Introduction

The findings presented in this book are drawn from an empirical study of the ways in which different groups of actors discussed the role, position and contribution of voluntary action during the two transformational decades of the 1940s and 2010s. The study focused on three narrative voices – public, state and voluntary – through identifying, selecting and analysing documentary sources associated with each set of actors across both the 1940s and 2010s. The research focused on the social policy fields of children, youth and older people’s services, each of which reflect areas of need identified by Beveridge (1948) in his *Voluntary Action* report and which re-emerged with some urgency in the 2010s (Armstrong, 2017). The fourth field of activity is the voluntary movement as a whole (Figure 2.1). We accessed state narratives through reviewing documents such as white and green papers, speeches and parliamentary debates produced by different state actors; voluntary narratives through documents such as the annual reports, board papers, policy position statements and consultation responses of key voluntary organisations operating
TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS IN SOCIAL WELFARE

Image 2.1: Front cover of the *Mass Observation Bulletin* reporting the results of research into public views on charity, 1947

As Cold as Charity

RECENTLY M-O has been investigating attitudes to all the various forms of charity. Street samples were questioned on their habits and feelings; and the National Panel has been used to fill in the details and give depth to this background picture. Here we mainly discuss the trends apparent amongst the more complex Panel opinions.

**LANGUAGE**

When people write about charity and what it means to them, many use a specialised jargon. This 'jargon,' where it is religious or historical in origin, is linked with the Biblical interpretation of charity as love; where it is topical, 'White Paper' officialise it is more often used in discussion of the social aspects of charities as they are organised at the present day. Some recurrent words and phrases are:

- *penance*
- *chivalry*
- *covenants*
- *take courage and look-up*

- *supplementing state service*
- *essential services*
- *inform or desist from persons' sole support*
- *social obligation*
- *relief of temporary distress*

From the way in which people have used them it is clear that these terms are most often employed merely as clichés; to that extent, the use of them indicates the unreality to the writer of the idea he is trying to express.

The use of clichés may well be a symptom of lack of interest, and there is every indication that people are not willingly interested in this subject. Loss of interest has perhaps been inevitable ever since charity began to lose its personal character and became an organised affair. Today the important person is no longer the giver; what interest remains now centres on the *recipient,* who has paid with the stigma that 'taking charity' now seems to involve. This stigma may help to account for much of the artificiality of language and attitude, not to mention the distance and lack of interest, with which charity is now associated.

Street sample interviews illustrate this in a different way. Guilty indifference produces attitudes based on unusually conflicting ideas. Ideas have never been co-ordinated and reconciled one with one another, and attitudes never thought out. Not that this is unusual in itself:

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1. Mass-Observation, National Panel of voluntary observers is a predominantly middle-class group, above average in education and intelligence. Its opinions are unrepresentative statistically of the general population, but can be used in the qualitative way indicated above.

in each of the four fields; and public narratives through the written responses of the general public to MO directives.

This chapter is divided into three parts beginning with a discussion of the approach adopted by the study, followed by
Figure 2.1: The Discourses of Voluntary Action research at a glance

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<th>1940s</th>
<th>2010s</th>
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<td><strong>State narratives</strong></td>
<td><strong>Voluntary narratives</strong></td>
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Voluntary movement | Children | Young people | Older people

a description of the methods it employed, and ending with a discussion of the conceptual framework that guided the analysis.

Approach

The research adopted an interdisciplinary approach, which entailed integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, synthesising approaches to link the 1940s and the 2010s. For example, methodological approaches from human geography, sociology, social policy and history were integrated to analyse contemporary and historical sources, thereby contributing to an emergent tradition that recognises and promotes the relevance of history to contemporary policy making and practice. The research team brought skills and different substantive understandings to the diverse materials. Social science methods were applied to the collection and analysis of the historical and contemporary data and records; and theoretical approaches from sociology and political science were used to develop a conceptual framework.

The study also adopted a collaborative approach (Hodgkinson et al, 2001; Bannister and Hardill, 2014; Banks et al, 2019), working closely with various stakeholders. We developed
partnerships with key umbrella voluntary organisations in each of the four key fields of activity, each of which originated in or before the 1940s and were still operational in the 2010s. We collaborated with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), a key organisation for the voluntary movement as a whole, Children England for children’s services, the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) until its closure and afterwards UK Youth for youth services, and Age UK for older people’s services. In the 1940s, these organisations were actively involved in shaping the ‘social service state’ (Beveridge, 1948), and in the 2010s they sought to tackle the social issues that emerged with austerity, responding to and serving an increase in unmet need (see Figure 2.2 for a brief background on each; see also Chapter One). These organisations were not analysed as case studies; and our intention was not to produce organisational histories (most already have a published institutional history, even if some are somewhat out of date: see Brasnett, 1969; Roberts, 1970; Green, 1986; Davis Smith, 2019). Rather, these organisations were treated as research partners, and as windows into the ways in which voluntary sector actors were thinking and talking about the role and contribution of voluntary action in welfare provision across the two time periods. We collaborated with these organisations to access and interpret the documents through which these narratives were constructed and articulated. We also worked in partnership with the Mass Observation Archive (MOA), the organisation responsible for preserving and making accessible the materials gathered through the two different iterations of the MO social research project.

Working collaboratively facilitated the mobilisation of different types of knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001), enabled through various knowledge-sharing activities (Bannister and Hardill, 2014). It helped to ensure the quality, validity and impact of the research, and it was realised at all stages
The National Council for Voluntary Organisations was founded as the National Council for Social Service in 1919. The NCSS played a key role in establishing many high-profile organisations which later became independent charities. It changed its name in 1980 to emphasise the distinction between the voluntary activities of its members and the work of local government social services departments. In the 2020s the NCVO is the largest network for charities and volunteering in England, with over 14,000 members.

Age UK has its origins in the 1940s through the establishment of the NOPWC, initially formed as part of the NCSS. It gained independence in 1970 when it took on the new name Age Concern. Age UK was created in 2009 following the merger between Age Concern and the 1960s’ organisation Help the Aged. In the 2020s its network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland and some 130 local Age UKs throughout England, and Age International.

The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services was established in 1936 by 11 national voluntary youth organisations as the Standing Conference of National Juvenile Organisations. In the 2010s its network included over 175 national organisations and regional and local networks working with and for young people. It closed in 2016, shortly after the start of this research study, following a series of cuts to its funding.

UK Youth began life in 1911 as the National Organisation of Girls’ Clubs, and by the 1940s was known as the National Association of Girls’ and Mixed Clubs to reflect its increasing co-educational focus. In 2017 it merged with Ambition, which was founded as the NABC, in 1925. Both the NAGC and NABC were founder members of the NCVYS.

Children England was established as the Associated Council of Children’s Homes (afterwards the National Council of Associated Children’s Homes) in November 1941 by four of the largest charities then providing residential care for children in the UK: Dr Barnardo’s Homes, the Catholic Child Welfare Council, the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society and the National Children’s Home and Orphanage, with others soon joining. It became Children England in 2009 and in the 2020s operates as the leading ‘children’s specialist’ membership body for voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families.
The Mass Observation Archive was set up in 1970 as a charity with the aim of curating MO materials (Sheridan et al, 2000). The first iteration of MO had its origins in 1937, with the publication of letters in The New Statesman by its founders, inviting volunteers to be involved in a new mass observation science project (Moran, 2007). The letter proposed an ‘anthropology of home’ and ‘science of ourselves’. It led to the initiation of a variety of projects, including a national panel of self-selecting volunteer writers who contributed written responses to ‘directives’ – a list of often unrelated questions sent out to writers on a monthly basis. This writing project ran from 1937 to the mid-1950s. The archive of mid 20th-century writing was rediscovered and transported to the University of Sussex in the late 1960s. The second iteration of the Mass Observation Project was launched in 1981. Initially known as the ‘Inflation Project’, it recruited a national panel of self-selected volunteer writers who agreed to respond to questions or ‘directives’ sent to them by the MOA three times a year. Since 1983 these directives have been comprised of themed sets of questions on everyday life in Britain. The size and makeup of the panel have fluctuated over the last 40 years; in 2018 there were approximately 400 writers.
of the study: from design to completion. When preparing the research proposal, for example, the team had numerous conversations with staff at each of the potential partner organisations to build relationships, collectively develop the research questions, and discuss access to the documents. At the start of the study, this collaboration was underpinned by the signing of a memorandum of understanding with each organisation (Brewis, 2022). We met regularly with key staff to identify, locate, contextualise and interpret the materials (Mills, 2013) and to discuss emerging findings and their implications. A steering group was established which brought together the research team, partner organisations and other stakeholders to help guide the research. The steering group actively engaged in all stages of the study, including reviewing documents, assisting with developing frameworks for analysis, and planning dissemination activities. We ran a series of participatory workshops with our partner organisations and with wider stakeholders to discuss emerging findings, their validity and implications; and have shared drafts of all publications with partner organisations for review and comment. Finally, we have continued to work with partners beyond the end of the project to improve the long-term preservation and research access to organisational archives.

Data collection methods

As already noted, the research was based on the analysis of documents produced by our three sets of actors: the state, voluntary organisations and the public. The same data collection methods were employed across all three narrative voices, although the nature of the documents collected differed in source, format, language and intended audience. Here we focus on how we gained access to and prioritised relevant documents, and the work required to prepare the documents for analysis.
Identifying, accessing and prioritising relevant documents for our three sets of actors was a significant challenge, although the scale of the task and the precise issues faced varied. While we present them here as three separate sets of actors with associated documents, in reality boundaries were blurred. In particular, there was overlap between state and voluntary sector narratives, with, for example, documents reporting on speeches given by state actors located within the records of voluntary organisations, and consultation responses and evidence submissions from voluntary organisations found within the state records.

For public voices we worked closely with the MOA drawing on the MO writers’ views of the public on charity produced in the 1940s and 2010s, in response to questions posed in directives (see Figure 2.2). For the 1940s, the responses to three directives sent out in 1947, a year or so ahead of the implementation of major legislation that underpinned the welfare state, were most relevant. The directives which offered the closest fit to the research focus were sent out in April, May and June 1947, and focused on: charity and giving; voluntary work undertaken by the writers and writers’ views on voluntary social services; and on the need for new social services. However, water damage had affected responses to the May and June directives, resulting in many poorly preserved, partial scripts, only 41 of which could be used in the study. For this reason, the study concentrated on 142 responses to the April 1947 directive. For the 2010s, we worked with the MOA to commission a new directive, issued in April 2018, on charity and the welfare state. This repeated some of the questions posed in 1947, and produced 118 in-depth written responses. The material from the 1940s was accessed in a digital format, through Mass Observation Online. The MOA was able to share some material from the 2010s that had been submitted electronically, the remainder was accessed by physically visiting the MOA at The Keep in Sussex and making copies. Access to and prioritisation of
relevant documents relating to public narratives of voluntary action was, therefore, relatively straightforward. However, it is important to reflect upon the nature of the voices being heard through this method, the characteristics of participants, and what this means for the limitations of the study (see Figure 2.3 for more detail).

For state voices (a term we use as shorthand to encompass the voices of actors from the UK government in Westminster and the opposition), we identified and collated various official documents, policy papers, research reports, ministerial speeches, press releases, green and white papers and the resulting legislation, parliamentary debates and committee inquiries. Documents from the 1940s were collected through searches of dedicated websites such as legislation.gov.uk and Historic Hansard, and through access to specific records at The National Archives at Kew. Documents relating to the 2010s were accessed through two main sources: first, the gov.uk platform of government websites, where we focused on relevant offices and departments, such as the Office for Civil Society and the Department for Education; and second, parliamentary proceedings and committee inquiries, which we accessed through targeted searches of the UK Parliament website, which provides comprehensive access to proceedings in both the House of Commons and House of Lords (through Hansard) as well as to the work of parliamentary committees.

