



Mapping the Voluntary and Community Sector across South Yorkshire: a scoping study

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MACMILLAN, Robert (2005). Mapping the Voluntary and Community Sector across South Yorkshire: a scoping study. Project Report. Sheffield Hallam University.

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Sector across South Yorkshire: a scoping study**

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Sheffield Hallam University

March 2005

Acknowledgements

The research reported here was undertaken by a team of researchers at two research centres at **Sheffield Hallam University**:

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Both centres are also part of the Sheffield Hallam University-wide 'Centre for Voluntary Sector Research' (CVSR), a network of researchers from different departments with interests covering the voluntary and community sector.

The original idea for the research came from **Sue North** of the **South Yorkshire Open Forum**, who along with **Dan Rice** from the **Learning and Skills Council**, acted as an informal steering group. Thanks to both of them for their input.

We would like to acknowledge the support of the **Learning and Skills Council South Yorkshire** which provided the funding for the research.

Finally, we would also like to thank all those people (listed in Appendix 1) who, at quite short notice, were able to share their thoughts about research on the voluntary and community sector and respond to our requests for information.

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Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction: research context and background to the scoping study	6
2. What we think we know about the sector: a review of existing research	10
3. Gaps in knowledge and research priorities	27
4. What next? Conclusions and recommendations	31
References	34
Appendices	35
Appendix 1. Stakeholder contacts	
Appendix 2. Pro-formas	
Appendix 3. E-mail request to non-voluntary and community sector stakeholders	

Mapping the Voluntary and Community Sector across South Yorkshire: a scoping study

Rob Macmillan
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Executive Summary

1. Introduction: research context and background to the scoping study

Research on different aspects of the voluntary and community sector in the UK and internationally has grown dramatically in recent years. A number of cross-national, national, regional and local studies have sought to examine the size and shape of the sector. But the results of these surveys tend to beg the question: *'is it the same round here?'*

South Yorkshire Open Forum (SYOF) is interested to build a comprehensive picture of the sector across South Yorkshire. This scoping study has the broad aim of identifying what is thought to be known already about the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire, and the main gaps in our knowledge. It seeks to address the following questions

1. what studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire have been undertaken in the last five years, are in progress, or are currently being planned?
2. what do existing studies tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector?
3. what are the methodological strengths and weaknesses of existing studies?
4. what are the gaps in knowledge about the voluntary and community sector?
5. what are the priorities for future research involving the sector?

The study involved a detailed review of a number of key studies undertaken in recent years examining different aspects of the sector, alongside a series of short interviews about gaps in knowledge and research priorities with 24 key stakeholders, supplemented by email correspondence with other stakeholders.

2. What we think we know about the sector: a review of existing research

Our interviews and other contacts suggest that there are potentially a large number of research studies and consultancy exercises 'out there' which may have some bearing on our research questions. However, awareness of research about the sector is quite patchy. Most respondents knew of some recent research on the sector in South Yorkshire, even if in only sketchy terms, but different things were cited by different people. Both the circulation and 'shelf life' of research studies appears to be limited.

Research tends to be used by stakeholders to:

- provide evidence to justify need in relation to proposals or funding bids
- inform or influence wider strategies and policies of key stakeholders or partnerships
- raise the profile and increase awareness of the sector amongst different partners.

We reviewed twelve recent research studies and consultancy exercises. In addition, we became aware of at least eleven studies in progress, due to begin or planned in the near future. Several studies aimed to map the sector overall in a particular area, and more recently a number of studies have focused on infrastructure support in the light of the national *ChangeUp* agenda.

A lot of information has been generated about the sector in various ways in recent years. However, many studies are undertaken for specific and often isolated purposes. As a result, the picture of the sector

which emerges is rather partial and patchy - a bit like a jigsaw puzzle in which well over half the pieces are missing, and those which remain seem rather ill-fitting.

For example, we have statistics from 2003 about the estimated scale of the sector in Doncaster and Rotherham. Estimates of the value of the sector range from £32m to £61m in Rotherham and £21m to £92m in Doncaster. But the statistics are not really comparable because different approaches were adopted in each study. Furthermore, we do not have comparable data for Barnsley or Sheffield.

The research reviewed in the scoping study has many strengths, including the accumulation of an abundance of information about the sector over the last few years (where next to nothing was known before); the use of innovative ideas in terms of developing strategies and action plans; the willingness to pose 'awkward questions'; and the fact that research has covered an interesting range of questions addressed by a range of different research methods.

But there are also a number of crucial weaknesses. These include:

- research does not always refer to, and build upon, previous work
- actual research undertaken is not very well described, so the basis for any research findings is hard to assess
- problems in the use of postal surveys, including in particular low response rates and the representativeness of findings
- problems in the analysis of quantitative evidence, and particularly the basis for extrapolating survey findings
- a focus on reporting overall findings in terms of single variables, rather than exploring more fine-tuned analysis
- problems in undertaking and describing qualitative analysis.

3. Gaps in knowledge and research priorities

The main gaps in knowledge and priorities identified by key stakeholders are:

- the need for an assessment of the impact and contribution of the sector across South Yorkshire
- assessing the impact of funding and the implications of changes in the funding environment
- tracking the health and perspective of the sector over time, and analysing future trends.
- further analysis of workforce development issues.

4. What next? Conclusions and recommendations

The study concludes by making some recommendations for future discussion and consideration by stakeholders in the voluntary and community sector and beyond:

- greater thought needs to be given both to the dissemination of research and research impact
- stakeholders should be encouraged to share experience of conducting and commissioning research
- a research forum of interested parties should be established to discuss and coordinate research ideas and plans
- further consultation should take place with other parties around research priorities
- an evolving research strategy on the sector in South Yorkshire might include:
 - i. a South Yorkshire-wide mapping study of the contribution of the sector, designed to update earlier research exercises in Rotherham and Doncaster, to facilitate comparisons between areas and types of organisation and to identify key issues facing the sector. Extra care is required to ensure that the smallest groups and organisations are included, which may involve the need to go beyond the usual lists and directories to identify groups on the ground.
 - ii. investigating the impact and implications of a rapidly changing funding environment.
 - iii. exploring changing perspectives, concerns and organisational developments over time. It is worth considering the feasibility, and importantly, cost of organising some form of regular 'panel' operating at South Yorkshire level, along the lines of the 'State of the Sector Panel'
 - iv. continuing research on workforce development issues, such as the demands and challenges of professionalisation, the profile and development of the workforce, and employment practices within the sector
- Finally, the results of this research, and any developing research strategy, should be made available to all those who have taken part, as well as to others who may have an interest in research.

1. Introduction: research context and background to the scoping study

1.1 The voluntary and community sector: research context

In recent years research on different aspects of the voluntary and community sector in the UK and internationally has grown dramatically. Alongside the emerging findings from a major cross-national comparative study of the voluntary and community sector (Salamon et al 1999, Salamon et al 2004), a great deal more is now known about the size and shape of the sector across the UK. Every two years the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) produces its UK-wide voluntary sector Almanac. This is partly about enhancing the visibility and role of the sector to key stakeholders, especially central government. Using a definition of the sector restricted to 'general charities'¹ the latest Almanac suggests that in 2001/02:

- there are around 153,000 active general charities in the UK
 - with a total income of £20.8 billion
 - an operating expenditure of £20.4 billion
 - a workforce of 569,000 paid employees
 - a contribution of £7.2 billion to the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- (Wilding et al 2004: 17)

In addition central government continues to carry out a range of surveys and research projects which provide insights into the sector overall and the scale and nature of community participation and volunteering. For example, a 'State of the Sector' Panel of some 3,600 voluntary and community organisations across England has been established to facilitate research involving more or less the same group of organisations over an extended period of time. The results from the first wave of surveys are only just beginning to emerge (Home Office 2004a).

In addition to these 'extensive' surveys of the 'big picture' regarding the voluntary and community sector, there is a vast programme of smaller scale research examining different issues and aspects of the sector, including, for example, the structure of voluntary organisations and community groups, the meaning and experience of 'partnership', the motivations behind volunteering, the impact of funding and the role of infrastructure.

Much research, particularly that based on extensive surveys, tends to formulate a predominantly national picture. But this opens the question as to the extent of variation between different geographical areas, for example at regional and local level. The question is typically asked: *"If that is the national picture, is it the same round here?"*

¹ The Almanac's authors recognise that this definition can only capture part of what is typically understood as the voluntary and community sector, and will therefore not include the smallest community-based organisations. Definitional issues remain an almost permanent part of the debate in research and policy discussions of the sector.

In recent years, therefore, a large number of local and regional studies of the scale and contribution of the voluntary and community sector have been undertaken. Following the establishment of the regional voluntary sector networks in 2000, several studies looked at the contribution of the sector at a regional level (e.g. RAISE 2000, VONNE 2000). But since many voluntary and community organisations tend to operate within, and are more oriented towards, a local authority district level, most studies of the scale and contribution of the sector have been undertaken at district level. Local stakeholders have been interested to use these mapping studies to raise the profile of the contribution made by the local voluntary and community sector to potential partners and funders. Examples include district and unitary authority studies across North Yorkshire (North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations 2000), the North West (Wilding 2000) and between contrasting rural districts in County Durham and Northamptonshire (Wilding et al 2002).

