The British Are Not Coming!
UK Higher Education and the Nonprofit Sector

Paul Palmer, Mariana Bogdanova

The rationale for the growth of nonprofit management education in the United States has recently been charted by O’Neill (2005). Ten years previously, the United States and the United Kingdom were at similar levels of development. By 2006 the parallel lines had been broken. Why has nonprofit management education expanded in the United States while provision of graduate education for the voluntary sector in the United Kingdom has stood still? This article explores the factors that have prevented parallel growth in education provision. It argues that the university as an institution, both in terms of its nature and its power structures, is one of those factors. It presents the story of the closing of the world’s first voluntary sector course at the London School of Economics and concludes with reflection on the likely future of voluntary sector management education provision in the United Kingdom.

In 2005, Michael O’Neill described nonprofit management education (NME) as “largely a phenomenon of the past two decades, [one that] has grown rapidly in the United States. The field was virtually nonexistent in 1980; by 2000 there were ninety-one master’s degree programs with at least a concentration in NME, . . . nearly one hundred undergraduate programs, and about fifty university-based certificate programs. . .” (O’Neill, 2005, p. 5). O’Neill went on to describe the developmental context for this growth with a wide-ranging analysis of education drivers and the role of the nonprofit sector itself. If O’Neill’s article had been published ten years before, and had academics looked across “the Pond” at the United Kingdom, they would have found a similar picture. However, by 2005 the British experience was now very different. In that year, closure of the world’s first nonprofit course, at the London School of Economics (LSE), was announced. In 1995, in the United Kingdom there were four master’s degrees and five certificate awards. Ten years later, according to VolResource (J. Howes, personal correspondence, Apr. 3, 2006), there were ten certificate courses and two undergraduate degrees. In 2006, there were six master’s degrees with one about to
close. Reviewing O’Neill’s analysis against the UK experience, why has provision of UK nonprofit management education not followed that of the United States?

In the context of UK voluntary management education, this article reflects on the difficulties in developing management education for the sector and on the factors for underperformance. It specifically addresses the question of what, if anything, can be learned from the closing of the LSE program. The resulting discussion will lead to a fuller understanding of what this implies about the future development for voluntary sector education. The context within which this takes place includes an account of nonprofit sector growth and the changing profile of its management education counterpart, revealing some insights into the difficulties faced. Specifically, the argument is developed by referring to possible influences of voluntary sector culture on management education, a comparative perspective of the UK versus the U.S. experience, relevance of the lessons learned from the LSE case, and a perspective on the influence of external and internal pressures on university education for the sector.

Methodology

This article discusses the difficulties in developing management education for the sector alongside the factors for underperformance. Existing literature and documented trends in the sector are the initial information source used to generate an agenda for discussing current and future trends. More specifically, the issues outlined by the VOLPROF report (Bruce and Leat, 1993) offer a framework for reflecting on the case of the end of the LSE program. The framework is presented in the form of a semistructured interview schedule (see the Appendix) used to conduct interviews with four leading figures in voluntary sector management from October 11 to November 11, 2006. Their views are presented here to elucidate, from a firsthand “pioneer” perspective, the discussion on management education barriers as well as lessons learned from the LSE case.

The last stages for preparing this work have led to formation of a working group that aims to look at the sustainability of higher education for the sector in the United Kingdom. In this way, the resulting discussion presented here will hopefully contribute to a fuller understanding of what the implications are for the future of voluntary sector education.

Growth of the UK Nonprofit Sector

The voluntary sector in the United Kingdom has become increasingly important to policy makers since the mid-1980s (Kendall, 2003). Voluntary organizations began offering personal social services that previously had been provided by statutory authorities,
ushering in an era referred to as “the mixed economy of care” (Knapp, Robertson, and Thomason, 1990).

Prior to 1995, there are no authoritative statistics available on the entire UK voluntary sector. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) produced tables from the accounts of the top five hundred registered charities from the early 1980s, but no statistical modeling could be undertaken from this unrepresentative sample. In the early 1990s, government departments began collecting statistics on the voluntary sector relating to their particular interests. For example, the UK Charity Commission began keeping an accurate account of officially registered charities. In 1995, through the Central Statistical Office (now the Office of National Statistics), a consortium of four UK Councils for Voluntary Service, and a number of universities, the UK government funded a large questionnaire survey that for the first time allowed construction of an authoritative profile of the UK voluntary sector (Kendall and Knapp, 1996). The profile is updated biannually (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2006).

