meeting in person, we also hope to take on board the learning from running activities online and to incorporate that learning into our future activities.

This year we have also been deeply saddened by the loss of one of our founding members, Duncan Scott, who died from a severe stroke on 18 May 2020. Duncan played a significant role in not just the establishment of VSSN, but also of the field of voluntary sector research. His contributions have been captured in [both a blog on the VSSN website](#) and in a commentary in [Voluntary Sector Review](#).

Despite the challenging context, we have continued to work towards achieving VSSN's four strategic aims, which are summarized in the following diagram.

VSSN's strategic aims



In supporting the development of early careers researchers, we have organised new researcher sessions at the annual Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research conference, hosted several online development sessions, and facilitated networking and peer support through the discussion list.

In encouraging knowledge exchange across research, policy and practice, we have developed partnership initiatives with practitioners and policy makers, including hosting events with [NCVO](#), [BVSC](#), the [Association of Volunteer Managers](#), the [Institute for Volunteering Research](#), the [National Network of Volunteer Involving Agencies](#) and the [Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods](#). We have contributed to an informal evidence group, which feeds into a network established by NCVO at the outbreak of COVID-19, to bring together national networks of volunteer involving organisations and local volunteer centres and inform volunteering responses. The establishment of a Development Grants scheme has provided opportunities for our members to develop their own knowledge exchange activities, and we were delighted by the response to the scheme and the excellent initiatives that have been funded. And we continue to work in partnership with [Policy Press](#) to support [Voluntary Sector Review](#), which has celebrated its ten year anniversary this year and provides a high quality outlet for the sharing of academic and policy and practice articles, with new formats being introduced to increase reach.

To enhance opportunities for inclusive networking, peer support and collaboration, we have focused on both our members and subscribers through publishing newsletters, developing our website, hosting two discussion lists, and maximising networking opportunities through an expanding range of events and seminars. We had planned an academic writing retreat to support members with their writing endeavours, which sadly has had to be postponed due to COVID related restrictions. We recognize, however, that we have a considerable way to go to ensure that the Network is diverse and inclusive. This will be one of our key areas for development next year.

In promoting research on the voluntary sector and volunteering, across disciplinary and academic boundaries, we have hosted seminars and conferences which have included guest speakers from a range of academic disciplines, and policy and practice. We have built our social media presence and developed our website, to help promote voluntary sector research, and the Network, to wider audiences. Through the Editorial Management Board, we have supported *Voluntary Sector Review's* editorial team to extend the international reach of the Journal.

We would like to thank the members of the Steering Group and the Editorial Management Board for their energetic and hard work during the year. We would also like to thank Policy Press for their ongoing support of the Journal, and of course the editorial team: James Rees, Carl Milofsky and Daiga Kamerāde. Thanks also to David Kane for his ongoing support for the website, and particularly to Ann Hindley, and her colleagues at Cross Keys Associates who have so ably picked up the reins to provide our Executive Officer function.

2. VSSN's journal, *Voluntary Sector Review*

In 2019-20 VSSN's international interdisciplinary journal, *Voluntary Sector Review* (VSR), published by The Policy Press, continued into its eleventh year, with three issues per annum. A print copy of each issue is a VSSN membership benefit. During 2019-20 the journal has published papers from academics and researchers based both in the UK and overseas on, for example, the experiences of young people giving on social media, the experiences of nonprofit leaders in Saudi Arabia, the role of civil society in environmental sustainability, and many others. 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://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/journals/voluntary-sector-review>.

The journal is designed to appeal to a wide readership and each issue contains over 100 pages of Research Articles, Policy and Practice Papers, as well as Book Reviews. There are also two new sections: Comment and Debate, and Research Notes. In the Comment and Debate section, authors are encouraged to engage with pressing issues. It provides an outlet for short, critical pieces that respond to topical issues affecting the voluntary sector. The first piece in this section reflected on the voluntary sector in and beyond the coronavirus crisis. In Research Notes, authors are encouraged to present research which cannot be considered for full research or methodology articles. For example, they can present intriguing initial observations, time-sensitive results, advance a new idea, theoretical perspective, or methodological approach. They can also describe new data available for other scholars or publish a brief summary of a study that is usually difficult to publish. The first call for Research Notes on voluntary sector responses to coronavirus ran in Autumn 2020.

A team of three co-editors is responsible for maintaining the journal's direction, content and quality: Carl Milofsky (Bucknell University, US), James Rees (University of Wolverhampton) and Daiga Kamerāde (University of Salford). Daiga joined the team in January 2020, replacing Rob Macmillan, who stepped down after many years of excellent service in the role of editor, and many other positions for VSR and VSSN. The editors are joined in a wider team by policy and practice editors (Chris Dayson, Sheffield Hallam University, and Alison Body, University of Kent) who also manage the comment and debate section, and the book reviews editor (Eddy Hogg, University of Kent). Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley has stepped down from her role as a Practice Editor and we thank her very much for her contribution. Finally, we would like to thank former Policy Reviews Editor Cathy Pharaoh for all her work. Cathy was one of the original founders of the journal, and has been involved in various ways over the years. Two new regional associate editors have also been appointed: Georg von Schnurbein (University of Basel) will focus on representing the journal in Europe, and Lili Wang (Arizona State University) will focus on representing the journal in North America and Asia.

The journal has a twitter account: @vsrjournal, with a growing constituency of over 750 followers. This is used to keep people informed about forthcoming content, and the availability of free access articles. Jo Vincett (Liverpool John Moores University) has taken over as social media lead for the journal and we thank her for her sterling work so far.

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. The day to day activities of the journal are supported by an editorial assistant. Many thanks to Ellie Rivers for her work in this role over the years, and we are very pleased to welcome Lelinnä Hinh to the role. The post is jointly funded by The Policy Press and VSSN to support the editorial work underpinning the journal, including screening submissions and liaising with authors.

VSR Editorial Management Board

The journal is overseen by an Editorial Management Board (EMB), which meets twice each year – a January gathering to review the journal’s development and consider editorial strategy, followed by a mid-year teleconference. The EMB is a sub-committee of the VSSN Steering Group, chaired by Féilim Ó Hadhmaill (University College Cork), and is made up of elected representatives, representatives from The Policy Press, and the editorial team. During 2019-20, Joanna Vincett (Liverpool John Moores University) joined the EMB as an elected member. We thank Mike Hemmings for his contribution during his term of office, and for Daiga Kamerāde for her work as Chair before becoming a journal editor.

This year the main points of discussion for the EMB included the overall strategy for developing the journal, including enhancing its international reputation and building on its initial journal citation scores, emerging issues around open access, and the development of special issues on critical theory and qualitative data, and Muslim philanthropy, both of which are forthcoming in the years ahead.

3. Website

The VSSN website continues to play a central role in communicating with members, registering members, and facilitating the booking of events and membership payments, especially given the recent move to online only events.

VSSN successfully used online form software to manage registration for the first round of the Development Opportunities Small Grant scheme. The same functionality is likely to be used for most upcoming online events.

The use of Zoom for various events has allowed VSSN to record sessions. These have been made available on the website via embedded links to our YouTube channel, providing an additional new benefit to our members.

VSSN has also developed an online repository of research relating to voluntary action, and the COVID-19 pandemic and response. At the time of writing, details of 24 different projects have been provided and can be viewed on the website.

Behind the scenes, the hosting provider has been switched from DigitalOcean to WP Engine. Although this comes at a greater cost to VSSN, the advantages include greater stability, greater compatibility with other WordPress plugins, and more functionality for developing the website's operations.

Executive officer Ann Hindley and steering group member Chris Damm have continued to take responsibility for updating website content, including events, blogs and news items. VSSN has continued to formally enlist the help of David Kane, a former steering group member, to maintain the technical aspects of the website as well as assisting Chris Damm with further developing the website. We thank all for their ongoing efforts and expertise.

Plans for the following year include continuing to explore ways to improve the membership directory and the administration of registration and membership administration behind the scenes.

4. Annual conference, day conferences and other events

For more details of these and previous VSSN events, see <https://www.vssn.org.uk/events/>

‘Civil society in the four UK nations: past, present and future challenges’. Cardiff, November 2019.

