



# *Positive Steps* **Third Monitoring Report**

**March 2007**

## **Summary of main findings**

In February 2007 a total of 181 NICVA members responded to the third *Positive Steps* monitoring survey. This represented a response rate of 21.5%.

- 65% of respondents were aware of *Positive Steps* which compares to 75% in 2006.
- Almost two thirds of respondents (62.8%) are aware of the implementation process associated with *Positive Steps* which compares to 60% in 2006.
- In 2006, 28.4% of respondents felt that the recommendations in *Positive Steps* would have a great deal of impact on the sector. This figure has fallen to 11.1% in 2007.
- Just under half of all respondents (46.3%) in 2007 felt that *Positive Steps* was going to have a great deal of impact or some impact on the voluntary and community sector. This compares with a figure of almost 60% in 2006.
- Approximately one in five respondents (21.3%) believes that *Positive Steps* has had a great deal of impact or some impact directly on how their organisation operates and interacts with government.
- The key commitment respondents to this survey want to see addressed immediately, is the introduction of longer term (outcome focused) funding. Over one third of all respondents felt this was the priority area for them.
- Approximately one in six respondents felt that the acceptance of full cost recovery principles in funding applications was a key commitment of *Positive Steps* that needs to be addressed immediately.
- The area where respondents have witnessed the greatest change over the last 12 months is in relation to the development of departmental leads.
- With the exception of the increased visibility of a lead minister, information on government funding sources, support for modernisation and the introduction of full cost recovery, all the other recommendations were perceived by over half of all respondents to have produced no change at all over the past two years.
- The development of a strategy for networks remains the overwhelming area that respondents feel is important to their organisation.

## **Introduction**

One of the many issues outlined in the *Positive Steps* document was the need to assess and monitor the impact of the recommendations on the voluntary and community sector. NICVA has agreed with the Department for Social Development (DSD) that twice a year an assessment against the perceived progress of *Positive Steps* will be undertaken. NICVA has approached this task in two ways. First, a survey of all NICVA members is undertaken on annual basis to assess what the overall impact of *Positive Steps* has been. This survey was first undertaken in February 2006 and 18% of NICVA members responded to the survey. The findings in this third monitoring report are based on the second iteration of this survey which is discussed below. Where possible the questions have not been changed from the first survey but in one or two instances, in consultation with officials from DSD, the questions have been amended to take account of recent developments. The full questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

The second method NICVA has employed to monitor the progress of *Positive Steps* has been through the establishment of a panel of voluntary and community organisations. The panel is contacted on an annual basis. The second *Positive Steps* monitoring report produced by NICVA was based on the in depth responses of 72 individuals who have agreed (on behalf of their organisations) to commit to a series of three in depth assessments of their attitudes towards the implementation of *Positive Steps*. The same individuals (or where appropriate alternates) will be questioned again in September 2007. It is hoped that by asking the same individuals the same set of questions over a set period of time it will give a more accurate reflection of the impact of *Positive Steps* than that garnered through a more randomised sample.

## **Findings**

The findings presented in this report examine the views and opinions of NICVA members towards *Positive Steps* and the impact they perceive it to have had on the voluntary and community sector since 2005. A total of 905 surveys were circulated to full NICVA members based in Northern Ireland during February 2007. The results in this report are based on a sample of 839 full NICVA members (66 NICVA members were given a ‘holiday’ due to their inclusion in the panel study as described above). A total of 181 responses were received by NICVA which represented a response rate of 21.5%<sup>1</sup> of the valid sample.

## **Awareness**

Examining general awareness levels of the *Positive Steps* document amongst the NICVA membership found that 65.4% of respondents knew of its existence. This is down on the corresponding period in 2006 when 74.8% of respondents were aware of *Positive Steps*.

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<sup>1</sup> In February 2006 a total of 161 responses was received by NICVA which represented a response rate of 17.9%.

**Table 1: Awareness of *Positive Steps***

	Count 2007	% 2007	Count 2006	% 2006
Yes	117	65.4	119	74.8
No	62	34.6	40	25.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: 181 (2 missing) 2007; 160 (1 missing) 2006

As has been mentioned in previous monitoring reports knowledge of the existence, or otherwise, of the document is one thing but it is another to understand the processes that will ultimately make the recommendations a reality. It is impossible to test completely if respondents are fully cognisant with the implementation process associated with *Positive Steps*. However, Table 2 does attempt to give some indication of the level of general understanding that exists of the implementation process.

**Table 2: Level of information about the implementation process for *Positive Steps***

	Count 2007	% 2007	% 2007 (excluding unsure)	Count 2006	% 2006
Yes	49	42.6	62.8	64	59.8
No	29	25.2	37.2	43	40.2
Not sure	37	32.2	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: 117 (2 missing) 2007; 119 (12 missing) 2006

In the first monitoring report respondents were not given a ‘not sure’ category in which to respond and therefore direct comparison with 2007 is not entirely straightforward. However, if only the yes and no responses in 2007 are taken (excluding those respondents which are ‘not sure’) 62.8% of respondents are aware of the implementation process which is slightly up on 2006. Nevertheless the findings from this most recent survey found that one out of every three organisations (32.3%) which are aware of *Positive Steps* are unsure about the implementation process.

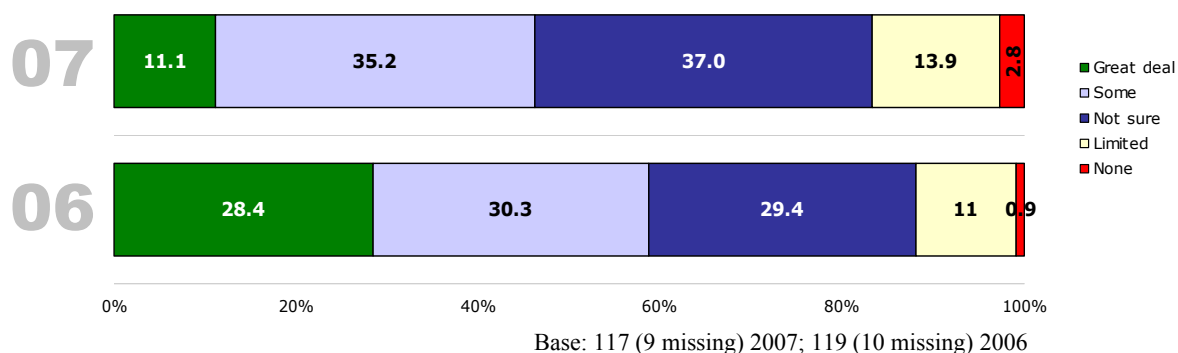
## Impact

Respondents<sup>2</sup> were then asked to assess the level of impact *Positive Steps* has had on the voluntary and community sector overall and more specifically the impact it has had on their own individual organisation.

First, respondents were asked about the level of impact that the recommendations outlined in *Positive Steps* would have on the voluntary and community sector over the next five years. Figure 1 below shows the results to this question in 2007 and the corresponding figures from 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Only those respondents who were aware of *Positive Steps* were included in the analysis for this section.

**Figure 1: Perceived impact of *Positive Steps* over the next five years**



As can be seen in Figure 1 the attitudes of respondents between 2006 and 2007 have shifted in terms of their assessment of the impact that *Positive Steps* will have on the sector over the next five years. In 2006, 28.4% of respondents felt that the recommendations in *Positive Steps* would have a great deal of impact on the sector, whereas in 2007 this figure has fallen to 11.1%. Overall, respondents in 2007 are more uncertain and perhaps slightly more negative in their assessment of the impact that *Positive Steps* will have over the next five years. For instance, in 2006 just over one in ten respondents felt that *Positive Steps* was going to have a limited or no impact on the sector. In 2007 this figure has risen to approximately one in six respondents expressing this opinion. Overall, just under half of all respondents (46.3%) in 2007 felt that *Positive Steps* was going to have a great deal or some impact on the voluntary and community sector. This compares with a figure of almost 58.7% in 2006.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on why they felt *Positive Steps* was going to have a significant, or otherwise, impact on the voluntary and community sector over the next five years.

**Positive comments about the impact on the sector over the next five years**

- “A central policy and its implementation have effects but it takes time to get to grassroots.”
- “Positive Steps can have a positive impact both through partnership working and acknowledging the sector as a benefit to the community.”
- “Framework for delivery of grant funded services will be based on outcomes focused approach and being able to demonstrate added value ... three year funding cycles and possibly seven years.”
- “Future funding contracts and service level agreements.”
- “I think change is already happening on the ground.”
- “It will have an impact if appropriately implemented.”
- “If the government takes it seriously then it will have a great deal of impact however this may be like other government strategies which are great on paper but no real resources to put it into action and sustainable action.”

