Choosing to volunteer

A small-scale survey to evaluate the experiences of young people involved in volunteering in a range of settings

This survey evaluates volunteering programmes located within a sample of schools, colleges, and youth and community settings. It reports on the experiences of the young people, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, who participate in volunteering programmes. Inspectors collected evidence through visits to six secondary schools, seven colleges and six youth and community organisations. The survey was supported by evidence from online panels of 328 young people.

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Executive summary

It is widely accepted that volunteering brings benefits to those who participate, to community groups and to civil society more widely. From the findings of this survey it is also clear that, as with any activity, volunteering must be managed effectively in order for those benefits to be realised. Examples found by inspectors illustrate the complexity involved in getting it right, and the importance of professional skills and leadership in realising benefits.

During the period from April to July 2011, inspectors visited six secondary schools and seven colleges with extensive volunteering activity taking place. They also visited six youth organisations located within the voluntary and charitable sector, and met with two national youth charities. The youth organisations visited targeted their work primarily on vulnerable young people. The Learner Panel provided further supporting evidence.[1] Ofsted also received online feedback from 328 members of its children's and young people's panel. In addition three learner focus groups were conducted. Definitions of what constitutes volunteering vary significantly. Inspectors took a broad view that young people's volunteering involved spending unpaid time doing something which was to the benefit of society.

Across the three sectors visited, schools, colleges, and youth and community settings, inspectors found a rich and eclectic range of approaches reflecting the diversity of volunteering scenarios. Some were linked to a course or qualification, while others were less formal; there was no single pattern. In the best settings visited, volunteering appeared in many guises within and beyond the curriculum, and grew out of active and constructive links with community groups, businesses and sports groups, with resources dedicated to staffing and training.

The great majority of young people spoken to by inspectors thought that volunteering had helped them to develop important skills and attributes such as advocacy, team working, motivation and resilience. Others reflected on their developing sense of responsibility and service to others. Improving employment prospects was a key feature for some, while for others volunteering had helped to develop their political awareness and civic engagement.

A minority stated that difficulties and pressures they currently faced, for example in securing paid employment, acted as a disincentive to volunteering. In Ofsted's small-scale online survey the benefit identified by the respondents least often was gaining an award or certificate, although this was often the focus for providers aiming to demonstrate the value of volunteering activity.

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[1] The Learner Panel is a platform for online research funded by the Young People's Learning Agency. It offers government departments and organisations in the further education (FE) sector access to young learners, for the purposes of both quantitative and qualitative research. The panel consists of learners aged 14+, all of whom are enrolled at schools, colleges and other training providers in England.

The most effective volunteering programmes were, at least in part, shaped by individual young people and involved a level of risk and challenge. They had clarity of purpose, comprised activities which stretched young people, and achieved a sensible balance between participation and accreditation. Responsive providers created pathways for participants such as volunteering at sports events and gaining an event stewarding qualification, performing and recording music, or becoming qualified youth workers.

The most effective practitioners had been trained in areas such as student-led decision-making, group work, project-planning, sourcing up-to-date resources and community networking. Providers also invested time in training young people, especially those with responsibility for others such as in mentoring, or in relation to management and governance.

In the less effective provision, providers were falling back on longstanding and repetitive volunteering opportunities rather than looking for fresh and appealing ideas. Young people came away from the activity uninspired or no better informed. A minority of teachers spoon-fed students ideas rather than working with them to develop their own projects. In these cases, providers had not reviewed their programmes to identify where simple improvements could be made to maximise learning for young people.

Two key factors emerged in relation to engaging more vulnerable young people in volunteering: skilled practitioners who built strong and trusting relationships with them, and the effectiveness of an organisation in removing barriers to participation. The work of external agencies and charities seen by inspectors was highly effective in engaging vulnerable young people and in supporting volunteering programmes in schools and colleges. However, many of these external agencies were facing very challenging futures due to reductions in grants and other sources of funding. For those young people who might have exhibited behavioural problems or been excluded, taking real responsibility through volunteering helped build their self-esteem and sense of purpose. Some of the young people interviewed who were involved in targeted provision had come to their own realisation that volunteering was a means of building their competitiveness in seeking employment.

Evaluating the impact of volunteering presents genuine challenges. Commonly, the senior managers interviewed in the schools and colleges visited asserted that dedicating curriculum time to volunteering helped raise academic standards. One college presented an analysis of data for some of the students who volunteered, indicating that they enjoyed better success rates than those who did not engage in volunteering. Other colleges cited improved retention and attendance rates. Measures applied by youth and community groups and charities generally centred on progression to employment, education, training or further volunteering.

In a context of declining resources, there is clearly a need to ensure that opportunities are being effectively targeted where the need is greatest, and that measures of success are clearly focused on the subsequent progress made by participants, not just on the attainment of immediate goals specific to volunteering

projects. There were instances where reduced resources had restricted the work of local community groups that was essential in providing opportunities for learners to pursue their volunteering. To differing degrees, young people were prevented from accessing volunteering placements in four providers due to a lack of collaboration and restrictive interpretation of safeguarding requirements by managers.

Key findings

- The volunteering activities seen supported young people's learning and development well and provided a means by which they could engage constructively in civil society. Well-managed volunteering programmes have the potential to realise significant benefits for young people in enhancing their learning experience.

- The most effective schools, colleges, and youth and community settings found creative ways of integrating volunteering within courses and 'in-house' projects enabling young people to take on greater levels of responsibility. They did not consider it as an 'add on' to mainstream learning.

- All of the schools and colleges visited worked with external national charities and agencies either to extend the range of volunteering opportunities on offer or to target specific groups of young people.

- In the targeted provision visited, organisations and practitioners were effective in identifying the support needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged young people and in developing their confidence and building their social skills.

- Providers recognised the need for young people to have skills, confidence and credibility in undertaking volunteering roles. All invested time in training young people, especially those with responsibility for others such as in mentoring, or in relation to management and governance.

- The most effective practitioners had been trained in areas such as student-led decision-making, group work, project-planning, sourcing up-to-date resources and community networking. They were very adept at ensuring young people were able to make informed choices about the volunteering opportunities available to them.

- Evaluating the impact of volunteering presents genuine challenges; there were examples where providers were able to evaluate elements of volunteering programmes, but none was doing so in a comprehensive manner.

- Linking volunteering with accreditation can bring both benefits and problems. Young people often spoke about the intrinsic value of volunteering and how it had nothing to do with gaining a qualification. There was clear merit in providers striking a balance and providing opportunities for accreditation where appropriate.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Office together with the Department for Education should:

- review the support provided to national charities to enable them to maintain their work with schools and other providers in developing young people's civic engagement.

Providers should:

- map the benefits to learning of the range of activities related to volunteering they undertake

- review their curriculum with a view to determining where opportunities lie for young people to enhance their learning through volunteering

- consider specifically the means by which volunteering is used to engage disadvantaged and vulnerable young people productively

- ensure key staff are skilled and knowledgeable about volunteering, through workforce development opportunities and networking

- develop more effective ways of evaluating and articulating the learning outcomes that young people accrue from volunteering.

Contextual information

1. Youth volunteering and civic engagement are very well established in England. Their origins can be traced back to the work of churches, cultural organisations, philanthropic societies, trade unions and uniformed organisations. As an important component of the government's Big Society initiative, volunteering and civic engagement for young people have become a significant government priority. The Cabinet Office and Department for Education are currently piloting a new eight-week National Citizen Service for 16–year-olds, operated through consortia of charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises. The importance of ensuring ways of productively engaging young people in their localities was highlighted by the disturbances encountered in some cities in the summer of 2011.

