



Scottish Government Tackling Sectarianism Programme Fund

Programme Evaluation 2012-2016 Summary Report

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Background and introduction

This is the summary report of an evaluation of the Tackling Sectarianism programme fund that took place between December 2016 and March 2017.

Scottish Government launched the Tackling Sectarianism programme fund in 2012. Over the five years of the programme £12.5m has been committed to help build understanding of the nature, extent and impact of sectarianism in Scotland. Since 2012, 108 organisations have been funded to deliver 120 projects across Scotland. Scottish Government commissioned the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) to act as grant administrators and provide development and capacity building support to funded organisations.

The funding of community-based approaches was carried out alongside work undertaken by an independent national Advisory Group, who produced a series of reports and recommendations about the direction of the programme over the period 2012-2015.

Programme aims and outcomes

The programme fund for the community-based projects had three key aims, to build understanding of:

- The nature and extent of sectarianism in Scotland and specifically how it is understood in, and impacts on, individual communities across Scotland;
- The extent to which tackling sectarianism is a priority for individual communities and the level to which communities are prepared to engage in open and frank dialogue with one another on this issue;
- The effectiveness of different interventions, and what can be learned from interventions which failed to have the intended impact.

These aims were developed into a comprehensive outcome framework following the first year pilot of the programme. Achievement of the programme outcomes is summarised below:

Objective	Outcome	Summary of findings
People and communities are more empowered to tackle sectarianism	1. People have increased skills in facilitating dialogue	A significant number of community facilitators have been trained, giving them increased skills and confidence to engage communities on the issue.
	2. Increased and improved resources for tackling sectarianism	A diverse range of resources have been produced that reflect the experience of different groups and communities.
	3. Increased opportunities for people to express their feelings, opinions and experiences about sectarianism	A broad range of meetings, workshops and other events have facilitated the coming together of individuals and communities to have discussions on the diversity of experience and opinions.
	4. Improved partnerships and collective responses to sectarianism	Many partnerships have either been strengthened or formed as a direct result of projects work during the funding programme.

Trust, respect and relationships between people and community groups are improved	5. Increased awareness and understanding of sectarianism and its effects	The scale and scope of the work carried out has resulted in evidence being gathered on the diversity of awareness and understanding of sectarianism in a range of communities as well as the diverse impacts it has on a range of individuals and communities.
	6. People and communities are more motivated and able to engage in constructive dialogue around sectarianism	The approaches taken by projects have acknowledged the sensitivities faced when discussing the issue and allowed people and communities to explore the issue in productive and safe ways.
	7. Reduction in prejudicial attitudes which lead to sectarian behaviour and language	Positive changes in attitudes at the end of project interventions were evidenced. However on-going reduction in prejudicial attitudes was less evident in project reports.
	8. Reduced sectarianism behaviour and incidents	It is recognised that this is a challenging outcome to achieve or measure, but there is some evidence of projects' contributions towards achieving it.
Practice, policy, funding and decision-making are better informed by evidence	9. Increased understanding of how sectarianism impacts upon individuals and communities across Scotland	See Outcome 5. The learning from the interventions carried out by projects has led to increased understanding of the diversity and complexities of the impact of sectarianism across geographies and communities of interest.
	10. Increased understanding of the extent to which tackling sectarianism is a priority for individual communities	The learning from projects has allowed increased understanding of sectarianism as a priority issue <i>alongside other community issues</i> . Again this is true both within communities and with key stakeholder organisations and agencies.
	11. Increased understanding of the extent to which communities are prepared to engage in open and frank discussion on sectarianism	Learning and experience from projects has led to increased understanding of the <i>sensitivity</i> and <i>depth of feeling</i> which can occur when engaging communities and stakeholders in discussions on sectarianism.
	12. Increased understanding of how sectarianism is understood in individual communities across Scotland	See Outcome 9. Learning and experience from projects has increased understanding of the diversity of perceptions of sectarianism amongst different communities, geographical and of interest.
	13. Increased understanding of the effectiveness of different interventions	The broad range and expertise of projects funded has enabled a variety of interventions to be tested. There are a range of key themes which are seen to have success in working on the issue of sectarianism.
	14. Increased understanding of what can be learned from interventions which fail to have the intended impact	The reporting of failed interventions has been limited. However, as with Outcome 13 there are key themes which are seen to inhibit the success of particular interventions.

Key Learning

There has been a range of learning generated as a result of the funding programme. The fuller report illustrates learning about:

- The nature and extent of sectarianism
- The effectiveness of interventions and approaches to exploring the issue
- Learning about the funding processes, and
- Structures and policy development

The conclusions presented below are drawn from the learning in each of these areas.

Conclusions

Tackling sectarianism requires a multi-layered response, which involves communities, organisations and agencies, and policy makers at local and national level. The issue is complex, affecting individuals and communities in different ways. Interventions, policy and practice development need to acknowledge and reflect this complexity.

The funding programme has enabled a diverse range of organisations to engage with communities in discussions about sectarianism across Scotland on a scale which has never happened before. This has resulted in an increased level of understanding about the nature and extent of sectarianism, the diversity of impacts for different communities and the effectiveness of interventions to support exploration of the complex nature of the issue.

