



supporting voluntary organisations that
work with offenders and their families

“Clinks is a top-class infrastructure body. It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.”

AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

2013



OUR VISION

Clinks' vision is of a vibrant and independent Voluntary and Community Sector working with informed and engaged communities to enable the rehabilitation of offenders for the benefit of society.

OUR MISSION

Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the Sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders.

Researched and written by M & E Consulting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

“If you want to find out what’s going on in that world, you talk to Clinks. They keep us informed about what is going on in that world because they are closer to it than we are and closer to their membership.”

Clinks is the membership body that supports, represents and promotes the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector working in criminal justice.

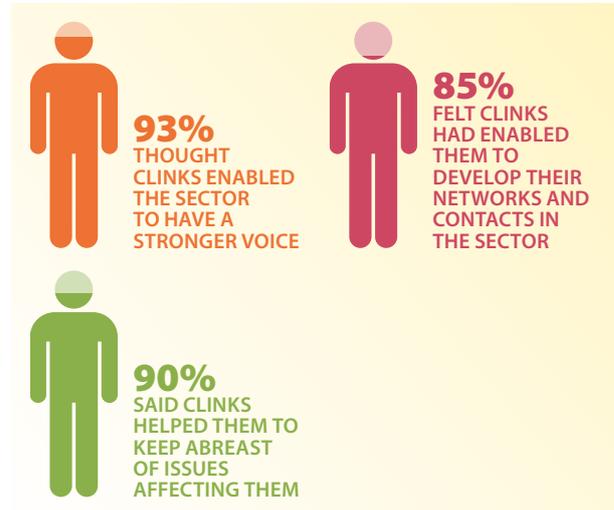
The overall picture from the impact assessment was overwhelmingly positive, Clinks is clearly held in high regard, well respected and trusted by their stakeholders. 93% of those who responded to the online surveys or who were interviewed felt that Clinks enables the Sector to have a stronger voice, 85% felt that Clinks had helped them to develop their personal networks and contacts in the Sector and 90% said that Clinks helps them to keep abreast of issues affecting them.

CLINKS’ IMPACT

This impact assessment has shown that Clinks is having a significant impact across three of the key impact areas:

- Strong organisations
- A dynamic Sector
- Supportive external agencies.

Clinks is clearly playing a vital role in helping to strengthen VCSE organisations in the Criminal Justice System by enabling them to work more effectively and become more sustainable. In particular, Clinks enables organisations in the Sector to keep up-to-date with issues and respond to opportunities as well as to network with other organisations.



“My understanding of issues like the threats and opportunities posed by current government policy would not be the same without the briefings, networking opportunities, and sensible leadership shown by Clinks.”

Clinks is also contributing to a more dynamic Sector by enabling it to have a stronger voice, develop and shape its thinking and become more unified. The importance of Clinks’ role in representing the views and experiences of VCSE organisations and advocating for the Sector emerged particularly strongly.

“Clinks’ responses to things like Transforming Rehabilitation are really useful because they are able to source and collate what the feeling is out there into something which adds a bit more kudos and power when it’s fed back as a single voice.”

“The smaller organisations need Clinks to speak with integrity on their behalf, particularly now the Sector is finding its voice is being constrained in terms of core funding or having to work with corporate partners.”

Finally, Clinks is enabling commissioners, funders, policy-makers and private sector agencies to work more collaboratively with the VCSE Sector. It does this by helping them to better appreciate the diversity of the Sector and the issues it faces as well as to consult and communicate more effectively with VCSE organisations.

“Clinks have been a very useful sounding board both in terms of their knowledge of the voluntary sector but also their own expertise in criminal justice.”

CLINKS' SERVICES

Generally, the majority of stakeholders feel that Clinks is providing the range of services and activities that they want and need, and that Clinks should continue to provide more of the same. The overarching theme in much of their feedback was the need for Clinks to equip the Sector for the changes ahead. Their suggestions for development suggest that Clinks' services need fine-tuning rather than fundamental change.

In particular, they suggested that Clinks should consider:

- Reviewing its training programme in terms of the range of topics covered, the methods used and the locations in which training is delivered
- Diversify the ways in which it shares information with its stakeholders (e.g. by using social media and new technologies)
- Providing more networking opportunities and more support for VCSE organisations, particularly in preparing for the changes facing the Sector
- Developing more regional activities
- Carrying out lobbying on specific topics such as the impact of PbR on the Sector, security clearance for staff and volunteers
- Providing a co-ordinating and support role for VCSE organisations wishing to tender for contracts
- Developing quality standards for VCSE organisations in the Sector.

As an organisation, Clinks should also consider:

- Strengthening its relationships with other infrastructure organisations
- Improving the way it promotes itself and the role of infrastructure organisations more generally.

MAXIMISING AND SUSTAINING ITS IMPACT

Clinks' effectiveness in meeting its stakeholders' needs enables it to have considerable impact. In order for it to maximise and sustain this impact, it is important to highlight the factors that contribute to Clinks' impact, in particular:

- The trust and respect Clinks has established amongst its stakeholders
- The relevance and accessibility of the services it provides
- The reputation of its staff.

It is also important for Clinks to take account of various factors which may limit its ability to have a greater impact. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the challenge for Clinks of representing and consulting effectively with its large and diverse membership as well as the risk that its ability to lobby and campaign may be weakened by the substantial funding it currently receives from government.

In order to maximise and sustain its impact, Clinks should therefore focus on preserving what it does best:

- Maintaining a wide and diverse membership base
- Representing its members through effective consultation
- Providing high-quality, relevant and accessible services
- Sustaining the culture and reputation of the organisation through investing in its staff and succession-planning
- Maintaining and demonstrating its neutrality and independence in all its work.

CONCLUSION

This impact assessment was set within the context of the significant changes taking place across the VCSE Sector and, in particular, within the Criminal Justice System. Infrastructure organisations such as Clinks have a vital role to play in enabling VCSE organisations to cope with these changes and take advantage of new opportunities.

Our assessment showed that Clinks is having a significant impact in the Sector and is fulfilling a vital role in supporting VCSE organisations working in the CJS. It is therefore well-placed to continue helping the Sector respond to the challenges it faces. In the words of one of its stakeholders:

“Clinks is a top-class infrastructure body. It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the VCS working with offenders.”

APPROACH TO THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Clinks is the only infrastructure organisation specifically supporting VCSE organisations working in the Criminal Justice System. M & E Consulting was commissioned by Clinks to carry out an impact assessment with the aim of helping Clinks establish:

- What difference it is making to its external stakeholders
- Whether it is providing the range of services and activities that its external stakeholders want and need
- Whether it is focussing its resources correctly and where its services are having the greatest impact.

The assessment was based on a model developed by the Value for Infrastructure Programme¹ to help infrastructure organisations demonstrate their impact. Feedback from stakeholders was gathered through in-depth telephone interviews carried out with 32 people, representing Clinks' key stakeholders (partner organisations, funders and commissioners, private sector contacts and key individuals in the Sector).

A series of online surveys publicised to all contacts, was completed by 46 of Clinks' Members, 72 of Clinks' VCSE Sector contacts and 53 non-VCSE Sector contacts. Feedback gathered by Clinks at recent events and training courses was also analysed.

The number of people who participated in our interviews and who responded to the online surveys was relatively small. The findings therefore cannot be taken as a representative view of all Clinks' stakeholders but they do provide a valuable insight into perceptions and experiences of a range of Clinks' different stakeholders.

01 INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, Clinks commissioned M & E Consulting to carry out an impact assessment of its work. The aim was to assess the focus and direction of Clinks' activities and the impact these are having on their various stakeholders.

1.1 CONTEXT

This impact assessment is set within the context of the significant changes taking place across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector and, in particular, within the Criminal Justice System (CJS). These changes have already started to affect many VCSE organisations working with offenders and their families, whose survival is threatened by the economic downturn as well as the introduction of Payment by Results (PbR), new commissioning practices and the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. Clinks' latest report into the state of the Sector found that 86% of organisations have been affected by the economic downturn and policy changes.²

Infrastructure organisations have a vital role to play in enabling VCSE organisations to cope with these changes and take advantage of new opportunities, such as being able to secure social investment or deliver public service contracts. However, they also face challenges of their own as funding priorities shift towards frontline services:

"Government funding for infrastructure support and services, both local and national, is in decline, and the pace of change in the policy and funding environment requires voluntary organisations to respond faster, while coping in many cases with reduced resources."