However, considered across the country as a whole, mapping the sector at local and regional level appears more as a patchwork of studies involving different methodologies for different purposes. And much of the country remains 'uncharted'. In a comprehensive review for the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum, Lewis (2001: 11) reported that by 2001 no mapping studies had been undertaken in South Yorkshire. However, since then a number of research and consultancy exercises have taken place, and it is partly this emerging situation which gives rise to this scoping study.

1.2 The background to this study

South Yorkshire Open Forum (SYOF) is interested to develop a research project examining the size and nature of the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire. The overall aim is to build a comprehensive picture of the sector across the sub-region, in recognition of the fact that existing knowledge is somewhat patchy.

Preliminary discussions in early 2005 with researchers at Sheffield Hallam University around questions of potential research design have covered:

- Aims, objectives and research questions: *'what would we like to know?'*
- Methodology: *'how should we go about finding these things out?'*
- Respondents: *'who should we be talking to about this?'* and
- Next steps: how to take the idea forward.

It was suggested that three potential phases of research could be envisaged: a scoping study, an 'extensive research' phase and an 'intensive research' phase:

- **Phase 1 - scoping study:** this phase has the broad aim of identifying what is thought to be known already about the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire, and the main gaps in our knowledge. This is arguably an essential first step in order to optimise the use of limited resources and to avoid the possibility of duplicating recent research.
- **Phase 2 - 'extensive research':** this part of a potential research programme would aim to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge identified from the scoping work, particularly relating to the scale and scope of the sector's activities. Because this phase follows logically from phase 1, exact details of

design and methodology, including scale and cost of any such research, cannot be specified until after the scoping study has been undertaken.

- **Phase 3 - 'intensive research':** this part allows the scope to examine some particular issues in more depth, through more intensive qualitative research involving case studies and in-depth interviews. Potential issues raised in discussions so far which might require further examination include the perceived impact on staff, volunteers, organisations, groups and services of funding changes from 2006 onwards, and the nature of relationships between organisations and groups within the sector, including issues of competition, duplication and collaboration.

It was agreed that an initial scoping study should be developed to examine the current state of knowledge about the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire, as a potential prelude to further research at a later stage. This is the report of the scoping study.

1.3 Scoping study: approach and research questions

The scoping study was designed to be primarily a desk-based exercise with the aim of providing information about what is already thought to be known about the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire, and where there might be gaps in knowledge which could be addressed in subsequent research. As such it would provide some safeguard against the possibility of duplicating recent or current research.

The scoping study sought to address the following **research questions**:

1. what studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire
 - a. have been undertaken in the last five years,
 - b. are in progress, or
 - c. are currently being planned?
2. what do existing studies tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector?
3. what are the methodological strengths and weaknesses of existing studies?
4. what are the gaps in knowledge about the voluntary and community sector?
5. what are the priorities for future research involving the sector?

1.4 Scoping study: methodology

The study was undertaken in two main stages between January and March 2005:

Stage 1 focused on **collating and analysing existing research**. Information about recent, current and planned research and consultancy exercises on the sector was collected from a variety of sources. The aim was to gather together all known research studies of relevance to the sector. This could be within or across the four boroughs, at regional level involving South Yorkshire, or, where possible, at national level involving South Yorkshire.

Each of the collected studies was reviewed and critically appraised in order to address the research questions in 1.3 above, particularly around what the research

tells us already about the sector, and what issues are yet to have been addressed. A standard pro-forma (reproduced in Appendix 2) was used to guide the review process.

Stage 2 concentrated on **analysing gaps in our knowledge**. As well as reflections on the review of existing studies in Stage 1, this stage involved conducting a series of short interviews with key stakeholders in order to identify gaps in knowledge and any priorities for research. In the short timescale available, we focused on interviewing key stakeholders from within the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire. Twenty-four telephone or face-to-face interviews were carried out; twenty with voluntary and community sector representatives, and one each from the four local authorities. An interview guide (reproduced in Appendix 2) was used to provide some structure to the discussion. We recognise that many more people in the sector are likely to have valid contributions to make to these discussions. This point is taken up in Section 4 of the report.

In addition, an e-mail request for information (see Appendix 3) was circulated to key stakeholders in South Yorkshire from beyond the voluntary and community sector. It was thought pragmatic to use the South Yorkshire Partnership Officers Group (21 members) as the basis for this request.

The full list of all respondents is given in Appendix 1.

1.5 Structure of the report

Section 2 of this report discusses the main results of the **review of existing research**.

Section 3 considers the main **gaps in knowledge** and **research priorities**, arising from the review and the stakeholder interviews.

Finally, **section 4** reflects on the results of the scoping study overall, and makes some suggestions for discussion amongst stakeholders about a potential research agenda in the future.

2. What we think we know about the sector: a review of existing research

A number of research studies and consultancy projects have been undertaken within and on the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire over recent years. This section primarily discusses the main results of a critical review of some of these studies. Before this, however, we consider first some definitions, followed by a discussion of existing awareness of research on the sector and how research tends to be used amongst key stakeholders.

2.1 Definitions

Our task in this scoping study has been to explore what is currently thought to be known about the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire. By using the term 'voluntary and community sector' we are merely following the most customary shorthand for what Kendall and Knapp (1995) famously referred to as a 'loose and baggy monster'. Others may prefer different labels, implying potentially different emphases and definitions. The approach we have taken here is deliberately flexible about what might be included in the review, including what some people describe as the 'blurry edges', such as, for example, the faith sector and the social economy. However, definitions are important. The NCVO Almanac statistics are based only on 'general charities' rather than the wider voluntary and community sector as a whole.

It might be useful to consider a basic two-dimensional typology of research involving the voluntary and community sector. Research can be undertaken:

- **directly or indirectly about the sector:** that is, research which looks exclusively about the voluntary and community sector (or parts of it) or indirectly about the sector in relation to specific policy themes or issues. The latter may involve the sector or parts of it, but only alongside other sectors, and only to the extent of its contribution to the chosen policy area or issue. This distinction coincides with that between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' perspectives on the voluntary and community sector (Kendall 2003: 6).
- **at different geographical scales:** for example at cross-national, national, regional, local and neighbourhood levels. Our interest in this scoping study is in studies about or involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire. Anything at South Yorkshire level or below is automatically of relevance, but this does not necessarily preclude studies at regional and national levels. But for these studies a further question arises: can studies at regional and national level tell us *directly* about the sector in South Yorkshire (for example, because South Yorkshire case studies are used, or because statistical data is extractable at a South Yorkshire level or below), or is it a study from which information about South Yorkshire either has to be inferred or is missing altogether.

This would appear to case the net quite widely. Our focus in reviewing studies here has been at a South Yorkshire level or below, but we have also reviewed several regional studies which were thought to be of relevance for South Yorkshire.

It is arguable that a distinction should also be drawn between research studies on the one hand, and more applied consultancy work on the other. We do not think this is a useful distinction, given that much work undertaken in the form of consultancy projects is either research-based or involves a strong research component. Furthermore, as will be seen, much of what can be learnt about the sector actually comes from consultancy projects. Rather than being precious about 'research', the approach in reviewing studies and reports here is always to ask 'what can they tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the sector?', whatever they are.

2.2 Knowledge and use of research

Our interviews and other contacts suggest that there are potentially a large number of research studies and consultancy exercises 'out there' which may have some bearing on our research questions. However, many of these are unpublished, or the sources were a little vague, or the research could not be obtained in the time available. In some cases the research was not actually written up formally. Often research takes place informally as part of someone's work plan, or by volunteers interested to pursue a particular issue. It may never result in a formal report. There is certainly a lot of information out there, although not all of it is thought by respondents to be 'research' and not all of it accessible or available.

From our discussions with key stakeholders, it appears that awareness of research about the sector is quite patchy and partial. Most respondents know of some recent research on the sector in South Yorkshire, even if in only sketchy terms. There are some polarised views on this, illustrated at the extreme by one respondent who stated that "*there's so much research out there*" compared with another who argued that "*there had been very little done on the sector. There's quite a gap*". However, few respondents mentioned the same things. Although the net effect was an impressive, albeit opaque, list of different research reports, mapping studies and consultancy exercises, few people had much in the way of an overview of what had been done, or what was going on.

This is potentially an issue of the limited circulation and impact of studies, and the obvious fact that not everything will be relevant to everyone. Unless people know of research because they have commissioned it, participated in it directly, or have an interest in the topic under examination, they may not necessarily be interested, may not get to hear about it, or may not be able to get hold of it. This also gives rise to the suggestion that the 'shelf life' of research studies might be quite limited.

Some respondents have limited awareness of research studies on the sector, mainly because they are new in post, or do not have a pressing need to find out what is already out there. One respondent thought there was bound to be research relating to their organisation or field "*lurking in the cupboard somewhere*", again suggesting that it may have less relevance or significance than perhaps researchers or consultants might wish.

