 THINK data  
 Scotland

Scottish Third Sector Data Network



## Big Data and the Third Sector

Using data to better understand the scale and scope of the Scottish third sector

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Scottish Universities Insight Institute

## Making big impact with big data

The third sector plays a vital social and economic role in Scotland so the better we understand this area, the more we can do to improve the services and policies in it. Although as organisations we might collect a lot of data about third sector activity, very often it is under-analysed through lack of knowledge or resource, or fails to give the information we need to effectively develop services and measure outcomes. But big data gives us the potential to strike up partnerships, share information and gain new and better insight.

In the first of our workshops on the use of data in the third sector we brought together practitioners, researchers and policy-makers and asked them, 'how can we use data to better understand the scale and scope of the Scottish third sector?'

### Two messages stood out:

#### Quality

We need to be clear about what we want – by harmonising language, developing key indicators to maximise data sharing and improving the quality of questions, we can produce richer data.

See presentation videos of keynote speakers Professor Lester Salamon and Chris Yiu here.

#### Collaboration

Although there is some anxiety around sharing data, the overall consensus is that if we work together and share best practice we can improve our capacity to handle and understand data. With these relationships and increased data linkage, we can make a real difference in the way we evidence the impact of services and influence policy.

This post-conference report aims to give you a snapshot of the presentations and conversations that took place.

## Keynote speaker Professor Lester Salamon: Smashing through some of the great myths of global civil society



Professor Salamon and his team (CNP) at The John Hopkins University are undoubtedly pioneers in non-profit research – thanks to their work over the past 15 plus years we now have greater understanding of the scale of global civil society. When first looking into the structure and economics of the non-profit sector they found that a considerable lack of statistical evidence had left it exposed to misinterpretation by governments, policy-makers and the public. Working with associates in over 45 countries, CNP generated new data which, contrary to perceptions of a slow growth sector with little to contribute to the economy, revealed a non-profit sector that is a major economic force. With that, ten great myths were debunked. Here are a few of them:

[LINK TO CNP ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector](https://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector)

**“Statistics are the lenses through which we see reality.”**

**Professor Lester Salamon**

### There is no such thing as a civil society or non-profit sector

Surrounded by terminological and statistical confusion, a distorted version of the world’s non-profit sector had emerged, rendering its size and key social and economic contributions largely invisible.

For instance, under the UN’s System of National Accounts, The John Hopkins University – a non-profit organisation – would effectively disappear from non-profit statistics. Why? Because students pay for their education, under SNA guidelines, the university would be listed under the corporation sector instead of non-profit.

So how do you define a sector so diverse it incorporates community groups, hospitals charities, trade associations and more – what features do they share that would allow a consistent approach to data collection?

CNP established five main criteria: each entity should be organizational, private (separate from government), non-profit distributing, self-governing and non-compulsory.

With this they were able to extract and analyze comparable data from countries across the globe, revealing the true scale of the non-profit sector.

### The civil society sector is a marginal actor on the economic landscape

With a clear definition of non-profit organisations for data collection, CNP conducted research in 37 countries to establish their economic impact, revealing some staggering figures:

- In 2012 the non-profit sector was the fifth largest economy in the world, almost twice that of the UK and behind only the USA, China, India and Japan.
- It accounted for 48.4 million full-time equivalent jobs, in other words, that is 4.6% of the economically active population and 12 times more than the 4 million people employed by the world’s largest private companies.

### Philanthropy is the chief source of civil society organisation revenue

Could you put a figure on how much non-profit revenue comes from philanthropy in the UK? CNP’s research in 34 countries showed the average income non-profit organisations receive from philanthropy is ....12%. And the other 88%? Fees and other charges generate a huge 53% of income with governments contributing a sizeable 35%.

### Paid staff in the non-profit sector drive out volunteers

Not so. Out of 37 countries, CNP found that the scale of volunteering was huge in the majority of them: 44% volunteers versus 56% paid staff. And in some Nordic countries the volunteer figure was as high as 64%.

They also found that in 84% of countries taking part, organisations with above average levels of staff attracted above average levels of volunteers and vice versa.

