Building (more) Change

An overview report on the Building Change Trust
1. Executive summary

1.1 This ‘overview report’ on the Building Change Trust was commissioned with a view to reflecting on its achievements so far and offering a perspective on the remainder of its ten-year life, following its establishment in 2008. It was compiled on the basis of a documentary review and 30 interviewees with individuals associated with the trust in various ways and external stakeholders.

1.2 The context is the very challenging environment now facing the third sector in Northern Ireland. On top of pressures for many years to raise funding from its own resources, the sector is now coping with the impact of recession and austerity, and a not particularly sympathetic devolved administration at Stormont.

1.3 The trust was established just as the global economic crisis was hitting. In other ways it had an inauspicious foundation, with a vague brief from the Big Lottery Fund to invest £10 million in the sector, an awkward governance structure, formed by the coming together of its founding partners, and difficulties posed by initial awards to the latter, which BIG’s appraisal systems appeared to require to be independent of one another. This led to a slow and shaky start. An attempt by the partners to work together in two localities in Northern Ireland was not a great success. And the first grant programmes made available to other third-sector organisations, which did not match the trust’s aim to be more than a grant-maker, were discontinued after receiving applications of patchy quality.

1.4 The trust has, however, picked up the pace more recently. An initiative to promote collaboration in the sector has met strong demand and the involvement of Charity Bank has raised awareness on issues of social finance. Programmes addressing individual organisations are now more focused and less vulnerable to opportunistic bids. The trust has organised many well-attended events and established learning circles on individual topics. The credibility of the trust has accordingly risen.

1.5 Looking to the future, the trust can further enhance its authority by telling a clear and coherent narrative about what a changed sector would look like, how that would prefigure a ‘good society’, and how it will act to catalyse that change. The report sketches this narrative as a series of interlinked themes—a focus on outcomes, user engagement, the importance of advocacy, how impact is assessed and the significance of networks—and argues that such an interconnected thematic approach, rather than ‘programme silos’, should frame the work of the trust for the remainder of its life.
1.6 To this end, a number of recommendations are made:

- The trust should become the repository of expertise on how ‘social value’ is added to realise outcomes, based on international good practice, on which individual third-sector organisations can draw.

- On advocacy, the trust could usefully partner with a consulting company combining journalistic expertise and understanding of the sector to assist third-sector organisations—and the trust itself—to develop communications strategies.

- User engagement is a strand of work which the trust should strongly develop, initially through a learning circle and a commissioned paper.

- The trust could usefully raise awareness in the sector as to the range of methodologies available for impact assessment—surveys, interviews, focus groups, case studies and so on—and how these might be triangulated in a bespoke fashion for individual organisations.

- The learning circles the trust has established should be developed to become semi-autonomous nodes of networks within the sector.

- On collaboration, the trust should seek to replicate the experience in Italy, where ten or more co-operatives may join local consorzi (federations), which provide common management services.

- In working with organisations to ‘add value’, the trust can highlight the Code of Good Governance to encourage them to link ambitious outcomes to best-practice governance arrangements.

- The trust should consider broadening its marketing and communications sub-group into a policy, practice and communications sub-committee of the board, which would develop the narrative of the third sector, and wider society, of the future.

- The trust should organise further events in the future which would showcase examples of how third-sector organisations can prefigure the good society.

- The suggested Enabling Change programme should not be about grants but about establishing ‘relational contracts’ characterised by iterative dialogue with a small number of organisations.

- The trust should consider a planned programme of papers commissioned from experts, offering solutions to problems identified within the sector but otherwise not readily available to it.

1.7 The report concludes by arguing that there is an enduring role for the trust as a ‘think tank’ for the sector. It thus, finally, recommends that the trust should seek to have a further lease on life after its funded period expires in 2018.
2. The third-sector environment

2.1 The third sector in Northern Ireland faces a very challenging environment in the remaining period of the Building Change Trust mandate. First of all, its relative weakness should be recognised, when compared with Scotland and Wales—never mind the much more robust sectors in the Nordic countries (Wilson, 2010a). While there are 8.7 and 8.6 third-sector organisations per 100,000 people respectively in those two devolved jurisdictions, the comparable figure for Northern Ireland is just 2.6. And this despite the fact that organisations in the region receive on average 61 per cent of their income from public funding, while in Scotland and Wales this only accounts for 39 and 44 per cent respectively (Alcock, 2012: 224). This dependence on grant support has meant many organisations have been unable to build up reserves and have weak balance sheets. The unity of the sector in Northern Ireland has also been undermined by the division of responsibilities in government between the Department for Social Development and (for social enterprise) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ibid: 226). A fundamental underlying problem remains the way that organisations in Northern Ireland seeking to articulate identities and interests that cut across the sectarian divide, as third-sector organisations often seek to do, have no political space to do so (Acheson, 2012: 4).

2.2 Contrary to the rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’ which the Tory leader David Cameron used to woo the centre ground in the 2010 Westminster election, public spending cuts under the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition taking effect from this financial year—and conveyed via ‘Barnett consequentials’ by the devolved administration at Stormont—have the potential to hit third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland hard, while simultaneously increasing demand for their services through growing social exclusion, as a deflated economy flattines into the indefinite future. This pincer movement is creating what the chair of Building Change Trust (2012: 4) has called ‘substantial stress’. One direct manifestation has been a 25 per cent cut in 2012-13 in the Regional Infrastructure Programme, which has for two decades supported core costs for key organisations playing a role across Northern Ireland in support of the sector (RSM McClure Watters, 2012b: 6).

2.3 It comes against a backdrop where for several years third-sector organisations have been required to become more entrepreneurial, as the balance of their revenue has tilted from public funding to contract receipts (Wilson, 2010a)—with the associated ever-increasing demands on their governance arrangements. This pressure has been exacerbated by the winding down of funding related to the ‘peace process’ from the European Union, the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies (Acheson, 2012: 6). As the latest State of the Sector (NICVA, 2012: 58) summed it up, ‘Voluntary and community organisations face a range of challenges stemming not only from the economic downturn, cuts in public sector funding, reduction in donations, but also [their] increasing role in public service delivery, increasing demands of competition, tendering, collaboration and coping with late payment for services.’