During November 2019, WISERD (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods) hosted a joint day conference in Cardiff with the Voluntary Sector Studies Research Network entitled ‘Civil society in the four UK nations: past, present and future challenges’. The day included a diverse range of papers from academics and third sector organisations. The first session presented research findings on civil society and the state across time and territories. Irene Hardill (Northumbria University) and Rob Macmillan (Sheffield Hallam University) presented ‘Moving frontiers: Voluntary action and social welfare’, exploring and comparing dominant discourses from the 1940s and 2010s on the shifting relations between the state and civil society. Hannah Ormston from the Carnegie UK Trust introduced the recent report ‘Carnegie UK Trust: The Enabling State’. This compared approaches to public policy-making in the nations of the UK and found the devolved legislatures involved a complex process of learning and dissemination but also enabled generally more favourable developments in Wales and Scotland in relation to civil society than those in England. Other presentations included analysis of changing governance and voluntary sector engagement in Wales (Amy Sanders Cardiff University, WISERD) and in Scotland (Jane Cullingworth University of Glasgow), highlighting the complex trade-offs many voluntary organisations have to negotiate as they seek to influence government.

Rich insights were shared in the panel discussion, ‘Community action in local places – Building leadership and leading change’. James Rees (University of Wolverhampton) highlighted the importance of relational networks within civil society in generating place leadership. This theme was picked up by Dr Sarah Lloyd-Jones, who outlined the Rank Foundation funded project ‘The Llechi, Glo a Chefn Gwlad (Slate, Coal and Countryside) partnership’ which will work with 9 community organisations to support the development of local leaders. Finally within this Panel, Sue Denman (Solva Care and Solva Community Land Trust) and Jessie Buchanan (Trecadwgan Campaign Group) provided rich evidence of how community ownership and delivery of social care can grow through local community action.

The initial afternoon panel focused on the ‘politicisation/ de-politicisation and/or re-politicisation of children and young people’s voluntary action’ and considered how this group engages in voluntary action. Contributions from Alison Body (University of Kent), Esther Muddiman (WISERD, Cardiff University) and Emily Lau (Canterbury University), highlighted the importance of how we involve children and young people and its subsequent impact on ongoing civic action. Rich empirical data demonstrated the role of schools and families in both facilitating and shaping values and action by young people.

The final panel reflected on lessons from practice, with contributions on ‘the impact of government initiatives to end rough sleeping on voluntary sector organisations across England, Wales and Scotland’, Mike Hemmings (York Saint John University); ‘Tensions from volunteer befriending inside a British immigration detention centre’, Joanne Vincett (Open University); and ‘Welsh Town Twinning: A future for civil society across borders, or the end of association?’, Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins (Aberystwyth University). Joanne Vincett described the tensions negotiated by the volunteers she studied, as ‘quietly advocating’. This term captures a key theme emerging from the day, highlighting how voluntary organisations are continually challenged to find ways to advance their actions whilst maintaining working relationships with the institutions of government.

VSSN/NCVO Annual Voluntary Sector Research Conference, September 2019

Once again VSSN partnered with NCVO to host the Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research (VSVR) Conference. However, unlike previous conferences, this was the first time that VSSN took the role of lead partner, reflecting the growth and development of our network over the past 20 years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank NCVO for their leadership of the conference over many years and look forward to continue working with them in the future.

VSVR is the UK's most prominent annual gathering of researchers, practitioners and policy makers carrying out research in our field. In September 2019, more than 100 delegates attended the conference, held at Aston University in Birmingham, to take part in scholarly debate and discussion associated with 'A civil society for the future: setting the agenda for voluntary sector and volunteering research in the 2020s'.

The theme was selected to reflect the fact that the preceding period had witnessed considerable public and political debate about how civil society can be at the heart of the changes needed to ensure that all communities can thrive. This includes how to strengthen social value within communities, how civil society can revitalise and enhance democracy, and the potential for reshaping state-civil society relationships.

