

Volunteering Policy: Convergence or Divergence?

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Convergence or Divergence?

1. The UK Context;
2. Developments in England;
3. Devolved volunteering;
4. Divergence – the how;
5. Divergence – the why;
6. Continuing regionalisation;
7. The supra national context;
8. Some key questions.

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Volunteering – The UK Context

- Volunteering assumed a key UK policy role since 1997 ¹:
 - ❑ The Third Way;
 - ❑ A Communitarian philosophy;
 - ❑ Social exclusion;
 - ❑ Active citizenship
 - ❑ Significant role for the Third Sector in a range of policy/service delivery areas;
 - ❑ Volunteering as a ‘solution’ to a range of policy problems ².

Developments in England

- The Experience Corps (£20 million of funding);
- The Office of The Third Sector within the Cabinet Office;
- A guide to good practice on volunteering as part of the Compact with the Voluntary Sector;
- V – volunteering programme for young people;
- No national support for infrastructure.

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Devolved Volunteering

- Volunteer a devolved matter;
- Active Communities Strategy;
- Social Inclusion (Social Justice Milestone 28 aimed to increase the numbers of people taking part in voluntary activity);
- Voluntary Issues Unit;
- Minister for Communities;
- The National Volunteer Strategy;
- MV Awards (moving away from the original employability focused programme);
- SG support for national VC Network.

Divergence – The How

- A national network of Volunteer Centres – 1 in each Local Authority area;
- The Volunteering Strategy;
- A marketplace analysis – recognising the need for organisational change;
- Removing the barriers to participation in volunteering;
- A volunteering strategy for the NHS in Scotland.

Divergence – The Why

- Doubts about a distinctive Scottish Social policy post-devolution ³, but,
 - ❑ An ‘independent’ civil society;
 - ❑ Devolution – back to the future – a return to pluralist/consensual politics pre 1979 (policy ‘triangle’: Government/Public Sector/Civil Society) ⁴;
 - ❑ ‘New Politics’ in a ‘New Nation’;
 - ❑ Commitment to social justice/reducing inequality ⁵;
 - ❑ Election of the SNP Government in May 2007.

Continuing Regionalisation

- The historic concordat – the localism agenda in Scotland;
- Key policies areas already devolved, e.g, Health and Education;
- Enterprising third sector/growing the social economy;
- Funding for Project Scotland not to be continued;
- UK policy becoming increasingly regionalized, in particular Welfare Reform ⁵;
- Growing differences in volunteering policy:
 - ❑ £10.5 million to tackle youth unemployment in England
 - ❑ Continued support for the V Programme
 - ❑ £3 million for inter-generational volunteering
 - ❑ A 'Volunteer Champion' in government (GOAT).

The Supra National Context

- Several EU countries gave volunteering established/regulated by statute (e.g. Czech Republic) ⁷;
- European Volunteer Centre now receives funding from EU Commission (DG Education & Culture);
- 'Opinion' from European Social and Economic Committee; recommended that member states should have a law on volunteering ⁸;
- Proposed EU Year of Volunteering in 2011.

Some Key Questions:

- Will the powers of the Scottish Parliament be increased e.g. borrowing capital sums;
- Will different administrations at Holyrood and Westminster exacerbate policy divergence;
- Will Scotland ever have to consider a 'volunteering law' directive from the EU

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