

INSPIRING IMPACT NI PROGRAMME

Interim Evaluation Report

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Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Purpose of external evaluation.....	4
1.2. Methodology	4
1.3. Structure of Report	6
2. About the Inspiring Impact Programme	7
2.1. Background to Inspiring Impact UK.....	7
2.2. Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland	8
3. Findings: Delivery of outputs and processes.....	12
3.1. Introduction.....	12
3.2. Support to the VCSE sector.....	12
3.3. Engagement with funders	14
3.4. Inspiring Impact Exchange.....	18
3.5. Governance and Management.....	20
3.6. Marketing, Communications and Evaluation.....	21
3.7. Extent to which expected outputs and processes have been delivered	24
4. Findings: Delivery of outcomes	25
4.1. Overview of progress	25
4.2. VCSE programme	29
4.3. Engagement with funders	36
5. Conclusions and recommendations	45
5.1. Conclusions.....	45
5.2. Recommendations: the next six months.....	46
5.3. Recommendations: post-2015	47

Appendix Stakeholders consulted

Executive Summary

Context

This section summarises the main conclusions and recommendations of an interim external evaluation of Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland (IINI).

In June 2013 the Building Change Trust (BCT) approved its support for IINI - a two year programme to run from November 2013 to December 2015. BCT, as the Northern Ireland partner of the UK board, committed £500,000, matched by a further £188,000 to March 2015 from the Department for Social Development (DSD), to support the roll out of a programme to support voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and their funders in Northern Ireland to better understand and embrace an impact focussed approach to their work. Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) was contracted by BCT to deliver the programme. The central evaluation question addressed by the external evaluation was:

Is this programme – and the way BCT has contracted CENI to deliver it – making a difference to: awareness; and the beginnings of change in practice?

Following a period of contractual arrangements and planning, IINI was formally launched in March 2014, with three strands: i) Support for the VCSE sector; ii) Engagement with Funders, and iii) Impact Exchange. The VCSE delivery partners were funded in October 2014 and so at the time of writing this interim report, their support programmes have been underway for six months. The public sector demonstration projects began in late November 2014, and ended on 31 March 2015, a period of four months linked to the period of DSD funding.

Core evaluation finding

The external evaluation has found that the IINI programme has been a timely and relevant intervention which has been well planned and well executed. It has engaged a significant cohort of VCSE delivery partners as well as public sector funders to engage with and plan for the implementation of a new approach: impact practice. The engagement of independent funders has proved a challenge, with just one demonstration project at an early stage.

Overall, the programme to date is achieving its aim in terms of increasing awareness and understanding, and enabling organisations to review and plan for impact practice. It has succeeded in attracting a cohort of 13 VCSE delivery partners and five demonstration projects from the statutory sector, all of which show evidence of awareness of and engagement with the concept of impact practice. While it was never intended that this phase would bring groups through from planning to full implementation of impact practice, there is nonetheless evidence of the beginnings of change in practice, with some participants indicating changes such as:

- Carrying out organisational strategic planning with a focus on impact;
- Changes to funding application processes, for example, greater engagement with potential grantees through co-design, working with grantees on a Theory of Change, agreeing on a core set of outcomes as opposed to multiple output-focused objectives, and revision of reporting templates in order to reflect the changed focus;

- Six organisations working on projects for young people classified as NEET have piloted the JET Shared Measurement Framework which as a result has been customised for Northern Ireland, and have taken the first steps in implementing it.

However, while there was a sense that a certain momentum was being created around the concept of impact practice, there was evidence of challenges and issues for both VCSE delivery partners and public sector funders, and the approach could not be said at this stage to have fully embedded: its roots remain shallow. That said, a significant amount has been delivered and achieved in a short period of time, and the core outcomes envisaged at this point have been achieved: there is clearly awareness of and an appetite for the programme, plans are in place for impact practice, and there is some evidence even at interim stage of the beginnings of change in practice.

Recommendations

Section 5 contains a series of recommendations which are summarised below.

For optimum achievement of outcomes for the next 6 months, BCT should:

- Identify ways to further support the current VCSE delivery partners to continue to develop skills, knowledge and capacity so they can meet the growing needs of the member groups they support;
- Consider options for supporting the ongoing engagement of the current public sector demonstration projects;
- Share learning from the independent funder demonstration project with other independent funders in order to identify possibilities for further engagement;
- Build opportunities to exchange learning, both between VCSE delivery partners, and between VCSE and public sector demonstration projects;
- Review the Advisory Group's function and membership.

In order to embed impact practice post-2015 BCT should now:

- Consider how the impact of its investment to date might be maximised and how it might strategically support IINI to achieve widening and deepening. A number of options are set out in Section 5 which BCT should explore;
- Put in place an engagement plan, identifying key leaders across the VCSE sector, the public sector, and independent funders, aimed at achieving a policy mandate for impact practice, as well as strategic support and leadership across sectors;
- Identify the most appropriate mechanism for leading this work across sectors;
- Clarify, as the approach widens and deepens, practical issues such as whether there is a core standard for impact practice to ensure some quality control – or not;
- Revisit the language of impact practice to ensure that its core simplicity and utility are maintained;
- Provide a statement indicating how impact practice both complements and is distinct from monitoring and evaluation, and compliance reporting mechanisms;
- Articulate both the complementarity and the distinctiveness of IINI with other outcomes based approaches that are currently being developed and disseminated.

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of external evaluation

In June 2013 the Building Change Trust (BCT) approved its support for Inspiring Impact NI (IINI) a two year programme to run from November 2013 to December 2015. IINI is part of a the Inspiring Impact UK (IIUK) initiative which aims to change the way that voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (VCSEs) think about impact and embed good impact practice into their work so that high quality impact measurement is the norm by 2022.

BCT as the Northern Ireland partner of the UK board committed £500,000 matched by a further £188,000 from the Department for Social Development (DSD) to support the roll out of a programme to support VCSE organisations and their funders in Northern Ireland to better understand and embrace an impact focussed approach to their work. Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) was contracted by BCT to deliver the programme.

Following a tendering process, in July 2014 Helen McLaughlin and Pamela Montgomery were contracted to conduct an external evaluation of IINI to supplement an internal evaluation process conducted by CENI. This report represents an interim evaluation of the programme. A final evaluation report will be produced by December 2015.

The central evaluation question the evaluation process was designed to address was:

Is this programme – and the way BCT has contracted CENI to deliver it – making a difference to: awareness; and the beginnings of change in practice?

The external evaluation was required to provide a high level overview of progress in this regard. In order to do this the evaluators developed a detailed evaluation plan and as part of that process agreed with BCT and CENI a set of evaluation questions which were:

- To what extent have programme outputs and processes and associated contracts been delivered by CENI and BCT?
- To what extent has progress been made towards the programme outcomes across the three main pillars of activity? Has the right mix of approaches been used and have there been any gaps?
- Are the structures established for the oversight, management, delivery and development of the initiative fit for purpose?
- What have been the key learnings from the programme?
- In the context of what has been learned to date, what are the practical (management, development and delivery) and strategic implications and how should these be addressed?
- How should this work be carried forward after December 2015? Who should lead it and how might it be resourced?

1.2. Methodology

The overall approach to the evaluation was informed by the terms of reference for the evaluation which called for an assessment of systems and processes associated with the roll out of the programme together with a high level summative assessment of programme outcomes. A detailed evaluation plan was developed by the evaluators based on an

Operational Plan for IINI and a logic model for the programme setting out expected outcomes. It was expected that the interim evaluation report would focus on the roll out of the programme identifying any evidence of progress on outcomes to date together with an assessment of the implications for the future. It was envisaged that the final evaluation report would focus more squarely on outcomes delivered.

In developing an overall approach to the evaluation, the evaluators sought to complement the internal evaluation process being undertaken by CENI. As such the approach taken in compiling this report has been to extract and present in summary form top line developments in and lessons from the programme rather than forensically documenting all of the work undertaken or providing a detailed evaluation of the individual statutory or VCSE projects. However we have provided a high level review of main themes emerging from the work to date. A fuller account of work undertaken across the programme will be provided by CENI through a number of planned learning reports and case studies from the main programme strands.

This interim report provides an assessment of IINI over the period January 2014 to March 2015. The evaluators have used a wide range of monitoring and other information specified in the evaluation plan. Reference is also made to a learning report which at time of writing had been prepared on one strand of the programme scheduled for publication in June 2015.

Table 1 Methodology

Main evaluation methods	Sources
Monitoring and other programme documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly management reports and reports to DSD • Minutes of Advisory Sub-committee meetings • IINI Development Plan and Operational Plan • ITTs and expressions of interest • CENI and PWC contracts • Public Affairs plan • Attendance lists for events and post event evaluations • IIUK reports and tools • Event reports and published documents
Consultation meetings	2 joint meetings with BCT and CENI Meeting with representatives of DSD Individual interviews with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCT Director of Operations • BCT Board member • IINI Programme Leader • ACF consultant • Three members of IINI Advisory Committee • PWC consultant • NEET Strategy Forum Regional Co-ordinator
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group meeting with CENI team
Observation	Attendance at 6 Inspiring Impact Learning Exchange events

Those selected to take part in the consultation were agreed with BCT. The interviews took place on a non-attributable basis and each person was interviewed according to a template of agreed questions chosen to feed into the evaluation questions. A full list of stakeholders consulted is contained in an Appendix to this report.

1.3. Structure of Report

Section 2 of this report provides background to the Inspiring Impact programme across the UK and in Northern Ireland. Section 3 presents findings on programme outputs and processes and section 4 on progress against expected outcomes. A final section 5 presents conclusions and recommendations.

2. About the Inspiring Impact Programme

2.1. Background to Inspiring Impact UK

IIUK is a UK wide initiative that aims to change the way the voluntary sector thinks about impact practice. IIUK developed in the context of significant changes in the not for profit sector over the last decade including: its role in delivering public services; its funding including a shift from grants to contracts; growing public and funder expectations of funded organisations and increasing pressure on the organisations delivering services in an economic climate that has put its income under pressure and at the same time has led to increased public demand for its services.¹ The challenging economic context in particular has driven impact up the agenda as government and funders look to get the most for their investment and charities and social enterprises are increasingly required to demonstrate they are using resources to greatest possible effect.

IIUK was established in 2012 by organisations² working across the UK including BCT, the lead partner for Northern Ireland. IIUK's central aim is to change the way the voluntary sector thinks about impact and to make high quality impact practice the norm for charities and social enterprises by 2022. Its goals are that:

- The majority of charities and social enterprises routinely plan, measure, assess and improve their work on the basis of their impact;
- The majority of funders seek to increase their impact by using impact data to allocate resources and improve practices;
- Evidence about effective interventions is widely available and regularly used to inform policy and practice; and
- Effective interventions are widespread leading to significant and sustainable improvements to the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable people.

IIUK works to promote its cycle of impact practice, a holistic approach to impact practice, which is about more than just measurement. It includes planning for impact, understanding how to measure it and using information to communicate and effect change. It has developed and made available a number of resources to support impact practice:

- A Code of Good Impact Practice³ and Funders' Principles⁴;
- Measuring Up!⁵ an online resource to help organisations assess themselves against the code; and
- An online Inspiring Impact Hub⁶ of resources and tools to support impact practice.

¹ Ní Ógáin, E., Lumley, T. and Pritchard, D. (2012) *Making an Impact: Impact Measurement among Charities and Social Enterprises in the UK*. NPC, London.

² The partners are: Association of Charitable Funders (ACF); Association of Chief Officers of Voluntary Organisations; Charities Evaluation Services; National Council for Voluntary Organisations; New Philanthropy Capital (NPC); Evaluation Support Scotland; BCT.

³ See <http://goo.gl/hg7t9X>

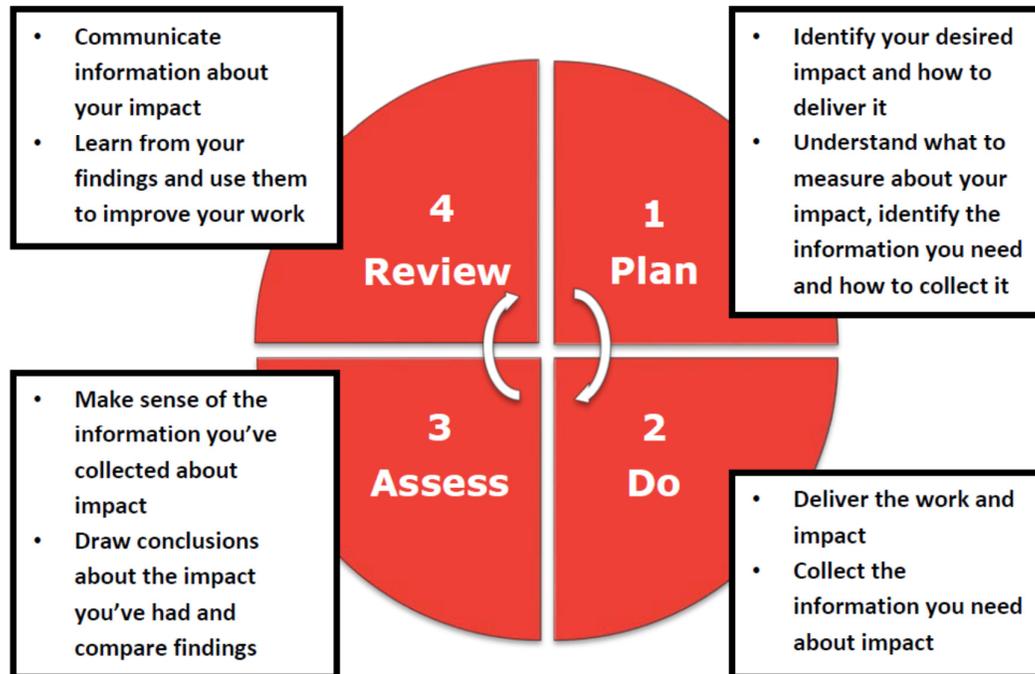
⁴ See <http://goo.gl/OGJwDy>

⁵ See <http://inspiringimpact.org/measuringup/>

⁶ See <http://inspiringimpact.org/listings/>

The cycle of impact practice

There are four main areas of activity that make up impact practice:



2.2. Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland

2.2.1. Context

Third sector organisations form a significant part of the social and economic infrastructure in Northern Ireland accounting for around 4% of the workforce in Northern Ireland⁷. In common with the position elsewhere in the UK, economic challenges have placed VSCEs and funders under increased pressure to demonstrate the value of activities, services and investment and the difference this makes to the lives of intended beneficiaries⁸. In addition a range of broader policy and other developments provide a context in which IINI has particular relevance at this time. Main drivers include:

- Reports by the NI Audit Office⁹ and the Public Accounts Committee¹⁰ on the creation of effective partnerships between government and the voluntary and community sector. These set out the need for improvements based on practical actions aimed at reducing the level of bureaucracy through the adoption of proportional monitoring and audit; a focus on outcomes; and more improved funding arrangements.

⁷ NICVA (2012) *State of the Sector VI*. NICVA, Belfast

⁸ See <http://www.nicva.org/article/viewfinder-14>

⁹ Northern Ireland Audit Office (2010). *Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector*. The Stationary Office, Belfast.

¹⁰ Public Accounts Committee (2012). *Report on Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector*. The Stationary Office, Belfast.

- The agreement of a Concordat between the NI government and the voluntary and community sector. The Concordat is a framework for developing effective partnership working and includes a list of priority actions which need to be addressed jointly. A Joint Forum comprising representatives from Central and Local Government and VCSEs is the monitoring group for Concordat commitments. The Joint Forum has established a number of Action Teams to take forward shared commitments.
- In response to the NIAO and PAC reports, DSD led on the establishment of a NICS cross-departmental project, the Addressing Bureaucracy Project, to address many of the issues raised in these reports. This resulted in the publication of a report¹¹ containing a range of recommendations including recommendations in relation to the piloting and testing of an outcomes or impact focussed approach to funding in the public sector. This report originally envisaged this pilot being taken forward as phase 2 of the Addressing Bureaucracy Project, however as the IINI project was in the early stages of development it was agreed that this strand of work could be addressed through it to avoid duplication.
- Local Government Reform which led to a reduction in the number of councils from 26 to 11 and which has also resulted in new councils taking on a statutory duty to lead and facilitate community planning in their areas and to work in partnership with other service providers and statutory bodies to meet community need.
- The establishment by the Department of Finance and Personnel in 2013 of a Public Sector Reform Division to develop and implement innovative solutions to generate more efficient and effective outcomes in statutory bodies.
- Reductions in public sector spending and a requirement on government departments to achieve significant savings are impacting significantly on the voluntary and community sector with reductions in funding causing VCSEs to reduce their staff and services. Over the life of IINI this position has become more acute with a requirement to reduce spend in 2015/16 leading to what NICVA has estimated will be a loss of over 460 jobs in the sector, reductions in or the withdrawal of vital services and in some cases the closure of organisations.¹²

Linked to these developments is an increasing trend within both government and voluntary and community sectors towards measuring outcomes, including:

- A drive towards Outcomes Based Assessment (OBA)¹³ across government departments;
- The development of the *Innovation Strategy¹⁴ for Northern Ireland* and the concept of Innovation Labs;
- The *Social Return on Investment (SROI) Model¹⁵*;

¹¹ DSD (2013). *Addressing Bureaucracy: A report on tackling bureaucracy in government funding to the voluntary and community sector*. See <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/addressing-bureaucracy-report.pdf>

¹² See <http://www.nicva.org/article/cutswatchni-results-are-coming>

¹³ The *Outcomes Based Accountability Model (OBA)* was developed by Mark Friedman as outline in his book *Trying Hard is not Good Enough* (2005).

¹⁴ See <http://www.detni.gov.uk/innovation-strategy-2014-2025.pdf>

- Carnegie Trust's work on *Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland*¹⁶;
- The Bryson *Social Value Framework*¹⁷, developed with support from the Ulster University and piloted with INVEST NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme;
- CENI's development of the *Measuring Change* approach which is tailored to enable funders and organisations to capture and use outcomes data to improve delivery;
- Other organisation-led developments such as *Sportworks*, introduced by Spotted, aimed at measuring the impact of sport particularly on the risk of young people becoming involved in negative behaviour.

2.2.2. Programme Development and Aims

As the Northern Ireland partner on the Board of IIUK, BCT committed to supporting the delivery of a linked IINI programme.

BCT was established in 2008 by the Big Lottery Fund to invest £10 million to help shape the future of Northern Ireland's voluntary and community sector over a ten year period. The Trust seeks to facilitate development in three areas: collaboration, sustainability, and learning and influence and has six specific areas of action, one of which is Inspiring Impact.

Informed by developments from within the UK programme and from a consultation process across the sector in Northern Ireland including a major Impact Summit, a Development Plan for IINI was produced in June 2013. BCT committed funding of £500,000 to support the delivery of a two year IINI programme. DSD subsequently committed further funding of £188,000 for the delivery of the programme ending in March 2015.

The Development Plan set out an ambitious, targeted programme of work to support the VCSE sectors and their funders to better understand and embrace impact practice drawing on the resources developed by IIUK. Approved by the BCT in June 2013, it contained the rationale and a broad direction of travel for a two year programme to run from December 2013 to December 2015. This included broad themes, core programme elements and expected outcomes. Broadly it was envisaged that work would focus on three main areas: support to VCSEs; engagement with funders; and an Inspiring Impact Exchange initiative to share information and good practice. Also included were proposed arrangements for the delivery and management of programme activities to be implemented by a commissioned strategic delivery partner.

While it was hoped IINI would make a contribution to embedding impact practice in the VCSE sectors, it was recognised that there would be a limit to what could be achieved in a resource limited two year programme. Therefore the hope was that IINI '*will facilitate the sector in taking modest steps*' on a longer term journey and that '*sustained progress will require the continuing commitment of resources and expertise into the future*'.¹⁸

Following further discussions, BCT decided to tender for the appointment of a delivery partner to support the Trust with the strategic development and delivery of IINI in August

¹⁵ See http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Cabinet_office_A_guide_to_Social_Return_on_Investment.pdf for a simple guide

¹⁶ Carnegie UK Trust (2014). *Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland: a new conversation for new times*. See <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=a0efb5c6-dd32-442d-849d-56ced2ad250f>

¹⁷ See <http://socialvaluehub.org.uk/?id=119&view=oneresource>

¹⁸ See <http://www.buildingchangetrust.org/inspiring-impact/resources>

2013. CENI was identified through the tender process as the preferred strategic partner in September 2013.

Elements of the original Development Plan were subsequently refined particularly during the course of pre-contract negotiations between BCT and CENI prior to the award of the contract for the delivery of the IINI programme. This resulted in the development of an agreed Operational Plan for the programme in January 2014. However, the broad direction of travel and three main areas of focus for the programme remained as set out in the original Development Plan. IINI was formally launched in March 2014.

3. Findings: Delivery of outputs and processes

3.1. Introduction

Main work streams undertaken as planned for in the IINI Operational Plan and outputs achieved to March 2015 are set out in summary below together with a high level assessment of progress to date.

3.2. Support to the VCSE sector

One of the three main work strands of the IINI programme was to provide support to VCSE organisations to help embed impact practice within the sector using a range of products developed by IIUK.

It was planned to deliver this strand of the programme through commissioning a network of around 10 key VCSE organisations to act as impact ‘champions’ and to provide direct support to their members or client groups so that they are better able to:

- Understand the cycle of impact practice;
- Assess their own impact practice;
- Access information on impact tools and resources; and
- Plan to apply impact practice.

Following an open bidding process in June 2014, 21 applications were received and following assessment 13 organisations were selected as delivery partners. These were:

- ABC Community Network;
- Age NI;
- Ballymoney Community Resource Centre;
- Community Development and Health Network;
- CO3;
- Holywell Consultancy;
- National Deaf Children’s Society;
- National Children’s Bureau;
- NICVA;
- Playboard;
- Sported Foundation;
- Volunteer Now Enterprises;
- Youthnet.

Each VCSE delivery partner received a small grant of £15,000 to implement the programme over a 12 month period beginning in September 2014 specifically to:

- Become impact champions;
- Provide trained enablers/mentors to support their member groups with impact practice; and
- Produce demonstration projects illustrating impact practice in specific areas of their work.

Following initial training and support by CENI, the delivery partners were tasked with identifying and recruiting organisations from their constituent groups within geographical areas or in thematic areas (e.g. faith-based groups) and then delivering support on impact practice. They were also required to document the process, learning and achievements and share learning through the Inspiring Impact Exchange. Three of the delivery partners (CO3, NICVA and Volunteer NOW) agreed a collaborative approach co-ordinating training by thematic and geographic areas to ensure the most effective use of resources and to avoid clashes of dates and duplication.

The 13 delivery partners have offered a diverse range of approaches including:

- Widespread promotion;
- Peer learning sessions, workshops, seminars and masterclasses;
- One-to-one support and distance support;
- Provision of examples.

A further area of activity, not envisaged when the Development Plan was being drafted, was the support and facilitation of work with the VCSE sector on shared measurement through engagement with an already existing Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) forum. Through this work, support was provided by CENI to six organisations working with NEET young people to adopt and adapt Journey to Employment (JET) a shared measurement framework. Eight further organisations engaged with JET although resource limitations did not enable them to be supported.

Table 2 Main VCSE activities and outputs achieved by March 2015

Aim	Planned Work	Work Delivered	Outputs Achieved
Development: work with a sample of VCSEs to design and test a programme to support the delivery of impact practice support projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop training and support materials Recruit sample of 5 VCSEs Develop criteria for commissioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All activities delivered as planned No significant variation to roll out of work though decision taken to increase the number of VCSE delivery partners from 10 to 13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suite of resources and support materials developed by CENI 4 awareness events held Roundtable event held on JET framework for NEET forum members
Promotion: promote awareness and generate interest from across VCSE sectors to engage with IINI and/or deliver impact support projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce and disseminate promotional materials Workshops to promote IINI Invite bids to deliver support projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant delays in implementation of planned work by BCT or CENI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 VCSEs commissioned to deliver IINI and provided with training/support 166 VCSEs engaged (either attending training or receiving one to one support) on developing impact practice
Commissioning: Up to 10 VCSEs commissioned to deliver impact practice support projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission 10 support projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support on JET measurement framework also supported and completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 VCSEs completed Measuring Up self-assessments
Delivery: CENI provides support to commissioned VCSEs who deliver impact support projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of training/support programme in each of 10 VCSEs VCSEs host events, promote impact practice and deliver support to target members Demonstration projects produced documenting the application of impact practice and learning derived 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning Exchange Event held for 13 VCSE delivery partners to share experience and practice Shared learning paper on insights and lessons underway by CENI. Report will be published and disseminated at a Learning Exchange event in June 2015 6 organisations supported to apply JET measurement framework JET framework adapted for NI and learning report launched (Jan '15)

3.3. Engagement with funders

The second main area of work for IINI was engaging with funders of VCSEs to foster a clear understanding of what impact practice is, how it can work for them and how they can support their funded VCSE projects to implement better practice. It was envisaged that this strand of IINI would seek engagement with both independent funders (charitable trusts and foundations) operating in Northern Ireland and public sector bodies.

3.3.1. Independent funders

It was intended that IINI would facilitate the development of a shared measurement demonstration project among a cohort of funders; for example through a number of independent funders working on a common issue exploring and piloting how they might measure their work in the same way. The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) was commissioned by BCT in 2013 to carry out preparatory work to facilitate the delivery of this

aspect of the programme prior to the appointment of CENI as BCT's strategic delivery partner in November 2013. ACF continued to engage independent funders on the prospect of a shared measurement project until March 2014 at which point CENI took this area forward. While there was engagement with independent funders on the Funders' Principles, impact practice and exploration of the potential for a shared measurement approach, there appears to have been little appetite from the funders in working together on a demonstration project. A call for expressions of interest in December 2014 for a pilot project through the Northern Ireland Trust Group generated no response and it was only after further targeted follow up by CENI that an expression of interest was obtained from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). CFNI will be receiving support for a six month period under IINI from May 2015 to apply the Funders' Principles framework to its Telecommunity Fund.

3.3.2. Statutory funders

There were three main elements of work planned to be taken forward with statutory funders.

Firstly, it was planned to engage with public sector bodies to assess the applicability of the Funders' Principles to statutory funders. ACF was commissioned by BCT to lead on this area until the appointment of CENI. Following an initial presentation to the Public Sector Group¹⁹ a Public Sector Engagement Group (PSEG) comprising representatives from central and local government was established. In addition to providing a vehicle to create awareness of impact practice among public sector funders and identifying prospective leaders who could take forward demonstration projects, it was planned that the PSEG would consider and review the Funders' Principles. Subsequently the PSEG agreed that amending the Funders' Principles in advance of implementing demonstration projects was not necessary and that this matter should be revisited after the demonstration projects had been completed. Following on from the demonstration projects it has been concluded that the Funders' Principles are applicable to statutory funders and as such there is no need to refine these. However, the need for a step by step guide to applying the principles in that context has been identified.

Second it was planned to commission a scoping study on the needs, issues and challenges to implementing impact practice in statutory bodies. Thirdly and based on initial engagements it was planned to identify 'impact leaders' from within statutory bodies to develop two demonstration projects to implement impact practice principles within one of their programmes with consultancy support commissioned by CENI. A pragmatic decision was taken to roll both of these pieces of work into one contract. This was taken in the context of slippage in implementation largely due to what proved to be over-optimistic timescales for agreeing procurement arrangements with DSD and a growing understanding of the linked nature of both pieces of work. There was further slippage given the longer than anticipated contract negotiations with the successful bidder PWC. In addition, and in view of the fact that it was a requirement of DSD that its funding commitment be fully utilised by March 2015, a further pragmatic decision was taken to support up to five demonstration projects rather than the planned for two projects over a shorter time-scale: November 2014 to

¹⁹ The PSG is a mechanism for public sector co-ordination and consideration of voluntary and community related issues across central and local government. It meets three times a year and is chaired by the Director of the Voluntary and Community Unit within the Urban Regeneration and Community Development Directorate of the Department of Social Development.

March 2015. Projects were identified through the PSEG with expressions of interest sought and assessed against agreed criteria established by the PSEG. The five bodies which participated in the demonstration projects were:

- Belfast City Council (Community Development Grants Scheme);
- Department for Employment and Learning (United Youth Programme);
- Department for Social Development (Regional Infrastructure Support Programme using examples of Faith Based and Advice themes);
- NI Housing Executive (Community Grants Scheme); and
- Public Health Agency (Healthy Living Centres Programme).

The purpose of the support for statutory funders was to help them think about how they measure their own impact and how they can help grantees to do so. The stated desired outcome of the pilot was that 'a range of statutory funders to the VCSE sectors have adopted and can demonstrate how they are planning for impact in their core planning and programming systems'. Each of the five statutory demonstration projects were expected to:

- Complete the Measuring Up! tool;
- Develop a Theory of Change for their specific grant programme; and
- Develop an impact plan which would be implemented after the initial phase of the project (which ended on 31 March 2015).

It was envisaged that they would be made aware of the Impact Hub and the resources available there.

Table 3 Main Funder activities and outputs achieved by March 2015

Aim	Planned Work	Work Delivered	Outputs Achieved
<p>ACF Translating the ACF funders principles into practice through demonstration project with a cohort of funders</p> <p>Assess application of ACF funders principles to statutory funders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage ACF Funders for Impact Group to explore development of a 'shared approach' project among a cohort of ACF funders Support pilot demonstration project with a cohort of funders to show how ACF Funder Principles have been translated into practice Hold sessions with VCU/Joint Forum to present and review ACF Funder Principles Review applicability of ACF funder principles to statutory funders and make recommendations for amendments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is some variation between how it was planned to deliver the work and how this was actually delivered It was felt that the planned review of the Funders' Principles should be changed so that this takes place after the completion of demonstration projects rather than before Despite best efforts, it was not possible to gain the participation of independent funders in a shared measurement pilot project. One funder, CFNI did express interest at midpoint in year 2 of piloting impact practice in one grant programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping study of opportunities and barriers to applying an impact approach across the public sector published 5 demonstration projects undertaken and end of project learning exchange event held to share insights and next steps Shared learning paper on insights and lessons from the 5 demonstration projects will be published and disseminated at a Learning Exchange event in June 2015
<p>Consultants Scope needs of statutory funders, identify issues and challenges for impact practice</p> <p>Manage delivery of demonstration projects to test implementation of impact practice with range of funders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out scoping study of range of statutory funders on needs, issues and challenges to implementing impact practice Identify potential impact 'leaders' to take forward demonstration projects Commission consultancy to support planning and implementation of demonstration projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While it had been planned to support 2 statutory funder demonstration projects a decision was taken to support 5 projects A decision was taken to package the scoping study and demonstration project support into one tender rather than two 	
<p>CENI Programme leader</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conjunction with ACF and consultants engage with statutory funders on funders principles and to promote IINI In conjunction with BCT and participating funders commission and oversee consultancy support to help impact leaders implement demonstration projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was slippage in the implementation of planned work. An independent funder demonstration project expected to begin in early 2014 only emerged mid-2015. There were delays in the implementation of the various elements of the demonstration project strand including the appointment of consultants and the initiation of projects which were not begun until December 2014 running to March 2015 	

Overall, while there were some variations in how it was planned to deliver work under this strand, much of the hoped for outputs were delivered by the end of March 2015. Most of the variation in delivery was in relation to the planned work with statutory funders due to slippage in implementation. This meant that more demonstration projects than initially planned were delivered over a much shorter time-scale; three to four months. As a result the focus was on the planning stage of the impact cycle. While there was variation across demonstration projects, by the end of March 2015 all had made progress in the plan stage of the impact cycle as envisaged. In addition, there were examples of strong forward motion in or towards implementation (more detail follows in section 4). It is planned to disseminate learning from this strand to show how statutory funders have implemented impact principles in practice over the remainder of 2015. A paper on learning from the five statutory sector demonstration projects and the scoping study will be launched at the Learning Exchange event planned for June 2015 which will focus on learning to date from work with the VCSEs and statutory funders.

The one area where less progress was made was with independent funders. Despite the best efforts of ACF and CENI it was not possible to deliver the hoped for shared measurement demonstration project by a group of independent funders. There were different views reported as to why it had proved so difficult to deliver this strand of work. One view given was that while there were clear policy drivers for statutory bodies to engage with IINI and the strong leadership provided by VCU, there were no corresponding external drivers within the independent funders sector. Another view expressed was that independent funders may feel they have already embraced impact practice and did not feel they needed to engage. A further contributory factor reported was that the 'ask' of independent funders was perhaps on reflection not appropriately pitched. Specifically, the promotion of a shared measurement approach was perhaps a step too far for independent funders to contemplate at this stage and that more mileage might have been achieved through canvassing support for engagement with one funder developing a common approach within one or a number of funding programmes; for example developing a common outcomes framework for use by all grantees.

3.4. Inspiring Impact Exchange

The final pillar of the IINI programme was the Inspiring Impact Exchange, a strand of work to both promote the initiative and provide a mechanism to share learning on impact practice to key stakeholders including: funders, delivery bodies, impact practitioners and decision makers. Through a programme of events, workshops, seminars and study visits it was intended to share learning from the IINI programme and to facilitate access to leading edge developments in best practice locally and elsewhere.

Table 4 Main Impact Exchange activities and outputs achieved by March 2015

Aim	Planned Work	Work Delivered	Outputs Achieved
Disseminate learning emerging from IINI and facilitate access to best practice domestically, nationally and internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host annual IINI event • Host 2 sharing/learning workshops with participating VCSE delivery partners • Organise 1 study/exchange trip • Invite visiting experts/speakers to occasional seminars on current topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the exception of facilitating leading edge research, all activities delivered as planned • No significant variation to roll out of work though some slippage on delivery of public affairs strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Affairs strategy commissioned from Stratagem to guide public affairs work over September to May 2015 • Stakeholders mapped and key messages developed • Relationships built with wide range of political and other senior stakeholders
Facilitate leading edge research and development in best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential innovative practice and fund research to support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roundtable with NEET Strategy Forum members and other key stakeholders (Mar '14)
IINI is understood and supported by key stakeholders including funders, impact practitioners and decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop public affairs strategy and commission consultants to deliver aspects • Engage with policy makers and politicians via events and media 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar for key stakeholders on IiUK Measuring Up and Resource Hub • Survey of MLA views on current systems to assess impact of public sector funding investment in VCSEs • 'Sowing the Seeds of Change' event (Nov '14) showcasing strands of work supported by IINI and linking this with UK funders and groups • JETNI framework and learning report launched (Jan '15) • 'Investing in the Voluntary and Community Sector: Compliance v's Impact – Getting the Balance Right' Stormont Long Gallery event (Feb '14) targeted at MLAs and senior stakeholders • Study visit (Mar '15) for 9 statutory and VCSE participants to NPC Leading Impact conference • 2 Learning Exchange events (Mar '15) – for demonstration project staff (one for statutory funders, one for VCSE delivery partners)

A wide range of events have been delivered to date in line with initial plans. These have been very well attended by target stakeholders in all but one case (the Long Gallery event targeted at MLAs failed to attract any political engagement) and formal feedback sought from those attending indicates that these have been generally well received. While earlier events were focussed on raising awareness of the context for IINI, the need for good impact practice and the aims of the IINI programme, as the programme has rolled out there have been increasing opportunities to focus events on sharing learning between programme participants and between participants and key stakeholders. While it had been hoped to bring together the statutory funders and the 13 VCSE delivery partners to share learning in a joint Learning Exchange event by March 2015 (the conclusion of the funded statutory demonstration projects) it was decided that it would be more appropriate to hold separate learning events in the first instance and hold a joint event later in the year; a June event has now been scheduled.

One area of envisaged activity, facilitating leading edge research and developments in best practice, was not undertaken. It was reported that in the absence of any strong emerging opportunities or issues this area of work was not prioritised. The decision not to prioritise the support of research on innovative practice seems to have been appropriate. It seems likely that the potential outputs of a dedicated research strand with respect to the identification of innovative practice will emerge from the demonstration projects supported under IINI.

3.5. Governance and Management

Governance and Management arrangements for the IINI programme were implemented largely in line with what had been envisaged in the initial Development Plan for the programme.

3.5.1. Management

Following a competitive tendering process CENI was appointed as a delivery partner to support BCT with the strategic development and delivery of IINI. A Programme Leader based in CENI was recruited to lead on IINI and was responsible for the overall day to day management of the project and liaison with BCT through the BCT Director of Operations. The Programme Leader also represents IINI at meetings of the IIUK Board. Formal reporting arrangements including a formal written progress report compiled by the Programme Leader were established by BCT initially monthly and then quarterly. A regular report was also provided by the BCT Director of Operations to DSD.

In line with contractual arrangements CENI was responsible for delivering the IINI programme including commissioning and managing consultancy support. While CENI was responsible for delivering the programme, as previously outlined delivery of the work with statutory funders including the demonstration projects and scoping study was contracted out to PWC. Support to VCSEs was delivered by the 13 delivery partners supported by CENI which provided initial training and support materials. CENI designed and managed the content of the Impact Exchange strand of the programme including the production of learning reports and was responsible for developing internal monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

3.5.2. Governance

A sub-committee comprising two directors of the BCT board was established to oversee IINI with delegated authority to make decisions on the roll out of the programme including grant aid. The sub-committee has met on a regular basis and is attended by the BCT Director of Operations, the Programme Leader and Director of CENI. One of the two BCT director members of the sub-committee stood down from the Board of BCT in February 2015 and has now been replaced.

These BCT directors also represent BCT on an Advisory Sub-Committee. This was established to provide advice on the implementation of IINI and built on a previous Advisory Committee established by BCT to support the planning process for the programme. In addition to the two BCT directors, its membership is drawn from a range of VCSEs. The initial members were nominated by BCT. However, members have been encouraged to suggest additional members. The majority of the members are actively involved in IINI and while most are from the VCSE sectors two funders involved in the statutory demonstration projects are now members.

Table 5 Main management and governance activities and outputs achieved by March 2015

Aim	Planned Work	Work Delivered	Outputs Achieved
Contractual arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree contractual arrangements between BCT and CENI and between CENI and ACF • Identify any further contractual arrangements to be established for future support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities delivered as planned • No significant variation to roll out of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractual arrangements developed with range of external bodies • Operational Plan developed through negotiation between BCT and CENI • Programme Leader recruited • Management structures developed and implemented
Recruitment of programme leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for recruitment and induction made and implemented 		
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of monthly progress meetings between BCT and CENI • Establishment of BCT to meet on quarterly basis • Establishment of Advisory Subgroup • Attend meetings of IIUK 		

3.6. Marketing, Communications and Evaluation

Arrangements for marketing and communications were largely implemented in line with what had been envisaged in the Development Plan. BCT and CENI agreed a marketing and communications protocol as part of the contractual arrangements. Events have been generally well attended and key messages are being disseminated through these, IINI's website and social media.

CENI has put in place an internal evaluation process and will use data collected to produce papers on the key learning points from IINI later in 2015. An external evaluation was commissioned in mid-2014 and in addition to this interim report, a final report will be

produced by the end of the programme in December 2015. In terms of evaluation, the only significant departure from what was planned was a decision not to commission a follow up study to a CENI review of evaluation practice in the voluntary and community sector carried out in 2009 and published in 2010²⁰. A decision was taken at the early stages of programme implementation that this study would not be necessary. It was felt that the completion of the Measuring Up! tool by 100 plus organisations would be a sufficient source of baseline data on impact practice at the outset of IINI.

²⁰ CENI (2010). *Measuring Up: A review of evaluation practice in the voluntary and community sector*. Belfast, CENI.

Table 6 Main marketing and communications activities and outputs achieved by March 2015

Aim	Planned Work	Work Delivered	Outputs Achieved
Marketing and Communications			
Planning for marketing and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree communications/marketing strategy, roles, development and content of social media, core messages and target audiences • Produce branded promotional materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities delivered as planned • Some variation to roll out of work and it was decided that one element, an update to a baseline study, would not be followed up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of IINI website (1416 visitors in 2014; 827 to May 2015) and twitter presence (500+ followers by Mar '15) • Production of regular e-letter to database of around 800 subscribers
Launch of IINI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-launch announce appointment of CENI as BCT strategic partner and undertake initial awareness raising of IINI through social media • Plan for and host launch and follow up promotion 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of a range of briefing papers distributed at events and meetings • Launch of IINI (Mar '14) • Promotion of IIUK Measuring Up! tool and II Resource Hub
Supporting delivery of programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of VCSE support programme and impact exchange • Production and promotion of materials, case studies and results of annual reviews/evaluation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of MLA briefing papers • Development and use of video animation used to convey key IINI messages • 4 VCSE delivery partners profiled on IINI website • 2 learning papers to be produced and launched at Impact Exchange Learning event in June '15 • Case studies to be prepared and published later in 2015
Evaluation			
Plan and implement formative evaluation of IINI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and implement internal formative evaluation and prepare annual review report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some variation between how it was planned to deliver the work and how this was actually delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal evaluation will inform production of learning reports and case studies to be published later in '15
Support external summative evaluation of IINI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop terms of reference and commission external evaluation • Develop terms of reference and commission follow up of 2010 baseline study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision taken not to commission a follow up to 2010 baseline study • Decision taken to tender for an external formative evaluation though terms of reference includes summative elements. An interim report will be produced in May '15 and a final report in Dec '15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interim external evaluation report is being completed and will be submitted in May '15 and a final report by Dec '15

3.7. Extent to which expected outputs and processes have been delivered

While there were some delays to the initiation of some of the planned activities and some variation between how it was planned to deliver aspects of the programme and how this was ultimately delivered, overall the majority of planned activities, processes and outputs have been delivered or are on course for completion by the end of 2015.

An important contributory factor in this was the extensive planning undertaken by BCT in conjunction with CENI to operationalise the initial Development Plan. While the pre-contract negotiations between BCT and CENI took longer than envisaged, conducted over a three month period from August to September 2013, it appears that this time was well spent in refining the broad themes set out in the Development Plan and mapping out a well-planned and executed programme.

Delays in the implementation of some aspects of the programme, in particular the statutory funder demonstration projects, appear to have been largely beyond the control of IINI. Appropriate steps were taken to make changes to manage the impact of these delays through supporting a larger number of pilot projects over a shorter period of time. While this meant that IINI had wider reach working with a larger number of impact leaders across the public sector albeit over a much shorter timeline, this did mean that the focus was on the planning stage of the impact cycle. By the end of March 2015 all projects had developed impact plans and there were examples of strong forward motion in or towards implementation. However, at this stage it is too early to assess the extent to which these plans will be implemented in the future.

A small number of planned for activities were not undertaken though there was a clear rationale for these decisions.

While there was a focus on the delivery of the operational plan, a flexibility of approach was in evidence enabling good emerging opportunities such as the JET initiative to be incorporated. This flexibility was required in response to slippage of timelines in some areas to ensure the delivery of outputs within the timeframe for the programme.

The one area in which it has not been possible to make significant progress has been engaging independent funders in a shared measurement project. Despite significant input from IINI it did not prove possible to create sufficient impetus to bring together a group of funders interested in piloting a joint project. CENI was successful in engaging CFNI in piloting an impact approach in one of its funding programmes and a six month project is now underway. Following on from the completion and distillation of learning from the CFNI project, there may be merit in a process of reflection with independent funders, possibly using the ACF NI funders group as a mechanism, to discuss outcomes from the CFNI study and how independent funders might engage substantively with impact focussed funding approaches through their work.

4. Findings: Delivery of outcomes

4.1. Overview of progress

The central question for this interim evaluation to address was:

'Is this programme - and the way BCT have contracted CENI to deliver - making a difference: to awareness, and to beginnings of change in practice'.

With this focus on awareness and beginnings, the idea was to support planning for impact practice, as opposed to complete implementation of the *Plan, Do, Assess, Review* cycle. The programme outcomes were set with that in mind. It was agreed that the interim evaluation report should focus largely on the Level One Outcomes which focus on support, understanding and access expected to result directly from activities undertaken. This section focuses mainly on to what extent progress has been made towards the Level One outcomes across the three pillars of the programme: Support to VCSE; Engagement with Funders; Impact Exchange. We will address, where appropriate, Level 2 Outcomes which focus on adoption and implementation expected to flow from the achievement of Level One outcomes, although it was agreed that the final evaluation will be best placed to consider these as the programme nears completion. It was agreed that the Level 3 Outcomes, which focus on impact on clients, community and policy, fall beyond the timeframe of the external evaluation.

The table which follows sets out in summary form our assessment of the extent to which progress has been made to date on the expected outcomes for the programme. Where there has been evidence of progress in relation to Level Two Outcomes these have also been reported. Drawing on this, a themed discussion is set out which considers what the key learnings have been from the programme to date in terms of:

- Impact to date
- Most effective approaches
- Enablers
- Challenges.

Table 7 Progress on level one outcomes (support, understanding and access)

Outcomes	Extent to which this outcome has been achieved
VCSEs and funders are more aware of and better understand impact practice	Reports, interviews, input at Exchange events and at the Advisory Group show that the 13 VCSE delivery partners, the six JET pilot participants and funders who have engaged with the programme are more aware of and better understand impact practice.
VCSEs have improved access to appropriate support	The 13 VCSE organisations who engaged have reported good access to support from CENI through funding, one-to-one support and events. They in turn are providing support to their member organisations in the form of one-to-one mentoring, holding workshops and seminars, and some are providing guidance notes on how they might build impact practice into their work. Support was provided to six member organisations of the NEET Strategy Forum to engage in the JET pilot. Eight further organisations embarked on the pilot unsupported due to resource constraints, but were unable to progress. The support for the six pilot organisations is now at an end, and the NEET Strategy Forum are seeking ways to support informal mentoring between the pilot organisations and others.
VCSEs have improved skills and knowledge in planning, doing, assessing and reviewing	The 13 VCSE delivery partners report improved skills in reviewing and planning and increased knowledge about doing, assessing and reviewing, and inputs at the JET NI launch suggests that this also extends to the six JET pilot organisations. It is important to bear in mind that the aim of this pilot was to enable organisations to get to planning stage, so they are not at the stage of doing, assessing and reviewing.
Funders, government policy makers and economists formally engage with the initiative	<p>Five statutory funders have formally engaged with the initiative by putting forward key funding streams as demonstration projects. Representatives of demonstration projects including VCU (DSD) have also engaged in the Advisory Group. Policy makers for example from DSD and DEL have engaged by attending the 7 November 2014 Exchange event. Inputs at meetings, interviews and events suggest engagement with and interest in impact practice and how it can support more effective planning and delivery. However, as the statutory demonstration projects ended on 31 March 2015, it remains unclear what the mechanisms will be for formal engagement to continue.</p> <p>The Exchange event in February 2014 was targeted at MLAs and senior stakeholders, but, whilst well attended, did not succeed in attracting any politicians.</p> <p>Engaging independent funders has proved a challenge with only one independent funder having formally engaged to undertake a demonstration project – this is the CFNI Telecommunity Fund.</p>
Demonstration projects contribute to understanding and development of impact practice	Those personnel engaged in demonstration projects have showed an understanding of impact practice and its relevance to their work as evidenced by interviews and inputs at the March Exchange Events and at the Advisory Group. However, it is not clear to what extent the development of impact practice will continue as the support programme for statutory demonstration projects ended on 31 March 2015.
New district councils understand impact practice and engage with the initiative	One District Council (Belfast City Council) has engaged with the initiative through its Community Development Grants Scheme, and input at the Exchange Event suggests an understanding of and engagement with the initiative. Whilst Belfast City Council often leads on practice in many areas, the model still needs to embed within this fund, this department, and within the Council at a strategic level, as well widening out to the other Councils.
Barriers to good practice are identified and mitigated	A number of barriers to good impact practice have been identified through interviews, exchange events and at the Advisory Group, as well as in the draft Learning Report. Some barriers such as constraints on timelines have been able to be mitigated, while other barriers have been identified which are beyond the scope of the programme or indeed participating organisations and are unable to be mitigated, the most notable of these being uncertainty over funding and contracts.

VCSEs, funders and evaluators have access to an independent marketplace for tools and systems	An online hub is available offering a range of tools and systems. JET NI tools and guidance have been made available and their use supported. Exchange events have been held to enable exchange of learning. Interviews and input at Exchange events suggests that some organisations, particularly VCSE members, are adapting guidance to ensure that they are customised to the needs of their members.
VCSEs, funders and evaluators have access to a forum for sharing, development and learning	The key forums for sharing, learning and development have been the events, in particular the JET NI launch event, the Feb 2014 Stormont event, the March 2015 Exchange Events and the Advisory Group meetings. Further events are planned for June 2015 and Autumn 2015 which will bring together VCSE and funders.
Evidence of changes in impact practice	The evaluation has found evidence of the beginnings of change in impact practice across VCSE lead organisations, JET pilot organisations and in some statutory demonstration projects. These changes are outlined in section 4.2 and 4.3 below.

The findings suggest that at the interim stage, progress is being made towards all Level One outcomes, with the exception of engagement with independent funders, in that there is awareness, engagement, increase in skills and knowledge and the beginnings of change in practice. Exchange of learning is taking place, and there is some engagement with the Impact Hub. Further discussion of findings as well as conclusions follow in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 8 Progress on level two outcomes (adoption and implementation)

Outcomes	Extent to which this outcome has been achieved
VCSEs and funders routinely build impact practice into planning	<p>Some of the 13 VCSE umbrella organisations indicate that they already have built impact practice into their planning, or intend to: e.g. NICVA and Sported. It was suggested that all six JET pilot organisations intend to build impact practice into planning. Some of the five statutory demonstration projects also indicate that they have done so or intend to, such as VCU’s Regional Infrastructure Support Programme and DEL’s United Youth programme.</p> <p>However it is too early to say unequivocally that VCSEs and funders routinely build impact practice into planning.</p> <p>It is also too early to say to what extent to which the organisations supported by the VCSE delivery partners, or the organisations funded by the statutory sector demonstration projects, routinely build impact practice into their planning.</p>
VCSEs implement good practice across all their activities	<p>Where it is built into planning the reported aim is to implement good impact project across all activities. However it is too early in the process to say that any implement good impact practice across all their activities as the emphasis of this phase has been on planning rather than implementation.</p>
VCSEs can understand, access available tools and systems and adopt appropriate approaches to collecting and using evidence	<p>Some VCSEs have talked about adopting or adapting tools and systems but it is too early to say that all tools are understood or that appropriate approaches to collecting and using evidence are in place. Some have suggested that available tools and systems still require amendment to have a greater NI focus, including offering links to data sources in NI. It has also been suggested that some tools may be too costly for small VCSE organisations. The JET NI organisations have all accessed the JET NI shared measurement tool and it has informed their impact practice planning.</p>
Funders understand and adopt the Funders’ Principles as a means of improving their own impact practice	<p>Statutory funders appear to have understood and adopted the Funders’ Principles as the PSEG has agreed on reflection that they do not need to be reviewed or adapted to suit public sector funders, as was initially envisaged, as they are considered to suit them already.</p> <p>As regards independent funders, while it has been suggested to us through interviews that many independent funders have embraced the Funders’ Principles, there is no evidence that this has translated into their adoption as a means of improving impact practice across independent funders, particularly as only one independent funder has recently joined the programme.</p>
Funders support VCSEs to improve their impact practice	<p>Some statutory funders are already prompting VCSEs whom they fund to consider impact in their work and are working with them to support them to do so (e.g. DSD VCU, DEL United Youth).</p>
Impact practice is increasingly embedded in the VCSE sector	<p>The concept has been introduced, supported, initiated and welcomed by the 13 VCSEs and the six JET pilot organisations, but interviews and reports suggest that it is not yet embedded.</p>

The findings suggest that at the interim stage, progress towards Level Two outcomes is limited, as there is insufficient evidence to suggest that impact practice has been adopted and implemented to the extent that is routinely embedded across all activities or across VCSE and public sector funders. Further discussion of findings as well as conclusions follow.

4.2. VCSE programme

4.2.1. Impact to date

This section focuses on the first element of the IINI programme, the support to VCSE organisations. We have also included discussion of the third element of the IINI programme (Impact Exchange, including the Impact Hub and the Exchange Events) as they complement the examination of the Support to VCSE element of the programme.

While the VCSE element of the programme still remains fairly new and albeit that this is an interim report, we have considered it important, given the programme's focus on impact, to reflect as far as possible on the impact the programme has had to date. Internal reports, interviews, and inputs at events suggest that the programme has already had some impact on the 13 VCSE delivery partners, and to some degree on the organisations they are supporting, inasmuch as awareness appears to have increased and in some cases, aspects of planning and reviewing have changed. In a small number of cases, a wider impact has also been suggested.

Impact on VCSE delivery partners

Some of the 13 delivery partners report having tested the IINI approach by embarking on it themselves. Initially, the purpose of this was to familiarise themselves with the available information resources and tools (the Code of Impact Practice, the Measuring Up! diagnostic etc.) This has led to delivery partners developing their own Theory of Change with a number reporting they were building impact practice into strategic planning. They had found great value in the very visual report that Measuring Up! offers which was able to be used in their Strategic Plans and in funding applications.

Organisations attending the VCSE Exchange event in March 2015 felt that their engagement with the Inspiring Impact tools had prompted them to look at their own practice and had provided lead organisations with a greater focus, with many revisiting their mission and core work.

Some of the 13 delivery partners felt that the work had enabled them to build better relationships with their member groups, and to get a better insight into them. For others, it had brought them into contact with organisations they would not normally have contact with.

Impact on supported groups

All delivery partners experienced an appetite for this approach among their supported groups, with a general welcome for the idea of measuring the difference they were making in their work. While many of the 13 organisations reported, through internal reports, interviews with lead organisations and attendance at Exchange events, that the process was challenging and time-consuming, many of the VCSE delivery partners also reported important impacts on their supported groups.

One delivery partner reported: *'This has given our groups clarity and focus and the impetus to change. They have a commitment to impact in the longer term – this is the kick start of a longer piece of work – they want to collectively keep doing this'*.

A number of delivery partners commented that by bringing groups together in the programme, groups had acquired the ability to connect to the *'bigger picture'* and had

confidence or affirmation as a result. Many said that they would be going back to their organisations and sharing the learning, therefore leading to a multiplier effect.

Another delivery partner working with small, volunteer led groups reported IINI had enabled these groups to engage with the concept of impact practice for the first time.

There was general agreement at the VCSE Exchange Event in March 2015 that there was increased knowledge and understanding of impact practice for those who did not have knowledge of it before. Some of the 13 delivery partners discovered that their supported organisations did not have a vision, mission, or Theory of Change. There were suggestions that both VCSE delivery partners and some supported organisations plan better, indicating a strong sense of the link between impact measurement, planning and practice.

For the six member groups of the NEET Strategy Forum who were supported to undertake the JET pilot, all had completed their Measuring Up! assessment, and all had produced a Theory of Change. A framework for JET specially adapted for Northern Ireland has been published alongside case studies. It was suggested that the key impacts of the JET pilot have been:

- The availability of a shared measurement framework and therefore a common language for organisations working with young people classified as NEET, which is customised to take account of factors impacting on young people in Northern Ireland. For example, five organisations chose to focus on measuring increased self-confidence, and despite being funded by different funders, are all using the same tool to evaluate impact, which, it was suggested, adds robustness and comparability;
- Availability of a range of free tools associated with JET;
- Increased awareness and interest in the concept of co-design;
- It has enabled organisations to become clearer about where their intervention sits on the employability journey, thereby enabling the young people they support to be clear about where they are on their journey;
- It has enabled participating organisations to identify gaps in provision;
- It allows each stage of intervention to be valued equally;
- It has pushed the pilot groups to clarify whether or not they are delivering the outcomes they think they are delivering, and opens a space to ask the question '*should we be doing something different?*' This was seen as an impetus to developing best practice;
- The inclusion of learning exchange about JET on the agenda of a newly established practitioners group. The idea is to establish a buddying system whereby those who have completed the JET pilot will mentor others;
- It was suggested that engagement with the JET pilot enabled conversations with funders, not least DEL's United Youth programme and it was considered that this helped to inform their approach to developing the United Youth programme. This coincided with United Youth's engagement in IINI as a demonstration project.

Wider impact

In addition to impact on the 13 VCSE delivery partners and the organisations and groups they are supporting, wider impacts were reported in terms of dissemination and influence.

One delivery partner reported now sharing the learning from IINI across their organisation at a UK level through a mini pilot project in England and the sharing of resources with two English groups.

The JET Framework has also had a wider impact. For example, DEL's United Youth programme, which is also a demonstration project for IINI, has incorporated many elements of the JET framework into its overarching outcomes framework. CENI's most recent quarterly report notes that the JET pilot report has been launched and JET materials have been shared with Big Lottery Fund which is referencing it in grantee workshops within the Empowering Young People programme.

Another delivery partner has engaged a Health Trust with the concept of impact practice through a pilot project of the Trust with a view to rolling out to other Trusts.

Understanding of and engagement with the concept

The evaluators found, through reports, events and interviews, that the concept of impact practice was well understood. In other words, speakers and interviewees showed an awareness not only of the importance of a shift to measuring impact rather than activity, but also an awareness of the value of focusing on impact in informing planning and doing. Many of the VCSE delivery partners valued the concept as enabling them to refocus (or even interrogate) mission and function. As value-driven organisations this was considered essential. All 13 delivery partners reported that the organisations they were supporting were responding positively to the concept.

While the concept tended to be embraced, VCSE leaders reported that some of the organisations they were supporting still saw it as *'bolt-on'* or an additional piece of work as opposed to a *'way of working'*. For example, one delivery partner recognised that the way that they had initially communicated the programme to their members may have made it sound like *'another ask'*. They revisited their messaging, and attracted five groups to participate. That said, the voluntary nature of the local groups has meant that it continues to be difficult for groups to fully engage, and new ways are being sought to offer *'simple, time efficient methods of impact practice and how to embed them into their everyday management activities'*.

For those who recognised impact practice as a way of working right through from *Planning, Doing, Assessing and Reviewing*, the challenge was that this therefore required engagement and support not just from programme evaluators, but from planners, programme designers, systems designers, auditors and others – in other words from the whole organisation. In other words, whether a bolt-on, or a way of working, there was recognition that embracing the concept and embedding it in practice required time and commitment.

Enablers

For the aspects of the programme that were most successful, a number of factors were felt to have contributed.

i) Confluence with current developments

The confluence with current governmental and organisational trends towards measuring outcomes, as outlined in Section 2.2.1 above, has meant that many groups and

organisations are familiar to some degree with the concept of measuring outcomes, and have been “warmed up” for the progression from measuring outcomes, to planning and delivering for impact, and assessing and reviewing impact to inform future plans and delivery.

ii) Leading by example

It was considered that supported organisations had benefited from the example set by VCSE delivery partners offering themselves as a worked example – in other words, completing Measuring Up! and sharing their results. For example, a number of delivery partners had worked through the Measuring Up! tool and were able to share their report and Action Plan. There was agreement that this reassured groups and gave them confidence that even lead organisations could fall short in some areas. It was reported by one delivery partner that doing this was *‘a good way to face up to the fact that we weren’t measuring impact organisationally’*. There was a shared view among lead organisations that it was *‘good for others to see we’re not perfect’*.

A further delivery partner reported that their sessions had been invigorated considerably from shared examples and case studies from organisations who had progressed further, not least from the JET programme.

iii) Support

There is no doubt that having direct support available has been one of the major factors for the programme’s successes to date. Without exception, the 13 VCSE delivery partners talked about the importance of being able to provide a range of support measures to their groups, and indeed many talked about the demand they faced for more support than they had originally planned to provide. There were a number of comments suggesting that groups needed at a minimum mentor / facilitator support to work through the initial documents and tools – even before the implementation stage.

It was reported that all six member groups of the NEET Strategy Forum who were supported to undertake the JET pilot completed their Measuring Up! self assessment, and produced a Theory of Change, whereas none of the eight members of the Forum who attempted the pilot without support (due to the resource limitations of the programme), managed to complete the Theory of Change, suggesting that the support provided was critical to enabling groups to embrace the concept and to plan for practice change.

iv) Flexibility and initiative

It was clear from reports, interviews and events that the 13 delivery partners had offered a broad mix of support responsive to the needs of their groups. In addition to offering one-to-one support, workshops, seminars, and distance support, many are, on their own initiative, also developing ways to customise the information in the way that best suits their groups. Examples include the development of tailored: Learning Logs; a guide for groups using simple language; an impact plan template; and a communication book to record service user comments. In addition, collaborative approaches have been used where needed: for example NICVA, CO3 and Volunteer Now co-ordinated their masterclasses so as not to duplicate work, and to avoid targeting the same groups.

v) Language

Aspects of the language of IINI were found to be simple and easy to follow. In particular it was suggested at the Exchange Event that many groups found the concept of *Plan, Do, Assess, Review* very straightforward.

vi) Code of Good Impact Practice

Some delivery partners reported that the Code of Good Impact Practice was useful. One partner placed a key focus on getting groups to sign up to this with the result that 18 out of their 20 participating groups have signed up. They considered it essential to help groups understand the language before proceeding.

vii) Aspects of Measuring Up! self assessment diagnostic

For those who had completed Measuring Up!, the feedback was largely positive. The most useful aspects were:

- It asks the right questions;
- It uses a traffic light system of scoring which provides a very visual report;
- It turns the responses into an Action Plan;
- It can be completed by members of an organisation logging in remotely: there is no need for everyone to be in the same place;
- The process is clear and straightforward, step by step and guidance notes good; and
- People can use the findings in funding applications.

viii) Aspects of the Impact Hub

Those who had engaged with the Hub generally found it useful as it offered a good range of data measuring tools, and pushed organisations to dedicate time for completion. NICVA reported that it had had a high number of views on the NICVA website.