BIG | 2011

It is therefore increasingly important for infrastructure organisations to be able to clearly articulate and demonstrate the impact of their services.

1.2 CLINKS

Clinks is the only infrastructure organisation specifically supporting VCSE organisations working in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). A number of other organisations also provide infrastructure support in the Sector³ but focus either on particular areas of the CJS or have a more generic focus that includes work with offenders.

Clinks' services centre on:

- Promoting the work of the Sector
- Representing the Sector
- Providing specialist support for the Sector
- Identifying priority areas and finding solutions.

Clinks has 496 VCSE organisations as Members, a further 4,000 VCSE contacts and 5,000 non-VCSE contacts. It is also part of a number of networks and partnerships including the Transition to Adulthood Alliance, Making Every Adult Matter and NAVCA. Clinks also runs the Arts Alliance which is a coalition of arts organisations working in the CJS.

1.3 THIS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

M & E Consulting, an agency specialising in helping organisations to assess the outcomes and impact of their work, was commissioned to carry out an impact assessment of Clinks' work during 2011 – 2012 in order to help Clinks establish:

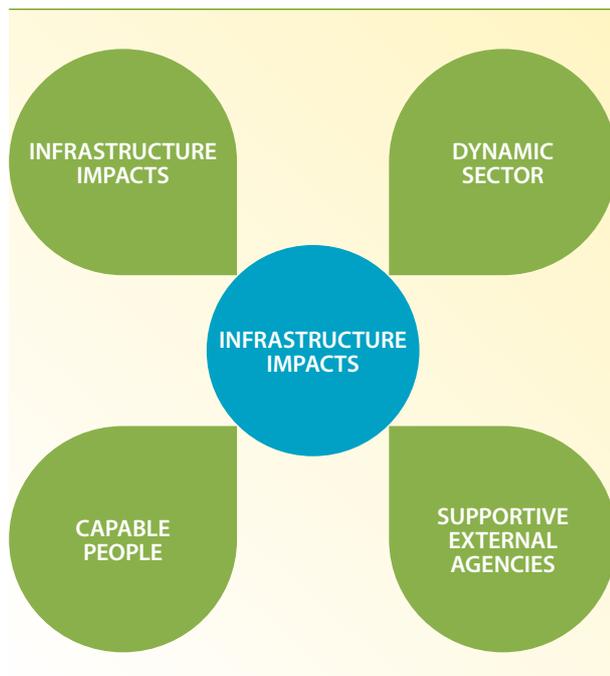
- What difference it is making to its external stakeholders
- Whether it is providing the range of services and activities that its external stakeholders want and need
- Whether it is focussing its resources correctly and where its services are having the greatest impact.

APPROACH

Our impact assessment is based on a model developed by the Value for Infrastructure Programme

(VIP)⁴ to help infrastructure organisations demonstrate their impact by using a common language and identifying areas in which they can look for evidence of the difference they make (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 | THE VIP IMPACT FRAMEWORK



METHODOLOGY

Evaluation design

The VIP model provides a range of tools to enable infrastructure organisations to measure their impact however these tools are designed to measure change over time. As this impact assessment looks back on the period 2011 – 2012, we used the VIP tools to help us identify indicators to assess Clinks' impact retrospectively.

Data collection methods

We used two main methods for collecting information from Clinks' stakeholders:

- In-depth telephone interviews with a small sample of Clinks' key stakeholders
- Online surveys to gather views from the broader spectrum of Clinks' members and contacts.

The interview schedules and online surveys were based on the VIP indicators we identified from the VIP tools and in consultation with Clinks staff.

An initial group of interviewees were identified by Clinks from stakeholders who had a particularly good understanding of the Sector and of Clinks' work. To reduce any risk of bias in our interviews, we also asked the people we interviewed to recommend other people so that we could gather a variety of perspectives on Clinks' impact.

Invitations to participate in the online surveys were sent out by email to all Clinks' Members and contacts, and incentives were offered to encourage them to take part. In addition, Clinks' data was analysed to look for further evidence of Clinks' impact.

SAMPLE

Telephone interviews

Clinks originally identified 26 people for us to interview. Some of the people we spoke to suggested other people we should talk to, giving us a total of 40 people to contact. We carried out interviews with 32 of these people; 24 from the initial group identified by Clinks and eight from those recommended by them. They included:

- Clinks' Members and partner organisations
- Private sector contacts
- Key individuals in the Sector
- Funders and commissioners.

Online surveys to Clinks' Members and VCSE contacts

The invitation to participate in the online survey was sent to all 496 of Clinks' regular Members and to 4,000 of its VCSE contacts. 46 members and 72 VCSE contacts responded to the surveys, representing a response rate of 9% and 2% respectively. This was lower than had been hoped; research suggests that average response rates to online surveys range from 10% to 30%. However as Clinks had recently asked its Members and contacts to complete a number of other online surveys, it is likely that some people may have suffered from survey-fatigue.

Nonetheless, the profile information provided by respondents shows that the surveys obtained a reasonably representative response:

- Respondents came from organisations across England and Wales with the largest groups based in London, the South East and the South West.
- More than a third of organisations had a national remit and just over a third were working at a local level; just over a quarter were working regionally.
- Over three-quarters of respondents worked in small or medium-sized organisations and over a fifth worked in large organisations.
- Respondents worked with a wide range of people (offenders, ex-offenders, young offenders, offenders' families, etc) and across many different areas (mental/physical well-being, accommodation, employment, etc).
- They mainly held senior positions within their organisations: nearly half were Directors or Chief Executives and nearly a third were managers.
- They had made use of a wide range of Clinks' services, particularly their information and events.

Online survey to Clinks' non-VCSE contacts

The invitation to participate in the online survey was sent to 5,000 of Clinks' contacts (i.e. non-VCSE individuals and organisations). 53 non-VCSE contacts responded to the survey, representing a 1% response rate. Profile information provided by respondents revealed that:

- Over half were from public sector organisations and over a third were from the private sector.
- Just under half were from organisations with a national remit and nearly half were from local organisations.
- Over a third worked in the prison sector; the rest of the respondents were from a wide range of backgrounds including the Police, researchers and training providers.
- Nearly a third were based in London and the South East and just over a fifth in the South West.
- Respondents had made use of a wide range of Clinks' services, particularly their information and events.

ANALYSIS

The surveys and interviews provided a large amount of qualitative data from a range of different perspectives. Analysis was carried out

using WEFT, an open-source tool for qualitative analysis of text, and involved identifying key themes and coding responses accordingly. Quantitative data was analysed using Excel.

LIMITATIONS

Given the size of Clinks' membership and contact base, the number of people who participated in our interviews and who responded to the online surveys is small. Although the findings cannot be taken as a representative view of all Clinks' stakeholders, they do provide a valuable insight into perceptions and experiences of a range of Clinks' different stakeholders.

It is also important to note that there may be some bias in the findings as the people who took part in the impact assessment are likely to be people with particularly strong views of Clinks. Whilst the majority of the feedback was extremely positive, both interviewees and survey respondents provided further feedback that has helped to inform our findings and recommendations.

02 CLINKS' IMPACT

There was considerable evidence from our interviews and online surveys that Clinks is having a significant impact in three of the key areas identified in the VIP model:

- Strong organisations
- A dynamic sector
- Supportive external agencies.

As there was less evidence of the impact Clinks is having on individuals working in the Sector, relevant feedback has been included in the following section.

2.1 STRONGER ORGANISATIONS

CLINKS IS HELPING TO STRENGTHEN VCSE ORGANISATIONS IN THE CJS BY ENABLING THEM TO **WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY AND BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE.**

MORE EFFECTIVE WORKING

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations who responded to the online surveys or who were interviewed as part of this impact assessment highlighted how Clinks helps them work more effectively by:

- Enabling them to keep abreast of and respond to issues and opportunities
- Keeping them in touch with others in the Sector
- Helping them to improve their systems and procedures
- Developing the skills and networks of their staff
- Saving them time and providing them with additional resources.

More aware of and able to respond to issues and opportunities

The vast majority (90%) of the VCSE organisations who responded to the online surveys said that Clinks helps them to keep abreast of issues affecting

them. In particular, respondents felt that the information provided by Clinks is vital in identifying and summarising key developments in the Sector:

“They send out very good discussion papers which help smaller organisations keep really abreast of what’s going on.”

“Without them it would be incredibly difficult particularly in terms of sorting the changes and trying to translate them into something bite-sized and manageable.”

Respondents and interviewees also described how Clinks not only keeps them up-to-date but also helps them to understand and make sense of the developments in the Sector:

“My understanding of issues like the threats and opportunities posed by current government policy would not be the same without the briefings, networking opportunities, and sensible leadership shown by Clinks.”

In addition, many people described how Clinks’ support on specific issues is particularly helpful:

“Clinks has really helped us to get to grips with the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners. It’s meant that I’ve felt fully informed and that the bits where I need to take it further, I know where they are.”

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of VCSE organisations also felt that their involvement with Clinks had helped them to develop new ideas and perspectives relating to their work. For example, some people described how information from Clinks had informed their organisation’s strategic direction by enabling them to anticipate how the changes would affect their organisation and in some cases, to respond rapidly:

“By being made aware of the developments in the Sector, we are better able to position ourselves to take hold of the opportunities arising or to prepare for new challenges and potential difficulties.”

“It ensures I am up-to-date on developments and am able to capitalise on these developments quickly.”

Some people also highlighted the particular role that Clinks' information plays in empowering smaller organisations by helping them to understand and keep abreast of the changes in the Sector:

“Making sure people are kept informed and up-to-date is vital. It really does empower those smaller organisations and they feel supported.”

Keeping VCSE organisations in touch with others in the Sector

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the VCSE organisations who responded to the online surveys felt Clinks helps them to develop relationships with other organisations. In particular, many people described how Clinks' information and events enable them to identify and network with others in the Sector:

“We can follow up news items we see in Light Lunch and make connections with other organisations.”

For some people, the opportunity to develop relationships with other organisations within the Sector had resulted in greater mutual support:

“Being at various Clinks' events has been great for developing a network of like-minded organisations with whom we can share our stories and find collective solutions to the various problems the Sector is facing.”

For smaller organisations, being able to network with other organisations helps them feel less isolated:

“Clinks brings a greater sense of one-ness and knowing we are sharing the same problems ... it stops there being a feeling of isolation.”

“Sometimes an organisation can feel very isolated and it's great to hear how other organisations in similar situations overcome issues.”

Improved systems and procedures

Half (50%) of the VCSE organisations who responded to the online surveys felt that the support and information from Clinks had helped them to develop their organisation's systems and procedures. In particular, this had helped them with monitoring and evaluating their services, involving volunteers and developing service user involvement:

“We are now able to measure the impact our services make to the lives of our service users. We were unable to do this before.”

“The workshops enabled me to meet other organisations and discuss how they are managing volunteers along with what has worked and what has not.”

“The principles and theories in Clinks' report [into involving service users] were useful for developing service user involvement in our own organisation.”

Capable staff

Feedback from the interviews and surveys also suggests that Clinks is equipping individuals within the Sector to work more effectively through developing their personal networks and their skills.



85%
FELT CLINKS
HAD ENABLED
THEM TO
DEVELOP THEIR
NETWORKS AND
CONTACTS IN
THE SECTOR

NETWORKS

The majority (85%) of the VCSE organisations who responded to our online surveys felt that Clinks had helped them to develop their personal networks and contacts in the Sector and nearly half (49%) felt that the training and events run by Clinks had helped their staff to improve their skills:

“Several colleagues have been on Clinks’ training which has been great for their personal development.”

In addition, the feedback collected by Clinks from people who had attended their training courses shows that:

- 95% said they had increased their understanding of volunteering in prison.⁵
- 82% said they had increased their understanding of volunteering with offenders in the community.⁶
- 86% said they had increased their understanding of outcomes.⁷

Time and resources

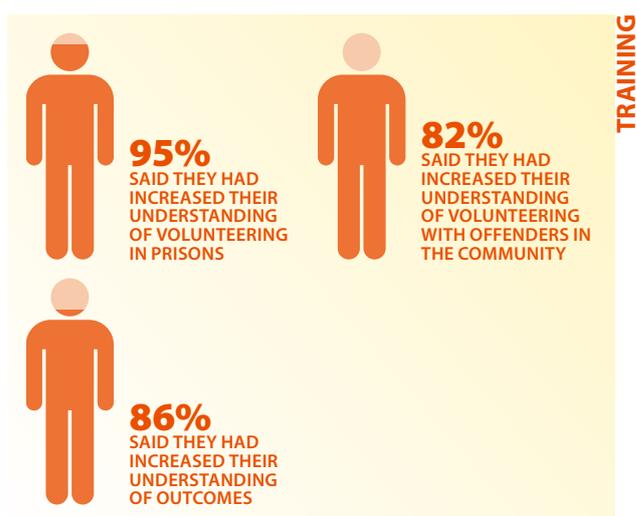
Some people highlighted how the information from Clinks is invaluable in saving them time:

“You’ve got something national which can do the research and invest the time whereas on the ground we don’t really have it. There’s only one of me.”

“Light Lunch is the definitive document. There is so much stuff around – when you are a small charity, you are flying around and you don’t know where you are with consultation documents.”

Others described how additional resources from Clinks had enhanced their service provision:

“We have laptops for our service users. This helped our service users get skills for employment - which in turn builds a better work force because we are enabled!”



“We got a free consultant to help with business planning and a discounted copywriter to help with the Christmas Appeal.”

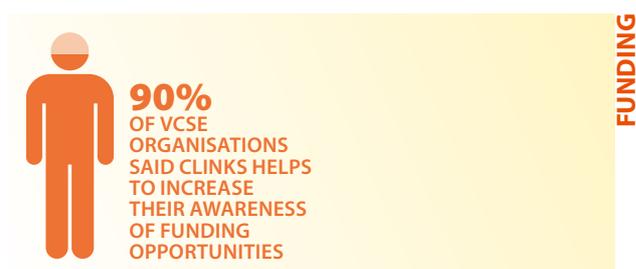
MORE SUSTAINABLE

Many of the VCSE organisations who responded to the online surveys or who were interviewed as part of this impact assessment described how support and information from Clinks is helping their organisations become more sustainable by:

- Making them more aware of funding opportunities
- Giving them better access to funders and policy-makers.

More aware of funding opportunities

The vast majority (90%) of the VCSE organisations who responded to our online surveys or who were interviewed said Clinks helps to increase their awareness of funding opportunities.



Some had found it particularly useful as it had enabled them to secure funding for their work:

“It has opened doors for us and opened up funding for us.”

“Clinks keeps us abreast of funding opportunities that we have followed up and been successful in winning.”

In addition, one person said that the support they had got from Clinks around understanding the nominations process for police and crime commissioners (PCCs) had helped them to secure funding for one of their projects through their local PCC.

Some stakeholders also described how the information from Clinks enabled them to respond rapidly to opportunities and in some cases people said they would not have seen this information elsewhere:

“It’s meant that we can take advantage of funding opportunities earlier on.”

“We sometimes find grants on the Clinks emails that we haven’t seen elsewhere.”

For many, information from Clinks had also given them a greater understanding of changes in the funding climate (92% of VCSE Sector survey respondents). This was particularly important in enabling organisations to keep abreast of the current changes around commissioning and payment by results:

“I have come away with a stronger understanding of the VCSE perspective on commissioning.”



Others said that Clinks’ support had enabled them to strengthen their organisation’s case for funding:

“We have been able to evaluate the first year with a robust evidence-based report which has improved our chances for further funding.”

Access to funders

A number of people also felt that being able to meet funders, commissioners and policy-makers at Clinks’ events had been important for their organisation’s development:

“At Clinks conferences I’ve been introduced to a key stakeholder with a lot of influence who has been difficult to get hold of.”

In some cases, people felt that their involvement with Clinks had also given their organisations greater recognition in the eyes of policy-makers:

“If it wasn’t for Clinks inviting us in to meet key stakeholders and ministers, they wouldn’t have taken notice of us or known about us but they do now.”

