

National Coalition for  
Independent Action

**DISSENT**  
*protects  
democracy*

# **NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services**

**Working Paper 8**  
**The impact of commissioning and  
contracting on volunteers and  
volunteering in Voluntary Services  
Groups**

**Colin Rochester**

October 2014

[info@independentaction.net](mailto:info@independentaction.net)

# **NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services**

## **Working paper No 8**

### **The impact of commissioning and contracting on volunteers and volunteering in Voluntary Services Groups**

#### **Foreword**

This paper has been produced as part of the NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services. The Inquiry is specifically concerned with those voluntary organisations that deliver *services* in local communities, especially those that accept state money for these activities. These are the groups that have been particularly affected by successive New Labour and Coalition Government policies regarding the relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors, and attitudes and intentions towards the future of public services. In this and other papers we refer to these as Voluntary Services Groups or VSGs.

It has long been NCIA's contention that the co-optive nature of these relationships has been damaging to the principles and practise of independent voluntary action. The nature and scale of the Coalition Government's political project – ideologically driven - to degrade rights, entitlements and social protections, and to privatise public services that cannot be abolished is now laid bare. This has created new imperatives for VSGs to remind themselves of their commitment to social justice and to position themselves so that they can once again be seen as champions of positive social, economic and environmental development.

Our Inquiry is a wide ranging attempt to document the failure of VSGs, and the so-called 'leadership' organisations that purport to represent them, to resist these shackles on their freedom of thought and action. But it is also an attempt to seek out the green shoots of a renaissance that will allow voluntary agencies to assert their independence and reconnect with the struggle for equality, social justice, enfranchisement and sustainability.

This paper is one of a number that has been produced through the Inquiry. It describes and summarises how the shift to commissioning and contracting has affected the position of volunteers in VSGs and changing attitudes towards volunteering on the part of the organisations involved. It has been prepared for NCIA by Colin Rochester to whom we offer grateful thanks.

For more information on the NCIA Inquiry please visit our website – [www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net).

NCIA  
October 2014

# 1. Introduction

Notice of the impact of contracting on service-providing voluntary agencies (described in the NCIA Inquiry and this paper as Voluntary Services Groups or VSGs )was served by David Billis and Margaret Harris in the early nineties (Billis and Harris, 1992). Their review of evidence collected by staff and students at the LSE's Centre for Voluntary Organisation enabled them to identify a cluster of changes in the way organisations went about their activities, brought about by their engagement with the new funding regimes introduced by local authorities.

They noted a *'fundamental shift in the nature, or balance, of activities ... away from self-help, community development or campaigning work, towards the management of funded "projects" or the direct provision of services'*; a new focus on the most frail or disadvantaged users of their services; and a move from the provision of less formal activities – such as support groups and luncheon – to more formal services - such as day centres and residential activities.

And, alongside these changes they highlighted changes in the deployment of paid staff and volunteers. There was *'a trend towards replacing volunteer workers – service-providers, supervisory staff, clerical support and fundraisers – with paid staff'*. And the volunteers who remained:

*"...have often found themselves subject to rising expectations, both about the amount of time they will devote to volunteering and the type and quality of service they will provide. They have been expected to undertake more and more training, to submit to various forms of monitoring, to commit time more frequently, or to extend the range of tasks they will perform."*

Other early studies (Russell and Scott, 1997; Scott and Russell, 2001) provided additional evidence about these trends. In order to meet the need to deliver the level of service required by their contractual obligations many agencies became more dependent on paid staff while others adopted a more formal approach to their volunteers that included tighter specification of tasks, increased supervision and performance review. And, *'volunteers who continued to play a key role generally saw their workload and level of responsibility increased'* (Scott and Russell, 2001; 59). Many of the volunteers who had been given greater responsibility and closer supervision felt that this had improved their status and had led to an improved service to users and thus an enhanced *'sense of a job well done'*. Others, however, had been de-motivated by the change in their roles and the loss of autonomy and flexibility this brought with it (Russell and Scott, 1997: 8-9).

A more fundamental concern voiced by Russell and Scott, however, was that the drive to improve services by *'using paid workers or ... importing volunteers with existing professional skills'* would *'preclude the participation of some social groups, and also close down important routes into employment'*. Contracting could, in their view, undermine the ability of voluntary organisations to provide a service to volunteers as well as service users:

*"... enabling them to work through particular problems of their own, gaining confidence and skills in the workplace or in relationships with other people, recovering from psychological problems and alcohol use, coping with bereavement*

*and isolation and so on” (Ibid.; 67-8).*

The next section of this paper will examine the extent to which these early concerns about the impact of contracting on volunteers in VSGs have persisted and to what extent, if any, the trends have been given additional impetus by the transition to full-blown commissioning. It will look in turn at: the opportunities for volunteer involvement and the numbers involved; the range of roles played by volunteers; the position of volunteers in relation to the organisations with which they are involved; and the development of formal methods of volunteer management.

## **2. The impact of commissioning and contracting on VSGs**

### **Opportunities, roles and access**

To what extent, then, have volunteers been supplanted by paid staff in VSGs? The evidence is limited and somewhat contradictory. Overall the number of paid staff working in voluntary sector organisations rose by 41% between 2002 and 2012 (*NCVO Civil Society Almanack*, 2014). We do not have directly comparable statistics for the total number of volunteers but what we do have (for example, Low et al, 2009; DCLG, 2008) strongly suggest that this figure has remained static or may even have fallen slightly. What seems clear is that the ratio of paid staff to volunteers has shifted significantly in favour of the former.

What this means for individual agencies or specific fields of activity is less apparent. There is some evidence that organisations are providing fewer opportunities for people to get involved. A study of volunteers in the field of homelessness found that there had been an exodus from large ‘corporatist’ agencies that dominated the field as they professionalised their services (Cloke *et al*, 2007). Another study found that 20% of the organisations studied had experienced a fall in the number of their volunteers (Gaskin, 2005). Many of those agencies that have become involved in public service provision have been most likely to replace volunteers with paid staff in order to be confident of meeting their contractual requirements (Elstub, 2006). But there is also evidence that some organisations – including some involved in public service delivery – have involved ‘more volunteers than ever before’ and one of them reported a three fold increase in the number of volunteers they involved – in line with the increase in the value of their contracts (Ellis Paine *et al*, 2010).

On the other hand, one unexpected finding from a survey of 1,382 volunteer managers conducted by Machin and Ellis Paine in 2008 lends support to the view that the number of opportunities for volunteering in VSGs has fallen – or at best has ceased to grow. A significant minority of respondents – 29% - reported that their agencies had as many volunteers as they needed while a similar proportion – 27% - said that their organisations would not involve more volunteers even if they could raise additional resources to support them (Machin and Ellis Paine, 2008; 36-37). A great deal of the volunteering literature has focused on the need to increase the supply of volunteers and it was salutary to find some evidence that the demand for volunteers is not unlimited.

The lack of a consistent trend in changes to the numbers of volunteers in organisations is matched by uneven experiences of changes in the role or function of volunteers within individual agencies. There are two opposing trends. On the one hand, in many

organisations volunteers have been relegated to low-level roles and ‘ancillary tasks’ while the more demanding, complex and rewarding functions are reserved for paid staff (Geoghehan and Powell, 2006). There are, however, also examples of volunteers taking on new, more diverse and more onerous roles in the delivery of services alongside paid staff as organisations take on an increasing range of functions (Ellis Paine *et al*, 2010). But these appear to be comparatively rare phenomena and tend to be associated with smaller and less formal organisations.

The trend towards fewer volunteers (whether in absolute terms or as a proportion of the voluntary sector workforce) and their relegation to routine and comparatively undemanding tasks has been accompanied by a narrowing of access to volunteering roles. In the first place, it has become increasingly common for organisations to look for volunteers with the skills or aptitudes that will equip them to carry out specific tasks. Volunteer managers no longer welcome all comers or see it as a key part of their role to find ways in which those who come forward can be helped to find ways in which they can contribute to the work of the organisation. Instead they use formal methods modelled on the processes used to appoint paid members of staff and using tools very similar to job descriptions, person specifications and the taking up of references to try to ensure that the volunteer is equipped – often after a period of training - to carry out a specific and pre-determined function within the agency.

These formal recruitment processes restrict access to opportunities for volunteering in VSGs in three ways. In the first place they are designed to prevent all but those who are already able to meet the requirements of specific roles from contributing to the organisation’s work – and, in the process acquiring knowledge and experience and developing skills. Secondly, formal ‘bureaucratic’ recruitment methods act as a deterrent to many potential volunteers, who feel that they are incompatible with their view of volunteering as a creative activity with a degree of autonomy of action (Gaskin, 2003). And, thirdly, they constitute one of the biggest barriers to the involvement of people from a variety of ‘socially excluded’ groups such as ‘disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic groups and ex offenders’ (IVR, undated; 4; Obaze, 1992).

### **The growth of ‘managerialism’**

These formal methods of recruiting volunteers are part of a wider phenomenon – the application of the techniques of human resource management to the ways in which the activities of volunteers are organised. The treatment of volunteers as unpaid workers is not new: it can be traced back at least as far as the influential Aves Committee of 1966 which was set up ‘to enquire into the role of voluntary workers in the social services’ (Aves, 1969: 15) at a time when government was increasingly aware of the contribution that volunteers could make to the provision of health care and personal social services. The Committee’s report, published in 1969, has been hailed as ‘something of a watershed in the development of volunteering’ (Sheard, 1992; 15). It took a largely instrumental view of volunteering as a means of securing additional resources to assist the statutory agencies and their professional staff ‘to meet a very wide range of human needs’ (Aves, 1969; 16). This approach has continued to inform and shape government policy on promoting volunteering; the Efficiency Scrutiny of 1990, for example, described it as ‘a very cost effective way of

*providing desirable services*<sup>1</sup> (Home Office, 1990; 18).

The Aves Report laid solid foundations for the development of a managerial approach to volunteering. To ensure that the greatest possible value was obtained from this important resource it argued that the work of volunteers should be put on a clear organisational footing:

*'(I)t is very necessary in any service using volunteers that there should be some form of organization of their work by which we mean the provision of a system within and through which volunteers are enabled to carry out their work, as far as may be possible, effectively, smoothly and with satisfaction to their clients, themselves and the services which need their help' (Aves, 1969; 93).*

The system should include provision for:

- Identification of the needs for voluntary work and allocation of appropriate individuals to carry out the relevant tasks;
- Providing volunteers with appropriate preparation or training;
- Making sure that volunteers receive the help and support they need;
- Ensuring that the service provided by the volunteers is of a satisfactory quality; and
- Making sure that the volunteers are aware of the extent and nature of their involvement; the lines of accountability for their work; and the practical details such as payment of expenses and insurance cover;
- and each service or agency needed to employ a dedicated voluntary service organiser or manager.

