

The Commission
on the Future
of Volunteering

Report of the Commission on the
Future of Volunteering and
**Manifesto for
change**

January 2008

The Commission on the Future of Volunteering

The Commission on the Future of Volunteering was established by the England Volunteering Development Council in order to develop a long-term vision for volunteering in England.

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1 OUR VISION

Our vision is of a society in which we will be united by our common concern for the well being of others; a society in which we enrich our own lives by enriching the lives of others through the giving of time. This may be through offering services to individuals, or it may be through working for a better society in other ways.

Our vision is that at every turn and every point in life it will be easy to contribute – and people will be encouraged to do so in a huge variety of non-remunerated ways – towards a better society, in which communities pull together and care for our collective quality of life. People will not only help others but will also enrich their own lives, fulfilling personal passions and goals, and enabling others to do likewise. And at any point in our lives we might be either givers or beneficiaries of this volunteer effort – or both.

Our vision, ultimately, is that volunteering becomes part of the DNA of our society – it becomes integral to the way we think of ourselves and live our lives, and we are inspired to contribute in this way. Our aim is for a culture change in society so that helping others and benefiting from a culture of mutual dependence become a way of life, from which the whole of society benefits. We would like to see a society where not volunteering would be seen as missing out on something that was life enhancing, enjoyable and useful. Being able to make a contribution by giving time, and deriving satisfaction and enjoyment from doing so, makes volunteering truly a win-win situation.

Our vision depends as much on the way we all feel about ourselves and others as about technical questions such as whether we have the right policies and funding mechanisms (important though these are). This approach has informed our whole report, which is why we emphasise values rather than technical questions.

We are well on the road to achieving our vision, and most people's lives are already touched by volunteering in some way, even if they do not always see it in those terms. There must be very few people - if any - who have never been helped by volunteers, even if they have not realised this. But our vision takes us further, to a situation where volunteering is more clearly at the heart of how we live and how society works. There would be an expectation that at least some of our services will be delivered by volunteers, not by default, but as a positive choice. We will all benefit from this as volunteering develops and the infrastructure for supporting it modernises and enables more people to be involved in different ways at various stages of life.



2 CONTEXT

We realise that in some ways volunteering has never had it so good. Volunteering is higher on the public policy agenda than ever before and governments of all political persuasions are courting it as a solution to some of the major economic and social problems of our time. The International Year of Volunteers in 2001 was celebrated in over 130 countries worldwide and volunteering has been identified by the United Nations as essential to the achievement of its Millennium Development Goals. IYVPlus10 in 2011, the proposed European Year of Volunteering and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, will provide other opportunities to showcase volunteering on the global stage.

In this country volunteering has also had a higher profile than ever before. From John Major's Make a Difference Initiative in 1994 to the designation of the Year of the Volunteer in 2005 and the establishment of Goldstar and v, successive governments have sought ways to promote volunteering and increase its take up. Strides have also been taken to rationalise the volunteering infrastructure in recent years with the creation of Volunteering England, the establishment of the do-it database of volunteering opportunities, and the beginning of a modernisation programme for local volunteering development agencies.

But, despite these positive trends, volunteering faces a number of challenges if it is truly to fulfil its potential. There is declining trust in institutions both public and private; there is growing sectarianism as communities turn inwards in the face of rapid change; we are increasingly risk-averse and consumer-oriented; and many feel that in the last few decades we have lost something important – a sense of neighbourliness, community and collective sympathy. Some people might describe us as a society where we are, increasingly, cash-rich, but time-poor (although we have not forgotten that many people are cash-poor too). We have also not worked out how to make the most of old age, in an era where more of us will live to experience it, and for a longer period than most previous generations.

Yet there are also positive signs. We are now – irreversibly – a society of many cultures, faiths, values and approaches, and our society is all the more vibrant and productive as a result. Volunteering within communities can build confidence and pride and can transmit a powerful message to those outside a particular community about the strengths and values that are common to all, but may be expressed in diverse ways.

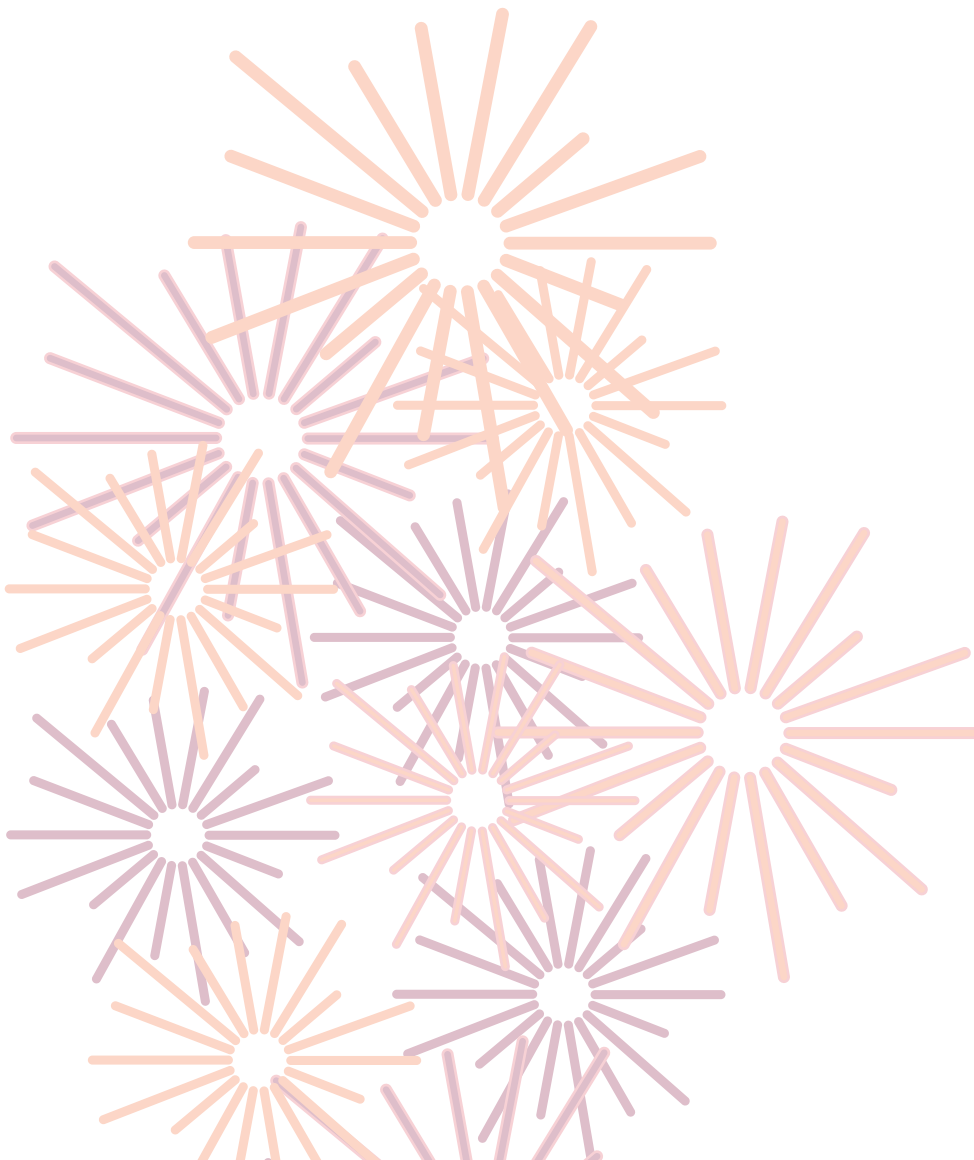
Also, it is widely recognised that volunteering across communities helps bring people together, and makes them feel part of a greater whole by sharing with others from different backgrounds, helping those who have had a less than good start in life, working to foster good relationships in fraught environments and caring for the places we love and live in. We believe the more this can be encouraged, not only within communities but also beyond them, the more we will all feel that there is a common endeavour to be undertaken, and a common cause we can all share across faiths and communities, between urban and rural environments, between people who share a passion for sport, music, or a myriad of other interests. Volunteering, in whatever context, can bring together people who have different politics, are of different ages, and come from different family or other backgrounds. Voluntary activities can build bridges between people of different ethnic and faith groups, strengthen social cohesion and make us proud to be British, in a way which is marked out by a culture of giving of time, energy and commitment.

'[Volunteering] can give people an insight into how others live and what they are coping with I think this can only be a good thing. Prejudice is born of ignorance, so it can help society a great deal to have one section of the population understand another. In real terms this can only happen through personal experience rather than being told.'

'Let's not turn volunteering into a crusade that sets ridiculous targets and creates the impression that if you don't volunteer you ain't an OK person.'

It is important to note that there are many routes to good citizenship and many ways to be a responsible and altruistic person other than volunteering. Many of those who gave their views to the Commission pointed out that people can make a contribution to society in a number of ways other than by being a volunteer. Equally, one organisation pointed out that while most of its volunteers were 'upright citizens', some would readily admit that they are not model citizens, so we do not make any moral judgments about volunteering equating with (or being the only path to) being a good person. Also, people emphasised to us that the notion of universal volunteering is unrealistic because, for some people, it may not be possible to do voluntary work. This may be due to family or work commitments and responsibilities or to personal circumstances such as very poor health. However, we are aware of many examples where people have been enabled to volunteer in spite of challenging personal circumstances – and far more could yet be done.

We are also realistic about the number of volunteering opportunities, and that we are some way off a situation where there are great opportunities to suit all potential volunteers. However, while volunteering is, in its nature, voluntary, and while it may not include every single person, the context in which people volunteer has many obstacles which could be removed or mitigated so that more people could make a genuine choice about whether to volunteer and how best to do so.



3 ABOUT THE COMMISSION

3.1 Who we are

The Commission on the Future of Volunteering was established by the England Volunteering Development Council in March 2006, with funding from the Volunteering Hub, to develop a long-term vision for volunteering in England as a legacy of the Year of the Volunteer 2005. It has met under the chairmanship of Julia Neuberger as a group of people who are – unashamedly – passionate and knowledgeable about volunteering. As we state in our vision, we see the potential of volunteering, and recognise its immense contribution, but we also see that its potential is not being fulfilled. We are ambitious but also realistic, as we recognise the many constraints that stand in the way of this vision being achieved. We do not think that volunteering is a panacea – though we do think it could make a significant contribution towards a more cohesive and effective society, and one where more people feel that they are making a direct contribution, increasing their own sense of satisfaction and a feeling of belonging, while also making things better for other individuals and for society as a whole.

3.2 How we define volunteering

Before we go any further, we need to take a moment to define what we are talking about. Although volunteering seems like a simple concept, there are numerous definitions around. The Commission has chosen to use the definition set out in the Volunteering Compact and Code of Good Practice¹:

'[Volunteering is] an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.'

This definition is a broad one, and would include not only formal volunteering, through clubs or organisations, but also informal volunteering, often carried out on a more individual basis. It is also worth noting that people volunteer in many different contexts: health, social care, protecting and improving the environment, sport, social action and many other areas.

In a *Voluntary Action* journal article published in 2001, Justin Davis Smith wrote about defining volunteering and suggested a way of categorising activities according to their outcome, and we endorse a concept of volunteering that includes all the aspects he notes:

*'It is possible to identify at least four different types of volunteer activity, categorised according to their final outcome or final purpose: mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation; and advocacy or campaigning.'*²

Some of the people who gave us their views urged us not to restrict our idea and definition of volunteering, pointing out the substantial amount of voluntary help given to public bodies, for example, as school governors and special constables, and we have taken heed of their views. There is almost no area where volunteering does not reach – or could not reach, and, of course, many organisations have volunteer trustees and members of management committees.

Equally, the Commission wishes to be clear about the potential for modern volunteering to evolve beyond the traditional models that many people associate with the concept. To many people, 'volunteering' evokes an image of people helping out in traditional locations or offering advice and assistance to vulnerable people. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this form of volunteering. There is, however, another - and growing - arm of volunteering which operates differently. This applies across all the four types of volunteering which are outlined above, but the key differentiation is that the activity is defined, devised, implemented and evaluated by volunteers themselves. Youth action agencies, for example, have, for years, put young people in the driving seat of their community action. This innovative approach can be equally relevant to other age groups too, although there is, of course, also a need to balance the legitimate aspirations of volunteers to influence decisions with the need, also, to heed the views of service users and others.

The Commission does not see volunteering as having to fit within a single model. We believe that there will always be a demand for the kind of service opportunities offered by some of the larger volunteer-involving organisations. In addition, we also see volunteering as including the kind of activities where volunteers themselves decide how they can best give their time, rather than those decisions being made by the organisations they volunteer with. This type of volunteering may inspire involvement among people who have not previously found volunteering opportunities that reflect their own passions and interests. It also has the potential to build social capital in ways that are suited to the enormous variety of circumstances in which communities find themselves.

It is also worth saying what volunteering is not. For example, from time to time there is discussion about the merits, or otherwise, of introducing a compulsory 'national service' scheme for young people to put in a period of time in community service. We do not take a position on whether this would be a good or bad idea, and we note that some of the activities that might fall within such a scheme might well have a lot in common with what volunteers do, but the very fact of compulsion makes it essentially different to volunteering, which is, by definition, a voluntary act.

We also note that it is sometimes difficult to be clear about where volunteering ends, and where low-paid work (perhaps undertaken to gain experience and for other reasons) begins. This is all the more complex since some organisations now offer a relatively substantial amount of money for 'volunteering'. While we have no problems whatsoever with giving volunteers reasonable living allowances for subsistence, we do not see that the concept of volunteering is compatible with financial reward.

Less clear cut is the boundary between the different ways in which people engage with local community and political activities. Some aspects of civic engagement and some public appointments are unpaid, and fall within the definition of volunteering. Other roles attract financial reward, which may be nominal or substantial. On the whole, for the purpose of this report, we are not including as volunteers those who hold elected public office, such as local councillors, or those who are formally appointed to positions where there is some degree of financial reward such as non-executive directors of NHS bodies, although we fully recognise that volunteering can lead some people towards public office or public appointments and many who hold such office also make a contribution to volunteering, beyond the demands and expectations of their official position.

In conclusion, while a consistent definition of volunteering is essential, so that we all share an understanding of what we are thinking about, it is also helpful to recognise that volunteering is a multi-faceted concept, and exists within a spectrum of involvement. The line between volunteering and other forms of involvement and engagement may be fuzzy at the margins, but they are clear enough to enable us to make some useful observations, without getting too caught up with semantics.

3.3 What we have done

When we first came together, we recognised that between us we brought a great deal of professional knowledge and experience of volunteering to the table. But we were also convinced that we needed to hear from others, particularly those at the sharp end. So we sought and received a huge amount of written evidence, and travelled the country to hear hundreds of oral testimonies from those within the volunteering world. To understand another side of the story, we commissioned Opinion Leader Research³ to gather the views of those who are not currently volunteers and those who do not see themselves as volunteers at all.

Further information about the evidence submitted to the Commission is available on the website of Volunteering England (www.volunteering.org.uk) and fuller details of what we heard is set out in the report of the results of the public consultation published by the Commission⁴.

3.4 Our manifesto

This report includes our manifesto for the future of volunteering in England. It draws extensively on what we were told by individuals and by organisations and it is informed by a literature review and other work that was commissioned by us.

The conclusions and recommendations are ours and ours alone. We hope these will be of interest to a very wide range of people. In particular, we have a number of audiences in mind for our specific recommendations, as follows:

First, to people, both volunteers and non-volunteers – to whom we simply say: we need you, and volunteering can be fun!

Second, to the voluntary sector, volunteer-involving organisations and in particular what we call the ‘volunteer infrastructure’ – to whom we present some of our most challenging recommendations.

Third, to employers – who by their actions and values can make a huge difference – or not – to the delivery of our vision.

And finally to the government – which is responsible for overall policy towards volunteering, for whom we have some strong messages about strategic direction and coherence – but also about non-interference.

So our conclusions (see section 6) draw attention to the need to achieve the culture change we have identified, and the recommendations (see section 7) set out some specific things we believe need to happen. If they are done, we truly believe we will have embarked on one of the most important journeys our society can take towards greater cohesion and wellbeing.

4 WHO VOLUNTEERS, AND WHAT THEY DO

Before we set out our report and manifesto in detail, it is useful to take stock of who does what.

As we wrote our report, the headline figures from the Citizenship Survey from April to June 2007 were emerging⁵. These showed that in that period:

- > 73 per cent of all adults had volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in the past year
- > 48 per cent had been involved at least once a month

Overall, levels of volunteering have not changed since 2001. However, levels of formal volunteering have risen over this period, while informal volunteering has declined.

Volunteering contributes to society in several respects, which include making a contribution to the economy. It is possible to estimate the economic value of volunteering. Volunteering England estimates that in 2005 volunteers contributed the notional equivalent of £48.1 billion to the economy. This is the equivalent of around 2.1 million full-time workers.

People who volunteer are involved in many different ways. Drawing on the more detailed findings that are available from the 2005 Citizenship Survey, Colin Rochester, in his literature review for the Commission,⁶ reported that by far the most common types of formal voluntary activities undertaken were reported to be:

- > raising or handling money/taking part in sponsored events; and
- > organising and helping to run an activity or event (49 per cent).

Other frequently mentioned activities included:

- > leading a group or being a member of a committee (29 per cent)
- > providing transport or driving (23 per cent)
- > giving advice or information or counselling (23 per cent)
- > visiting people (20 per cent)

Other activities carried out by volunteers included secretarial, administrative or clerical work, befriending or mentoring, care-related activities, representing, campaigning and other forms of practical help.

Simply stating what volunteers do does not actually describe the nature of their contribution. We cannot over-emphasise that the fact that volunteers are involved simply because they want to be brings a freshness and a level of commitment that is invaluable. Much of the evidence to the Commission, both from volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, gave details of how volunteers do more than just provide extra help and fill gaps in services (although that is also important). Their contribution is often distinctive and critical to how organisations are run and services are delivered. For example, we were told that:

- > volunteers make services more personal and genuinely caring
- > volunteers encourage innovation and fresh perspective
- > volunteers promote equalities, including equal access to services
- > volunteers enable a service to be user-led

- > volunteers can be a means of precipitating change, through campaigning, lobbying and involvement in governance
- > volunteers can enable a sense of ownership
- > volunteers can focus on one task, whereas paid staff may have other duties
- > volunteers can offer long-term support to an organisation
- > volunteers are flexible and motivated, being aware of what needs to be done rather than what could be done
- > volunteers build up people's skills base and can be a source of new staff for organisations
- > volunteers are a source of local and other knowledge
- > volunteers promote community cohesion and help to build strong communities

'By involving volunteers we develop a broader, more diverse group of stakeholders and champions for the organisation. It's helped us involve people from our user base, or who are similar to our user base, to support our work, bring fresh ideas, and inform the strategic direction and effect change.'

'Many services are better delivered by peers of the service user rather than professionals. Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are often closer to the need in both awareness and understanding.'

'The contribution volunteering brings, the independence of thought and ability to consider a contribution, unencumbered by costs, brings a level of innovation which can be unequalled.'

'In the case of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organisations, many are very small and entirely volunteer-run. Without these volunteers, LGBT people throughout the country would lack crucial support and services.'



5 THE VOLUNTEER JOURNEY

During our deliberations we came up with the concept of the ‘volunteer journey’ to encapsulate and describe our thinking. It helped us to capture the challenges and opportunities faced by volunteers, and it has shaped our conclusions and recommendations.

The volunteer journey is a journey in two dimensions. The first – which we all share – is through life, during which volunteering (or being a beneficiary of volunteering) will come and go and take different forms, which we describe below. During each of our life journeys it is, of course, possible to escape either volunteering ourselves or being a recipient of volunteering, but in practice we think remarkably few people’s lives are totally untouched by it.

The second is about how people get into volunteering and how their involvement in it may develop. This is about depth and is relevant to those who consciously volunteer. It is our personal journey from the moment we first think about volunteering to the point at which some of us become committed activists. Studying this journey helps us understand better why people do not volunteer as well as why they do, and the obstacles and constraints they face.

We find these concepts useful as a means to explore some of the issues around volunteering, but we recognise that people’s lives do not fit neatly into categories. In reality, people may experience different stages of the journey all at once, and some not at all. But that does not detract from our belief that both journeys illuminate the issues we explored and heard about.

5.1 The journey through life

Youth participation in volunteering

Our proposition

We believe a culture of youth action should be embedded right the way through our education system – as it already is, for example, within the International Baccalaureate – and beyond, so that those on the fringes of society feel valued enough to participate too. Volunteering provides a way for children and young people to connect to and value their local communities, and make a positive contribution to them. It also provides opportunities to learn about life: volunteering can help young people work together to achieve shared goals, take risks, and even fail trying. It is not just the outputs of volunteering activity that have the most obvious benefits to young people. Simply being involved, achieving personal development or feeling a sense of self-worth are what young people take from their involvement. Britain’s youth have recently been described as the unhappiest in the industrialised world – so we champion youth action as a proven means both to build self-esteem and promote greater understanding and respect between ages, ethnic groups and cultures. We need to give young people real choice about their volunteering, reward them meaningfully for their participation and hand over control and leadership to young volunteers.

Key issues

Most of us begin our volunteer journey early in life, and the 16 to 19 age group has the highest participation rates in all kinds of volunteering. 63 per cent of this age group are involved in some kind of volunteering and 32 per cent are engaged in formal volunteering. This means that young people aged between 16 and 19 are more likely to volunteer than any other age group. So in addition to the benefits to themselves – and others – of making

an early start, youth volunteering also offers an opportunity to establish a lifetime commitment and a positive attitude towards volunteering, the benefits of which could permeate through society throughout the young person's whole life.

Although, as we have seen, many young people do volunteer, a sizeable minority does not. It is interesting to reflect on why they do not do so. It is unclear how far this is due to the image of volunteering generally, which still rests on a stereotype that is not free of ageism, and in any case does not begin to capture the range of volunteering.

We heard mixed messages about the image that volunteering has amongst young people. On the one hand, we were told by Opinion Leader that people who are young and single often see volunteering as unappealing and possibly boring. However, the literature suggests that many young people have a positive attitude to volunteering and that those who think it is not cool or boring are in a minority. Interestingly, it is reported that those who were involved in volunteering had a wider appreciation of its scope and potential, while those who did not volunteer tended to have a narrow and stereotypical view of what was involved. The question, therefore, is how get young people started on the road to volunteering, as once they do so, they are quite likely to enjoy it.

Young people, like other age groups, may well be moved to volunteer primarily for altruistic reasons. However, we heard many things that made us realise that other kinds of motivation are particularly important for this age group too. Some young people may well be tempted into volunteering because it will help their own career prospects and personal development, but that does not make it any less worthwhile.

Nor should it be forgotten that volunteering can be, and usually is, enjoyable and can even be fun. That is a message well worth promoting to young people in particular.

We also know that young people place a high value on group and team activities, and on volunteering being part of their leisure and social lives.

Young people also say that they volunteer to have fun. This is an important point that should not be forgotten, as it links to one of the Every Child Matters outcomes and reinforces the fact that there are many personal and societal reasons why young people choose to volunteer.

It can also be quite a delicate balancing act to ensure that young people have the opportunities they want to influence decision-making, while also being allowed to progress at their own pace, and with support and back up from older people and more experienced volunteers.

The story of young people volunteering also underlines that there is no one size fits all solution. It only takes a moment of observing or talking to young people to realise how many young people conduct their entire lives through text messaging, mobile phones, emails and social networking websites such as Facebook. Older people may also use these media of communication, but probably not as extensively or as comfortably. So we have to tailor methods of communication to what young people like to use. Any self-respecting young person can detect false attempts by older generations to appear cool, so that is not what it is about. What is required is simply to capitalise on communications that young people are comfortable with, and to remove unnecessary barriers about how the world of volunteering may otherwise be perceived by some of the potentially most active and enthusiastic volunteers.

A focus on employers, from two directions

Our proposition

Our proposition about volunteering associated with employment is two-fold. We believe there are two dimensions of volunteering associated with employment and both bring real, though different benefits. The first is employer-supported volunteering, where employees of a particular organisation are encouraged to volunteer; it is often organised by and through the employer. The second is where employers involve volunteers in their work, which many charities do as a matter of course. There is more scope for developing this in the public sector and, where it is delivering services on behalf of the state, the private sector (for example, care homes and prison services).

'I always imagine the little old dears that are in the charity shops.'

'Well, I'm doing A Levels at the moment and I've to go to Uni, so like I have heard from a lot of the teachers that are doing a lot of voluntary work, it looks good on your CV.'

'Employers should be encouraged to recognise the value of volunteering for their staff and use this as a tool for staff development.'

'Blue chip companies that want to be the employer of choice for the brightest young graduates see that opportunities to volunteer are part of the package that these potential employees will use to choose between potential employers.'

'The government can...encourage and support employers to make practical changes to their policies and approach to flexible working to enable more employees to access voluntary.'

The critical tests are that volunteers add genuine value and do not substitute for core service provision.

In particular, the public sector needs to open up to become more welcoming to volunteers and to develop appropriate ways to utilise their distinctive contributions. We believe the benefits of expanding this approach could be huge, for individuals, employers and society at large.

Key issues

People of working age who are in employment are often enthusiastic volunteers. Overall, people who are in employment are more likely to volunteer than those who are not. This may seem surprising, since people in employment may be assumed to have less time to spare. But the facts are that when we look at the variations in the level of formal volunteering by employment status, distinguishing between employees, self-employed and employed people, we see that people who are employed have the highest rates of volunteering, and those not working the lowest⁷.

Some people in employment are involved with support from their employers, and some firms take employer-supported volunteering very seriously as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes. But most employees do not have a great deal of positive support for volunteering from their employers. A Volunteer Centre that convened a consultation exercise on the Commission's questions found a consensus that there was insufficient support for a culture of volunteering from many employers. As a result, employees often did not feel that they could ask their managers about taking time off to volunteer.

With regard to the first part of our proposition – employer-supported volunteering – a 2005 national survey of volunteering and charitable giving⁸ showed that three in ten employees worked for an employer that had both a volunteering and a giving scheme, while one fifth worked for an employer with either a giving or a volunteering scheme. The survey showed that over half of employees would like to see a volunteering or giving scheme established by their employer where they do not currently exist, but that does not tell us what proportion of people in work would actually take advantage of increased employment-related opportunities to volunteer, nor does it enable us to differentiate between employees' attitudes to giving time and giving money.

At present, the literature tells us that employer-supported volunteering reflects both the size of the employer and the sector. Larger companies were more likely to support volunteering, and public sector employees were more likely to say that their employer had a volunteering scheme than those from the private sector. People also told us that more could be done to enable employers, particularly those in small and medium enterprises, to understand, recognise and value volunteering for the skills it develops.

The nature and extent of employer support for volunteering varies too. The most common way (in 33 per cent of cases, according to the 2005 national survey) is for employees to be supported to volunteer in their own time – arguably not a very generous contribution on the part of the employer. However, other employers had schemes that in various ways supported volunteering in work time. This might include a certain amount of paid time off for volunteering up to an agreed maximum, or matching time-off schemes to supplement employees' own time given to volunteering, or flexi-time to enable volunteering.

It was interesting to note that a number of people who responded to the Commission's initial consultation urged us to consider employer-supported volunteering. Also, those who gave their views to the Commission included some passionate supporters of extending employer-supported volunteering. Some pointed out that the government could and should do more to move this along. Indeed, as one of the largest employers in Europe, government is particularly well placed to support and champion volunteering by those who work for government departments and agencies at all levels.

With regard to the second part of our proposition – that employers should involve volunteers in their work, we have learned a great deal from what people told the Commission. We are fully aware that this is an issue that elicits strong feelings, both in favour and against.

On the positive side, many people told us about how volunteers answer the need for service provision, making organisations more effective, increasing the range and depth of service provision, bringing about better outcomes and providing services that simply would not otherwise exist. They also bring a human face to services that might otherwise feel less personal.

Employers would do well to realise that many services are actually run better when they involve volunteers, and they are perceived to be better precisely because volunteers play an important part.

The other side of the argument revolves around different perspectives on involving volunteers alongside paid workers. A number of those who provided written submissions to the Commission's consultation, both paid staff and volunteers, were particularly concerned that more extensive involvement of volunteers in the delivery of public services might lead to volunteers being used as cheap labour, carrying out work that they considered to be properly the province of paid staff.

People who gave their views to the Commission appeared to be concerned both about the principle of job substitution – many were unhappy with the concept of volunteers doing what they considered to be paid jobs – and also about the implications for volunteers and volunteering. Real anxiety was expressed about the idea of volunteers being exploited by paid staff, and about the risks to low-paid staff of losing their jobs because of the contribution of volunteers.

'Our organisation is a day hospice with 31 paid staff and 270 volunteers working in patient services. As a charity, we would not be able to offer the range of professional services, such as counselling, complementary therapy, life coaching, benefits advice, etc, without the donated time and skills that our volunteers give us. Last year a volunteer value audit showed that our volunteer staff had saved us over £600,000. This is the amount we would have had to pay commercially for these services.'

'Volunteers can also alter how our services are perceived by service users and the public. They can be excellent ambassadors, supporters, advocates and champions. Volunteers add value to much that we do. In terms of service users' perceptions, it often makes a difference that volunteers are purely there because they want to be: volunteers have credibility simply because they don't receive a pay cheque.'

'Public services are required by the people who need them. Most volunteers are truly dedicated people but should not be used by the government to cut costs and provide public services.'

'It is shameful that so much valuable public service depends on volunteers. Volunteers should be supplementing services, not doing tasks that are within the remit of paid employees. They are not free labour. They are additional labour.'

'The organisation for [which] I volunteer is a local county council-owned museum that would seriously struggle to run the programme it currently offers its visitors without the contribution of volunteers. It would be almost impossible. It has neither the physical resources nor funding to do so. Much of the behind-the-scenes work is also carried out by volunteers.'



Both of these apparently conflicting perspectives on volunteers in the workplace are real. It is not possible to reconcile them, as they refer to different sides of the coin, but it is possible to reach a balanced judgment on the relative risks and benefits, recognising that in most cases where this already happens, it has proved to be workable and beneficial, without falling too deeply into the traps that undoubtedly exist in terms of exploiting volunteers or undercutting paid staff. The way forward is to look more closely at how volunteers can add to what the paid workforce can do, not by replacing paid workers, but by complementing their role for everyone's benefit. In addition, good volunteer management goes a long way towards ensuring that volunteers are used appropriately.

Family and intergenerational volunteering

Our proposition

Our proposition is that for many reasons we need to see more opportunities for intergenerational volunteering and for families to be involved together in volunteering. In some instances, we see this as a matter of convenience, and possibly the only way in which some people with family responsibilities will be able to commit their time to voluntary service. But we also see huge benefits in different generations volunteering together, and family volunteering can be one aspect of that. Above all, we see opportunities for volunteering that include people working together across the generations as a positive means of generations inspiring and enthusing each other, and breaking down negative stereotypes that are borne of restricted opportunities for generations to understand and get to know each other.

