

# Voluntary and community sector participation in extended schools

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This report is produced by VCS Engage, a programme funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to strengthen the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivering the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. VCS Engage is steered by a consortium of infrastructure and delivery organisations working in the children, young people and families voluntary and community sector; and supported by a large number of individual agencies that are committed to working as part of the programme.

The report was commissioned as part of the VCS Engage work around extended schools. VCS Engage aims to identify the barriers to VCS participation, and deliver training and guidance to help strengthen the sector's capacity to deliver extended schools services.

Members of the consortium are:

- National Children's Bureau (NCB)
- National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO)
- National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
- National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)
- Parenting UK
- Family Welfare Association (FWA)
- NCH

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## Introduction

Towards the end of February 2007, NCB commissioned a relatively rapid overview exercise of the barriers to VCS participation in the extended schools programme. It was anticipated that recommendations to overcome these barriers would be made for activity in the 2007/8 financial year. This exercise is part of the larger VCS Engage consortium programme that is looking more generally at VCS engagement in the delivery of Every Child Matters services.

The exercise involved a review of existing materials on extended schools; telephone and face-to-face discussions with a range of strategists, practitioners and providers; and a number of visits to schools. All discussions were held on a non-attributable basis. The list of main contributors appears in Appendix 1. The topics covered in interviews and field visits appear in Appendix 2; and Appendix 3 is a list of the most relevant background material.

Although the review was specifically aimed at identifying barriers and ways to overcome them, a very high level of enthusiasm was found, on all sides, for the extended schools' vision as well as numerous examples of service provision by or with the VCS working well and effectively. There was also a high degree of consensus around the key issues and this being the right time to examine them. There was a strong feeling that the extended schools programme and its support arrangements are beginning to achieve momentum; and, given the aim that all schools will offer extended services by 2010, that there is a tremendous opportunity for the VCS to make a substantial contribution to this.

Many hours of discussion and review have been distilled into this short and focused report which, it is hoped, will lay the foundations for further proactive work by the VCS Engage consortium. The consortium will have to decide whether the issues identified here are specific to extended schools; or a manifestation of more general challenges in VCS service delivery that can be dealt with in the context of activities already underway.

In the time available, visits were limited and geographically selective. As a result, it is possible that this study has not identified issues to do with particular types of school, or settings (e.g. very dispersed populations), or location in the country. This has been covered in the Recommendations section on page 9 – a two-page section that can be used as an executive summary. There is also a one-page summary (Appendix 4).

## Context

At the heart of the extended schools policy is a belief that nurturing the whole child – in the school, the home and the community – will promote the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Every Child Matters (2003) set out an agenda for change and developed the concept of extended schools that would act as hubs for services for children, families and other members of the community; and full-service extended schools that would provide a core of childcare, study support, family and lifelong learning, health and social care, sports and arts facilities, and access to IT.

By 2005 DfES (now DCSF) had refined this concept into a policy for all schools. It published an extended schools prospectus, *'Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all'*, which set out a programme for all schools to offer a wide range of extended services by 2010. The 'core offer' would be:

- high-quality wraparound childcare (provided on the school site or by linked local providers) with a target of total provision between 8am and 6pm for those who want it
- a varied 'menu' of additional activities
- parenting support
- swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist services
- wider community access to facilities for ICT, sports, arts and adult learning.

A support structure was put in place to assist and monitor the development of extended schools. This involved the Training and Development Agency (TDA) (including local authority-based remodelling teams); and two third-sector bodies, 4Children and ContinYou. Start-up funding was made available to local authorities and to schools through a standards grant. The extended schools prospectus strongly encouraged schools and local authorities to form partnerships with the VCS to provide services, but there was no absolute requirement to do so (and, in fact, the whole programme is essentially non-statutory).

There has been debate amongst strategists as to the accuracy and usefulness of the 'extended schools' label. Comments include: 'If all schools are to be extended schools, we can just call them schools' and 'Numerous schools have been offering these sorts of services for years without using the label'. However, there is no doubt that for many schools this is a challenging agenda for change – especially if the full benefits are to be realised through the integration of additional services into the life of the school. These services should be given equal status with the more traditional school activities. The Audit Commission report 'Sum of the parts' demonstrated that local authorities also had some way to go to assimilate the full benefits of the reconfiguration of children and young people's services.