2.4 This has potentially serious implications for the independence of the third sector. The Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector (2012: 6), initiated by the Baring Foundation, warned of ‘the risk of organisations becoming too closely aligned with the aims and objectives of statutory funders, rather than the individuals they exist to serve and the communities out of which they grew’. It pointed to the trust third-sector organisations enjoyed from users and the wider public and stressed how that depended on their independence being sustained (ibid: 7). It highlighted the particular vulnerability of small organisations unable to compete for tenders in this more competitive environment and those working with very vulnerable groups, such as the homeless and offenders, entirely dependent on conventional public funding (ibid: 14).
2.5 While at one level State of the Sector VI painted a picture of considerable resilience, the strains are clear. The ‘Big Society’ idea was that as the state withdrew volunteers would, for some reason and somehow, step forward to fill the gap. But a Charities Aid Foundation poll told a different story of third-sector organisations across the UK being forced to eat into their reserves (one in two) and to cut staff and services (one in four).1 And the most disadvantaged areas of the UK are not just the most dependent on public funding but also the least well resourced in terms of active citizens (Alcock et al, 2012). The vibrant Nordic third sectors are based on a recognition that a strong, not a weak, state is needed to support a strong civil society (Trägårdh, 2007). And State of the Sector VI reported that nearly three quarters of third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland had difficulty recruiting volunteers with the skills or experience required (NICVA, 2012: 60). Tellingly, almost exactly the same proportion ranked the economy as the main determinant of their prospects over the coming year (ibid: 82).

2.6 More positively, the Carnegie commission on the future of civil society across these islands (Carnegie UK Trust, 2010: 5)—of which the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action was a member—set out in its 2008 report the parameters of the ‘good society’. It said: ‘Civil society is not a panacea, nor are all expressions of it uniformly good or admirable. It is by its nature complex, messy and unpredictable. But, time and again, civil society has been at the heart of progressive social change: in the campaigns to abolish slavery, in the struggles of the Chartists and Suffragettes and in the achievements of the environmental movement in raising awareness of climate change.’ The baton has also been taken up by Compass and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, in a series of round tables across Europe on the ‘good society’, for which a UK template has been developed by Wilson and Bloomfield (2011).

2.7 The trust was founded in 2008. It was the year in which the global economy turned and third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland had to begin to think of a different political world from the sympathetic context of the decade following the ‘compact’ with the voluntary sector, introduced after Labour was elected at Westminster and in advance of devolution following the Belfast agreement. Symptomatically, that year Partners for Change, which had fleshed out the compact, was not subject following the renewal of devolution to the further three-year iteration then due (Wilson, 2010a). A renewed compact, now called a ‘concordat’, was concluded between ministers and third-sector leaders in 2011 (DSD, 2011) but showed, unlike in England, little evolution since 1998 (Acheson, 2012: 5). And while in 2008 State of the Sector V had found (a quite modest) 37 per cent of third-sector organisations surveyed believing that renewed devolution would be positive, this had fallen to just 22 per cent by the successor report (NICVA, 2012: 81). For example, individual social enterprises in Northern Ireland have been recognised as UK leaders, yet the sector has faced indifference from Stormont, including the creative proposition of a Green New Deal for the region (Stutt, 2011). In the context of ‘a political settlement that vests responsibility for social and economic reform in a state-run administration controlled by a compulsory coalition of competing ethno-religious blocks’, Acheson (2012: 13) writes, ‘[d]e-investment in infrastructure and a redirection of available funds to direct service delivery against tightly defined targets is turning back over 20 years of development of a relationship originally founded on a mutual recognition of partnership’.

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3. The role of the trust

3.1 This briefly sketched environment puts in necessary context the trust's founding aim: ‘Investing in social change; working to make today's challenges tomorrow's opportunities.’ For the implication is that third-sector organisations will have to engage in a ‘bootstrapping’ strategy over the coming years, unable to rely on growing economic prosperity or political support.

3.2 But they can do what they already do—make real, positive changes to many individual lives—and they can always do that better. And they can prefigure in microcosm a different kind of society and show that another Northern Ireland is possible in a more conducive macro-economic and political environment. Hence the ‘vision’ in the trust’s 2010-13 strategy of a ‘strong, vibrant, independent and relevant’ third sector in the region.

3.3 In any event, standing still is not an option for third-sector organisations that wish to thrive in the face of the current headwinds. ‘Social innovation’ (Lloyd, 2011) is key and organisations can pursue it through one or more of the following routes:

- improving their engagement of users (where relevant) in the design and ‘co-production’ of services, in conjunction with professional staff;
- building the human resource of members (where relevant) and volunteers, including by encouraging the former to become the latter;
- developing governance arrangements which ensure all stakeholders—workers, volunteers and users—are fully involved in the management of the organisation, unless it is already democratically controlled by members;
- (further) diversifying their revenue streams, through operating in whole or in part as social enterprises, able to draw down sources of social finance and win contracts against competitors (which may include capitalist enterprises);
- scaling up through mergers with identical organisations or collaboration with complementary ones, with all the associated synergies of cross-fertilisation, and
- benchmarking against international examples of best practice, and finding ways to replicate these practices themselves.

3.4 Hence also the features of the trust strategy—being more than just a grant-maker; supporting innovation, learning and sharing; and sustaining a focus on change. These however have not proved to be simple to translate into effective programmes, as section 5 demonstrates.

3.5 The trust thus concluded in its 2011 report that it itself could not ‘stand still and expect to build awareness based on current and past activity only’, recognising ‘a need for a clear and distinctive strategy and programmes for the future’, while a survey of third-sector organisations’ perceptions of the trust had also revealed that ‘more needs to be done’ to enhance its profile (BCT, 2011: 17).

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4. This report

4.1 It was in that context that the trust commissioned this ‘overview report’ on its work.

The brief can be interpreted as having a twofold focus:

   a.i) synoptic—an account of progress made so far and lessons learned from these experiences and
   a.ii) analytical—reflections on change in the sector, the policy environment and future challenges and opportunities.

It is also clear from what the trust describes as the purpose of the exercise that an additional goal was:

(iii) communicative—informing and stimulating discussion engaging key stakeholders.

a) To fulfil these objectives, the following combination of methodologies was adopted:

   a.i) a literature review of trust documentation and wider material on the future of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland,
   a.ii) an online survey, distributed to trust contacts and to the sector via NICVA e-news³ and
   a.iii) semi-structured interviews⁴ with trust personnel and grantees, and more broadly among the sector and key stakeholders.⁵
   a.iv) a half-day round-table discussion of emerging findings, attended by the majority of interviewees.

4.2 The research was conducted between October and December 2012. The author is very appreciative of the generous co-operation of all concerned. Responsibility for all views expressed rests of course with him.

5. The story so far

5.1 Building Change Trust was established in November 2008 as a partnership among five large Northern Ireland third-sector organisations—Business in the Community NI, Community Evaluation Northern Ireland, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, the Rural Community Network and the Volunteer Development Agency (latterly Volunteer Now)—brought together by a proposal from the BIG Lottery Fund. BIG would invest £10 million via the trust into the sector, geared to the following outcome: ‘People can actively participate in their communities to bring about change.’ The trust would address poverty and disadvantage and promote tolerance and social inclusion, through supporting community development, volunteering, partnerships, skills development and infrastructure (FGS McClure Watters, 2010: 2-3).

5.2 Nominees of the five organisations and BIG, plus an independent and Bill Osborne as chair, comprised the initial board of trustees. CFNI provided the secretariat and Nigel McKinney of CFNI was appointed trust administrator in 2009. Support was subsequently enhanced with the addition of a Building Change Co-ordinator, Charlie Fisher, a finance/administration officer and a part-time marketing and communications post (provided by CFNI).
5.3 The first commitments of funding came in the initial transformative awards to the participating partners. CENI was to map ‘community assets’, to which BiTC was to develop linked private-sector support, and to work on monitoring and evaluation. CFNI was to be responsible for a (rather oddly named) ‘observatory’, encouraging relationships between the third sector and policy-makers. RCN was to develop a ‘strategic framework’ for community development. And the VDA was to lead on transforming the infrastructure supporting volunteering.

5.4 BIG’s own appraisal procedures required these projects to be disentangled from each other. The partners then elected to pursue an area-based initiative, Catalyst for Change, in the hope that this could provide a focus for a more co-operative approach. Two areas, Enniskillen and upper Ards, were selected after a mapping exercise. CENI mapped ‘community assets’ in Ards, in conjunction with CFNI and BiTC, and provided formative evaluation for the project throughout.

5.5 Individual third-sector organisations were to be beneficiaries of two programmes, Exploring Change and Deliver Change, with the latter more demanding. Here the idea was to use modest funding (up to £20,000 and up to £50,000 respectively per organisation) to promote activities the trust had been set up to support. It was envisaged that 60 and 20 organisations respectively would be funded under the two programmes but there were only 29 recipients before they were wound up (RSM McClure Watters, 2012b: 22), respectively in 2012 and 2011. Trust support staff within CFNI have suggested the Trust replace these programmes by Enabling Change, which would require a two-step application process—working up in conjunction with the trust an initial expression of interest—and would only fund 16-20 projects, in 2012 and 2013, up to a maximum of £75,000. These would have to be risk-taking, genuinely transformative for the sector and capable of sharing the associated learning.

5.6 In lieu of the original plan to establish a Strategic Programme Panel as a trust sounding board, an Added Value Support Programme was developed to engage the sector through initially developing relationships with the award programme grant recipients. Its three elements are networking, support to individual organisations and clusters, and seminars and training. This is linked to wider sharing of knowledge across the sector, whether via one-to-one support, learning circles, seminars or study visits.

5.7 A further programme suggested by staff is called Enabling Change Locally. This relates to the revival of the previously stalled reform of public administration—which had been one of the key movers behind the establishment of the trust in the first place.. If such a programme were agreed, it would assist the trust in continuing to relate to small organisations within the sector across Northern Ireland, rather than just the large regional bodies based in Belfast. The trust has commissioned a paper on the implications of local-government reform for the sector. An issue highlighted at the round table is how to ensure the proper engagement and accountability of local stakeholders, in the context of the reconfiguration of local authorities and other agencies.

5.8 A significant focus of the trust’s work as it has evolved has been the stimulation of collaboration, reflected in the formation of Collaboration NI—a joint project of NICVA, CO3 and Stellar Leadership—in response to a trust tender in 2010. As Collaboration NI (nd: 4) has itself noted, this has been driven by disparate forces—notably, on the one hand, the case for ‘joined-up’ working and, on the other, the drive for enhanced efficiency. Collaboration covers a spectrum from informal working together via networking and partnership to merger (ibid: 6-10). Existing collaborations bunch at the lower end of the scale but more than three quarters of third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland say they would wish to collaborate more (ibid: 11, 19). In 2012 the trust allocated £200,000 to a Collaboration Enabling Fund to assist organisations engaging in collaborative initiatives.
5.9 The trust has taken a strong interest in the potential of ‘social finance’ to spur change in the third sector. Loan finance may provide the necessary investment to open revenue streams from social entrepreneurship or allow the purchase of assets which can then offer secure collateral for fundraising efforts—as well as engendering a sense of associational ownership which may be of its own worth, especially with regard to co-operative ventures. Charity Bank has been supported in its extension to Northern Ireland in that regard, though the challenge of ring-fencing benefit for the region in return for trust investment in the bank delayed a commitment of £1 million until 2011.

5.10 A further concern for the trust—linked to the involvement of CENI from the outset—has been assessment of the impact of the work of third-sector organisations. In 2012 it decided to associate itself with an initiative called Inspiring Impact, led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) and engaging six other major partners in Britain; the trust will deliver a programme in Northern Ireland linked to the 10-year programme envisaged.

6. The assessment

6.1 In retrospect, the trust’s foundation in 2008 was somewhat ill-starred, in terms of the environment, the brief and the organisational arrangements. A precipitating factor had been the anticipated reform of public administration, establishing new interfaces between third-sector organisations and reconfigured local authorities, notably in the area of ‘community planning’. But disagreement between the political parties on the number of new councils, following the renewal of devolution in 2007, stalled the process for years. Elections to the 11 new authorities will not now take place till 2015.

6.2 The outcome sought for the trust by BIG (see previous section) was very vague and broad. One insider asked: ‘Were we clear at the outset what we as a trust were articulating around change? … The answer to that might probably be no.’ And it confused substantive achievements—reducing poverty and disadvantage, promoting tolerance and inclusion—with processual activities: enhancing volunteering, community development and so on. This failed to recognise that the only means known to social policy of tackling inequality is a Nordic-type universal welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 2009) and that sectarian polarisation is now woven into the very warp and weft of governance arrangements in Northern Ireland (Wilson, 2010b). The third sector can make change on the micro-scale and it can prefigure a different society, as indicated earlier, but it cannot substitute for politics and policy. And so, inevitably, the trust experienced ‘mission drift’, focusing on what it could achieve—the processual, rather than the substantive (FGS McClure Watters, 2010: 52). Moreover, while £10 million seems like a large investment in the sector, it was spread over a decade and represented only 2 per cent of its annual income (ibid: 13).

6.3 The origin of the trust as a partnership of independent organisations, rather than a unified entity established de novo, compounded the difficulty. As an internal evaluation by CENI put it, there was ‘a lack of clarity about the distinctiveness and “added value” of some of the activities being undertaken through BCT funding’, which could be related to an ‘[a]bsence of an agreed framework of outcomes against which change can be measured’ (BCT, 2011: 33-4). An external evaluation by Hall Aitken similarly found progress ‘difficult to recognise’, with a lack of clear outcomes, projects ‘operating largely in isolation’ and a focus on operational rather than strategic issues (ibid: 36). Trust representatives had

6 See http://inspiringimpact.org/.
‘struggled to provide evidence’ of what had been achieved and impact on the ground. The evaluation concluded bluntly: ‘It is difficult to discern what the Trust is trying to achieve.’