Key issues

The pattern of family life is changing in Britain in many ways. One aspect of this is the steady increase in the number of lone parent families. As fewer households are made up of parents, many changes occur in how people organise their time. Children may spend some time with one parent and some with another. Both time spent with children and time spent without them may seem particularly precious to the adults in the family, and these factors may shape people's attitude to volunteering.

Other factors, such as the trend towards more women working and going back to work soon after having their families may also lead to a wish to be with one's children during spare time, and for some families volunteering together may be one way to achieve this.

For at least some families – both single parents and others – volunteering as a family may be an attractive proposition that enables people to make the most of the time they have together. Doing something with one's children, or one's parents (and this applies to grown-up children and parents too) can simply be good fun, and many families already know this. We see many indications that volunteering is seen as a leisure activity, and to the extent that this is so, people may wish to enjoy their leisure with family and friends. Volunteering is entirely compatible with that aspiration.

At particular stages of our life, volunteering with family members may be particularly attractive. Volunteering with the family is an area about which we heard limited evidence, but some of what we heard, particularly from Opinion Leader's research, was very important. In particular, we heard that grandparents want to spend time with their grandchildren, and this presents opportunities for volunteering together.

We also heard that it was relatively common for people to volunteer in connection with sporting activities, and this is particularly an area where people often become involved in a family context because they have a child who is playing for a school or club team. Further and higher education activities also provide opportunities to include students and others in volunteering. We were also made aware of evidence from Australia that suggests that one of the paths into volunteering, particularly for people aged 30 to 40, is through voluntary work associated with the services their children might need⁹.

We are aware that in some minority ethnic cultures, family ties are still particularly strong (although we are well aware of myths that this applies to all minority ethnic families and communities). So, without making unwarranted assumptions, we simply say that it is important to note that where people wish to do things as a family rather than as individuals, for cultural reasons or any other reasons, this should be facilitated.

It may well be that for some people, volunteering that is done as a family is seen as a better fit with other values and life choices. Equally, we recognise that for others, the opposite applies, and for some, getting away from the family is in itself part of what volunteering can offer to the individual.

In addition, we make links between the idea of different generations volunteering together and what we are about to say about older people.

Volunteering in older age

Our proposition

Many volunteers today are those who have retired or who are no longer working full time. They make an enormous contribution, but that is not always appreciated in full. In the evidence we received, the image of the elderly lady in the charity shop was uppermost in many people's perception of a volunteer. Not only is this tinged with ageism and possibly sexism, but it is inaccurate as older people – both women and men – are involved in other many aspects of volunteering too. Many older people are already involved in some kind of structured volunteering, and there are numerous ways in which this could be extended. For example, programmes to help people move from full-time work into volunteering during retirement could deliver great benefits. Harnessing the skills, experience and enthusiasm of older people has huge potential benefits and can fill an important role not only for society but in ensuring that older people's lives retain – and even regain – activity and meaning as they move into a new phase of their lives.

'Volunteering keeps them active, their mind focussed and their lives fulfilled.'

Key issues

There is a real danger of thinking about old age as if it was a simple and unified phenomenon. Older volunteers may be recently retired (including some who have retired before the official pensionable age) and others are much older. The level of volunteering is different in different age groups of older people, and it is likely that many of their needs are different too. All too often, we think of older people as though they were all the same. We would not dream of thinking of an age cohort comprising people aged 10 to 40 as being essentially similar, but that is sometimes the assumption made about people aged 60 to 90 plus, whose age range is just as wide.

Indeed, when we look at rates of volunteering in older people, we see that there are real differences. The younger-old, including newly retired people, are often active volunteers and have higher rates of participation in volunteering than people aged 75 and over. We know from the literature that the 75 and over age group has the lowest rate of volunteering of all kinds (38 per cent are involved in volunteering of all kinds, and only 21 per cent in formal volunteering). Even so, there is evidence of the enormous contribution made by older volunteers. We were told that organisations valued the work of older volunteers for their willingness to contribute more hours over longer periods than younger people, and for their willingness to take on a wide range of tasks. They were also valued for their accumulated skills and experiences.

The literature usefully points out that there are different types of post-retirement volunteer. Some older people look to volunteering to replace the way their lives were given purpose and structure by paid work while others are seeking a complete break from it. Also, some older people have always been involved in volunteering, while others now have the time to return to it, and yet others become involved for the first time once they are retired. There are clearly opportunities to broaden the ways in which older people see volunteering, and to enable them to ease their way into it as part of their preparation for retirement. Some employers take this on board now, but many do not.

Research carried out by Opinion Leader for the Commission showed that some older people perceive volunteering as energetic and too physically demanding. We also learned from the research that older people's perception of volunteering is that volunteers are people with lots of energy who often take on physically demanding roles such as coaching a children's football team or helping very old people around the house or garden. Lack of information about volunteering and the breadth of activities available that people can get involved in regardless of physical ability makes this barrier harder to overcome.

The research also stated that for disabled people and older people, volunteering may be triggered by the benefits volunteering can bring to their health and wellbeing. This must surely be seen as an opportunity.

If we can create an environment in which older people can develop and change the nature of volunteering as their needs, vigour and priorities change, we would be able to promote healthy and active ageing at the same time as maximising and encouraging the immense contribution that age and experience can bring. It is also very important to ensure that – like all other age groups – older people can choose to move between different types of volunteering. The reliability of older people is sometimes taken for granted and exploited and they are assumed to be content to continue to do what they have done for a long time, when, in fact, many older people would welcome the challenge of new activities to refresh their enthusiasm.

We also note that many of the factors that affect volunteers of all ages may impact disproportionately on older people. For example, if they do not feel that they are properly valued and thanked for their contribution, that may resonate with and amplify the ageism that older people often experience and may be severely demoralising and damaging to their self-esteem. Some older people on fixed incomes may be deterred by the hidden cost of volunteering, such as expenses for lunch away from home, or the cost of caring for a relative while volunteering. Older people also experience many of the barriers that are also mentioned by people with disabilities (of all ages) in relation to physical access and transport.

5.2 The journey into volunteering

Looking closely at the journey into volunteering helps us understand why people volunteer and why they do not. We spent a great deal of time talking to existing volunteers and voluntary organisations, but we were also determined to understand the views and attitudes of those who do not volunteer – or who do not see themselves as volunteers. This exposed us to some uncomfortable realities. What we heard also helped us to appreciate the opportunities and constraints that shape people's ability, even when committed to volunteering, to make a contribution. This is important as we heard overwhelming evidence that despite the fact that a huge amount of volunteering takes place, there are real constraints and frustrations. Sadly, volunteering is not always the joyous experience we would like it to be.

Although for the sake of our analysis we conceptualise a journey into volunteering, we do not mean to imply that this is a linear route or a one-way street. People may dip in and out of volunteering, doing more, less or nothing at all as volunteers at various stages of their lives, as a matter of choice or through other circumstances. There are various typologies described in the literature that most commonly recognise a distinction between long-term and short-term volunteering. There has also been a suggestion that short-term volunteering may be best understood as episodic volunteering. That may be done on a temporary or one-off basis, or regularly but for limited periods of time, or at regular intervals for short periods of time.

We also recognise – and celebrate – that volunteering consists of a spectrum of involvement and that some people may volunteer casually while others may become committed, and even professional, volunteers. We emphasise that this is a spectrum and not a ladder and we do not suggest that there has to be an inevitable progression towards ever-greater involvement or even that there is intrinsic virtue in becoming more and more involved. We simply wish to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to become as involved in volunteering as and when they wish, in ways that suit and fulfil them and bring benefit to others too. All of our combined experience and the evidence we have heard reinforces our conviction that the journey into volunteering can be made a great deal more comfortable and more likely to arrive at the most suitable destination if the right support is in place.

'Volunteering should be something that people can dip in and out of to suit their desire to volunteer, availability, skills and interests. It is important that people know how to access volunteering opportunities and feel like they can walk away if their circumstances change and they want a break – eg during exams, after having a baby, due to changing work patterns, etc.'

Our proposition

Quite simply, we advocate a thorough re-think about how people are encouraged and supported to become volunteers and to remain involved in volunteering, and how they are, regrettably, sometimes deterred or discouraged from volunteering. We also believe that as a society we are not making the fullest possible use of the goodwill and enthusiasm that exists in the community of volunteers and potential volunteers who may, at various times of their lives, wish to assume different roles and responsibilities. We are also deeply concerned that some groups of people in our society perceive and actually face barriers that deter, discourage or even exclude them from volunteering.

We look at these concerns from several angles. First, we look at some of the issues for people as they take their first steps into volunteering, and then as they may think about getting more involved. In doing so, we look at what we heard about obstacles, perceptions and opportunities to overcome some of the obstacles. Many of these issues apply to all of us, but we do not think that the story would be complete if we did not also highlight some of the issues that apply to specific sections of the community, who may encounter additional obstacles and opportunities in their journeys into volunteering.

Taking the first steps as a volunteer – key issues

Information and awareness

We cannot make an informed choice to become volunteers if we do not know what volunteers do or what opportunities may exist. We were told by people who do not volunteer that volunteering does not have a high profile and that information about how to get involved is not readily available. We were also informed that people need more information on the value of the activities they may take part in and how they will make a difference.

A lack of material in accessible formats such as Braille and tape and in community languages may also compound the more general lack of information. Information also needs to be appropriate to reach the whole age spectrum, women and men, people of all cultures, those with and without disabilities, those who have volunteered before and those who have not.

Respondents to our consultation made it clear that more information needs to be available, and disseminated in a wide range of media and materials, simply to let people know about opportunities to volunteer and to enable them to make informed choices about whether volunteering is for them, and if so, how and where they could get involved. People suggested that traditional methods such as leaflets and posters need to be supplemented by information within the local community, such as in supermarkets, by word of mouth and by high profile respected public figures who are well known as volunteers. None of those suggestions should be taken to contradict the need to promote volunteering through new media too.

Whatever the methods used to reach people on a local basis, we recognise that local efforts by volunteer-involving organisations and infrastructure organisations must be supported by, and operate within, much more significant and long-term work promoting volunteering as a concept.

Image

Research carried out for the Commission by Opinion Leader confirms that, sadly, there are still negative perceptions and associations with volunteering, particularly amongst those who do not volunteer. As we have seen, outmoded stereotypes may persist, for example, volunteers being seen as do-gooders, or as people who volunteer only in traditional volunteering environments. Yet we have also been made amply aware that people respond well when appeals are made for skills that they personally have, and also when volunteering is presented as fun and as something that fits in around family life and other commitments.

We have also considered the fact that some people who volunteer do not have an image of themselves as volunteers, but simply as people who are helping out other

‘Raising awareness: not everyone is aware that people have problems or there are disadvantaged people around you or whatever.’

‘It should be made as easy as possible for people who want to volunteer to do so in their chosen activity.’

‘[There is a need for] accessible information to assist them making a personal choice on whether to volunteer.’

‘I would volunteer if the opportunity was working with people whose problems I can relate to, and if I would be learning new things and meeting new people.’

'Many [volunteer involving organisations] are being required to undertake Disclosure checks on volunteer roles that they do not believe actually require a check under CRB guidance. Examples of this are common within NHS Trusts and educational establishments. In many instances, they will not allow anyone on to the premises who has not had a satisfactory CRB Disclosure.'

'... the third most commonly cited constraint to the development of voluntary sport is the increase in the number of checking procedures, form filling requirements and training that volunteers are asked to complete (such as Criminal Records Bureau checks need to be repeated for every county they work in...).'

Formal accreditation and over-bureaucratic procedures are a barrier to volunteering and go against the culture of volunteering, which is in danger of losing its flexibility, so there is a careful need for balance.

individuals or their whole community. Does this matter? We do not think that their activities are any less valuable as a result of not construing them as volunteering, but we suspect that this may result in people missing out on opportunities for support and development in their volunteering role, which might result in some people getting no further than informal or occasional voluntary service.

Capitalising on initial enthusiasm

We were dismayed to hear from people who took part in our consultations that people's first tentative steps into volunteering were not always given sufficient recognition. People on the verge of volunteering need to know that they are welcome and that their interest will be put to good use. We were saddened to hear stories from people whose offers to volunteer had not been followed up by organisations. We believe there is a crucial time-window when people first express an interest in volunteering. They need to be encouraged and inducted into volunteering as soon as possible, as failure to do so can be perceived as apathy or even rejection. Good volunteers can be lost as a result, and it is for that reason that we believe that mass calls for volunteers (as in the call for volunteers for the 2012 Olympics) must have a well-worked out strategy for harnessing enthusiasm.

Red tape

An allied point is that when people take their first steps to volunteer, they may lack self-confidence. If they meet with too many obstacles and barriers, they may be deterred before they have had a chance to invest, emotionally and practically, in their chosen cause. Time and time again we heard stories of bureaucratic hurdles that may have been well motivated, but had, in fact, degenerated into caricatures of risk aversion. This may indicate a need for more public discussion in order to reach sensible and proportionate decisions on how to apply requirements in relation to such important issues as security checks, insurance cover and health and safety standards.

As things stood at the time people gave their views, volunteer-involving organisations often had no choice but to require Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, references and other assurances that in some cases at least were probably disproportionate in relation to any actual risks and burdensome for the organisation. There are also problems for specific groups, such as asylum seekers, who may not be able to provide satisfactory information about their addresses during the past few years and may, therefore, encounter difficulties in obtaining clearance.

Nor is this an issue that only affects those taking their first steps into volunteering. We also heard about the need to seek new CRB checks when people changed the context in which they volunteered, even though checks had been made recently elsewhere.

We note that significant changes are on the horizon, with the forthcoming Independent Safeguarding Authority's vetting and barring scheme, which applies equally to volunteers and paid workers¹⁰. At least some of the problems that we were told about may be addressed in the future. When the new scheme is phased in from autumn 2008, it will reform current vetting and barring systems. This scheme is likely to make a difference to volunteers in a number of ways. In future, more roles will require mandatory checks. At present there are only a small number of roles where a check is required by law, most checks arising through an organisation's conscious decision to check due to their duty of care towards clients. It is hard to say if this change will, in practice, result in many more checks being made.

A very positive feature of the new system is that once a person is within the scheme, the next time they apply to volunteer in a role requiring checks, the volunteer-involving organisation will be able to make an instant online check. This will address the problem that volunteers may currently have to wait weeks for a CRB check, even if they have had one recently elsewhere.

The committed volunteer – key issues

The committed volunteer is someone who has an established and recognisable commitment to volunteering, contributing what might be termed a ‘public good’. These are people whose contributions go beyond providing benefits to their immediate families or local communities. They form the bedrock of many voluntary organisations and are invaluable; yet they can also be the most frustrated group, not least because they can feel taken advantage of and become – or believe they become – indispensable. Ironically this group can also put others off, because they set standards of commitment and contribution that make others feel inadequate. And they can become very comfortable with the status quo and resistant to change. Committed volunteers are hugely important as role models as well as for the vital contribution they make, and we need to make it easier for them to make their contribution, for their roles to evolve to meet their changing needs, and for them to stop feeling that they are being taken for granted. All this raises challenges for the volunteers themselves and for the organisations they work with.

5.3 Diversity and the volunteer journey

We encountered mixed views on whether volunteering means the same thing to people from different backgrounds, faiths, cultures and communities. While the desire to help others transcends differences between communities, most people told us that they felt that social and cultural contexts did shape the interpretation and organisation of volunteering. In particular, volunteering is more formalised in this country than in some others. We were told that in some communities, volunteering is seen more as an expression of who you are rather than as something that you do.

We also know that the journey into volunteering and the continuation of the journey once it is underway is not the same for all individuals and groups in society. Many of the issues we have highlighted apply across the board, but some are more specific to some groups than to others. This fact has been made clear to us in more than one way.

First, the literature review shows that some groups volunteer more than others. For example, volunteering is not equally (or proportionately) evident across all ethnic groups. The key points from the data cited in the literature review are that volunteering is higher in white people than in people from minority ethnic communities, but looking at this in more detail, Black and mixed race people were found to have higher rates of involvement than the white population, while Asian and Chinese/Other people were less likely to be involved. More recent information from the April to June 2007 Citizenship Survey confirms that there were some differences in volunteering between ethnic groups. Black African (31 per cent), White (29 per cent), Black Caribbean (28 per cent) and Indian groups (27 per cent) were all more likely to volunteer formally on a regular basis than those from the Pakistani (14 per cent) or Bangladeshi groups (12 per cent)¹¹.

It has also been suggested that observed differences in formal volunteering patterns are largely due to lower rates of participation by people born outside the UK, rather than any other factors associated with ethnicity¹². There are also differences in volunteering rates amongst and between faith communities, gender differences and regional differences too (including urban and rural variations), and very probably differences that relate to the sexuality of volunteers.

Second, both the literature and other evidence submitted to the Commission provided instances where particular problems and barriers were experienced, for example, by asylum seekers and refugees, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health problems, homeless people and so on.

We regard it as significant that there are groups that do not neatly fit into our models of the volunteer journey, and one of our key tenets is that barriers which prevent people from realising their potential as volunteers must be eradicated. For example, we were told by a regional infrastructure organisation that there was a need for ‘different

‘Our ... committee of six had an exceptionally helpful treasurer, but the other members were stuck in the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ mindset.’

‘Some will be very dedicated while others will feel that anything they do is a big favour to you and so you can’t rely on them to turn up to events or do what they say they will do. Over time you have to encourage the latter to change or just not use them.’

‘Volunteering is a way of shaping the world in which you live, and if we deny people the chance to volunteer, or place barriers in their way, I think that’s a way of excluding them from society.’

‘... the generic nature of programmes has tended to isolate or ignore equalities strands (the exception with BME communities) and this has led to perceptions about inclusion and the lack of targeting in the promotion of volunteer roles.’

'In paid employment people are entitled to up to 70 per cent of their childcare to be paid via tax credits. This is not available to volunteers. ... Many not-for-profit organisations cannot afford these expenses and miss out on the skill parents bring.'

'[In relation to refugees and asylum seekers] Although we have published information on the recruitment of refugees and asylum seekers, it seems that some volunteer-involving organisations are still not aware of the rules and do not know where to go for further information.'

'My project seeks to make volunteering more accessible to homeless people. We are finding that people are routinely told by Job Centre Plus staff that volunteering will affect their benefits.'

promotional and support approaches depending on social, cultural and geographical considerations'. We do not claim to know all that is to be known on this, and we suggest that this is an area for further research. However, we know enough to highlight some key issues for groups that are in some way under-involved or even excluded; and we have some initial observations on what we heard about some specific groups which we use as a means of considering issues that may also apply to others.

We know from the literature that practical issues such as expenses are important, especially for people at risk of social exclusion, such as those who are unemployed or on low wages. Poor or fluctuating health, previous negative experiences of volunteering, an information deficit and over-formal recruitment processes all affect particularly groups who are at risk of social exclusion generally. Attitudes and unhelpful stereotypes may play their part in deterring would-be volunteers, and for some groups, the lack of positive or targeted encouragement may be perceived as actual discouragement.

Some volunteer-involving organisations referred to aspects of government policy and legislation (or, in some instances, the lack of it, or lack of knowledge of its implications) that act as barriers to the involvement of specific groups of people as volunteers, and which, in their view, run counter to the government's commitment to diversity. Examples were given in relation to volunteers with mental health problems, lesbian, gay and transgender volunteers, refugees and asylum seekers, people who need help with childcare and homeless people.

Issues for specific groups

We briefly highlight issues in relation to some specific groups. This selection is neither intended to be comprehensive in relation to the groups covered nor in the scope of our comments. However, we wish to signpost the kinds of issues which we believe must be addressed in the quest for a more inclusive approach to volunteering, and we use these examples to illustrate points that may well apply also to others.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Although we do not have a great deal of direct evidence from refugees and asylum seekers, we know from the literature and from our previous experience that there is still a good deal of misinformation in circulation about whether asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer. They are, in fact, allowed to do so, and many do, particularly within their own communities. However, it is likely that some do not know the facts and are deterred. We are concerned that even those who do volunteer may not be given the best possible opportunities to use their rich array of skills and experiences. This seems to us to be a waste of talents that is in nobody's interests.

People with physical disabilities and with physical and mental health problems

Traditionally, images of volunteering have depicted disabled people and those with physical and mental health problems as the helped rather than the helpers. In spite of this, many disabled people and people with significant health problems do volunteer.

Some of those who gave their views to the Commission highlighted the need for awareness of disability to be raised; others, who were disabled, felt both that the voluntary sector was a positive place for them to work, and that they were given the necessary support to volunteer. However, some people commented on barriers that prevent disabled people from volunteering, including inadequate access and lack of awareness of disability issues.

We know that fewer people with disabilities engage in volunteering than is the case for the wider population. Nevertheless, the message we heard was that disabled volunteers make a huge contribution, and volunteering can be particularly empowering for them, but (as with all volunteers) they must be properly supported. We would also like to see more evidence of volunteers with health problems or disabilities being empowered to make a contribution in all fields, and not just in relation to organisations and services for disabled people, important though that contribution undoubtedly is.

Urban and rural differences

Evidence from several individuals and organisations drew our attention to differences in the volunteer journey for those in rural and urban areas. Volunteering opportunities are more abundant in urban areas, although in spite of this, a higher proportion of people volunteer in rural communities. It is not unusual for volunteer-involving organisations in rural areas to rely very heavily on volunteers and for volunteers to stay in their particular roles over long periods. As well as leaving organisations vulnerable if their volunteers cannot sustain their usual level of service, there are also implications for the individuals concerned. They may be particularly susceptible to burn-out and may have few opportunities to re-invigorate their volunteering by changing the nature or location of their contribution. In consequence, in some instances, individuals and organisations may become too set in their ways. This can be exacerbated by the closeness of some rural communities, which can be both a source of pride, but also a deterrent to newcomers or those who wish to do things differently. On the positive side, rural volunteering may present more opportunities to volunteer across generations and social groups.

There are also practical obstacles that face those who wish to volunteer, foremost of which is transport. For individuals, the volunteer journey can be an issue literally as well as metaphorically, as public transport can be difficult and expensive and the distances involved can make travelling by any means expensive and time consuming. For organisations, the challenges of working with isolated communities and dispersed populations are considerable, and the costs of addressing them are high.

Taking all of these factors into account, more needs to be done to ensure that volunteering is equally open to people whether they live in cities, towns or the countryside.

The capacity of volunteer-involving organisations

We heard from a number of volunteer-involving organisations that they were committed to the principle of involving people from all sections of the community, and many were striving to do so. However, some organisations pointed to a lack of resources as a constraint, particularly as they were limited in how much support they could offer to new volunteers in their organisations and particularly to those who had not previously been involved in volunteering.

The role of Volunteer Centres

We heard mixed views on the effectiveness of the infrastructure of volunteering, including Volunteer Centres, and their role in supporting a strategic approach. Few people who gave us their views had experienced local organisations (mainly Volunteer Centres) performing a representational role. Of those who did, some thought that these centres were ‘excellent’ while others deemed them to be ‘irrelevant’. Most people saw Volunteer Centres as linking potential volunteers with available opportunities, and developing good practice. Indeed, there is some suggestion in recent data that volunteer development agencies have done well at engaging with groups that might otherwise be considered hard to reach, such as Black and minority ethnic groups and people seeking work¹³. However, their heavy commitments in relation to matching volunteers and volunteering opportunities, combined with a view that they are under-resourced, were thought to be why they were not more effective.

We explored a range of views about whether Volunteer Centres in the twenty-first century could best promote and support volunteering by small changes in how they worked or by radical ones such as ceasing to be office-based, or by merging with other bodies.

‘The lack of resources has a knock-on impact, as it means that we are not engaging as well as we should be with the whole community and offering the support that we should be to enable more people to engage in voluntary roles with our organisation.’

Encouraging diversity – going forward

To sum up, we note that the volunteering community is already diverse to a certain extent, but barriers and obstacles remain that effectively deter people from some groups. Often, these are groups that are socially excluded in other respects too. That being so, we say that it is not enough to say to such groups ‘you are welcome to

‘Volunteers can be very helpful and beneficial within a busy organisation. When working with youth volunteers it can be difficult to juggle the supervision of volunteers. Depending on their support needs, it can often become more work to get volunteers involved rather than asking staff to do this on their own. There is a balance to achieve when looking at timescales/expectations, etc, and the support needs and abilities of volunteers.’

‘As long as an appropriate infrastructure is provided, involving volunteers will have a positive impact on public service delivery; however, poor support could well lead to poor outcome.’

‘We need to recognise that if volunteering is to be valuable both to the individual and to wider society, it should be well organised and supported, and a suitable infrastructure should be in place.’

‘Support in the form of additional training, learning and development and supervision is provided and is considered to be an essential part of our project. We believe that our volunteers must have the backup they need in order for them to be confident in their role with us and to ensure quality of service to our service users [and to] safeguard both the volunteers and the vulnerable young people we work with.’

volunteer’. Practical issues, low levels of awareness of what they can do, previous life events, material issues such as costs, practical issues such as transport and caring and many other factors, including the capacity of organisations to embrace and support diversity, can all combine to make the hurdles to volunteering insurmountable. But they are not. A creative approach and a will to broaden the volunteering base is required if we are to avoid wasting a great deal of valuable talent from all sections of our diverse society as well as losing opportunities for social cohesion.

5.4 Keeping the volunteer journey on track

Managing volunteers and volunteering

We heard a great deal, particularly from volunteer-involving organisations, about managing volunteers. The key message is that effective volunteering requires well managed volunteers. As in paid employment, this extends to everything from recruitment and retention to succession planning, team working, individual development, resources and so on.

Many of the comments we heard from both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations related to the need for an effective infrastructure. Further investment in the volunteering infrastructure was seen as essential in order to ensure adequate management of volunteers. In particular, we were told by organisations that any more extensive involvement of volunteers in public services delivery would require careful management, support and training in order to ensure delivery of a consistent and high quality service. One Volunteer Centre manager with previous experience of involving volunteers in service delivery for vulnerable adults suggested that it is important to take volunteers into account when contracts are being agreed and that contractors should ensure that good volunteer management processes are in place. Clearly, the issue of good management has major implications, both for service-providing organisations that need full cost recovery, and for the volunteering infrastructure that needs to support and promote effective management.

Keeping people motivated

Like paid staff, volunteers can become stale and demotivated. The principles of good management include the provision of appropriate support and that applies just as much to volunteers as to paid staff. We were pleased to note that most organisations stated that they had provision for supporting volunteers, using a wide range of measures, of which the most common was mentoring. However, we also heard that in spite of a widespread awareness that more support for volunteers was needed, the extent to which this could be improved was inextricably linked to costs and staff resources.

In order to keep motivated, volunteers need an opportunity to review what they do, and to be enabled to grow and develop into new roles if they wish. For some people this may mean a journey into paid work, while others want to try out a new role in the same organisation or to move onto a new organisation in which they can put their skills to use. Others may, indeed, wish to continue much as they have always done, and if this suits the needs of the organisation and its service users, there may be no reason to disturb the equilibrium, but only good and no harm can come out of ensuring that people remain motivated and are able to develop and move on if they wish to do so. We believe that active volunteer support and management is key to the sense of renewal that is so much needed by long-term volunteers.

Recognition

Many volunteers are selfless and do not seek recognition or reward for their work. However, that does not mean that they will be happy and productive if their contribution is not recognised. We were made aware that, occasionally, volunteers experience a lack of respect for what they do. Perhaps more often, they were simply taken for granted, while others felt adequately recognised for what they do. We strongly favour means of

informally and formally recognising the contribution of all volunteers, and long-term, committed volunteers in particular. Volunteers do not serve in the expectation of recognition, but if it is forthcoming, it is often very much appreciated. Certificates of recognition of service at key milestones (perhaps at one year, five years and ten years) would be simple but eloquent gestures for those with long service.

Equally, those who volunteer short-term or episodically need to have their contribution recognised too. Successful volunteering depends on impact and not just putting in the years. Celebratory events, especially for volunteers, and the inclusion of volunteers in the social events of the organisations they serve, are appreciated by both long- and short-term volunteers, and we need to find more ways to recognise, validate and appreciate their contribution.

Training and maintaining standards

While maintaining standards and training and supporting volunteers is not just an issue for the committed volunteer, we take the opportunity to raise these issues here. The need for excellent training and support is as essential for volunteer-involving organisations as it is for their volunteers, although, of course, we are fully aware that even the best training does not solve all problems, and many other issues are of equal importance. Without measures to ensure safe and satisfactory standards, all but the smallest organisations are unable to function at all. Organisations that seek funding or hope to win contracts almost always need to be able to demonstrate that basic training and quality assurance is in place.

We heard mainly from organisations about the challenges of providing training for volunteers, although some individuals also signalled this as an issue. The key challenge is how to provide volunteers with sufficient training (and the right training) in a way that does not overwhelm and deter them, but also enables those who wish to explore training further to do so. This is particularly pertinent to volunteers on their journey through volunteering, as their needs for training and support are likely to be different at the various stages of the journey. A further challenge for organisations is meeting the cost of training for their volunteers, and some volunteers reported being out of pocket through meeting their own training expenses

Putting together what we heard in the evidence with what we have observed over many years, we are convinced that the time is right for an approach to training volunteers that is both systematic and flexible, and which is included in the costs of providing services that involve volunteers. While basic training must be a right of all volunteers (and one that all volunteers must commit to), beyond that we wish to see training that allows volunteers to enter it at different levels and to proceed as far as they wish at a pace that suits them. Committed volunteers will particularly benefit from a system of volunteer training that is recognised outside their own volunteering environment, as having equivalence to other training courses, and thereby easing their passage, should they wish to move on to other opportunities within or outside volunteering.

Equally important is the need to train those who manage volunteers, as well as leaders in volunteering infrastructure organisations so that they are better equipped to get the best out of volunteers and offer them appropriate support. It is also essential to provide suitable training for employees who work with volunteers. It is often forgotten that policy makers within government and commissioners of services provided by organisations that involve volunteers need training too. All these aspects of training are described in detail and quantified in a submission by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering to HM Treasury in 2007¹⁴.

A strategic approach

Much of what we heard from volunteer-involving organisations related to government programmes to promote volunteering. We believe that these comments are highly relevant to improving the volunteer journey, and there is clearly a lot of learning to be derived from experience to date. Some organisations welcomed the increased interest in and funding of volunteering. Some, particularly national volunteer-involving agencies, felt that they had had a chance to help shape volunteering policy. Agencies working in

'I could not do my job without them. They are so talented, versatile and innovative and it amazes me they are so willing and able to undertake so many things. For them 'thank you' is more than enough; for me to them 'thank you' is not nearly enough!'

'The do-it/V-Base initiative has revolutionised the day-to-day operations of Volunteer Centres and provided them with the means to produce statistics. It's brilliant.'

'My organisation has participated in a number of government programmes. As a whole they tend to be poorly conceived, aimed at grabbing attention, and misunderstand volunteering and the voluntary sector.'

strategic partnership with the Office of the Third Sector were generally positive about the experience and the influence they felt they were able to exert in relation to volunteering matters and government programmes. Some were particularly enthusiastic about the development of volunteering databases as part of government volunteering initiatives.

However, there was also a very large amount of criticism of several aspects of all of the government's initiatives to promote volunteering. Comments focused on:

- > the planning process – insufficient planning and lack of joined-up thinking
- > continuity between initiatives – new initiatives set up in isolation from other programmes and without considering how benefits will be sustained at the end of a programme
- > consultation and communication with volunteer-involving agencies – lack of adequate consultation and poor communication, particularly with smaller organisations
- > funding timescales – too short a time to apply for funding
- > reporting and monitoring timescales – put extreme pressure on organisations
- > focus on targets – too much emphasis on targets, to the detriment of quality
- > lack of resources to capitalise on initiatives – more investment is needed in infrastructure bodies
- > the nature of the volunteering placements available – quality and quantity of volunteering placements available was either insufficient or did not meet volunteers' expectations
- > the focus of some programmes – some criticism of the focus of particular programmes, sometimes seen as too narrowly defined

The depressing thing is that messages about short-termism and a project-based approach that fails to become mainstream - all of which we heard about repeatedly - are not new. That is why we draw attention in our manifesto to the need for a different cultural approach to volunteering over and above any number of quick fixes or new initiatives.



6 CONCLUSIONS

In this section we draw together a number of conclusions, all based firmly on what the Commission learned from all the information and opinion presented to it. Ultimately, to fulfil our vision, we are convinced that it is volunteering and the processes and attitudes that surround it that need to change, not volunteers. At the moment there are too many obstacles and hindrances that get in the way and prevent volunteering from truly becoming part of the DNA of our society, and we try to address these.

We recognise that general observations without the specifics will not happen, but specific recommendations without a more general change in culture in attitude are unlikely to be put into practice in a sustainable way. Therefore, our conclusions in this section should be read alongside the recommendations that follow in the next section

Cultural change

Volunteering can make a huge difference, at all levels, to individuals, organisations and society, so we wish to see a cultural change about how we think of volunteering. It should not be seen as an add-on, but as part of how we live and how services are provided. Many changes follow from this: we would expect business and public leaders to set an example and to demonstrate that making a voluntary contribution to the public good is an expectation of people in a senior leadership position. We also look to educational institutions – schools, further education and higher education institutions – to support a culture of volunteering linked to personal development, civic engagement and active citizenship. And while awareness raising is a familiar mantra, we contend that it is important, as the image of volunteering and volunteers is clearly outmoded and needs to change.

We believe that some of this cultural change will need to be underpinned by public debates about the nature of volunteering - for example, how it interfaces with paid work, and when it is and is not desirable for volunteers to do the same work as paid colleagues.

We also see that cultural change on the scale we envisage it will affect how organisations work, not just in relation to volunteering. We are very much in favour of including volunteers in the life of the organisations they work in (everything from celebrations to decision-making) and this has implications not only for volunteer involvement, but for employee involvement and user involvement too, and it has potentially major implications for the governance of organisations of all types.

At the same time, we hear loud and clear that the culture of volunteering in this country tends to downgrade certain types of voluntary work, such as informal volunteering, and to exclude or undervalue what certain groups can contribute. The cultural change we wish to see is based on inclusion, and on revitalising and reshaping the culture of volunteering, while preserving its unique feature – the giving of time to benefit others.

Sort out the infrastructure

There are many changes needed in the infrastructure that supports volunteering. Many of these changes need to come from within the institutions themselves, but they will be greatly helped if there is a sympathetic policy and financial climate set by the government.

Mainstreaming good practice

We recognise that a great deal of good practice is set out in the Compact and Code of Practice¹⁵. But we are mindful of what we were told by both individuals and organisations about the sometimes low level of awareness of the Compact, particularly in smaller voluntary and community organisations and those outside the social welfare field. We also heard from some people who felt that the Compact and Codes were mostly applied in certain types of organisations and that these agreements had not reached their full potential. Therefore we wish to see more adherence to the spirit of the Compact by all bodies that work with the voluntary sector and volunteer-involving organisations.

Rethinking risk

Reassessing how society assesses and mitigates risk is a cultural change which we all need to be part of. It is not just a matter of changing the rules, although we have some specific suggestions about that too. The point is that organisations at all levels may have lost sight of the purpose of some of the measures that were introduced as safeguards. We are absolutely in favour of safe practice and protection for volunteers and those receiving services, but it cannot be right that good people are deterred by avoidably slow and inflexible procedures.

Removing barriers to volunteering

No one should be excluded from contributing to society by volunteering simply because of incidental costs associated with it, or by misinformation about how other sources of income (particularly financial benefits) will be affected by volunteering. This means that issues that are gradually being addressed for the paid workforce, such as child care, carer costs, etc, will need to be considered in relation to volunteering too. Perverse or unintended factors that deter willing volunteers should be systematically addressed.

Valuing diversity

We note that a fresh approach to diversity would result in groups that may well be excluded becoming involved, while those who may already be involved in volunteering would be further enabled to try out new types of voluntary activity or to volunteer in new environments. We particularly counsel against the dangers of stereotyping people so that minority communities for example, are only valued for contributions to their own communities. All of this will need active planning, support and management, and will require significant input from infrastructure organisations.

There is an urgent need for a greater level of commitment to addressing diversity issues in relation to volunteering to enable greater involvement of all sections of the community, and particularly those people who have not always found it easy to be fully involved hitherto, such as people with mental health problems, refugees, prisoners, people on parole, etc.

In sum – all of these conclusions lead us to making a number of challenging but achievable recommendations, which are set out in the next section.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, the following recommendations provide the basis for a series of inter-related changes that are needed to enable volunteers and volunteering to develop further over the next decade. We recommend that Volunteering England, together with others, takes the lead in monitoring progress on the implementation of these recommendations and produces an annual progress report from which success can be judged.

1 Raising the profile of volunteering

Enhancing volunteering promotional events

1.1 We recommend a sustained, high-level approach to raising the profile of volunteering. As part of that, we recommend that existing events to promote volunteering be enhanced and made more effective.

We believe more is required to promote volunteering to the wider public and to demonstrate the value of volunteering to individuals and to society at large. Existing promotional events such as Volunteers Week and Make a Difference Day could be hugely enhanced, and politicians, volunteer champions and others could all play a lead role in this. We urge all volunteering-involving organisations, public, private and or voluntary sector, to get involved in these events. We recommend that major media companies, both traditional and new media, are invited to play a part, in order to extend profile and reach.

Volunteering champions

1.2 We recommend the introduction of volunteering champions at local level.

We propose that volunteering champions are established in each local authority area, linked to the wider modernisation agenda and the Volunteering Matched Fund recommended below (see recommendation 3.1). These champions could work either individually or in groups, and could be based either within existing volunteer development agencies or other relevant agencies or within the local authority itself. The volunteering champions should be volunteers, and sufficient funds need to be made available through the Volunteering Matched Fund to provide proper support and training. The role of the volunteering champions would be to work with infrastructure agencies and local government to promote the value and benefits of volunteering to individuals and organisations. We are impressed with v's strategy to develop youth volunteering champions in each region of England and would like to see this extended to other groups of volunteers.

2 Making volunteering open to all

Access to Volunteering Fund

2.1 We recommend the establishment of an Access to Volunteering Fund.

More action needs to be taken to ensure that volunteering is genuinely open to all. We therefore recommend the establishment of an Access to Volunteering Fund, available to both individuals and organisations. The Fund will support the organisational costs involved in involving disabled volunteers and will also be open to individual volunteers to fund the cost of a carer or support worker to enable them to undertake their volunteering. We propose that, in the first instance, £1 million be made available from central government to pilot this programme in two or three regions of the country, with a view to a nationwide roll-out if it proves successful. We recommend the initial focusing of the fund should be on the needs of disabled people, but if it is successful, we would like to see it extended to other under-represented groups, such as volunteers from single parent households, refugees and asylum seekers and others who are currently less likely to volunteer.

Removing obstacles to volunteering

2.2 We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the government sets up a working party with volunteer-involving organisations and the volunteering infrastructure in order to remove unnecessary or disproportionate obstacles to volunteering (for example, in relation to Criminal Records Bureau checks, entitlement to benefits by volunteers, risk management, etc).

There are many obstacles in the way of some people who wish to volunteer, which prevent them doing so. Such obstacles include problems regarding Criminal Records Bureau checks (although these are in the process of being resolved, to some extent), insurance issues, issues relating to the interpretation of regulations about welfare benefits and availability for work rules, health and safety issues, risk and so on. We recommend that the government and key volunteering agencies work together to build on our findings and propose remedies for removing these barriers. Some solutions will require legislative action, whilst others will require training, for example of benefit agency staff. There will need to be considerable development and dissemination of good practice on, for example, proportionate risk management. There should be an annual report on progress on removing barriers made to a joint meeting of government and the sector, along the lines of the annual Compact review meeting.

Employer-supported volunteering

2.3 We recommend an extension of employer-supported volunteering, appropriate to the size and operational requirements of the business.

We are encouraged by examples of employer-supported volunteering where they exist and we see real opportunities for extending this. Employers could be further motivated to support their employees in volunteering by the inclusion of appropriate criteria in the Investors in People standard. The public sector and the voluntary sector have shown little leadership in this area, and need to develop such schemes urgently. Small and medium size enterprises, sometimes facing different challenges from the big employers, have also been slow to act. We recommend that employers should set up schemes, where they do not already exist, to support employees to take part in volunteering. There are many ways for employers to demonstrate their support for volunteering, for example, by offering flexible working hours for volunteers, by building community involvement into annual appraisals and by giving employees time off from

work to volunteer to match the volunteering carried out in the employees' own time, up to a maximum of, say, five days a year. However, a range of other creative ways for employers to support volunteering may be applicable in particular workplaces.

2.4 We recommend that one department or agency takes responsibility for the promotion of volunteering by government employees, with appropriate targets for raising the level of volunteering by public servants.

The government should lead by example, both in the development of employer-supported volunteering programmes and in the engagement of volunteers within the public sector, at a central and local level and in the NHS and other public service organisations. We would expect to see all government departments and local authorities producing annual plans for the involvement of volunteers which are placed in the public domain and upon which their performance can be judged.

3 Modernisation of volunteering

Modernising the volunteering infrastructure

3.1 We recommend that funds be made available to assist with the modernisation of the volunteering infrastructure at local level.

We propose the establishment of a Volunteering Matched Fund totalling £5 million a year for three years, to which partnerships of local infrastructure organisations and local authorities could bid to support the strategic development of volunteering. Central government funding would be contingent upon a similar matched funding amount being provided by the local authority or partnership and upon well thought-out strategies for long-term financial sustainability. The fund would also support the establishment of teams of local volunteering champions outlined above (see recommendation 1.2).

Although some work in this area has already begun, we believe that much of the present infrastructure is not fit for purpose, and that further change is required to make it work appropriately for the twenty-first century. This should include greater use of new technology to attract people into volunteering and match them to opportunities, and more strategic alliances and partnerships between existing infrastructure agencies. There is also a need for a review of the local volunteering infrastructure, to enable it to connect and communicate better with volunteers. This process of modernisation will require significant investment from government to kick-start the process, as well as considerable rationalisation of what is presently available.

Modernising volunteer-involving organisations

3.2 We recommend that volunteer-involving organisations undertake a critical review of their ways of working in order to identify new and creative opportunities for volunteering.

We recognise that many people are happy with the volunteering opportunities that exist, and that there is already a great deal of good practice in engaging volunteers in ways that play to people's strengths and passions. But we received evidence that some volunteer-involving organisations continue to operate in traditional ways without explicitly reviewing whether their approach meets either individual or organisational needs. Consequently, some potential volunteers remain uninvolved or under-involved, while other existing volunteers may become demotivated. There is enormous scope for volunteer-involving organisations to look for more creative ways of involving people, and for volunteers themselves to be more included in identifying priorities and ways of working.

4 Reward and recognition for volunteers and volunteering

Developing appropriate ways to reward and recognise volunteers and volunteering

4.1 We recommend the development of new mechanisms for reward and recognition of volunteers, attuned to the diversity of factors that motivate volunteers.

4.2 We recommend that time spent in formal volunteering should be acknowledged as a legitimate and important part of an individual's curriculum vitae and career development path.

Many organisations already take steps to reward and recognise their volunteers. But we believe more action is needed to ensure that all kinds of volunteers – short and long term, within formal and informal settings – are recognised, valued and rewarded. This is a much more complex issue than simply devising formal mechanisms of public recognition, and needs to be a mixture of recognition for volunteers and for volunteering. Recognition needs to be appropriate to the widely varying aspirations and motivations of volunteers. Mechanisms may include celebrations and other events to include volunteers, certificates to recognise voluntary service, engagement of volunteers in the governance of organisations and in determining strategy, receiving information about outcomes and impact, and the development of externally recognised records of time spent and experience gained through volunteering. In addition, training can be both a form of reward and a means of supporting and enhancing the contribution of volunteers (see Recommendation 5.1)

5 Training

It is necessary, but not sufficient, to train front-line volunteers. Our recommendations on training extend also to those who manage volunteers and those who work in organisations that involve them. We recognise that effective training has resource implications, but there is simply no way to have effective volunteering and enthusiastic volunteers without it. In terms of value for money and making the most of volunteering, the amount of investment required is relatively modest. The costs of proposed training (to include a co-ordinating training delivery team, training for volunteers, for those working with volunteers, for managers of volunteer-involving organisations, for leaders in volunteering infrastructure organisations and for government policy makers and commissioners of services) have been quantified and submitted to HM Treasury¹⁶ and the sum required amounts to £1,775,000 per year for each of the three years from 2008 to 2011.

Training for volunteers

5.1 We recommend that government, volunteer-involving organisations and the volunteer infrastructure endorse an explicit commitment to train (and be trained) for all formal volunteers up to an agreed basic level. Beyond that, training must be made available, as appropriate to the individual circumstances and aspirations of the volunteer and to the needs of volunteer-involving organisations.

5.2 We recommend that government, volunteer-involving organisations and the volunteering infrastructure work closely with further education colleges, adult and community education centres and higher education institutions to develop training, which must be valued, accredited and recognised within and beyond the context of volunteering.

5.3 We recommend that government actively promotes and supports a coherent approach to accreditation and training for volunteers and ensures that national standards for volunteer training are established.

Training should be seen as an opportunity and not a barrier, recognising that some people come into volunteering with a great deal of relevant experience and skills and do not necessarily require or want a great deal of training, while for others it can be part of a personal development programme that may lead them into other volunteering or employment opportunities. Either way, training should be a means of enabling volunteers to apply their enthusiasm and passion for what they do in ways that maximise their effectiveness and their personal satisfaction in what they do. Training for volunteers must be universally recognised as contributing to a portfolio of skills that can be applied in a variety of contexts, within and beyond volunteering. Where appropriate, training programmes for volunteers should enable people to acquire recognised qualifications that are accredited and recognised as having equivalence with training undertaken in other contexts.

Training for volunteer managers

5.4 We recommend that serious attention be given to meeting the training and support needs of managers in volunteer-involving organisations.

This is a key task that the volunteering infrastructure, in cooperation with government, should act upon without delay, for example by issuing new guidance for training managers in volunteer-involving organisations. Flexibility and sensitivity to individual training needs will be required and there will need to be clear underlying principles in devising effective training for volunteer managers. Their training will need to be grounded in the experience of individual volunteer managers and the nature of the organisations in which they work, offering modular learning programmes and a choice of learning methods.

Training for public sector staff

5.5 We recommend that public service staff, such as those in the NHS, civil servants and local government officers, be trained to enhance their understanding of the role of volunteering and in acquiring skills in working with volunteers.

5.6 We recommend that training for public service staff should enhance their understanding of the necessity for organisations to be funded to cover the full costs of involving, managing and supporting volunteers when they submit proposals to deliver services that include the engagement of volunteers.

This training is essential so that these staff can understand how to make the best use of volunteers and enable volunteers to be managed and supported in a way that enables volunteering to have the greatest impact. Without proper training, there is a risk that public service staff may either not understand the value of volunteers, or they may (inappropriately) see them simply as a means of reducing the costs of providing a service. Proper training can assist public service staff to understand the distinctive added value that volunteers can bring and can help them to appreciate the costs and benefits of involving and supporting volunteers alongside the paid workforce.

6 The contribution of government

Government can contribute in many ways – not by setting up new initiatives or projects, but by setting the strategic direction, acting as a facilitator, and enabler and by removing obstacles to volunteering. We set out key ways in which government can do this.

Responsibility for volunteering

6.1 We recommend that government ensures that a cabinet minister takes responsibility for volunteering, with a cross-cutting brief across all departments, as well as ensuring that one permanent secretary holds responsibility both for volunteering by government employees, and for the topic of volunteering as a whole.

6.2 We recommend that a parliamentary select committee should be given responsibility for volunteering and community championing, separately from any overview of the voluntary sector, to parallel the emerging local volunteering champions.

The government has made it clear, in its creation and support for v, and its appointment of Julia Neuberger as the Prime Minister's volunteering champion, that it is serious about volunteering. However, the whole issue of volunteering goes beyond any one government department, and certainly beyond the Office for the Third Sector, admirable though that office's support for volunteering has been.

Whilst it is up to government as to how it organises the responsibility for volunteering, we believe that there is still too much confusion between the voluntary sector and volunteering, and that therefore this responsibility needs to be held more widely than within the Office for the Third Sector, and separately from it, and be recognised as being a central governmental responsibility.

The role of regulators

6.3 We recommend that regulatory bodies, such as the Healthcare Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and Ofsted should include as part of their regular inspections an assessment of how organisations involve, support and manage volunteers in order to provide high quality and user sensitive services.

If we are serious about volunteering being an integral part of how our public services are delivered, this ought to be part of the monitoring of performance on a par with other standards. We would expect regulators to develop standards in partnership with volunteer-involving organisations and the volunteer infrastructure, so that meaningful progress on the development of volunteering could be monitored in the organisations they inspect and regulate.

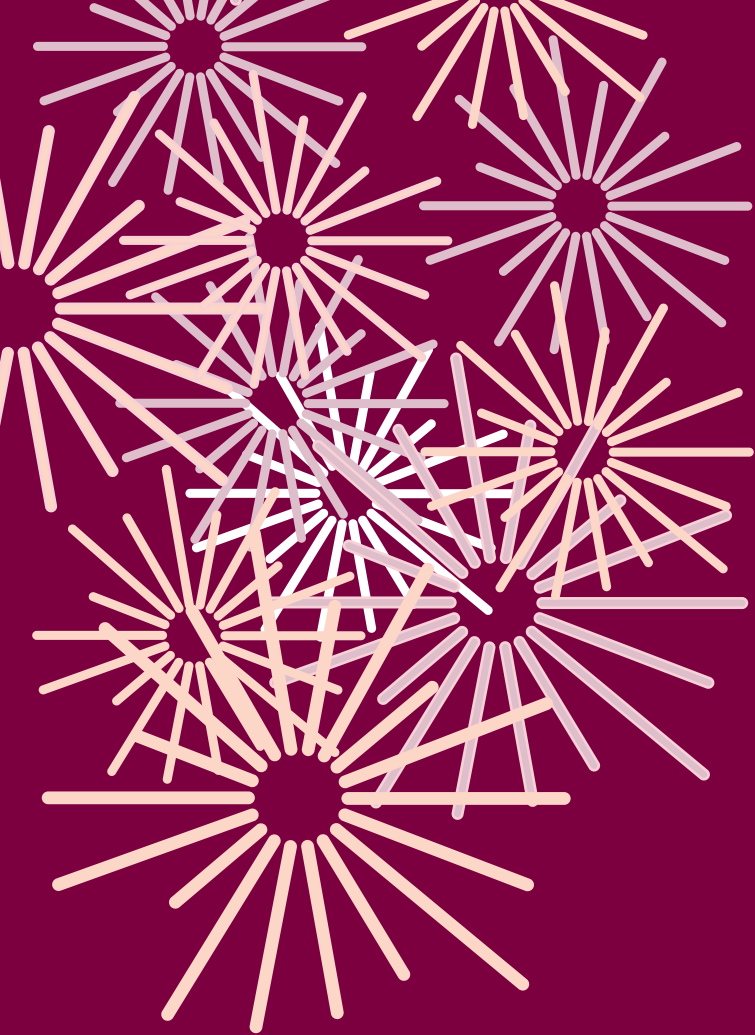
The Compact and Volunteering Code of Practice

6.4 We recommend that all government departments and agencies make a specific commitment to the Compact and the Volunteering Code of Practice and monitor their implementation.

The Compact and the Code of Practice on volunteering are generally seen as helpful and positive, but implementation has been poor and its applicability has been limited. Government is in a position to strengthen adherence to the Compact and Code of Practice, particularly when making funds available at a local level.

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