

**Summary of a study into the accessing of Lottery monies by religious groups and the impact on groups with religious objections to applying for Lottery funding.**

## **Introduction**

Since its inception in 1994, the UK National Lottery has become a major source of funding for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Funding has supported a wide range of activities including health, education, heritage, environment, arts, sport and local community projects. There are, however, religious groups that have moral or religious objections to applying for lottery funding and have expressed concerns about being unable to access these funds, although they have chosen not to make applications. This is not unique to Northern Ireland but it has been suggested that not accessing lottery funding has had a greater impact on religious groups in Northern Ireland compared to other parts of the UK,

Many religious groups object to applying for lottery funding because any association with the Lottery is perceived as gambling. The objection to applying for lottery funding has been articulated in recent years by religious based organisations in a number of fora and was raised at a conference on weak community infrastructure organised by the Department for Social Development (DSD) in December 2001. At the conference, the objections of religious groups to applying for lottery funds were clearly highlighted as a priority that needed to be addressed.

This led to a research project being commissioned jointly by the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) in DSD into the accessing of lottery monies by religious groups and the impact on groups with religious objections to applying for Lottery funding. The CRC and VCU are pleased to present summary findings of the study undertaken by Vision Management Services and Macauley Associates.

## **Methodology**

For the purposes of this study, religious groups were defined as “those groups, organisations, associations and communities that could be seen to be associated with or derived from one or more religious faiths”. This included Christian churches, other religious faiths, church-based youth organisations, faith based community and voluntary and community organisations, para-church organisations, inter-church groups, religious orders and loyal orders.

The researchers conducted extensive desk research and undertook a range of consultations with a wide range of interested parties. This

included leaders from religious groupings and a variety of religious groups that have not applied for lottery funding. Two open consultation workshops were also organised in Belfast and Cookstown and four smaller focus groups were organised to provide an opportunity to discuss the issues in more depth. A number of religious groups were also consulted by telephone to ensure inclusivity. The majority of religious groups invited to participate in the research responded positively. Some religious groups, however, chose not to participate as they had no desire to apply for lottery funding and/or would not be eligible to apply. We are grateful to all of those who gave their time and input to the research.

## **Findings**

The findings of the study make some very insightful and significant points.

One of the main issues raised by the report is that further research would be beneficial considering the often-complex nature of the work and the difference of opinion that exists within and between various religious groups. There are a number of religious groups that have a clear policy of not applying for lottery funding. The research concluded that this was a more prevalent problem in Northern Ireland as there was a smaller proportion of religious groups making application for lottery funds compared to Great Britain.

The research did conclude that some religious groups have no objections or have removed or relaxed restrictions upon making applications to lottery funders. It was not possible to quantify, however, the full extent of groups that would be eligible for lottery funding, but who choose not to apply. It should also be noted that the research did not seek to assess to what extent these groups would be eligible for funding.

The research also highlighted that the issue of accessing Lottery funding or the perceived denial of access is not an issue that can be addressed by Lottery distributors who were found to be carrying out their roles in accordance with the guidelines and statutory requirements. Religious objections to monies from sources deemed to be unethical, long outdates the existence of the National Lottery and therefore as such is not directed as an objection to any Lottery funder but to the practice of organised lotteries which they perceive to be a form of gambling.

There is no evidence that applications from religious groups are less successful than applications from non-religious groups. In fact, the lottery funders have all made awards to religious groups and there is evidence of an increase in numbers and range of religious organisations applying to lottery funders since the National Lottery was established. It was suggested, however, that Lottery distributors should consider further ways of developing communication channels with religious groups.

The impact on religious groups that have not accessed lottery funding has been mixed. Some groups have experienced minimal impact because they are not engaged in activities that would be eligible for lottery funding and have secured other sources of funding. Other groups, however, have registered a more significant impact because lottery funding is perceived as the main source of funding for their activities such as heritage grants and after-schools clubs. For example, many church based organisations considered they were well placed to run after-schools clubs. A number of groups expressed concerns that lottery funding was the main source of funding for after-schools clubs and this presented a particular financial challenge to those groups.

Finally, there was a proposal for a separate fund to be established to which those religious groups that object to applying for lottery funding could make applications for funding. This would be problematic, given the difficulty in securing resources and also defining criteria for a fund which would be exclusive to a section of the community. Whilst this proposal requires further clarification, it seems very unlikely at this stage that this will be considered as a viable option.

## **Summary**

Some religious groups that have chosen not to apply for lottery funding, for whatever reason, have clearly experienced difficulties in realising their vision within their local communities. Although a number of religious groups have successfully applied for lottery funding, many others are reluctant to consider that approach.

Some matters which this short piece of research has highlighted are worthy of further consideration. It would be helpful, for example, for a more detailed analysis of the extent of the cross-section of religious groups that choose not to apply for lottery funding.

It is the hope of both the CRC and the VCU that this research will go some way in helping frame the issues and provide a platform for further discussion.

## **Acknowledgements**

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*A copy of the full research report can be downloaded from the websites of the Community Relations Council ([www.community-relations.org.uk](http://www.community-relations.org.uk)) or the Department for Social Development ([www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)).*