6.4 The associated co-ordination dilemma was exacerbated by the initial transformative awards (grant aid from the trust to the 5 founding partners), which tended to make collaboration within the partnership ‘challenging’, as CENI reported (ibid: 34): ‘The difficulties in part reflect the fragmentation of the original partnership bid into five individual contracts which has necessitated ongoing negotiation about how to “reassemble” in order to establish some collaborative focus.’ Hall Aitken was highly critical of the proposals, claiming that they had ‘no clear project logic to them (inputs-activities-outputs-outcomes), generally mixing up activities, outputs and outcomes’ and lacking links to the outcomes sought by the trust—although it did describe the observatory as a ‘significant achievement’. With the founding partners comprising a majority of trustees yet also being beneficiaries of the trust, this was bound to lead to an unhealthy focus on their own individual projects, rather than the aim and objectives of the trust as a whole, and to some introversion at the expense of investing in, and building relationships with, the third sector more broadly. Indeed, far from sponsoring change, this was bound to favour ‘more of the same’ (FSM McClure Watters, 2011: 93). One interviewee described a lot of the projects as ‘rather pedestrian’.

6.5 Hall Aitken further complained that learning from projects had not been shared, outside of CENI and trust staff, partly because of the focus of the board on the operational. It said ‘weak and sporadic’ communications by the trust had led to ‘confusion and some cynicism’ externally (BCT, 2011: 36). And it said: ‘Among directors of the Trust there does not appear a coherent and consistent view on what the Trust’s mission and values should be.’ Consultees for the Hall Aitken evaluation urged that ‘a coherent and consistent message … be communicated to the Building Change Trust audience’. At the end of 2011 e-bulletins were introduced by the trust to develop regular contact with its constituency. Interviews with staff and project participants have been put up on YouTube and a presence on Twitter has been established.

6.6 CENI (2012) produced a much more positive assessment of the initial transformative awards in 2012. Its own ‘Measuring Up’ research had helped position it vis-à-vis government and non-statutory funders, and encourage both to build impact assessment into funded projects. The Policy Observatory had stimulated CFNI to think of alternatives to its traditional grant-making role, such as asset transfer and social investment. RCN’s work on a strategic framework for community development would be of wider relevance to the sector, especially as the role of the latter was increasingly focused on support for the delivery of public services. Volunteer Now’s work on ‘timebanking’ had offered a robust approach to volunteer and civic engagement. And, overall, learning had fed into the trust’s Exploring Change and Deliver Change programmes.

6.7 When the Catalyst for Change initiative was ended in 2011, while significant progress had been made by individual projects the area-wide impacts were reported by the trust (BCT, 2012: 20) as ‘less clear’. The partners recognised that any achievements had been ‘relatively small-scale and individualised’ (RSM McClure Watters, 2011: 39). CENI (2012: 58, 60) concluded that it was difficult for regional

7 This and other quotations lacking citation below are from the full text of the Hall Aitken evaluation, furnished to the author, otherwise excerpted in the 2011 annual trust report.

8 Very similar problems beset an international third-sector organisation, Football Against Racism in Europe, prompting its restructuring in 2009 (on which the author advised). FARE had similarly come together as a consortium of organisations, linked to external funding (in this case, from UEFA) of which they were individually beneficiaries. This also led to difficulties in operating as a collective entity and a certain introversion.
organisations to achieve such local collaboration ‘operating at a distance’ and that ‘a clear rationale and vision’ for collaboration was required. Interviewees described the initiative as ‘a spectacular failure’ and ‘an embarrassment, a disaster’.

6.8 The Exploring Change and Deliver Change award programmes were also discontinued. The trust board had become concerned that these were not ‘capturing and identifying the most innovative change projects’ (ibid: 21). Applications were of a variable standard, with some poorly tailored and some proposing merely to extend existing activities (RSM McClure Watters, 2012b: 21). Having said that, the trust had always envisaged that this initial investment in new ideas would only be a prelude to the Added Value Support Programme, in which grantees were required to participate. And there were enduring benefits arising from participation—see below on Mencap.

6.9 The Added Value Support Programme represented a step forward, in terms of the interactive relationship between the trust and third-sector organisations, individually and severally. The idea was to cast a funding net to capture innovative projects. This should be seen alongside the learning circles which have facilitated shared learning and improved expertise across the sector (RSM McClure Watters, 2011: 102). This more dialogic approach with the wider third sector has been received ‘extremely well’ (ibid: 93) and represents the right direction in which to take the trust over the coming years: between December 2011 and June 2012 alone it organised 16 events, attended by 323 participants, who valued in particular the opportunity to take time out to reflect and network, to learn from worked examples and share experiences (RSM McClure Watters, 2012b: 32, 34). For example, a report on social finance (ECORYS, 2012) commissioned by Charity Bank and the Ulster Community Investment Trust (funded by Delivering Change) led to study trips and opened up the discussion of ‘community shares’ (see below). The trust has also evidenced this in the recent commissioning of a number of think pieces on the future of the sector. Such an outward-facing perspective, encouraging the sector to function more effectively as a coherent network that is greater than the sum of its parts, shows a real progression from the introspection of the initial transformative awards to the bid partners. One round-table participant stressed how the trust had provided indispensable exposure to new environments and new ways of working.

6.10 Collaboration NI and Charity Bank only became operational as trust-supported projects in 2011 and they have thus so far been evaluated in terms of outputs rather than outcomes. But Collaboration NI is seen within the sector as ‘a valuable support mechanism’ (RSM McClure Watters, 2011: 107) and a trusted broker (Dennis McCoy Consulting, 2012). A 2009 trust consultation with the sector found strong interest in collaboration and demand has exceeded the capacity of the two workers employed full-time by Collaboration NI. As for Charity Bank, initial strong interest from potential lenders waned but the bank has appointed a regional manager, who is co-located with the trust in the CFNI building, and an advanced diploma has been developed by the University of Ulster to instil the necessary competences within the sector for ‘investment readiness’ (RSM McClure Watters 2012a), following a series of seminars on that theme organised by Charity Bank.

6.11 As hinted in the previous section, there is a tension between collaboration driven by a concern to offer an holistic service to users, or to make the voice of advocacy stronger on their behalf, and collaboration forced by pressure—particularly from government—to provide more for less in service provision. When the minister for social development announced in September 2011 the large cut in the Regional Infrastructure Programme referred to above, he cited Collaboration NI as offering third-sector organisations assistance with coping (RSM McClure Watters, 2011: 6). But evidence from the State of the Sector is that it is a user focus which primarily stimulates collaboration from the standpoint of organisations themselves (Collaboration NI, nd: 19). In this context, economies of scope—where a more ‘end-to-end’ service is offered to users by collaboration/merger of different functions—may be
more valuable than economies of scale, as government may seek (Rees et al, 2012b: 55). The latter may reduce, for governmental convenience, a complex ecology of providers to one large and perhaps remote monopoly, which users may not find as sensitive to their personal needs (ibid: 54)—a local cancer charity in Northern Ireland may know individually all those in the area with serious diagnoses. Where economies of scale are sought, it is much better to use the ‘hybrid franchising’ model adopted by the Bryson Group, where an existing small provider, with its tacit knowledge and local trust, is sustained but with the brand of the group (and associated support) being applied to it—to continue the cancer example, this will allow the local group to have access to professional oncologists in a region-wide organisation (see below).

