



## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# Mapping third sector quality standards and the Compact

June 2009

### Introduction

This research is about the Compact and quality in the third sector. By 'quality' we mean how well an organisation meets the needs of its users or beneficiaries.

The study looked at two mechanisms which third sector bodies can use to help them think about and improve the quality of their organisations:

1. The Compact. The Compact is the agreement between government and the voluntary and community sector to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and community gain. The Compact contains a set of undertakings for third sector organisations, which are mainly focussed around quality and good practice. Following these undertakings is particularly important for third sector organisations that have a relationship with any part of government, and therefore expect government to fulfil its Compact undertakings.
2. Quality standards. Many third sector organisations choose to adopt quality standards to help them run their organisations effectively and efficiently. Quality standards tend to be systems or assessment tools that help organisations to look at what they do, identify areas where they are doing well and not so well, and decide where improvements might be needed. There are a number of different quality standards available for different types and sizes of organisations in the third sector.

### Rationale and Aims

There seem to be some important similarities between the content of quality standards and Compact undertakings, but prior to this study they had not been examined in detail. This study was therefore commissioned to explore the relationship more systematically. The aim was to explore the content of a selection of third sector quality standards, and map how they relate to Compact undertakings.

### Method

The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) carried out this research on behalf of the Commission for the Compact in March 2009. Eight quality standards were selected to be mapped against the Compact: ACRE Good Practice Quality Standard, Hallmarks of an Effective Charity, Investing in Volunteers Standard, Investors in People Standard, NAVCA Quality Award, PQASSO, Quality First and VISIBLE.

### Main Findings

The relationship between the Compact and the selected quality standards was explored on a scale between one and five, with one representing a low fit and five representing a high fit. This was called the 'degree of fit' scale.

- 75 per cent of the Compact undertakings scored between 2 and 4 on the 'degree of fit' scale
- There was a similar degree of fit between each of the four themes in the Compact and the quality standards
- At least five factors were found to influence the degree of fit between the Compact undertakings and the quality standards. These included language, purpose, specificity and structure and are discussed in more detail in the main report.

## Shared Principles

The research identified a set of principles that are shared between the Compact and the quality standards, and underpin ways of working in the third sector. These principles are:

### **Inclusiveness**

This principle recognises the need to consult, involve and enable the contribution of diverse communities to public policy, service delivery, service improvement and partnership working. This requires effective and varied methods of communication.

### **Equity**

This principle recognises that equal access to services and opportunities should be available to all user groups. This requires appropriate people management, recruitment policies and sensitive/flexible means of consultation and involvement.

### **Efficiency**

This principle recognises the need to be clear about an organisation's purpose and values, and to make efficient use of time and resources. This requires clear mission statements and business planning.

### **Improvement**

This principle recognises the need to base service development on evidence collected through monitoring and evaluation. This should ensure that services continue to address local needs.

### **Transparency**

This principle recognises the need to provide clear and accurate information about the organisation and its activities. This includes appropriate financial management, delivery of outputs and reporting frameworks.

### **Accountability**

This principle recognises the need to ensure clear lines of responsibility for both internal processes and users of services. This requires high standards of governance, adherence to legal requirements and clarity over the organisation's various lines of accountability.

## Conclusion

Overall, the research found that the Compact is complementary to third sector quality standards. The implication is that third sector organisations do not need to be concerned about the potential burden of following Compact undertakings and quality standards, as they largely complement each other.

The researchers concluded that the relationship between the Compact and quality standards could be strengthened or made more noticeable if the following were considered:

- Revisiting the level of detail and the language used in each of the Compact undertakings
- Making explicit which Compact undertakings are the responsibility of the third sector as a whole and which apply more to individual organisations
- Restructuring the Compact undertakings in accordance with the six key principles identified in this research.

The Commission for the Compact is currently discussing the implications of these findings with its partners.

The full research report can be downloaded from [www.thecompact.org.uk](http://www.thecompact.org.uk)

For more information about this research please contact:

**Ruth Fennemore**

Policy Adviser

Tel: 0121 237 5912

Email: [ruth.fennemore@thecompact.org.uk](mailto:ruth.fennemore@thecompact.org.uk)

**Commission for the Compact**

77 Paradise Circus Queensway  
Birmingham B1 2DT