

# Assessing the impact of volunteering on the further education sector

Executive summary

February 2008

Funded by:



Leading learning and skills

 **Student  
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JOINING FORCES

Learning shouldn't just  
be in the classroom,  
volunteering provides  
the opportunity  
to find future leaders

Vereen Ryan, Director of Student Services, Tower Hamlets College

## Foreword



I have great pleasure in introducing to you *Assessing the impact of volunteering on the further education sector*.

In September 2005 we published *From here to sustainability*, our strategy for sustainable development. Our vision is that by 2010, the learning and skills sector will proactively commit and

contribute to sustainable development through its management of resources, the learning opportunities it delivers and its engagement with employers and communities.

One of the key areas in the strategy is volunteering. We want to encourage more learners and providers to undertake volunteering activity as part of a community commitment to sustainable development.

With this aim in mind, we welcomed the opportunity to work with Volunteering England on this project. It provided a way to better understand the impact of volunteering in the further education sector, its benefits and the barriers that stand in the way of greater participation by both learners and providers.

This report sets out the key findings and recommendations from the research carried out by Volunteering England. There are some challenges but we think it provides an excellent basis for moving forward and for making volunteering a cornerstone of our approach to sustainable development. I hope you find it useful.

Our thanks go to Volunteering England for leading the work and to all organisations and individuals who contributed their views.

**Rob Wye**

National Director, **Learning and Skills Council**

## Introduction

The further education sector provides education and training for over five million people in England, giving them the qualifications, opportunities and experiences these learners need to fulfil their potential. To reflect the changing needs of the population a variety of developing initiatives are being designed to equip learners with the skills that make them valuable employees and candidates for further educational opportunities.

As the sector explores new and more flexible routes of learning the Learning and Skills Council in collaboration with Volunteering England decided to carry out this research to assess the impact volunteering has on the sector to ascertain what role, if any, volunteering can play in developing learners.

### About the organisations

#### **Learning and Skills Council (LSC)**

The Learning and Skills Council exists to make England better skilled and more competitive.

We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to ensure we have a workforce of world-class standard.

#### **Volunteering England (VE)**

Volunteering England is an independent voluntary agency committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity. The work links research, policy innovation, good practice and grant-making in the involvement of volunteers.

The Student Volunteering Team at Volunteering England, formerly Student Volunteering England, has been working to support students to make a difference to their local and wider communities for over 25 years.

## Going Further

In January 2006 the Student Volunteering Team at Volunteering England launched the Going Further project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This project was designed to build a volunteering ethos in the further education sector by supporting six further education colleges to develop and establish volunteering projects for their learners, and then sharing the learning to enable other colleges to take part.

The six Going Further colleges, Bridgwater, Harrogate, Liverpool Community College, Newcastle, Oxford and Cherwell Valley and Tower Hamlets, represent a varied range of institutions, from their size, to location, to learner make up. As a result they have created a diverse range of projects but at the heart of each is a proven commitment and enthusiasm for volunteering.

## Key findings

Learners, staff and senior managers from colleges as well as other FE providers were consulted to gather their views on volunteering in further education. The research included face-to-face interviews, online surveys and focus groups.

### Learner survey results

**100%** of the learners who were volunteering rated the experience as beneficial, citing reasons including that it was a fun way to spend time, improved their skills, helped to guide their career path.

The most popular reasons people volunteered were because it enabled them to give something back to their communities and it allowed them to do something good for other people.

**95.9%** said they would definitely recommend volunteering to others.

**44.6%** of learners found their volunteering opportunity through their FE institution.

The majority of the volunteering opportunities that learners were engaging in were:

- mentoring
- fundraising
- working with the elderly
- working in schools/after-school clubs and with young people
- environmental projects
- college-based opportunities such as course representative/college magazines/student unions

### Learners who aren't volunteering

**33%** of the non-volunteers felt that their courses meant they didn't have time to volunteer.

**0.8%** of recipients said that they thought volunteering was boring and old fashioned.

### Survey results from FE staff with volunteering as part of their remit

**48.3%** were able to spend between two and four hours a week supporting volunteering.

**60.9%** received support from external volunteering organisations.

Examples of the organisations that colleges received support from include Millennium Volunteers, local Volunteer Centres and more recently involved teams. Involved teams are funded by the youth volunteering charity, and work to increase volunteering opportunities for young people either within an organisation or for a geographical location.

**55.6%** felt their work in volunteering is supported by their institution.

**52.2%** per cent supported learners to come up with their own volunteering ideas.

**27.8%** strongly agreed that volunteering is a high priority in their institution; this is in comparison with the senior managers in colleges of whom 100 per cent believed that volunteering was a high priority, albeit with the caveat that it has to take second place to getting learners through their qualifications and courses.

**83.3%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be able to offer more volunteering opportunities.

## The policy landscape

As the key findings demonstrate volunteering is seen as an important option for learners. However, it has become apparent that colleges and providers need a flexible approach to volunteering and that one model doesn't suit all. It is also apparent that the sector moves very quickly and is often subject to new and changing initiatives. In this section we will be exploring how volunteering can help institutions to

comply with both existing and developing FE policies and qualifications.

The following extracts from government reports and policies show how volunteering can help the sector to improve opportunities and meet government targets.

### Every Child Matters (2004)<sup>1</sup>

#### Background

The aim of Every Child Matters is to ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Every college is assessed by Ofsted on how they meet the requirements of Every Child Matters.

#### How volunteering can support the delivery of Every Child Matters

A volunteering presence can provide an essential quality measure within the Every Child Matters framework for an FE provider. Below are extracts from the Common Inspection Framework for inspecting education and training from Ofsted.

“ The reviews will evaluate the extent to which for each area the following five outcomes for children and young people are being met:

1. Being healthy
2. Staying safe
3. Enjoying and achieving
4. **Making a positive contribution**
5. Achieving economic wellbeing ”

<sup>1</sup> [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

Ofsted inspectors will judge the positive contribution outcome with the following evidence:

1. Children and young people have opportunities to provide mentoring support to others
2. Children and young people are encouraged to take part in and to initiate voluntary activities to support the community and environment

### **Russell Commission (March 2005)** <sup>2</sup>

#### **Background**

In 2005 the Government launched a report outlining a national framework for youth action and engagement. The report made a set of recommendations which the government is committed to fulfilling through v and the following government departments: Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Cabinet Office.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

It should be commonplace for young people to volunteer whilst they are at school, college or in higher education. ... All FE colleges, sixth form colleges, and work-based training institutions should have links with local Volunteer Centres, and the new framework should build on what already takes place.

<sup>2</sup> <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/russellcommission/report/index.html>

### **Association of College Managers**

The ACM believes the further education sector must be shaped by the needs of learners. Learners should be given every opportunity to develop and improve their skill base and we believe volunteering is integral to achieving this. We would endorse every FE student being given the opportunity to volunteer and FE providers having resources available to them to make this a reality.

By building an ethos of volunteering into the FE sector, the institutions can become a hub for developing the skills and experiences of learners, contribute to a nation of long-term volunteers and develop strong links with their local communities.

### **White paper: Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (March 2006)**

#### **Background**

The Department for Education and Skills' white paper addressed the need of the sector to be providing opportunities that upskill learners.

#### **How volunteering can support the delivery of the white paper**

Opportunities to undertake volunteering activities can enrich the learning experience in FE and promote active citizenship. Volunteering can enable students to develop the soft skills required by employers, strengthen providers' engagement with their local communities and help foster an inclusive ethos.<sup>3</sup>

### **Leitch Review of Skills and Implementation Strategy (December 2006)** <sup>4</sup>

#### **Background**

The Leitch review of skills outlines the need for the UK to further develop the skills of the population to accommodate the changing

<sup>3</sup> DFES, Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances, p37, March 2006

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews/leitch\\_review/review\\_leitch\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm)

economic climate by 2020. The report has outlined many recommendations and next steps for all stakeholders, which includes recommendations for the FE sector.

### How volunteering can support the delivery of the Leitch Review of Skills

Over 70 per cent of employers would hire someone with voluntary experience over someone without. TimeBank

Evidence has shown the value of volunteering for developing the skills and experiences sought after by employers. When curriculum such as Train to Gain for Volunteers is being developed, FE providers can include volunteering as an effective means of developing skills in their learners.

### The Ten Year Youth Strategy (July 2007) <sup>5</sup>

#### Background

This looks at how the government can help all young people, particularly those in deprived areas, to take part in enjoyable activities in their free time which can help them develop new skills and raise their aspirations.

More young people are volunteering than any other age group and making a positive contribution in their communities – in 2005 around half of 16-19s were providing informal help within their communities, while a third were formal volunteers.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy>

#### 157 Group

The 157 Group demonstrates its belief in the power and potential of volunteering through the volunteering activities taking place in the member colleges. We believe that volunteering can enhance learners, equipping them with new skills and providing vital experiences that can lead onto employment or further educational opportunities.

### How volunteering can support the delivery of The Ten Year Youth Strategy

Volunteering: making a difference to the community can alter young people's aspirations and the way they see themselves.

Evidence from the Young Volunteer Challenge (YVC) Pilot Programme 12 demonstrated the impact of volunteering on different groups of young people. After nine months, those with few or no qualifications experienced an increase in confidence and their ability to handle work situations; better qualified young people had higher aspirations about future education and employment.

### Education and Skills Bill

#### Background

The Bill contains measures to encourage more young people to participate in post-16 learning and to achieve higher levels of skill and qualifications, so that by 2015, all 18 year olds are participating in some form of education or training.

The current proposals realise the skills that young people can gain through volunteering, and have included this as a form of participation. This again demonstrates the need to build a volunteering ethos within further education.

Further information on these proposals will be available upon the publication of the bill in 2008.

## Association of Colleges

The millions of students in our colleges are a very powerful source of volunteering activity and their contributions should be actively encouraged. It is important that each and every learner is given the opportunity to benefit from the new skills and new experiences that volunteering can offer.

### The full report highlights the links between volunteering and government policy in the following strategies and reports:

- LSC Working Together Strategy: Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector
- LSC Sustainable Development Strategy
- National Improvement Strategy
- Learner Involvement Strategy
- Further Education and Training Act
- Public Service Agreement targets
- 14-19 Reforms

### Embedding volunteering in FE

There are already a number of providers and initiatives within the FE sector which have pioneered volunteering. Echoing the key findings of the report there are many examples of FE providers who have embedded volunteering into their curriculum frameworks. The full report contains information and examples from different providers including:

- Rathbone
- Learning and Skills Network (LSN)
- Citizenship Champions in QIA post-16 citizenship support programme

There are also a number of government programmes already in place or on the horizon which have a strong link to embedding volunteering in the curriculum.

The examples of these in the full report include:

- Foundation Learning Tier
- International Baccalaureate and English Baccalaureate
- Personal Best Programme
- Train to Gain for Volunteers

## National Learner Panel

The National Learner Panel represents what all FE providers should be striving for: students who are empowered to use their voice to influence and shape their education. FE providers need to ensure they have the provision to support learners to take part in these voluntary learner voice activities and that the learner voice is heard and taken seriously.

The National Learner Panel also fully believes in the importance of developing other volunteering opportunities for students enabling them to make the most of their education.


This voluntary initiative [National Learner Panel] is mutually beneficial – the organisations who work with the panel have found it to be invaluable in shaping their thinking, but panel members themselves also benefit from the experience:

**“It’s a great opportunity to learn about things you wouldn’t necessarily learn about. It’s fun too. You meet lots of people, you travel to different parts of the country and so on. Professionally and personally you learn about others views too.”** (Yr 1 panel member)





Volunteering  
is a free  
education



Student, Newcastle College

# Recommendations

From our key findings and the policy landscape we are proposing the following recommendations for the FE sector. Responsibility for these lies with a variety of organisations, providers and volunteering bodies.

## **Volunteer co-ordinators and funding streams**

As a demonstration of the commitment to Every Child Matters, colleges and providers should have access to funding for volunteer co-ordinators. There should also be more funding streams available for FE for their learners and for specific volunteering projects.

## **Embedding volunteering in existing provisions**

Setting up new volunteering initiatives may seem unrealistic to the sector but colleges and providers need to map out how volunteering can compliment existing activities rather than necessarily having to set up a new and separate volunteering project.

## **Working together**

The voluntary and third sector organisations who have vested interests in volunteering in FE should be working together to share their learning and to establish how there could be more collaborative working.

## **Sector-wide volunteering strategy**

To support a more co-ordinated way of working all FE stakeholders need to come together at a cross-sector conference to launch work on a sector-wide strategy for volunteering. Steering groups of FE organisations, colleges and providers would guide the conference and

then take the lead on pledging to a strategy which enhances learners' abilities to access quality volunteering opportunities.

## **Employer involvement**

We need to be working with employers to promote the skills learners will gain through quality volunteering opportunities and demonstrate how these will increase their employability.

## **The importance of reflection and recognition**

As part of learners' volunteering, they should have support in reflecting upon their experiences to establish what skills they have developed and the effect their volunteering has had on them. The wider community also needs to recognise the value of volunteering.

## **Quality opportunities**

Volunteering opportunities need to be quality opportunities which give learners a real chance to build their skill base.

## **Agency support**

The FE sector needs easy access to information, advice and resources from specialist volunteering organisations.

I wouldn't be  
in the job I'm in  
now if it wasn't  
for volunteering

Lucy Downes, Head of Youth Work, North Yorkshire Youth  
and Former FE student volunteer

# The Full Report

The full research report and detailed recommendations can be found by following this link: [www.volunteering.org.uk/feresearch](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/feresearch)

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Going Further colleges (Bridgwater, Harrogate, Oxford and Cherwell Valley, Liverpool Community College, Newcastle and Tower Hamlets) for their time and input. Thanks also go to all the other colleges, providers, learners and FE sector organisations who gave their time and opinions.

We are extremely grateful to our funder the Learning and Skills Council for their support and to the Big Lottery Fund for their support of the Going Further project.

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