**Positive impacts continued ...**

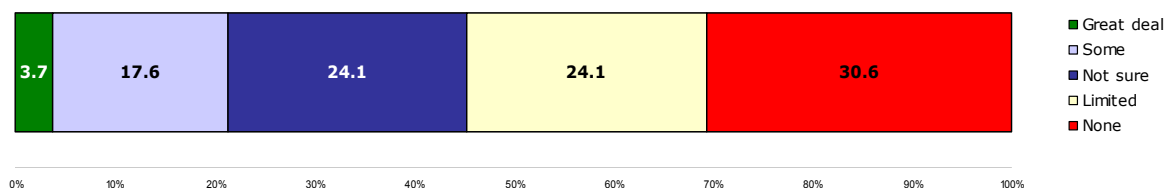
- *“Positive Steps is a very important document in that it established some key principles for the sector however these principles do not seem to be filtering down to the people on the ground.”*
- *“Recommendations need implemented fully.”*
- *“This document is simple and if implemented then it can work well.”*
- *“This is a strategic approach and government s a key stakeholder.”*

**Negative comments about impact on the sector over the next five years**

- *“Government does not have the talent, resources, understanding or commitment to make the changes.”*
- *“Government seems very slow to put in place recommendations from Positive Steps.”*
- *“I can only judge by the impact on our group which in effect is minimal to zero.”*
- *“I think that it is very hard to change the political system and the voluntary sector are increasingly under pressure to perform without adequate support, there is one rule for government and another for our sector.”*
- *“It is difficult to judge at present as RPA, the Assembly and funding changes are creating such instability.”*
- *“Momentum has gone, communication is poor from DSD ... prevarication is now the approach.”*
- *“Over the years so many documents have been produced most of the recommendations have never been implemented or properly funded.”*
- *“Particularly from a financial perspective, government appears to espouse concepts such as full cost recovery but do nothing in practical terms when negotiating funding levels with different government departments.”*
- *“These things are rarely followed through and we are almost always paying lip service only to whatever is the current buzz word.”*
- *“While a lot of work appears to have gone into Positive Steps little of substance has appeared on the ground within the sector. I feel that the response has stalled at this stage.”*

Focusing more specifically on the impact that respondents believe that *Positive Steps* has had so far on their own organisations, the results, as shown in Figure 2, portray a more pessimistic view of the impact of *Positive Steps* on the respondent’s own organisation.

**Figure 2: Impact of *Positive Steps* from an organisational perspective<sup>3</sup>**



Base: 108 (9 missing)

Approximately one in five respondents (21.3%) believes that *Positive Steps* has had a great deal of impact or some impact on how they operate and interact with government. Over half of all respondents (54.7%) believe that *Positive Steps* has had little or no impact on their relationship with government.

Respondents were asked to give some additional comments to explain their response to this question.

### **Positive experiences of *Positive Steps***

- *“DSD has engaged more.”*
- *“Government appears to be much easier to deal with ... ready to listen but still a long way to go.”*
- *“Greater opportunities for public procurement.”*
- *“Have used Positive Steps in discussions with commissioning bodies.”*
- *“I feel that there is more awareness within government departments of the need for the community and voluntary sector and the role it plays. They appear more prepared to consult on a range of issues; the next stage is to ensure they respond appropriately.”*
- *“Now using balanced scorecard approach to keep a handle on financial/non financial measures ... implementing ISO9001 ... organisation much more business focused.”*
- *“Only in terms of using DSD guidelines on governance ... applied to Modernisation Fund and Community Investment Fund.”*
- *Perhaps the willingness to consider full costs of providing a service ... need more joined up approaches between service delivery policies and strategy.”*
- *“We have been able to use the document in firming up our position during discussion with the Department of Health and politicians. It has given weight to the need for our project.”*
- *“We have been successful in gaining modernisation funding which we hope will increase the impact over the next few years.”*
- *“Consideration of full cost recovery and the thought behind longer term funding.”*

<sup>3</sup> This question was not asked on the 2006 survey of NICVA members.

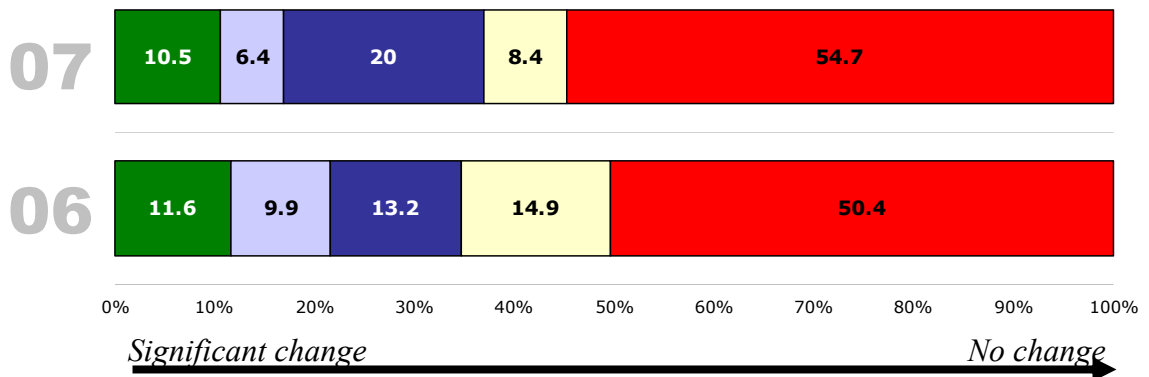
**Negative experiences of *Positive Steps***