What is clear is that this is an important agenda for the VCS, given that over the next three years more schools will aspire to offer a wide range of additional services and that it is likely that, by 2010, schools will be commissioning a substantial proportion of children and young people's services – in some parts of the country at least. It is also clear that there is a huge amount of relevant current activity (including wide-ranging and innovative additional activity and encouraging examples of swift referral); as well as some uncertainty on all sides about how best to ensure that the VCS – in all its many forms, from a parent wanting to get involved

in sports training, through to a local interest group, or major voluntary programme providers – has the opportunity for full involvement. Of course, there remains a wide spectrum of progress on extended services by schools, with some schools still to be convinced of the benefits of offering comprehensive extended services. In light of numerous pressures, the low priority that these services are given can be the cause of some frustration for VCS providers eager to participate. Equally, the process of negotiating participation with schools can be daunting, particularly for VCS providers with no previous experience of this sector.

Given the relatively low level of central prescription, there is also a great deal of concern as to how many issues can be influenced by action at a national level, as much of the activity has a local focus.

## Barriers

Many of the key issues identified as barriers to VCS participation are linked and overlapping. This section considers the following issues:

- information
- quality assurance
- funding
- commissioning
- accommodation
- partnerships.

### Information

As there is a great deal of local discretion about how the key outcomes are delivered, it is extremely important that information about what is happening locally is made widely available. TDA monitoring systems do identify those schools that are providing core offers, but this information is not readily accessible. Information does not seem to be consistently collected on which services are being provided by the VCS (except for the younger childcare phases).

The extended schools prospectus requires schools to consult with staff, pupils, governors, parents and the local authority about their extended schools plans, but not specifically with potential VCS partners. Various directories are being drawn up by different VCS providers in local areas, with some developing web-based brokerage arrangements. Many local authorities also hold regular forums to update the VCS and discuss what services might be needed. But the trend appears to be towards schools-based commissioning (sometimes, but not always, on a cluster basis), which is a particular challenge for large charities seeking volume contracts. In another arena, similar cluster-based issues will arise with general practitioner commissioning of related services.

Better information might also help to prevent new services from depleting existing provision. While there was some recognition of this as a potential issue, no relevant hard facts and figures were available.

### Quality assurance

Linked to the provision of information is the issue of how those seeking services can be certain of their quality and the effectiveness of what is on offer. Although there are many quality assurance (QA) and kitemarking schemes across different kinds of provision, their multiplicity adds to the difficulty. At the same time, many felt that a national QA scheme would be bureaucratic and cumbersome, as well as costly. Schools appear to trust the recommendations of other schools most readily, but obviously this poses a problem for new providers.

### Funding

It appears that most of the start-up resources for both schools and local authorities have been needed to fund support arrangements rather than content. Thus, many schools feel there are budget constraints to doing as much as they might wish and on having people available in the longer term to coordinate the extended schools

offerings. On the other hand, there is a view that there are many opportunities for both schools and the VCS to pursue additional grants for their activities (and partnership working is nearly always a criterion). Although it is recognised that stereotypes exist, these were not especially borne out by the purchasers and providers who were interviewed for this report. However, there is an issue as to whether schools would allow more coordination to be done by VCS providers themselves.

There appears to be a fairly practical approach to charging. Recovering full costs is more of an issue, particularly where the front-line cost is easily identifiable; and, while there are pressures to charge overheads as a matter of good practice and for survival, purchasers are much less enthusiastic. Of course, some VCS organisations are funded by other sources and do not seek to recoup full costs from charging or from school budgets. But for many these arrangements are fragile.

There are also considerable concerns from all parties about the availability of funding from 2008, when various programmes are due to end. Smaller providers in deprived areas are vulnerable to seesaw funding and cannot always ensure that those who benefit most actually attend their sessions. Current arrangements for wraparound care are seen to militate against non-working parents. Another grey area appears to be that of children of parents in training. Further study here is desirable, given the importance to both children and parents of this type of provision.

### Commissioning

Although many providers seem to be commissioning, there is considerable worry in VCS organisations about the development of the process at local authority level and how this might be reflected as schools take more responsibility. The key issues raised are:

- the transparency of the process
- the 'neutrality' of the commissioning team with regard to external (as opposed to internal) bidders
- the need for a safeguard if contracts are awarded to 'in-house' providers on the basis of small cost differences, especially if external agencies are already providing the service effectively
- clarity over the application of employment procedures, for example the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations (TUPE), which come into effect when a job is transferred from one organisation to another
- the proportionality of preparation and paperwork – and the frequency of recommissioning – to the value of the bid, and an understanding that bodies may be bidding to more than one commissioner at a time.