VSSN recognise that these debates present opportunities and challenges for civil society actors and for research undertaken on, with, and for them and that the Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research Conference provides a unique opportunity for academics, policy makers and practitioners from the UK and further afield to come together to share findings and discuss the implications of research. We hoped the conference would build on ongoing debates about how civil society can be at the heart of the changes needed to ensure that all communities can thrive. Highlights from the programme included:

- An opening plenary with Asif Afridi (BRAP and Civil Society Futures panel member) and Rob Macmillan (Sheffield Hallam University), reflecting on the current and future role of civil society;
- A plenary panel of three civil society leaders and policy makers – Andrew Purkis, Debra Allcock Tyler, and Alice Wilcock – provided some personal reflections on the future of civil society;
- A lively session on the future of civil society research, led by John Mohan (TSRC) and Caroline Ffienness (Giving Evidence), during which participants had the opportunity to meet and share ideas with other researchers, policy makers and practitioners around themes of common interest;
- Six parallel sessions of papers, panels and workshops across the ten core Conference Streams;
- The largest ever New Researchers session, with 20 participants from a range of institutions and disciplines.

Sadly, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, our day seminar planned for May 2020 in Norwich had to be cancelled.

In March 2020 we partnered with AVM, IVR, NCVO and NNVA in hosting the 'Maintaining Bridges' workshop. Building on [earlier events](#), it brought together a group of volunteer involving organisations, volunteer managers, policy makers and researchers to strengthen collaborative working around volunteering research. The day kicked off with a 'get to know you' session, when everyone was asked to think – individually and then collectively – about questions that they would prioritise to be addressed through research on volunteering. We then split into smaller workshop sessions, for more detailed discussions about existing and potential research and practice under four

themes: volunteer management; diversity, inclusion and exclusion; trends, developments and innovations; blurred boundaries and the definition of volunteering. We came back together at the end of the day to think collectively about how to take the agenda forward.

5. New Researchers

Continuing in our tradition, we ran the New Researchers Sessions (NRS) as a concurrent stream at the annual Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research Conference, held in September 2019 at Aston University in Birmingham. The NRS provides a route for emerging scholars and researchers in the field to share their work in a supportive environment, develop a support network of peers and network with delegates across the conference.

The participation of new researchers is subsidised, in part by a prior grant from NCVO, as well as by VSSN's reserves and a portion of conference fees. This year, the NRS was supported by Jane Cullingworth, VSSN Steering Group member, and Amy McGarvey, Researcher Manager at NCVO. This year set another record with 21 people presenting and 22 attending. Discussants provided feedback to presenters on their research and presentation skills and a workshop on publishing in *Voluntary Sector Review* was held by two of the journal's editors.

In light of the COVID pandemic, support for new researchers moved online with regular sessions held to provide space for people to connect and provide peer support. The sessions were hosted by Jon Dean, Vita Terry and Jane Cullingworth, Steering Group members. Sessions were held in April, May and June, with another planned for August, and included focusing on topics such as how to publish from a PhD. On average, between 7 and 13 new researchers attended from across the UK and Europe, drawing in people who had not participated in VSSN before.

Our discussion list designed specifically for new researchers (VOL-SECTOR-NEW-RESEARCHERS) continues to provide a forum for information sharing, networking and support and currently has over 60 participants. If you are interested in contributing ideas to our support of early career researchers or want to get involved, please email newresearchers@vssn.org.uk

6. Membership

A decision was made to open the membership portal early this year in a direct response to the coronavirus lockdown which has had, and will, continue to have a direct effect on higher education institutions and their finances. A message was sent to all members encouraging them to renew early and explaining why. This produced a small number of early renewers in July.

At the end of the financial year, we had 99 members, comprising 7 organisational members and 92 individuals. 72 of these were renewals and 20 were new. In the previous year, there were 95 individual memberships and 3 organisational memberships, covering 15 people. A new organisational member brought another 5 new members with them. Most of our members are based in the UK but there are also members in Argentina, Japan, USA, and Nigeria.