4.2.2. Challenges/barriers in VCSE programme

There were some challenges faced during the programme, and some barriers to progress were identified. These are outlined below.

i) Time

Many of the lead organisations cited the time factor as a challenge for a number of reasons:

- A common theme to emerge in interviews, reports and events was that given the nature of the programme, the time allocated was too short. This was exacerbated by the sense that once this initial phase (completing Measuring Up! and putting an Action Plan in place) was over, there was no certainty about how the implementation phase would be supported. As one organisation put it: *'There's concern that once you have got the ball rolling, it's over'*.
- There was a widely shared view that given the funding crisis currently facing voluntary and community organisations (see below) that organisations were much less likely to be able to devote the time to anything which might seem like additional work.
- There was concern that the statutory demonstration programme and VCSE programme were on different timelines, with the statutory funders' programme ending 31 March 2015. It was considered that the link between statutory and voluntary sector was critical to achieving real change and that it was essential to influence public sector thinking and reform on impact practice.

ii) Funders - in or out?

This tied in with another widely shared view that impact practice would only embed if VCSE organisations feel that funders *'are going down the same railway track'*. As one contributor put it: *'We would like funders to be using the same language as us – commonality and consistency'*. Frustration was expressed that some government reporting mechanisms can stifle any attempts to focus on outcomes / impact. Overall, there was concern that if funders do not embrace this, it will be a major barrier to VCSE organisations embracing it. For this reason, it was felt that impact practice needs to be both top down and bottom up, hence the need to continue the connection between statutory funders, VCSE stakeholders and of course independent funders.

iii) The funding situation

As mentioned above, the funding crisis was raised by a number of lead organisations as a major barrier to engaging their groups in IINI. As one contributor put it: *'It's hard to think about 5-year impact when you're fighting for survival and may have no job in two weeks time!'*

One delivery partner's interim report summed up a situation acknowledged by many of the 13 lead organisations: *'the chaos and uncertainty that is currently being experienced as a result of government funding pressures (e.g. organisations are uncertain if their funding will continue after 31.3.15 and paid staff have been put on protective notice) has led, in some cases, to a reluctance to engage in activities until they know their future is reasonably secure'*.

It was also noted that funding pressures have been exacerbated by the climate of change engendered by Local Government Reform, with uncertainty about Council funding for community and voluntary activity, Community Planning and Charity Commission requirements.

iv) Aspects of Measuring Up

While it was reported that those who have completed the Measuring Up! diagnostic have generally found it to be useful, only a proportion of supported groups have completed it and generated the resultant Action Plans. As at 30 March 2015, 36 out of 166 Impact Plans were completed. Interviews, reports and input at events raised a number of aspects of Measuring Up! which it was suggested could be off-putting to groups, particularly to smaller, volunteer-led groups:

- It takes too much time for smaller groups, and for larger organisations, it may be easier to do it for one project than for whole organisation;
- The language may be too daunting for smaller groups;
- There are repetitive questions;
- Guidance notes look GB focused; and
- Access to IT and some basic skills are needed – this can be a challenge for groups who are not IT literate, and who do not have access to equipment.

v) Aspects of Impact Hub

While there was recognition that the Hub was a useful resource offering many tools, it was also suggested that many groups were not yet in a place to engage fully with this, and that there were some aspects which could be off-putting:

- Hub looks GB focussed;
- Prices of some tools prohibitive;
- Some tools not relevant to NI – Office for National Statistics is referred to for example, but not NISRA or NINIS, the Northern Ireland official statistics sites;
- Some omissions were fed back to the Hub, but the necessary changes had not been made; and
- One organisation had experienced some practical difficulties with the website.

vi) Language

There was a view that while the Code of Good Impact Practice and Measuring Up! were largely useful, the language of the programme could be challenging. One group reported receiving comments from their supported groups about *'the terminology of impact being confusing, unspecific and being academic rather than about practical implementation'*.

Spotted NI reported that the Code document had been very hard for their voluntary groups to digest and apply. Others concurred, saying that their groups had found the Code too academic, with some having to *'translate'* it for their groups.

Some also suggested that the Theory of Change was difficult to grasp, as well as the term Logic Model.

Overall, there was a shared view that appropriate language and messaging was important and there was a need not to oversaturate small, volunteer-led groups with inaccessible or overcomplicated terminology.

vii) Proportionality

The view that adopting impact practice should be proportionate arose in interviews, reports, and at events. A concern was expressed that *'this could become disproportionate to what you do'*. The importance was stressed of *'keeping what you measure relevant to your Strategic Plan, Mission, Aims and Objectives'*. This might mean that small organisations begin by selecting for example three key outcomes to measure, and find a short and simple way to measure and record, ensuring that they utilise findings to inform their future plan.

viii) Organisational buy-in and culture change

The majority of contributors spoke of the importance of securing organisational buy-in if impact practice was to become a way of working across the organisation, rather than a bolt-on evaluation tool. Two delivery partners spoke of the challenge of achieving organisational buy-in, commitment and motivation, even within their own organisations. There was a shared view that for impact practice to embed, there needed to be both cultural and attitudinal change.

ix) Capacity and skills

Whilst there was broad agreement that groups and organisations needed support to get impact practice into their organisations, ultimately they would need the capacity and skills to continue it themselves. Many VCSE delivery partners had found that this was difficult for small, volunteer-led and older people's groups, and for frontline staff who are generally more used to being asked to focus on delivery rather than impact.

As one delivery partner put it: *'challenges are in relation to the confidence of groups to engage and understand the Inspiring Impact process, issues of capacity, resources: time commitments for both volunteers and staff, an issue perhaps more pertinent to older people is IT literacy'*.

x) IT resources and skills

Many VCSE delivery partners talked about the need for IT resources and skills, even for the smallest organisations, if they are going to be able to embrace impact practice. There was a view that there was a need for reliable, effective IT systems to make the information amenable to collation and analysis. This was felt to require investment to develop user friendly, accessible and affordable systems. Organisations would also need to know how to access external data. It was considered that even groups who collect data on paper ultimately need a system if they are going to regularly analyse and update that data.

4.2.3. VCSE programme: conclusions

The findings suggest that progress has been made in creating awareness of impact practice across the 13 VCSE Delivery Partners. The beginnings of change in practice are in evidence for many of the 13. However, for the 166 supported groups, while reports suggest that awareness has been created, and an appetite for the concept generated, it has not always been easy for particularly small, volunteer-led groups to engage, and it remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which the change in practice is beginning. It is expected that there will be more evidence for this towards the end of the programme.

4.3. Engagement with funders

4.3.1. Introduction

This section discusses outcomes for the second element of the IINI programme, namely engagement with funders. The original aim was to engage a small number of public sector demonstration projects, and a small number of independent funder demonstration projects. However, the core focus of this section is on the statutory sector demonstration projects, because, as was noted earlier, only one independent funder (the Community Foundation NI Telecommunity Fund) has to date engaged with the IINI programme. An action plan to support this demonstration project has been developed and agreed and sessions held with staff and CFNI trustees. As its engagement is at an early stage, outcomes have not yet been achieved for this aspect of IINI. While there may be a number of reasons for the reticence of independent funders to engage in the model, it seems likely that the key reasons may be:

- A desire to hold on to independence: it was suggested there may be concern that agreeing to engage in a shared measurement approach could constrain the ability of funders to measure what they want to measure in their own way;

- Similarly, there may be concern that the concept of shared measurement could constrain the individuality and difference of independent funders, by in some way homogenising their work;
- It was suggested that, because impact practice is considered to require systems change, that it may feel like a large task to undertake, particularly for large funders who have complex systems in place. Conversely, it may be that for smaller funders, the initial investment of time required to introduce impact practice may feel prohibitive or disproportionate to the size of their funding programmes.

The remainder of this section therefore focuses on the public sector demonstration projects. We have also included discussion of the third element of the IINI programme (Impact Exchange, including the Impact Hub and the Exchange Events) as they complement the examination of the Engagement with Funders element of the programme.

4.3.2. Impact to date

Because this programme is about impact, it was considered important to reflect on the impact the programme has had to date: in other words, given that the five projects have all completed the above steps, what difference has it made to them? Internal reports, interviews, and inputs at an Exchange Event (March 2015) suggest that the programme has already had an impact to some degree on the five statutory demonstration projects. All had developed an implementation plan to move towards a more impact focussed funding approach and there were examples of strong forward motion in or towards implementation. However, at this stage it is too early to assess the extent to which these plans will be implemented. A paper on learning from the five statutory sector demonstration projects and the scoping study will be launched at the Learning Exchange event planned for June 2015 which will focus on learning to date from work with the VCSEs and statutory funders.

i) Impact on participating statutory funders

Internal reports, interviews and input at the Statutory Exchange Event suggest an increased level of awareness and understanding of impact practice among those involved in the demonstration projects. It was suggested that engaging in this process had prompted conversations and questions among the five demonstration projects such as:

- Are we doing the right thing?
- Is grant support the right mechanism?
- How might resources be used more effectively (e.g. through direct delivery rather than grants).

It was suggested that engagement had also enabled discussions about data such as *'why are we collecting this information if we don't use it?'*

While most demonstration projects focussed on the planning phase one contributor considered that the programme had *'triggered challenging conversations that were never had before for many public sector staff'* and that an understanding was growing about the fact that current reporting processes should not replace the need to demonstrate impact. For one participant, engagement in the programme has *'triggered a whole new way of thinking for those involved – challenging what they have always done and thought – the 'so what' question'*.

CENI has suggested that the funders have shifted from asking 'how can we get organisations to do this' to asking 'how can we do it'. This they consider to be the transformative aspect of the programme – in doing it themselves, funders change their own practice and give a lead to their grantees.

Based on the information reviewed to date from the pilot projects, it would appear that more progress has been made in some demonstration projects than others. However, there do seem to be examples of changes made across all projects. Some examples follow of the type of changes demonstration projects have made as a result of engaging in IINI.

DSD VCU

VCU focused on the support from the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme to CCWA (Churches Community Work Alliance) and Advice groups. They completed the Measuring Up! tool, and saw completing the Theory of Change and building the outcomes they wanted to achieve as a key tasks for VCU. Changes include:

- Greater clarity on what VCU is trying to achieve by supporting groups;
- A co-designed Theory of Change with CCWA;
- A new funding contract and template being piloted underpinned by the Theory of Change.

It also looks likely that the new approach will reduce bureaucracy as CCWA will no longer be reporting on a wide range of objectives (reducing a large number of objectives to 5 outcomes). VCU is now moving on to develop indicators with support from CENI, and will then progress to base-lining. Monitoring arrangements have changed accordingly.

DEL United Youth

This programme is a headline action under the *Together Building a United Community*²¹ strategy which proposes 10,000 places on programmes for young people classified as NEET aged 16-24 years. There was a desire from the outset to engage more with stakeholders, particularly young people, in programme design, and IINI fitted well with that impetus. Changes include:

- Programme design has been informed by a focus on outcomes;
- An application process designed with impact practice in mind; and
- Work is progressing on adapting the Young Foundation's *Framework of Outcomes for Young People*²² with the intention of developing some consistency in reporting impact across its funded groups.

Belfast City Council Capacity Building Grants Programme

BCC was unable to apply the IINI approach directly to grantees in this round of grant-making, as they were in the process of a live application round when they joined the programme. However, they reported that using the Measuring Up! tool and developing a Theory of Change has helped to:

- Identify challenges and barriers in-house;

²¹ See <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community>

²² McNeil et al. July 2012. See <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people-July-2012.pdf>

- Identify champions;
- Raise awareness of the need to work with colleagues so as to build capacity, as this was felt to be an issue in the public sector as well as in the voluntary sector.

NIHE Landlord Services Division Community Grants Scheme

NIHE completed the Measuring Up! diagnostic and completed a Theory of Change with the support of PWC.

It was reported that a clearer distinction has been made between short-term impacts and medium to long-term projections.

PHA Healthy Living Centres

PHA invests £1.2m in 14 Healthy Living Centres, all of which are very different from each other. PHA is required to comply with procurement protocols, and so increasingly needs to know what it is that the Centres need to deliver, and to have some framework around the work. To this end, the Centres have embarked on a “Strengthening Commonalities” programme which the impact practice approach complements. Stakeholders have been involved in the Theory of Change process.

ii) Wider impact

In addition to impact in the five demonstration projects, potential wider impacts were reported in terms of dissemination and influence.