We searched websites using terms such as ‘charity’, ‘voluntary organisation’ and ‘social enterprise’ to identify hundreds of potentially relevant items. Given the accessibility of online information, a far greater volume of material was available from the 2010s compared with the 1940s. All accessed documents were then catalogued and skim read, with the most relevant for the project’s concerns about the role, position and contribution of voluntary action being selected for more detailed analysis.

To access voluntary sector voices, we gathered documents, including annual reports, board papers and minutes, communications to local branches or member organisations,
Mass Observation writing is reflective, subjective, contemporary and retrospective (Sheridan et al 2000; Harrison, 2014; Lindsey, 2020). Responses to directives are shaped by the form in which questions have been posed (Lindsey, 2020) and by the values and backgrounds of writers. Metadata available on writers through the MOA and the Mass Observation database can help provide insights into respondents’ ages; regions of domicile; political orientation; occupations; and class identities. There were no available data on ethnicity of writers in the 1940s or the 2010s.

Forty per cent of the panel writers in 1947 were women and 60 per cent men. Respondents were located across the UK, although the greatest proportion were from England, and the majority were between the ages of 36 and 45. Many writers were recruited from left-wing publications (Stanley, 1981). In terms of their reported political identities, just 15 per cent of writers responding to the April 1947 directive identified as supporters of the Conservative Party, 15 per cent identified as Liberals, and 61 per cent identified as being left of centre. A range of different professions were represented but a large proportion of writers came from lower middle class origins or had occupations that were typically lower middle class (Stanley, 1981; Hinton, 2013).

The 2010s panel, which was relatively fluid, with writers joining and leaving each calendar year, was over-represented by women (in 2018, 60 per cent of replies to our directive were from women and 40 per cent were from men, a reversal of the proportions in 1947), and by people in professional occupations (see Lindsey, 2020). Although there was a more even spread in the ages of writers compared to 1947, there were fewer writers under the age of 36 responding in 2018. Writers in the 2010s came from across the UK, but the greatest proportion were from England. The 2018 directive asked writers which political party best represented their views at the time of writing: 77 per cent responded, revealing a broad range of political allegiances, including Conservative (23 per cent), Labour (29 per cent), Lib Dem (13 per cent), Green (8 per cent), SNP (3 per cent) and UKIP (3 per cent).
policy position papers and responses, research reports, consultation responses, press releases and occasional correspondence from the archives of our voluntary sector partner organisations (see Figure 2.4). As far as possible, we sought to gather similar materials for the 1940s and 2010s. The archival records of these organisations, however, varied considerably both in their scope and their preservation. Prior to this project, the NCVO and UK Youth were the only

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<th>The NCVO’s archive is deposited at the London Metropolitan Archives, although at the time of writing it only contains documents up until 1996. We worked with colleagues at the NCVO to identify and select 2010s material directly from the organisation’s current records, which are stored in-house and are referred to as the NCVO private archive in this book.</th>
<th>The NCVYS collection was donated to UCL Special Collections in association with this project and is now publicly accessible. An additional deposit of digital documents was made after the initial cataloguing. The UK Youth archive is at the University of Birmingham, within the Cadbury Research Library Special Collections. More recent UK Youth documents, including the entire Ambition archive, are kept in-house and are referred to in this book as the UK Youth private archive.</th>
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<td>All Children England’s documents were stored in-house. We acquired surviving archival material, dating back to the 1940s, which was deposited at UCL Special Collections, and worked with the current staff team to select 2010s source material from physical and online storage systems. Documents from this collection are referred to in this book as coming from the Children England Archive.</td>
<td>All Age UK’s documents were stored in-house. We acquired surviving archival material dating back to the 1940s, which was taken on temporary deposit at UCL Special Collections for the duration of the research. Additional material was accessed at the British Library. We worked with colleagues at Age UK to identify and select records relating to the 2010s. Documents from this collection are referred to in this book as coming from the Age UK Archive.</td>
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organisations to have formally deposited their records in a public archive (see Brewis et al, forthcoming, for a discussion) and neither of these collections contained documents from the 2010s. In addition, the NCVYS archive was donated to UCL upon the closure of the organisation in 2016 just as this study was commencing, with an additional deposit of digital documents made during the study period. All other collections were privately held by the organisations, in various states of consolidation and preservation, and maintained as a mix of paper-based and digital materials. We worked closely with each of the voluntary organisations to identify and access potentially relevant documents. Access to these private collections depended on establishing trust with partners, drawing on the team’s strong track record of voluntary action research as well as experience of previous archival ‘interventions’ (DeLyser, 2014; Brewis et al, forthcoming). Not all the organisations had retained full sets of minutes for the 1940s, and in some cases the physical condition of poorly stored records made access difficult. A further challenge was that several of the bodies were set up originally as umbrella or coordinating committees, rather than independent organisations with their own record-keeping processes. In order to fill some of the gaps in archival records, additional documents such as printed reports and publications were accessed from the British Library. Records from William Beveridge’s 1947–8 Voluntary Social Service Inquiry, which are held as part of the Beveridge Papers at the London School of Economics, were also accessed. For the 2010s, the main issue was the need to work with partners to identify the most relevant sources from among thousands of possible documents, often stored across several online filing systems and accessible through different people. Securing access to potentially sensitive papers such as current board minutes was also problematic, and not possible in all cases. We have used the term ‘co- curation’ to describe the dynamic and interactive approach adopted with our voluntary organisation partners to
access, identify, collate, select, prepare and interpret archival materials ([Brewis et al, forthcoming]).

**Data preparation**

Once identified, the documents collected representing the three narrative voices were then collated, further prioritised and prepared for analysis. We began by skim reading and cataloguing each document, with only the most relevant being selected for more detailed analysis. In this way the team reduced potentially tens of thousands of documents to a more realistic set of several hundred for full analysis. Material that was not originally created or already available in digital format was digitised – that is, most of the 1940s sources and some 2010s material – and scanned with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software to create readable and searchable word and pdf documents. Some documents, such as handwritten MO responses, were transcribed.

The sources we selected and analysed – ‘our data’ – whether published or unpublished are referenced in endnotes in this book, to distinguish these from other literature we reference. We have sought to attribute all source material accurately, but it has not always been possible to assign page numbers, for example, where these were not included in the original document or where OCR software has been used to create new documents. We also illustrate each chapter with one image selected from the archives that we accessed.

**Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed. A common coding frame was developed to guide analysis for all three narrative voices across both time periods. The coding frame was informed by our key research questions, our conceptual framework, discussions with our project partners, and our initial skim reading and sampling of material, thus creating a mix of inductive and
deductive codes which were developed iteratively across the initial stages of analysis. The same basic coding frame was used for the analysis of the historic and contemporary data. However, additional codes were developed in response to the specifics of each period and each narrative voice. This approach necessitated frequent team meetings and discussions to share analytical findings and guide the next stages of analysis.

Analysis also included a consideration of the different ways in which the authors of the various documents sought to convey a particular set of messages to their intended audience. The focus was on identifying the various narratives that were produced and articulated, exploring how these were constructed, and to whom they were addressed. The integrated analyses of the two time periods, the 1940s and 2010s, identified similarities and differences in the narratives produced by these different sources of data across these two periods, and looked for change and continuity in these narratives over time, while also ensuring that the context and integrity of each dataset was maintained (Moran-Ellis et al, 2006).

**Theoretical lenses**

The research design and analysis were underpinned by a conceptual framework drawn from three theoretical approaches which helped inform our understanding of the importance of narratives in signposting and articulating change. First, we drew on social origins theory. This develops the idea of ‘civil society regimes’ where the non-profit (voluntary) sector is seen as embedded in specific national contexts, with its size and role linked to different welfare regimes – liberal, social democratic, corporatist and statist (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Salamon and Anheier, 1998). Cross-national differences in the non-profit sector are argued, broadly, to be the historic product of the balance of class forces. The UK is considered a liberal regime, with a comparatively large non-profit sector and low welfare spending (Salamon and Anheier, 1998: 228–9);
but retaining some social democratic regime features, based on ‘pro-state attitudes fostered by the government’s wartime successes and working class mobilisation’ (p 241). Social origins theory provided a useful starting point for the study, raising questions, for example, about the extent to which the changing balance of class forces can help account for shifting narratives between the 1940s and 2010s. However, it is somewhat reductionist, providing a rather static account of regimes drawn from contemporary data and broad-brush historical reflection (Kendall, 2003). The UK’s characterisation as a liberal non-profit regime with social democratic elements is, however, suggestive of the need for a more dynamic and historically sensitive account of voluntary action in relation to the welfare state.

Strategic action field theory offered a second approach which addresses these concerns (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011; 2012). Field theory sees society as a complex array of overlapping fields, with fuzzy and porous boundaries (for example a single organisation, a network, a sector, or an issue- or policy-based configuration of actors). Struggles over the boundary between the state and the voluntary sector – the moving frontier encapsulating the respective roles of voluntary organisations and others in the provision of social welfare services – form one area of contention within a field. Field change occurs through ‘unsettlement’, both from ordinary internal shifts like competition and innovation, but also from rarer exogenous shocks, such as war, economic crisis and pandemics, each acting ‘like a stone thrown in a still pond, sending ripples outward to all proximate fields’ (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011: 9). The 1940s and 2010s could both be considered as periods of ‘unsettlement’, ‘transformational moments’ in the welfare state, when roles and expectations have been in flux. Strategic action fields theory therefore lead to questions such as: to what extent, and how, do different narratives about the role of voluntary action in welfare service provision reflect field-shaping discursive interventions and a changing configuration of actors?
Thirdly, discursive institutionalism helped inform understandings of the importance of narratives in shaping the voluntary sector (Schmidt, 2008). While strategic action field theory tends to highlight issues of power, resources, interests and struggle, it has comparatively less to say about the role of ideas and narratives. At moments of crisis, unsettlement and field change, narratives become important field-shaping interventions, in the ways in which they organise ideas, evidence and argument to make sense of contemporary developments and frame imaginable futures. But Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 7) also refer to the ‘social skill’ involved in securing the cooperation of others through the persuasive construction of identities and coalitions. In political science, discursive institutionalism draws attention to the ways in which actors are mobilised through discursive frames and thus how change is narrated, with strategic purpose, as seen, for example, in the ‘crisis narratives’ of the 1978–9 ‘Winter of Discontent’ (Hay, 1996; 2010), and more recently with the competing narratives of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath (Gamble, 2009; 2014). Narratives of events and fields are also involved in a struggle for ‘room’; as dominant ‘common sense’ ways of articulating change and providing persuasive and settled visions for the future. In this perspective, therefore, the way in which narratives embody specific worldviews, and the work they seek to do to advance positions in a field, come to the fore.

**Summary**

This book adopts an interdisciplinary approach integrating theories, knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a synthesis of approaches to link the 1940s and the 2010s. The research team worked collaboratively with voluntary organisations that were active in both the 1940s and 2010s and the MOA to examine how different narratives were articulated during these transformational moments. Elsewhere, in Brewis et al (forthcoming), we have suggested that the
dynamic, interactive and collaborative approach adopted with our voluntary organisation partners should be considered ‘co-curation’. Comparison of discussions from the 1940s and 2010s can enable new understandings of historical and contemporary debates.

How, then, can we understand debates about the place of and room for voluntary action in social welfare during ‘transformational moments’? Having described both the overall historical context of the 1940s and the 2010s, and the methodological and theoretical basis for our research in this area, we begin the exploration of the findings in the next chapter with the presentation of two overarching narratives – evident in both time periods – on the role, position and contribution of voluntary action.