7. E-mail Discussion List and Twitter account

As of 31 July 2020 we had 465 subscribers to the VSSN jiscmail discussion list. Subscribers are a mix of academics, practitioners and policy makers, extending our reach considerably beyond our formal membership base. The discussion list continues to serve as a forum for sharing information, advice, ideas, questions and resources about voluntary sector research. It allows for the development of

discussions, which this year have included topics such as the numbers of people who put themselves forward to volunteer in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Reaching an even wider audience is our Twitter account @VSSN_UK, which currently has 1,468 followers and which we use to share information about forthcoming events, publications and research from across our network.

8. Development Opportunities Grants

This was the first year the Voluntary Sector Studies Network set up a [development grant](#) and invited applications from members for proposals to support and develop an idea or activity that will benefit voluntary sector studies in the UK. The grant can be used to fund seminars, workshops, roundtables, webinars, podcasts, film/animation and other activities linked to research, learning and teaching. The main focus will be to bring individual researchers and/or practitioners and/or policy makers together, to create a dialogue on a voluntary sector and volunteering related issue. In particular, we encourage applications that will provide ongoing dialogue.

In June 2020, we were proud to announce that three proposals were awarded grants. First, Mike Aiken, Vita Terry and Julian Manley's proposal to deliver a series of seminars on 'Emotions and feelings in voluntary sector work: Explorations from research and practice' was successful. This series seeks to bring together the community, social and psychological realm. The aim of these seminars is to explore the cross-over issues through informed discussion, gaining insight from speakers with professional insight and co-learning through small group work, involving practitioner experience and research insights. The three events will potentially be held in Preston (October 2020), Bristol or South West (March 2021) and London (June 2021). However, in light of the current restrictions due to COVID-19, a mix of online and face-to-face events will be held, if or when restrictions are lifted.

Second, Tot Foster, based at the Open University, was successful for their proposal on 'Small charities use of video'. This proposal aims to deliver a day long training session (in October 2020) for small charities in making no/low budget films, looking at what video has to offer and on developing critical editorial and practical decision-making skills. As part of her PhD, Tot Foster developed a new design-based approach to video production, tailored to small charities. The feedback from the training will inform the next iteration of the production process which will then be converted into an online course, such as a MOOC which is being produced with the Open University.

Third, Philippa Davies' (based at Cardiff University) successful proposal focuses on sharing the results of a research study, which examines women leaders' experiences of gender (in)equality in Welsh sport leadership, backed with the Welsh sport sector, and in particular, Welsh sport leaders. Results will be shared creating a bi-lingual report which provides an overview of the results and also deliver seminars to present the results and answer any questions. These seminars will be delivered online in 2021.

8. The organisation and management of VSSN

Building partnerships

Our successful partnership with NCVO continues, particularly through their involvement in co-hosting our Annual Research Conference. In preparation for the 2020 conference, we have also been partnering with the Birmingham Voluntary Service Council. We partnered with WISERD, the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods, at Cardiff University, in our November 2019 seminar, *Civil society in the four UK nations: past, present and future challenges*. We maintain

formal links with a range of organisations through our website and through regular meetings and networking.

Steering Group meetings

The full Steering Group met formally four times during the year: immediately after the AGM and day conference in November 2019, at an all-day strategic planning meeting in January 2020 (during which we confirmed and refined our four strategic aims, as set out in the co-chair's report), and for two meetings in May, one of which focused on strategic planning. A decision was made this year to increase our regular number of meetings to five to enable fuller discussion and ongoing engagement. In between meetings, the Steering Group uses its e-mail discussion list to progress business and holds teleconferences as needed.

During the year, the Steering Group focused its efforts on: responding and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic; delivering our day seminar, events and annual conference; building our partnerships; supporting early career researchers; liaising with the VSR editorial board and strengthening our support for VSR; developing our membership base; and publishing a newsletter. In response to the pandemic, we had to cancel the May day seminar (rescheduled online for November 20) and move the annual two-day conference online. In addition, we began offering regular online sessions for early career researchers and set up an online repository related to COVID-19 research and voluntary action research.

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 either modest or no fees to attend. Similarly, our online discussion lists are 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. An additional service offered this year was the COVID-19 research repository which was open to any academic, voluntary or public sector organisation. A new system of Development Opportunity Grants was also put in place to encourage and enable members to develop proposals to support and develop an idea or activity that will benefit voluntary sector studies in the UK.