Respondents tended to mention some of the main pieces of research we review in more depth in this section. The most frequently cited references were to:

- the range of studies undertaken in Rotherham over the last few years, and in particular the 2003 “*Valuing the voluntary and community sector in Rotherham?*” study. It is worth noting that this study was well regarded by a number of respondents. In Barnsley and Sheffield, for example, there was some interest in undertaking something along similar lines (see 3.2 below)
- the various studies of infrastructure completed by Meridien Pure over the last year. This is not surprising, given the involvement of most of the respondents in the South Yorkshire *ChangeUp* Consortium.
- analysis of workforce development issues, and in particular the South Yorkshire workforce development needs study and 3 year action plan.

In addition, respondents cited mapping studies undertaken in relation to specific services, themes and issues (e.g. childcare, family support and advocacy services) or about specific groups of people (e.g. women, BME communities, older people, disabled people and vulnerable people). In these voluntary and community organisations may have a role or contribution, but the sector is not the primary focus of the research. Some respondents mentioned national studies on or about the voluntary and community sector, or aspects of it, including studies published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Community Fund/Big Lottery Fund and the Home Office.

Respondents also identified that useful information often results from internal monitoring processes, and evaluations/reviews of organisations or services and projects. Some public sources might also be of use in providing information about the voluntary and community sector, even if it is not necessarily classed as ‘research’. A number of respondents noted the ‘Help Yourself’ Directory as a valuable (though not necessarily comprehensive) guide to the sector in Sheffield. Similarly, Sheffield City Council’s annual reports on Grant Aid provide some information about those organisations in receipt of grants.

Much of the research identified by respondents involves the development of strategies and action plans, informed perhaps by some background and primary research. This emphasises that there is a blurred line between wider research studies and consultancy projects focusing on the development of strategies or action plans. As we will see from the review of existing research, it is often hard to identify what research has actually been undertaken in some projects. It also leads to an acknowledgement that invariably research is undertaken with a specific and dedicated purpose in mind. Because many studies or consultancy exercises are so focused on a particular agenda or issue, they may appear somewhat narrow in retrospect, and do not build on what was already in existence. This often means that it is difficult to obtain much of a sense of cumulative development of a ‘knowledge base’ on the sector across South Yorkshire. That being said, many of the studies cited by respondents, and reviewed here, are very impressive in their ability to provide a clear structure for the development of a forward strategy or action plan.

It is instructive to consider how research actually tends to be used in the sector. Our respondents offered some comments about their use of research in general, or in relation to specific studies that had been of some use. Research is used primarily in three ways:

- to provide **evidence to justify need** in relation to proposals or funding bids.

An example here is the development of the South Yorkshire Infrastructure Investment Plan which came out of the South Yorkshire infrastructure mapping work undertaken by Meridien Pure. One respondent suggested that research is used in these circumstances *“to prove the things you thought but had no proof”*. It is worth noting here however that some of the assumptions about how research is often undertaken and used were challenged. In this view, the focus on identifying needs and gaps is regarded as a ‘deficit model’ which perpetuates inequalities between service providers and potential users, and leads to short term initiatives without more fundamental change. In this view, research should aim to have more of a transformative or emancipatory effect, and should focus on opportunities and strengths as much as on gaps and needs.

- to **inform or influence wider strategies**, policy briefings and policies of key stakeholders or partnerships.

One respondent described how studies of workforce skills in the sector had been used to inform the development of learning and skills strategies, whilst another advised how a mapping study around a specific service area had been used to develop a strategy for part of the Objective One programme.

- to **raise the profile of the sector** and increase the awareness of the sector, amongst different partners, and throughout the voluntary and community sector itself.

An example is the initial Rotherham mapping study from 2003, which continues to be used to raise the awareness of the sector’s contribution and activities to key strategic partners.

Additional comments on how research is typically used included:

- informing work plans or the development/adaptation of services, including training
- informing overall Business or Strategic Plans for organisations
- exchanging information between partners and between organisations
- lobbying for change
- identifying gaps in services and avoiding duplication, and finally
- demonstrating the impact and outcomes of a project, organisation or the sector as a whole.

One respondent neatly encapsulates how research is viewed and used amongst our key stakeholders:

“Research has mainly been of use in evidencing funding applications. In general keeping up to date with research strengthens ‘our’ case with other funders and the role we can play on strategic groups (e.g. Compact working groups). More generally it helps us add to the knowledge base”

2.3 Research on the voluntary and community sector: what is 'out there' and what is currently going on?

From our discussions it is apparent that there is a lot of research currently underway, or close to completion, and our consultations suggest that a number of research/consultancy projects are being planned. Table 1 below indicates a list of those projects which were brought to the attention of the research team, although it is important to note that there may be others. The results of these projects, and any others that are subsequently obtained, can certainly add to the picture which is being drawn here.

Table 1. Current and planned research projects of relevance to the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire

	Sponsors (S) and consultants/ researchers (R)	Status at 31.3.05	Geography	Title/Focus
1	SY ChangeUp consortium (S); Meridien Pure (R)	Due to complete	South Yorkshire	Trends and impacts of policies on the VCS in South Yorkshire
2	Doncaster Strategic Partnership (S); Meridien Pure (R)	Due to complete	Doncaster	Review of Community Sector Participation in the work of Doncaster Strategic Partnership
3	Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum (S); ERBEDI-Leeds Met Uni (R)	Due to complete	Yorkshire and the Humber	Loss of funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector Post 2006
4	SYFAB (S); Webster and Tinklin (R)	Underway, due to complete April 2005	Rotherham, Barnsley & Doncaster	Impact Assessment of SYFAB's work in the South Yorkshire Coalfields
5	South Yorkshire Partnership (S); EKOS Consulting (R)	Underway, due to complete June 2005	South Yorkshire	Economic Development for the BME Community in South Yorkshire
6	Yorkshire and the Humber Assembly (S); University of Hull - Prof. G. Craig (R)	Underway, due to complete May 2005	Yorkshire and the Humber	The economic contribution of the voluntary and community sectors to the region
7	Voluntary Action Sheffield/SCEDU (S)	Underway	Sheffield	Research examining the procurement agenda in the environment and children/young people's sectors
8	Voluntary Action Rotherham (S,R)	Ongoing	Rotherham	Research examining the sustainability of voluntary and community organisations
9	Objective 1 Programme Directorate (S)	Planned	South Yorkshire	Community Action Plan and Pioneer Area Workshops
10	Voluntary Action Sheffield (S); Sheffield Hallam University - S. Cohen (R)	Planned	Sheffield	Added Value? The Voluntary and Community Sector's contribution to older people's and young people's services in Sheffield
11	Objective 1 Programme Directorate (S)	Planned	South Yorkshire	Repeat of 2003 survey of the VCS

We are also aware of the following research and consultancy exercises which, for various reasons, we have not been able to incorporate in this scoping study at this stage:

1. Social Enterprise/Social Economy mapping studies: Sheffield and regional

2. Objective 1 Programme Directorate studies, including those on specific Objective 1 measures, and the initial 2003 survey of the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire
3. Voluntary Action Barnsley: Training Needs Report
4. Vulnerable People's Task Group: research on accommodation needs for groups supporting vulnerable people in Sheffield city centre
5. Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum studies: 'Regional and Sub-regional infrastructure linkages', 'Powerful Connections' and the Active Partners study: 'Usual Suspects or Community Leaders: What's the difference?'
6. South Yorkshire Coalfields Partnership: 'Options for Sustainability'.

These were either unobtainable, not obtained within the time available, or not fully written up. It is probable that there are many more studies, and research and consultancy exercises, in existence. If these subsequently become available they can be incorporated into the emerging picture presented here.

The review of existing research undertaken as part of this scoping project concentrates on **twelve reports of research carried out between 2001 and 2005**. Table 2 below provides the full listing, in chronological order.

Table 2. Research reports reviewed in the scoping study

	Authors/ Produced by	Date	Geography	Title
1	Lewis, G	May-01	Yorkshire and the Humber	<i>Mapping the contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Yorkshire and the Humber</i>
2	Coule, TM	Jan-03	Rotherham	<i>Valuing the voluntary and community sector in Rotherham?</i>
3	Milburn, Trinnaman and La Court	Mar-03	Doncaster	<i>The Economic Impact and Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Doncaster</i>
4	Finney, L	not dated	Barnsley	Untitled, but referred to as 'Barnsley CD survey report'
5	People Projects	not dated	Rotherham	<i>Rotherham Voluntary and Community Sector Needs Analysis</i>
6	JCF Ltd	Apr-04	Yorkshire and the Humber	<i>Voluntary and Community Sector Capacity Building and Support - Early Investment Programme</i>
7	Managing Locally	Jun-04	South Yorkshire	<i>Workforce Development Needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector in South Yorkshire and 3-year implementation plan</i>
8	Social Business Company	Nov-04	Yorkshire and the Humber	<i>Making a Difference: Options for effective BME engagement across Yorkshire and Humber</i>
9	Coule, TM	Nov-04	Rotherham	<i>Survival or Sustainability? A Focus Group Study of the Local Voluntary Sector in South Yorkshire</i>
10	Meridien Pure	Dec-04	South Yorkshire	<i>Voluntary and community sector infrastructure support in South Yorkshire: Infrastructure Investment Plan</i>
11	Meridien Pure	Dec-04	Barnsley	<i>Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network Community Empowerment Team: Report</i>
12	Senior, P	Jan-05	Yorkshire and the Humber	<i>NOMS Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy - Yorkshire and the Humber Study</i>

An initial glance at table 2 suggests that a great deal of research activity appears to have been undertaken from 2004 onwards. Much of this reflects the emergence of the 'ChangeUp' infrastructure agenda (Home Office 2004b) and associated resources available under *ChangeUp* and the 'Early Investment Programme'. Earlier mapping studies in Rotherham and Doncaster appear to have been funded through Neighbourhood Renewal or Community Empowerment funding.

It must be stressed that the picture formulated from the review is emergent, provisional and subject to amendment. If other studies or reports are found they can be added to the list and their findings may reshape the picture we have so far. This point is made to emphasise that the sector is never a fixed object. As such 'pictures' of the sector are merely snapshots which need to be kept under constant review. However, figure 1 represents a provisional 'map' of sorts in relation to research on the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire.

Figure 1. The current 'map' of research on the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire

NB - Studies noted in italics are currently underway or planned; NK = Not known

Yorkshire and the Humber	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping the contribution (2001) • Infrastructure mapping (2004) • BME engagement (2004) • VCS involvement in prison and probation work (2005) • <i>Loss of funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector Post 2006</i> • <i>The economic contribution of the voluntary and community sectors to the region</i> 	
South Yorkshire	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Development Needs (2004) • Infrastructure mapping (2004) • <i>Trends and impacts of policies on the VCS in South Yorkshire</i> • <i>Impact Assessment of SYFAB's work in the South Yorkshire Coalfields</i> (NB excl. Sheffield) • <i>Economic Development for the BME Community in South Yorkshire</i> • <i>Objective 1 Community Action Plan and Pioneer Area Workshops</i> • <i>Repeat of Objective 1 2003 VCS survey</i> 	
Barnsley	Rotherham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnsley CD survey report (not dated, c.2003) • Infrastructure mapping (2004) <p>- NK -</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing the VCS (2003) • Needs Analysis (not dated, c.2004) • Sustainability Focus Groups (2004) • <i>Research examining the sustainability of voluntary and community organisations</i>
Sheffield	Doncaster
<p>- NK -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Issues around the procurement agenda</i> • <i>Added Value? The VCS contribution to older people's and young people's services in Sheffield</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic impact and role (2003) • <i>Review of Community Sector Participation in the work of DSP</i>

2.4 The voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire: some headline findings

Before considering some of the issues raised from the review of the main studies in more depth, the central findings from each study are indicated below. For ease of presentation we have divided the studies into three groups:

- A. Mapping studies
- B. Infrastructure studies
- C. Reports on specific issues

Table 3. Mapping studies

Although Lewis (2001: 11, see below) reports a lack of overarching mapping studies in South Yorkshire, by 2003 in different ways research has taken place in Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley.

<p>Lewis, G (May-01) <i>Mapping the contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Yorkshire and the Humber</i></p> <p>It was estimated that between 20,000 and 48,500 voluntary organisations were based in the Yorkshire and Humber region in 2001 (though this may be as high as 80,000), employing between 45,000 and 92,000 paid staff, and with at least 300,000 regular volunteers.</p> <p>However, this is based on extrapolations of various kinds from local and other studies. Noticeably in relation to South Yorkshire: "No existing or proposed [mapping] studies have been identified in the South Yorkshire sub region" (Lewis 2001: 11).</p>	<p>Coule, TM (Jan-03) <i>Valuing the voluntary and community sector in Rotherham?</i></p> <p>Total extrapolated income for the voluntary and community sector in Rotherham is valued at £32.4m per annum as a minimum, but could be as high as £61m per annum.</p> <p>Whilst only 4% of organisations have an annual income of £250k or more, 74% of organisations have an annual income of less than £10k.</p> <p>At least 2,138 people are employed in the sector, alongside over 15,000 volunteers.</p>
<p>Milburn, Trinnaman and La Court (Mar-03) <i>The Economic Impact and Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Doncaster</i></p> <p>In Doncaster, it was estimated that the voluntary and community sector generates approximately £91.8m per year, using a calculation based on the average income per organisation.</p> <p>Around 59% of organisations have an annual income of less than £10k.</p> <p>Again using average figures, around 2,683 paid staff are employed in the voluntary and community sector, alongside an estimate of 12,812 volunteers.</p>	<p>Finney, LM (not dated, probably 2003) Untitled, but referred to as the 'Barnsley Community Development survey report'</p> <p>41% of organisations were aged 5 years or younger; 59% 6 years or older</p> <p>33% had registered charity status</p> <p>58% of full time staff, and 71% of part time staff, are female</p> <p>28% of organisations have an annual budget of up to £10,000; 39% of organisations have an annual budget of over £51,000</p>

Table 4. Infrastructure studies

Following the Treasury’s Cross Cutting Review in 2002, and the subsequent development of the *ChangeUp* agenda, a number of studies have examined both the demand for, and supply of, infrastructure provision within the sector. The four studies included here cover regional, sub-regional and local authority levels.

<p>People Projects (not dated) Rotherham Voluntary and Community Sector Needs Analysis</p> <p>Most important issues for organisations are: advice on funding, HR issues, finance, marketing and campaigning; and training on HR, funding, finance and business planning.</p> <p>Organisations prefer direct/hands on support rather than just information in these areas, accessible through a single 'one stop shop'</p> <p>Levels of awareness of where support (information, advice, training, consultancy) can be obtained is relatively low, but levels of satisfaction with the support provided by support and umbrella organisations in Rotherham are very high.</p>	<p>JCF Ltd (Apr-04) Voluntary and Community Sector Capacity Building and Support - Early Investment Programme</p> <p><i>"Overall, the findings show that the voluntary and community infrastructure support sector tends to be fragmented and appears to lack any specific identification of needs in relation to gaps within existing provision in respect to demand from users"</i> (JCF 2004: 18).</p> <p>In South Yorkshire, emerging gaps in infrastructure provision were reported to be around developing quality systems, staff qualifications, dedicated funding advice, generic development workers, community accountancy services, human resources and legal advice.</p>
<p>Meridien Pure (Dec-04) Voluntary and community sector infrastructure support in South Yorkshire: Infrastructure Investment Plan</p> <p>There is a diverse but complex range of infrastructure support agencies in South Yorkshire, much of it reliant on short term funding. A total of 72 infrastructure support organisations were identified: 'at least 20-30' specialist infrastructure organisations and 'as many as 40' organisations offering VCS support as part of a range of services.</p> <p>Short term funding issues preoccupy large numbers of 'frontline' organisations and funding information and advice was the most common type of advice sought.</p> <p>In Doncaster, surveyed organisations appear to be 'less developed' than elsewhere, i.e. smaller and less likely to train staff and volunteers. In South Yorkshire overall 15% of organisations stated that they had not sought advice and support on any issue at all. In Doncaster this figure was 26%.</p>	<p>Meridien Pure (Dec-04) Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network Community Empowerment Team: Report</p> <p>Organisations in different circumstances have different infrastructure support needs. Five main types in Barnsley were described: Stable medium sized organisations; Stable small organisations with growth potential; Stable and unambitious micro-groups; Unstable but aspiring small organisations and Unstable medium sized organisations.</p> <p>The supply of infrastructure support in Barnsley is patchy and overlapping, with poor coordination and leadership.</p> <p>The research contains an 'options review' for the development of infrastructure. Of four options, a 'subsidiarity' option was preferred by local stakeholders. This involves placing infrastructure services at the geographic level from which they can best be delivered, with appropriate services at community, Barnsley and South Yorkshire levels.</p>

Table 5. Reports on specific issues

Here we have included four studies completed in the last year covering specific issues within the voluntary and community sector: workforce development, BME engagement, sustainability and contributions to resettlement and community justice.

<p>Managing Locally (Jun-04) Workforce Development Needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector in South Yorkshire and 3-year implementation plan</p> <p>The report states that there are approx. 6,000 voluntary and community organisations in South Yorkshire; of which around 4,500 have no paid staff.</p> <p>Around 106,000 people are engaged in the workforce: 16,000 full and part time staff and 90,000 volunteers (including management committee members)</p> <p>Over the three years to August 2007 an estimated 25,000 learning places have been set as a target in 20 priority skills/learning development areas, of which 31% would be accredited and 69% non-accredited.</p> <p>However, all workforce development providers in the voluntary and community sector except one have to rely on short-term funding streams.</p>	<p>Senior, P (Jan-05) NOMS Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy - Yorkshire and the Humber Study</p> <p>The study finds that there are a range of strengths of the VCS, including that it is: community based (connected to local experience and to service users); customer-focused (client-centred, holistic); provides specialist skills and experience (meeting specialist needs); diverse (in focus, type and size of organisation); and responsive (to a climate of quick and unpredictable policy changes). However, barriers to involvement include: cultural differences, capacity concerns, structural problems, difficult funding regimes and unequal access to funding, information and strategic influence.</p> <p><i>“A significant critical mass of VCS organisations”</i> is working with the prison and probation services in the region. For the probation services, VCS agencies in South Yorkshire spent most resources on education to employment/Learning and Skills services(53% in 2003/2004) followed by Drugs/Alcohol Services (26%) and Advice (12%). By comparison, VCS in other parts of the region (Humberside, North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire) spent more of their budgets on Drugs/Alcohol Services.</p>
<p>Coule, TM (Nov-04) Survival or Sustainability? A Focus Group Study of the Local Voluntary Sector in South Yorkshire</p> <p>There is a major challenge of managing the sustainability of small and medium sized organisations.</p> <p>Key issues faced include core costs, strategic planning, maintaining the mission of an organisation, human resource sustainability in a context of short term funding and maintaining a shared vision.</p>	<p>Social Business Company (Nov-04) Making a Difference: Options for effective BME engagement across Yorkshire and Humber</p> <p>There are many small BME groups/agencies, which are active at district level but poorly represented in partnerships. Involvement is geared towards the larger BME organisations or through third party organisations. There is limited coordination and support within the BME sector. The consequence is lack of influence and limited funding. BME organisations do not feel engaged.</p>

2.5 What do existing studies tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector?

From these twelve studies alone, it is clear that we have a much better picture of the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire than we had just a few years ago. A lot of studies, apparently on the basis of quite short timescales, have generated a wealth of information about the sector. Where a practical element of strategy formation or action plan development has been involved, on the strength of the reports at least, some impressive work has been done to provide a sense of structure to future work and agendas.

