Will service users ever agree to a national organisation?

Catherine Jackson reports on the latest development in a long-running saga.

How did they do it?

VOX in Scotland emerged from a loose coalition of 23 groups that originally came together in 2002 to develop service users' ideas for responding to the psychiatric survivors' Mental Health Act (Reform) (Scotland) Bill. A conference in 2004, funded by the Scottish Office, produced a clear manifesto of demands from the services that they wanted a national organisation to represent them. A steering group then went about developing a membership plan, with which they persuaded the Scottish Executive to provide initial, matched funding for their campaign. It is matched by the national health boards, which will jointly fund the service users' organisation and logistical support for a development organisation. It will then begin individual membership development work with explicit political and well-established building aims. It will also have a head office in Scotland's Parliament, with funding and guarantees of national health board support. The national mental health delivery group, “in the bag, in the bag, and already,” is the Scottish Executive-funded Healthcare Development Scotland. A new model for a mental health delivery group.

There’s a healthy rhythm to the pace, it’s a pretty good one. We all set up quite effectively the national partnership in which a national delivery group would be the voice of the national service user sector.