Executive Office

We would like to express our gratitude to our Executive Officer, Ann Hindley of Cross Keys Associates, who took on the role of supporting the Network from October 2019. The Executive Officer plays a key role in the smooth running of the Network, particularly membership services. We are most grateful to Ann for her work over the past year.

10. 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, membership subscriptions were held at the 2018-19 level. Membership benefits include its journal, *Voluntary Sector Review* and a preferential rate of registration for day conferences. Total membership subscriptions were £8,235 (£8,340 in 2018-19). This reflects the addition of three organizational members but the loss of some individual members.

During the financial year, day conference fees received were £1,220 (£3,300 in 2018-19). Only one day conference was held, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was in November 2019 and it operated at a surplus, totaling £341.10 (£210.90 for the whole of 2018-19).

The 2019 Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research Conference run by VSSN with the support of NCVO was a great success. We partnered with Aston Business School and recorded a surplus for VSSN of £6,115.69 (an identical amount was yielded by Aston Business School and recognised their staff's input to the organisation and success of the conference). As this was the first year we have been financially responsible for the conference, it was a pleasing result.

VSSN continued to support the work of new researchers, including the granting of three 'Development Grants'. At year end, it held restricted funds for use in furthering the activities of new researchers of £280.00 (£480 in 2018-19). These funds are from a prior NCVO grant and specifically relate to VSVR Conference. Further support of new researchers will continue in the coming year.

The overall surplus in 2020 on a cash basis was £591.25. In 2018-19 the surplus was £2,470.14 as no payments had been made for *Voluntary Sector Review* and therefore the 2019-2020 result reflects payments for both 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Obligations

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

- Current liabilities of £441.33 for the fee of the Executive Officer for July 2020 and a commitment for the *Voluntary Sector Review* Editorial Assistant (£416.67)
- Other binding commitments of £7,148: the fee of the Executive Officer for at least one quarter plus an additional quarter's notice period (£2,648); likely expenses of the Executive Officer (£200); one-half of the fee of the Editorial Assistant (£1,000); payments to Policy Press for publication of *Voluntary Sector Review* (estimated £3,000 – being the minimum of £2,600 plus a proportion of membership fees); expenditure on the website (estimated £300) and our commitment to three Development Grants (£2,020).

Reserves Policy

The trustees have set a policy of maintaining unrestricted reserves equivalent to twelve months' expenditure. This takes account of obligations arising from VSSN's commitment to the Policy Press for supporting Voluntary Sector Review, its contract for services as Executive Officer to Cross Keys Associates, and associated risks with hosting the VSVR conference. At the end of the 2019/20 financial year, the reserves amount to just over one years' expenditure – this reduced during the year through early career researcher and member support.

Funds in the bank at year-end were £26,600.22 (£26,008.97 in 2018-19) of which £26,320.22 was unrestricted and £280 restricted (see above). Allowing for current liabilities and long-term commitments, the effective balance was £16,789.22. This was £2,907.21 higher than 2018-19. It includes £215 prepaid membership subscriptions (nil in 2018-20).

These figures mean that VSSN's current financial position is relatively comfortable, given recent events. However, its financial position is determined by its capacity to attract members and to encourage attendance at its research days and annual conference. There is, therefore, a need to continue to promote memberships (especially among the large number utilising its web-based mailing list), encourage attendance at research days and, where possible, to attract additional funding and lower costs for its conferences.