The approach to policy and practice development which has evolved within the funding programme is relatively rare and creates opportunities to use this learning in the development of future funding programmes.

Conclusions: Engagement and interventions

- **Organisational understanding and capacity.**
Organisations seeking to engage individuals and communities in discussions on sectarianism must first build their own understanding of the issue. Engagement with individuals and communities on sectarianism can be emotive and challenging. Organisations need to have an understanding of the issue to ensure interventions are planned in a way that acknowledges and prepares for such challenges.
- **Skilled facilitation.**
Facilitators must have both community engagement and dialogue skills but also subject-specific understanding to ensure they have the confidence and ability to explore the issue in a supportive way and deal with any challenges that arise.
- **Contextualise the issue.**
The lack of understanding of 'what sectarianism is' combined with the normalisation of certain behaviour and language leads to the perpetuation of the issue. Interventions should begin by exploring the context of the issue to allow reflection and discussion on the history, links to other forms of prejudice and the different experiences of different communities.

- **Interventions must reflect the complexity and diversity of experience.**
Different communities perceive and experience sectarianism differently. Interventions must reflect and respond to this diversity to ensure they are relevant to the lived experiences of individuals and communities engaged.
- **Build trust and create safe spaces for discussions.**
Taking time at the outset to build relationships and trust supports the willingness of people to engage in what can be sensitive and challenging discussions. This approach creates a safe space for people to reflect and discuss the issue in a productive way.
- **Use of participatory and creative approaches.**
Creative and participatory approaches enable the issue to be introduced in a way that does not focus on personal experience. The use of techniques such as role play, drama or focussing on 'characters', enables participants to explore the issue in a way that feels less personally threatening or emotive. Such techniques allow exploration at a general level and support participants to feel more able to open up about their own personal experiences as trust is built and discussions evolve.
- **Broadening out to include wider equalities and hate crime issues.**
Contextualising sectarianism within the broader themes of equalities and hate crime increases relevance and engagement. However sectarianism should continue to be a key aspect of discussions. The challenging nature of the issue and the ambivalence, or at times denial, to its existence and impacts, must be acknowledged and addressed.
- **Partnerships.**
New partnerships formed, and existing partnerships developed, have supported the sharing of knowledge and learning and increased the reach of the programme. However, there is a challenge to engaging strategically and committing to longer term partnership working due to the year on year funding cycle.
- **Stakeholder engagement.**
Engagement with local authorities and Community Planning structures will be key to embedding learning from the programme and ensuring future mainstreaming of policy and practice developments to address the issue.

Conclusions: Programme processes and structures

- **Partnership approach to policy and practice development.**
The approach taken to partnership working and joint learning between funded projects, VAF, the Scottish Government and the Advisory Group is a key success of the programme. This approach to policy and practice development is relatively rare and has attempted to ensure 'bottom up' community led approaches have influence over national policy and strategic developments. The genuine interest of all stakeholders and commitment to meet with, and listen to, projects on a regular basis has brought an invaluable richness of understanding, both for government and for the other stakeholders involved. The approach offers key learning which can be shared with other government funding programmes and directorates.

- **Expertise and commitment of partners.**
The existing expertise of partners combined with the commitment to building strong supportive working relationships has been a key success of the programme. This approach takes time and willingness on behalf of all partners involved but has created the opportunity to ensure learning has been shared throughout the life of the programme.
- **Structures to support capacity building, learning and partnership working.**
The creation and facilitation of events and meetings to bring projects, funders and policy makers together built capacity, supported the development of partnerships and enabled learning to be shared. The structures and processes developed offer learning to future funding programmes which seek to address complex issues at national and local level.
- **Funding processes and limitations.**
The funding programme has had many successes and has allowed a significant range of learning to be gathered. However, the year on year allocation of funding has at times impacted on projects' capacity to plan strategically and make longer term commitments to communities and other stakeholders. This learning is useful for Government, and other funders when developing future funding programmes. Funding programmes which seek to address deep-rooted, complex societal issues will have increased impact and improved chance of sustainability if funding is committed and allocated over a longer time period.

Conclusions: Policy and strategic development

- **Opportunities to increase impact at national level.**
Key policy and strategic developments¹ provide opportunities for learning from the programme to extend and positively impact more broadly. Sectarianism extends beyond the realm of criminal justice and the alignment of the issue alongside broader community cohesion, equality and hate crime issues would allow a transfer of knowledge on approaches to tackle what are often inter-linked and complex issues.
- **Opportunities to increase impact at local level.**
As highlighted in the final report of the Advisory Group, COSLA and local authorities are key partners in the development of policy and practice at local level to address the impact of sectarianism. Locating the issue within Community Planning structures and processes would ensure the complexity of impacts is considered by a range of relevant local stakeholders. It would also help align action to tackle sectarianism with wider equalities and community cohesion policy and practice developments.

¹ Such as the Equalities Act (2010) and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) and the recent report from Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion