

## Progress and Plan towards enhancing performance and developing talent across the third sector

**Julia Lever talks to Denise Fellows about how the Centre is delivering its mission to increase the effectiveness and achievement of voluntary and community organisations.**

Denise is Head of Consultancy and Training Services within the Centre for Charity Effectiveness and an Honorary Senior Visiting Fellow. She is also a Founder Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Management Consultants which jointly launched the Centre with Cass Business School in December 2004. Reporting to Professor Ian Bruce, founder and Director of the Centre for Charity Effectiveness, Denise is responsible for all the work the Centre does apart from the Diploma and Degree Programmes which are directed by Professor Paul Palmer and the Research Programmes led by Professor Jenny Harrow. Originally, 24 months ago, Denise was tasked with setting up a consultancy business; she is now also responsible for the Training and Development, Coaching and Mentoring, and Short Course and Workshop strands of the Centre's activities. More recently, an emerging publishing development is also part of her remit.

A little history briefly. The Centre for Charity Effectiveness grew out of City University's VOLPROF Department; both were founded by Professor Ian Bruce. The Centre is now part of the Faculty of Management, Cass Business School at City University, London and is the result of a very productive joint venture partnership between Cass Business School and the Worshipful Company of Management Consultants. Its focus is on helping voluntary sector organisations in Governance, Leadership and Management Development, Operational Effectiveness and Diversity & Equality. This is delivered through a range of executive (i.e. part-time) Post-Graduate Degree and Diploma programmes specialising in voluntary sector management, Research, Coaching and Mentoring Services, a budding virtual Learning Network, Short Courses, Seminars and Workshops; and a substantial Consultancy group which also embraces leadership and management development programmes.

Recently Denise wrote, "the broad range of services and the depth of practical and academic thinking provide a powerful blend to create real change within the organisations with which we work. The Centre has grown rapidly in the last two years through development of the consultancy and short course programmes which provide a deep impact on the effectiveness of charities". She is quick to acknowledge the value of the Centre's gene pool, firstly Ian Bruce's vision and determination in embarking upon such a groundbreaking venture; secondly City University and particularly Cass Business School for embracing the notion that the voluntary sector needed and merited the same excellent business education as the commercial sector and backing this with financial support; thirdly the Company of Management Consultants who had and continue to play a material role in the formation and development of the Centre providing significant time, talent and funding.

The team within the Centre comprises those teaching on the Centre's degree and short course programmes, research practitioners and around thirty associate consultants including Members of the Company of Management Consultants. Most of these individuals have contributed a vast amount of pro-bono input to help establish the Centre because they believe it has the ability to make a real contribution. Perhaps one of the fundamental reasons that the Centre is effective in achieving its mission is that its work is delivered by people who as well as having functional expertise have extensive sector experience; they understand how the third sector works, warts and all.

Denise has recently led those most involved, the core team, through a vision clarification and business planning process which has been highly productive. "Over the last two years, our knowledge and experience base have grown continually. We now have a collegiate core group rather than a collection of independent sole traders, who combine to share experience in problem solving and inputting to programmes and assignments" I asked her about aspirations for the future and she was clear that "having more beneficial impact on more organisations is our priority – to develop high value publications, online services and workshops which can reach and support even the smallest charities."

Periodically people choose to criticise money spent on consultancy and training and development and never more so than in the charity sector where the majority of funding is from voluntary donations of one sort or another. The sector spends a great deal of time trying to make donors feel a real sense of ownership of the service their donations help to provide and understandably finds it hard to justify money spent on training and development whether of staff, volunteers or of trustees.. It is essential that the Centre adds value, rather than duplicating existing provision. It is helped in this regard because its culture is that of any other charity where many talented and committed individuals invest their time and talent, frequently pro bono into something they feel is important. This enables the Centre to operate on a heavily subsidised basis whilst offering world-class quality and cost-effective support to the sector. The Centre sees that its purpose is to enhance performance and develop talent throughout the sector and it does this by working both with clients on a long term basis and also with funding partners who see it as an opportunity to invest directly in enhancing the effectiveness of their chosen sectors or particular charities. Another reason for not chasing growth indiscriminately is that this strategy enables the Centre to remain light on its feet and flexible to different ways of working.

Above all over the last 2 years, Denise identifies that the Centre is evolving a holistic way of working with clients, sharing the journey, listening and learning from them. And for this year and next? "As we continue to develop and deliver more "products" to meet the continuum of our clients' needs, we aim to be able to offer them to a broader cross section of the Sector by securing innovative funding relationships and to extend more of our work to the next level down of senior staff, the chief executives of the future."

Denise would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in exploring whether or not the Centre could help with organisational or individual development needs.