

Mapping human rights organisations in Scotland

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The context

The study required the team to develop a database of local, voluntary, community and self-advocacy (i.e. non-statutory) groups across Scotland working on issues relating to the rights of those groups within society 'whose rights are not at present adequately protected'. The database emerging from this work was required to extend to people who were older, had physical or mental disabilities, were living in poverty, or in receipt of care in residential or domiciliary settings. Some boundary issues emerged:

- i. The meaning of 'local': the scope of the study was taken to include organisations from the very local to the national (i.e. Scotland-wide). It would therefore include both very local, neighbourhood- or community-based (1) organisations, local authority-wide, subregional and regional bodies, as well as bodies which were based elsewhere with a Scottish presence, organisations based on networks or consortia, including those reflecting a community of identity. Organisations with no formal status i.e. as registered charities, would be included wherever possible given that they might not be picked up through national surveys.



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- ii. The SHRC referred to groups 'not at present adequately protected'. The framework for defining human rights and an organisation's approach to it was very broad-based, set out in a typology developed by the SHRC itself and based on five organisational categories. This would ensure that organisations not centrally regarding themselves as human rights organisations could define some part of their work as such. The definition of human rights might include organisations which were working politically in very different ways.
- iii. The boundaries of the TS (2) were defined in an inclusive fashion to include many organisations funded by central or local government but not having a statutory basis.

Previous experience showed that organisations working more locally have smaller numbers of staff and annual turnover, may not have charitable or appropriate company status, do not contract for public service delivery, and tend to feature less in published databases. Most national (and local authority) databases are thus skewed towards larger organisations, as reflected in the annual returns filed to national charity regulators such as the Charity Commission and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), to national TS organisations (TSOs) which monitor TS activities (such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - SCVO) and to autonomous bodies, collecting and publishing TS data, such as Guidestar. This bias would be addressed here by local case studies.

Methodology

The study was based on a national questionnaire survey, supplemented by local case studies. Developing the *questionnaire* was a relatively straightforward task; this was constructed through a process of consultation between the research team,

the SHRC, and the SCVO. The questionnaire was delivered – with a covering letter - through postal contacts but largely electronically through databases, electronic noticeboards, and advertisements in newsletters and internal emailings. Sixteen different sectors were identified for mailings including local government, police, health bodies, higher and further education, organisations concerned with faith, local economic development, housing and special interest groups (such as minority ethnic groups or groups concerned with sexuality), community, community development and volunteer groups.

Constructing a *database* of organisations to which the questionnaire would be sent was, however, a time-consuming exercise involving contacts with a wide range of organisations both directly and indirectly through a series of brokers and frequently involved cascading requests for help down through a hierarchy of organisations as well as networking; this became a highly significant part of the development of the database. Confirming earlier experience, as we approached more local levels, information became increasingly unreliable and incomplete. There were concerns about overlap with existing mapping exercises. The SCVO latterly posted the survey to a 10% sample of its own 20,000+ database.

Two case *study sites* were identified in which to undertake some detailed investigations, one a compact urban/rural local authority and one a much more dispersed rural area, the actual choice of the areas made after data from national mapping came available. On the basis of an initial analysis of the distribution of returned questionnaires by local authority area, we chose Scottish Borders and Clackmannanshire as the two case study areas. Case study work involved exploring the databases available locally in all major settlements (including local libraries, colleges, voluntary sector bodies, news media) to supplement data gathered through the national data

mapping exercise. Analysis of returned questionnaires showed that, compared with a national mean of 7.1 organisations returning questionnaires per 100,000 population, the number of organisations returning per 100,000 population from the Scottish Borders council area (population about 113,000) was 4.4 (5 organisations) and from Clackmannanshire (population 49,000 – the smallest mainland Scottish local authority) was 2.0 (1 organisation) i.e. both were considerably under-represented in returns made.

Allowing for duplication, the final total of TSOs identified from databases in Scottish Borders was 908. On the basis of the average of the data provided by SCVO and OCSR, of the 23,600 organisations within Scotland's TS, 3.1% or 732, were located within the Scottish Borders. This simple but detailed case study exercise thus managed to identify a further 176 or an extra 24% of organisations, confirming that there were very many organisations operating 'below the radar' and characteristically not reached through national surveys.

A similar exercise was carried out in Clackmannanshire. The average of the OSCR and SCVO data suggested there would be approximately 140 TS organisations within the area (0.6 % of 23,600). Combining databases available from some of these organisations with details of other organisations collected en route, removing duplication, we identified 493 TS organisations, i.e. more than three times the number anticipated from the OCSR or SCVO databases. It is unclear why there should be such a disparity in numbers, and particularly in the case of the smallest and most compact authority, or for that matter why there should be so many more organisations per head of population (on this basis, roughly 10 organisations per 1,000 head of population compared with the 8 in the Scottish Borders but less than 1 organisation per 1,000 head of population in Scotland as a whole (taking 45,000 as the baseline for the number of organisations)).

Conclusions

The key question emerging from the study was 'how many organisations are really out there?' Discussions with SCVO suggested that the database they held already contained roughly 35,000 organisations and that they anticipated reaching a further 10,000 organisations which fitted within the parameters of the TS. That implies that the total number of TSOs in Scotland might be of the order of 45,000. Our independent approaches suggested that around 20,000 organisations could potentially be reached through our early development work, although this figure had to be regarded with some caution as we had no way of knowing what the extent of overlaps would be between different databases. A later figure from SCVO, however, suggested that of these 45,000 organisations, only 23,600 were known 'to be active in Scotland today, are definitely voluntary sector ...' The 10% sample was sent to 2,030 organisations i.e. the number of active organisations known to the SCVO was, on this basis, 20,300. The OCSR annual report (3) analyses data from 23,806 charities. The SCVO figure does not make clear how many registered as charities. This is a complicating factor: being part of the voluntary sector does not require organisations to be registered as charities. Smaller organisations (often termed 'hard to reach', perhaps more appropriately defined as 'easy to ignore') often don't have charitable status, either because they are ephemeral, relatively new, have few assets or do not welcome public scrutiny. This was found to be the case in the national evaluation of the Local Network Fund (4) and in other recent children's organisations' mapping.

These estimates suggest that there are roughly 24,000 charities active in Scotland; but we cannot know how many organisations overall are active in the Scottish TS, that is how many smaller organisations (charitable or not) are being overlooked. On the basis of

the Scottish Borders case study, we could add another quarter at least (given that the case study could not provide comprehensive data) to the minimum estimate, making a total of 30,000 (if the figure of 24,000 is accepted as a baseline) or almost 44,000 if we accept 35,000 as a baseline. This latter figure is comparable to the SCVO's overall estimate of 45,000 organisations. The OCSR annual report points out that almost 8,000 charities were removed from its register in nine months to March 2007: this reflects a sector with a huge degree of turnover.

Whilst the overall rate of return to the postal questionnaire was disappointing, analysis did offer useful pointers for future work.

1. whilst all organisations recognised that some aspect of their work might impact on human rights, only 7% declared that human rights work was a core mandate of their work. A further 11% organisations suggested that human rights was a secondary issue. The OCSR shows that only about 4% of organisations define the advancement of human rights as their charitable purpose. This suggests that the targeted language of the SHRC picked up rather more organisations or enabled others to define themselves as human rights organisations using a broader definition of human rights.
2. seven areas of activity characteristic of TSOs (service provision, awareness raising, education and training, support/mentoring, campaigning, capacity building and advocacy) were well-represented, involving at least a quarter of all organisations responding. This compares with the OSCR analysis which doesn't analyse charities in terms of the type of activity but does show that education and community development (capacity building) are featured most strongly in organisational returns.
3. in terms of the size of organisation as measured by numbers of fulltime staff, bigger organisations were concentrated in the large urban centres. The OCSR analysis does not provide this detail; our survey shows that both in terms of staffing and income, there is a huge range of organisations within the sector.
4. responses to the question about legal status suggested that eight out of ten were registered charities: the OCSR returns are based on charities but within their returns, almost one fifth noted that they were also companies.
5. the largest single number of organisations focused on issues of non-discrimination and equality. A focus on health, education, poverty and the right to work also featured strongly; this correlates closely with OCSR returns.
6. looking at beneficiaries by age group, the SHRC showed similarities to OCSR returns although categories were not collected in the same way. OCSR suggests that key age groups indicated were, in order, children and young people, the community, older people and people with disabilities or health problems. The SHRC survey shows children and young people as the key group (these two subgroups being taken together), followed by adults, young adults and older people. The OCSR suggests that about 5% of its returns focused on 'people of particular race or ethnic origin'. Without more detail, given that the Scottish BME population of Scotland is now around 5%, we cannot know whether 'race' is under-represented in the work of the Scottish TS. The SHRC survey found substantial evidence of faith-based organisations. OCSR returns suggest that more than 20% of organisations are concerned with the promotion of religion, and religious or racial harmony.

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Conclusions cont.

7. The area of benefit also shows interesting differences. The most frequent category for SHRC returns was 'national', followed by regional (20%), single local authority (17%) and community (14%) levels. About 10% said their area of benefit was the UK as a whole. In the OCSR survey only 7% indicated they covered 'all or most of Scotland', a further 14% covering the UK and overseas. Twenty-two percent of OCSR returns covered one local authority and 10% 'more than one local authority' (i.e. what the SHRC termed 'regional'), i.e. the OCSR survey was weighted more strongly towards single local authorities and away from regional coverage.

8. Finally, the two case studies confirmed our working hypothesis, that many more TSOs would be identified, the closer one got to the grassroots, than were known through national or regional databases. Case studies identified an additional 529 organisations. Although we cannot know if these additional organisations would reflect the same profile in relation to their involvement with human rights work, any exercise attempting to be comprehensive would need to pay attention to detailed ground-level work as well as to the use of national sources.

Note: The research instruments, and further details of the study, can be obtained from Professor Gary Craig at Gary.craig@durham.ac.uk

About the project

A team led by Professor Gary Craig, supported by Dr Clare Whitfield (University of Hull) and Dr Nicole Westmarland (Durham University,) was commissioned by the Scottish Human Rights Commission to explore the extent of Third Sector (TS) human rights activity in Scotland. This was part of a wider initiative whereby the SHRC intends to promote human rights activity more generally.

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Footnotes

- 1 We defined community not only as a geographical space but in terms of community of identity (e.g. a minority ethnic group) or community of interest of issue such as a group campaigning around speeding traffic. The latter type of community might be quite ephemeral.
- 2 The Third Sector was taken to include both voluntary groups – groups generally in receipt of state funding, with paid staff, charitable status and autonomous management arrangements; and community groups which tend not to be funded by government or local government, usually do not have either paid staff or charitable status but are representative of 'communities' whether of geography, identity or interest. Boundaries between the two categories of organisation are often blurred.
- 3 OSCR (2009) *Scottish Charities 2008*, Dundee: Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.
- 4 Craig, G. *et al.* (2006) *Was the money used well?*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
Craig G. et al., (2008) *Every organisation matters*, London: National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations/National Council for Voluntary Youth Services.