The picture of the sector emerging from the studies maybe far from comprehensive (particularly across South Yorkshire as a whole), but existing research does tell us something. The combination of mapping approaches and later infrastructure studies indicates a sense of what the sector looks like, and what its key concerns and support needs are. Most of the studies reviewed here contain a vast amount of information in the form of statistics about aspects of the sector and qualitative descriptions of the nature of the sector. Combined with all the studies we have yet to assess, it seems an almost impossible task to select some key aspects of what we think we know about the sector in South Yorkshire. Nevertheless, if we are to go by the reports of the research undertaken and reviewed here, we think² we know that:

- **How many voluntary organisations and community groups?**
There may be around 6,000 voluntary organisations and community groups operating in South Yorkshire. Local authority level studies indicate that this figure may include around 1,130 organisations in Rotherham and 1,058 in Doncaster.
- **How many staff?**
Only around 1,500 of these organisations and groups have any staff, but overall there may be around 16,000 full time and part time staff. Of these, Rotherham accounts for around 2,138 and Doncaster 2,683 staff.
- **How many volunteers?**
There may be around 90,000 volunteers in the sector (including both service-based and management committee volunteers). Of these, the local authority level studies suggest that there may be over 15,000 volunteers in Rotherham, and 12,812 in Doncaster. The Barnsley report refers to a figure of 2,026 active volunteers.
- **How big are the organisations and groups which make up the sector?**
Most organisations in the sector are fairly small, reflecting the fact that most do not have staff. In Rotherham it was estimated that 74% of organisations have an annual income of less than £10,000, in Doncaster the figure is 59%, but the Barnsley report refers to 28% of organisations having a budget of up to £10,000. At the other end of the spectrum, 10% of organisations in Rotherham have an income of over £100,000; in Doncaster the figure is 14%, and the Barnsley report has a figure of 21%.

² There are a number of important qualifications to what we think we know. These are addressed more fully in section 2.6 below.

- **What is the financial value of the sector?**

We have no figure for the sector across South Yorkshire as a whole. In Rotherham the highest estimate of the value of the sector in 2003 was £61m (the low estimate was £32m). In Doncaster the highest estimate of the value of the sector in 2003 was £92m (the comparable low estimate would be £21m).

In addition, the studies reviewed here suggest that:

- The sector's **infrastructure** of between 20-30 specialist agencies and around 40 other agencies providing infrastructure services amongst other things is argued to be fragmented, complex, competitive and reliant on short term funding.
- Most organisations across South Yorkshire **require infrastructure support** of some form, although awareness of what is available is low. However, only 15% have not sought advice and support on any issue at all. The preference appears to be for direct, 'hands on' forms of support.
- **Concerns around funding**, and therefore an interest in funding information and advice, appears to preoccupy large numbers of groups across South Yorkshire. The sustainability of small and medium-sized organisations features as a key concern in several of the Rotherham-based studies, and the 'stability' of groups is addressed in the Barnsley infrastructure study.
- The sector (across Yorkshire and the Humber) is **valued highly for its contribution** to prison and probation work with offenders and ex-offenders, and in particular for: being community based; customer-focused; providing specialist skills and experience; diverse and responsive. However, barriers to involvement include: cultural differences, capacity concerns, structural problems, difficult funding regimes and unequal access to funding, information and strategic influence.
- These **barriers to involvement** (in service delivery, and in partnerships) may be more severe for some groups compared to others. We have some knowledge of the BME sector in particular. Many small BME groups operating at district level seem to be poorly represented in partnerships and do not feel engaged. There is limited coordination and support within the BME sector, resulting in a lack of influence and limited funding.

We will address the potential gaps in our knowledge in section 3. For the remainder of this section we will make some assessment of the strengths of the claims.

2.6 What are the methodological strengths and weaknesses of existing studies?

A key concern in undertaking the review has been around the potential strength or robustness of the research findings. It is important to note that to some extent all research claims are provisional, and always open to doubt or question. This is why in this report we tend to use the phrase 'what we think we know'. However, the crucial issue is one of the credibility and 'weight' of research: the degree of confidence we might have in it, and its ability to withstand criticism. This is particularly important in a voluntary and community sector sense, since for political reasons the sector can often be overlooked, dismissed or marginalised by more powerful and sometimes sceptical stakeholders. One means through which this can happen is by criticising the robustness of research. The credibility of research is not just a purist 'academic' concern.

We assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the studies reviewed here, paying particular attention to research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation. For reference, Table 6 below indicates the methods used in each of the 12 studies reviewed.

Table 6. Research methods used in reviewed studies

	Authors/ Produced by	Title	Research Methods
1	Lewis, G	<i>Mapping the contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Yorkshire and the Humber</i>	Desk-based review of existing research at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels - extrapolates data on the sector's contribution to the regional economy.
2	Coule, TM	<i>Valuing the voluntary and community sector in Rotherham?</i>	1. Postal survey: 1130 questionnaires circulated; 533 survey responses, 95 ineligible. Reported response rate = 47%, actual response rate = 42% (i.e. 438/1035) 2. Single focus group involving a cross section of organisations convened in order to explore key themes.
3	Milburn, Trinnaman and La Court	<i>The Economic Impact and Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Doncaster</i>	1. Review of key policy developments and research 2. Postal survey: 1058 questionnaires; 237 survey responses (22.4%) 3. case studies and consultations: a workshop of key stakeholders and 8 interviews with representatives from VCS organisations
4	Finney, L	Untitled, but referred to as 'Barnsley CD survey report'	Postal survey: 450 questionnaires circulated (300 by post, 150 by hand); 92 survey responses (20%).
5	People Projects	<i>Rotherham Voluntary and Community Sector Needs Analysis</i>	1. Two consultative focus group workshops 2. Postal Survey - Pilot survey followed by main survey of 900 organisations; 117 questionnaires returned after telephone follow up 3. Desk based research on provision within the borough 4. Consultative workshop with steering group 5. VAR organisational review: structured interviews and workshop with managers
6	JCF Ltd	<i>Voluntary and Community Sector Capacity Building and Support - Early Investment Programme</i>	'Cascade' approach to information collection was used - collating information on infrastructure provision across the region, and asking contacted organisations if they were aware of any others delivering infrastructure services or support to the sector
7	Managing Locally	<i>Workforce Development Needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector in South Yorkshire and 3-year implementation plan</i>	1. Analysis of existing information on VCS skills and development needs - 14 separate studies reviewed; 2. consultation with the Workforce Development Subgroup over the draft Framework of Needs; 3. Qualitative research into development needs of VCOs; 4. Mapping Provision against the Framework: identifying major providers across all sectors; email questionnaire; 5. Identification of gaps and under capacity in provision through comparative analysis

8	Social Business Company	<i>Making a Difference: Options for effective BME engagement across Yorkshire and Humber</i>	Face-to-face and telephone interviews including focus groups with frontline organisations
9	Coule, TM	<i>Survival or Sustainability? A Focus Group Study of the Local Voluntary Sector in South Yorkshire</i>	Five exploratory focus groups, aiming to explore organisational sustainability, and designed to develop key themes for a subsequent questionnaire and in-depth case studies. Participants included Trustees, Chief Executives, and Project Managers, from organisations employing between 5 and 30 employees, selected non-probabilistically from a database compiled from previous research
10	Meridien Pure	<i>Voluntary and community sector infrastructure support in South Yorkshire: Infrastructure Investment Plan</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. review of secondary sources, including existing research; 2. mapping exercise of current infrastructure support (38 responses from 72 questionnaires circulated); 3. telephone survey of demand from 200 frontline organisations (50 from each borough selected at random from lists supplied by partner organisations) 4. face-to-face interviews with 35 frontline groups using a 'semi-directive interview technique' 5. workshop with users and providers of infrastructure
11	Meridien Pure	<i>Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network Community Empowerment Team: Report</i>	<p>Not made explicit, but report describes the approach as involving:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mapping existing issues facing the sector and establishing an overview of existing infrastructure support based upon previous research (secondary material appears to have been used from the wider South Yorkshire infrastructure mapping exercise); 2. Identify best practice; 3. Undertake face-to-face interviews with infrastructure providers and/or frontline organisations; 4. workshop held to discuss the Options Review.
12	Senior, P	<i>NOMS Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy - Yorkshire and the Humber Study</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desk research and documentary analysis 2. Semi-structured interviews, telephone interviews, written responses, focus groups: in total 141 people. 3. Mapping VCS involvement across the sector and collating information from each probation region, all the prisons in the region and a number of VCS organisations 4. Attendance at meetings and feedback from initial work

We have mentioned some of the key **strengths of the studies** examined already. They include:

- The accumulation of an abundance of information about the sector over the last few years (where next to nothing was known before), often collected during research and consultancy exercises undertaken over very short timescales.
- Research has invariably been intended for specific practical purposes. Whilst this also presents some problems, it appears to have led to some innovative ideas in terms of thinking through ways forward and developing strategies and action plans. Examples include the workforce development

‘Framework of Needs’, the infrastructure ‘Options Review’ in Barnsley, and the Infrastructure Investment Plan for South Yorkshire as a whole.

- Some studies, particularly relating to infrastructure, are not afraid to pose challenging and ‘awkward questions’ for their audiences.
- The research has covered an interesting range of questions, and as table 6 demonstrates, these have been addressed by a range of research methods, including surveys, interviews, focus groups and workshops.

But there are also a number of crucial **weaknesses in the research**. Some of these are more serious threats to the credibility of the research than others. We offer these in a spirit of constructive criticism about existing research, and we hope that they will be seen as such. Given that we have suggested that all research is provisional, our own review and assessment of existing research is also open to critique. Some may not agree with our assessment. Reviewing other people’s work is arguably a bit of a luxury, but our intention here is to raise some key issues and thereby contribute to the debate about future research priorities. We have noted six main weaknesses in the list below and discuss them at length in turn:

- the research does not always refer to, and build upon, previous work
- the actual research undertaken is not very well described
- problems in the use of postal surveys
- the analysis, interpretation and presentation of quantitative evidence
- the analysis of single variables
- analysis of qualitative aspects of the research.

Firstly, reviewing the studies as a whole, the **research does not always refer to, and build upon, previous work**. There are notable exceptions to this, for example the South Yorkshire Workforce Development Study, which included a review a large range of studies. However, even where some form of secondary documentary review is included in the methodology, discussion in several of the studies under review here is cursory, and rarely placed within the context of existing material. There are at least two perhaps obvious reasons for this. Because studies have often been conceived with particular purposes in mind, there might be no apparent need to build on what is already thought to be known about the sector. The focus is the practical aim rather than the development of the ‘knowledge base’ as such. Additionally, we have seen from discussions with stakeholders that reports seem to have only a limited circulation and ‘shelf life’, and are not that easily obtained.

Secondly, typically the **actual research undertaken is not very well described** in terms of research questions, research design and methods. It is not always clear what questions overall were addressed, what was actually done and why. This may not be a priority for many studies, where the emphasis is more on providing an accessible account of key issues, findings and recommendations. But where such reports claim to be based on research, it is essential to know what was done and why, how participants were selected and recruited, and what was asked. The recent study of infrastructure in Barnsley is one example among several where it is not exactly clear how the research findings were generated. In this study, organisations seeking support are divided into five types or segments, as a way of identifying different needs for groups in different circumstances. But it is not clear how this segmentation was derived, nor if the needs thus identified came from discussions with frontline organisations or infrastructure providers.

Thirdly, **the use of postal surveys** in research on the voluntary and community sector seems to have been somewhat problematic. Although such an approach can be relatively quick and cost effective in generating a lot of empirical information for a relatively small research input, it is prone to a number of practical and methodological problems. Identifying a meaningful and up to date sampling frame is not straightforward. There are doubts over the extent to which existing databases, directories and mailing lists are and remain comprehensive. Systematic bias can enter the research in so far as certain types of potential participants, particularly smaller and newer groups, do not appear on lists provided by umbrella organisations.

Moreover postal survey response rates tend to be relatively low. The three mapping studies in the review undertaken here recorded responses of 42%, 22% and 20% respectively (438, 237 and 92 cases respectively) using postal surveys. Generalising the results from a limited response in any survey can become a serious problem. However, the issue of the representativeness (of both the sampling frame in relation to the 'population' of interest, and the survey response in relation to the sampling frame), and what can legitimately be claimed from it, is not addressed in the studies under review. The exception to this is the telephone survey of 200 frontline organisations used in the South Yorkshire infrastructure study and subsequently in Barnsley. Infrastructure agencies supplied lists from which 50 organisations were randomly selected in each district. But the reports make clear that the results of this survey must be seen as indicative of views rather than representative. Whilst we might have wished for a larger sample, at least the qualification over interpretation is made clear.

Fourthly, some of the **analysis, interpretation and presentation of quantitative evidence** is problematic. There is a presentational aspect to this weakness. It would be beneficial for studies involving statistics to present them both graphically (for accessibility) and in table format (to enable closer examination of the data), even if this implies the use of appendices. The South Yorkshire Infrastructure Study contains a wealth of information from its frontline survey, and involves some comparisons, however cautious, between the four local authority areas. This is perhaps the only consistent comparison across the four areas we currently have, even if the base is only 50 organisations in each area. But because the data is presented only in the form of complicated bar charts, it is very difficult to draw conclusions from.

It is not always clear where many claims have come from. The South Yorkshire Workforce Development Study, for example, cites aggregate figures for the number of organisations, staff and volunteers for the whole of South Yorkshire, but does not make clear whether these figures came from elsewhere or how they were derived. In another study some findings are erroneously reported as majorities (i.e. more than 50%) when in fact they are below 50%, and merely the most frequently cited category amongst a range of potential responses.

Another problem here relates to the **extrapolation of data**. Both the Rotherham and Doncaster mapping studies sought to extrapolate survey findings on key variables to arrive at an aggregate figure for the sector in the borough as a whole. But the basis for making these extrapolations is either unclear, or is done in a way which runs the risk of over-estimation. In particular, there is no discussion of weighting the survey response in either study. An assumption that the survey response can form a basis for making an extrapolation without weighting is made by default. The Doncaster study makes clear that it is the *average* income figure

which is then multiplied by the number of potential survey respondents to arrive at its high estimate of the value of the sector as a whole at £92m. However, averages are notoriously difficult to generalise from where there is great diversity, as is often stated to be the case in the voluntary and community sector. Most mapping studies, including the NCVO Almanac, report that the sector is skewed, in that there are many more smaller groups and organisations, and relatively few larger organisations. In this situation, if an average is multiplied it is likely to over-estimate the final total. This problem is exacerbated if the survey response is itself skewed towards larger organisations, as tends to be the case in postal surveys of the sector (although this possibility is not discussed in the Doncaster study). The outcome of these reflections is that the 'headline figures' used to describe the sector may be somewhat inflated.

A fifth weakness again relates to the analysis of survey data. Most analysis appears to be presented in terms of simple frequency and percentage counts. What you tend to get is the overall picture presented in **single variables**. But there is hardly any exploration of potential cross-tabulations between two or more variables. This would allow a more fine-tuned disaggregated analysis of the data. To enable this to be done with any confidence larger samples would be needed. However, much can be learnt from asking how things might differ for different sub-groups. This is particularly relevant in the voluntary and community sector where organisations are often poles apart. Missing questions here seem to be over a disaggregated analysis of the differences between larger and smaller organisations, those with and without staff, older and newer organisations, and organisations based in different geographical areas.

A final criticism is noted specifically in relation to **qualitative aspects of the research** reviewed here. Some of the weaknesses identified above are also relevant to qualitative methods. For example, it is not always clear how interviewees and workshop/focus group participants are selected, and what they are asked. Most discussion of qualitative material appears to draw out 'themes' from a number of interviews or workshops, but how this is done is not typically described.

If these criticisms and weaknesses are thought to be valid, then some of the claims about the sector overall may not be so strong or credible. But this is a matter for further debate and discussion.

In the next section we will look at what the research does not tell us: about the gaps in our knowledge and what priorities might exist for future research.

3. Gaps in knowledge and research priorities

This section discusses the main gaps in our knowledge of the sector, and the main research priorities. Information here comes partly from the review of existing research, and partly from the interviews and email correspondence with key stakeholders.

3.1 Gaps arising from the review

The research reviewed in section 2 of this report has provided something of an emerging picture of the sector across South Yorkshire. But, as has been seen, the picture is partial and patchy. The twelve studies include:

- 4 covering Yorkshire and the Humber
- 2 covering South Yorkshire
- 3 covering Rotherham
- 2 covering Barnsley
- 1 covering Doncaster, and
- none covering Sheffield.

It must be noted that **regional studies** do not always translate into a sub-regional picture. Sometimes they are based on research undertaken in other parts of the region. It may therefore be difficult to distil the implications for South Yorkshire, and even if it is possible, stakeholders may not see the relevance of the study for their work. There are some aspects of the regional studies reviewed here which can be drawn upon, and regional work currently in progress (for example the implications of post-2006 funding regimes) should have some interest for South Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, we also have **district-level studies** on different aspects of the sector. Most of these do not compare well across districts. For example, we have mapping studies in Rotherham and Doncaster undertaken at about the same time, but using different approaches and not always asking the same question. We have only a limited Barnsley exercise, and no comparable data from Sheffield. On the face of it, we know very little about Sheffield's voluntary and community sector.