CENI reported that the IINI programme has ongoing engagement with the Public Sector Group on Voluntary and Community Matters²³ and the Joint Government / Voluntary and Community Sector Forum²⁴ in linking in with the Addressing Bureaucracy agenda and that it has influenced the Addressing Bureaucracy project to change its central reporting template from an outputs to an outcomes focus.

While the demonstration project in Belfast City Council was focused on a relatively small scale funding programme (£650,000) Community Planning could present an opportunity for introducing impact practice.

iii) Understanding of and engagement with the concept

Some contributors who have connections with IIUK suggest that IINI is considered to be ahead of the UK in term of the level of engagement of public sector funders, with the IIUK programme looking to NI for learning.

Indeed, the evaluators found, through reports, events and interviews, that the concept of impact practice appeared to be welcomed and well understood by those engaged in the public sector demonstration projects. In other words, speakers and interviewees showed an awareness not only of the importance of a shift to measuring impact rather than activity, but also an awareness of the value of focusing on impact throughout organisational and programme cycles from planning through to delivery, evaluation and review.

The factors enabling this are discussed later, but broadly speaking, it is likely that this was largely because of a move already within departments towards Outcomes Based

²³ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/print/index/voluntary_and_community/vc-partnership-working-with-vcs.htm

²⁴ Ibid.

Accountability. The leap from measuring outcomes to using impact to inform planning, delivery and evaluation was therefore not a large one.

iv) Enablers

For the aspects of the programme that were most successful, a number of factors seem to have contributed.

Confluence with current developments

As was the case with VCSE delivery partners, the confluence with current governmental and organisational trends towards measuring outcomes, as outlined in Section 2.2.1 above, has meant that the statutory demonstration projects are familiar to some degree with the concept of measuring outcomes, and have been 'warmed up' for the progression from measuring outcomes, to planning and delivering for impact, and assessing and reviewing impact to inform future plans and delivery.

Support

Through the programme, support was provided to demonstration projects on completing the Measuring Up! tool, developing a Theory of Change and putting in place an Implementation Plan. All demonstration projects considered that the support and critical friend approach they had received respectively from PWC and CENI as very useful, with one contributor describing the support as '*immense*'.

Consistency and Flexibility

The five demonstration projects demonstrated an awareness that the IINI model is not a set of tools to be applied across all programmes or organisations, but rather that it promotes impact as the driver for planning, delivery assessment and review, and that within that, different tools or measurement frameworks may be considered appropriate to different programmes or organisations.

Funder Principles

The Funder Principles were brought to the Public Sector Working Group and were initially seen as needing to be altered for the public sector as it was considered that public sector funders would have a different focus (accountability and value for money) than independent funders for whom it was suggested the principle focus would be learning. In fact the principles have remained unchanged as the group considered that they hold true for both public sector and independent funders. However, as noted earlier the need for a step by step guide to applying the principles has been identified.

Aspects of Measuring Up! Self Assessment diagnostic

As with the Funders' Principles, the Measuring Up! diagnostic tool was originally developed for VCSE organisations, but in fact all statutory demonstration projects have completed the tool and have found the process positive and useful in highlighting areas for development and triggering challenging conversations about focus, methodology and internal processes. That said one demonstration project suggested a change in language to make the tool more relevant to funders.

Exchange event

Contributors at the Statutory Exchange event generally found it useful to hear about other demonstration projects and it was suggested that more similar opportunities would have been welcomed – although there was also a view that the timescale of the pilot programme meant that this would not have been possible.

4.3.3. Challenges/barriers

i) Time

Time has been a constraining and perhaps a defining factor for the demonstration projects from the outset. Due to delays in getting started, the decision was made to move from supporting two major demonstration projects over a longer period, to supporting five, running from November 2014 until end of March 2015.

The short timescale meant that the primary focus was on reviewing current impact practice using Measuring Up! producing a Theory of Change and Implementation Plan. There were plans originally for each of the five demonstration projects to complete Measuring Up! both before and after their pilot, but this was dropped due to the timeframe.

The four month period was considered a very short time span to make change in terms of engaging others outside direct staff members, developing skills, and building political will for culture and systems change.

In addition, the timescale did not entirely suit the operational cycles of some demonstration projects. For example, one of the pilot projects could not involve organisations on the ground in their Theory of Change process, as they were engaged in a live application round, so instead focused on capacity building of staff.

Another project also found the timescale a challenge as they already had outcomes in place, and so an earlier starting point, before outcome setting had taken place, would have been useful. The view was that in the timescale available, the support received and work done was extremely useful, but *'if doing it again we'd have a longer timeframe'*.

These views and experiences are summed up by one participant's view of impact practice: *'It's a marathon, not a sprint'*.

ii) Organisational buy-in and culture change

It was noted that all the demonstration projects are smaller parts of larger organisations. There was a shared view that for impact practice to take root, the concept needs to be supported throughout the whole organisation, and driven by high level leadership, particularly as it requires a cultural change within organisations. If impact practice was to embed across the public sector, it was suggested that a policy mandate would be needed, as well as departmental directives.

For example, it was noted by participants that if impact practice is not built into performance management and other corporate frameworks, impact practice will not be embedded. It was suggested that for this to happen, it would need to be driven by a top down directive showing commitment at a senior level for example to develop an outcomes based approach and to have staff trained in it. It would also be essential to work with those who design performance management systems, as well as auditors, so that the alignment and distinctions between compliance and impact practice can be addressed. An additional

challenge for councils, it was noted, is the fact that decisions lie with elected members who, span a range of parties, making it challenging to get agreement.

Commissioning practice and the focus on compliance, targets, outputs and SMART objectives was seen as another challenge and one which can lead organisations to be *'good at counting activities, not at measuring quality'*. There was a shared view among the demonstration projects that impact practice means involving all stakeholders including those concerned with these forms of measurement: auditors, systems designers etc. As one contributor said: *'If you are not used to working on outcomes / impacts you focus on numbers and it's easy. In this, you have to think about measuring what matters. It needs a cultural change. Cultural change needs leadership, to keep momentum – otherwise it's easy to skip into old ways of working. The ethos needs to pervade the organisation'*.

This was a view supported by another participant who indicated that *'it's about systems and culture change'*. This means selling the idea of impact practice to internal stakeholders such as auditors and economists, which was considered to be a key challenge as fully implementing and embedding the impact approach would require systems changes across the organisation.

It was noted however, that for key leaders to promote impact practice within the public sector, and for it to become embedded in corporate structures, it needs to be shown to *'work'*, and the timing of this phase had not allowed for any worked through case studies to be developed as yet. This was all the more true if it is to be ultimately become embedded in the Programme for Government, as some contributors suggested.

iii) Language and presentation

Given the shared view that impact practice needs to be embraced across whole organisations, it was suggested by some contributors that there is a need for work to be done on the language of the programme. There were some concerns about the complexity or opacity of the language with which impact practice has been articulated and presented. Some contributors pointed to the potential for confusion between terms such as the Theory of Change and the Logic Model, which it was felt could look very different from one organisation to another. Some felt that the concept has become overcomplicated and needs to be simplified again.

iv) Alignment with monitoring, evaluation and compliance requirements

Linked to the need for simplification was the need to explain clearly the alignment (and distinctions) between impact practice, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting based on compliance and accountability requirements. One speaker felt that impact practice needs to be articulated so that *'it fits with existing corporate language and priorities'*.

That said, there was also a view that, while it is important for impact practice to be seen as complimenting existing monitoring and evaluation, it is equally important to *'decouple'* it from other reporting systems, lest it be recruited as another accountability mechanism (hence losing focus on *'why are we doing this – what difference are we making?'*)

v) Consistency and flexibility

There was also a challenge for funders in achieving a balance between the flexibility of the IINI approach, and the need for some consistency. One example given was the possibility of encouraging funded groups to produce a Theory of Change. The suggestion was that it

would be incumbent on the funder to bring those groups together to ensure some level of consistency between the Theories of Change, as they would all be supported by the same programme with the same overarching outcomes. For this pilot project, the challenge would be how to align the flexibility of impact practice which allows for the distinctiveness of different programmes, with the consistency brought by a shared measurement tool. As with the VCSE cohort, some funders did express interest in the idea of shared measurement within the IINI approach, signalling a desire to balance flexibility with consistency.

vi) Proportionality

Within the statutory demonstration projects, there were programmes of varying scales from the large to the very small. A number of contributors spoke of the need for proportionality – the need to ensure that impact practice is designed to match the scale of the project and the investment. Based on experience, one participant reported that it was important to focus on key impact and primary purpose – otherwise it could become too unwieldy. It was also considered important to get a proportionate balance between monitoring, evaluation and impact: *‘It’s important not to overdesign how impact is measured – make it appropriate to size of investment’*. They had started off with a very ambitious Theory of Change and then needed to pare it down considerably. Linked to this was the need expressed by some to ensure that impact practice could be adopted without multiplying bureaucracy.

vii) Capacity and skills

While capacity and skills featured strongly as a challenge within the VCSE sector, this issue was also raised, albeit to a lesser degree, within some of the statutory demonstration projects. It was considered that putting in place a new approach to planning, delivery and review requires skills and knowledge.

viii) Opportunities to connect and exchange learning

The timeframe meant that there were few opportunities to meet and exchange learning, with one statutory sector Exchange event at the end of the programme. Some would have welcomed the opportunity to share experiences with other public sector bodies and with VCSE organisations, but there was also a recognition that the timescale would have meant that initially, there would not have been much learning to share.

Nonetheless, there was a view that if the direction of travel is to be maintained, *‘we need to keep the conversations joined up’*. It was considered essential to close the gap between government and voluntary sector, and to keep talking.

vii) Impact Hub

Demonstration projects did not appear to make significant use of the Impact Hub at this stage as the resources were seen as being of more relevance to VCSE organisations.

4.3.4. Engagement with funders: conclusions

The five statutory projects have demonstrated an awareness of impact practice, and all have completed the Measuring Up! diagnostic and have developed a Theory of Change and an Implementation Plan. There are some examples of funders who are already working to put in place changes to their funding application processes, to contracts, and to their reporting processes, so it is possible to say that the beginnings of change are in evidence. However, because of the early stage of development of impact practice within these bodies, it is not yet possible to say to what extent this increased awareness and the beginnings of change in

practice will cascade through to funded groups and organisations. It is also too early to say to what extent these demonstration projects will be able to influence the departments they sit within, or indeed to what extent they will influence policy leadership of impact practice in the medium to longer term. It may be that until demonstration projects can offer a full demonstration of the working through of impact practice through the entire *Plan, Do, Assess, Review* cycle, it will be difficult to achieve leadership for this approach at strategic and policy level.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The overall aim of the external evaluation has been to address the question:

Is this programme - and the way BCT have contracted CENI to deliver - making a difference: to awareness, and to beginnings of change in practice?

The IINI has been under development since 2011. However, the current project under evaluation has been running for 18 months at the time of writing this interim report. The VCSE delivery partners were funded in October 2014 and so their support programmes have been underway for six months. The public sector demonstration projects began in November 2014, and ended on 31 March 2015, a period of four months.

The programme to date is achieving its aim in terms of increasing awareness and understanding, and enabling organisations to review and plan for impact practice. It has succeeded in attracting a cohort of 13 VCSE delivery partners and five demonstration projects from the statutory sector, all of which show evidence of awareness of and engagement with the concept of impact practice and its applicability throughout the organisational cycle (Plan, Do, Assess and Review). While it was never intended that this phase would bring groups through from planning to full implementation of impact practice, there is nonetheless evidence of the beginnings of change in practice, with some participants indicating changes such as:

- Carrying out organisational strategic planning with a focus on impact;
- Changes to funding application processes, for example, greater engagement with potential grantees through co-design, working with grantees on a Theory of Change, agreeing on a core set of outcomes as opposed to multiple output-focused objectives, and revision of reporting templates in order to reflect the changed focus;
- Six organisations working on projects for young people classified as NEET have piloted the JET Shared Measurement Framework which as a result has been customised for Northern Ireland, and have taken the first steps in implementing it.

VCSE delivery partners report that many of their supported organisations are engaging with the concept of impact practice. However, for some, particularly the smaller, volunteer led groups, there is evidence to suggest that grasping impact practice and finding the time needed to engage with it, even to complete the Measuring Up! tool and produce an Implementation Plan, has been a challenge. Similarly, for the statutory demonstration projects, it is not clear to what extent their grantee groups have grasped or embraced impact practice at this point.