“It’s enabled us to drag some of those public sector organisations into the room with us when before they might not have come.”

2.2 A MORE DYNAMIC SECTOR

CLINKS IS CONTRIBUTING TO **A MORE DYNAMIC SECTOR** BY ENABLING IT TO HAVE **A STRONGER VOICE**, DEVELOP AND **SHAPE ITS THINKING** AND BECOME **MORE UNIFIED**.

A STRONGER VOICE

The majority (93%) of those who responded to our online surveys or who were interviewed felt that Clinks enables the Sector to have a stronger voice by:

- Representing the views and experiences of the Sector to policy-makers and others
- Advocating for the Sector.



93%
FELT CLINKS
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VOICE

Representing the views and experiences of the Sector

Many stakeholders felt that Clinks is effective in representing the views and experiences of the Sector to external agencies:

““ Their responses to things like Transforming Rehabilitation are really useful because they are able to source and collate what the feeling is out there into something which adds a bit more kudos and power when it's fed back as a single voice.””

There was a strong view among many of those we consulted that Clinks is also effective in consulting with the Sector and putting forward a unified view to policy-makers and others:

““ The views they put forward represent what they have gleaned from others so it's a powerful representation and an aggregation which is more powerful than one organisation.””

This was particularly important in giving the Sector a single voice that others listen to:

““ Clinks has given organisations that work with offenders a collective voice. In the current climate, voluntary work with offenders is not 'sexy' – Clinks keeps it professional and pertinent.””

Advocating for the Sector

Stakeholders also felt that Clinks plays an important role in advocating for the Sector and demonstrating its value:

““ Clinks has been effective at enabling the Sector to recognise its value and has acted as a strong advocate of its role on society – not just a cheap provider.””

““ They've got a strong voice in the Sector and the Sector is changing massively and it's more important than ever that we have an organisation like Clinks that is standing up for the Sector.””

Some stakeholders felt that this was particularly true of Clinks' role with policy-makers:

““ Clinks has made it abundantly clear to policy-makers that if they are doing anything in the voluntary sector, they can't just impose it, they need to involve Clinks in the process.””

Clinks also clearly plays a crucial role in supporting and advocating for smaller VCSE organisations, particularly in terms of new commissioning practices:

““ I think they provide a really useful forum, particularly for the smaller VCSE organisations that perhaps don't have the capacity and capability on their own.””

““ The smaller organisations need Clinks to speak with integrity on their behalf, particularly now the Sector is finding its voice is being constrained in terms of core funding or having to work with corporate partners.””

DEVELOPING AND SHAPING THINKING

Feedback from stakeholders strongly suggests that Clinks enables the Sector to develop and shape its thinking by:

- Providing ways for VCSE organisations to share information and good practice
- Channelling and distilling information from policy-makers to the Sector.

Sharing information and good practice

Feedback from the surveys and interviews reveals that the information and opportunities provided by Clinks enables VCSE organisations in the Sector to share learning and good practice:⁸

“Keeping up to date and providing easily accessible information helps us all to be responsive and dynamic.”

“Clinks has encouraged organisations to join together and to share ideas. The networking opportunities - particularly in the early days - were vital for us.”

Channelling and distilling information from policy-makers to the Sector

Feedback from those we consulted also suggests that Clinks is enabling the Sector to respond to the opportunities and challenges it faces. In particular, Clinks acts as a conduit for the Sector, sharing information from policy-makers:

“They are an important source of information in terms of and channelling information and transferring government policy to the Sector, across the Sector, and across constituent groups in the Sector.”

More critically, Clinks plays a vital role in explaining policy so that the Sector can respond accordingly:

“It is able to provide a coherent voice to Government and the prison service and act as a conduit and explain government policy downwards to the Sector.”

MORE UNIFIED

The majority of those who responded to our online surveys felt that Clinks helps the Sector to develop shared values and a common sense of purpose as well as build strong cross-sector partnerships.⁹ In particular, feedback gathered through our interviews and online surveys reveal that Clinks plays a vital role in helping the Sector to come together and be true to its principles:

“By being a unifying presence Clinks empowers the Sector to come together around similar, though not always identical, values.”

“It’s getting back to those shared values they embody...it’s like having a moral gauge.”

Clinks is also helping the Sector to work more collaboratively:

“It helps organisations to see the wider picture and encourages cross-working.”

“If I understand what is going on and coming up, I can approach other agencies to offer support and talk about how we can work together.”

“It does the hard work of identifying issues, putting contacts clearly on view and encouraging participation.”

2.3 MORE SUPPORTIVE EXTERNAL AGENCIES

CLINKS CLEARLY PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN **ENABLING COMMISSIONERS, FUNDERS, POLICY-MAKERS AND PRIVATE SECTOR AGENCIES TO UNDERSTAND AND WORK MORE COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE SECTOR.** CLINKS DOES THIS BY INCREASING THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SECTOR AND THE ISSUES IT FACES AND ENABLING THEM TO **CONSULT AND COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY** WITH ORGANISATIONS IN THE SECTOR.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SECTOR

The majority of the external agencies and contacts who responded to our online survey said that Clinks increases their understanding of the way the Sector works and of the issues and challenges it faces.

For example, several funders and commissioners said they had found it useful to talk to Clinks about the reality of the challenges facing the Sector:

“It’s certainly helpful for people like us, for government, local authorities, etc. to really understand the situation charities are in.”

“If you want to find out what’s going on in that world, you talk to Clinks. They keep us informed about what is going on in that world because they are closer to it than we are and closer to their membership.”

Many external agencies and contacts also talked about how Clinks helps them to understand the role of the Sector and the diversity of views and experiences:

“My impression is that Clinks is playing a significant role in raising awareness of the role of the voluntary sector in the criminal justice field. Other people aren’t necessarily that aware of the range and scale of voluntary sector activities.”

“It helps us to have a better and more accurate picture of what the Sector is like.”

Several funders and commissioners also described how Clinks helps inform the development of their policies and practices:

“Clinks have been a very useful sounding board both in terms of their knowledge of the voluntary sector but also their own expertise in criminal justice.”

“We are always keen to have a Clinks view when we think about where to fund next or the key issues.”

MORE ABLE TO CONSULT AND COMMUNICATE WITH THE SECTOR

The majority (73%) of the external agencies and contacts who responded to our online survey felt that Clinks had enabled them to consult and communicate more effectively with the Sector.



73%
OF EXTERNAL
AGENCIES AND
CONTACTS FELT
CLINKS HAD
ENABLED THEM
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COMMUNICATE
MORE EFFECTIVELY

COMMUNICATION

Some of the commissioners and policy-makers we spoke to talked about how useful it was to have one point of contact:

“It’s certainly made it a lot easier to commission pieces of work. Their communications go out to an awful lot of people.”

“Clinks offer us a single communication channel into that Sector to invite them to events to consult with them.”

“We have used the directory created by Clinks to access VCSE projects that work with offenders.”

It appears that Clinks is playing a significant role in helping private sector organisations to consult and engage with organisations in the Sector:

“If we have to look at an area where we don’t have any VCSE in our network then Clinks offer us a single communication channel into that sector.”

“We were looking for VCSE organisations in the North East and Clinks helped to facilitate events and

advised us through the process.”

“It has helped us to determine more clearly where there are opportunities for us to work across the criminal justice sector.”

For some external agencies, their contact with Clinks also meant that they were able to engage with organisations in the Sector that are too small to be identified in other ways:

“We find the support that Clinks provides invaluable. Government would struggle to engage with some of those really small organisations.”

This is clearly important in light of imminent changes to the way in which offenders are supported in prison and post-release. For example, one private sector organisation described how Clinks had helped them involve organisations in the Sector in their bid for probation services:

“Clinks has been really helpful in that we will be looking to involve the VCSE in delivering rehabilitation and through the gate.”

03 MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE SECTOR

As well as looking at the impact of Clinks' work, this assessment explored the extent to which Clinks is currently meeting the needs of its stakeholders. We therefore asked stakeholders whether they feel Clinks is currently doing enough to achieve its strategic aims of:

- Promoting the Sector
- Representing the Sector
- Providing specialist support for organisations in the Sector
- Identifying priority areas and finding solutions.

We also asked stakeholders what else, or what more, they feel Clinks should be doing to support their work and that of the Sector more generally.

3.1 PROMOTING THE SECTOR

Clinks seeks to promote the Sector by raising awareness of the diversity of the Sector and highlighting the value and quality of its work. The majority of those who responded to the online surveys said that Clinks does not need to do more than it currently does to promote the Sector.¹⁰ This was reflected in the feedback from those we interviewed; they described how Clinks helps to increase awareness of the Sector and give it credibility:

“Clinks is playing a significant role in raising awareness of the role of the voluntary sector in the criminal justice field. Other people aren't necessarily that aware of the range and scale of voluntary sector activities.”

“It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the VCSE working with offenders.”

For others, Clinks also gives the Sector an identity which it had previously lacked:

“Clinks certainly give us a real identity as a Sector ... while we all may come from different areas, we were a part of the VCSE that had very specific needs which weren't being met before Clinks.”

3.2 REPRESENTING THE SECTOR

Clinks seeks to represent the Sector to policy-makers, focusing particular on ensuring the voices of smaller organisations and of different sub-sectors are heard.

The majority of those who responded to the online surveys felt that Clinks does not need to do more than it currently does to represent the Sector.¹¹ Feedback gathered through our interviews and the surveys reveals that Clinks plays a vital role in ensuring the views and experiences of the Sector are heard by policy-makers:

“Clinks' function as the voice of the Sector is extremely important in influencing government policies and the legislation that impacts on our work.”

In particular, Clinks is seen to provide a collective voice for VCSE organisations in the CJS which no other organisation is doing. Many stakeholders felt this was particularly important in ensuring policy-makers did not lose sight of the smaller organisations and the role they play in supporting offenders, ex-offenders and their families:

“There are so many small organisations out there that really don't have a voice. Clinks keep reminding everybody of those organisations.”

Some policy-makers themselves also recognised that without Clinks they would struggle to engage and take account of the needs of smaller organisations in the Sector:

“We would go to the four or five big organisations because we would just about manage to talk to them. The danger is we would lose the voice of the smaller ones because we would just find it very difficult to make the time.”

For many people, Clinks is also seen as providing a bridge between the statutory and voluntary sectors, which again, was important in enabling smaller organisations to be heard:

“It’s opening up direct links to Ministers and MoJ that small organisations wouldn’t get if it wasn’t for Clinks. They will invite us in whereas other agencies only invite the larger organisations.”

3.3 PROVIDING SPECIALIST SUPPORT FOR ORGANISATIONS IN THE SECTOR

Clinks aims to support organisations in the Sector so that they can provide effective and innovative services. Again, it focuses its support particularly on smaller organisations.

The majority of VCSE organisations who responded to the surveys are satisfied with the amount of specialist support Clinks is providing for organisations in the Sector.¹² In particular, people highlighted the role that Clinks plays in providing information for organisations, especially for smaller organisations:

“They co-ordinate and bring together information which is useful for small organisations which they otherwise wouldn’t have the time to research.”

“I find the Clinks Light Lunch hugely important in ensuring that we’re not ‘cut off’ from everything that is happening.”

A number of people also felt that the work Clinks does around developing the professionalism and competence of its Members is important, particularly in preparation for the changes in funding and commissioning:

“I think the work they do around evaluation is great and I think it will probably unfortunately become more important.”

In addition, one person described how a small capacity-building grant from Clinks had enabled their organisation to develop partnership-working with a number of other local organisations:

“It enabled us to really think through the issues around how we could work together and what the pros and cons would be.”

3.4 IDENTIFYING PRIORITY AREAS AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

Finally, Clinks aims to identify priority areas for organisations in the Sector and to enable them to work together to find and implement solutions.

The majority of those who responded to our surveys said they were satisfied with the amount that Clinks is doing in terms of identifying priority areas and finding solutions:¹³

“Over the last couple of years Clinks has really helped to focus attention on the key issues, such as PbR, Social Impact Bonds, and involving volunteers in working with offenders.”

It also appears that Clinks plays an important role in facilitating dialogue and providing opportunities for VCSE organisations to come together:

“I think that the things that Clinks are trying to do at the moment in terms of helping people prepare for a new world of payment by results, etc. are really helpful and exactly the right kind of approach.”

3.5 WHAT ELSE CLINKS SHOULD BE DOING

Many people did not feel that Clinks should be changing what it does or should do anything new. Nonetheless, feedback gathered through our interviews and the online surveys reveals a number of areas in which people felt that Clinks could develop its services for VCSE organisations and for the Sector as a whole. In addition, some people suggested ways in which Clinks could strengthen its own position in the Sector.

FOR VCSE ORGANISATIONS

Training

People clearly value the training Clinks provides. However, there were some suggestions for training on specific topics such as:

- PbR negotiating
- Mentoring
- Management/leadership skills for ex-service users.

Other people suggested ways in which Clinks might expand the training it provides through offering 'bite-sized' training events or e-learning or providing more training in different regions. A number of people also suggested Clinks could offer more low cost or free training.

Information-sharing

Information-sharing was another key theme in the feedback we received around how Clinks could develop its services. Some of the comments related to the way in which Clinks shares information such as a more accessible blog with sections relating to specific subjects or a calendar of upcoming events so VCSE organisations can make sure their events do not coincide with other organisations' events.

A few people also suggested that Clinks could develop resources on specific topics such as:

- Working with specific demographic groups
- The impact of the welfare reform changes
- Safeguarding of children/vulnerable adults
- Changes to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Networking

Many people stressed the importance of the networking facilitated by Clinks and simply want Clinks to provide more opportunities for them to come together with their peers in the Sector. In particular, one person felt that Clinks could develop a forum for policy officers to meet on a regular basis.

Specialist support

Although the majority of the VCSE organisations who responded to the surveys felt Clinks was providing enough specialist support, some felt Clinks should do more. For many people, this centred on helping organisations prepare for the changes ahead:

“With the increasing complexity of the commissioning environment, especially as PbR enters the fray, providing support to organisations in how to operate effectively in these new times will be necessary.”

In particular, some people said that they would appreciate introductions to private sector organisations:

“We're being told we have to engage with the private sector. Give us a list of who are the contacts in Serco, Tribal that we need to contact ... Get us in a room together.”

However, there was also a sense that Clinks needs to support organisations that choose not to engage with the new commissioning agenda:

“Clinks has a very important role in supporting small organisations who should not be part of this market.”

More regional support and presence

Some people feel that Clinks should develop its regional activities and support. For example, some people said they would like more events across the country and one person felt that Clinks could do more to develop regional networks:

“I don't feel part of anything regionally. Is there anything I can get involved in?”

“How can I assist? I know more about what is going on nationally than here.”

FOR THE SECTOR

More lobbying on specific issues

Although the majority of VCSE respondents felt Clinks was doing enough to represent and promote the Sector, some felt that Clinks should be doing more, particularly in terms of raising specific issues such as universal security clearance for staff and volunteers, lack of suitable, affordable housing for ex-offenders as well as the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women in the CJS.

More generally, a number of people felt Clinks should be doing more to campaign against some of the more detrimental changes to the Criminal Justice System, particularly the impact of payment by results:

“We are talking about PbR and the difficulties, but we aren't challenging it. It's a 900 strong collective but we are not saying 'this isn't working, it will never work, we will never get this square peg into a round hole.'”

Preparing for new commissioning arrangements

A key theme in much of the feedback we received was the need for Clinks to do more to enable VCSE organisations to prepare for the new commissioning arrangements, particularly in co-ordinating and facilitating joint-working. For example, there was a recognition that Clinks could provide toolkits and consultancy for organisations seeking to merge.

Some people also suggested that Clinks could act as a co-ordinating body for smaller VCSE organisations bidding for contracts and provide them with advice and support in producing and presenting their bids:

“Clinks should provide a forum where the smaller VCSE organisations can find ways to learn about each other's' services, look at aligning provision and then approach commissioners (public, and private) with a joined up offer that is larger than the sum of its parts.”

In addition, it was felt that Clinks could play a pivotal role in linking the 'big primes' with the smaller VCSE organisations who are at most risk of being left out of the new PbR/commissioning frameworks. It was also suggested that Clinks could encourage funders to fund consortia of VCSE organisations to deliver services.

Quality standards

A number of people suggested that Clinks should help the Sector prepare for the new commissioning arrangements by developing the Sector's ability to demonstrate its professionalism. Although most people felt that some kind of accreditation system would not be appropriate, a number felt Clinks could develop quality standards which Member organisations could use to guide their development:

“This is the baseline if you are thinking about impact. These are the kinds of things you would want to be looking at when thinking about value for money. These are the kinds of things to think about if you're thinking about becoming a sub-contractor.”

One person felt that Clinks could offer a “best practice compliance review” for VCSE organisations and a forum where they could ask questions in a friendly environment.

FOR CLINKS

Relationships with other infrastructure organisations

Some people suggested that Clinks could provide more leadership for the group of infrastructure organisations currently funded by MoJ. Another person felt Clinks could do more to align itself with other generic infrastructure organisations to lobby around more general issues such as working with prime contractors, payment by results and social finance. In addition, some other infrastructure organisations in the Sector felt that Clinks could do more to 'share the platform' with them:

“I'd like my voice to be given not just through Clinks but with Clinks.”

Greater recognition

Some people suggested that Clinks needs to promote itself more in different areas:

“I don't think they are known enough around the MoJ. That's partly their responsibility and partly ours. The key people keep changing all the time so I think they just have to keep going round and saying this is our job, your organisation is giving us money to do this, and we can help you.”

“Get Clinks higher up the corporate hierarchy and make their pitch to more senior people.”

“If any of the prime providers don't beat a path to Clinks' door, then they need to do that.”

It was also suggested that Clinks could do more to ensure policy-makers understand the value of infrastructure organisations.

04 MAXIMISING AND SUSTAINING CLINKS' IMPACT

It is clear that Clinks' services are effective in informing and supporting the work of VCSE organisations in the Sector. It is also evident from the feedback we gathered that Clinks is helping external agencies working in the CJS to understand the VCSE better and appreciate the challenges it faces.

However, in considering Clinks' impact, it is important to identify why Clinks is able to have the impact it has and what may limit its impact so that it can consider how best to maximise and sustain its impact in the future.

4.1 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO CLINKS' IMPACT

Feedback from stakeholders reveals that Clinks has impact because it:

- Is trusted and respected
- Provides high-quality services
- Has skilled and experienced staff.

TRUST AND RESPECT

Feedback from stakeholders shows that people trust and respect Clinks because they feel Clinks is neutral, has a good understanding of the issues facing the VCSE and represents a wide range of organisations in the CJS.

Many people felt that Clinks' neutral stance enables their Members to trust them:

“They could easily just let their personal views just interfere. And they don't. And I think that impartiality helps Clinks' Members think things through better.”

“I think it's because they almost have a sort of honest broker role because they're not involved in going for service delivery contracts themselves, so they're not bidding for contracts so people feel they can trust them.”

Many of the people we interviewed also felt that Clinks listens to its Members and represents their views rather than its own:

“What I see time and time again is Clinks operating very much for the benefit of third sector organisations.”

“With Clinks it doesn't feel like it's all about them. It does feel like it's about the Sector.”

Many of the stakeholders we consulted also felt that Clinks' experience and its ability to really understand the issues facing the Sector contributes to the impact they have:

“They're very clear and have a good grasp of the issues.”

“There are so many different views but what Clinks seems to be able to do is work out which ones are the most important.”

Others also felt that Clinks' diverse and wide-ranging membership means that their voice is credible:

“The breadth of organisations, the small grass-roots organisations that they can engage with ... they cover a really diverse group.”

“It's really useful for them to say 'we have x number of Members, this is what we are hearing on the ground'. It's much more difficult for whoever their audience is to dismiss that.”

As a result, Clinks are clearly trusted and respected by VCSE organisations in the Sector and those in the CJS more widely:

“It has a rational voice which government are prepared to listen to.”

QUALITY OF ITS SERVICES

Feedback from stakeholders highlights the vital contribution that Clinks' services make to the Sector and those involved with it:

““ Their conferences are brilliant. Since recession we have a policy that our staff don't go to conferences but the only ones we do are the Clinks ones.”

““ It has become a key organisation because of the information it can provide on a raft of issues.”

In particular, stakeholders praised Light Lunch for the breadth and quality of the information it contains which makes it central to their work:

““ Light Lunch is fantastic for everybody, not just people in the Sector.”

““ You almost feel if you take a week off you're completely at sea.”

QUALITY AND REPUTATION OF THE STAFF TEAM

It is evident from the feedback we received that Clinks is extremely successful at building relationships with its stakeholders. Funders and commissioners were generally very positive about the relationships they have built up with Clinks over the years:

““ Clinks are one of our key stakeholders and a valued partner for us.”

In particular, stakeholders emphasised the skills and abilities of the staff team who are valued for their experience, expertise and openness:

““ It is the experience and expertise of the staff that work at Clinks ... they're always willing to help. That's key for us.”

““ I've been much impressed by some of the staff – around how they are open to ideas.”

““ If I'm doing a piece of work, I can phone up any of [the staff at Clinks] and ask them who do you think I should approach, where do you think I should go – which I find incredibly helpful. It's really important for me to be able to rely on them.”

There is also strong evidence that Clinks' Director is particularly key to the organisation's impact. Many stakeholders felt that Clive is invaluable because of his knowledge of the Sector, his ability to build relationships at all levels and his unique style:

““ In Clive Martin they have an exceptional person in terms of his knowledge and understanding.”

““ Clive Martin's reputation and profile is excellent.”

““ He has a wry delivery style which allows him to throw punches at people without them realising they have been hit – he can say difficult things without people realising what he has said.”

4.2 WHAT LIMITS CLINKS' IMPACT

Although this impact assessment has highlighted the significant impact Clinks is having on the Sector, there are a number of factors that also limit its impact.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Many stakeholders highlighted the difficulty Clinks faces having an impact at a time when there are so many changes taking place in the Sector:

“In terms of actually influencing policy-makers, anyone trying to do that at the moment is crying in the wind. I’m not sure that Clinks are being particularly listened to at the moment but I think they have in the past and I’m sure they will be again in the future.”

“Clinks’ strength very much depends on government of the day – I think they are feeling more voiceless with this government, as everyone is.”

DIVERSITY OF MEMBERS’ VIEWS

Some stakeholders also felt that although Clinks plays an important role in representing the Sector, the wide range of organisations that make up its membership makes it more difficult for Clinks to provide a balanced representation of the Sector:

“The Sector is so diverse so the large ones like Nacro don’t have the same issues as some of the small localised organisations, so there can’t be a collective voice.”

“I think it’s a difficult position for them and I think they struggle with it daily to make sure they’re not being biased.”

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

A few stakeholders were also concerned that Clinks could be constrained in its lobbying and campaigning for the Sector as it receives statutory funding:

“It’s hard to bite the hand that feeds it. Long term future would be more secure if Clinks could find a way of becoming self-financing.”

CONSULTATION WITH THE SECTOR

One of Clinks’ key strengths is its ability to represent its membership effectively. However to do this, it relies on its Members responding to its consultations. Some people were concerned that Clinks may not always be able to consult as widely as it would like to:

“Clinks do lots of consultations and Members are happy to leave that to Clinks but I’m not sure they can say that they have canvassed all views and maybe that is the nature of the beast. With over 300 Members how on earth can they make that happen?”

“I think people are done to death with consultation ... It’s always the same people giving their time.”

One person suggested that Clinks should look at ways to increase the responses it gets to its consultation:

“They need to start thinking about how to reward those people who are coming to the consultations and giving them their time as that could draw more people in.”

Some stakeholders were also concerned that Clinks might be used by policy-makers as a short-cut for consulting with the Sector:

“They are always faced with risk that [policy-makers] will say that they have spoken to the Sector because they have talked to Clinks.”

RELIANCE ON KEY STAFF

Finally, there was concern from some stakeholders that Clive Martin’s leadership and style of working play such a key role in Clinks’ success that it leaves Clinks vulnerable in the longer-term:

“I wonder what that ‘service’ would look like if Clive weren’t there. Not because it wouldn’t happen perfectly well, but because the lead is crucial ... I regard Clinks as vital, but Clive will be a hard act to follow.”