We also have no information about the sector which explores different geographies, for example within different parts of each of the districts, or between more deprived and more affluent areas, or between rural and urban areas.

At the **South Yorkshire level**, we have two studies (on workforce development and infrastructure) which mainly take a broad overview, rather than undertake a detailed comparison between areas. The study which comes closest is the South Yorkshire infrastructure study with its frontline survey, though confident comparisons are limited by low numbers of respondents.

In addition, we only have limited investigations explorations of some specific issues which groups face. **Funding** is the key issue here, and again stakeholders in

Rotherham have taken a lead in examining the issue of organisational sustainability in a turbulent and challenging funding environment more closely, and using different methods.

In relation to **infrastructure**, the main gaps remaining after the studies undertaken recently include:

- further analysis of the capacity, sustainability, coverage and effectiveness of infrastructure provision
- further analysis of demand for, and use of, infrastructure, for example what is likely to be demanded by different kinds of organisation and from where frontline organisations currently source support.

Two other issues are worth raising here. Firstly, many studies tend to take individual groups or organisations, represented by staff, committee members or active volunteers, as the unit of analysis. But organisations and groups do not exist in isolation. They relate to each other in multiple ways, sometimes close or distant, collaboratively and competitively, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, with things changing over time. This aspect of the voluntary and community sector often gets overlooked. **How do organisations ‘get on with each other’?** This is a limited feature of only a few of the studies reviewed here. For example, the Rotherham Focus Group study on sustainability looks only briefly at the role of networking and collaboration for organisations, and the various infrastructure studies begin to explore the complex and ill-coordinated relationships between infrastructure providers. There may be merit in investigating some of these issues further.

Secondly, it has already been noted that relationships and issues change over time. The same is true of most other aspects of the sector, sometimes quite rapidly. There may be an argument for **examining change through time** in its own right. All of the studies reviewed here are cross-sectional ‘snapshots’ taken at fixed moments in time. There may be interest in repeating such a snapshot after some time to see how much has changed. Alternatively, there may be some interest in following or tracking longitudinally an issue or a group of organisations over time. A national example is the Home Office’s ‘State of the Sector’ Panel of 3,600 voluntary organisations and community groups (Home Office 2004a).

3.2 Gaps and priorities identified by key stakeholders

There are countless other issues and approaches arising from the review of existing studies which might be of interest to key stakeholders. But during the scoping study we were able to ask a number of people directly for their perceptions of what was missing and what the priorities might be for future research. A broad range of gaps in knowledge and suggestions for future research were raised in the interviews and email correspondence. The main gaps and priorities were:

1. an assessment of **the impact and contribution of the voluntary and community sector** across South Yorkshire

This was raised and considered favourably by more respondents (14) than anything else. A comprehensive view of the sector was thought to be needed because:

- there is no full assessment in Sheffield or Barnsley,

- the Rotherham and Doncaster studies are becoming somewhat dated,
- they used different methodologies.

An overview at a South Yorkshire level was suggested, but also some assessment of the contribution made in different geographical areas would be useful (i.e. what differences exist between and within the four districts?):

“Economic impacts on a South Yorkshire wide basis, with analysis at district level. The same information needs to be known about each district in order to make comparisons”

One respondent in Sheffield noted that nobody is particularly aware of how many organisations there are in the sector, their turnover, or how many people work in the sector: *“We don’t know what our sector looks like”*.

Further fine-tuned analysis was suggested in relation to the different contributions made by different types of groups in the sector. Of particular interest here was the contribution and impact of the smallest groups, which are typically volunteer-only organisations and are less likely to have participated in research, as well as comparisons between different ‘sub-sectors’, such as health, social care and arts.

Assessing the impact or contribution of the sector is not just a quantitative matter, and so the qualitative nature of the contribution was also raised (e.g. the impact of organisations, value added, the distinctiveness of the sector’s contribution - are there lessons to be learned about how the sector operates?). Respondents also thought that some assessment of the contribution and impact in relation to specific policy agendas or themes would be extremely useful. For example, what are the various contributions made by organisations in the sector in relation to unemployment and ‘worklessness’? Is the sector in contact with people furthest from the labour market? In terms of individual careers and labour market histories, where have the sector’s staff and volunteers come from? What career trajectories, if applicable, are they on? How does involvement in the sector help with career progression and ‘distance travelled’? These questions are related to point 4 below.

Some respondents urged caution around the interest in identifying the sector’s contribution. In particular there is a need for clarity of purpose and definition. A general ‘map’ may not be of much use, and is likely to date quite quickly. A ‘map with a purpose’ was required, but in addition definitional issues need to be addressed to consider those typically ‘off the map’, and also what types of organisation should be included and what types excluded.

2. assessing the **impact of funding** and the **implications of changes in the funding environment** on groups.

The spectre of a post-2006 rationalisation of the sector given future funding trends was raised. This was linked to an ongoing concern to examine and provide support around issues of **sustainability** for organisations in the sector, as is being explored currently in Rotherham. The geography of funding access and its implications was also mentioned. Concerns about the **procurement** and service contracting agendas were also raised, particularly with regard to the pressure to consider delivering services, and the capacity of organisations to negotiate contracts and cost services adequately. On this theme, some

respondents were interested to explore which organisations are considered to have the potential to deliver services, business development issues and capacities, and the role and impact of **the social economy**.

3. monitoring and **tracking the health and perspective of the sector over time; and analysing future trends.**

It was thought to be useful to have some form of structured regular review in order to 'take the temperature' of the sector periodically, and to analyse future horizons. Some interest was expressed in the 'State of the Sector' Panel. One respondent wondered to what extent data from the Panel could be extracted at South Yorkshire level.³ In addition it might be possible to track the longevity of organisations and the extent to which organisations grow, stabilise or decline over time.

4. further analysis of **workforce development** issues.

Issues worthy of further investigation here include the increasing professionalisation of the sector, skills mapping, the extent and nature of 'family-friendly' working practices in the sector and extending the emerging and changing profile of the workforce.

Other priorities considered by our respondents included the need to:

- continue identifying gaps and avoiding duplication between services and providers (although, as we have seen, this approach was also criticised as being too much of a 'deficit model' of research)
- assess the effectiveness of infrastructure provision
- assess quality and performance management issues within the sector
- examine how representation operates within the sector, including how issues and positions are actually represented, and the expectations of other stakeholders around representing diverse perspectives with a single voice.

Clearly, the review of existing studies, and the reflections of key stakeholders, have uncovered a wide range of issues and questions in which there is interest in further exploration. However, not everything can be researched, and it was noted that parts of the sector are 'researched to death'. In the final section we conclude by considering some potential ways to take these ideas forward.

³ It is worth noting that this may not be feasible. The panel consists of 3,600 members across England, of whom 8% are based in Yorkshire and the Humber. If the number of panel members in South Yorkshire reflects the population of the sub-region as a proportion of the region as a whole (which may not necessarily be the case), we could estimate that there would only be around 74 panel members in South Yorkshire (30 in Sheffield, 14 in Rotherham, 17 in Doncaster and 13 in Barnsley). Even if access to the data was permitted, there may not be enough members to be able to tell us much about the sector in South Yorkshire.

4. What next? Conclusions and recommendations

This scoping study has been a welcome opportunity to take stock of some of the wide range of research and consultancy exercises which have taken place across South Yorkshire over the last few years. Reviewing existing or recently completed studies, and the chance to interview a number of key stakeholders for their reflections on the state of our knowledge has proved to be an extremely interesting process. The reports have been fascinating, and the interviews, although brief, have helped us gain a sense of what is thought to be important by key stakeholders in terms of existing and future research.

Summarising briefly, the study has found that:

1. **Existing research** tells us quite a bit about different aspects of the sector. However,

- studies have often been undertaken for very specific practical purposes
- whilst one obvious strength of these research exercises is their ability to provide a simplified but structured route through a particularly complex policy or practical agenda (and therefore potentially facilitating clearer decision making and the development of a forward strategy), they seem only rarely to relate to what is already out there
- research is typically not very well described in terms of questions, research design and methods (i.e. what questions were addressed, what was actually done and why)
- on occasion the research appears to suffer from some fundamental methodological weaknesses which undermines its credibility, and
- when viewed as a whole, the research forms only a sketchy picture of the sector across the sub-region.

Overall, and for perfectly understandable reasons, the picture of the sector which emerges is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle in which well over half the pieces are missing, and those which remain seem rather ill-fitting.

2. Key stakeholders have provided a wealth of ideas about research already undertaken, **gaps in knowledge** and **priorities for future research**. In particular,

- respondents appear to have only a partial picture of what research has been undertaken in recent years, although knowledge of studies underway or in preparation is greater. This seems to imply that both the circulation and 'shelf life' of research on the sector might be somewhat limited.
- research is used for a variety of reasons, but the main areas cited include providing supporting material in funding bids or the development of strategies and raising the profile of the sector amongst other partners (from both within and beyond the sector).
- key priorities for future research include building a picture or map of the contribution of the sector overall, at different geographies, in particular

policy areas, without overlooking the contribution made by the smallest groups.