In fact, if volunteers were to form the populace of one nation it would become the world’s second largest after China.

## Keynote speaker Chris Yiu: Creating opportunities and evidence-based policymaking with data

Chris Yiu, Director of Digital at the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is a big fan of numbers. Take £4.9 billion for example – that’s how much income Scotland’s third sector generated between 2012 and 2013. Keen to know where the figure came from? We hope so because that is exactly what SCVO want – more engagement with data so we improve our understanding of third sector activity.

By working smarter and producing and analysing high quality data we can really start to evaluate our impact in the third sector. As an organisation do you know who is involved in your activities, where you should invest resources or how government policy will affect you? While intuitive understanding is useful, only through reliable, factual insight can we really begin answering these questions.

**“In God we trust.  
Everyone else bring data.”**  
W. Edwards Deming

We need to ‘up’ our data skills and create robust infrastructures and partnerships so we have the information and evidence to plan effectively and influence policy. Regulators, registers (SCVO included) and panels are just some organisations that regularly collect data from across the country – what opportunities are there to share information?

SCVO use their own CRM platform which collects organisational data from around Scotland through Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), making it possible to see the shape of the sector and analyse activity. And although not all data can be shared publicly, it allows Volunteer Scotland to promote volunteering opportunities while Get Involved users can search for third sector organisations using keywords.

And next on the agenda? Encouraging more linkage between platforms so we can share data and expand knowledge; machine readable data to make information easier to work with; partnerships for participation to encourage more community engagement and, finally, new partnerships for innovation.

[www.volunteerscotland.net/find-an-opportunity/opportunity-search/](http://www.volunteerscotland.net/find-an-opportunity/opportunity-search/)

[www.getinvolved.org.uk/](http://www.getinvolved.org.uk/)

### Claire Stuart, The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability

**Claire on eSAY learning disability dataset:** eSAY was set up as part of the Scottish Government's learning disability strategy to improve policy and practice. The data we collect provides a picture of the learning disability landscape in Scotland i.e. its demographics and the services accessed by these groups. All 32 local authorities are involved, providing administrative data based on 21 variables to help us understand more about education, employment and home life as well as services.

We are involved in data linkage on health and social care across the UK which helps us identify people with pre-existing health data sets – learning disabled people have some of the worst health inequalities. And we are about to publish findings of new research after mapping where people with learning disabilities live to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD); this has never been done on a national level. Results show that people with learning disabilities tend to live in more deprived areas, even if they started off in better areas, suggesting a life course outcome.

And of course, the output from our research has to be accessible so we publish easy read guides and infographics in addition to our annual report.

#### We talked about:

- Difficulties in tracking people: SCLD use key identifiers to highlight new cases and those who drop off the list. The people likely to get missed are those who do not access services.
- Qualitative research is difficult for ethical and anonymity reasons.

### Alasdair Rutherford, University of Stirling

**Alasdair on social survey data on the voluntary sector – an overview:** Much of the data we hold for the voluntary sector comes from population surveys. These vary in focus and sample size and can be cross-sectional or longitudinal to capture current data and information across time. There are some issues such as how questions are worded and who is being asked. However, because the surveys go out to large groups it means we can make inferences about a wider population.

So what is missing? As yet Scotland has no version of the English longitudinal study of aging although attempts are underway to start one. And there are specific areas where data is lacking or poor in quality, for example organisations that are not registered as charities or have no employed staff. Similarly, we often fail to pick up good data that can tell us more about informal volunteering (especially outwith an organisation) and demand for volunteering – more questions are needed to capture information about these groups.

#### We talked about:

- The majority of census data has little depth and can be difficult to work with.
- Some surveys have standardised questions, making it possible to amalgamate data.
- The potential to combine self-collected data with existing secondary data.

### James Arnold, Scottish Social Services Council

**James on social service workforce data:** As regulator for social service workers, we publish an annual Workforce Data Report to help employers understand and plan for their workforce. We collate data from two sources – the Care Inspectorate annual returns from registered services and the Scottish Local Authority Social Work Services annual survey. Set codes are used to standardise information and the two datasets are merged to produce statistics on a range of information including paid employees and volunteers, employer types, age and gender. We have an online interactive data visualisation tool where you can tailor information and create charts and graphs using SSSC data.