As well as establishing the foundations of a managerial approach to volunteering and the employment of specialist managers the Aves Report also recommended the development of a framework for promoting its view of volunteering. This involved the setting up of a national centre to provide a *'focus for all aspects of the work of volunteers in the social services'* (Aves, 1969; 192). Established in 1973 as the Volunteer Centre UK this body has been successively renamed the National Centre for Volunteering and Volunteering England before being taken over by NCVO in 2012. During its lengthy history the national centre's focus segued from a concentration on the contribution of volunteers to the statutory provision of health and social services to the inclusion of a wide range of volunteering taking place within the voluntary agencies that eventually became its primary audience.

## **Models of volunteer management**

While Aves laid the foundations for the instrumental and managerial characterisation of volunteering that has been described as a *'dominant paradigm'* (Rochester, 2011; Rochester *et al.* 2010) its development in its present form was by no means unchallenged. While there was general agreement that opportunities for volunteering needed to be better managed – after all 71% of respondents to the 1997 *National Survey of Volunteering* (Davis Smith, 1997) were dissatisfied with the way in which their work had been organised – the idea that the 'workplace model' was the only or the best way of achieving this has been questioned

---

<sup>1</sup> Although it did also acknowledge the inherent value of volunteering 'as a desirable activity in its own right' (*loc cit*). But it is the view of it as valuable unpaid labour that has continued to have a major impact on government policy on volunteering.

by a number of writers. Steven Howlett (2010) has identified three models of volunteer management.

The first of these – the *receptionist* model as it has been characterised – assumes that anyone in the organisation with the time to spare can manage the work of its volunteers because no specific knowledge or skills are needed to carry out this function. It is largely as a reaction against the perceived shortcomings of this approach to volunteer management that the second - *workplace* - model has been widely adopted. This treats volunteers as unpaid workers whose activities supplement the work of paid staff and who need to be managed in much the same way as the organisation's employees. It is implemented without any acknowledgement of the distinctive challenges involved in managing volunteers or the variety of circumstances under which volunteering takes place' (*Ibid.*, 357). Finally, Howlett has identified an emerging approach that offers a third model which provides an alternative to the workplace model as '*an antidote to the inadequacies of the 'receptionist model'.*

Sightings of the emerging third model are found in the literature of volunteering. In a 1996 essay in which he asked 'Should volunteers be managed?' Justin Davis Smith argued that, while the workplace model was suitable for some organisations a different – more informal and flexible - approach might be needed in others. And he quotes with approval the view of Liz Burns (1991) that different styles need to be developed to take account of differences in the kinds of volunteering, the organisational settings in which it takes place and the motivations and interests of the volunteers themselves. Richard Goodall's study of charity shops (2000) highlighted the value of a specialist approach to managing volunteers rather than the application of the generic techniques of retail management as a means of improving their performance.

Meta Zimmeck (2000) identified a less formal 'Home-Grown' style of managing volunteers which focuses on expressing the organisation's core as an alternative to the increasingly prevalent "Modern-Management' approach which aimed at creating the most perfectly structured and efficient bureaucracy. And Katharine Gaskin's enquiry into the composition of the '*choice blend*' of organisation and management that volunteers wanted emphasised the need for a variety of '*management approaches and structural arrangements*'.

The task for volunteer management is to find the right blend for the organisation, combining choice and control, flexibility and organisation, to be experienced by the volunteer as a blend of informality and efficiency, personal and professional support (Gaskin, 2003; 27).

It has, however, been an unequal contest between the advocates of the two schools of thought and the proponents of the 'workplace model;' of 'modern management' have prevailed. There are a number of explanations for their success. In the first place history was on their side: the basis for thinking about volunteer management established by the Aves Committee was developed in the context of volunteering in large, formal statutory 'welfare bureaucracies' where the model worked best. Secondly, there were powerful interests in their corner including the largest charities and an army of management consultants and trainers versed in this approach as well as the various arms of government with an interest in volunteering, which were themselves organised as bureaucracies. Thirdly, there was a ready-made set of compelling methods and techniques ready to take off the

shelf as opposed to a less developed collection of principles and practices that were largely the property of isolated individuals. And, finally the direct involvement of the government was decisive. As part of its ambition to build the capacity of the voluntary sector, New Labour turned its attention to the management of volunteers and adopted the 'work-place model' as the way forward. One result was the establishment of a Volunteer Management Programme as part of the Capacity Builders initiative; another was the establishment of a set of National Occupational Standards that define the skills and knowledge required to manage volunteers in 75 prescriptive pages.