There was concern that there didn't appear to be a document that explained the commissioning process in a simple way and which was easily accessible to both schools and the VCS.

### Accommodation

Considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of facilitating extended schools activities in school rebuilding and refurbishment programmes, but there are worries that 'extra' facilities will be axed first if budgets have to be trimmed. There were some interesting discussions about whether the traditional classroom was still a sensible basic unit for a school at all. Accommodation is a major issue for small primary schools and although off-site provision can be very helpful, it is not always ideal for parent and community involvement, or for accommodating specialist services. Other potential issues of concern are hiring costs (for example, should VCS pay if the service is for the school's pupils?), and protocols on issues such as storage,

damage, and health and safety. These issues can become particularly difficult where the school has external facilities management arrangements.

### Partnerships

It is clear that a great deal of goodwill exists on all sides, but there are still issues to overcome that require greater mutual understanding and communication. Time and energy are huge issues on all sides: being able to speak to a decision-taker in a school is often perceived to be difficult. Not all VCS providers feel that schools recognise them as part of the learning mission and able to play a significant role in the schools' focus on individual children. The key here is probably to encourage good mutual communication rather than produce 'how to' guides. It is also unsurprising (given the pressures on schools and the many messages they get from different quarters) that the assessment and recommendations of Ofsted and school improvement advisers are particularly significant.

The next 18 months or so is a critical period when more schools will be offering more services with the help of quick and easy referrals. Current estimates show that there are now 4,000 schools delivering on all five aspects of the core offer, with an expectation that this will rise to 6,000 by September 2007.

## Recommendations

In the light of the analysis and issues raised above, it is recommended that VCS Engage should consider the following areas of activity for 2007/8:

### Information

- To agree with local authorities to provide consistent information on the schools that provide, or are intending to provide, services (perhaps on a twice-yearly basis). It should include: the key contact in each school for the VCS; what directories of VCS services are in hand or planned, including web-based directories, and how VCS can register to appear in them; and which QA issues are dealt with in those directories.
- To discuss with DCSF the provision of more detailed national breakdowns of progress on extended schools, perhaps in the context of an updated prospectus, and on any plans to collect information about VCS involvement in service provision.
- To discuss with 4Children and others whether it would be helpful to produce further material, for the VCS and schools, on engaging with extended services, and whether this, or a separate document, should cover principles of commissioning. (As there is already so much paper around, this suggestion must be treated with caution.) It must be ensured that parents, schools and the VCS have enough common information on charging, including flexibilities and tax credit issues.
- To examine the feasibility of a sponsored national web-based brokerage system (running along principles similar to 'eBay' or 'Slivers of Time'), which all VCS and schools can access easily and that would be emblematic of the new partnership.
- To decide whether an audit of VCS participation in extended services, in one or two local authorities, would provide some useful benchmarking material and a richness of detail not currently available. It might be possible for this to be combined with audit action already in hand.

### Other

- To discuss with Ofsted whether some form of expert training in the potential of the VCS contribution to extended schools would be useful. Similar discussions could be held with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and those organising joint-service reviews.
- To initiate a forum with those responsible for school capital project funding and facilities management on promoting VCS engagement in schools.
- To discuss with those in the extended schools support operation how the many different regional teams can be brought together with regional VCS forums, possibly involving the government offices.
- To initiate a project to consider in detail the sustainability of VCS after-school provision in deprived areas (particularly at the older primary phase), with particular emphasis on sources of funding; links to school attainment; parental contributions and links to benefits and tax credits; and ensuring that those who benefit most can attend, irrespective of parental situation.
- To hold an event or series of events to engage those considering the future shape of extended schools education and assess interest group attitudes and approaches, to ensure that the VCS is linked into such thinking.

- To write up a small number of case studies of schools that have high VCS involvement and are convinced that the extended activities are feeding back into pupil attainment.
- To engage with DCSF and TDA on the work taking place to evaluate extended schools activities, so that the VCS can be involved and understand any implications for the way in which services are provided.
- To decide whether further study of VCS and the development of extended services in particular types of school (e.g. special schools) or particular places (e.g. deprived, rural) is needed.
- To discuss with DCSF how the desirability of consultation with the VCS can be stressed in any new guidance.
- To sponsor authoritative workshop(s), at national or regional level, with strategists and policy-makers to discuss whether there are any major omissions in the developing coverage of extended services (both in terms of content and of particular VCS sub-sectors, e.g. black and minority ethnic or faith groups), especially in terms of wraparound or quick referrals, and how these might be addressed.