Taking forward these issues, the following points are offered as suggestions for further discussion amongst key stakeholders:

1. Greater thought needs to be given to the **dissemination of research findings**, in a range of formats and through a variety of mechanisms, as well as some assessment of **research impact**.
2. There may be some merit in discussion amongst stakeholders around **sharing their experience of research**, that is, conducting, commissioning and overseeing or steering research (including how to steer researchers or consultants).
3. There is some potential for the **development of a research forum** of interested parties to meet to discuss research ideas and plans. Not only would this help to avoid duplication and potentially strengthen research, it could help disseminate findings. There are different models for how this may be done. One might involve, for example, a regular meeting around a research strategy. This could be held alongside a broader meeting held on a less frequent basis to disseminate research findings and to discuss with a wider audience the state of knowledge on the sector. At the very least, it would be useful for some form of communication network to be established between those who are most likely to be involved in commissioning research, in order to improve the coordination of research plans.
4. In the meantime, **further consultation** should take place with other interested parties who have either expressed some interest in the ideas being discussed here, or have not yet been reached by these discussions. Staff at two of the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) have indicated a wish for some further discussion about the state of research into the sector, and it has been acknowledged that there are many more people in and beyond the sector who may have an interest in research.
5. A range of studies might form the basis for **an evolving research strategy** on the sector in South Yorkshire. In one sense this is perhaps a 'wish list' of priorities taken from the discussions and emerging from the review. But this means that it is therefore (a) subject to further discussion and (b) subject to the availability of resources. Some difficult choices may have to be made about research priorities. On the basis of this scoping report, there is merit in:
 - undertaking a South Yorkshire-wide mapping study of the contribution of the sector, designed to update earlier research exercises in Rotherham and Doncaster, to facilitate comparisons between areas and types of organisation and to identify key issues facing the sector. The design, sampling strategy and assumptions behind this type of study would need considerable thought and careful preparation. If such a survey is undertaken, extra care is required to ensure that the smallest groups and organisations are included. This may involve the need to go beyond the usual lists and directories to identify groups on the ground.
 - investigating the impact and implications of a rapidly changing funding environment. This may involve extensive (survey) or intensive (case study)

methods, and may be linked to a wider survey. It would be essential for the aims, purpose and questions of such a study to be clarified. In addition close coordination with allied work at regional (post-2006 loss of funding), sub-regional (SYFAB coalfields impact assessment) and district (Rotherham sustainability study) levels.

- exploring changing perspectives, concerns and organisational developments over time. It might be worth considering the feasibility, and importantly, cost of organising some form of regular 'panel' operating at South Yorkshire level. The Home Office Panel provides a national model which could be adapted for sub-regional purposes. A panel could provide a testing ground for emerging issues, and a regular sector 'health check'. Although of great interest, this approach is likely to require considerable preparation and management. Panels tend to suffer from what is known as 'attrition', where participation from the original cohort declines over time. Organisations close down, people move on and sometimes lose interest in taking part. As a result a lot of work is required in maintaining the interest of panel members, without overburdening them with requests for information.
 - continuing research on workforce development issues, such as the demands and challenges of professionalisation, the profile and development of the workforce, and employment practices within the sector.
6. Finally, the results of this research, and any developing research strategy, should be **made available to all** those who have taken part, as well as to others who may have an interest in research on the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Stakeholder contacts

Sheila Messider	Advice Centres Support in Sheffield (ACSIS)
Kate Adams	Age Concern Yorkshire
Trenton Wiggan	Barnsley Black and Ethnic Minorities Initiative
Joe Micheli	Barnsley MBC
Zahid Hamed	Black Community Forum
Peter Singh	Doncaster Ethnic Minority Regeneration Partnership (DEM RP)
Christian Foster	Doncaster MBC
Rosemary Hooper	IMBY
Neil Coulson	Manor & Castle Development Trust
Dave Jackson	Open Forum for Economic Regeneration (OFFER)
Kristy Swift	RegenSchool
Mahroof Hussain	Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA)
Andrew Towlerton	Rotherham MBC
Dave Thornett	Sheffield Community Enterprise Development Unit (SCEDU)
Shelli Cooper	Scoop Aid
Anne Giller	Sheffield City Council
Jane Leathley	South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau (SYFAB)
Sue North	South Yorkshire Open Forum (SYOF)
Isadora Aiken	South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust
Joanne Bott	Together for Regeneration
Angus Robson	VC Train
Penny Stanley	Voluntary Action Barnsley (VAB)
Tracey Coule	Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR)
Paul Carnell & Nigel West	Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS)

Additional e-mail and telephone contact was made with:

Julie Readman	Business Link South Yorkshire
Christine Tolson	Doncaster Strategic Partnership
Costas Georghiou	Objective 1 Programme Directorate
Richard Breese	South Yorkshire Coalfields Partnership
Graham Joyce	South Yorkshire Partnership
Janet Wheatley	Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR)
Peter Richardson	Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum

Appendix 2. Pro-formas

Mapping the Voluntary & Community Sector in South Yorkshire: a scoping study

What we think we know about the VCS in South Yorkshire: pro-forma

For each study reviewed, please complete the following pro-forma.

Research questions

Don't forget, we have the following overall research questions for the scoping study

- *what studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire*
 - a) *have been undertaken in the last five years*
 - b) *are in progress or*
 - c) *are currently being planned?*
- *what do existing studies tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector?*
- *what are the methodological strengths and weaknesses of existing studies?*
- *what are the gaps in knowledge about the voluntary and community sector?*
- *what are the priorities for future research involving the sector?*

Title

Author
Date published
Commissioned and funded by
Geographical area
Thematic area
Dates research undertaken
Reviewed by

1. **Please give a description of what the research was about**
For example: what were the aims/objectives; policy context etc
2. **What research methods were used?**
3. **Headline findings**
4. **What does the research tell us about the *scale and scope* of the sector?**
5. **What does the research tell us about the *nature* of the sector?**
6. **What are the strengths of the research?**
7. **What are the weaknesses of the research?**
8. **What gaps in knowledge/future priorities does the research identify?**
9. **Are there any other gaps arising from this study?**
10. **Other comments**

Mapping the Voluntary & Community Sector in South Yorkshire: a scoping study

Knowledge gaps and research priorities on the VCS in South Yorkshire: interview guide

For each interview, please use the following guide. Please also use these headings to write up notes.

Research questions

Don't forget, we have the following overall research questions for the scoping study

- *what studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire*
 - d) have been undertaken in the last five years*
 - e) are in progress or*
 - f) are currently being planned?*
- *what do existing studies tell us about the scale, scope and nature of the voluntary and community sector?*
- *what are the methodological strengths and weaknesses of existing studies?*
- *what are the gaps in knowledge about the voluntary and community sector?*
- *what are the priorities for future research involving the sector?*

Interview with:

Name

Position

Organisation

Interview by

Date

Length of interview

- 1. What does your organisation do?**
- 2. What geographical areas does it cover?**
- 3. What is your role?**
- 4. Do you know of any studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire have been undertaken, say, in the last five years?**
- 5. How have they been used, if at all?**
- 6. Do you know of any other studies currently in progress or being planned?**
- 7. Are there any other research studies you have used or found useful?**
- 8. How?** *(for example in funding bids)*
- 9. What are the main gaps in our knowledge of the *scale and scope* of the sector?**
(e.g. what it does, how big it is)
- 10. What are the main gaps in our knowledge of the *nature* of the sector?**
(e.g. how it operates, key issues and challenges it faces)
- 11. What would be your main priorities for future research?**
- 12. Other comments**

Appendix 3. E-mail request to non-voluntary and community sector stakeholders

Dear South Yorkshire Partnership Board Officer Group Members

You may be aware that a short research project on **the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire** is currently underway. I believe that you may have been contacted by **Sue North** from the **South Yorkshire Open Forum** by email in the last week about this. Sheffield Hallam University are conducting the research, with funding from the Learning and Skills Council. The first phase involves drawing together and reviewing what we currently know about the sector (both geographically across the four boroughs and thematically), as well as identifying research priorities and gaps.

In relation to this, we are seeking to contact key stakeholders in order to ask what they consider to be the main research needs and priorities for and about the voluntary and community sector. In the short timescale we have we would like to enable as many stakeholders/partners as possible to have an opportunity to feed into the research and inform future priorities.

Consequently, we would be extremely grateful if you could respond to the following two questions:

1. Do you know of any studies involving the voluntary and community sector in South Yorkshire which have been undertaken, say, in the last five years? Or of any studies currently in progress or being planned?

Please provide details if you can. We are trying to draw together existing research on the sector.

2. What do you consider to be the main gaps in our knowledge and/or the main research priorities about the voluntary and community sector across South Yorkshire?

We would be grateful if you reply by **the end of Monday 21st March 2005 at the latest**. Please feel free to forward this email onto other staff members in your organisation if this is more appropriate. If you would like further information about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone (contact details below).

Many thanks in anticipation,

Yours sincerely

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