The intention to engage independent funders in demonstration projects has proved a challenge, with one independent funder only recently agreeing to become involved (CFNI Telecommunity Fund).

Learning has begun to be shared through Advisory Group meetings, and through the March 2015 Exchange Events, with more planned. Learning papers are also due to be published in June 2015. JET programme learning has been exchanged through regular NEET Strategy Forum meetings, through the programme launch, and through a final report of the process. Supported groups have also been brought together by the VCSE delivery partner organisations in workshops and seminars. One VCSE delivery partner has shared the

learning with its UK counterpart, which has initiated a pilot in England. However, opportunities for VCSE and public sector projects to exchange learning together have been limited to date.

Levels of engagement with the Impact Hub have varied. The resources have generally been found to be useful, but with some suggestions that there is a GB rather than an NI focus, and that some tools on the Hub are too costly for VCSE organisations.

Delivery structures have been satisfactory and effective, and CENI has delivered its contract to the satisfaction of BCT. Where slippages or changes arose, measures were put in place to mitigate them.

While the management structures have been effective to date, the Advisory Group role now requires review.

Summary

In summary, IINI has been a unique programme in engaging a significant cohort of VCSE delivery partners, and public sector funders. To date it has been a well planned and executed programme. A significant amount has been delivered and achieved in a short period of time, and the core outcomes envisaged at this point achieved: there is clearly awareness of and an appetite for the programme and plans are in place for impact practice. The programme is timely, relevant and is developing momentum.

However, while some felt that impact practice was *'on the agenda now'*, a more widely held view was that it was *'gaining traction, and has the potential to embed, but still has shallow roots'*. Impact practice is not yet considered to be fully embedded even in those organisations which are most committed to it, and no organisation has yet been through the full impact practice cycle (nor were they intended to be at this stage). There is recognition of impact practice within key parts of the VCSE and public sectors, but this is neither as wide nor as deep as it could be.

There was an anxiety expressed by many contributors to the evaluation that, because of the extent to which impact practice needs support, and because of the need to reach the point of having case studies which have reached completion (and can prove its utility) the initiative may flounder if thought is not given to *'the next phase'* (embedding) and ultimately to an exit strategy aimed at sustainability.

Given the contextual circumstances which suggest that this may be an optimum time to embed impact practice, the challenge for BCT is what to do in the next six months of the programme, and post-2015 when the programme ends, in order to build upon the momentum generated by this short pilot.

5.2. Recommendations: the next six months

5.2.1. VCSE

Consideration should be given to suggestions and requests made by the VCSE lead organisations which they felt would be of practical help as they move towards implementation, for example:

- Provision of templates;
- Development of case studies;
- More training for the 13 VCSE delivery partners who feel that the further they progress in the process, and the more their supported groups ask for help, the more skills and expertise they will need;

- More opportunities to share learning with each other and with funders to avoid re-inventing the wheel. As well as sharing forthcoming Learning Papers, where possible, organisations could be sharing information around the development of shared measurement and participatory methods for information gathering along the lines of the JET framework. The learning from JET should therefore be shared with the 13 delivery partners. The learning from a DARD pilot carried out separately from IINI, which is now further along the impact practice cycle, should also be shared.

5.2.2. Public sector demonstration projects

Consideration should be given to the best way to support the ongoing engagement of the public sector demonstration projects, who now need to move from planning to implementation: a peer support group which meets regularly has been suggested as a minimum.

5.2.3. Independent funders

Following on from the completion and distillation of learning from the CFNI demonstration project, there may be merit in a process of reflection with independent funders, possibly using the ACF NI Funders' Group as a mechanism, to discuss outcomes from the CFNI experience, and to consider how independent funders might more substantively engage with impact focussed funding approaches through their work.

5.2.4. Exchange Events and Impact Hub

More opportunities to exchange learning should be built in to the remainder of the programme, both between VCSE delivery partners, and between VCSE and public sector demonstration projects. More thought should be given as to how the Impact Hub might be maximised as a forum for sharing learning, templates and methodologies.

5.2.5. Structures

The Advisory Group function should now be reviewed to focus on what needs to be done to embed impact practice post 2015. Its membership should be augmented to include more statutory participation, and consideration given to which strategic leaders might most usefully engage with this group.

5.2.6. Connections

Discussions are reported to be already underway with a number of initiatives which are relevant to IINI, including the Carnegie Measuring Wellbeing initiative, the Innovation Lab, and Delivering Social Change. It is essential to continue these connections and to ensure clarity about what each initiative offers, and to seek potential alignments where possible. The connection with IIUK should also continue to be developed.

5.3. Recommendations: post-2015

5.3.1. Widening and deepening

Work needs to begin now to plan for what happens post-2015 if the shallow roots of the impact practice approach are to embed more deeply within the pilot organisations and projects, and if the approach is to achieve a wider reach beyond those already engaged. This requires consideration of BCT's role, and also the potential role of organisations who have participated in the programme to date, as well as external existing and potential partners in taking this forward. There is a need for strategic planning for the future of IINI within BCT, and there is a need for strategic engagement outside of it.

This consideration needs to be informed by what the evaluation has found, namely that while the goal is for impact practice to become a way of working *'in the DNA'* of organisations rather than a bolt-on programme, in order for it to reach this point, capacity needs to be built and skills learned. In other words impact practice, at least initially, needs to be supported, and support requires resource. While the context and time may be right for impact practice to take off, for large scale widening and deepening to happen across sectors, impact practice needs to be understood, supported and led at a strategic level, and again, work to build this understanding, support and leadership will need to be resourced.

This work on deepening and widening is closely linked of course. For widening to occur, organisations need to see proof that the approach works, and the best way to show this, is by supporting existing participants to deepen their impact practice, and to share their example in the form of a selection of convincing Northern Ireland case studies, and the creation of opportunities for dissemination and exchange of learning.

For VCSE delivery partners, consideration might be given to providing support to take further aspects which have worked particularly well, perhaps through an ongoing mentoring scheme along the lines of CFNI's Social Justice Approach to Community Development model. While BCT's remit is to support the voluntary and community sector, there is no doubt that further work is needed to support the public sector demonstration projects to progress further through the impact cycle.

5.3.2. Resourcing post-2015

As indicated above, attached to the work required to widen and deepen impact practice is a resource implication. Discussions need to be in process now as to how the further work needed should be resourced post 2015. BCT should consider how the impact of its investment to date might be maximised and how it might strategically support IINI to achieve widening and deepening, aiming to arrive at a critical mass platform from which the initiative can be sustained. There appear to be a number of options most of which are not mutually exclusive which should be weighed and explored as there are costs and benefits to each. These are summarised below:

- BCT ends the programme at end of December 2015;
- BCT financially supports the programme for a second phase 2016-2018 aimed at widening and deepening;
- BCT acts as a facilitator of the development of a next phase programme which may or may not have the same level of engagement / leadership from BCT: for example BCT might act as a partner in a collaborative bid to an external source,
- BCT supports the 13 existing VCSE delivery partners (or a willing cohort) to make a collective bid to a strategic funding source in order to carry the VCSE work to the next level.

Whichever option or combination of options BCT might choose, there should be planning in place for a managed exit from impact practice work at the appropriate time.

5.3.3. Changing systems and cultures post-2015

While it is essential, particularly in the short – medium term for BCT to consider the resourcing options for the next phase of IINI, the programme cannot be thought of as a project or series of projects. Across VCSE and the public sector participants, there was agreement that full adoption of impact practice through the *Plan, Do, Assess, Review* cycle

within an organisation requires organisational buy-in and culture change. For impact practice to be fully adopted at a systemic level, it was suggested that a policy mandate is needed. This requires leadership, which means that engagement is needed with key leaders at a political and departmental level. The ideal scenario would be for impact practice to be built into the next Programme for Government, and at the commissioning stage of services. Equally, key leaders in the VCSE sector need to be engaged.

BCT should therefore put in place an engagement plan, identifying key leaders to target for engagement with a view to changing systems and culture. This might include the following:

- Build on the support within DSD and VCU which has made the link between impact practice and PAC and Addressing Bureaucracy concerns. For example, if VCU were prepared to require Regional Infrastructure bodies to provide support on impact practice, and to resource them to do so, this could be a useful way of ensuring that impact practice becomes a normal part of the support that these organisations give to their members: many already provide support on planning, information gathering and monitoring and evaluation.
- Linked to this is the potential for support from DARD which is already reported to be well advanced in implementation of impact practice across eight rural networks (outside of this programme). If DARD can also be convinced to build impact practice into the formulation of its departmental policy objectives, with two departments adopting the approach, others may be more likely to follow, although this will require the identification of key personnel in other departments to lead and promote the approach.
- Engagement work needs to be done with the major NI funders such as SEUPB regarding Peace IV and Interreg funding, and the Big Lottery, to encourage them to promote and encourage impact practice among their grantees (SEUPB do have a track record of taking on board new approaches: in the last Peace Programme they adopted the Aid for Peace indicators).
- The new councils need to be engaged and opportunities maximised. For example, Belfast City Council's Community Planning programme, the Belfast Agenda, and Neighbourhood Renewal already have an emphasis on "commonality and co-design" and may be ripe for adopting impact practice. There should be exploration of the possibility of Belfast City Council Community Services department becoming a leader for impact practice within and across the Council, with a view to Belfast City Council becoming a champion for impact practice across Councils, perhaps through engagement with NILGA and other relevant bodies.

An essential part of this work of engaging with strategic leaders must focus on future resourcing and sustainability.

5.3.4. Co-ordination and communication between VCSE and funders

Embedding impact practice requires co-ordination and communication between VCSE organisations and funders. BCT needs to give consideration to the best mechanism for ensuring that this work will be strategically planned, driven and overseen across VCSE, public sector and independent funders. In particular consideration should be given to whether this can be done through an existing mechanism such as the PSEG or the establishment of a Commitment Action Team under the auspices of the Joint Forum. At an

operational level, provision will need to be made for exchanges of experience and learning across sectors.

5.3.5. Dissemination: who owns impact practice?

While the evaluation found that there was an appetite for this work to be widened and deepened, there was some concern about ownership and quality assurance. BCT needs to give consideration to the practicalities e.g. around ownership of materials and tools. Some thought also needs to be given as to whether there is a core standard for impact practice – or not.

5.3.6. Simplify and streamline

Linked to the idea of widening, deepening and dissemination is the issue of language. There was a sense from some contributors that the concept of building desired impact into planning, delivery and review, was simple, but had become overcomplicated. BCT should revisit the language of impact practice to ensure that its core simplicity – and utility – is not lost in jargon. Similarly, the idea of proportionality was considered important. BCT should explore the possibility of simplifying the *Code of Good Impact Practice* and the Measuring Up! tool so that they feel simple and proportional for smaller and volunteer led groups in particular.

5.3.7. Alignment with monitoring, evaluation and compliance

Linked to the idea of simplification is the need to ensure clarity about how impact practice links with monitoring and evaluation and compliance reporting mechanisms. It will be essential to articulate, perhaps not least for public sector bodies, the alignment between the two, as well as the distinction. It will be important for stakeholders to grasp that impact practice should not be slotted in as another compliance and accountability aid – it is about making a difference, planning to make a difference, delivering to make a difference, measuring and articulating that difference, and using lessons to plan to get better at making the difference. BCT needs to give consideration to its role in guidance in this area.

5.3.8. Alignment with other ‘outcomes’ approaches

While IINI has no doubt been assisted by operating in an environment where outcomes based approaches appear to be multiplying, and are increasingly on the agenda, that does also create the potential for confusion. It will be essential going forward to articulate both the complementarity and the distinctiveness of IINI with other outcomes based approaches as outlined in Section 2.2.1.

Appendix

Stakeholders consulted

Name	Organisation
Maurice Meehan	Building Change Trust/PHA
Nigel McKinney	Building Change Trust
Brendan McDonnell	Community Evaluation NI
Aongus O'Keefe	Community Evaluation NI
Gladys Swanton	Community Evaluation NI
Nicola McIldoon	Community Evaluation NI
Sharon Polson, James Elliott and Colette McCluskey	Voluntary and Community Unit, DSD
Anne McCready	Youth United Programme
Sandra Adair	Volunteer Now Enterprises Ltd
James Magowan	Association of Charitable Foundations
Lynn McCourt	Bryson Group
Kate Clifford	Rural Community Network
Lorraine Boyd	Bryson Group