- “Whilst many of the principles are not being applied it does provide a document to negotiate with.”
- “Positive Steps should change the funding environment significantly but I'm not holding my breath.”
- “Some government departments are not aware of this document.”
- “Support from DSD is as poor and as impoverished as the relationship with DEL ever was.”
- “The current vacuum (politics) is a negative to real progress in Positive Steps ... attitudes at centre slow to change.”
- “There has been no impact on our working or our relationships with funders.”
- “We are able to label it as a tool and use it in our own approaches to some extent ... does not find the same approach with government bodies.”
- “We have seen no improvement and we have not experienced direct upheavals.”

Continuing to assess the impact of *Positive Steps* on the voluntary and community sector, respondents were asked to rate the relationship with government against a number of the key recommendations laid out in *Positive Steps*. The following graphs present the findings from the 2007 survey against those achieved in 2006.

**Figure 3: Longer term (outcome focused) funding**

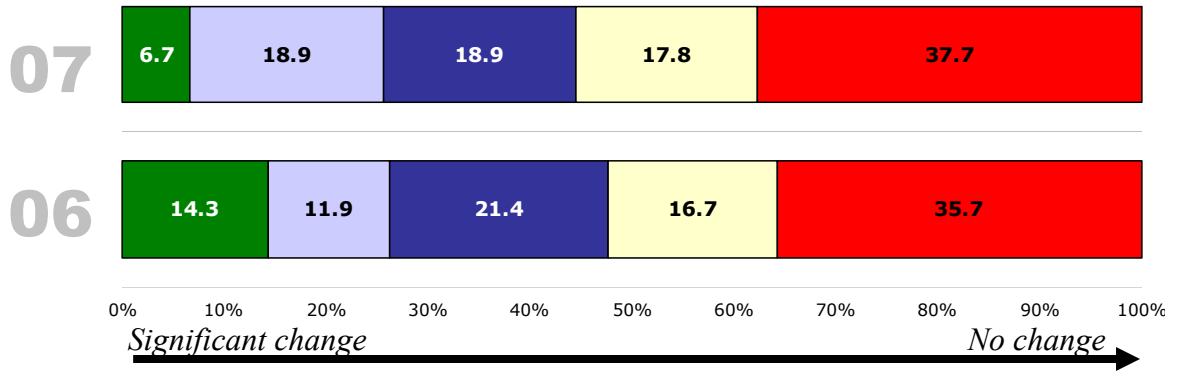
Base: 117 (15 missing) 2007; 119 (25 missing) 2006



As can be seen from Figure 3, there has been little change in attitudes towards longer term funding. In 2006 11.6% of respondents felt they had witnessed a significant change in the relationship with government in terms of longer term funding. A slightly lower result was achieved in 2007 (10.5%). Overall the results are very similar with only a few more respondents in 2007 thinking there has been no change at all in relation to longer term funding. Nevertheless in both surveys just over half of all the respondents felt that there had been no change at all in the relationship between themselves and government in relation to longer term (outcome focused) funding.

**Figure 4: Information on government funding sources**

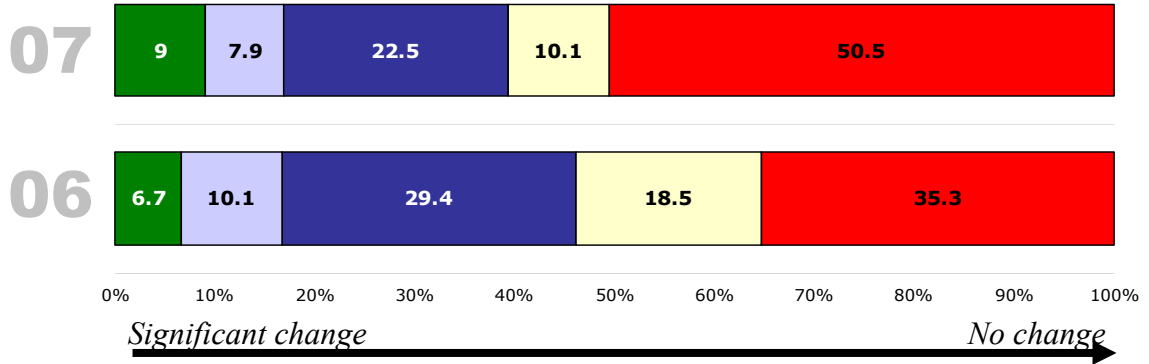
Base: 117 (20 missing) 2007; 119 (28 missing) 2006



In 2006 respondents felt that it was in this area (information on government funding sources) they had witnessed the most significant, positive change to have occurred since the publication of *Positive Steps*. Developments such as the VCU website which lists government grants to the voluntary and community sector ([www.volcomgrantsni.gov.uk](http://www.volcomgrantsni.gov.uk)) had obviously made an impact. However, once established it is understandable that the level of change associated with this area will reduce. Broadly speaking however, attitudes have not changed significantly since 2006.

