

Big Society Unplugged

Nick Hurd's responses to questions we sent him after the conference

At Big Society Unplugged, Nick Hurd offered to answer any questions that he wasn't able to take on the day in the Q&A session. This set of additional questions was sent to The Office of Civil Society on Thursday 18th November, the questions and responses are set out below.

1. Can you spell out the proportion of unclaimed assets going into the Big Society Bank that will be targeted at children's services?

- A. The Big Society Bank will be an independent wholesale institution and as such would be free to make its own investment decisions based on the quality of opportunities presented by the market. We will promote new sources of private and charitable finance into youth work, including through the Big Society Bank. The aim of the Bank is to make it easier for social entrepreneurs to access capital, which will include looking for opportunities to support the development of community led, social enterprise initiatives to improve opportunities for young people

2. Can you tell us the expected real active launch date for Big Society Bank?

- A. We are aiming to have some functions of a Big Society Bank in place by April 2011 and be ready to make initial investments from early summer, which is when we expect the first dormant accounts money to become available for spending.

It will, however, take longer for the BSB to be fully operational. This is dependent on a number of factors including the timing and volume of dormant accounts monies released from the central reclaim fund, as well as legal and regulatory issues, including state aid considerations.

3. How can the Bank's work improve the number of credible and investment ready ventures?

- A. The Big Society Bank will work over the medium term, with new and existing social investment intermediaries to support the growth of a bigger, well functioning and sustainable social investment market, making it easier for social entrepreneurs to access capital. The types of activities that the Bank will undertake could include supporting innovative ways of matching the needs of frontline social enterprises with potential investors – for example, by acting as a cornerstone investor in a new product – and working with intermediaries to increase the capacity of social enterprises to take on investment.

4. How will the Bank's work include scaling out, (more small ventures), as well as scaling up?

- A. The aim of the Big Society Bank is to help social enterprises, charities and voluntary organisations access more resources. Working with social investment intermediaries,

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the Bank will help support new and existing frontline organisations increase their capacity to take on investment. For example, it could make grants to intermediary organisations for investment readiness programmes, or offer success fees to incentivise advisers to help social enterprises access investment.

5. **How will the success or otherwise of Big Society be evaluated? Given that the VCS is already “Big Society” will it be heralded as a success on the basis of what has already been achieved?**
 - A. This is a very important point and is something that OCS in collaboration with other departments is thinking about. We have previously measured things such as levels of volunteering and charitable giving and we are thinking about how these and other measures can be developed to assess Big Society.
6. **What activity is taking place in Y+H under the recently announced NCS pilots and how can youth organisations and those focussing on youth volunteering work with them?**
 - A. Several NCS pilots will be running in Y&H. These include projects run by:
 - a. The Football League Trust, working with the club trusts of Sheffield Wednesday and Rotherham United in those areas
 - b. The Field Studies Council, working in Bradford and Hull
 - c. V, working with delivery partners in Leeds
 - d. The Prince’s Trust, working with partners in various locations across the region

Youth volunteering organisations interested in contributing to NCS can contact these lead organisations to discuss opportunities to get involved.

7. **What will happen to the people who fall just below the threshold to be eligible for personal care budgets? What will happen to these people and their carers?**
 - A. This question is for the Department of Health. The Civil Society lead in the Department of Health is Olivia.Butterworth@dh.gsi.gov.uk
8. **There is evidence to suggest that cuts to VCS organisations delivering LA contracts or services are more than the 7.5% cuts made to LA’s. Can the Minister tell us how the government will protect extremely vulnerable groups from such cuts?**
 - A. Government will always need to ensure that the most disadvantaged are protected, but we need to build something better than a basic safety net.

Big Society provides a vision for tackling disadvantage, reversing social breakdown and driving progressive change for everyone.