6.12 There is no doubting the benefits of collaboration in realising what economists call ‘agglomeration effects’, which cannot be realised if organisations merely compete. The Fermanagh Trust, for example, houses nine charities in Fermanagh House in Enniskillen. A strategic partnership with Bryson Energy has developed as a result, and a major international project in which the Fermanagh Trust is involved originated with a conversation two years ago in the foyer. Collaboration is however much easier in theory than in practice. Organisations may be competing for members and profile, never mind funding. They may have quite different organisational cultures. Some may be driven by an agenda of a London headquarters, rather than having a Northern Ireland perspective. Boards may be organisationally protective and chief executives may, or may not, get on. And there is the always cancerous effect in the background on trust in Northern Ireland of its deep-seated sectarian divide, from which its third sector is by no means immune (Acheson and Williamson, 2005)—as one interviewee put it, ‘Northern Ireland is fragmented and fractured.’ The brokering role of Collaboration NI is thus all the more important and has been beneficial, for instance, in the emergence of the children’s centre which Mencap is developing, with voluntary and statutory partners, at Newtownbreda, and in the partnership secured between Cancer Focus and Lilac in Mid-Ulster (assisted by an Exploring Change award).

6.13 As to social finance, more than one interviewee highlighted how it provides third-sector organisations with an important source of unrestricted funds, thus easing the pressure on them to ‘kowtow to the funder’, as one expert put it. Government accounting is proving problematic, though: if organisations can build up reserves through external investment, DSD has tended to argue that these should be drawn down before funding is injected into the organisation—an attitude which clearly militates against prudent planning. With regard to asset transfer, there is, however, a recognition in government that, as one well-placed interviewee put it, ‘rubbish stock’ can not be passed on. DSD has recently agreed to fund the newly established Development Trusts Northern Ireland (an associate of Locality, formerly the Development Trusts Association, in Britain) to work on asset transfer and it is seeking to establish three to five pilots. The organisation has made clear to the minister, however, that this is no ‘panacea’: some assets should not be divested and some ‘communities’ (for instance, where there is paramilitary control of an association) should not have assets transferred to them. And, as one interviewee pointed out, one can only borrow against an asset once. Having said that, many third-sector organisations are already in possession of substantial assets, from which revenue streams could be drawn. A good example of such social-entrepreneurial activity is the John Hewitt bar in Belfast, named after Northern Ireland’s premier socialist thinker (and leading poet), which was established by the Belfast Centre for the Unemployed next door as a revenue source as well as a convivial central social milieu.

6.14 Other initiatives, the proposed Enabling Change Locally programme and the involvement with Inspiring Impact, are freshly minted. Enabling Change Locally would, however, have clear potential to foster local agglomerations within the third sector, based on the real success of collaboration among small organisations, as with The Villages Together in Co Derry, the east Ballymena cluster in Co Antrim and the Fermanagh Trust in Enniskillen, which the trust has previously supported. All have explored
wind-energy projects, with a view to establishing a new revenue stream as well as an environmental
good. These small, local organisations and networks may not be readily visible on the third-sector map
but play a critical role nevertheless.

6.15 One of the difficulties the trust has faced is that the large number of initiatives it has sponsored, while
seen as ‘innovative’, has also caused some ‘confusion’, because of ‘a lack of association between the
strands’. And so an RSM McClure Watters (2011: 106) evaluation concluded: ‘There is a sense that
the Trust still needs [to] define its own identity, before a message can be brought to the sector.’ These
interconnected issues of coherence and unity of purpose are addressed in the next section.

7. The future

7.1 The trust undoubtedly had a slow and shaky beginning, as the foregoing discussion indicates: ‘There
were two years that almost disappeared,’ one interviewee said. Another, having been involved in its
gestation, similarly complained that it had taken two years to ‘find its feet’—a phrase also used by one
of the founding partners—and had been too ‘cautious and timid’. But it is evident from the interviews for
this project, on which this final section is based, that the trust has picked up the pace and established
its relevance in what yet another interviewee called its ‘teenage years’. In maturity, it can and should
step up further—particularly since, as the same interviewee noted (having also been there at the birth),
the scale of the challenge facing the third sector in Northern Ireland, in the context of the economic
crisis and the pressure on budgets, is greater than had been anticipated at the outset. If the approach
in the past had been ‘a bit scattergun’, she said, now it was important to ‘corral’ activities into particular
themes. The trust’s 2010-13 strategy is not only coming to a close but is a thin document, doing little
more than list the programmes. One interviewee, while grateful for the grant her organisation had
received under one of those programmes, said she was ‘not clear what the overall strategy now is’. She
wanted ‘stronger leadership from the board and a more focused strategy’. In this context, another said
that the process of establishing the trust had involved ‘throwing in a room’ the founding partners, and
he welcomed the fact that in the last three years power within the trust had been transferred from them
to the board ‘as an entity’, making it ‘master of its own destiny’.

7.2 The two previous sections have been organised around the programmes supported by the trust. This
section, by contrast, is organised thematically—as indeed a number of interviewees recommended
the future of the trust should be structured. One said that it needed to get out of the ‘programme silo’.
As the first section made clear, the third sector is in many ways fragile and under threat—and, as one
interviewee put it, Northern Ireland has not been ‘hit with the iceberg yet’. The interlinked themes below
sketch the form of a robust and successful third sector and so the change which the trust can and
should sponsor in the remainder of its life.

7.3 But first, some context. Peter Alcock (2012: 234) has pointed to the tensions facing the third sector
across the four UK jurisdictions—tensions exacerbated by austerity driven from London—between ‘the
encouragement of third sector organizations to contract with government to deliver public services’
and ‘the promotion of organizations as sites for independent citizen and community action’. As one
interviewee put it succinctly, this is a ‘risk of mission drift’ or, as another said, that the sector becomes
‘the 12th or 13th department of the executive’. A third said the sector’s independence was ‘very much
in question’. One expression of that tension is contrasting approaches to evaluation. While the focus
ought to be on the outcomes for service users, it too often devolves to the outputs of the service
provider (CENI, 2010: 28). This is associated with an emphasis solely on quantitative measures, when a
balance between quantitative and qualitative assessment is often more appropriate (ibid: 25).
7.4 One positive way of addressing this tension is to use the concept of ‘networked’ or ‘citizen-centred’ governance, which has been in circulation for the last decade and a half (Rees et al, 2012b: 4; Wilson, 2002). This has involved a recognition that the needs of governance in a complex society go beyond the institutions of government and therefore can only be realised through partnerships with organisations outside government. In fact, this has mostly been conceived as engaging private companies (Rees et al, 2012b: 6), although for all sorts of reasons what might be called ‘social goods’—for example, labour-market activation—tend to be poorly produced by organisations motivated by profit rather than social ends.

7.5 In that sense, asserting the role and values of the third sector in this new context can be contrasted with the idea of accepting a dependent relationship whose terms are set by government—a view strongly affirmed by Northern Ireland’s largest third-sector contractor, the Bryson Group, and reflected in the campaigning commitment of another established provider, Barnardos. On the contrary, what can be pursued are ‘relational’ contracting arrangements, based on long-term commitment and iterative dialogue, trust and reciprocity (ibid: 14)—in which, as one interviewee pointed out, failures can be reported. Here the idea is that government can draw on the responsiveness to users and tacit knowledge of third-sector providers, as well as their relative flexibility, to develop highly attuned and personalised services. Third-sector organisations in the field should press for the voice of users to be heard in the very design of such contracts—so that they are part of the relationship too and the contract is tailored to their needs (ibid: 53). And contract allocation should be based on ‘social value’—within a budget ceiling, of course—rather than price (Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector, 2012: 9). This would not only tilt the balance in contract allocation towards the third sector but would also make it easier for smaller third-sector organisations to compete (ibid: 17). Rees et al (2012a: 26) set out a very useful typology of how ‘transactional contractual partnerships’ and ‘collaborative partnerships’ differ—for instance, whereas the first limits access to information on grounds of ‘commercial confidentiality’, the second favours transparency and trust.

7.6 The alpha and omega for third-sector organisations has to be the outcomes they seek to realise—as one interviewee put it, focusing on what they ‘want to change’, not what they ‘want to do’. Bearing in mind Oscar Wilde’s invocation against those who understand the price of everything and the value of nothing, they should resist pressures to monetise their goals. This is not only intellectually fraudulent—being always based on arbitrary assumptions about human worth—but fundamentally denies the wider social, and environmental, impact which third-sector organisations seek to achieve (McCabe, 2012: 4). Such organisations should occupy what one interviewee called ‘a moral universe’ defined by ‘clarity of mission’, so that they can be in control of their agenda. And if a third-sector programme is so successful that it solves the problem it is addressing, and so realises the outcome, then the organisation should be pleased to stop it, another said. Securing an outcome, however, requires a clear ‘intervention logic’ (Sanderson, 2000: 221) which defines how and why the organisation does what it does. To know whether such a logic is robust for a new programme requires knowledge of relevant academic literature and/or evidence of good practice elsewhere which can show that it works—too often third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland can end up reinventing the wheel because they are not aware of similar projects that have been essayed before or which can be found by scanning the international environment. This should give focus to the Added Value Programme, which should be sustained beyond its notional end in 2014. The trust should become the repository of expertise on how ‘social value’ (Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector, 2012: 9) is added, based on international good practice, on which individual third-sector organisations can draw.
7.7 The significance of advocacy—and not primarily to seek funding—naturally follows. Indeed, advocacy has always been essential for third-sector organisations to demonstrate that they outcomes they seek do indeed have social value, by raising consciousness and awareness. In this way they have been able to articulate the existence of unmet needs to which services should be attuned—refuges for victims of domestic violence, pioneered in London by Chiswick Women’s Aid in the 1970s and now replicated around the world, are a very good example (Mooney, 2000). Now more than ever, however, with need escalating in response to austerity and recession, advocacy and campaigning may come to the fore (Buckingham, 2012: 5). As one interview said, advocacy should not just be for funding but ‘to change the system’. Third-sector organisations can shape policy and desired outcomes and design services, consistent with their advocacy roles (Rees et al, 2012a: 16). As another interviewee stressed, the international evidence shows that organisations which sustain a base in their own mission and the groups they represent are much more likely to influence government. But, as one round-table participant pointed out, third-sector organisations tend to advocate only in their own cause—the trust has the impartial but informed position to work on advocacy in the round.

7.8 Such advocacy can also ensure government is made fully aware that not all organisations can go down the social-enterprise route—they have to be service providers for a start—and even those which can need to have their core costs met through continued grant funding unless they are able fully to include overheads in project budgets. One insider warned that government was trying to ‘wash their hands of [the sector] and walk away’. Another interviewee said that the joint forum linking government with the sector was ‘like walking through treacle’ and the concordat was ‘going absolutely nowhere’. A third said that the sector had been so busy trying to get Northern Ireland politicians to think about it at all that it had been too ‘deferential’ to them. As to what the trust can do in this arena, one interview pointed to the need when he said there was not nearly enough work done on communications strategies in the sector, which was ‘absolutely terrible’ in relating to a world of fast-changing communications technologies. The six films commissioned from Pixelbrix have been a positive initiative in this regard, covering for example asset transfer and the work of the Fermanagh Trust. Here the trust could usefully partner with a consulting company combining journalistic expertise and understanding of the sector, at least one of which exists in Northern Ireland, to assist third-sector organisations—and the trust itself—to develop communications strategies.

7.9 Fundamental to advocacy has to be user/member engagement. Government ministers often talk the language of service ‘delivery’ but, as one interviewee put it, third-sector organisations must avoid such a ‘done to’ approach to their users. It is essential that third-sector organisations are not seen as ‘part of the machine’, another said: ‘We should be free to give voice to people who don’t have a voice.’ Ensuring they respond to needs on the ground is the best antidote to being focused on where the next tranche of funding is going to come from. It is also key to innovation at the micro-, organisational level. Innovation cannot be driven by the profit motive of business (which of course leads to accumulation, not necessarily innovation). It can however come in the third sector from the engagement of users, recognising that their needs are personalised, diverse and labile. There is some practice in Northern Ireland on which to draw, such as the Multi-Dimensional Homeless Support Team of Extern has pioneered or the user groups which NIACRO has established as sounding boards, but user engagement is a strand of work which the trust should strongly develop, initially through a learning circle and a commissioned paper.

7.10 Users must also be at the heart of impact assessment. How adequately is an organisation realising the outcome it sets out to achieve? This cannot simply be quantitative, not least because user experiences must be central. It is not feasible to develop a generic ‘impact assessment tool’ for all
third-sector organisations: this is too high a level of generality to address the warp and weft of particular organisations or to be sensitive to the human dimension of the specific users (or members) to which the organisation caters and it is not a road the trust should go down. Several interviewees did however think the trust could do more work in this area. The key to this conundrum is a recognition that as long as a clear outcome is defined as the aim of a third-sector organisation—as distinct from an often aspirational ‘vision’ or ‘mission’—then how its realisation is assessed methodologically is a technical question which any competent social science researcher can determine. The trust could usefully raise awareness in the sector as to the range of methodologies—surveys, interviews, focus groups, case studies and so on—and how these might be triangulated\(^9\) in a bespoke fashion for individual organisations. Funders too need to be educated on how to move beyond what one interviewee called a ‘compliance’ approach to evaluation. A useful methodology which CENI has crafted in this regard, trialled with Belfast City Council and the Irish Football Association, is the use of groups of organisational stakeholders—funders, staff, users, relevant agencies—to make, and discuss from their different perspectives, recurrent assessments of progress on the objectives of the organisation (summing to the outcome it seeks) on a simple numerical scale. And the relationship with Inspiring Impact will allow the trust to plug into wider UK debates in this arena. The trust has commissioned CENI to develop a plan for applying Inspiring Impact in Northern Ireland, with a view to changing attitudes and practices in the sector, in government and among funders.

7.11 Third-sector organisations which are successful are not organisationally defensive and egoistic but, on the contrary, are transparent and collaborative. They appreciate that such ‘untraded interdependencies’ are beneficial to all who contribute to them and so how critical it is that they are embedded in wider networks. If the trust seeks to act as an indispensable hub to the network of third-sector organisations in Northern Ireland, the learning circles the trust has established should be developed to become semi-autonomous nodes of networks within the sector. With their thematic focus—on collaboration or the social economy to date—they cut across distinct trust programmes while bringing together diverse individuals from organisations who otherwise might only be isolated grant recipients. A number of interviewees referred to the value of the trust as a space for reflection and it would be useful to canvas the views of recipients of the e-newsletter on what they think the ‘hot topics’ would be for further learning circles. This can be linked to further study visits, updates, webinars … all to encourage knowledge transfer and in particular the sharing of best practice. Again, several interviewees favoured further work in the arena of collaboration, building on the initiative of establishing Collaboration NI.

On collaboration, one avenue to pursue would be to see if it would be possible to replicate the experience in Italy, where ten or more co-operatives may join local consorzi (federations), which provide common management services (Wilson, 2010a). As one interviewee also pointed out, the work on collaboration, as that on community shares, can and should be linked to the pursuit of intercommunal reconciliation.

7.12 The trust is also interested in developing work on leadership in the sector. CO3 already addresses issues here vis-à-vis chief executives and chairs—which is not to say there is no scope for the trust to contribute in partnership, given the scale of the challenge: CO3 survey data show that fully 43 per cent of third-sector leaders are due to leave their organisations in the next five years. But an appropriate further focus for the trust might be other non-executive board members. One interviewee said that the role of the board was ‘very underestimated’. Trustees are not always aware of the legal responsibilities they personally bear, especially in unincorporated associations. More positively, in well-functioning

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\(^9\) Triangulation in social-science research is the combination of more than one methodology and/or more than one set of data to conduct an inquiry. If the findings are similar regardless of methodology or dataset deployed, then one can be reasonably confident of their reliability.
third-sector organisations, boards genuinely provide leadership and direction, as custodians of the aims and values of the organisation (Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector, 2012: 22), rather than merely providing a formal rubber-stamp for executive decision-making. This requires that they be recruited to supply specific needed competences, rather than be generally drawn from the ‘great and good’, as one interviewee put it, and, as another said, they must be able to ‘really challenge’ executive staff. Board members can also function as sources of innovation, by introducing fresh perspectives and ideas, as well as disinterested advocates for their own organisation and indeed for the sector as a whole. The biggest source of queries from third-sector organisations to Business in the Community is about potential board members—if they can import skills investment and risk-management skills they can counter risk aversion on a board when considering, for example, social finance and asset transfer. A resource is provided by the Code of Good Governance for third-sector organisations elaborated by the Developing Governance Group of Volunteer Now and 14 partner organisations. In working with organisations to ‘add value’, the trust can highlight the Code of Good Governance to encourage them to link ambitious outcomes to best-practice governance arrangements.

7.13 Change must ultimately mean the prefiguring by the third sector in Northern Ireland of an alternative, social, model to the ‘business’ model taken for granted in so much of public life—for instance, in the way a ‘business case’ has to be provided for projects deserving of public support, rather than just a case, period. One interviewee stressed the need to reverse the Thatcherite emphasis on individual property ownership and to restore the co-operative ideal. Another said that the trust needed to ‘develop a coalition of the willing’ around what was required for ‘social change in Northern Ireland’ and the role of the sector in that. The conference in 2012 organised by the trust on the idea of community shares, including showcasing potential Northern Ireland examples like Crusaders FC, was a good example of how it can project such a social model to the sector and beyond. The Northern Ireland Co-operative Forum has since generated for the trust a proposal for a pilot community-shares initiative. One roundtable participant said that the disparate nature of the sector meant third-sector organisations might not share the same vision of it—but a broad consensus could be anticipated on a wider social model which equally empowered all individuals to pursue their autonomous lives in a spirit of solidarity (Wilson and Bloomfield, 2011: 13). The trust should organise further events in the future which would showcase examples of how third-sector organisations can prefigure the good society.

7.14 These various themes should be communicated by the trust in a ‘guiding narrative about the role of the third sector as a single policy actor’ (Acheson, 2012: 2). One interviewee said: ‘We need to put together a very clear and coherent narrative around the success stories of the sector.’ And a roundtable participant said the trust should convey an image of the ‘jigsaw puzzle box lid’—rather, that is, than of ‘fractured’ programme pieces. Happily, the themes fit neatly together. For instance, one useful way of thinking about collaboration is the notion of ‘impact networks’. These attend to potential economies of scope by considering the range of needs of a service user and the organisations in place to provide them, with a view to establishing a collaborative network to do so in an holistic fashion. This in turn requires a focus on outcomes rather than on one’s own organisation, and indeed it may imply relinquishing a function better executed by another (Ludlow and Vernon, 2011). Similarly, collaboration can sometimes be pursued by campaigning organisations wishing to maximise their advocacy voice (Rees et al, 2012a: 22). The trust has itself recognised that, in light of the complexity of its activities, it needs to emphasise how each of its strands of work can influence change in the sector and to communicate this better. To do so, the trust should consider broadening its marketing and communications sub-group into a policy, practice and communications sub-committee of the board, which would develop this narrative of the third sector of the future.

10 See www.diycommitteeguide.org/content/developing-governance-group.
7.15 It is very important, however, that communication is not one-way traffic. The trust has to apply the principle of user engagement to itself. One interviewee, who thought it had been a ‘slow-moving beast’ rather than being ‘responsive and identifying themes’, said the trust should be ‘hearing from the sector what the sector needs and wants’. Even though the online survey for this report received a weak response, two things were very clear (and unsurprising): respondents felt the biggest single priority for the sector was for organisations to diversify their revenue streams and they themselves would value help from the trust with collaboration above all else.

7.16 Set against all these tasks, there is not a good case for open-call grant programmes like Exploring Change and Delivering Change, geared to individual organisations. One interviewee said the trust should ‘back the horse that’s going to win’. Another said: ‘There is a need to be focused, rather than a scatter-gun approach.’ Should the Enabling Change programme be agreed by the board, funding should only be made available to recipients which can persuasively argue that they can promote change which is of wider benefit to the sector and the public good than to their organisation alone—militating against the ‘more of the same’ or opportunist bids which bedevilled previous programmes—and that they can distil from the experience good-practice lessons of wider relevance. In other words, **Enabling Change should not be about grants but about establishing ‘relational contracts’ characterised by iterative dialogue with a small number of organisations.** This is set against the backdrop of the emergence of the Social Investment Fund, offering £20 million a year to organisations over the coming four years. Interviewees frankly described their expectation that this will deployed in a clientelistic fashion, which would thereby mitigate in favour of conservatism rather than change.