The number of formal voluntary organizations defined as registered charities grew from 98,000 in 1991 to 169,000 in 2004. Currently some 2.2 percent of the UK workforce, or 608,000 people (Table 1), have paid employment in the voluntary sector, a figure that has been increasing by more than 10,000 persons each year (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2006).

The importance of the voluntary sector and the increase in numbers of staff are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. As David Miliband, minister for communities and local government, stated in his speech to leaders of the UK voluntary sector in 2006: “The Government’s plans to devolve more power to individuals and communities would open up three major opportunities for voluntary groups. First, they could act as advisers to people who had been given direct payments so that they could control their own care. Second they would benefit if, as planned, an increasing number of grants were handed out at neighbourhood level. Third, they would be able to win assets more easily as the government channelled funds from dormant bank accounts into the voluntary sector and give communities more chances to purchase defunct assets” (Miliband, 2006).

### Table 1. Total UK Workforce by Sector 1995–2004, Headcount in Thousands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>19,095</td>
<td>20,711</td>
<td>20,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>6,042</td>
<td>6,246</td>
<td>6,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary sector</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total workforce</td>
<td>25,616</td>
<td>27,520</td>
<td>27,720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2006, p. 101.
Base: All people age 16 and over.
Table 2. Voluntary Sector Higher Education Programs in the United Kingdom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Content on Voluntary Sector Is Central</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London School of Economics</td>
<td>M.Sc. in voluntary sector organization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Bank University</td>
<td>M.Sc. in charity finance</td>
<td>Master of voluntary administration (MVA)</td>
<td>Master’s in charity accounting and financial management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ICSA certificate in charity management</td>
<td>Master’s in charity marketing and fundraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of East London</td>
<td>M.A. in voluntary sector studies</td>
<td>M.A./postgraduate diploma/certificate in social enterprise: development and management</td>
<td>M.A./postgraduate diploma/certificate in voluntary sector studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City University Business School</td>
<td>Postgrad diploma in voluntary sector management</td>
<td>M.Sc./postgraduate diploma in charity accounting and financial management</td>
<td>M.Sc./postgraduate diploma in charity marketing and fundraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(now Cass Business School)</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.Sc./postgraduate diploma in grantmaking management</td>
<td>ICAEW diploma in charity accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds Metropolitan University</td>
<td>Postgrad diploma in management in the voluntary sector</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSU College, Southampton</td>
<td>Voluntary/nonprofit sector management</td>
<td>M.Sc. in professional studies: the management of voluntary organizations (specialist stream in social works studies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(now part of University of Southampton)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>Management certificates for voluntary sector managers</td>
<td>Professional certificate in management</td>
<td>Master of public administration (MPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Master of public administration (MPA)</td>
<td>Winning resources and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M.Sc./certificate/diploma in development management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool University</td>
<td>M.A. in charity law</td>
<td>Professional certificate in management</td>
<td>Master of public administration (MPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(course never ran due to insufficient numbers)</td>
<td>Master of public administration (MPA)</td>
<td>Winning resources and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M.Sc./certificate/diploma in development management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aston University</td>
<td>M.Sc./MBA in public sector management</td>
<td>M.Sc./MBA in public sector management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield Hallam University</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.Sc. in charity resource management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roehampton University</td>
<td></td>
<td>M.Sc./postgraduate diploma/certificate in voluntary action management</td>
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</table>
However, the minister then went on to describe some of the “challenges” the voluntary sector faced—in particular, funding issues and management capacity. The government also needed to address the fact that many voluntary groups were not ready to bid for public sector contracts.

**Profile of UK Higher Education for the Voluntary Sector**

In 1996, the *Charity Finance Yearbook* listed those UK higher education institutions offering accredited courses for voluntary sector managers. Table 2 compares these findings with those in the 2007 edition of the yearbook. Currently the number of full-time graduate courses in general management offered by UK universities stands at 757 (Hobsons Postgrad, 2007). More important, as Table 2 illustrates, over the ten-year period from the first account on course development for voluntary sector management in UK higher education institutions, the total number of institutions offering courses has not changed. There were three new programs by 2007, and three that had closed. This contrasts with the U.S. experience in graduate program development for nonprofit management, documented by Wish and Mirabella (1998). Between 1990 and 1997, the authors report rapid growth in U.S. university- and college-based graduate programs, increasing from 17 programs in 1990 to 76 in 1997.2

By comparison, the U.S. programs were more often housed in public administration, political science, or arts departments rather than in business schools at the time of the study. Today there is a more equal split of courses between schools in the United Kingdom,
which is perhaps a clue to understanding the development course of graduate education for the sector in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, despite no change in the total number, the growth that can be seen from the table is within institutions, which have expanded their established programs rather than instituting new programs.