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It is about unlocking the potential of individuals and communities to play a greater role in supporting everyone in their society. It is about improving services so they are more responsive to the local needs of the most disadvantaged

9. What will government do and what can others do to help create more time for people to volunteer?

- A. Promoting social action and volunteering is a key part of the Government's vision for the Big Society. Whilst we have high volunteering levels in this country, one of the main barriers to people volunteering is a lack of time. The Cabinet Office will be publishing a Green Paper on the giving of time and money in late December. It will set out some of the ways in which the government plans to increase social action. However, government cannot address this barrier on its own and there is sometimes a need for organisations involving volunteers to be more flexibility in their approach.

10. How do we ensure that the good practice in enterprise education in schools and colleges supports the capacity and capability of young people to engage positively with Big Society in their communities?

- A. The Big Society is all about encouraging children and young people to play an active role in their communities. We believe that enterprise education is valuable because it both helps young people develop the employability skills that employers need for the world of work (team working, creativity, innovation etc) and teaches them what it means to work in, or run, a business.

We would encourage schools and colleges to continue to support students, working with local partners (including businesses and the local community) to provide opportunities on enterprise education. But in line with the Department for Education's policy of giving more autonomy to heads and schools, it is for schools to determine whether, and how, enterprise education is delivered, as well as its content, as an extra-curricular activity.

11. In developing new services, how will quality be assured and measured and how will accountability be built into services?

- A. OCS will be working with its delivery partners to ensure that the Government's key new services for growing the Big Society – National Citizen Service, Community Organisers, Community First and Big Society Bank – are evaluated and that information on their value for money is made available on a regular basis. This will enable citizens to hold these services to account.

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12. Rural Community Councils have seen it as their role to support rural communities in developing the capacity to manage their own affairs; for example in village hall management, community led planning, funding advice. What will be the relationship between the community organisers and the work of the Rural Community Councils? They could overlap considerably. How do we avoid competition and duplication?

A. Community Organisers are community-led; they are not led by organisations or by their own priorities. They work with communities, building capability, capacity and confidence through enabling the community taking action on the issues that matter to them. There is scope for RCCs to support the activity of organisers, either financially through 'sponsoring' someone through the training and in the full-time role, and / or through helping them in their activities. But to be clear, this is community-led, not organisation-led work, distinct from and complementary to community development approaches.

13. Work is being given to private organisations like KPMG without the opportunity for other organisations to tender. Would this not be an opportunity for smaller third sector organisations to bid collectively?

A. One of the key themes of Big Society is the reform of public services. This will enable charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to offer people high quality services.

By promoting contestability to open up more contracts to voluntary, community and social enterprise sector providers, and making existing contracting opportunities more accessible, our reforms are aimed at giving the sector a bigger role in delivering more innovative, diverse and responsive public services.

To take these commitments forward, the Office for Civil Society is leading the production of a Green Paper on the modernisation of commissioning in order to increase the involvement of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises in public services. This will be published in December 2010. The conclusions of this Green Paper process will feed into a wider reform White Paper, which will be published early in the new year.

14. There is talk about using and developing the capacity of social enterprises to deliver services, but in Yorkshire this support has been drastically cut, and SE's are being classed as VCS or the private sector. Is there a risk that specialist knowledge will be lost, and that the specialist business support for social enterprises to become sustainable businesses will not be available?

A. OCS is consulting on the future support needs of civil society organisations, including social enterprises, and encourages people to respond on this issue.

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The government recently published a strategy on local growth which set out how business support will work in future and encourage social enterprises to engage with LEPs and consider bidding to the Regional Growth Fund

15. The John Lewis model is being held up as a shining example, as their social aim is a happy and contented workforce. Are there better examples of external social benefits and aims that organisations can deliver?

A. Cabinet Office is working to create a genuinely ground-up movement where staff, who are the real experts, can come together to take over and deliver better services. John Lewis is held up as an example because it represents one of the strongest, most established and most successful employee-owned businesses.

There are a wealth of examples of external social benefits and aims that organisations can deliver, ranging from large international NGOs to small local voluntary groups.

Yorkshire & the Humber Forum.