### **The impact of 'modern management' on volunteering**

Zimmeck spells out the impact of the 'modern management' of bureaucracy on volunteers<sup>2</sup>:

*"The 'modern' model has two interlocking aims, to structure/restructure organisations along bureaucratic lines and to enable such organisations to function as efficiently as possible.*

*It regards volunteers and employees as factors of production, "human resources" to be deployed to achieve organisational imperatives, and it mandates treating them on the basis of parity ...*

*But, all things being equal, in the cut and thrust of daily practice, it subordinates volunteers, who have no rightful place in formal hierarchical structures, to employees.*

*It advocates the extension to volunteers ... of the tight controls and the full panoply of rules and procedures already applied to employees. It concentrates on controlling volunteers' "functional" relationships, those with their managers and their paid co-workers.*

*While recognising that volunteers have different incentives than employees, it focuses on those which are most employee-like, such as payment of expenses and access to training.*

*Finally it advocates the greatest possible division of labour and differentiation of functions and tasks, in particular between volunteers and employees."*

Evidence of the extent to which 'modern management' practices have been adopted by voluntary organisations has been provided by the survey of volunteer managers conducted by the Institute for Volunteering Research and funded by Capacity Builders – the quango charged with delivery of the Government's Change Up programme (Machin and Ellis Paine, 2008). The data from this study is derived from telephone interviews with volunteer managers in voluntary organisations (n=1,248) and the NHS (n=134). This was the first large-scale survey although it does not claim to be statistically representative. On the other hand, the researchers did try to address the bias towards larger voluntary organisations by ensuring that organisations with lower incomes were included and that the sample extended beyond the 'usual suspects' in the shape of registered charities.

---

<sup>2</sup> I have set these out as separate points for the sake of clarity but the original is a paragraph of continuous prose.



Overall the findings demonstrate that many of the voluntary organisations in the survey had adopted the key features of a formal approach to volunteer management but these were less commonly seen than in the NHS organisations surveyed. This is not surprising: the sample of voluntary organisations included smaller and less formally structured agencies while organisations in the NHS tend to be organised along the bureaucratic lines that are a feature of government agencies. The key findings were:

### ***Professionalisation***

- Volunteer management was carried out by paid employees in 77% of the organisations for which the survey provided data and by board members or other volunteers in the remaining 23%.
- The proportion of paid managers increased with the size of the organisation – 23% of those in the smallest organisations (with incomes of less than £10,000); 67% of those in the £10-£99,999 income bracket; and 99% in the £1 million and above category.
- Few of those identified as volunteer managers spent most of their time carrying out this role: 56% spent less than 25% of their working hours on volunteer management and only 23% devoted more than half of their time to the role.
- Half of all respondents had received training or had been on educational courses in volunteer management and only 30% did not feel the need for professional development.

### ***Implementing 'Good Practice' Generally***

- 75% of the voluntary organisations (VCS) in the survey and 94% of the NHS organisations had a written policy on volunteer involvement.
- 58% of the VCS and 72% of the NHS respondent organisations carried out evaluations of the impact of volunteers on their activities or services.
- 79% of the VCS and 85% of the NHS organisations carried out equal opportunities monitoring of their volunteers
- 90% of the VCS and 97% of the NHS organisations had a key person (or persons) to whom volunteers could go to for advice and support.
- 77% of the VCS and 93% of the NHS organisations arranged training for their volunteers.

### ***Implementing Volunteer Management Practices***

- 51% of VCS organisations and 76% of NHS organisations always produced written task descriptions for the roles carried out by volunteers.
- 83% of VCS organisations and 99% of NHS organisations interviewed (or had an informal chat with) all their prospective volunteers before they became involved.

- 45% of VCS organisations and 51% of NHS organisations held one-to-one supervision sessions with all their volunteers.
- 26% of VCS organisations and 33% of NHS organisations always held exit interviews with volunteers when they left the organisation.

These figures demonstrate the extent to which the accepted ‘good practices’ of volunteer management had penetrated the sector. Unsurprisingly, these were more evident in the statutory sector organisations of the NHS that are generally unambiguously bureaucratic in form. What is perhaps more striking is less the differences between sectors than the convergence of the findings if we take into account the inclusion in the VCS sample of significant numbers (23% of the total) of small and thus less bureaucratic organisations.

Overall, then, these volunteer management practices had, by 2006, become the norm in volunteer-involving organisations. For Howlett (2010) this may help to explain the dramatic reduction in the numbers of those who felt that their volunteering could have been better organised from 71% in 1997 (Davis Smith, 1998) to 31% ten years later (Low *et al.*, 2007). Clearly, it is in the interest not only of the volunteer but also of the organisation and its beneficiaries that the opportunity for volunteering should be well planned and implemented and the techniques of the formal ‘workplace model’ offer one way of achieving this. But the approach is not without its critics – not least from the volunteers themselves.

### **What do the volunteers think about these methods?**

There are two major sources for evidence of the volunteers’ own views of their experience at the hands of volunteer-involving organisations - a study of ‘*what volunteers want from organisation and management*’ (Gaskin, 2003) and the major survey of volunteering carried out by Low and his colleagues (Low *et al.*, 2007) – as well as a number of smaller scale studies of specific areas and kinds of volunteering (including Tihanyi, 1991; Rochester and Hutchison, 2001; Cairns *et al.*, 2007; Cloke *et al.*, 2007).