“I guess there’s always the risk that there’s a heavy reliance on Clive and to what extent his kind of characteristics are in the other members of his paid team and to some extent the board.”

05 CONCLUSION

Our impact assessment has shown that Clinks is having a significant impact across three of the key impact areas identified in the VIP framework:

- Strong organisations
- A dynamic Sector
- Supportive external agencies.

Clinks is clearly playing a vital role in helping to strengthen VCSE organisations in the CJS by enabling them to work more effectively and become more sustainable. In particular, Clinks enables organisations in the Sector to keep up-to-date with issues and respond to opportunities as well as to network with other organisations. Clinks is also contributing to a more dynamic Sector by enabling the Sector to have a stronger voice, develop and shape its thinking and become more unified. The importance of Clinks' role in representing the views and experiences of VCSE organisations and advocating for the Sector emerged particularly strongly. Finally, Clinks is enabling commissioners, funders, policy-makers and private sector agencies to work more collaboratively with the VCSE. It does this by helping them to better appreciate the value and diversity of the Sector and the issues it faces as well as to consult and communicate more effectively with VCSE organisations.

Stakeholders feel that Clinks is providing the range of services and activities that they want and need and that Clinks should continue to provide more of the same. Their suggestions for development indicate that Clinks' services need fine-tuning rather than fundamental change. Nonetheless, the overarching theme in much of their feedback was the need for Clinks to equip the Sector for the changes ahead.

Meeting the needs of its stakeholders undoubtedly enables Clinks to have considerable impact. However, various other factors contribute to Clinks' impact: the trust and respect it has established amongst its stakeholders; the relevance and accessibility of the

services it provides; and the quality and reputation of its staff. It is therefore vital that Clinks recognises the importance of preserving these key aspects in order to maximise and sustain its impact.

Nonetheless, Clinks needs to take account of various factors which may limit its ability to have a strong impact. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the challenge for Clinks of representing and consulting effectively with its large and diverse membership as well as the risk that its ability to lobby and campaign may be weakened by the substantial funding it currently receives from government. In addition, stakeholders attributed some of Clinks' impact to its Director's leadership style and personality; relying heavily on one person inevitably makes an organisation vulnerable in the longer-term.

Although the current climate creates difficulties for Clinks and the organisations it supports, our assessment has shown that Clinks is having a significant impact in the Sector and is fulfilling a vital role in supporting VCSE organisations working in the CJS. It is therefore well-placed to continue helping the Sector respond to the challenges it faces. In the words of one of its stakeholders:

“Clinks is a top-class infrastructure body. It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the VCSE working with offenders.”

06

RECOMMENDATIONS

Feedback from stakeholders highlighted a number of areas in which Clinks can improve its services; the full list of suggestions that were made can be found in Appendix C. The findings from this impact assessment highlight the following recommendations for Clinks to consider in terms of the services it provides.

Clinks should consider:

- Reviewing its training programme in terms of the range of topics covered, the methods used and the locations in which it is delivered
- Expanding the range of information and resources it provides to include topics such as the impact of welfare reform changes and the Disclosure and Barring Service
- Diversify the ways in which it shares information with its stakeholders (e.g. by using social media and new technologies)
- Providing more networking opportunities and more support for VCSE organisations, particularly in preparing for the changes facing the Sector
- Developing more regional activities
- Carrying out lobbying on specific topics such as the impact of PbR on the Sector, security clearance for staff and volunteers
- Providing a co-ordinating and support role for VCSE organisations wishing to tender for contracts
- Developing quality standards for VCSE organisations in the Sector.

As an organisation, Clinks should also consider:

- Strengthening its relationships with other infrastructure organisations
- Improving the way it promotes itself and the role of infrastructure organisations more generally.

Finally, in order to maximise and sustain its impact, Clinks should focus on preserving what it does best:

- Maintaining a wide and diverse membership base
- Representing its Members through effective consultation

- Providing high-quality, relevant and accessible services
- Sustaining the culture and reputation of the organisation through investing in its staff and succession-planning
- Maintaining and demonstrating its neutrality and independence in all its work.

In addition, the process of analysing Clinks' own monitoring data identified gaps and inconsistencies in the way that Clinks records information on its outcomes. It would therefore be useful for Clinks to carry out a review of its monitoring and evaluation processes and develop an evaluation framework which would enable it to collect and report outcomes information more effectively.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A | EVALUATION SAMPLE

SURVEY	Number of people who took part
Online survey to members	46
Online survey to VCSE non-members	72
Online survey to non-VCSE contacts	53
Telephone interviews	32
Total	203

PROFILE OF VCSE ORGANISATIONS WHO RESPONDED TO THE ONLINE SURVEY

LOCATION	Clinks' members (n = 37)	VCSE non-members (n = 58)
London	30%	34%
South West	22%	10%
North West	11%	5%
South East	8%	14%
East of England	8%	9%
East Midlands	5%	2%
North East England	5%	10%
West Midlands	5%	3%
Wales	3%	2%
Yorkshire and the Humber	3%	10%
Total	100%	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

SIZE	Clinks' members (n = 37)	VCSE non-members (n = 58)
Less than 20 staff	57%	28%
21-50 staff	35%	41%
More than 50 staff	8%	31%
Total	100%	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

REMIT	Clinks' members (n = 37)	VCSE non-members (n = 58)
National remit	30%	43%
Regional remit	14%	38%
Local remit	57%	19%
Total	100%	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

FOCUS	Clinks' members (n = 37)	VCSE non-members (n = 58)
Mental and physical well-being	39%	43%
Accommodation	24%	29%
Education, training and employment	50%	42%
Finance, benefit and debt	26%	26%
Drugs and alcohol	24%	31%
Attitudes, thinking and behaviour	43%	51%
Other	20%	24%

Many organisations had more than one focus of their work

ROLE OF RESPONDENT	Clinks' members (n = 35)	VCSE non-members (n = 58)
Director or Chief Executive	60%	43%
Manager	31%	31%
Trustee	3%	0%
Fundraising officer	0%	5%
Communications officer	0%	5%
Service delivery worker	0%	2%
Volunteer	0%	2%
Other	2%	12%
Total	100%	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

PROFILE OF CLINKS' CONTACTS WHO RESPONDED TO THE ONLINE SURVEY

LOCATION	Clinks' contacts (n = 33)
London	24%
South West	21%
North West	12%
South East	12%
East of England	9%
West Midlands	9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	6%
East Midlands	3%
North East England	3%
Wales	0%
Total	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

REMIT	Clinks' contacts (n = 34)
National remit	44%
Regional remit	9%
Local remit	47%
Total	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

SECTOR	Clinks' contacts (n = 34)
Public sector	56%
Private sector	35%
Other	9%
Total	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

TYPE OF ORGANISATION	Clinks' contacts (n = 34)
Prison/police/PCC	39%
Grantmaker/funder	9%
Other	42%
Total	100%

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

TYPE OF ORGANISATION	Identified by Clinks	Recommended by other interviewees	Total
Members/partner organisations	10	6	16
Private sector contacts	3	0	3
Key individuals	1	2	3
Funders/commissioners	10	0	10
Total	24	8	32

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding

APPENDIX B | EVALUATION DATA

RESPONSES FROM CLINKS' VCSE MEMBERS AND CONTACTS

STRONGER ORGANISATION	Members (n = 44-46)	VCSE non-members (n = 67-69)	Total (n = 111-115)
Increased awareness of funding opportunities	89%	91%	90%
Increased awareness of changes in the funding climate	93%	91%	92%
Increased awareness of other changes/ issues affecting their work	89%	91%	90%
More effective services (e.g. monitoring and evaluation, service-user involvement)	52%	48%	50%
Improved the way it manages its volunteers	41%	39%	40%
Developed external relationships	55%	72%	65%

CAPABLE PEOPLE	Members (n = 43)	VCSE non-members (n = 65)	Total (n = 108)
Developed new ideas and perspectives	60%	77%	72%
Developed networks and contacts in the sector	79%	86%	85%
Improved skills	40%	48%	49%