We would like to record our thanks to Ann Hindley and Cross Keys Associates for taking over so ably the Executive Officer role and managing VSSN's financial recording and payments systems. The quality of support has been invaluable in helping VSSN in its financial planning and provision of services to its 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 25th September 2020 and signed on their behalf by:

Angela Ellis-Paine
Co-Chair

Chris Damm
Secretary

VSSN Annual Accounts 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

	2019-20	2018-19
	£	£
Receipts		
Conference surplus/Grant from NCVO	6,115.69	2,000.00
Seminar fees – members	730.00	1,595.00
Seminar fees - non-members	490.00	650.00
Member subscriptions	6,765.00	7,500.00
Organisational member subscriptions	1,470.00	840.00
Contrib. towards editorial assistant services	750.00	500.00
Other	90.90	-
Total receipts	16,411.59	13,085.00
Payments		
Conference expenses	-	216.00
VSSN event expenses	878.90	2,034.10
Publications supplement	5,740.00	-
Editorial assistant services	1,000.00	1,000.00
Committee expenses	702.36	117.00
Executive officer – fees	6,622.00	5,300.00
Executive officer – expenses	-	223.10
Development Grants	-	-
Early Career Researchers	200.00	460.00
GDPR preparation and maintenance	-	775.00
Equipment (table banner, stand)	-	51.59
Website development/hosting/database	310.02	-
WorldPay	295.06	366.07
Other (Bank fees)	72.00	72.00
Total payments	15,820.34	10,614.86
Surplus	591.25	2,470.14
Balance b/fwd from previous year	26,008.97	23,538.83
Balance carried forward to next year	26,600.22	26,008.97

VSSN Annual Accounts 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	2019-20	2018-19
	£	£
CURRENT ASSETS		
Monetary assets		
Unity Trust Bank current account	26,600.22	26,008.97
Total monetary assets	26,600.22	26,008.97
Represented by monetary funds		
Unrestricted funds	26,320.22	25,528.97
Restricted funds	280.00	480.00
Total monetary funds [Note 3]	26,600.22	26,008.97
Non-monetary assets and liabilities		
Membership/day seminar fees owing	-	95.00
Total non-monetary assets	-	95.00
Total monetary and non-monetary assets	26,600.22	26,103.97
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
<i>Miscellaneous creditors at year end</i>		
Expenses payable at year end	-	276.96
Executive officer services payable at year end	441.33	1,325.00
VSR editorial assistant services owing	416.67	500.00
Amount payable to Policy Press for VSR	-	2,970.00
Total miscellaneous creditors	858.00	5,071.96
Deferred income: Subs received in advance	-215.00	-
OTHER BINDING COMMITMENTS AT YEAR END		
Executive Officer contract [Note 4]	2,648.00	2,650.00
Executive Officer expenses	200.00	200.00
VSR editorial assistant services 2017-2018	1,000.00	500.00
Minimum obligation for VSR	2,600.00	2,600.00
Estimated supplementary obligation for VSR	900.00	900.00
Web expenditure	300.00	300.00
Development Grants	2,020.00	-
Total other commitments	9,168.00	7,150.00
Total current liabilities and provisions	9,811.00	12,221.96
NET ASSETS AND NON-MONETARY	16,789.22	13,882.01

Notes to the Accounts

1. These accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, with all revenue and expenses shown on a cash basis. Non-monetary assets and liabilities are shown at estimates of the value at the end of the year.
2. 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.
3. VSSN has two funds: an unrestricted General Fund and a New Researchers' Fund. The latter is a restricted fund supported by a prior NCVO grant. (The New Researchers' Prize is funded by VSSN.)
4. VSSN contracts with Cross Keys Associates to provide the role of Executive Officer from 8 October 2019 to 7 October 2022 (subject to three months' notice by either party) for a fee of £5,248 per annum. This includes costs of travel to the two-day conferences and reasonable costs of posts and printing. Day conference accommodation and extraordinary costs are claimed as additional expenses. The outstanding payment for one month (July 2020) is shown as a current liability.
5. 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 per annum ('minimum obligation') and a second payment based on the number and income category of VSSN's members ('supplementary obligation'). Due to the timing of invoice by The Policy Press, payments may occur in different financial years than the corresponding membership fee receipts.
6. VSSN has agreed with Policy Press to share the fee (£2,000 p.a. from 1 March 2020) of the editorial assistant of *Voluntary Sector Review*. VSSN will pay this year's arrears to The Policy Press in the 2021-21 financial year.
7. 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 day conference and the annual conference. However, Steering Group members may be reimbursed for these costs when they do not receive institutional support. Apart from this expense reimbursement, no remuneration was paid to any trustee.