The *Helping Out* survey (Low *et al.*, 2007) found significant resistance to formal management methods among volunteers:

- 28% of current, regular volunteers felt that there was too much bureaucracy in their organisation and 17% thought that volunteering was becoming too much like paid work.
- Nearly half (49%) of those who were not current volunteers but wanted to get involved said they had been put off by the degree of bureaucracy involved.
- 82% of current volunteers said that they did not need advice and support.
- 65% of them did not want written role descriptions, either because they were unnecessary or because they were inappropriate and would undermine the informality and flexibility of volunteering and make it too rigid and formal.

Gaskin’s qualitative study (Gaskin, 2003) provides us with some explanations for the unenthusiastic and somewhat hostile response on the part of current and volunteers to the

formal management approaches adopted by many organisations.

In the first place, there may be a mismatch between what a potential volunteer is looking for and what the organisation is aiming to achieve in an initial interview. *'Volunteers prefer a relaxed approach that is not too bureaucratic'* but *'procedures may be off-putting, too drawn-out, too formal or insufficiently personalised'*. Instead of a *'satisfying personal interaction in which the person representing the organisation takes the time to find out what their interest, capabilities and inclinations are ... and to suggest suitable opportunities'* they may find themselves being assessed for their ability to carry out a specific role or function (Gaskin, 2003; 9, 10, and 11).

Secondly, 'modern management' methods pay little attention to promoting the ethos and culture of the organisation and ensuring that the volunteers will find themselves in a welcoming atmosphere, a sense that the people in the organisation value their contribution and that there is *'commitment to and understanding of the role of volunteering in the organisation'* (*Ibid.*; 18).

Thirdly, volunteers felt that *'responsiveness and flexibility'* were *'of paramount importance in overall management'* but that they sat *'uneasily in the increasing professionalisation of volunteer management'*. Volunteers reluctantly acknowledged that some degree of formalisation was necessary but felt that it *'should be done in a low key sort of way and be a compromise between having "every damned rule written and allowing volunteers to contribute creatively if they wanted"'* (*Ibid.*; 17).

Fourthly, Gaskin's findings emphasised the importance of creating the means by which volunteers become psychologically identified with the organisation; participate in planning and problem solving processes; and become involved in the general shaping of its organisational culture (*Ibid.*; 21).

And, finally, they stress the importance of relationships among and between the volunteers. While volunteers should be able to access support from their managers the organisation should also be aware of the 'comradeship' that can exist between volunteers and its value as a provider of support, advice and information on both a one-to-one and a collective basis (*Ibid.*; 22).

### **Achieving the right balance**

Organisations need to find a balance between empowerment and control in dealing with volunteers; they want enthusiastic volunteers but they also want to channel their energies to meet the organisation's purposes (Cameron, 1999: quoted in Gaskin, 2007). The crucial point about volunteering – and the reason why volunteers cannot be treated simply as a workforce – is that it is freely given and undertaken by choice: *'anything that abrogates this spirit endangers the willingness of people to go on doing it'* (Gaskin, 2003; 25).

And the workplace model concentrates on one reason why people get and stay involved: the satisfaction to be had from completing a task and achieving an objective. There is no doubt that this instrumental or *purposive* motivation is a powerful inducement to volunteer but it is not the only and, in many cases, may not be the most important reason for involvement. This may instead be either the pursuit of *sociability* – the satisfaction of the need for social interaction with other people – or of *informational* or *developmental*

incentives for the acquisition of knowledge and personal growth (Smith, 2000). And, while the nature of the activity or the cause involved may prompt many volunteers to come forward the ability to retain their involvement often depends on the degree to which the organisation meets these other kinds of motivation.

Finally, Ellis Paine and her colleagues (2010; 103) point out that:

*'the pressures of contract funding, other demands of professionalisation and the formalisation of volunteer management have been found to contribute to an erosion of the more social aspects of volunteer support and involvement such as informal get-togethers and chats over coffee'*

This, they argue:

*'has implications for the relationships that are formed between staff and volunteers and among volunteers themselves'.*

## **The Position of Volunteers within the Organisation**

While the impact of managerialism on the volunteer experience is important this is only part of the story. 'Modern management' has contributed to more profound changes in the status and position of volunteers within VSGs. These wider changes can be explored and understood through the theory of 'hybridity' developed by David Billis (2010b) and applied to volunteering by Angela Ellis Paine and her colleagues (2010).

Billis explains the complex and shifting organisational features of voluntary sector organisations by identifying the ideal type of voluntary organisations as the 'association' and placing it alongside its counterparts in the other sectors – the 'firm' in the private or for-profit sector and the 'bureau' in the public or governmental sector. Each of these typifies a non-hybrid organisational form and together they form the building blocks for a theory of hybridity in which organisations take on some of the elements of a sector or sectors other than the one in which they have their origins and their roots.

Each sector and its ideal type exemplar has distinctive and different organisational features.

- The voluntary sector association is owned by its members who have established an organisation in order to *'resolve their own or other people's problems'*. The members *'elect committees and officers to guide the work of the organisation'* and that work is carried out by the members themselves. This *'is driven neither by the need to make a profit nor by public policies but primarily by the association's own agenda'* (Billis, 2010b; 53);
- The private sector firm takes the form of a managerially controlled hierarchy of paid employees held accountable through a board to its owners – the shareholders - and its work is driven by the need to make a profit;
- The public sector bureau takes a similar hierarchical form but its paid staff and managers are accountable via politicians to the electorate and its work is shaped by public policies and statutory duties and responsibilities.

Hybrid forms of organisation in the voluntary sector are formed when organisations whose origins and roots are in the associational form, take on some of the characteristics of either the private sector firm or the public sector bureau. This might, for example, involve the appointment of managers, staff and the adoption of an agenda which was driven either by the priorities of the state or the urge to become 'businesslike'.

Billis distinguishes between two kinds of voluntary sector hybrids. There are 'shallow hybrids'. Here the employment of some paid staff (often to work alongside volunteers rather than completely replace them) requires some accommodation with the world of bureaucracy, and the funding to meet the cost depends on meeting the requirements of government or private sector agencies. This kind of hybridity and the tensions it embodies has been the common lot of large numbers of voluntary organisations for many years and their leaders have learned how to manage it. The second kind of voluntary sector hybrid is the 'entrenched' variety where the characteristics of a neighbouring sector are 'deeply embedded' (Billis, 2010a; 78). This form of hybridity is also not new; the large 'household name' charities have been powerfully influenced by the forms and methods of other sectors since the end of the First World War.

But in recent years we have witnessed a growing prevalence of hybrid forms in the sector which can be explained by:

- the increasing commitment of voluntary organisations to public service delivery;
- their growing dependence on funding via contracts and commissioning;
- and the adoption of the managerial techniques and culture that has accompanied these changes (for a fuller account of these changes and their impact see Rochester, 2013).

Ellis Paine and her colleagues (2010; 105-9) have used this typology of associational archetype, and shallow and entrenched hybrids, to develop 'an emergent model' that distinguishes between differences in the positioning of volunteers within an organisation and in the prevailing ethos of volunteering found in the different organisational forms.

- In associations, they argue, volunteers are the '*owners*' and '*the beginning and the end of the organisation*'. They '*identify closely with the organization and are strongly committed to its aims and values*'. And '*to talk of volunteer management is inappropriate, with associations adopting a far more subtle and contingent process of organisation and mutual support*'.
- In shallow hybrids the '*more central role*' played by paid staff in '*strategic and operational roles*' means that '*volunteers are positioned not as owners but as members; they have a role in decision-making ... but they are not the ultimate power holders*'. Volunteer roles '*develop in response both to organisational need and to the interests of individual volunteers*'. The organisation and management of the volunteers activities are undertaken '*informally and developmentally and inclusively along the lines of Zimmeck's (2001) "home-grown" model*'. And volunteering can be an end as well as a means.
- In entrenched hybrids the '*balance of power*' has shifted irreversibly to the paid staff. The organisation may involve large numbers of volunteers but their involvement is limited. They:

*'are treated as resources to be deployed by organisations in the delivery of services; they are a means to an end and their strategic role in organisational decision-making is minimal'..... Top-down workplace management practices are applied to paid staff and volunteers alike, with volunteers subject to standardised, formalised and rigorous selection processes; role description; supervision; and performance management.'*

### **3. The wider implications of a monocular vision of volunteering**

While the hegemony of the 'workplace model' has clearly had its greatest impact on volunteering in voluntary sector organisations whose activities are concentrated on the delivery of services commissioned by government agencies, the development of this 'dominant paradigm' has had wider implications. This section looks briefly at the ways it has affected volunteering outside the more bureaucratic 'service-delivery' sector and at its impact on the way in which volunteering is generally perceived.

The organisational and managerial logic of applying 'modern management' methods to the organisation of the work of volunteers in the 'entrenched hybrids', where the bulk of service delivery is carried out, is clear. However, there is a manifest danger that its techniques and ethos will also be adopted in the shallow hybrid and associational voluntary organisations which are not exclusively or mainly concerned with the delivery of services. These may be concerned, for example, with self-help or mutual aid; community development; and advocacy and campaigning. There is a comparatively small body of evidence about the effects of applying an inappropriate model to these kinds of volunteering opportunities but its message is clear.

An early study (Rochester, 1992), for example, found that an attempt to introduce formal methods of volunteer recruitment to the informal world of local community-based adventure playgrounds was an expensive failure. An exploratory study of small 'volunteer-led' groups carried out for the Institute of Volunteering Research (Ockenden and Hutin, 2008; 40) concluded that volunteering infrastructure bodies needed to develop tailored support for such groups and urged them:

*"...to recognise that while training can be highly beneficial and appropriate, groups may not always welcome interference through further generic capacity- building initiatives or the imposition of models of management and volunteer support".*

And from the USA Carl Milosky (2008; 185) warns:

*"Organisations which are disorganised and that cannot draw on basic financial, group-leadership, and community mobilisation skills are likely to sputter. These organisations are hurt further because the knowledge that their volunteers bring to the work often is inappropriate. People think they know how [to] build organisations from their experience with business organisations or large, bureaucratic nonprofits, and they lack sourcebooks describing strategies that work for small nonprofits and associations".*

As well as causing well-meant havoc in the less formal organisational arena, the hegemony of the 'dominant paradigm' of volunteering can do a great deal of harm to the way we

understand the idea and the phenomenon of volunteering in general. The treatment of volunteers as additional resources in the form of unpaid labour, that needs to be directed and supervised, is very much at odds with the underlying values associated with volunteering and the general principles that help us to understand the nature of voluntary action set out by Jimmy Kearney (2001). Three of these principles are of particular importance in any assessment of the 'workplace model'<sup>3</sup>:

The first of these is that *volunteering is an act of free will or choice*. The volunteer has the freedom to become involved or to choose not to take part and this also means that he or she has *'the right to choose in what area he or she will participate and for what purpose'*. Volunteers are *'not biddable'* and have the right to behave as mavericks. Kearney (2001; 6) quotes with approval Sir Kenneth Stowe's (2001) view that volunteering is *'essentially self-starting, inner directed, and often angry ... it is or can be untidy, uncoordinated, awkward and irresponsible'*.