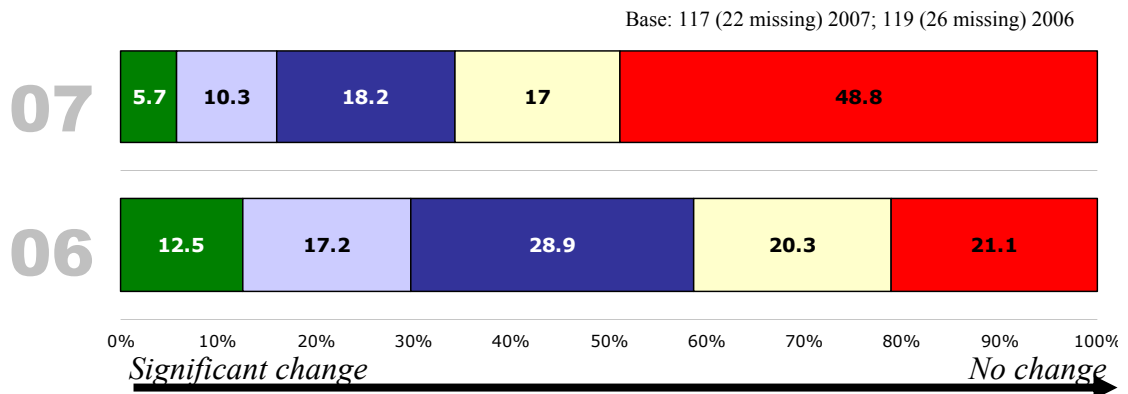
**Figure 5: Community development support (Community Investment Fund)**

Base: 117 (22 missing) 2007; 119 (25 missing) 2006



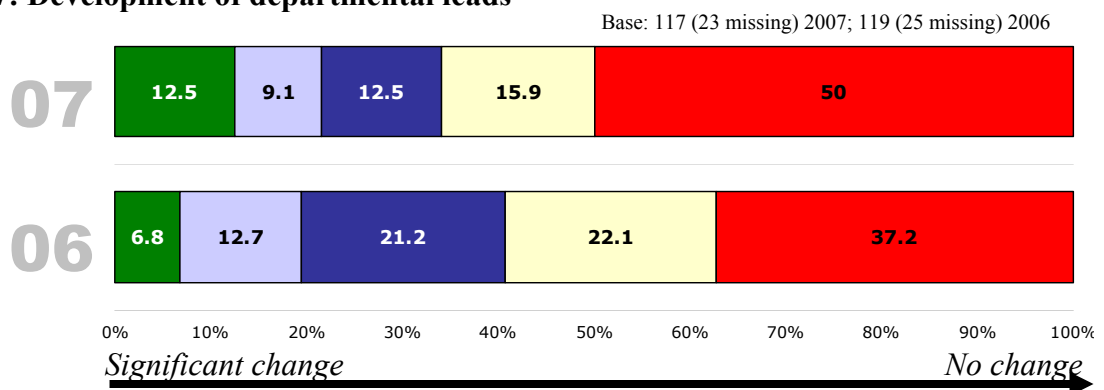
The Community Investment Fund was established at £5 million over a three year period (2006/07 to 2008/09). The aim of the Fund was to provide a stable basis for funding of community development activity, enabling a strategic, longer term approach. The closing date for applications was 8 June 2006. It is perhaps no surprise therefore that in the 2007 survey respondents felt there had been an increase in the level of change associated with this area. Of course the Community Investment Fund and community development support in general, is not applicable to all organisations which could account for the relatively high number stating there has been no change at all.

**Figure 6: Support of modernisation and change within the sector (Modernisation Fund)**



Round One of the Modernisation Fund closed on 10 January 2006 and was very much in the minds of respondents in the 2006 survey. Given that the current application process has closed and organisations have been informed of any final decision about their application, it is no surprise that respondents’ attitudes towards progress against this area have changed in 2007. It is the intention of DSD to make a further call for applications in the spring of 2007.

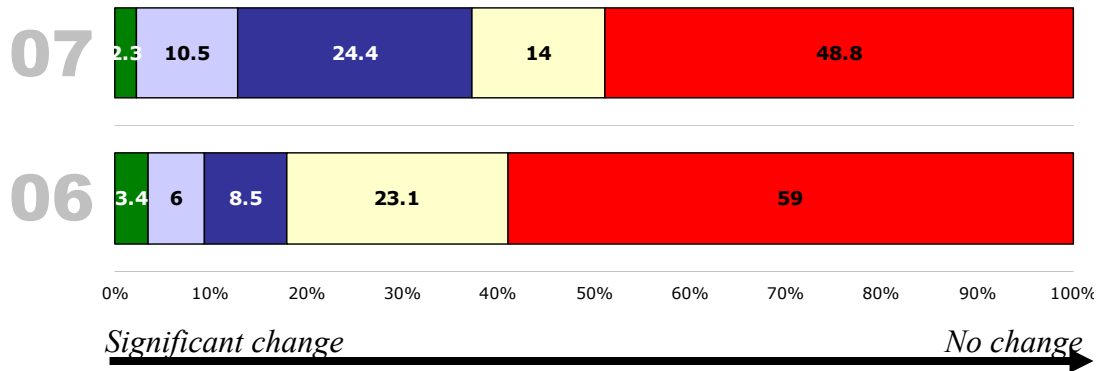
**Figure 7: Development of departmental leads**



Between 2006 and 2007 respondents have witnessed a significant, positive change in relation to the development of departmental leads for disability/young people/women/rural services. In fact the number of respondents reporting a significant, positive change since 2006 has almost doubled. Although difficult to substantiate in this type of survey, it would appear that some aspects of *Positive Steps* are now permeating through other government departments. Nevertheless this recommendation is the one where respondents have witnessed the most significant change since 2006.

**Figure 8: Increased visibility of a lead minister**

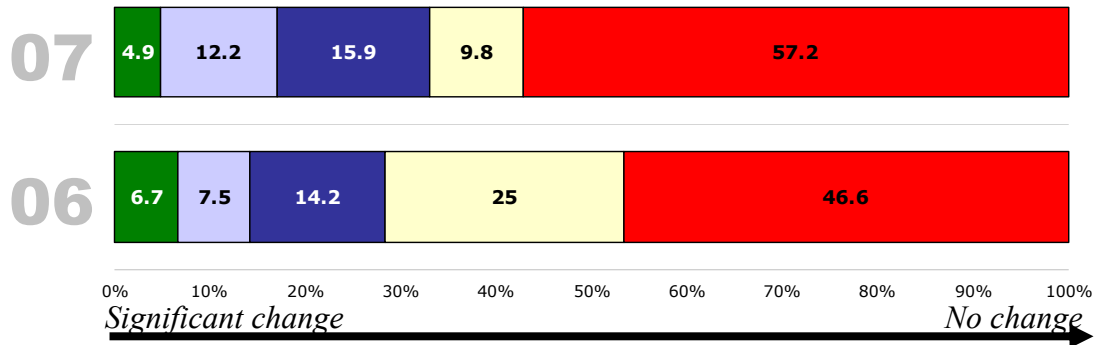
Base: 117 (24 missing) 2007; 119 (27 missing) 2006



In 2006 respondents felt there has been little change in terms of the increased visibility of a lead minister for the voluntary and community sector. This is perhaps understandable given the fact that direct rule ministers have a much wider portfolio of departmental responsibilities than their local predecessors. When the results in 2007 are compared with 2006 there is an overall sense that the visibility of a lead minister for the voluntary and community sector is increasing.

**Figure 9: Lead funder approach**

Base: 117 (34 missing) 2007; 119 (25 missing) 2006

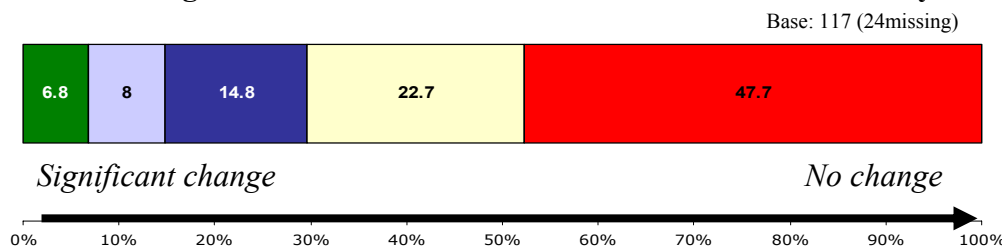


Overall there has been little change in the level of significant, positive changes in relation to the introduction of a lead funder approach between 2006 and 2007. Of course a number of the initiatives described above (not least developing a lead funder approach) will take a period of time to embed in government and in the sector. The type of organisation and their relationship with government can also be an influencing factor in this assessment. Nevertheless one third of respondents in 2007 are reporting some change in this area.