This portrayal sits uncomfortably with a comment made by one veteran of voluntary sector studies that the quality of institutions delivering voluntary sector education has declined (interview with David Billis, Dec. 6, 2006). An example of the observed negative trend in numbers, and arguably in quality, has been the loss of the world’s first management education program, at the LSE’s Centre for Voluntary Organisations (CVO). In 2006 the CVO announced that the M.Sc. in voluntary sector organization was to be withdrawn. Together with weaker development of UK voluntary sector programs compared to the United States, this event poses questions as to the reasons behind the overall negative trend of voluntary sector management education in Great Britain.

Characteristics of the Early Voluntary Sector Management Programs: Beyond Vocational Training?

Reflecting on the work of the early pioneers of management education for the voluntary sector some fifteen to twenty years later, we find it interesting how aware they were of Mintzberg’s academic precipice: “We prefer to see management education as walking... on a high alpine ridge, covered with ice and snow. On one side is a sheer drop—that is the cliff of academic irrelevance. ... On the other side, the terrain falls off sharply. This is the slippery slope of easy practicality. Start down there and you may never stop” (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002, p. 75).

The initial rise of business schools in the United States in the 1950s and in the United Kingdom in the 1960s is well chronicled (Cornuel, 2005; Knowles and Hensher, 2005; Townsend and Cairns, 2003; Grey, 2002), as is the struggle between a demand for vocational training on the one side and on the other the wider concept of management education underpinned by research. In 1978 David Billis, a staff member at the Brunel Institute of Organisation and Social Science, founded the Program of Research and Training into Voluntary Action (PORTVAC), the first university-based program devoted to the study of the voluntary sector anywhere in the world, so far as is known presently. The first Master’s Program into Voluntary Sector Management grew from the research program. In 1987, the program moved to the London School of Economics under the new Centre for Voluntary Organisation, which subsequently became the Centre for Civil Society (CCS). The development of the first M.Sc. course in voluntary sector management followed a series of research projects, workshops, and consultancies, which fed a series of books and articles outlining a theory of the voluntary sector: “Theories were
developed but they were ‘usable’ theories [Billis, 1984] providing explanations which helped the practitioners to understand why things happened in their organisations the way they did which suggested appropriate responses to practical problems of organisation and management. Postgraduate students were encouraged to take a similar approach so that they completed their studies with a collection of theoretical tools to apply to the challenges they would face in the future” (Harris, Rochester, and Halfpenny, 2001, p. 5).

From the outset, management education for the voluntary sector on the part of UK universities followed the management education path outlined by Starkey and Tempest (2005) of being academically rigorous but also relevant. This perspective argues that staff development goes beyond the narrow range of management training focused on work-based skills and views education as more than a mere training ground. Instead, a much larger role is seen in the cultivation of a nation’s culture. In this respect, voluntary sector management education could be viewed as a critical hub in business schools, both generating and adopting perspectives on sustainability, change, and society, identified as key subjects in the future of management education (Grey, 2002; Coopey, 2003). This is an important reflection in terms of exploring the boundaries of management education for the sector, a structural component embedded in the university institution.

There was considerable interuniversity support among the early pioneers. For example, staff from the Open University assisted course development at South West London College, which launched a Certificate in Management Studies (Community Enterprises) around 1980, primarily aimed at supporting community-based economic initiatives. This was inevitably facilitated by the circumstance that the small handful of full-time academics who were teaching and researching voluntary sector studies were, like the voluntary sector itself, having to justify their existence. Most had mainstream academic teaching elsewhere and the response of many deans was to see such activities as mildly interesting as long as they did not get in the way of the “core business.” At that time, there were no full-time professors of voluntary sector management. Billis was a senior reader at the LSE, and the other early pioneers were junior.

By the mid-1990s, a small but visible presence of voluntary sector management education had now established itself in the United Kingdom. It was also quite diversified. Institutions such as the LSE and City University had management degrees for aspiring chief executives. South Bank, by then a university, had a suite of management degrees for specialist function managers in finance and fundraising. Community organizations were being served by institutions such as the University of East London, Sheffield Hallam, and Southampton College, among others, which meant that the London focus was beginning to stretch out to the regions. Finally, the Open University developed specialist distance-learning management certificates in both general management and fundraising.
Looking back ten years, we see that all the foundations were in place for a major expansion of voluntary sector management education. So why, ten years later, did the Class of 1996 not expand?

**What Stopped Management Education from Developing?**

The question of the barriers that management education faces is approached by drawing on a report derived from City University’s VOLPROF program (Centre for Voluntary Sector and Not for Profit Management), exploring the current practice and future prospects in developing voluntary sector managers (Bruce and Leat, 1993). The “Management for Tomorrow” report outlined the case for management education and the barriers to development of management education for the voluntary sector. In particular the report noted:

Management development is likely to encounter obstacles in all organisations—statutory, voluntary and commercial. In the voluntary sector, apart from costs, there may be particular barriers related to the ethos of the sector, structures of governance, the role of technical professionals, volunteer involvement, ideologies of participation and empowerment, funding and employment patterns and sources. The future nature and growth of management development in the voluntary sector depends on answers to four fundamental questions: (i) is not-for-profit management different from management in other sectors? (ii) is it helpful to talk about generic (as distinct from industry specific) voluntary sector management skills and training needs? (iii) is management training primarily concerned with skills for now or for the future, for managing change? (iv) what significance should be attached to credibility and career considerations? [Bruce and Leat, 1993, pp. 3–4]

Underpinning some of the issues raised by the Bruce and Leat report is resistance to management education in general (Cornuel, 2005) and for the United Kingdom in particular (Handy, 1987). An argument for this has been the perception of the distinctiveness of the sector’s culture and thus the extent to which voluntary sector management should be different in its need to address this distinctiveness. This debate has been further complicated by the issue of the changing nature of the voluntary sector as it moved from the outer fringes of public policy to the mainstream, overcoming its constant need to justify itself and posing a new question: What should the role of the voluntary sector be in this mixed economy of care (Deakin, 1996)? A series of research studies preceding the VOLPROF report attempted to answer these questions, ultimately arriving at what the way forward for voluntary sector management education should be.

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The VOLPROF report, however, outlined a number of barriers to management development in the voluntary sector that went beyond a simple analysis of voluntary organizations not being able to afford training. The specific barriers identified are:

- Ethos of the sector: There is antipathy to management, driven by the view that “doing good is good enough.”
- Costs: Voluntary sector ideology conveys that the organization does not exist to benefit staff and that money not spent on charitable purposes is money misspent.
- Employment patterns and sources and structure: “Voluntary organisations are simultaneously very large and very small in that they are composed of a collection of more or less autonomous branches or members” (Bruce and Leat, 1993, p. 39). Although a national body may see the need for management training, it may be unable or unwilling to impose such requirements on the local organization.

This article argues that the universities themselves are equally important obstacles to expansion of voluntary sector management education. These barriers have not been constructed deliberately but reflect wider changes in management education and, in particular, the way such education is funded and supported within the university institution.

The University as a Barrier

A number of factors relating to the UK higher education system in the last ten years have contributed to an environment that, even though not actively opposing voluntary sector courses, has not supplied the feeding waters to allow voluntary sector management education to expand. Since the 1960s, the UK higher education system had been formally multitiered. At the apex were the chartered universities, treasuring their independence and their academic staff enjoying considerable freedom, relatively light teaching timetables, and encouragement to undertake research and innovation. At the second tier were the polytechnics, designed to offer a more vocational education and not as well resourced as the universities. Polytechnic staff had a heavier teaching load, but pockets of research expertise were allowed to exist and indeed such staff enjoyed a relatively privileged existence, being seen as the “cream” of their institution. The third category were the colleges of higher education, which ranged from some general colleges covering both “further education” and “higher education” to degree level, usually externally awarded via a
university or highly specialized institution such as a theological or arts college. Some enjoy the prestige of a university.

The 1992 Education Act abandoned this system, and very quickly all the polytechnics and more slowly the colleges became universities. The change was modeled on the view that the tier system was elitist and not in keeping with a merit-based democratic society. Moreover, this change served as support for government targeting of dramatic increases in the number of the UK population in higher education to produce a labor force for the challenges of the twenty-first century (Her Majesty’s Government, 1991). In 1995–96 there were 1,720,094 students, and by 2003–04 this number had risen by 648,911 to 2,369,005 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2006). Funding for teaching in this period rose from £2,268 million to £4,004 million (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2006). UK higher education has expanded, with an increase in resources from the government linked to increasing student numbers. New teaching contracts were imposed in the new university sector. In essence, the universities began to play the numbers game, with an emphasis on efficiency reflected in staff-student ratios.

Higher education funding in the United Kingdom in the twentieth century had also moved to be highly dependent on the state. The endowments of leading universities such as Cambridge and Oxford did not keep pace with their counterparts in the United States, as the British universities continued to take more and more “easy” resources from government.

In 2003, a two-year moratorium on Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funds on postgraduate education was announced. With voluntary sector education primarily at the postgraduate level, no development funds for new courses or endowment funds to support fees was a further blow to any academic wishing to develop new courses. Furthermore, the Labour government elected in 1997 was committed to an expansion and improvement in public services, involving a combination of new public service management initiatives and expansion with 360,000 new public sector posts (Gershon, 2004). Unlike those from the voluntary sector, these public service students came with generous funding to pay full-cost course fees. At the senior level, the MPA (master of public administration) arrived.

The private sector was equally able to secure student numbers able to pay full-cost fees, with elite university MBA programs being seen by students as an investment in future earnings. In 2005, the average starting salary for an MBA graduate from the top business schools was over £109,000 (Financial Times, 2005). In contrast, the largest thirty-two charities’ chief executives had salaries averaging £103,000 (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2005). Expensive management education could not be guaranteed to be paid back to a manager wishing to embark on such a course by self-finance, and as discussed earlier there is a resistance in the voluntary

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sector to paying fees. Therefore, there was no incentive for universities to develop voluntary sector specialist courses. Instead, electives or some contextualization to make an existing management course seem attractive to voluntary sector managers has been the norm.

Alongside the barriers of fee cost and sustainable numbers, another major problem has been the curriculum design for most specialist masters. The early courses were all founded on active research programs in voluntary sector management practices. Second, a distinctive feature of voluntary sector management courses is that they are multidisciplinary in nature, needing to call on disciplines that are, on occasion, opposed, such as business and policy (Hall and others, 2001). All this requires considerable investment to make a course that is both relevant and academically rigorous. For example, the Open University course attracted considerable seed capital, and similar foundation and commercial financial sponsorship supported the courses at LSE, South Bank, and City University.

In one sense, the early pioneers carried into practice the fundraising and entrepreneurial management activities they were observing in the voluntary sector, ten years before such sponsorship funding arrangements were identified as a way forward for the future sustainability of UK higher education (Sutton Trust, 2003). However, such fundraising activities tend to be very labor-intensive. Academics often feel uneasy about raising funds, and, like voluntary-sector funding, it tends to be short-term in nature. Such activity also requires constant attention, which does not fit well into competing demands on academic time. In 1996, UK higher education was subject to a national exercise involving assessment of research capability (the Research Assessment Exercise, or RAE). Tied to the assessment exercise was future research funding. The RAE was repeated in 2000, by which time it had become apparent that:

- The grading structure meant that only the highest graded departments received funding. The new universities in particular received little funding from the exercise (Prince and Beaver, 2004; Morgan, 2004).
- Assessment of academics relied on a very narrow definition of research output. In particular, it focused on publication in a number of discipline-based, refereed journals (Geary, Marriott, and Rowlinson, 2004; Bence and Oppenheim, 2004).
- The RAE has been detrimental for emerging subjects and those with a practitioner focus (Stewart, 2005; Paisey and Paisey, 2005).

In particular, it seems that voluntary sector studies by their nature tend to be multidisciplinary and practitioner-focused. Though there are a number of excellent refereed academic journals dedicated to voluntary sector study, such journals received little recognition in the RAE. They were, in essence, not on the list that had informally emerged, based as they were on functional traditional academic
subjects such as economics. For the existing research-active academics interested in the voluntary sector or for those seeking to build a research profile, the nature of the RAE proved a distinct disincentive. Within the elite universities, staff were encouraged to publish in selected journals and look for discipline categories to build capacity with other colleagues. Voluntary sector studies received no specialist designation. In the new universities, the absence of research funding after the 2000 exercise meant that any interest and encouragement rapidly evaporated at the senior level.

From these factors, one concludes the university is an institutional barrier to management development for the sector, over and beyond the barriers identified in the VOLPROF report. This perspective of institutionally bounded education for the sector, both in the context of the nature of the university facing external pressures to perform and internal pressures in the form of power struggles, is explored further by presenting the case of the closing of the LSE program. The case itself also embodies some of the issues introduced earlier regarding the barriers to management development for the sector: the debate on the distinctive nature of the sector and its changing role.

The LSE Case: Lessons Learned?

Examination of the LSE program closure leads to two central questions with respect to what lessons can be learned in taking the sector’s management education into the future. Was the closing of the course a consequence of the founder’s actions and their mismatching with developments in the sector? Was it a matter of institutional embeddedness or structural power struggle issues? In their own versions of the story, the respondents’ views are presented as a tapestry of anonymous comments on the life and death of the VSO (Voluntary Sector Organisation) master’s program at the LSE’s Centre for Voluntary Organisations, generating a “collective story.”

Development of the master’s program in this prestigious institution, led by the founder of the CVO, followed a series of practice-based research projects, workshops, and consultancies, exploring new voluntary-sector-specific theories, concepts, and models. The instability of those theories, as the founder saw them, was critical to the argument being made for the practice orientation of the associated research. This placed an emphasis on practice-generated theory useful to the sector. Thus the CVO and its master’s program were a place where experienced sector practitioners, mostly based in smaller UK organizations, developed their thinking and leadership. The learning outcome from the program emphasized how their organizations worked rather than how they should or might be managed. This critical educational orientation was central to the integrated model of the CVO, where practitioner students shaped the research on the basis of their concerns and interests, which were then fed back into teaching.
Crucially, the institution and the departmental location were the “right intellectual home” (interview with Colin Rochester, Roehampton University) for the CVO in that both shared a social administration discourse, where the study of social policy spanned the theory-practice divide and translated into voluntary sector action on the ground. Structurally, fees were low and bursaries were available for the program, which kept the CVO on track with its academic activities without major distractions in recruiting students.

For the CVO's founder and director, the primary academic and practice focus was the relationship between the voluntary sector and government, mostly in the latter's role of a funding body. Thus, in the CVO's work emphasis was placed on how and why voluntary sector organizations were different from business and government, based on an underlying need to confirm the legitimacy of the sector and, in turn, the legitimacy of management education for the sector. As this need subsided, the university began to consider the CVO's work in light of its international perspectives. Viewed thus, the center's director appeared to side with the original social administration focus, leading to his withdrawal from the program. The CVO itself seemed to be faced with a choice: either break away from its original direction or be an outsider to the direction of the university and risk loss of its embeddedness.

In 1998, on the retirement of the founder director and the departure of the deputy director to a prestigious chair in another university, an internationally known U.S.-based academic with a significant and influential comparative research track record in this sector was appointed to head the center. The change of the CVO's name to the Centre for Civil Society reflected incorporation of the discourse on organizational theories and international flavor. This direction had already been embraced by the university and seemed to be a natural course for voluntary sector education in these circumstances.

By the late 1990s, the roles of business and international relations were integrated as components of the curriculum at the CCS, although the emphasis was clearly on policy rather than management. The center was now looking at an international market of younger and more mobile students. This was reflected in its more general approach in terms of the program content, allowing greater movement between the business and public as well as the voluntary sectors. Following the trend at the university as a whole, the fees had also come to reflect the international market, pricing the program courses out of the market and raising difficulties in managing the center's finances. As the director at the time admitted, the CCS did little in terms of fundraising, exhibited inattention to looking after its bursaries, and failed to nurture key relationships within the department and the university. More important, rather than an inability to raise funds alone, there was inattention to the way the university operates, as well as a perception of opaqueness of university politics among leadership.
In 2002, another change in leadership took place in an attempt to steer the CCS back to its UK voluntary sector practitioner roots as established by its founder. This proved to be a difficult task, in that there was no real interest in researching the UK sector at the time within the department and positioning of the courses in the UK market was uncompetitive in terms of prices and time limits set for the turnaround. This ended with the dissolution of the master’s program, leaving the CCS and its international outlook on course provision for the sector. This could be said to have been a disappointing outcome for many alongside the questions it raised in terms of the appropriate model for current and future programs in the sector. A quote from the Condolences document created at the demise of the VSO course in May 2006 is relevant to the central theme in this account, the embeddedness of the CCS in the university: “The course was tolerated more than promoted at the LSE and I thought that this blasé attitude reflected how the school had changed from a rather radical source of ideas, an academic conscience for the country, to a source of investment banking candidates and New Labour ideology. In fact, the change probably mirrors just what the course taught; that, as institutions grow, they move toward the mainstream.”

Reflections

In retrospect, the initial VSO master’s program agenda, with its focus on the development of reflective theory from UK voluntary sector practices, was too narrow given the subsequent institutional move toward a more globally responsive UK education. The resulting mismatch between the founder’s vision and LSE’s chosen course has been described by firsthand observers as an “institutional failure of leadership,” which arguably left voluntary sector education severed from its once-recognized place in the university institution.

On the other hand, the international direction at the core of the new leadership at the CCS had already been embraced by the philosophy of the university and seemed to be the natural course for voluntary sector education. Considering the new director’s academic background in social research, this could be seen as a case of coinciding interests between the institution and the center’s new leader rather than a case of complying with some kind of globalization movement. In this sense, it was more of a realization of the need for sustainability in a cross-sector context, which the CCS met by becoming a hybrid structure.

The practice-theory dichotomy of the early and late voluntary sector program delineates, if only in hindsight, differing education models for the sector developing over time. The program had moved from aiming to understand the sector as a practitioner to understanding the sector from a more theoretical cross-sectoral perspective, both grounded in the institutional transformation of the host university. With the attempt to steer the LSE program back to its
original course, even though it ran counter to the current direction of LSE's development, the resulting mismatch and lack of institutional support was perhaps the only possible outcome. The reason for failure from this perspective is not necessarily in the focus and aims of the former and latter models, but rather in the attempt to attain either path against the principle of institutional embeddedness.

Embeddedness is acclaimed in a number of other cases in the context of developing voluntary sector management education programs in the United Kingdom. For example, the Voluntary Action Management program at Roehampton University is perceived to have been built on appropriate ground within a university with a history in teacher training dating back to 1841. The university's tradition lies in religious colleges and organizations, which creates a good fit for voluntary action in the university's legacy of educating people in the “caring professions” (interview with Colin Rochester, Roehampton University). The program's new degree in faith-based organizations is an example of institutional embeddedness and accounts for the support the program receives from the university's leading figures. A similar case of embeddedness can be made for Cass Business School hosting the Voluntary Sector Management Program. The origins of the business school are traced back to the livery companies in the city of London and a legacy of social responsibility and philanthropy, thus affording fertile soil for the development of voluntary sector education.

Aside from the embeddedness argument and the lack of sufficient resource planning, another factor influencing the outcome for the VSO program could be the lack of a well-developed succession plan, leaving change in leadership the only possible strategy. Indeed, a number of successors of the founder's vision had established themselves in other institutions before the course finally closed. This signaled the presence of a sufficient capacity to keep the policy administration legacy strong as a whole rather than scattered around the United Kingdom. Today this capacity is endorsed: programs with a policy administration history have been developed as stand-alone entities in universities such as Roehampton and Aston, to which some of the heirs to the original LSE center have migrated.

Such programs could continue to exist alongside that of the more international policy-focused program of LSE's Centre for Civil Society, as well as alongside the voluntary sector programs emerging from a more business-oriented perspective, such as those in the University of Southampton, Cass Business School, and the Open University. The perception of a more stratified and specialized market for VSO management education is one of choice rather than competition, thus creating possibilities of collaboration between the program models rather than posing questions of survival. These are still relatively small units in big institutions, which offers a basis for working toward mutual support and building a coalition for promoting management education for the sector. This could mean a stronger
appeal to education and other government bodies for a bursary fund and funding for curriculum development. This last point leads the discussion to a positive look to the future, exemplified by the recent formation of a working group of the heads of a number of voluntary sector centers to look at the sustainability of higher education for the sector.

Conclusion: The Future for UK Voluntary Sector Studies

What does the future hold for UK nonprofit education? In essence there are three scenarios:

1. The existing provision neither improves nor becomes worse.
2. The existing provision shrinks. (For example, Cornforth, 2006, argues that separate nonprofit programs are no longer viable, and as such their time has ended.)
3. There is an expansion in provision.

Although in the short run scenarios 1 and 2 are the most likely, we would like to hold forth hope for scenario 3. An obvious solution for attaining an expansion of provision of management education for the sector would be an injection of finance. The question of what source of funding is appropriate for which element of a program is more complex. A stronger appeal to education and other government bodies for a bursary fund and funding for curriculum development, for example, is one option emerging from a stronger collaboration across all UK programs.

Though undoubtedly a more favorable funding regime would assist and is even seen to be required, the sustainability of voluntary sector management education programs involves more than increased funding. A different starting point is an understanding of the voluntary sector itself as an idiosyncratic entity that is constantly remolding itself. Addressing the practice-theory orientation of a sustainable program, the role of voluntary sector management education is therefore to understand and explain, which goes beyond simple description and makes voluntary sector students critical and reflective.