DYNAMIC SECTOR	Members (n = 42)	VCSE non-members (n = 59)	Total (n = 101)
Has a voice	93%	93%	93%
Shares information and learning	93%	92%	92%
Has shared values and common purpose	74%	81%	78%
Builds strong cross-sector working/partnerships	83%	83%	83%
Presents and disseminates learning	86%	90%	88%

SERVICES USED	Members (n = 46)	VCSE non-members (n = 59)	Total (n = 105)
Light Lunch	76%	83%	80%
Information (e.g. briefings, toolkits)	50%	57%	54%
Publications	35%	39%	37%
Working With Offenders Directory (WWOD)	26%	7%	15%
Training	24%	25%	24%
Events	39%	39%	39%
Clinks Network	17%	25%	22%
One-to-one support	4%	9%	7%
GrantNet	20%	n/a	8%
Extra member benefits	20%	n/a	8%
Twitter	4%	16%	11%

MEETING THE SECTOR'S NEEDS: MEMBERS' VIEWS (n = 39)	Should do more	About right	Should do less	Don't know
Promoting the work of the Sector	26%	72%	0%	3%
Representing the Sector	21%	77%	0%	3%
Providing specialist support for organisations in the Sector	23%	69%	0%	8%
Identifying priority areas and finding solutions	33%	62%	0%	5%

MEETING THE SECTOR'S NEEDS: VCSE NON-MEMBERS' VIEWS (n = 58)	Should do more	About right	Should do less	Don't know
Promoting the work of the Sector	16%	79%	0%	5%
Representing the Sector	12%	84%	0%	3%
Providing specialist support for organisations in the Sector	21%	71%	0%	9%
Identifying priority areas and finding solutions	21%	69%	0%	10%

RESPONSES FROM CLINKS' NON-VCSE CONTACTS

SUPPORTIVE EXTERNAL AGENCIES	(n = 51)
Increased understanding of the way the VCSE works	86%
Increased understanding of the issues and challenges it faces	90%
Increased ability to consult/communicate with the VCSE	73%

DYNAMIC SECTOR	(n = 40-41)
Has a voice	93%
Shares information and learning	98%
Has shared values and common purpose	83%
Builds strong cross-sector working/partnerships	75%
Presents and disseminates learning	90%

SERVICES USED	(n = 53)
Light Lunch	57%
Information (e.g. briefings, toolkits)	38%
Publications	25%
Working With Offenders Directory (WWOD)	17%
Training	13%
Events	30%
Clinks Network	21%
Twitter	9%

MEETING THE SECTOR'S NEEDS: VCSE NON-MEMBERS' VIEWS (n = 58)	Should do more	About right	Should do less	Don't know
Promoting the work of the Sector	25%	67%	0%	8%
Representing the Sector	28%	64%	0%	8%
Providing specialist support for organisations in the Sector	44%	39%	0%	17%
Identifying priority areas and finding solutions	39%	50%	0%	11%

APPENDIX C | SUGGESTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Training

- Training with thematic focus
- Bite-sized training sessions, or offer bite sized e-learning on CJS and environment
- Training on PbR negotiating skills
- Leadership/management training for ex-service user staff
- Leverage scholarships to develop managers organisational skills
- Some mentoring training and support
- Free training for volunteers
- Low-cost training for staff and trustees.

Networking and events

- More networking events
- Forum for policy workers
- Facilitate local networks
- A database of VCSE organisations (not necessarily Clinks' members) who are interested in developing partnerships
- Webinars for senior managers.

Regional presence

- More pro-active regional development
- More meetings/ training/partnership-working/ seminars/informal events in the North West, Wales, the West, the South West and the North.

Specialist support

- Introductions to private sector organisations
- More shared consultancy support
- Consultancy around how to develop as a business or business mentors
- Support for specialist organisations (e.g. offender-led or organisations working with high-risk offenders)
- Support for new organisations or organisations new to work in the CJS
- Signpost organisations to other members for support

- More support engaging with private sector organisations or working with statutory agencies
- Helping organisations get contract-ready
- Support for smaller organisations to promote their work, possibly with a book of case studies to highlight their impact.

Lobbying on specific issues

- Universal security clearance for staff and volunteers
- Email-a-prisoner
- Online payment to prisoners
- Lack of suitable, affordable housing for ex-offenders
- The new core day
- The value of volunteers (who are "not free labour")
- BAME women in the CJS
- Access to funding streams for smaller organisations
- PbR
- Encouraging funders to standardise their processes and set realistic targets
- Lobby private sector organisations to give better sub-contracting deals to VCSE organisations.

Representing the Sector

- Facilitate a criminal justice zone at party conferences.
- Rethink the timing of Clinks' Task and Finish papers.
- Share the platform more with other infrastructure organisations or members with relevant expertise
- More opportunities for organisations to feedback directly to government
- Make the focus groups larger
- Work more closely with other specialist infrastructure organisations when developing specific projects.

Supporting mergers, partnerships and joint-working

- Act as a broker to bring organisations together/merge/build consortia
- Develop toolkits and provide consultancy support.

Commissioning/contracting

- Engage with private sector organisations to co-design probation services
- Act as a co-ordinating body for smaller VCSE organisations interesting in bidding for contracts
- Link big primes with smaller VCSE organisations
- Encourage funders to fund consortia of VCSE organisations to deliver services
- Clinks should bid for large contracts which can then be shared amongst other VCSE organisations.

Developing professionalism

- Develop accreditation or quality standards/mark
- Share good practice
- Support with impact measurement
- Best-practice compliance review.

Information-sharing

- A more accessible blog with sections relating to specific subjects
- A comprehensive directory of charities and foundations in the Sector
- A calendar of upcoming events so VCSE organisations can make sure their events do not coincide with other organisations' events
- More filtering on the online directory
- Q&A section on Clinks' website
- Greater use of social media and video conferencing
- Share information more widely i.e. outside the Sector.

Specific information on:

- Clinks' contact with MOJ and commissioners
- How to access funding
- Welfare reform changes and how they affect people in the criminal justice sector
- Safeguarding of children/vulnerable adults
- Changes to the DBS
- List of organisations with experience of carrying out evaluations in the Sector
- Working with prime contractors

- Bidding and contracting processes
- Toolkits around working with specific demographic groups disproportionately represented within the CJS.

Working with other infrastructure organisations

- Lobby government with other infrastructure organisations
- Provide leadership for MOJ-funded infrastructure organisations
- Broker relationships for other infrastructure organisations.

More recognition for Clinks and its role

- Promote value of its work as an infrastructure organisation
- Develop and maintain relationships at MOJ/NOMS on an on-going basis
- Make contact at a senior level in the private sector
- Be more proactive in approaching prime providers.

Other

- More discounts for members
- Start-up office-space for VCSE organisations.

END NOTES

1. VIP was developed by NCVO, Triangle Consulting and the Third Sector Research Centre.
2. State of the Sector, Clinks 2012.
3. The term 'Sector' is used to describe VCSE organisations working with offenders in England and Wales.
4. VIP was developed by NCVO, Triangle Consulting and the Third Sector Research Centre.
5. This feedback was collected from 39 people who had attended Clinks' 'Volunteering in Prison' training course.
6. This feedback was collected from 36 people who had attended Clinks' 'Volunteering with offenders in the community' training course.
7. This feedback was collected from 18 people who had attended Clinks' 'Understanding the CJS and Outcomes Focus' training courses.
8. The vast majority (over 90%) of those who responded to our online surveys said that Clinks helps the Sector to share information and learn from each other.
9. 78% said Clinks helps the Sector to develop shared values and a common purpose and 83% said Clinks helps the Sector to build strong cross-sector working/partnerships.
10. Over three-quarters (76%) of VCOs and over two-thirds (67%) of non-VCSE contacts said they felt Clinks was doing enough to promote the Sector.
11. Over four-fifths (81%) of VCOs and nearly two-thirds (64%) of non-VCSE contacts said they felt Clinks was doing enough to represent the Sector.
12. Over two-thirds (70%) of VCOs said they felt Clinks was doing enough to provide specialist support to VCSE organisations in the Sector.
13. Over two-thirds (66%) of VCOs said they felt Clinks was doing enough to identify priority areas and solutions.



CLiNKs

59 Carter Lane, London EC4V 5AQ
020 7248 3538 | info@clinks.org
www.clinks.org