Respondents were asked to give their perspective on how much change they had witnessed in relation to the implementation of full cost recovery principles (this question was not asked in 2006). As can be seen in Figure 10 below, 6.8% of all respondents felt there had been a significant, positive change in the relationship between government and the sector in terms of the application of full cost recovery. A total of 47.7% of

respondents felt there had been no change at all since the publication of *Positive Steps* in relation to this area.

**Figure 10: Level of change associated with the introduction of full cost recovery**



With the exception of the visibility of a lead minister, information on government funding sources, support for modernisation and the introduction of full cost recovery principles, all the other recommendations were perceived by over half of all respondents to have produced no change at all in their respective areas. As mentioned previously it often takes a long time for such initiatives to bed down and become part of government policy but, superficially at least, the respondents to this survey have yet to witness any real or substantive change in the majority of these areas.

Respondents were asked to list the key *Positive Steps* commitments (as listed above) they would like to see addressed immediately.

**Table 3: Key *Positive Steps* commitments**

	%
Longer term (outcome focused) funding	36.0
Full cost recovery	15.2
Departmental leads for disability/young people/women/rural services	13.6
Community development support (Community Investment Fund)	12.8
Support of modernisation and change within the sector (Modernisation Fund)	7.2
Information on government funding sources	6.4
Lead funder approach	4.8
Increased visibility of a lead minister for the voluntary and community sector	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Base: 125 responses

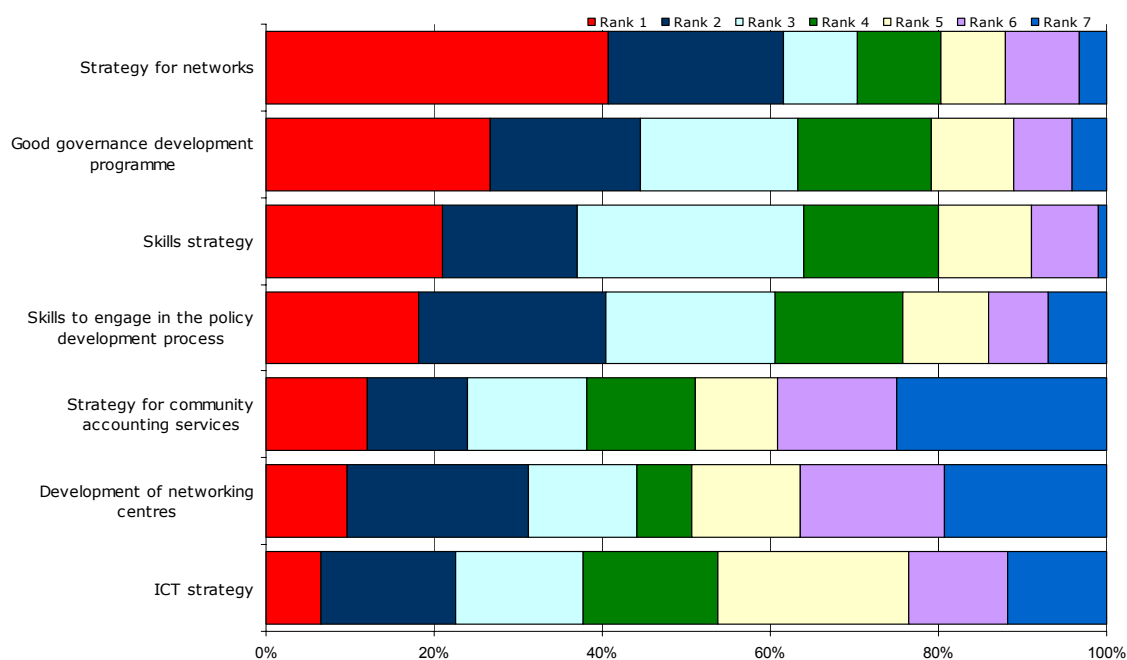
As can be seen in Table 3, the key commitment respondents to this survey want to see addressed immediately is the introduction of longer term (outcome focused) funding. Over one third of all respondents felt this was the priority area for them. Approximately one in six respondents felt that the acceptance of full cost recovery principles in funding applications was a key commitment of *Positive Steps* that needs to be addressed immediately. Clearly the development of longer term (outcome focused) funding programmes and the introduction of full cost recovery principles is a complex undertaking which does not involve just one government department and cannot be introduced overnight. Nevertheless, over half of the respondents to this survey want to see immediate action in these areas as expectations have been raised but yet 54.7%

(longer term funding) and 47.7% (full cost recovery) of respondents have yet to see any change in these areas over the last two years. Based on the evidence in this report these two issues should be priority areas that the Positive Steps Implementation Group focuses on.

As in 2006 respondents were asked to rank the importance of the various areas that were outlined in *Positive Steps* that were deemed to require future support and development.