Figure 1: Regular participation in voluntary activities in the 12 months before interview, 2008–09 (percentage of respondents)
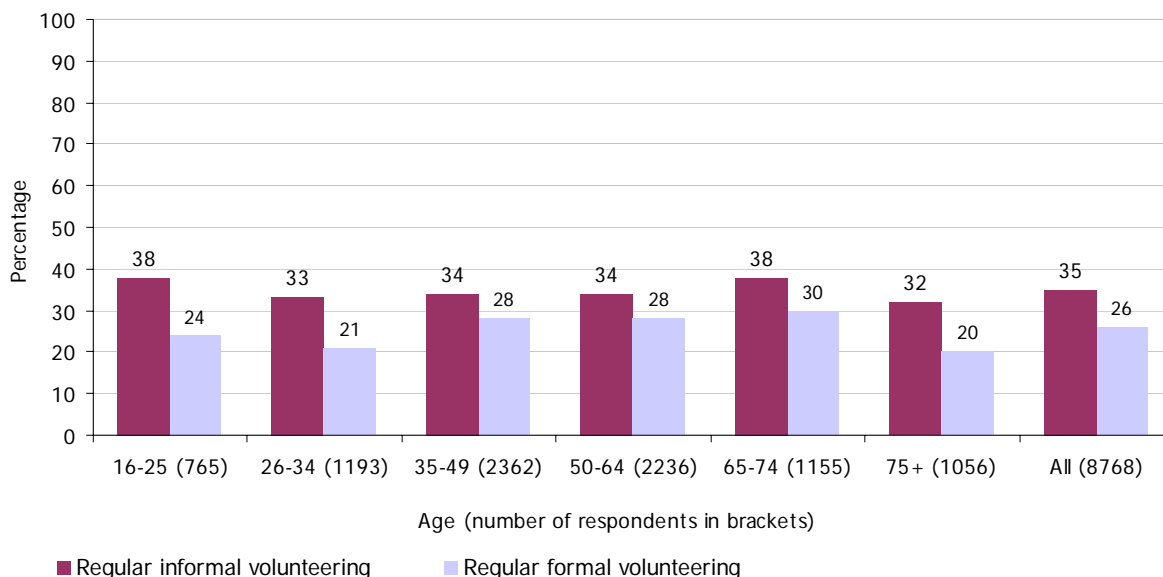
Respondents with missing age and gender data are included in the 'All' row. Source: 2008–09 Citizenship survey: volunteering and charitable giving topic report, Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2010, page 14.

2. Volunteering is defined in varying ways and because of the informal nature of much activity, it can be difficult to judge how much volunteering young people undertake. The Citizenship Survey is currently the largest scale longitudinal survey of volunteering in England. As shown in Figure 1, in 2008–09 the survey found that 24% of 16–25-year-olds participated in formal volunteering, defined as unpaid help given as part of a group, club or organisation to benefit others or the environment. This was a lower proportion than for age groups 35–49, 50–64, and 65–74, but higher than for those aged 26–34 or over 75. By contrast, 38% of young people aged 16–25 participated in informal volunteering, defined in the survey as unpaid help given as an individual to someone who is not a relative. This was the highest for any age group apart from those aged 65–74.

3. These levels of participation have remained relatively constant across subsequent surveys. A survey conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that young people are engaged in a variety of informal activities that come under a wider definition of 'charity', from giving goods to charity shops to buying the *Big Issue*, purchasing Fairtrade goods, recycling, campaigning and taking part in charity events.[2]

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[2] *Engaging young people in giving and charity* (ISSN 0958-3084), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002; www.jrf.org.uk/publications/engaging-young-people-giving-and-charity.

Figure 2: Understanding of the word 'volunteering': what does the term 'volunteering' mean to you (percentage of respondents)?
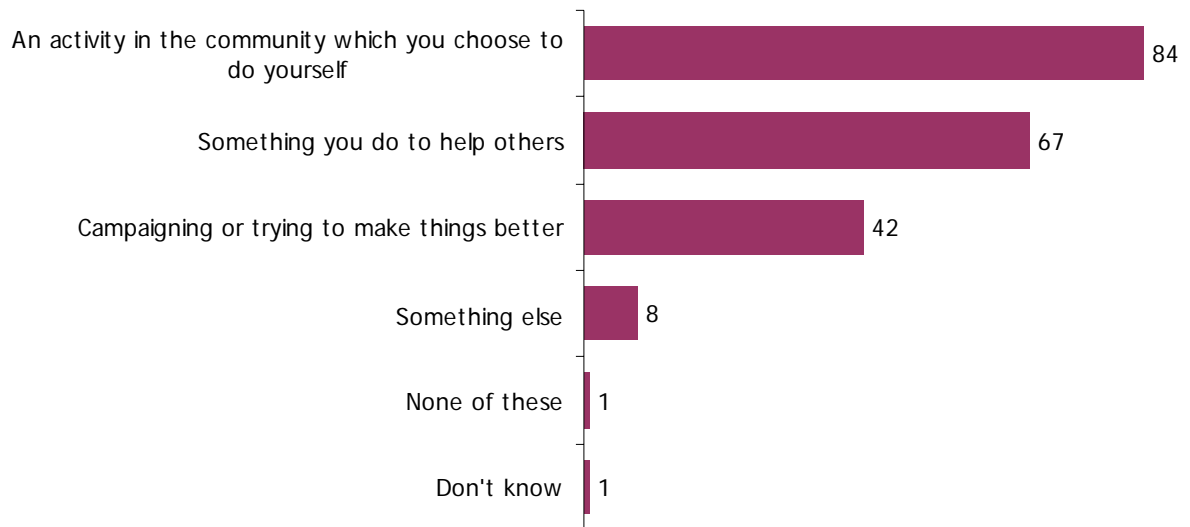
Based on 328 children and young people aged 11–25 on the 'Your Say' panel, surveyed between 20 June and 12 July 2011. Source: Ofsted 'Your Say' panel summary report – volunteering.

4. Evidence gathered through Ofsted's online survey confirmed the wide interpretations which young people applied to volunteering. The most common meaning ascribed by the 328 respondents to the word 'volunteering' was an activity in the community which you choose to do yourself (84%). Two thirds (67%) said that volunteering is something you do to help others, while 42% said that it is campaigning or volunteering to make things better. Respondents who currently volunteer, or who have done so in the past, are more likely than those who have never volunteered to say that volunteering is something you to do to help others (73% compared with 55%).

5. For the purposes of this survey, inspectors took a broad view that young people's volunteering involved spending time, unpaid, doing something which was to the benefit of society. The volunteering activity seen was primarily linked to a small sample of secondary schools, colleges or youth and community settings.

6. The aim of the survey was to consider the following:

   ■ the learning taking place in high-quality volunteering programmes and the extent to which volunteering opportunities have an impact on learners' attainment

   ■ how well volunteering is managed to ensure the best learning outcomes for young people

- how effectively volunteering opportunities involve the full range of learners, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

7. Across the three sectors, the volunteering activity seen by inspectors fell broadly into the following categories:

- volunteering organised by teachers, tutors or youth workers within an institution

- volunteering initiated and led by young people taking place within their school, college or youth and community setting

- packages of activities related to volunteering provided to institutions by external specialist charities

- volunteering which forms an element of an award-bearing course or programme of study.

Developing and promoting volunteering

Volunteering within schools and colleges

8. Inspectors found three approaches to volunteering adopted by the schools and colleges visited:

- volunteering as a course component

- 'in-house' volunteering

- extending the curriculum through working with external partners.

Volunteering as a course component

9. In some mainstream programmes viewed, either practical opportunities for volunteering formed a component of the course or the course included a taught element about the role of volunteering in society. Programmes of this kind seen by inspectors included GCSE citizenship studies, sport and uniformed public services, ethics, the ASDAN community volunteers' qualification, the community sports leadership award, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the International Baccalaureate, and programmes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.[3] The nature of volunteering activities undertaken by students as part of mainstream courses included personal projects on social issues such as homelessness, promoting enterprise, or arranging and supervising sport activities for primary-aged children.

10. Volunteering activities were also often used to provide evidence towards a qualification. In some cases this involved placing volunteering within an 'independence curriculum' or a college's enrichment activities. One school

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[3] ASDAN is a curriculum development organisation and awarding body.

operated an extended project qualification at Key Stage 4, where students pursued an issue or topic of personal interest. In such cases, community volunteering, locally or even internationally, provided evidence towards their award.

11. The advantages of a course-focused approach were: the opportunity to target the needs of specific groups – for example, in one school the ASDAN Community Volunteers Qualification (CVQ) level 2 programme was used as a means of engaging lower-attaining students; and the opportunity to provide a more structured assessment of progress by participating young people. Courses incorporating volunteering also offered learners opportunities for progression, as in the following example.

> The 'Moving On' programme allows progression for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are reaching the end of their three-year supported learning programme at college. Volunteering is an inherent part of the student experience. 'Moving On' aims to provide longer-term engagement within the community. It includes a placement within a charity shop or a carers' centre, or planting flowers and vegetables at a community allotment. 'Moving On' had clear and tangible benefits to learners in areas such as communication and social skills, dealing with the public, handling finances and learning to use public transport independently. (Leicester College)

'In-house' volunteering

12. There were many outstanding examples of where providers had developed 'in-house' volunteering opportunities for learners to take up help and support roles within the school, college or youth setting. The range was rich and at times imaginative, with the best clearly reflecting learners' needs and interests. For vulnerable learners, those who required health care, or who lacked the confidence and experience to venture into community settings, the 'in-house' option often worked well. They successfully fulfilled tasks such as school ambassadors, gardening club volunteers, buddies to new students, receptionists or library support assistants. These activities provided sheltered first-stage opportunities with minimal risk.

13. Examples were also seen where higher-attaining learners were equally challenged by and engaged in 'in-house' volunteering. Activities were often linked to their academic studies, for example students in the Islamic Society supporting teachers by producing worksheets to use in class time or a budding teacher supporting her science teacher by planning and preparing resources. Other learners acted as peer mentors in roles such as music advisers or reading leaders. One young learner supported her visually impaired peer with the practicalities of undertaking a photography course. Academically related peer mentoring of this nature had the dual advantage of supporting the 'mentee' as well as providing a good volunteering opportunity for the mentor.

14. Other volunteer peer mentor schemes focused more on personal support and on overcoming barriers which young people often face in their time at school or college, such as attendance, behaviour, motivation, relationships with teachers or the general organisation of their work.

15. In the examples seen, peer mentoring was purposeful and well managed. Learners had applied for the voluntary role and been trained and supported. Succession planning gave mentees the chance to progress into mentor roles in future years. The following is a good illustration.

> The college had an established peer mentoring scheme which had developed over time. The programme was well managed and all mentors were trained. As participants of the scheme, mentees were also trained so that they accrued the maximum benefit. The young mentors understood and abided well by the various protocols, and were clear where demarcations existed between peer mentoring and professional student guidance and counselling. Word of mouth among students aided recruitment. The students were able to articulate very well the reason why they had decided to opt for support of this nature. They saw the benefits in terms of college work, achievement, socialising, qualifications and retention, but also the personal gains in terms of confidence and an ability to ask for help when needed. There was clearly no stigma associated with seeking personal support. (Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College)

Extending the curriculum through working with external partners

16. To a greater or lesser degree, all of the schools and colleges visited worked with external national charities and agencies either to extend the range of volunteering opportunities on offer or to target specific groups of learners. The external charities involved included 'V', the Prince's Trust, Envision, Changemakers, Giving Nation, the Youth Sports Trust and the British Council.

17. These charities contributed well and in different ways to the volunteering programmes seen. They often helped providers devise bespoke materials, and supported them with teaching resources, additional funding routes and professional guidance linked to their specialism. One school noted how links of this type added value and enabled students to access the funding to take part in cultural exchanges.

18. The positive aspects of their work included:

■ good facilitation skills and a focus on the individual learner

■ communication with young people through email, text and secure social media, which was efficient and quickly established a regular and open relationship between the organisation and individuals

■ a clear focus on learning and behavioural change with minimal drop-out from programmes

- sessions led by young volunteer undergraduates pursuing their own personal, academic and career development
- supporting learners to research and negotiate their own community-based placements
- a curriculum which features topics such as such as social action, citizenship, and local and global issues
- simple but effective learning records.

19. An example of the supportive approach brought by external partners is set out below.

> Envision worked within the school to establish three 'Envision teams'. The initial recruitment used a film presentation to a whole year group followed by interactive sessions such as the 'values continuum' and 'world café'; these resources reflected the organisation's aims and ethos. Learners were free to decide if they wished to join one of the Envision teams. The school also targeted those it considered would benefit from the group work experience. The main thrust of the project was for learners to research and determine for themselves subsequent social action projects. This resulted in three self-selecting teams:
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> - Power rangers – improving gym facilities and access for young people
> - Stereo teens – tackling negative images of young people
> - Free range – an awareness campaign on factory farming.
>
> (Downend School)

20. However, the external charities seen were facing very challenging futures due to reductions in grants and other sources of funding. Despite their positive impact on young people and the appreciation shown by providers of the value of these specialist inputs, few schools and colleges were looking strategically at working with them to integrate volunteering projects longer-term within the curriculum or funding this work to a greater degree.

21. Active and constructive links with community groups, non-governmental organisations, businesses, sports groups and health care providers were pivotal to the success of volunteering programmes across all three sectors visited (schools, colleges, and the voluntary and charitable sector). They opened possible routes to ongoing volunteering for young people, as illustrated in the following examples.

> The college wished to expand its internal volunteering programme into its local community. It enlisted the support of the London Citizens charity, through a local project, Shoreditch Citizens. This aimed to bring community groups together, supporting them in finding solutions to intractable local problems.

The charity's workers trained school staff in some of the skills needed, especially in community organising. The school and charity staff then selected the students to be involved. These students were underachieving but had the potential for talented leadership. Staff trained the students in communication and listening skills; the students then went out to find out their peers' views about key issues affecting them. These included the effects of poor housing, the anticipated impact of the loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance, and the local job situation.

The students then linked their school with 25 other local community organisations. At a democratic assembly attended by 500 people, these young people, who had never played such a public role before, presented their views and listened to those of others. This led to a shared set of community objectives. One of the immediate outcomes was that a local housing association agreed to meet with representatives of the assembly and then promised to address problems with damp in its managed homes. (Shoreditch Citizens and Bethnal Green Technology College)

Winsford Community Action Project (Wincap) involved stakeholders, including volunteers and participants, in a two-day project to plan the restructure and redesign of its premises. Thirty-two volunteers, participants and staff attended a conference on how best to reconfigure Wincap's premises and design the accommodation to meet the needs of a first-rate community centre. In order to include the views of all age groups, the delegates' ages ranged from 11 years to over-60s. The conference included talks from an established designer and an architect. The whole group then visited two existing and contrasting, community centres to gain ideas and inspiration. On their return, the stakeholders split into groups according to their particular interest or age and set about designing the interior spaces and garden area. They had to consider materials, colours, furnishings, lay-out and costs. The overall budget was approaching £1 million. Each group produced a three-dimensional model of their design. Each design was discussed, constructively and critically, by the group and a preferred design was established.
(Winsford Community Action Project)

22. The range of effective local partnerships seen by inspectors which provided routes to volunteering included:

■ London Borough Olympic 'legacy champions', bringing older and younger people together to develop a garden at a local community centre with the intention of growing local produce

■ businesses supporting various awards and student recognition schemes

■ volunteering networks promoting and coordinating larger-scale volunteering across an area

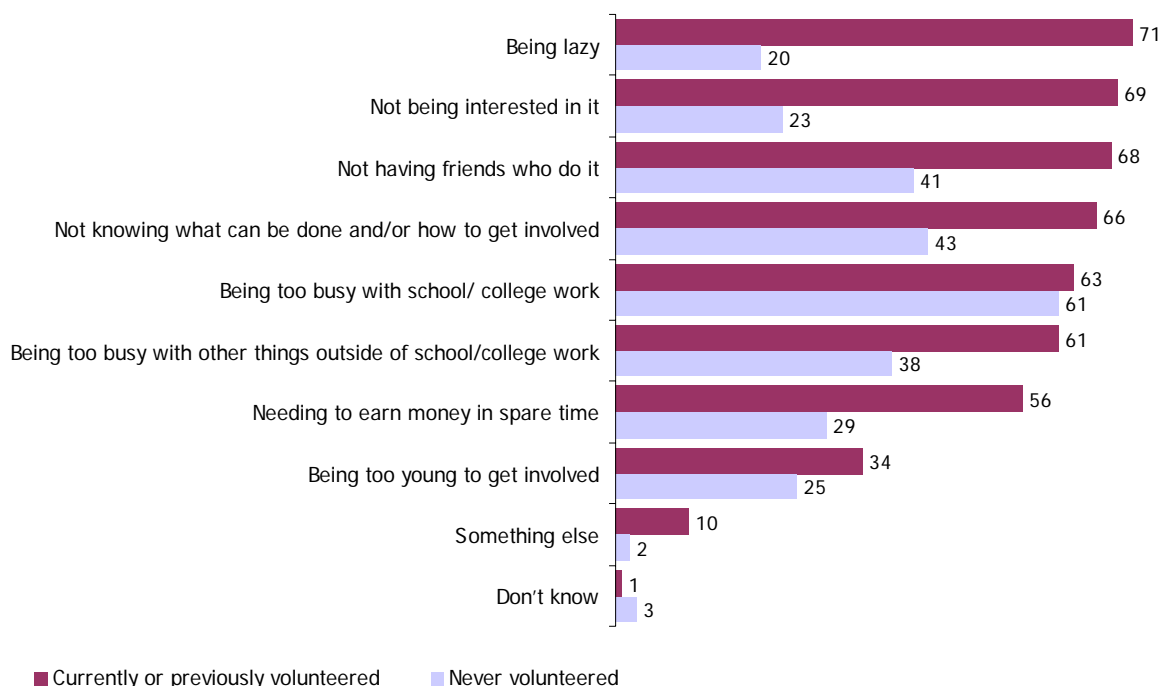■ sports clubs providing volunteering placements for young people

- media students acting independently to develop valuable business skills through networking with charities and undertaking commissions on their behalf

- a college forming corporate and strategic partnerships with the city hospital, a first division football club and large employers

- partnership programmes enabling progression and longer-term opportunities based in the community for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are reaching the end of their period at college

- employer engagement with local farmers seeking the help of students to design and build educational toys and oversee their use with the children of parents visiting the farmers' market.

23. Too few providers systematically reviewed and updated their portfolio of community contacts. On occasion, this led to an over-reliance on longstanding links for volunteering placements and opportunities were missed to add more variety to the programme.

Engaging the more vulnerable: strategies for inclusion

Barriers to participation

24. Ofsted's online survey of the views of young people found that almost three quarters (71%) of young people who responded and who volunteer, or have done so in the past, consider that the reason others do not volunteer is laziness. But young people who had not volunteered themselves were much less likely to hold this view; only one in five (20%) said that laziness was the main barrier that stopped people volunteering. The two most common reasons they gave to explain why people did not volunteer were: being too busy, either with school or college work (61%) or other things outside school or college (38%); and because they did not have the right contacts. Forty-three per cent said that not knowing what can be done and/or how to get involved was a barrier. Forty-one per cent of respondents said a barrier was not having friends who were involved in volunteering. A few of the written responses provided suggested that volunteering was not considered cool and that this could be a barrier for young people.

Figure 3: Barriers to volunteering: which of the following things might prevent you from volunteering (percentage of respondents)?

Barrier	Currently or previously volunteered	Never volunteered
Being lazy	71	20
Not being interested in it	69	23
Not having friends who do it	68	41
Not knowing what can be done and/or how to get involved	66	43
Being too busy with school/ college work	63	61
Being too busy with other things outside of school/college work	61	38
Needing to earn money in spare time	56	29
Being too young to get involved	34	25
Something else	10	2
Don't know	1	3

■ Currently or previously volunteered ■ Never volunteered

Based on 234 children and young people aged 11–25 on the 'Your Say' panel who currently or previously volunteer(ed), surveyed between 20 June and 12 July 2011; and 94 children and young people aged 11–25 on the 'Your Say' panel who have never volunteered, surveyed between 20 June and 12 July 2011. Source: Ofsted 'Your Say' panel summary report – volunteering.

25. The survey also reinforced the importance of immediate family: not only does having a close family member who volunteers mean young people are more likely to volunteer themselves, but volunteering in the family means young people are more likely to say they expect to continue to volunteer in the future (87% compared to 53% without an immediate family member who volunteers).

26. When inspectors conducted focus groups with learners involved in targeted youth provision, they revealed similar views about disincentives to volunteering. Participants agreed that parental lack of interest was a barrier. With regard to other pressures, they also said that difficulties in securing paid employment made them resentful when they were then expected to 'do something for nothing'. Young people in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance cited its pending removal as an additional source of frustration. They stated that they did not feel favourable to the notion of 'giving something back'. Unsurprisingly, those who were relatively new to the country, either through migration or seeking asylum, were less aware than others of the part played by volunteering in British culture. The young people noted that 'packaging' volunteering in an attractive and appealing way was important.

27. When inspectors visited a community school in East London which serves an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage, the expectations of the young volunteers were high. For those who might have exhibited behavioural problems or been excluded, taking real responsibility through volunteering helped build their self-esteem and resilience, and was often seen as the key way to reduce or resolve their problems.

Targeting provision and addressing barriers

28. Inspectors sought evidence on how effectively providers extended volunteering opportunities to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. Five of the youth and community organisations visited explicitly targeted vulnerable learners. Approaches adopted by schools and colleges in targeting vulnerable or disadvantaged young people were necessarily different. Few sought to target directly, but cast a wide net in terms of the range and nature of volunteering options available, on the premise that this would open doors to all students.

29. Among those youth organisations that specifically targeted work with more vulnerable young people, practitioners were alert to individual needs and circumstances. They built strong and trusting relationships with young people and offered practical support, such as accompanying them to meet with specialist support agencies. An illustration of well-planned but flexible practice follows.

> Youth workers from the YMCA centre encouraged a homeless 16–year-old to attend the centre regularly, introducing some structure to the young person's week. The approach was to provide the young person with support, guidance and practical help with his problems. This progressed, in a planned and personalised way, to him securing accommodation, gaining qualifications in English and mathematics, and becoming involved in a volunteer project staging live music sessions for other young people. Over time the young person developed the self-assurance to work well in groups and tackle challenges, such as money management, in a step-by-step manner. He began to attend the 'homeless voices' group, a campaigning and support group for homeless young people, and successfully secured a college place and independent accommodation. The support from workers spanned a five-year period. (Bournemouth YMCA)

30. It was often individual practitioners who provided the impetus in generating new volunteering opportunities. Their enthusiasm, energy and passion for a subject or specific area of interest were often taken up by volunteers. These practitioners promoted volunteering very well, led by example and acted as very effective role models for young people.

31. A number of the young people interviewed in the targeted provision had discovered for themselves that volunteering was a means of building their competiveness in seeking employment, or improving their curriculum vitae, as one young person said.

'I started volunteering three years ago. At the beginning I just got involved because I wasn't doing anything else. But as time went on I started to see a future out of it. I thought, "I might as well." I actually work now but volunteering is something I continue to do. I do football coaching and workshops as I got my youth work qualification. I talk to kids in schools. I volunteer because I want to get my coaching badges.' (StreetGames)

32. There were excellent examples of organisational responses to the challenge of encouraging and retaining vulnerable young people in volunteering activity. Responsive providers, across all three sectors, created pathways for participants, including taking on positions of responsibility at sports events and gaining event stewarding qualifications, performing and recording music or becoming trained youth workers. These young people often developed greater social awareness and a sense of responsibility by, for example, becoming knowledgeable and passionate campaigners on social issues such as homelessness and disability. Once involved in programmes, they often began to see the wider benefits of volunteering and helping others, and in many instances developed a fresh attitude to volunteering.

33. The schools visited often had effective strategies to ensure all students had access to volunteering. In particular, they ensured that the costs of volunteering did not prevent any young person from taking part, regardless of their circumstances. They often used their own resources to ensure that all those who wished to volunteer could do so. Impressive examples were seen of schools supporting students from more disadvantaged backgrounds in raising considerable amounts of money to join valuable and, in the words of students, 'life-changing' international trips.

34. All of the schools and colleges visited, to a greater or lesser degree, attuned their curricular and extra-curricular activities to the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable students. In one school, the ASDAN Community Volunteers Qualification level 2 programme was used as a means of attracting those with a relatively lower academic ability. It enabled students to use the learning and experience they gained from volunteering and community action as a means of gathering credits towards their award.

35. The same school worked with the Combined Cadet Force as a means of providing its more disaffected students with a structured, challenging, exciting and purposeful activity which they could join. Not only were learners required to show initiative and high levels of responsibility as cadets, but they had to demonstrate a record of good behaviour and attendance to volunteer in the first instance. Some had to improve their attendance before they were allowed to join and all had to agree to abide by military rules. Parental and student contracts were signed. Both the ASDAN programme and cadet activities required high levels of maturity for students to be allowed to take part and to retain their places.

36. In one youth organisation visited, the focus of the charity work was on enabling vulnerable young people to build confidence, social skills and self-esteem through musical learning and education. Even with the obvious benefits to individuals, the organisation still had to address practical barriers such as lack of parental engagement, and lack of access to financial support and musical equipment, while providing a personalised, flexible approach to enable less confident young people to engage in a way appropriate to them. For example, a support worker might attend the first session alongside a young person and only withdraw when she or he became more confident. Participants less confident about performing might be engaged in event organisation or sound technician work, or join the back-stage production team. The result of this investment was that most of the young people developed a strong affinity for the charity, and some went on to become volunteers themselves.

Programme design and delivery

Leadership

37. Where volunteering was managed most effectively, inspectors found clear and confident senior leaders who asserted that dedicating curriculum time to volunteering helped raise academic standards, improved the quality of learners' experience, formed a key aspect of learners' personal development and enabled them to demonstrate the institution's priorities, expectations and values within the community. The most refined and imaginative programmes delivered on these priorities through organic development, reflecting ideas from staff and learners.

38. Inspectors identified four key operational challenges which determined whether volunteering opportunities would deliver benefits or not:

   ■ ensuring coordinators and participants had the necessary skills to make the most of volunteering

   ■ identifying and removing barriers to participation

   ■ managing risk effectively so that young people were safe without being unhelpfully restricted in what they could do

   ■ achieving a suitable balance between the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing accreditation as a result of volunteering.

39. Examples of management processes which supported the promotion and development of volunteering included:

   ■ a curriculum which incorporated, legitimised and enabled volunteering, and enabled young people to gain a greater understanding of social issues

   ■ arrangements which ensured that young people could influence volunteering programmes to reflect their personal interests and concerns

   ■ managers appointing a staff 'champion' for volunteering

- regular departmental arrangements to review the impact of volunteering on learners

- tutorial and pastoral activity which supported the engagement of learners in volunteering, underpinned by explicit and well-designed guidance on volunteering

- a database which matched possible volunteering placements with learners' interests

- promotion of volunteering at college induction events

- arrangements to share best practice internally and celebrate success

- constructive relations with community groups which gave learners access to new volunteering opportunities

- working to ensure the sustainability of effective projects.

40. Where many of these conditions prevailed, learners expressed positive and appreciative views about their experiences.

> 'School creates the right conditions for volunteering, supports you well and gives you the confidence you can succeed.'

> 'There is lots of support and encouragement here for volunteering; you really feel you are making a difference.'

> 'You get respect from teachers for volunteering; they trust you more and think you are responsible.'

> 'School listens and makes changes; if teachers are willing to listen to you, it is worth getting involved as you know they will take action.'

Structuring learning

41. Where there was good planning, the schools and colleges visited had succeeded in bringing a level of structure and coherence to an essentially informal programme of volunteering activities. Some located volunteering within an 'independence curriculum' or college enrichment activities. One school operated an individualised extended project qualification at Key Stage 4, where students pursued an issue or topic of personal interest and where community volunteering, locally or even internationally, provided evidence towards their award.

42. In another instance, many of the outcomes of the 'creativity, action, service' (CAS) element of the International Baccalaureate were achieved in part through volunteering activities: an awareness of personal strengths, undertaking new challenges, planning and initiating, working collaboratively, perseverance and commitment, and global engagement. The model has been adapted in the development of a sixth form baccalaureate (SFBac), as illustrated in the following example from a sixth form college.

> The sixth form baccalaureate provides a structure and clear rationale for volunteering and civic engagement as a distinguishable element of the curriculum. The award recognises the full extent of a student's learning, including involvement in volunteering and charity work in the community. The college's comprehensive enrichment programme provides a reservoir of volunteering opportunities for students. Enrichment and volunteering are discussed and determined at enrolment, they are not an 'add on'. The SFBac does not seek to add more commitments, but acknowledges and includes work students are already undertaking. (Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College)

43. The youth organisations that were seen often used similar structured planning approaches to volunteering, which helped young people make sense of and maximise the opportunities on offer. However, in these organisations, unlike mainstream schools and colleges, participation in projects of this nature was voluntary. The fact that young people chose to participate in their own time helped ensure a high level of personal involvement in how programmes were designed. While the examples which follow differ considerably, each illustrates the value of a structured approach that enjoys participants' consent and commitment.

> In the Young Volunteer project there was a full-time opportunity where young people committed to approximately 30 hours a week with their expenses being met. Examples of their volunteering opportunities included: building a website, planning and delivering a summer activity programme, setting up and running a healthy living programme, and helping with recruitment of volunteers. All volunteers received an induction into volunteering which included health and safety, risk assessments, details about the organisation and their role. The high expectations and structure of the voluntary programme and the requirements upon participants were both challenging and beneficial. (StreetGames)

> The Truth about Youth project aimed to promote positive and realistic views of young people within society and in particular the media. The work of the group and the process underlying the project enabled members of the group to develop skills and confidence in specific areas. Its structure combined personalisation, with each member working on individual tasks such as a press release or travel arrangements, along with notable group activities such as a visit to Downing Street to meet ministers. Inclusive planning of this nature ensured that each young person contributed to the project's overall success. (Truth about Youth)

44. There was an element of risk evident within some of the more progressive volunteering activities, for example, external community placements, campaigning, political action, adventurous fundraising, international travel and activities chosen by young people of their own volition. Approaches of this nature often generated good learning opportunities, illustrated in the following examples.

> Students chose to engage independently in campaigning for change at local and national events on issues such as benefits and attitudes to disability. They learned much about related social and political matters. The significant risks to students were very well managed and overseen by college staff, who demonstrated: good skills and understanding of the safety nets required; very good knowledge of individual students and their specific needs; and awareness of the associated risks and the support required for students to succeed. (Hereward College)

> A Year 9 student was appointed to take responsibility for the finances of the school Summer Charity Fayre. This involved her attending most of the planning meetings, designing a spreadsheet which accounted for all of the internal and external stalls, and overseeing approximately 40 stalls to ensure all had a suitable float and their regular money collections were accounted for. She proudly reported that after she had collected the float loans, the school charity made just under £5,000. (Feversham College)

45. The value to young people of being actively and independently involved in selecting their own volunteering placements was also significant. A good example was a Prince's Trust team programme in which learners had, over a four-week period, researched projects in their local area, liaised with the host organisation selected, fundraised and planned an actual volunteering project. Young people interviewed were animated about their experience and able to describe how their initial levels of anxiety and uncertainty were allayed, so that they gained a fulfilling and worthwhile volunteering experience. They stated that this approach laid the foundations for further volunteering.

46. In the less effective provision, providers had not identified for themselves where simple improvements could be made to maximise learning for young people. Examples included young people not being sufficiently stretched or an inflexibility of staff within host organisations in supporting young volunteers. Occasionally, providers drew volunteering opportunities from a longstanding and repetitive pattern of external placements which were unadventurous and seldom changed from year to year. Young people on these programmes cited examples such as volunteering in a health care setting and doing no more than selling coffee, raising funds through a sponsored event without any input as to the beneficiary, or emptying bags at a charity shop. While they were clear that some involvement in the more mundane tasks was to be expected, they often came away from the activity uninspired or no better informed.

47. At one scheme designed to test out and gain experience for vocations such as teaching or childcare, volunteers learned how to organise activities, take some responsibility and communicate with clients. However, interactions between volunteers and clients were limited and somewhat superficial because the volunteers did not have the necessary insight to develop the discussions, questions or activities. They were neither trained for this nor provided with much guidance or feedback about it.

48. Inspectors observed lessons and activities led by teachers, tutors or youth workers. The most effective practitioners had generally been trained in areas such as student-led decision-making, group work, project planning, sourcing up-to-date resources and community networking. They were very adept at ensuring that learners they worked with were able to influence the volunteering opportunities with which they subsequently became involved, often to good effect. The following example illustrates this.

> A flexible approach by both the teacher and students in an FE college changed a potentially negative experience into one that was very positive. Students studying health and social care have volunteering activities built into their qualification in order to complete the unit on community action. Students undertook research individually to identify two community groups in their area. They then had to arrange to visit the groups to explore their benefits both to the community and to those volunteering at the community groups. The health and social care students completed their research effectively but were reluctant to visit the community groups. Discussion with their teacher identified that the reason for this was a lack of confidence. Jointly with their teacher they decided on an alternative route to meeting the requirements of the qualification. The students decided to sponsor the British Heart Foundation charity. All students had a job role such as marketing or obtaining donated prizes for the raffle. In total the events raised £193 and students presented the British Heart Foundation with a cheque at a formal event.
>
> Students were unaware of how much they had learnt from the activities until they formally evaluated them with their teacher. Their teacher observed how students united as a group as a result of the experience. They demonstrated more self-confidence, more maturity and willingness to take responsibility for their roles. Students said they had learnt how to approach and talk to people they didn't know, they had learnt how to organise the activities effectively and they had learnt from their mistakes. They would be happy to visit community groups in future and were keen to participate in voluntary activities. (North East Worcestershire College)

49. The converse was also the case, especially in the schools visited, with examples of teachers promoting ideas for learners based on the teacher's personal preference or on what had been done before. Instances were also seen of teachers or tutors spoon-feeding students with ideas rather than getting them to think creatively.

50. The responsiveness of staff within the volunteer placement organisations seen was pivotal to young people's enjoyment and the potential to learn from the experience. In one instance, in a day centre for the elderly, it became evident that while the residents were very receptive to young volunteers, the staff considered them an imposition, upsetting the working pattern of the unit. The frostiness and unwelcoming attitude displayed proved to be such an obstacle that the project ceased.

Training to fulfil volunteer roles

51. All of the providers visited invested time and resources in training learners for certain volunteering roles. The types of roles which were most likely to have training attached were those with responsibility towards others, such as mentoring, or in relation to management and governance. Providers recognised the need for learners to have skills, confidence and credibility in their roles. There were many examples seen of well-conceived and well-delivered training packages which instilled good habits among volunteers.

52. In one college, all student governors, student union elected officers and learner course representatives were trained together in how to undertake their roles. They attended team training in preparation for selection interviews for tutors, including for the college principal. In other instances training from school PE staff for young volunteer sports leaders gave students the confidence and skill to manage a group of primary school children with some presence and style.

53. Similarly, in providers where peer mentors were in place, most had been well trained. The content covered recording meetings and incidents, confidentiality and child protection. In a few instances, training introduced young people to higher-level practices such as supervision and techniques such as 'solution focused' approaches. It provided new and extended learning experiences for participants. The following example illustrates this.

> Before being allocated to placements, all young people attend a structured initial training programme, covering safeguarding, health and safety, and role-specific training, for example in mentoring other young people in their English and maths. The training drew on role play and required participants to devise learning materials. It required some young volunteers to demonstrate 'adult' responsibilities prior to undertaking their volunteering placements. (Voluntary Action with Kent)

54. Training, as well as an inducement for young people to volunteer, was often offered at little or no cost to young people themselves. This frequently resulted from providers themselves securing additional resources for training, for example through national sports governing bodies or local authorities.

The impact of volunteering on young people's achievement

55. Ninety-two per cent of the young people questioned in Ofsted's online survey thought that volunteering was worthwhile. Asked what they believed was the most important thing that people gained from volunteering, the most common answer (40%) was a good feeling and/or the knowledge of having helped. The next three most common answers were linked by more pragmatic considerations related to employment: experience (14%); new skills (11%); and 'looks good on a CV' (10%). The next three were skills related to personal development: being more confident (8%); sense of achievement (7%); and being better with people (6%). The benefit identified least often was gaining an award or certificate, though this was often the focus for providers aiming to demonstrate the value of volunteering activity.

Figure 4: Benefits of volunteering: which of these things is the single most important one that people gain from volunteering (percentage of respondents)?
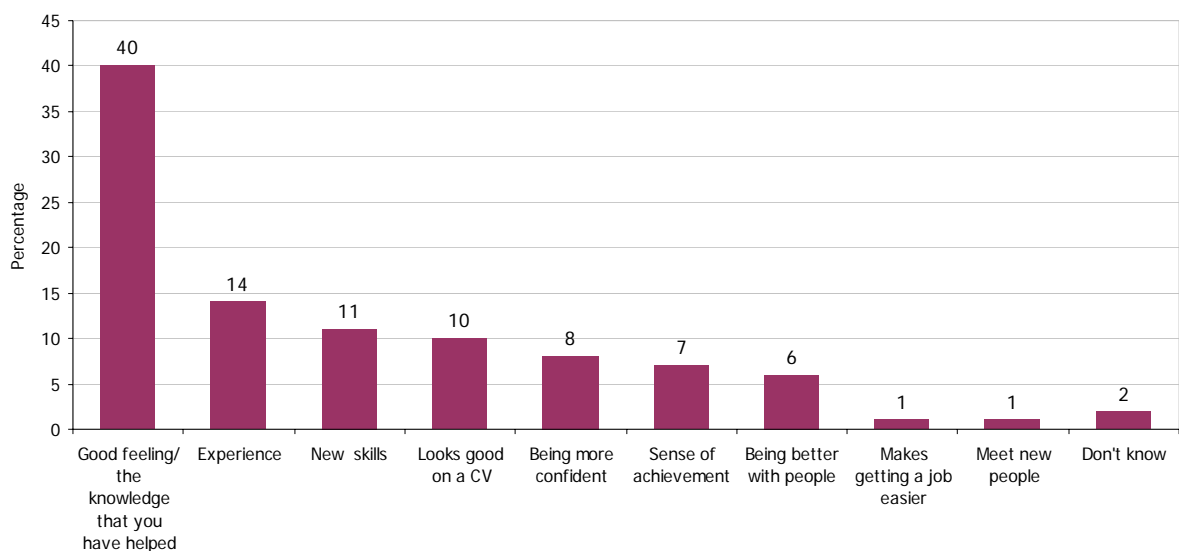
Based on 328 children and young people aged 11–25 on the 'Your Say' panel, surveyed between 20 June and 12 July 2011. Source: Ofsted 'Your Say' panel summary report – volunteering.

56. Similar views were expressed by the young people interviewed as part of this survey. The great majority thought that volunteering had helped them to develop important life skills and attributes such as advocacy, team working, motivation and resilience. Others reflected on their developing sense of responsibility and service to others. Improving employment prospects was a key feature for some, while for others volunteering had helped to develop their political awareness. Authenticating these claims proved more challenging but testimonies were strong.

57. When asked about the potential for learning and achievement through volunteering, the young people most often cited the development of their social skills and confidence. This was most evident among the more vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

58. Volunteering gave young people the skills and confidence to undertake community activities which previously they might not have considered as relevant, exposed them to new and often challenging situations, developed their capacity to research a subject, enabled them to travel, provided a context to apply their course to real-life situations, and opened their eyes to the work of organisations in the local community.

59. Providers cited good evidence of students' social and communication skills being considerably enhanced through volunteering, even for those who find communication difficult due to profound disability. One teacher explained that voluntary work had built the confidence and transformed the social and communication skills of a severely autistic child who took on the responsibility for the welfare of the chickens on the school's mini-farm during term-time and the holidays.

60. In response to Ofsted's online survey, of those who already volunteer, 48% stated that they would continue to do so and 42% thought they might. Many of the young people interviewed were keen to continue with volunteering activities which they perceived to have mutual benefits for themselves and those they were helping.

61. Most young people saw volunteering as a means of enhancing their future employment prospects, regardless of their background. Evidence for this claim was firm. Sixth formers spoken to pointed out the importance to them of having a worthwhile experience on their CV to discuss at their university interview. Other learners could point out how volunteering had helped them decide on future study or given them insights into the world of work. A student taking a community volunteering qualification explained how volunteering in the care sector helped her understand the skills and qualifications required to work with the elderly and in other associated careers such as podiatrist or paramedic. Another young person in the Combined Cadet Force felt he now understood well what is required of a soldier in the Army. Examples where volunteering had an impact on learners' future employment prospects are given below.

> Those involved in a youth music project learned about music-making, but also about key aspects of the industry such as events management, publicity, marketing, and sound and lighting technology, enabling significant numbers to move into paid work in music-related settings. (Sound it Out)
>
> A group on the Vtalent programme who had been disengaged from education or were not in employment found that volunteering, coupled with good personal support, had helped lead to greater stability in their

> personal life. They had developed clear aspirations for future employment and were taking practical steps to achieve their goals. (Bristol City College)

62. Many volunteers spoke of how their involvement had inspired them to become involved in volunteering outside of school in various charity activities, for example, leading sports, drama or church activities, or assisting with youth groups such as Brownies or Scouts.

63. Although benefits such as developing social and workplace skills are well understood by young people, it was the opportunity to 'give something back' or connect directly with their community that was a strong motivator for many.

> The benefits of opportunities to behave altruistically were keenly felt among a group in a specialist college for students with learning disabilities and difficulties. They appreciated that having been the recipient of help, it felt good to be able to 'give something back'. Their comments included: 'it's about proving yourself'; 'it gives you the motivation to do as much as able-bodied people'; 'it stops you from being isolated from the community'; 'you want people to know that you have skills just like anyone else and you can make a difference too'. (Hereward College)

64. In other examples, students in a Muslim girls' school referred to their faith and the fact that serving others without reward was one of the five pillars of Islam. Many expressed a desire to carry on volunteering after they had left school because 'it is something you should do out of the goodness of your heart, it is good for other people and yourself'. In another instance a volunteering placement at a cultural centre led to the student providing, voluntarily, a translation service for elderly clients who do not speak English.

65. In a Year 10 citizenship class, students were learning about homelessness. They undertook research and wrote to their MP highlighting the problem locally.

> On researching the issue during the harsh winter of 2010 two students decided the problem was such that they wanted to take further action to help. When researching the issue the students took it upon themselves to visit a homeless drop-in centre and talk to homeless people and charity workers. 'This wasn't part of the exam but our own passion that we wanted to take forward.' The pair plan to set up their own charity when they leave school but are currently involving the school further by building up a membership on their website, producing a video which is played on the school plasma screen and which has been used by teachers in tutor time, and encouraging students to donate cans of food to be distributed to the homeless by the Salvation Army and a local church. (Feversham College)

66. Volunteering activities viewed by inspectors often helped young people develop their moral, social and wider cultural awareness. Some broadened their

understanding of diversity by mixing with people they would not normally come into contact with. A group working in a residential care home for elderly people learned that the residents did not hold the stereotyped view of young people they had expected. In fact, it had been their view of the elderly people that had been stereotypical.

67. Personal testimonies logged by young volunteers provided telling self-reported evidence of the impact of their involvement.

> 'Outside of college I have been helping at a football club that a family member attends. I go along frequently to help with training and often to matches, preparing the boys for the match. This is a very good way of keeping in touch with sport, which I very much enjoy, but also it keeps my emotions in order as I have to be patient. I chose to go along to the club as a family member suffers with ADHD. He is very passionate about the sport and wanted to be able to play, sometimes however he can let his emotions get the better of him; therefore I am able to see the signs and help him to calm down if need be. I have also gained a special bond with him through doing this as a player. He often gets complementary tickets for a big match at the stadium. When he receives these tickets I often find that he asks me to take him. This gives me great pride to know that he thinks of me because I help with something he loves and so he shares something back with me.'

68. The knowledge and understanding gained through volunteering took many forms, depending on the type of activity. For some, it gave them a chance to develop more awareness of global issues, as illustrated in the following example.

> A group who visited East Africa were effusive in describing how much they had learned about life in Kenya as well as wider environmental, global, political and social issues. The visit aided their formal education considerably. They explained how they had learned about the effects of deforestation and the lack of conservation education in schools; the impact of the lack of resources including building materials and toys for the children; the history of the Mau Mau and its links to British rule; and the role of women and sexual politics in the region. (Walker School)

Assessing participants' progress

69. Evidence presented by providers about the impact of volunteering was essentially qualitative in nature. Much was persuasive and supported by numerous testimonials and endorsements by the young people and practitioners interviewed. Typically, the challenge faced by providers in assessing progress was that volunteering activities were seldom 'stand-alone' but an integral part of an associated programme. Two providers had refined their data collection so that it encompassed volunteering, but in respect of participation rather than the learning that took place.

70. Programmes generally did not include sufficient focus on learning outcomes and drew instead on general, high-level and broad success descriptors. Providers were, nevertheless, aware of this shortcoming and the need to focus more closely on recording benefits to participants. One college, for example, asserted that an analysis of data for some of the students who volunteered indicated that they enjoyed better success rates than the overall cohort; others cited improved retention and attendance rates. The data however were not sufficiently robust.

71. No one assessment approach accommodated the variety of volunteering scenarios that existed in the sample. In the better examples, however, volunteers were assessed at the start of the project through base-line testing of skills such as confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, using a commercial package, then the same test was applied at the end of project. The provider collected witness statements, observations and comments from agencies and professionals working with the young people and also checked longer-term measures such as retention in education and training.

72. Case studies were well used by eight of the providers to record the journeys made by those involved in volunteering. In a few instances these then informed end-of-project evaluations. Used alone, however, they often fell short in terms of detail or lacked validation.

73. Other examples seen of approaches to assessment were wide, varied and helped inform students' progress to differing degrees. They included:

- students achieving success on accredited schemes and courses which include a volunteering element

- informal recording and mentoring by form tutors who hold the overview of students' personal development

- encouraging voluntary and charitable organisations which provide placements to monitor a learner's progress and achievement

- end-of-year programme reports produced by practitioners or tutors

- periodic questionnaires about students' future aspirations following a volunteering programme

- formal and frequent discussions between volunteers and team leaders, in which the volunteer evaluates their experiences

- personal photographic albums where young people record and reflect on their experiences.

74. The following example illustrates an effective approach to assessment.

> The creativity, action, service (CAS) component of the International Baccalaureate provides a recording system which students relate well to and which calls for a wide range of evidence. It is an online log of CAS activities, but the process also allows students to reflect on their learning, which is inherently more valuable than logging only hours. It may include articles read, photos and testimonials.
>
> Among the examples seen, a student involved in teaching swimming on a voluntary basis made insightful observations about adapting her teaching techniques to reflect the needs of her learners, gaining a national qualification after having worked over a number of months to do so. Another reflected on his voluntary work in a hospital in Tanzania, considering the development of his communication skills and medical knowledge, international health comparisons, and attitudes to healthcare and nutrition. Both evaluative records demonstrated a large amount of focused self-review by students. (Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College)

Accreditation

75. Accreditation for voluntary action takes many forms and, in the programmes visited, was variously appreciated by learners. Often the schools and colleges accredited volunteering as a component of mainstream award-bearing courses or as part of a volunteering programme provided by an external national charity such as the V Impact Award. In other instances, young people's efforts were regularly recognised through in-house reward schemes.

76. In many cases the providers valued accreditation more highly than the learners, who seldom cited it as a particularly important motivating factor. The learners did, however, often express concern that accreditation had the potential to undermine learners' altruistic motivation to 'make a difference'. There was therefore a delicate balance to be struck which providers, to varying degrees, struggled with. The greater prominence and value a provider chose to give to volunteering, the less important accreditation was felt to be. However, there was universal acceptance among learners and practitioners that gaining nationally recognised qualifications improves employment prospects.

77. There were instances where the pursuit of accreditation created significant logistical problems for providers and was not considered to be 'worth the trouble'. Workers within a youth and community provider described well the hazards and pitfalls of imposing accreditation on young people who often undertook and relished structured volunteering as an alternative route to returning to education at school or college.

78. In other youth and community settings, young volunteers achieved accreditation in subjects such as emergency first aid, health and safety, food hygiene, safeguarding children and young people, sign language, equality and diversity, and counselling. These worked well when they were provided as options for young people, and where socialising and meeting friends within the youth club or project were equally valued activities.

79. Unlike schools and colleges, many youth and community organisations had funding constraints that necessitated a record of accredited outcomes as a primary measure of success. An example of accreditation being applied to good effect follows.

> Vtalent provides structured placements in areas such as nursery education, play, youth work and supported learning. It leads to a minimum of a level 2 qualification and the offer of a personal development grant for the young volunteers on completion of the programme. Vtalent students assist with the college tutorial programme by devising and delivering sessions on substance abuse and sex and relationships to other students.
>
> When devising materials for the sessions, the students produced convincing and creative videos of scenarios to prompt discussion around the topics. The sessions were highly engaging and feedback from students attending very positive. The Vtalent students valued mixing with a diverse range of people, being taught how to train others and how best to manage the young people they were supporting. They are now more ambitious and positive about their futures. Their confidence and ease when interacting with a large audience during tutorial training sessions were readily apparent. (Bristol City College)

80. The practical difficulties faced in relation to accreditation and volunteering included time-consuming paperwork, the potential for the process to detract from enjoyment, the lack of staff with experience of assessing at required levels, and providers misjudging the depth of work required to achieve an award.

81. Across all three types of provider, achievement was often recognised through their own awards and certificates, and announced in assemblies or newsletters. Special awards for 'outstanding citizenship' were common and enabled the more vulnerable and disadvantaged learners to demonstrate success. One provider sought to celebrate achievement through music concerts and gigs where learners' performances spoke for themselves.

Safeguarding

82. Generally, the providers visited took a well-considered and pragmatic approach to ensuring safe practice. They showed forethought and early consideration of the potential safeguarding risks involved. Variously, they took steps to mitigate risk by:

- scoping and risk assessing volunteering opportunities

- taking up references prior to volunteering placements taking place

- carefully considering what constitutes 'unsupervised activity' in relation to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks

- having clarity about the role that volunteers will play in delivering activities and services through the job descriptions or volunteer agreements

- inducting volunteers thoroughly into their roles

- giving training that helps volunteers understand safe practices and child protection protocols – for example how they might respond to signs of abuse or a disclosure, and how to deal with issues of confidentiality

- appointing a learner as a safeguarding champion charged with alerting staff to any concerns about, for example, cyber bullying

- accompanying vulnerable young people on volunteering activities.

83. The providers visited reported an inherent tension between implementing safeguarding measures and allowing young people easy access to volunteering opportunities. In the best instances, CRB checks were appropriately applied, for example, where volunteering activities placed learners at higher risk, such as in residential settings or where they were clearly unsupervised. At times issues over how and by whom the administrative costs for CRB checks were met acted as a barrier to placing young people. Where more than one provider was involved in placing and hosting volunteers, there was sometimes uncertainty as to whose responsibility it was to undertake safeguarding checks.

84. Effective interagency collaboration was key to good learner-centred safeguarding. An example seen by inspectors included a school volunteer placement at a club for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities failing to come to fruition because managers on both sides asserted that the liability for safeguarding checks lay with the other party. What was missing in resolving the issue was a sensible and cooperative conversation and shared solution between managers.

85. The need for cooperation of this nature is further amplified given that a minority of young people visited by inspectors had a history of petty crime or anti-social behaviour. They expressed caution about volunteering in the belief that their histories would be used against them. In the most thoughtful practice, organisations were mindful of these factors and had collaborative measures in place to deal with them.

Notes

Over the period of the survey, April to July 2011, inspectors visited six secondary schools, five colleges of general further education, one sixth form college, and a college for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They also visited six youth and community organisations located within the voluntary and charitable sector. School and college visits were chosen on the basis of their Ofsted inspection reports, which had indicated strengths in aspects of volunteering and that the institutions had extensive programmes in place. Visits to youth and community settings arose out of discussions with organisations and from initial investigations by inspectors into the volunteering work they carry out. These organisations were primarily working with vulnerable young people. Meetings were also held with two national youth charities.

Survey visits lasted up to one day and enabled inspectors to meet with learners, practitioners and stakeholders, visit various volunteering activities and view documentation. The issues explored included the approaches being taken by the institution towards volunteering; managing learning; accreditation; and young people's learning and achievement as a result of volunteering. School- or college-based sessions run by three external charities were viewed and practitioners and managers interviewed.

The survey was supported by evidence from the Learner Panel (see page 4n). Ofsted also received online feedback from a cross-section of 328 members of its children's and young people's panel about their experiences and views of volunteering. Further, Ofsted's public involvement team conducted three focus groups with learners. This evidence supplemented that gathered first hand by inspectors.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Citizenship established? Citizenship in schools 2006/09 (090159), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090159.

Progression post 16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (100232), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100232.

Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why (090236), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090236

Supporting young people: an evaluation of recent reforms to youth support services in 11 local areas (090226), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090226.

Other publications

An anatomy of youth, Demos, 2010;
www.demos.co.uk/publications/ananatomyofyouth.

Engaging practice, engaged, 2011; http://engaged.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications.

Experience required, Demos, 2011;
www.demos.co.uk/publications/experiencerequired.

2008–09 Citizenship survey: volunteering and charitable giving topic report (10CA06356), Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011; www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/citizenshipsurvey200809volunteer.

Measuring the impossible? Scoping study for longitudinal research on the impact of youth volunteering, Institute for Volunteering Research/ 'V' National Young Volunteers Service, 2010; www.vinspired.com/about-us/publications.

The Morgan Inquiry, 2008; www.morganinquiry.org.uk.

Websites

Ofsted Good Practice website: www.goodpractice.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex: Providers visited and organisations contacted

Schools and colleges visited	Location
Barking Abbey School, A Specialist Sports and Humanities College	London
Bethnal Green Technology College	London
City of Bristol College	Bristol
Downend Comprehensive School	South Gloucestershire
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College	London
Feversham College	Bradford
Hackney Community College	London
Hereward College of Further Education	Coventry
Leicester College	Leicester
Meadowhead School	Sheffield
North East Worcestershire College	Worcestershire
Walker Technology College	Newcastle upon Tyne
Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College	Leicester

Youth and community organisations	Location
Cooperative StreetGames Young Volunteers	London
Sound it Out Community Music Ltd	Birmingham
Truth about Youth – Regional Youth Work Unit North East	Newcastle upon Tyne
Voluntary Action within Kent (VAWK)	Kent
Winsford Community Action Project (Wincap)	Winsford
YMCA Bournemouth	Bournemouth

Focus Groups	Location
Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum	London
Barking College	London
Cooperative StreetGames Young Volunteers	London

Meetings

Envision

Youth Action Network (YAN)