Prioritising these recommendations will depend partly on affordability, but also on potential links to work already in progress on other aspects of VCS engagement. Discussion is also needed with 4Children on any action they intend to take on the VCS interface over the next year, to avoid duplication and to exploit complementarities.

### Acknowledgements

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## Appendix 1: Main organisations contacted for this study

### Visits and face-to-face discussions

Barnardo's  
Brighton and Hove Local Authority  
Bryanston Square  
CEA @ Islington  
Consultant to ContinYou  
ContinYou  
DfES [part of which is now DCSF]  
Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Language College, Islington  
Fairlight Primary School, Brighton  
4Children  
Hampshire Local Authority  
Holloway Secondary School, Islington  
Horndean Community Association, Waterlooville  
Horndean Technology College, Waterlooville  
Place2be  
Portchester Community School, Portchester  
Whitehawk Primary School, Brighton

### Other organisations

Berwick Family Centre, Berwick-upon-Tweed  
Bromley Local Authority  
East Start Associates, Suffolk  
Family Welfare Association  
Hove YMCA  
National Literacy Trust (family reading)  
NCH  
Parenting UK  
Play England  
Pyramid Trust  
Regional Youth Work Unit, Gateshead  
Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum  
Whitehawk After School Project

## Appendix 2: Outline issues for discussions

- Accommodation and facilities
- Assessment/inspection
- Case studies and documentation
- Definitions
- Evaluation
- Future plans
- Guidance
- Information
- Logistics
- Negatives to date
- Other perceived barriers
- Participation/progress to date
- Positives to date
- Resources (funding and charging, etc.)
- Support structure
- Take-up
- VCS/School/LA perceptions, roles and culture

### Appendix 3: Key contribution and background documents

*Developing Extended Schools: (How TESSS – the extended school support service – can help)*, TESSS and ContinYou

*Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all – a prospectus*, DfES (2005)

*Extended Schools: A report on early development*, Ofsted (2006)

*Extended Schools: Schools working with their community 2004–5*, ContinYou

*Extended Services in Schools and Children’s Centres*, Ofsted (2006)

*Extended Services: Supporting school improvement*, DfES (2007)

*Extended Schools Update*, TESSS and ContinYou

*Getting Started: Developing childcare in and around schools – a resource for schools and Partners*, 4Children

*Lessons From Extended Schools*, National College for School Leadership (2006)

*Policy into Practice documents on extended services* (quarterly journal), 4children

*Making it Work: Study support at the heart of your extended service provision*, ContinYou

*More than the Sum: Mobilising the whole council and its partners to support school success*, Audit Commission (2006)

*Schools Plus to Extended Schools: Lessons from the last five years*, ContinYou (2006)

*Socrates’ Tree*, Bryanston Square (2006)

#### Other various

*Extended Schools: Opportunities and threats for the voluntary youth sector*, West Midlands Voluntary Youth Service Forum

*The Extended Schools Agenda and the Voluntary Youth Sector*, Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum

NFER research reports

TDA, ContinYou and 4children web resources

## **Appendix 4: VCS participation in extended schools – a summary**

An increasing number of schools are offering a wide range of additional services under the extended schools programme. By 2010, all schools are expected to do so.

The VCS is already playing a significant role in providing services to and for extended schools, but there are outstanding issues and uncertainties. Given the momentum of the programme, it is important that VCS organisations have the fullest opportunity to participate.

This report identifies barriers under the following headings:

- availability of coherent and systematic information
- funding and commissioning
- quality assurance
- accommodation and premises
- productive partnership working.

The report makes recommendations for possible activity in the financial year 2007/8, including:

- better local information on extended schools development and on potential VCS providers
- better national information on the progress of extended schools
- a possible national brokerage database
- VCS-awareness training for school inspection and workforce development bodies
- input to school capital funding decision-takers
- VCS improvement interface with relevant teams at regional level
- a review of the sustainability of after-school provision in deprived areas
- engagement in work on evaluating extended services
- an identification of the major omissions in extended schools coverage.

The final work programme will depend on action on VCS engagement in Every Child Matters services more generally, and plans should be discussed with 4Children and ContinYou, who provide network support for extended schools.