We also produce experimental statistics, working with partners to overcome any issues so we can improve data quality. If we have any concerns then the data is not published.

#### We talked about:

- Issues when data is not like for like comparable.
- Local authorities using data to benchmark against each other.
- Defining a charity: Although redefined in recent years, definitions that suit the whole of the UK are not always ideal in Scotland – Caledonian canal bias

[data.sssc.uk.com/component/ssscvisualisations/about-us](http://data.sssc.uk.com/component/ssscvisualisations/about-us)

### Mudenda Munkombwe, Office of Scottish Charities Regulator

**Mudenda on data on Scottish charities:** OSCR is an independent regulator so we keep a register of all Scottish charities and use the information we collect from them to monitor activity and compliance with legislation.

Data collection starts as soon as a charity attempts to register – details such as its location, purpose and benefits are recorded. We use the next set of data for evaluation purposes – total donations, income and expenditure, etc. Then, as soon as a charity is registered, it must inform OSCR of any changes that could affect its operations or charitable status.

Extracts from the Register are available online which means members of the public can verify the charitable status of an organisation. We also receive specific requests for information, which can be anything from the gender population of trustees to plastic bag distribution.

#### We talked about:

- The data that OSCR records is logged under the administrative location of the charity in Scotland and not its regional branches.
- The public have more trust in a charity when they know it is registered with OSCR.



**Cafe conversations**

## Cafe conversations

### Kathleen Doyle, Volunteer Scotland

Kathleen on measuring volunteering in Scotland: We use the Scottish Household Survey to measure the scale of volunteering in Scotland. By 'volunteering' we mean someone who is unpaid, under no obligation to volunteer, works formally within an organisation or informally on an individual basis, for example babysitting. We capture information through a two-stage question – the word 'volunteer' is not used.

The SHS measures the 'types' of organisations people work for so we find that informal volunteering is less accurately measured. However, ask people what 'activities' they do and the response tends to be much greater. We see this reflected in the English Citizenship Survey where volunteering figures are higher because measurement is based on activities rather than organisations. It opens up the debate about how we make improvements in measuring scale.

#### We talked about:

- Better measurement of informal volunteering based on activities: when surveys focus entirely on organisations we miss a crucial part of the big picture.
- The impact of volunteering is mainly measured in terms of economic and private value; social value is often underestimated because it is harder to measure.

### Patty Lozano-Casal, Evaluation Support Scotland

**Patty on measuring impact:** We run a series of workshops around data collection for third sector organisations and funders. These focus on how to generate high quality data that can be analysed to produce meaningful information and, in turn, influence policy and practice. All too often emphasis is placed on the volume of data collection rather than what you can do with it.

ESS are involved in several initiatives to promote good impact practice which include:

- Inspiring Impact, a UK-wide programme with a clear goal : to make impact measurement the norm in the non-profit sector. High on the agenda are harmonising language for better reporting, improving tools and methods to measure impact and ensuring organisations have the ability and knowledge to access and use these.
- The Scottish Third Sector Research Forum whose aim is to maximise the impact of knowledge and evidence. We interpret and analyse data in a number of ways, for instance looking at tools and methods used in partnerships. We also pool datasets from individual organisations to get a better picture of the overall health of the third sector.

#### We talked about:

### **'Measurement of impact should be proportionate and consistent.'**

- Lack of third sector data to impact policy: some organisations can be anxious or unwilling to release data while others find linkage between different data systems difficult.

Patty is contributor to Evidence for Success, a guide to generating and creating maximum impact with data and evidence. Find out more here.

[www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/media/uploads/resources/ess-evidenceforsuccess-weblinked.pdf](http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/media/uploads/resources/ess-evidenceforsuccess-weblinked.pdf)

## We asked delegates...

What would you like to see us work towards collectively?

- Better resources, use of data and collaboration
- Sharing examples of good practice
- Evidence based decision making
- Using data to talk policy on our terms
- Insight into types of evidence needed to improve service design
- A one-stop data shop for third sector data information
- Access to microdata for analysis by the academic sector
- Hack days and challenges
- A 'who's who' of key contacts
- Campaign for UN changes to SNA to happen in UK

What do you need from others for that to happen?

- An open attitude to data gathering, methods and sharing
- More clarity about what we want
- Standardisation of measures in datasets
- Help with data analysis, especially complex data
- Challenge anxieties about big data (threatening, burdensome)
- More investment in technology, training and development
- Partnerships, discussions and focus groups at all levels
- Commissioning and procurement data
- Survey of funders in Scotland – scale, sector and impact
- Enthusiasm and commitment

What will you take away from our first workshop?

**'A picture of the third sector at international level'**

**'Knowledge of big data and the importance of good quality stats, plus some useful contacts'**

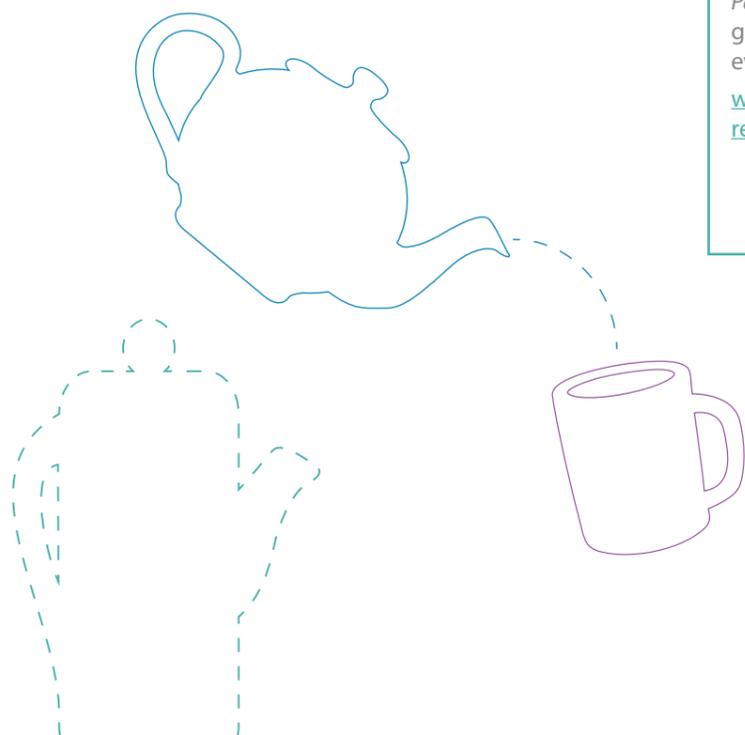
**'The variety of uses and need for third sector data'**

**'A more confident approach to data analysis'**

**'Contacts, data sources and perspectives!'**

What was the most interesting / useful element of this event?

- Global context.
- Hearing more of the scope of data collection.
- Networking, increasing my basic knowledge and considering how this will influence my approach to work. Now I will have evaluation at the heart of what I'm doing.
- Examples of organisations collecting, analysing and disseminating data and wider evidence.
- I found Lester's presentation useful as a starting point.



## ***Join the conversation***

The **Scottish Network for Third Sector Data** exists to link third sector organisations and researchers interested in the collection, analysis and use of data on the third sector in Scotland. It provides details of relevant events, training, research and data for the Scottish third sector.

Membership is free, and third sector organisations, public sector bodies, academics and students interested in third sector data are encouraged to join.

The workshop series is being organised by Alasdair Rutherford (University of Stirling), Eleanor Burt (University of St Andrews), Chris Yiu (SCVO) and Rikke Iversholt (IRISS).

### **Acknowledgments**

This event was very much a collaborative effort so a big thank you goes out to our keynote speakers, presenters and moderators. A special thank you to Nicola Allan and her team at the Scottish Universities Insight Institute for providing the venue and their help in organising this event.

Send any questions or comments to: [info@thinkdata.org.uk](mailto:info@thinkdata.org.uk)

Find out more at: [www.thinkdata.org.uk](http://www.thinkdata.org.uk)