In 2006 the development of a strategy for networks/infrastructure/support agencies was ranked the most important area for organisations in terms of future needs. This issue is followed by good governance development and the development of skills to engage in the policy development process. So have these priorities changed in 2007?

**Figure 10: Areas of importance for organisations where support and development are required (ranked)**



As can be seen in Figure 10, the simple answer is no. Between 2006 and 2007 the attitudes of respondents towards which areas of support and development are important have not changed at all. The development of a strategy for networks remains the overwhelming area that respondents feel is important to their organisation. Therefore the launch of the strategy for support services scheduled for spring 2007 will have an expectant audience. The only slight difference between the two surveys is that the development of a skills strategy for the sector is now ranked above the need to develop skills to engage in the policy development process. In 2006 these positions were reversed.

Finally, respondents were asked to give their assessment of what they believe to be the major achievements of *Positive Steps* since its publication in 2005. Listed below are the comments of the respondents.

### **Major achievements of *Positive Steps***

- *“Bringing the community/voluntary sector in as a viable third force that should be funded on full cost recovery (not always working on a shoe string).”*
- *“Difficult to say that there have been major achievements ... as a sector we were very disappointed by the low level of available resources.”*
- *“The Modernisation Fund.”*
- *“Generating the debate on networking/sharing resources.”*
- *“Government is much, much more approachable.”*
- *“Recognised the need for support and funding.”*
- *“Helping the voluntary sector move away from grant mentality to contract culture and thereby creating a platform for the sector to compete with the private sector for government contracts.”*
- *“I believe that it offered a higher profile to sector ... offering a series of practical workable recommendations to move forward with. Unfortunately it has had quite a low profile since 2005 and most people would be hard pressed to identify any achievements.”*
- *“I think it has opened the way for smaller local organisations to have communication with government ... there is still a long way to go but we welcome funding such as Modernisation Fund to build capacity and strengthen governance.”*
- *“It has set up Modernisation Fund and Community Investment Fund but the latter would have probably been implemented anyway as a consequence of Future Builders in the UK. They are both short term and not geared towards smaller groups.”*
- *“Its commitment to long-term development.”*
- *“Placing a focus and debate on development of strategic use of regional infrastructure.”*
- *“More engagement of government departments with the voluntary and community sector.”*
- *“More recognition for networks.”*
- *“Modernisation fund was too limited to cover the spread of the sector.”*
- *“No obvious achievement for our organisation.”*
- *“Opening up the debate within government and recognition of some of the issues facing the community and voluntary sector.”*
- *“Our organisation has not benefited significantly from Positive Steps to date.”*
- *“Recognition of the work the sector is responsible for ... better partnership working.”*
- *“Small on achievement, big on disappointment.”*
- *“That a strategy is at least in place but it has to be outworked.”*
- *“The commitment to work with the sector ... risk assessment of voluntary and community groups to assess needs of monitoring financial monitoring, ie by DSD.”*
- *“There have been no significant impacts on our organisation.”*
- *“What achievements?”*
- *“That it is there, we can quote it for funding but so far for us it hasn't had a big effect.”*

## Appendix 1 – *Positive Steps* survey

Are you aware of the *Positive Steps* document?

Yes		No	
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If yes, are you aware of a process to implement the recommendations in *Positive Steps*?

Yes		No		Not sure	
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How much of an impact do you believe the recommendations outlined in *Positive Steps* will have on the voluntary and community sector over the next five years?

Great deal		Some		Not Sure		Limited		None	
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*Please provide comments to explain your response above.*

From the perspective of your organisation, has *Positive Steps* had any impact so far on how you now operate and how you interact with government?

Great deal		Some		Not Sure		Limited		None	
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*Please provide comments to explain your response above.*

Please assess what changes, if any, you have witnessed in the relationship between government and your organisation in the following areas since the publication of *Positive Steps* (1 being significant positive changes through to 5 indicating no change at all). Please provide a score for each area.

Longer term (outcome focused) funding	
Information on government funding sources	
Community development support (Community Investment Fund)	
Support of modernisation and change within the sector (Modernisation Fund)	
Development of departmental leads for disability/young people/women/rural services	
Increased visibility of a lead minister for the voluntary and community sector	
Full cost recovery	
Lead funder approach	

Which of the key *Positive Steps* commitments listed above would you like to see addressed immediately?

**Positive Steps** outlines a number of areas where support and development are required. Please rank the following initiatives according to their importance to your organisation (1 being the most important and so on).

Strategy for networks/infrastructure/support agencies	
Development of networking centres (eg Ballybot House, Newry)	
Strategy for community accounting services (centralised accounting support and assistance)	
ICT strategy	
Skills strategy	
Development of a good governance development programme	
Development of skills to engage in the policy development process	

**What do you believe are the major achievements of Positive Steps since its publication in 2005?**