Reflection, however, should be practiced before it is preached. As pointed out by Billis (David Billis, personal communication, Dec. 6, 2006), there is an urgent need to survey the sector and pinpoint its specific needs rather than carry on with current programs. Such a survey would require input from an array of sector practitioners and UK professional decision-making bodies such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (Acevo), Charity Finance Directors' Group (CFDG), Institute of Fundraising (IoF), and Futurebuilders England.
Coopey (2003) suggests that improving organizational performance is at least as much about improving managerial competence as emancipation. For voluntary sector studies, this would include multidisciplinary skills encompassing policy, stakeholder, and resource analysis. The specialized market perspective for management education discussed earlier should be considered as creating synergy between the program models, which would enable the sector to draw on each program’s distinct strengths.

From reflections on the LSE case, one sees that UK programs could benefit from being more internationally oriented. This re-emphasizes the argument for embeddedness in the institution’s direction of development, which the CCS has demonstrated in keeping with the LSE’s tradition of moving on with the times. Just as the course in railway management that began at the LSE in 1903 was later abandoned as the industry shifted, perhaps so must management courses for the voluntary sector reflect changes in practice. At present much of the curriculum focuses on UK policy. Although clearly important, it should be the role of voluntary sector educators to introduce the experiences of the wider world. This could be achieved within a program collaboration and interchange schools for wider coverage of discipline development across European higher education institutions. The United Kingdom should perhaps look to the Continent as appropriate ground for collaboration rather than predominantly looking to the United States for comparisons.

Furthermore, research must be the foundation of the teaching programs. Unless there is an active and forward-thinking research program reflecting timely issues for the sector, voluntary sector studies will increasingly become vocational. This is also the basis for discussions on course design and integration within the university and how choices between generalist and specialist course orientation are made. Within a context of the public, private, and voluntary sector studies all sharing the generic disciplines, there is nothing wrong with linking voluntary sector students with their private and public sector counterparts for research development, course design, and teaching. Given the cross-disciplinary nature of the sector and its management education counterpart, it can be argued that connecting the sectors should be encouraged. For example, the flyover from philanthropy in voluntary sector studies to CSR in business studies has proved to be a natural cross-discipline development, which could influence the choice to develop generic or specialist courses. It would depend on the adequacy of input from each perspective for meeting the students’ objectives, which, as it has been argued here, ultimately resides in the embeddedness of the program within the university institution as a whole.

Encouraging interlinking is supported in the context of nonprofit management education as a part of the “three-legged stool” approach to balanced representation of the three sectors within the university (Hall and others, 2001). Such liaison, however, must be of equals and
not a cheap contextualization. There is much to commend the diversity of learning experience, and this is perhaps where the future of a more opportunistic UK voluntary sector studies lies.

Notes

1. Initial thoughts on the subject of management education for the sector were presented at the NCVO and VSSN Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference at the University of Warwick, Coventry, UK, in September 2006.
2. The figures refer to U.S. universities offering a graduate concentration, that is, three or more courses in the nonprofit management field (Wish and Mirabella, 1998). The figures for the United Kingdom refer to all graduate programs.

Paul Palmer is a professor of voluntary sector management and the course director for the specialist charity master’s program at Cass Business School, London.

Mariana Bogdanova is a research assistant at Cass Business School, London, working on research on management in the voluntary sector with Paul Palmer and Jenny Harrow.

References


Appendix: Interview Questions
1. How would you describe the changes that have been occurring in what I am broadly calling management education for the voluntary sector during the last twenty years in the United Kingdom?
2. It has been argued that “VCO [voluntary and community organizations] culture in the United Kingdom resists investing in staff development and management education.” Is this an argument you would accept, and if so, why?
3. In 1999 in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, you were disappointed by the lack of competition for LSE and other centers. Have other centers been sufficiently “competitive” in your terms, or has competition been a damaging factor in encouraging program growth and VCO as an area of study?
4. Can you give us your reflections on the closure of the LSE program?
5. What particular insights would you now offer on how to build nonprofit management in UK universities? (field, centers)
6. Should there be specialist funding for nonprofit management and leadership studies in UK higher education to encourage growth? (Have government initiatives such as Capacity Builders been a diversion with little to show for the funds?)
7. There has been a growth in the United Kingdom in the last ten years of practitioner-based management organizations such as Acevo, CFDG, and IoF: What impact and role do you think they have had on nonprofit management education? What will their role and impact be in the future?
8. What do you think will be the fundamental questions that will shape the direction of future developments for nonprofit and management education in the United Kingdom?
9. Are there any other points you would like to make about current and future directions?