The second principle is that *volunteers make a distinctive contribution*. They are not a substitute for paid staff or an alternative source of labour but complement and provide added value to the efforts of paid employees.

And the third is that *volunteering empowers*. Volunteers not only develop skills and gain new knowledge but also gain the confidence to make an effective and creative contribution to their communities and to social and community development.

A further dimension to the wider impact of the dominant paradigm on the world of voluntary action as a whole is the increasing wedge it has driven between different manifestations of the voluntary impulse. The adoption by VSGs of the workplace model of volunteer management, and the wider professionalisation agenda of which it is part, is also commonly accompanied by their acceptance of the contracting relationship as a definition of their relationship with the state. This has increased the distance between VSGs and less formal community and activist associations. One – important – dimension of this growing divide has been the de-politicisation of VSGs; despite mission statements – and strategic plans - that include commitments to social justice, equality and the elimination of poverty, VSGs are increasingly leaving the fight for social justice to poorly resourced and largely unsupported activist groups.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

The early studies of the impact of contracting with which this paper began have proved to be an accurate forecast of the continuing changes in the work and organisation of voluntary organisations in general, and of the impact of the contracting and commissioning regimes on volunteers and volunteering in VSGs. The development of formalised systems of volunteer management in order to meet the demands of tightly prescribed funding arrangements has been a notable feature of the past two decades. The paper has attempted to shed light on this development as well as to identify the kinds of impact that it, and the circumstances in which 'modern' methods of volunteer management became so dominant, have had on volunteering in service-providing voluntary organisations.

---

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of the values and principles underpinning volunteering, see Rochester *et al.*, 2010: 16-18).

The first concern is the impact on access to volunteering opportunities in these organisations. There has been a change in the composition of the voluntary sector 'workforce' with a greater emphasis on paid employees and a correspondingly lower expectation of volunteer involvement. At the very least the ratio of paid employees to volunteers has changed markedly. But it is not just a question of numbers; with some exceptions the trend is for volunteers to be relegated to low level and routine tasks while the more demanding – and satisfying – roles are reserved for paid staff. And access to volunteering opportunities within VSGs has become much more restricted by a combination of tighter criteria for selection on the one hand and the deterrent effect of formalisation for many who do not want to put themselves through the bureaucratic processes of recruitment on the other.

A second concern is the impact on the nature of the volunteering experience and the extent to which it meets the needs and aspirations of the volunteers themselves. As well as being involved in the more mundane roles, volunteers find that the formal managerial environment cramps any aspirations they may have had to exercise autonomy and explore creative or flexible approaches to the work of the organisation and inhibits their enjoyment of volunteering as a collective and sociable experience.

Thirdly, growing formalisation has been seen as reducing the importance of the contribution made by the volunteer to an organisation and the value attached to their involvement. In volunteer-led associations volunteers are clearly the 'owners' and principals. In the shallow hybrid forms of many voluntary organisations they take their place as key members alongside the paid staff and other stakeholders. But formalisation within many VSGs has reduced them to no more than additional sources of labour to be deployed in pre-determined roles, in support of the paid staff who undertake the key operational activities of the organisation.

The dominance of the 'workplace model' in the major part of the voluntary sector that is devoted to the delivery of services has an impact on other parts of the sector, on the interaction between these different parts, and on our wider understanding of the nature of volunteering. The formalisation of volunteer management is both a symptom and a contributory factor in the process through which the distinctive nature of voluntary organisations is ignored or undermined. The dominant paradigm threatens the untamed and often maverick expression of free will that defines the authentic spirit of the volunteering impulse, and can serve to separate and distance the work of VSGs from those volunteers and voluntary groups that occupy the world of activism.

## References

Aves, G. (1969) *The Voluntary Worker in the Social Services: Report of a Committee Jointly set up by the National Council for Social Service and the National Institute for Social Work Training*, London: Bedford Square Press and George Allen and Unwin.

Billis, D. (2010a) 'From welfare bureaucracies to welfare hybrids' in D. Billis (ed) *Hybrid Organizations and the Third Sector*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



- Billis, D. (2010b) 'Towards a theory of hybrid organizations' in D. Billis (ed) *Hybrid Organizations and the Third Sector*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Billis, D. and M. Harris (1992) 'Taking the strain of change: British local voluntary agencies enter the post-Thatcher period' *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 21 (3) 211-25
- Burns, L. (1991) 'Management; Meaning Well is Not Enough' in *Volunteers* No 88; 3-5, Berkhamsted, Volunteer Centre UK
- Cairns, B., M. Harris and R. Hutchison (2007) 'Sharing God's Love or Meeting Government Goals: Local Churches and Public Policy Implementation' *Policy and Politics* 35(3): 413-32.
- Cloke, P., S. Johnsen and J. May (2007) 'Ethical Citizenship? Volunteers and the Ethics of Providing Services to Homeless People' *Geoforum* 38(6): 1089-1101.
- Davis Smith, J. (1996) 'Can Volunteers Be Managed?' in D. Billis and M. Harris (eds) *Voluntary Agencies: Challenges for Organisation and Management*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Davis Smith, J. (1998) *The 1997 Survey of Volunteering*, London: National Centre for Volunteering.
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) *Communities in control: Real people, real power*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government, Cm7427.
- Ellis Paine, A., N. Ockenden and J. Stuart (2010) 'Volunteers in hybrid organizations: A marginalized majority?' in D. Billis (ed) *Hybrid Organizations and the Third Sector*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Elstub, S. (2006) 'Towards an inclusive social policy for the UK; The need for democratic deliberation in voluntary and community associations' *Voluntas* 17 (1); 17-39
- Gaskin, K. (2003) *A Choice Blend? What Volunteers want from Organisation and Management* London, Institute for Volunteering Research.
- Gaskin K. (2005) *Getting a Grip: Risk, Risk Management and Volunteering: A Review of the Literature* London, Institute for Volunteering Research.
- Geoghehan, M. and F. Powell (2006) 'Community development, partnership governance and dilemmas of professionalization: Profiling and assessing the case of Ireland' *British Journal of Social Work* 36;845-61
- Goodall, R. (2000) 'Organising cultures: voluntarism and professionalism in UK charity shops' *Voluntary Action* 3 (1); 43-57.
- Home Office (1990) *Efficiency Scrutiny of Government Funding of the Voluntary Sector*, London: Home Office.
- Howlett, S. (2010) 'Developing Volunteer Management as a Profession' *Voluntary Sector Review* 1(3): 355-60.

Institute for Volunteering Research (undated) *Volunteering for All? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion*, London: Institute for Volunteering Research.

Kane, D., J. Clark, S. Lesniewski, J. Wilton, B. Pratten and K. Wilding (2009) *The UK Civil Society Almanack*

Kearney, J. (2001) 'The Values and Basic Principles of Volunteering: Complacency or caution?' *Voluntary Action* 3(3): 63-86.

Low, R., S. Butt, A. Ellis Paine and J. Davis Smith (2007) *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, London: Cabinet Office.

Machin, J. and Ellis Paine, A. (2008) *Management Matters: A National Survey of Volunteer Management Capacity* London, Institute for Volunteering Research.

Milofsky, C. (2008) *Smallville: Institutionalizing Community in Twenty-First Century America*, Hanover, NH and London, University Press of New England.

Obaze, D. (1992) 'Black People and Volunteering' in R. Hedley and J. Davis Smith (eds) *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice*, London: Bedford Square Press.

Rochester, C. (2013) *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: the beat of a different drum* Basingstoke, Palgrave

Rochester, C., A. Ellis Paine and S. Howlett (2010) *Volunteering and Society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rochester, C. (1992) 'Community Organisations and Voluntary Action' in R. Hedley and J. Davis Smith (eds) *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice*, London: Bedford Square Press.

Rochester, C. and R. Hutchison (2002) *A review of the Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative* Research Study 248; London, Home office

Russell, L. and D. Scott (1997) *Very Active Citizens: the impact of contracts on volunteers* Manchester, University of Manchester

Scott, D. and L. Russell (2001) 'Contracting: the Experience of Service Delivery Agencies' in M. Harris and C. Rochester (eds) *Voluntary Organisations and Social Policy in Britain: perspectives on change and choice*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Sheard, J. (1992) 'Volunteering and Society. 1960-1990' in R. Hedley and J. Davis Smith (eds) *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice*, London: Bedford Square Press.

Smith, D.H. (2000) *Grassroots Associations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stowe K. (2001) *Evidence to the Parliamentary Hearings on Volunteering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* London, UK Volunteering Forum

Tihanyi, P. (1991) *Volunteers: Why they come and why they stay*, Case Study 1, London: Centre for Voluntary Organisation. LSE

UK Workforce Hub (2008) *Management of Volunteers: National Occupational Standards* London, UK Workforce Hub.

Zimmeck, M. (2000) *The Right Stuff*, London: Institute for Volunteering Research.

## The Author



Colin Rochester has worked in and with the voluntary and community sector for forty-five years as a practitioner, consultant and academic. He is an honorary research fellow in the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London; academic adviser to the Institute for Volunteering Research at NCVO; he has been chair of the Voluntary Sector Studies Network; and practice article editor of the *Voluntary Sector Review*. He was a co-founder of the Voluntary Action History Society and was for many years a board member.

Colin has made important contributions to the knowledge base on the voluntary and community sector and volunteering and has been published extensively. His most recent book, *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: The Beat of a Different Drum* (Palgrave Macmillan) was published in 2014.

Colin's experience is extensive and eclectic, theoretical and hands-on, but his aim has always been to support learning and the sharing of information about the broad voluntary and community sector and volunteering and, in particular, to concentrate on what works.

[colin@practicalwisdomr2z.co.uk](mailto:colin@practicalwisdomr2z.co.uk)