7.17 Change is all about innovation, as indicated earlier: it is fundamentally about how organisations don’t just do what they have always done. One interviewee spoke of the sector in Northern Ireland using the language of ‘stagnation’, ‘inertia’ and ‘parochialism and insularity’. Another complained of the sector being too ‘inward-looking’, stressing the links her organisation had with cognate organisations in the republic and in Britain. Yet another stressed the need to look to other countries, such as how in the Nordic countries life expectancy was greater, as citizens were more empowered and both deserved and expected better health as a result. Apart from being a critical subject in itself, this provides another useful stream of work which the trust could develop, building on the ‘think’ pieces it recently commissioned. More than one round-table participant valued the trust as a space free from day-to-day pressures to ask the ‘what’s next?’ question. **Recognising that it does not have all the answers and that some of the latter will come from experience and expertise outside Northern Ireland, the trust should consider a planned programme of papers commissioned from experts, offering solutions to problems identified within the sector but otherwise not readily available to it.** This should sponsor debate in a manner similar to the ‘dialogues’ which have been initiated by the Third Sector Research Centre in Britain. One interviewee stressed the need for ‘a space for challenging dialogue’ and she said: ‘Civil society should be constantly redefining itself.’ Another contended: ‘It’s about putting the civil back into civil society, in a way.’ The task of civil renewal was Europe-wide, he said, but only the Occupy movement and the indignados seemed to be promoting it.

7.18 The overall challenge, in conclusion, has to be to develop the sector as a unified protagonist in Northern Ireland, with organisations collaborating closely and sharing learning. In the more fragmented sector which currently exists, experiences of change are often not shared and publicised. Hence in the remainder of its life the trust should fundamentally be about what one interviewee described as ‘[t]elling stories, retelling stories and connecting people through networks’. A round-table participant highlighted the example of NESTA in England and Wales, which seeks to foster social innovation by mobilising investment, research, partnerships and networks.11

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11 See www.nesta.org.uk/home1.
7.19 This will take time—indeed, arguably, it is a never-ending task. Finally, and as a consequence, the trust should seek to have a further lease on life after its funded period expires in 2018. If the trust is able to establish itself securely as the indispensable hub of a network sponsoring continuing change in Northern Ireland’s voluntary sector, then it will have a strong case to return to BIG and other potential funders to seek ongoing support for the project. Clearly, the trust should not duplicate the work of NICVA or other region-wide bodies and it lacks what one insider called ‘authority’. But if it can act effectively as what one interviewee called ‘an independent think tank for the sector’, it can enjoy legitimacy and have an enduring role.
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Appendix 1: interview topic guide

The Building Change Trust was established in 2008 by the Big Lottery Fund following the submission and acceptance of a proposal developed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, Community Evaluation Northern Ireland, Business in the Community, Rural Community Network and the then Volunteer Development Agency (now Volunteer Now).

The trust is resourced through a National Lottery grant of £10 million as an investment for community capacity-building and promotion of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It is accepted as a charity by HM Revenue and Customs (XT11390) and is managed by a corporate trustee, Building Change Trust Limited, which is registered as a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (NI071182).

The trust’s aim is: ‘Investing in social change; working to make today’s challenges tomorrow’s opportunities.’ In its strategy it set out its vision of a ‘strong, vibrant, independent and relevant’ third sector in the region, which it hopes to help realise—in a tough economic environment—through funding projects characterised by innovation and modernisation. As it approaches the mid-point of its 10-year life, the trust has commissioned an overview report on its work so far and a perspective for the future—we stress this is not a procedural evaluation. The evidence will be gathered through a range of methods, including an online survey of voluntary and community organisations, interviews with voluntary-sector figures and a round table. As the quality of this report will depend on the breadth and depth of input from the sector, your cooperation with this interview would be greatly appreciated.

a.1.1.a.i.1. What is the biggest challenge or challenges facing the third sector in Northern Ireland?

a.1.1.a.i.2. Do you think the sector needs to modernise? If so how?

a.1.1.a.i.3. In an increasingly demanding funding environment, how should voluntary organisations better demonstrate the outcomes they realise?

a.1.1.a.i.4. What potential do you see for developing new sources of social finance and for organisations to become social enterprises?

a.1.1.a.i.5. What do you think should be the main drivers of change and innovation?

a.1.1.a.i.6. How do you think the Building Change Trust can best assist in addressing the challenges we have discussed?

a.1.1.a.i.7. … and how do you think it should communicate that to the third sector and other stakeholders?

a.1.1.a.i.8. Have you any observations you would make on activities the trust has supported to date in these regards?

a.1.1.a.i.9. Finally, have you any other reflections on the trust’s role on which we haven’t touched?
## Appendix 2: interviewee list

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alison Smith</td>
<td>Aware Defeat Depression</td>
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<td>Joanne McDowell</td>
<td>Big Lottery Fund</td>
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<td>Avila Kilmurray</td>
<td>Community Foundation Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Michael Hughes</td>
<td>Rural Community Network</td>
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<td>Nick Acheson</td>
<td>University of Ulster</td>
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<td>Wendy Osborne</td>
<td>Volunteer Now</td>
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<td>John Waddell</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue Christie</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Environmental Link</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beverley Bigger</td>
<td>Department for Social Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noelle Donnell</td>
<td>TVT The Villages Together</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Magowan</td>
<td>Freelance consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olwen Lyner</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Billy Gamble</td>
<td>Former Building Change Trust board member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiziana O’Hara</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Co-operative Forum</td>
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<td>John McMullan</td>
<td>Bryson Group</td>
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<td>Claire Gordon</td>
<td>Business in the Community</td>
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<td>Una Brown</td>
<td>Mencap Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Roisin Foster</td>
<td>Cancer Focus Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Sandy Wilson</td>
<td>Village Garden Broughshane</td>
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<td>Joe McVey</td>
<td>Blueprint Development Consultancy</td>
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<td>Patrick Minne</td>
<td>Charity Bank</td>
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<td>Seamus McAleavey</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Majella McCloskey</td>
<td>CO3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Field</td>
<td>Youthnet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Osborne</td>
<td>Building Change Trust chair</td>
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<td>Micheal Pyner</td>
<td>Development Trusts Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigel McKinney</td>
<td>Building Change Trust administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie Fisher</td>
<td>Building Change Trust co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauri McCusker</td>
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The Building Change Trust is managed by a corporate Trustee, the Building Change Trust Limited. The Building Change Trust is accepted as a charity by HM Revenue and Customs (XT11390). The corporate Trustee, the Building Change Trust Limited is registered as a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (NI071182).

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