

Social Action Inquiry Scotland

Unleashing the potential of *social action* in Scotland - an independent inquiry

Summary founding document (Updated September 2020)

Vision

The inquiry's vision is:

A Scotland where social action is valued and is able to make change happen in communities.

Purpose

The inquiry will address the following questions:

- How can citizens take *social action* in their communities which can make Scotland a better place to live? How can this be sustained?
- What are the factors – structural, policy, legal, financial, cultural, relational, demographic, digital, constitutional – which help or hinder the leverage and continuation of *social action*?
- What changes do state institutions, private businesses and third sector organisations, including providers and funders, need to make to maximise the leverage, and realise the long term potential of *social action*?
- How can harnessing the potential of *social action* enable us to respond to and be prepared for, and resilient in the face of, an increasingly turbulent and constantly changing environment?

The inquiry will try to create positive change as it goes along. It will also build evidence to inform a *theory of change* about how the potential of social action can be realised in Scotland. It will seek to bring people together (people who hold power, and those furthest from it) and shift behaviours so that people can find and use their voice and power. Within the inquiry, both money and power will be located with communities.

Social Action

Social action happens in civil society. We are all civil society – whenever and however we come together as citizens to take *social action* – informally and formally – outwith the state and the market.

People come together to help improve their lives and create responses to the issues that are important in them. Social action can empower citizens, support people and complement public services. It can challenge, or bypass vested interests. It benefits both individuals and communities.

This inquiry starts from the premise that *social action* is a vital part of the solution to the challenges we face as a society – now and in the future. The issue, therefore, is not *whether it should* but *how it can* realise its potential to bring about sustainable change – and in what conditions this happens.

Background

A group of organisations has been meeting since late 2018 to explore an inquiry into social action in Scotland, informed by the Civil Society Futures independent inquiry (<https://civilsocietyfutures.org/>) that took place in England.

The exploratory and set up phases are almost complete and the inquiry will be launched in late 2020. The partners currently involved in supporting the inquiry are: The Carnegie UK Trust, Corra Foundation, Foundation Scotland, the National Lottery Community Fund, The Robertson Trust, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations). SCVO will provide host/infrastructure support to the Inquiry Co-chairs, Lead and Panel Members.

This document sets out the starting point for the inquiry. It is intentionally focused around a clear vision, purpose and principles, rather than prescribing an approach in detail. This is intended to allow space so that the inquiry is shaped by communities, not prescribed by the organisations funding it and can evolve as it goes along.

The partners would like to thank Chris Creegan for his work during the development phase, much of which is reflected in this document.

The original timeline for the inquiry was impacted by the **coronavirus pandemic**. This slightly delayed the inquiry, however, the partners quickly moved to commission a focused piece of research to learn from social action that was prompted by the crisis. This research is due to report by the end of 2020 and will contribute to the learning of the wider Social Action Inquiry.

Inquiry principles

The inquiry will focus on *social action* in Scotland. It will:

- Be independent, including of the organisations funding it.
- Be shaped by, run by, and accountable to, people from communities furthest from the places where decisions are made and resources allocated.
- Invest in social action by communities (of geography or interest), particularly those with experience of disadvantage, poverty and marginalisation.
- Locate both money and power with communities, rather than with funders.
- Support communities to capture, understand and share the learning that comes from their social action and to use this to influence wider change.
- Be free to produce bold, radical findings that challenge power holders.

Delivery

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The inquiry will engage as widely and deeply as possible, drawing on the wealth of knowledge and insight that exists already in Scotland. It will seek both lived and learned expertise. It will also build on the findings of the Civil Society Futures independent inquiry, much of which is relevant in Scotland.

At the heart of the inquiry will be a set of '**social action hubs**', each focused around a community of geography and/or interest. Support, including financial resource, will be offered with communities deciding how best to use this. The hubs will be about enabling action, as well as producing learning to help inform wider change. The co-chairs will lead on identifying the hubs, supported by research experts.

The social hubs may be groups who are currently on the margins, but perhaps on the cusp of finding and using their voice. They may be communities who want support so that they can respond to challenges or to the changes happening around them. People involved in the social action hubs may wish to become involved as members of the inquiry panel.

As power and accountability are key themes of the inquiry, the structure reflects the desire for power not to lie with any individual, but to sit with people and communities. To reflect this, the inquiry will be led by two **co-chairs**, at least one of whom will be recruited from communities furthest from power.

The co-chairs will be supported by an **inquiry lead**, who will provide delivery and co-ordination of the work.

A **panel of advisers** will provide drive, guidance and oversight. The panel will play an important role in capturing, understanding, sharing and applying the insights from the social action. Membership of the panel may change through the inquiry, depending on what is needed at different stages. The panel will have around 10 members at any time but will seek to be a vehicle for far wider involvement.

The research element of the inquiry is expected to include a significant role for community members, trained and supported as **peer researchers**.

A **social action development associate** will be recruited to work alongside the inquiry lead to provide practical support to the social action hubs.

Outputs

The inquiry will produce accessible, engaging outputs to share learning and influence wider change. These could take a whole range of formats (e.g. events, art, performance, video, blogs etc.), determined by the people involved in the inquiry. The inquiry co-chairs and lead will engage research experts to support community members in undertaking high quality approaches to gathering, understanding and presenting the evidence that emerges.

The precise outputs will be shaped by those running the inquiry. It is anticipated that learning will be shared throughout the inquiry in order to influence change as it goes along.

Governance

Partners

A partnership¹ will provide very light oversight throughout the inquiry as well as advice and engagement as requested by the inquiry co-chairs and lead. The partnership will be made up of a number of organisations which are supporting the inquiry in a range of different ways. None of the partners will be involved as members of the inquiry panel.

Budget

A funding pot of c. £640k is currently confirmed. Of this, c. £68k has been allocated to an initial project focused on learning about social action during the coronavirus crisis.

Timescales

The timeline for the inquiry has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. It is expected that the inquiry will be set up by late 2020 and run for around three years, concluding by the end of 2023.

¹ Currently comprising: Carnegie UK Trust, Corra Foundation, Foundation Scotland, The National Lottery Community Fund, The Robertson Trust, RSE (Royal Society of Edinburgh), SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations).