Young people, volunteering and youth projects:
A rapid review of recent evidence

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Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

The context for volunteering generally, and for young people's volunteering in particular, has changed significantly over the past decade or so. Societal trends such as globalisation, technological transformation, demographic shifts, an evolving civil society, the emergence of post-modern values and changes in family life, work patterns and support structures all have implications for volunteering and are likely to have affected the attitudes and behaviours of young people towards getting involved (see for example Rochester et al, 2009). Government has become increasingly involved in volunteering since the mid-1990s (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008). Particular interest has been paid to engaging young people in volunteering, as it is increasingly promoted as a 'magic bullet' for solving all sorts of challenges, including increasing youth citizen engagement, promoting skills development, and rehabilitating young offenders.

Within this context the Russell Commission was set up in 2004 by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. The Commission undertook a nationwide consultation in October 2004 engaging young people, the voluntary sector, business and the media. The recommendations, published in March 2005 (Russell, 2005), were largely welcomed by government. The report outlined a national framework for youth action and engagement which would deliver a step change in the diversity, quality and quantity of young people's volunteering. It was hoped that this framework would tackle community needs with a particular focus on providing currently under-represented and disadvantaged groups with a new route to skills and qualifications. Crucially, it was thought that this framework should be youth-led, independent of government and run by a dedicated implementation body. It was out of these recommendations that **v** was created and launched in May 2006.

Since the launch of **v** the volunteering policy climate has continued to develop. There have, for example, been several new volunteering initiatives and two volunteering-related commissions, including the Morgan Inquiry (2008) which looked specifically youth volunteering. They explicitly commended some of the work **v** had been doing, but further argued that a lot more had to be done to

improve the flexibility of available opportunities, solidify and galvanise the relationship between volunteering and employment, increase formal recognition of volunteering and improve the information available to youngsters.

1.2   The review

This review was conducted as part of the scoping study of a formative evaluation of **v**, being conducted by a consortium of organisations led by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and involving the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR), which has authored this report**.** The review was designed to inform the evaluation by providing an overview of recent research on youth volunteering. It does not claim to be exhaustive and it draws heavily on an earlier review conducted by IVR (Gaskin, 2004a) which was a much more extensive and comprehensive review. Rather than duplicate that work, this review attempted to update and summarise earlier findings.

The first section of the review examines the evidence base on young people and volunteering, looking at both their attitudes to and participation in volunteering. The second section explores specific types of volunteering and various government-funded volunteering projects and initiatives (from the UK and beyond), from which some key lessons are identified. Finally, section three briefly summarises the main developments in the literature since the last comprehensive review conducted in 2004, and points towards some remaining gaps in the research.

1.3   The terminology

Under **v**'s funding criteria volunteering is any non-compulsory activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which is of benefit to others (excluding relatives), society or the environment. Drawing on a typology of volunteering developed for the United Nations (see Davis Smith, 2000) **v**'s definition includes activities such as mutual aid or self help, service to others, participation and civic engagement and advocacy and campaigning. All of these activities could be either formal or informal volunteering. In this review formal volunteering is defined as unpaid help given as part of groups, clubs or organisations and informal volunteering is defined as unpaid help given as an individual to someone who is not a relative, to benefit others or the environment (Citizenship Survey, 2005).

2   Young people and volunteering

2.1   Levels of participation

The most recent surveys of voluntary activity within England have found that a considerable proportion of young people volunteer. The 2007/08 Citizenship Survey found that 16-24 year olds were more likely than any other age group to have volunteered **informally** in the last month (41 per cent compared to the average of 35 per cent) but were among the least likely to have volunteered **formally** in the last month (24 per cent compared to the average of 27per cent) (CLG, 2008). Volunteering rates for young people have declined slightly since the 2005 Citizenship Survey although this slide was seen across all age groups and the causes of this decline remain unclear. Looking back to trends since 2001, levels of volunteering have generally remained static: they peaked in 2005 and have since returned to levels comparable with 2001.

When interpreting these figures it is important to remember that young people are far from a homogenous group and that demographic characteristics often affect participation rates and the nature of volunteering undertaken. Within the 16-24 year old age bracket, those towards the bottom end (16-19 year olds) tend to volunteer more than those towards the top end of the age spectrum (20-24 year olds), and this is seen consistently throughout formal, informal, regular and irregular volunteering (CLG, 2008). Generally there is a positive relationship between education, employment and incomes and participation in volunteering (Attwood et al., 2003; Davis Smith, 1998; Pancer and Pratt, 1999, Schroeder et al., 1995; Davis Smith et al., 2002). However, some researchers have found that there may actually be increased levels of certain types of voluntary and community work among some 'marginalised' young people (Gaskin et al., 1996; Gaskin, 1998a; National Youth Agency, 1998).

The evidence regarding the impact of gender on volunteering rates amongst young people is fairly inconclusive (Keith et al, 1990; Sundeen and Raskoff, 1994), although women are generally found to slightly outnumber men (Low et al, 2007; CLG, 2007/8). It is clear that gender has a strong impact on the type of activity undertaken, with many young volunteers involving themselves in opportunities that

correspond to stereotyped gender roles – males, for example, are more likely to be involved in sport whereas females are more likely to be involved in social services (National Youth Agency, 1998; Roker and Eden, 2002; Davis Smith et al., 2002; Gaskin, 2003a; Bradbury, 2003; Nacro, 2004b).

The Citizenship Survey 2007/08 gives levels of participation in volunteering by age and ethnicity (White, Black or Asian). Asian 16-24 year olds were significantly less likely to volunteer (either formally or informally, regularly or over the course of the year) than White or Black 16-24 year olds; with a similar pattern found across all age groups.

It has been suggested, however, that some of the apparent differences in levels of volunteering are more to do with how volunteering is researched and than real difference. Indeed there is a clear gap in the research into non-traditional volunteering roles, which may include some of the activities of groups who appear to have low volunteering rates. These non-traditional volunteering roles would include activities like youth action and reciprocal arrangements such as Timebanks (see for example Seyfang 2005), Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) and even less informal self-help style arrangements between friendship and kinship networks.

There is little evidence on the access of young people who are socially excluded (or at risk of it) to volunteering. Unemployment and poverty are two areas that have received some attention but other factors such as family conflict, being in care, school problems, living in deprived neighbourhoods and mental health problems (risk factors for social exclusion as defined by England's Social Exclusion Unit) are in need of further investigation. Although many commentators argue that voluntary activity is a possible route out of exclusion (IVR, 2004; Burchardt et al 2002), the problem for policy makers is that the lack of access to volunteering can be both a cause and manifestation of social exclusion (IVR, 2004).

2.2   Perceptions of volunteering

Young people have mixed views about volunteering – what it is and how relevant it is to them. A 2004 study commissioned by the Home Office found that this age

group thought that the most defining characteristics of volunteering were 'helping people out', 'being a good citizen', and 'a good way to get new skills and experience' (Ellis, 2004). In a 2008 study by **v**, young people expressed very positive views about volunteering generally and in particular the impact it can have on skills development, chances of employment and career progression (**v**, 2008).

Many young people also have a positive perception of volunteers themselves. The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering (Davis Smith, 1998) found the majority of 18-24 year olds felt that a society with voluntary workers is a caring society and that voluntary workers offer something that cannot be provided by professionals. Volunteers were seen as more committed than paid staff, but young people were less likely than other age groups to see volunteers as qualified, competent and professional (Davis Smith, 1998).

Other research has suggested that a stereotypical perception of volunteering and who volunteers (middle-aged, middle-class, women) still prevails amongst many young people (Ellis, 2004), and that some young people view volunteers as 'self-righteous' or 'middle-aged housewives with nothing better to do' (Foster and Fernandes, 1996; Richardson, 1990; Meisel, 1988). One study reported that two-thirds of the young people surveyed felt that most people their age couldn't see the point of volunteering and close to half said their friends would think it wasn't cool to volunteer (Gaskin, 1998a).

Others disagree, with more recent research suggestion that these views might be shifting. One survey found that only 15 per cent of young people agreed that their friends would laugh at people doing voluntary work, whereas 46 per cent disagreed (Ireland, Kerr, Lopes and Nelson, 2006). Another study found that 68 per cent of young people responding agreed that 'it's cool to volunteer to help other people' (Giving Campaign, 2002).

There is a considerable difference in the perceptions of volunteering held by young people who volunteer and those who do not. Those not involved in volunteering lack knowledge of the breadth and depth of the concept whereas those that are involved view volunteering as positive and progressive and are challenging the view that only certain sections of society volunteer (Ellis, 2004). However young

people may not always identify what they do as 'volunteering' (Gaskin, 1998a; Duffy, 1998; Gaskin, 2001) and even when they do think of it in these terms they may prefer not to use the word (Roker et al., 1999).

Young women have been found to have a more positive perception of volunteering than young men do (**v**, 2008, Giving Campaign, 2002). Indeed negative attitudes towards volunteering are seen especially among young males in their mid-teens and this is even more prevalent among the disadvantaged and unemployed (Prince's Trust, 2004, Gaskin, 1998a; Roker et al., 1999). A Prince's Trust survey also found variety between different ages within the 'young people' age bracket. For example, 14-17 year olds have been found to place more emphasis on material outcomes, whereas 18-25 year olds place more emphasis on relationships and self-fulfilment (Prince's Trust, 2004).

Despite the lack of firm evidence on the impact of other demographic variables on perceptions of volunteering among young people, there is good evidence on the influence of demographic characteristics among all age groups. It has been suggested that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and ex-offenders are more likely to have negative or narrow/stereotyped views of volunteering, or are less likely to see what they do as volunteering (Niyazi, 1996; Gaskin, 1998 and 2003; Lukka and Ellis, 2001; IVR, 2004). Some disabled people, for example, have been found to have particular difficulties relating to the traditional/stereotyped volunteering image of 'helper and helped', which has conceived of them as passive recipients of voluntary action (IVR, 2004).

There has also been a considerable amount of research into the wider social attitudes of young people, which has found that they have a good understanding of citizenship (Lister et al., 2001; Roker and Eden, 2002). Crucially the majority of young people associate volunteering with good citizenship (Lister et al., 2002). In the Roker and Eden (2002) study the vast majority of respondents felt that there should be citizenship education in schools and that young people should be actively encouraged to participate in their community. Care should be taken when assessing the attitudes of young people as many have a 'double-edged'

understanding of community, seeing it both as a source of source of support and education but also as a site of tension and exclusion (Valentine et al., 2002).

One key gap in the literature to date is research into the perceptions of organisations regarding young people, and how this impacts on the way they involve and value them as volunteers.

2.3   Motivations for engagement

Five broad categories of motivation for volunteering have been identified among young people: personal feelings (e.g. satisfaction, feel good), personal needs (e.g. pastime, relationships), altruism, experience (e.g. skills and work prospects) and personal inducements (e.g. qualifications) (Ellis, 2004).

Other studies have reinforced these findings of mixed motivations. The Helping Out study (a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving undertaken in 2006/7) asked respondents to choose from a list of reasons for starting to volunteer. The top reason given by 16-24 year olds was 'I wanted to improve things, help people', with 56 per cent ticking this box (higher than across all age groups). The cause being important was the third most commonly sited reason for volunteering. Other studies have also found that responding to community need and helping others are significant reasons for starting to take action (Eley, 2001 and 2003; NFO, 2003; Sport England, 2003).

The second most common reason cited for volunteering amongst young people in Helping Out was 'to learn new skills' (47 per cent). This was valued significantly higher by young people than amongst any other age group (19 per cent of all respondents gave this as a reason for getting involved). This emphasis on skills development as a motivation for volunteering amongst young people is borne out in other research (Foster and Fernandes, 1996; Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995; Gaskin, 1998a; Ellis, 2002; NFO, 2003; Volunteer Canada, 2001). Among disaffected groups the emphasis on personal inducements was even greater especially for those without a job or existing qualifications (IVR, 2004). For more 'privileged' young people 'voluntary experience was another string to their bow' while for disadvantaged youngsters 'the voluntary experience could be a lifeline' (Gaskin, 1998a). In Helping Out 'to use existing skills' and 'to help get on in my

career' also figured considerably higher as motivations amongst young people than other age groups as they did in the evaluation of Young Volunteer Challenge (GHK Consulting Ltd., 2004).

Volunteering should not always be thought of as a purely functional endeavour (neither altruistic nor educational) as more than two thirds of 15-19 year olds said volunteering offers the chance to enjoy themselves and have fun (Gaskin, 1998b). Meeting people and making new friends is also important (Low et al, 2007).

Some surveys have suggested that religion plays a smaller role in motivating young people to volunteer than it does amongst older age groups (Davis Smith, 1998). However, in Helping Out, 16-24 year olds were second only to over 65s in citing religion as a motivation, with the lowest scores being seen between 35 and 55 year olds (Low et al, 2007)

Motivations for volunteering may vary according to age, gender, ethnicity and any other demographic variables. Some evidence suggests that younger teens have a more social focus and may see volunteering as a good way to experience different work settings whereas older youths have a much greater focus on employment skills, qualifications and experience (Eley, 2001; NFO, 2003). Young women appear to be more concerned with helping others and contributing to society than young men who favour action-oriented activities (Eley, 2003; NFO, 2003).

2.4   Routes into volunteering

Motivations, however, are only one part of the picture. It is also important to consider how young people are recruited into volunteering. Young people (and indeed all age groups) are consistently found to prefer 'personal, face to face, methods of recruitment' (Ellis, 2004). When asked who would be best to give this face to face contact family and friends came out on top. However, there is also an important role for more general peer-advocacy, with a recognition that this may help to improve the image of volunteering and to get young people more enthusiastic about it (*ibid).*

More generally, word of mouth is an important route into volunteering for all age groups, with surveys suggesting that this is particularly true for 16-24 year olds:

three-quarters (73 per cent) of young people responding to the Helping Out survey heard about volunteering opportunities through word of mouth (Low et al, 2007). Word of mouth was a major recruitment method for Millennium Volunteers (Davis Smith et al, 2002) and Young Volunteer Challenge (GHK Consulting Ltd., 2006). The danger of reliance on this method, however, is that it can lead to 'a cloning effect' and therefore limit diversity (Davis Smith et al, 2002).

Institutions that young people engage in, such as schools, are also important recruitment sites. For example, one survey found that 39 per cent of 16-24 year olds got involved in volunteering through their school, college or University (Attwood et al, 2001). Elsewhere, though, young people have argued that while schools are an important tool for promoting volunteering, volunteering should not be controlled and solely led by the school (Ellis, 2004). Research in the US has also indicated that schools have an important role to play in developing a culture of volunteering, but that they are most effective at engendering future volunteering among their pupils when they encourage and facilitate volunteering rather than making it compulsory (see Musick and Wilson, 2008). Young Volunteer Challenge's strategy of basing staff for a week in schools for one to one interviews was 'the most effective way of stimulating interest' (GHK Consulting Ltd., 2004). Young Volunteer Challenge also made effective use of Jobcentre Plus and Connexions to broker disadvantaged young people and root them to the programme (*ibid*).

The family is particularly important in shaping socially responsible thinking and the behaviour of adolescents (Hart and Fegley, 1995; Pancer and Pratt, 1999) and represents an important institution in the recruitment of volunteers. Parents have a huge influence over children's perceptions through role modelling 'giving' behaviour as well as linking them to opportunities directly, and as such has a consider influence on the likelihood of engagement and on routes into volunteering (Eley, 2001; Gaskin, 1998b).

It has been suggested that a relatively small proportion (just over one in ten – 13 per cent) of young people access volunteering through mechanisms such as leaflets or posters (Low et al., 2007). Printed materials may not be especially effective in recruiting volunteers as they are easily ignored, however, they may be

a useful part of a broader marketing strategy, especially if they are well focused (National Youth Agency, 1998; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Roker and Player, 2002; Gaskin, 1998a, Gaskin, 2003b). Using advertisements and local media, as well as direct mail shots to potential recruits were also part of Young Volunteer Challenge's recruitment strategy (GHK Consulting Ltd., 2004). An even small proportion (3 per cent of 16-24 year olds in Helping Out) find out about volunteering through the organisation's website (Low et al, 2007). This was lower than for all other age groups, apart from the over 65 year olds, and is somewhat surprising given that children spend an average of 1.7 hours a day online a day (ChildWise, 2009).

Involving celebrities has also been suggested as another potentially important means of promoting volunteering to young people (Ellis, 2004), although other studies have revealed mixed views about the effectiveness of such endorsements (NFO, 2003; Gaskin, 1998a).

2.5   The role of incentives

The research is pretty conclusive that training, skills development and accreditation of some kind are key incentives for young people who are involved in volunteering (CLG, 2007/8; Ellis, 2004; Low et al, 2007; Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995; Davis Smith, 1998; Hirst, 2001). In one study, one-third (33 per cent) of young people said that free training would persuade them to do more voluntary work; a similar proportion (32 per cent) said that the fact that their peers were participating would encourage them to get involved (Ellis, 2004).

The issue of direct financial incentives is far more controversial among young people. Despite the direct financial and opportunity cost of volunteering being reported as a barrier to volunteering (see below), many young people are ambivalent towards direct payments as inducements to volunteering (Gaskin 1998a; NFO, 2003; Ellis, 2004). Many young people see the benefit of offering some small, targeted incentive for increasing recruitment rates and making volunteers feel more valued but many downsides were also offered such as devaluing volunteering and reducing the sense of purpose and satisfaction (Ellis, 2004). Less than a fifth of respondents in one survey of young people said that being modestly paid would encourage them to do more voluntary work (*ibid)*. Many

young people felt strongly that cash should not be offered since it could have a detrimental effect on the motivations of volunteers. However, this may not be the case for all young people and there is a big difference between a financial inducement for getting involved and an on-going financial support arrangement between organisation and volunteer.

The Young Volunteer Challenge evaluation concludes that although the financial incentive is 'not a major incentive' 'it definitely helped' and crucially made it possible for low income young people to take part (GHK Consulting Ltd, 2006). The financial incentive was a facilitator rather than an attractor in the Young Volunteer Challenge, facilitating a greater diversity of participant in terms of qualification level, socio-economic group, ethnicity, gender and disability. Some innovative projects, such as Orange Rockcorps, have also been successful in recruiting young people with non-financial incentives such as concert tickets. They have not, however, been without controversy.

2.6   Barriers to involvement

There are a number of barriers to young people getting involved in volunteering. A 2007 study of 1,000 16-25 year olds undertaken by **v** found that young people feel passionate about many global and local issues such as terrorism, war, poverty, climate change, crime, drugs and negative perceptions of young people, but a majority do not act on these concerns (**v**, 2007). Similarly, Helping Out found that 16-24 year olds had a strong desire to volunteer, with 70 per cent of respondents who were either irregular or non-volunteers, reporting that they would like to spend more time volunteering, well above the general average of 54 per cent (Low et al, 2007).

In common with all age groups, time is often reported to be the key factor in stopping young people taking action and starting volunteering (**v**, 2007*;* Low et al, 2007). The opportunity cost of giving up time for volunteering when you could be earning money can also be problematic (**v**, 2007), as can a perceived lack of flexibility within available volunteering opportunities (**v**, 2007, Morgan Inquiry, 2008). Other evidence, however, suggests that time is less of a factor for younger age brackets, with one study reporting that only one-fifth of older school children reported being 'too busy' to volunteer (Ireland, Kerr, Lopes and Nelson, 2006).

Perhaps even more important than time, was the perception among young people that they didn't have anything to offer (**v**, 2007). Indeed, other studies have also found that lack of confidence is a very significant barrier. Young people may fear rejection, have a feeling of not having anything to contribute or of other people not valuing the contribution young people can make. This lack of confidence may be exacerbated when volunteering occurs in unfamiliar environments (Ellis, 2004), and when negative peer-pressure about volunteering in added to the mix (*ibid,* 2004).

More generally, many young people report that one of the biggest barriers to volunteering is that they don't know how to get involved and take action on the issues they care about (**v**, 2007; Morgan Inquiry, 2008). Access to information can be seen as having two dimensions – firstly, there can be a general lack of information on volunteering; but secondly, it can also be the case that the information that is available is confusing and overwhelming (Ellis, 2004). There is also a lack of knowledge among young non-volunteers about the potential benefits of volunteering, while the lack of formal recognition for volunteering, particularly in terms of the link between volunteering and employment, has also been identified as a barrier to involvement (Morgan Inquiry, 2008).

2.7   Organisation and support

Helping Out showed that an overwhelming majority of 16-34 year olds felt that they could cope with the things they are asked to do (98 per cent), their efforts were appreciated (97 per cent), they are given the opportunity to do the sort of things they like to do (92 per cent) and that the organisation had reasonable expectations in terms of workload (Low et al, 2007). Some drawbacks to volunteering were, however, cited including: 'get bored or lose interest', 'feel that my help is not really needed' and 'feel that volunteering is becoming too much like paid work', although no more than one in ten volunteers stated each of these drawbacks.

In terms of how volunteering is organised and supported, Helping Out found that age made a difference to whether volunteers were provided with different forms of management. For example, young people were more likely than other age groups to have been given a role description (Low et al, 2007). Age also made a

difference as to whether or not volunteers were asked to undergo a CRB check, with young people again being the most likely age group to have been checked: 25 per cent of volunteers aged 16-24 years olds had been CRB checked (*ibid).*

In terms of how young people would like their volunteering to be organised, studies have found that they have some clear ideas (Ellis, 2004). Generally they want taster days, group activities (especially with their peers) and new volunteering opportunities with emphasis on choice and flexibility (*ibid*; Gaskin, 1998a). Young people also want a say in the planning and decision making of the project that they are working on, although they recognise the need for adult support and back up to fulfil such planning roles and that such involvement should be optional since some young people would feel too much pressure and responsibility (Ellis, 2004).

Generally 'youth action' has become a major trend in young people's voluntary participation. Youth action describes projects and activities in which young people play a leading role in planning and management, although there is a spectrum of youth ownership. A leading example is Changemakers, founded in 1994 by four national charities, which operates through partnerships particularly in schools and youth organisations throughout the country. It enables people aged 11-25 to design projects which they manage, help, resource and review in order to achieve positive change for themselves and their communities. In 2006 the government launched the £115 million Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF), which provide discrete funding for youth activities and facilities in each local authority in England, with young people in charge of deciding how those resources are allocated.

2.8   The benefits of involvement

2.8.1 What young people get out of volunteering

Reassuringly, the benefits that many young people get from volunteering correspond consistently with their motivations. Generally, young people report gaining and valuing new skills and qualifications much more highly than other age groups (Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995; Davis Smith, 1998). The focus on employability as a benefit of volunteering is particularly prevalent among the young. Although evidence of the impact of volunteering on employment rates is

mixed, young people certainly perceive volunteering as enhancing their employability (Hirst, 2001). Employers also report valuing the experience for the improved communication skills, leadership, team-work, self-confidence and initiative gained from volunteering (**v**, 2008; Morgan Inquiry, 2008). However, there are still a great number of employers who only recognise volunteering as valuable if it relates directly to the position being applied for (**v**, 2008) and there remains a need for more research that tests and explores the widely held belief that volunteering can lead to increased employability.

Much research also confirms the transformational benefits of volunteering for young people, with the actual undertaking of voluntary activity exceeding the expectations of those who participated in it. Participation has been recognised by many young volunteers are being enjoyable, boosting self-esteem, increasing the awareness of community and diversity and as having an impact on socio-political views (Eley, 2003; Roker and Eden, 2002).

2.8.2 What society gets out of young people volunteering

This review has concentrated on the experiences of young volunteers themselves. It would, however, be incomplete without a look at the difference that youth volunteering can make to wider society. Evidence of the positive impact young volunteers can have in areas such as sport (Sports England, 2004), health (Teasdale, 2008), offender management (Ronel, 2006), economic development and social inclusion (Ockenden, 2007), is being developed, but requires more attention. The Morgan Inquiry found that young volunteers are particularly vital to the success of organisations that work specifically with/for children and young people (Morgan Inquiry, 2008). The Commission for the Future of Volunteering has also championed the benefits of inter-generational volunteering as a key way of combating ageism and improving community cohesion (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008).

3   Volunteering forms, programmes and initiatives

3.1   International, gap year and full time volunteering

International volunteering shares many of the features of domestic volunteering and isn't distinguished in the majority of research. However, there are a number of features which ought to be mentioned at this stage. Firstly this type of volunteering has grown and developed considerably over the last 15 years (Jones, 2004). Secondly it is often undertaken in the context of a 'gap year'. This would include any voluntary work, which is part of an individual's 'time out of formal education, training or the work place, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory' (Jones, 2004).

Many of the motivations for this type of volunteering are the same as for any other but the desire to take a break from formal education or work and to gain a broader horizon on life and people of different nations stand out as distinct to this type of volunteering (Jones, 2004). It is often full-time (ranging from a few days to a couple of years), is undertaken as part of a travelling experience and it often involves a substantial financial contribution from the volunteer (or their parents).

The rates of participation have not been effectively assessed and figures range from between 60,000 and 350,000 depending on the survey consulted and the definition used (*ibid*). The weight of certain demographic variables, in terms of who does and doesn't get involved, appears to be exacerbated for this type of volunteering with a considerably disproportionate representation of white people, women, middle-class people, those educated in private or grammar schools and people from the south-east of England. There is also a clear under-representation of disabled participants (Jones, 2004; Sherraden et al, 2008,).

Some gap year and/or full time volunteering organisations, such as Community Service Volunteers (CSV) have a no refusal policy and have had some success in recruiting volunteers at risk of social exclusion but there are also a number of non-financial barriers excluding underrepresented groups such as a lack of good career advice and support, prejudice and an uninformed view of the nature of gap

year volunteering opportunities and a lack of knowledge and planning (Jones, 2004).

Again the benefits to volunteers of this type of volunteering are similar to other forms but in particular it is seen to boost educational attainment, help form and develop career choices and leads to the development of social values. Graduate employers are also seen to actively seek gap year participants due to the mix of their soft skills (communication, interpersonal) and life skills (leadership, self-discipline) (Jones, 2004, 2005; Kelly and Case, 2007). The wider, less tangible benefits of volunteering overseas such as a more reflective approach to life, self-fulfilment and a greater understanding of diversity are all reported in US research (Sherraden et al, 2008). Research conducted by IPPR into the experience of volunteering overseas with Raleigh International found a range of impacts on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds including: increased career ambition; more positive views of higher education; broadened horizons and increased likelihood of volunteering in the future (Sheldon, 2009).

However, other researchers have questioned the transformative nature of this type of volunteering and Gudykunst (1998) labels 'gap yearers' as 'fluent fools' who have the language of understanding but possess little actual understanding. Likewise Simpson's (2004) study argues that gap year providers' claims for the educative benefits of overseas volunteering are based on flawed assumptions regarding the value of experience in changing attitudes. Other research has found that young people's cross-cultural awareness can improve through volunteering when they volunteer alongside people from host communities and this can be particularly evident in volunteers who are not from middle-class backgrounds (Jones, 2005; Sheldon, 2009).

Another key difference between UK-based volunteering and that of international volunteering is the role of brokers in the process. For UK based volunteering, brokers are involved but they are almost exclusively from the voluntary or public sector. For international volunteering a different type of brokering is required as young people rarely arrange the placement with the host organisation directly. There are certainly a great number of voluntary sector based organisations who take part in this such as Voluntary Service Overseas and Raleigh, and even inter-

governmental agencies such as the UN. However, there is also a large number of profit-making companies involved, who often charging a brokerage fee of between £500 and £2,000 (Jones, 2004).

Moreover, gap year organisations have been criticised for creating volunteer programmes geared to the needs of volunteers rather than local communities and for failing to develop a critical pedagogy for international volunteering. In research on the gap year Andrew Jones found that developmental impacts on host communities were likely to be very limited (Jones, 2005) . A recent study of Raleigh International highlights tensions between the role of developing communities as sites for learning and the needs of those communities (Sheldon, 2009)

3.2   Student volunteering

Student volunteering has also grown significantly in recent years and encompasses a range of forms including student community action, extra-curricular volunteering organised by students themselves and not directly related to their courses and service learning (Ellis, 2002). In 2000 there were more than 180 Student Community Action groups involving 25,000 students. The National Survey of Student Volunteering in 2003 found a considerable increase, with 42,000 students volunteering through organised programmes at their HEIs (Student Volunteering England, 2004). This does not include the large number of students who volunteer outside of the framework and support structures provided by their university. This was partly a result of an injection of funding of £27 million in 2002-2004 by the Higher Education Active Community Fund.

The 2006 White Paper: Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances, stated that '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'. Findings of the 2008 report *Assessing the impact of volunteering on the FE sector* echo this paper. All of the students spoken to rated their volunteering experience as beneficial feeling that it allowed them to develop new skills, improve their employability and was a fun way to spend time. Nearly all (96 per cent) of students

stated they would recommend volunteering to others. Of those students that didn't volunteer 33 per cent felt they didn't have time due to study commitments. The study found that when implementing volunteering schemes in further education one size does not fit all and models need to be flexible.

3.3   UK-based youth volunteering programmes

Based on a review of externally published evaluation reports and studies, the following section will consider a number of recent youth volunteering initiatives within the UK. The evaluations of and processes involved in these initiatives have provided best practice and learning points for future projects and illustrate the potential impacts of youth volunteering.

Millennium Volunteers (MV) was established in 2000 and was an award scheme funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for people aged 16-24. An excellence award was given for completion of 200 hours and 100 hours of volunteering, delivered through voluntary organisations or a self-designed project. This was not full-time volunteering, but aggregated time given over a period of one year.

MV attracted people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and was very successful in recruiting unemployed young people (one fifth) and those who had never volunteered before (one half). There were wide ranging benefits for participants who gained a 'considerable increase in human capital', including personal development, generic and vocational skills. A majority (84 per cent) of participants said the experience had increased their confidence, 80 per cent were more aware of the needs of others and 68 per cent agreed they had become more committed to volunteering. Around two thirds of volunteers said that taking part had helped them develop future career plans and increased their chances of employment (Davis Smith et al., 2002).

MV also made a significant contribution to the local economy, increasing the capacity of organisations and social capital in communities, and providing benefits to the beneficiaries and service users through enhanced access to services, improved quality of life, peer support and social contact (Davis Smith et al., 2002).

An evaluation of Youth Sport Trust's Millennium Volunteers programme for 15-19 year olds found volunteers experienced increases in confidence and sense of personal achievement, skills, awareness of social issues, understanding of others' views and an enhanced understanding of citizenship.

Active Citizens in Schools (ACiS) was a three year pilot launched in 2001 and built on the Millennium Volunteers model by engaging 11-15 year olds in sustained volunteering activities through their schools. ACiS was delivered by Changemakers and ContinYou and was innovative due to its young person led approach (Ellis, 2005).

ACiS offered a wide range of volunteering opportunities for young people, many of which were linked to the citizenship curriculum. This led to a number of new partnerships being created between schools and local organisations in the community (Ellis, 2005).

Over 5,000 (5,398) young people took part in ACiS, a majority of whom were very positive about their experience. Between 80-90 per cent of those involved in ACiS felt their personal development had improved along with their sense of pride and enjoyment. The schools involved also reported improved behaviour, an increased profile, an improved reputation and a changing ethos in the school. A number of positive impacts on the community were also noted.

Although there were a few problems with the structure and the logistics of running the project overall, it was viewed as a success and as a project was deemed appropriate for national rollout (Ellis, 2005). In effect, however, national rollout was only implemented in a small way, with significantly less resourcing than the pilot had received.

ACiS as a project allowed further insight to be gained into citizenship activities within schools and deeper into the community. As a result of ACiS five key support mechanisms have been identified as helping implement citizenship in schools. These include action planning, paid youth worker, extensive training, communication and the development of a flexible framework (Kerr, 2004).

The Young Volunteer Challenge (YVC) ran pilots from 2003-2005 with the aim of 'removing the financial barriers that could prevent young people from low income backgrounds from getting involved in community service'. It offered a nine month 30 hour week volunteering placement to people aged 18-19 who had received Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or were eligible for income support while undertaking vocational training. They were paid a weekly allowance of £45 and received an end payment of £750.

The **YVC** model showed that long-term volunteering is a viable option for young people. Young people generally remained volunteers for at least six months. The quality of brokerage within the project also went a long way in encouraging volunteers and creating a worthwhile placement. Feedback on the impact of the programme was positive and volunteers said they would be keen to become involved again. Volunteers felt they had mainly improved their softer skills including communication and team working skills. The project did not quite have the full effect it intended and was unable in the time to provide a 'gap year' between further and higher education and being a new scheme it received some resistance.

One of the main challenges faced by YVC was recruiting volunteers. Only young people eligible for EMA were able to take part in YVC. This significantly reduced the target group for the project and resulted in a struggle to recruit the required numbers of volunteers. These recruitment issues highlighted the need to widen the eligibility criteria. Another difficulty faced by the scheme involved promotion. Schools and colleges should have been a major promotional vehicle for YVC however a number of schools and colleges either saw YVC as competition or lacked the capacity to engage with the project. YVC also experienced resistance from careers advisory services who did not see volunteering as a viable option for some individuals. In addition to this, YVC struggled to influence the decisions of those considering university as the timescales meant that it was generally too late to have an impact or influence individuals' decisions. YVC also faced a significant amount of competition from other programmes and initiatives and being a new project found it hard to compete at times. However, it successfully made a difference to the students it supported and provided high value learning (GHK Consulting, 2006).

Platform2 is a three year programme developed by Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and British Universities North America Club and is funded by the Department for International Development looking to support 2,500 UK youths. The project was set up in 2008 and aims to encourage volunteering in developing countries especially by less advantaged students aged 18-15. Students attend 10 week projects and engage in different cultures.

3.4   Non-youth specific UK-based volunteering initiatives

A number of non–youth specific volunteering programmes are considered in this section. Although not focused on youth volunteering they provide examples of strategic issues projects may face and methods of best practice which will help to inform future projects and programmes.

Capital volunteering was a London based initiative which aimed to tackle issues of mental health and social exclusion through volunteering. The project was set up in 2004 and worked to increase the range and amount of volunteering opportunities for people with mental health issues. At the time of reporting, it had helped over 5,000 individuals.

When asked about their experience 84 per cent of individuals said they had gained from their involvement in the project. After 12 months of involvement half of those involved had been able to apply their experience to other situations and to help others (Bellringer et, al, 2008).

Volunteering for all was launched in 2006 and was worth £3 million over two years. It has now been extended until March 2009. Volunteering for all aims to:

- Identify and tackle barriers to volunteering
- Fund high quality 'exemplar' volunteering opportunities
- Fund work to raise positive awareness of voluntary activity
- The project focuses largely on campaign work and targets those with no formal qualifications, disabilities or long-term illness and BME communities. Some funding is also available for small grants.

The **Goldstar** initiative aims to help organisations to realise the potential of volunteers from socially excluded or disadvantaged groups. Goldstar was launched in 2005 with £7.5million funding for 3 years. It funds 46 exemplar projects and provides significant information on good practice.

Home Office Older Volunteering Initiative (HOOVI) ran for four years starting in 1999 and funded a total of 26 projects aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of volunteering opportunities for people aged 50+. A range of voluntary opportunities were introduced by the projects including intergenerational activities with school children.

There are a number of findings from HOOVI which although project specific in this case can be applied to wider volunteering initiatives. For example:

- Organisations whose mission or purpose is to promote the well-being of older people have a considerable advantage in involving older people as volunteers
- The extent to which volunteering is a recognised and central feature of an organisation's work is an important factor in its ability to involve older volunteers quickly and effectively
- Older people from black and minority ethnic communities with little or no tradition of formal volunteering are more likely to volunteer within their own communities than in 'mainstream' organisations

HOOVI had a number of limitations which should be considered for future reference. These are as follows:

- It was essentially a reactive rather than proactive approach and lacked a coherent set of aims and objectives.
- Much of the programme was made up of short term and small-scale projects with a limited capacity to lay strong foundations for continuing activity
- Most projects operated in isolation and rarely shared experiences.

Volunteering in the Third Age (VITA) aimed to promote older volunteering and increase the number of over 65 year olds who volunteer by removing barriers and promoting best practice.

VITA has worked in a different policy environment to other initiatives such as Experience Corps and identifies the importance of placing projects/programmes in the correct context taking account of issues and policy during that time. VITA identified a number of best practice principles for setting up volunteering programmes both for older people and in general. Guiding principles include:

- Funding is managed within a strategic framework where 'money' is secondary to the 'bigger picture'
- The programme must inter-relate with relevant agendas
- Local, neighbourhood initiatives and innovation is valued and supported within a strategic framework
- Planning and evaluation frameworks of the programme and all individual projects are developed from the beginning
- There are a number of opportunities to encourage people to volunteer during life transitions. These channels need to be further explored and acted upon at a national and local level
- Eliminating age discrimination is central to success

3.5   Internationally-based youth-volunteering initiatives

Youth volunteer or civic service programmes, often though not always supported by governments, exist in many countries around the world. However, there is a lack of rigorous, publicly available and/or easily accessible research on the impacts of youth voluntary service programmes, especially on projects outside of North America and Europe. Indeed, in 2008 the World Bank Children and Youth Unit and Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) instigated a project to improve this evidence base on youth voluntary service. Their first report argued that in order to ensure programmes have significant positive impact on young participants and on wider society, researchers, policymakers and donors must develop the evidence of the effectiveness of these programmes (Mattero, 2008).

In England there have been few studies which look at longer term impact on volunteers or on wider social and community impacts of volunteer programmes. In contrast, in the USA there have been useful longitudinal studies assessing short, medium and long-term impacts of a range of schemes including Americorps and City Year (see for example Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008; Anderson et al, 2007). Such studies are important because they reveal that the impacts of involvement in volunteering can change for participants over time; some effects are strongest in the period during and immediately after completing a volunteer scheme while others take longer to develop (Anderson et al, 2007). Moreover, impacts may vary over time for volunteers from different social, cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Evaluations of youth service schemes suggest that volunteers may demonstrate higher membership of cultural associations and higher levels of participation in politics and politically linked organisations than non volunteers (Benedetta, 2009; Becquet, 2007). Research found the most important civic impact of AmeriCorps was in giving participants a sense of empowerment or self-efficacy, the belief that they can make a difference (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). Participation in youth volunteer schemes often has an immediate, positive impact on participants' plans for future volunteering (Becquet, 2007; Hahn et al, 2006). However, studies also reveal a gap between young people's intentions to continue volunteering and reality (Gleeson et al, 2008). Levels of volunteerism may decline in the years after completing a programme (Anderson et al, 2007). In the medium to long term, research suggests that the experience of full-time volunteering, at least, can instil a lasting commitment to voluntary service.

A common goal of youth service schemes is help young people develop a range of life skills, such as decision making, leadership, communication, self-confidence and teamwork. Research suggests that the personal and skills development benefits of participation in a full-time volunteer programme are strongest in the period during and immediately after completing the scheme (Benedetta, 2009; Roger Tym and Partners, 2007; Becquet, 2007). However while volunteers' themselves may attribute skills development directly to the programme, it is harder to establish such causal links (Malatest, 2006).

Some youth volunteer programmes place high value on developing young people's awareness of different cultures, regions, religions, languages and values within a country (Malatest, 2006). Evaluations of team-based programmes such as the French scheme Unis-Cité found that volunteers derive great personal development and inter-cultural learning from working closely in small teams composed of people from different social and cultural backgrounds to themselves (Becquet, 2007).

Many youth volunteer programmes emphasise the educational outcomes of volunteering and seek to encourage participants to continue formal education after completing the scheme. However evaluations show that the service experience may help young people see the importance of education but do not confirm that volunteering improves formal educational attainment (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008; Hahn et al, 2006). However, most studies reported that the experience of full-time volunteering had a positive impact on participants' employability and development of career or work plans (Anderson et al., 2007; Malatest, 2006; Becquet, 2007; Project Scotland, 2009). For example, former AmeriCorps and City Year volunteers are significantly more likely to work in fields such as education, youth, social work, arts, religion or government than their respective comparison groups (Anderson et al., 2007; Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008).

4   Key developments in evidence development and remaining gaps

This review borrows heavily from Gaskin's 2004 report *Young People, Volunteering and Civic Service* (Gaskin, 2004a). Many of the trends in youth volunteering remain relatively similar to those earlier findings. However, there have been some significant developments in the literature. Since 2004 there has been a strong increase in direct consultation with young people about their attitudes to volunteering through a host of youth surveys. These surveys have found that the very concept of volunteering is fluid and understood differently by different people in different places and in different times, and that there are divergent beliefs about incentives, motives and branding. However, despite this divergence around those issues there is general consensus that volunteering is a social 'good'.

There has also been an increased refinement of analysis into the impact of demographic variables within the 'young people' age bracket. This type of research shows that there are significant differences in the levels, nature and attitudes towards volunteering depending on gender, ethnicity, employment status, religion and the risk of social exclusion. The increased sophistication of this research has helped to counter the danger of homogenising young people. Despite these advances much more work needs to be done around these issues and in particular there remains a lack of research looking at different age groups within the broad 16-24 age bracket.

Indeed many gaps in the literature remain. Although the perceptions of young people regarding volunteer have been explored in greater detail the attitudes of volunteer-involving organisations remain under researched. In particular there is a lack of information about how organisations involve, support and value young volunteers. More research is also needed into the impact that young volunteers have on these organisations and those who use their services. There has been a focus on youth volunteering as a means of ameliorating many of the problems associated with youth transition, community cohesion and social exclusion. However, it is important to recognise the contribution young volunteers can make

to wider society. Some research has taken place into this area but more is needed to redress this imbalance.

Since 2004 some research has looked into the attitudes of employers towards youth volunteering. However, there remains a gap in the literature around volunteering and employability. There is a widespread belief that volunteering can help build many of the hard and soft skills necessary for employment but there remains a lack of solid and direct evidence of such links.

The barriers to volunteering faced by many young people are well documented, however, there is a lack of good practice around how these barriers can be removed and countered. Research into this area should be carried out to move beyond the problem and towards the solution. Crucially these recommendations need to be implemented as the lessons from successive youth volunteering (and indeed wider volunteering) projects have been frustratingly similar and often appear to remain largely unheeded.

Indeed there appear to be a number of consistencies across youth volunteering projects in terms of successes and challenges. All projects repeatedly report the positive impact of volunteering on volunteers and the organisations they volunteer for and have provided a wide range of evidence on the benefits of volunteering. This is especially the case with employability, personal development and health. One area which is harder to quantify is the impact of volunteering on the local community. As a result, research into community impact is limited and evidence scattered.

Key challenges emerging from these recent project evaluations have been:
- Problems with timescales and the length of time needed to implement the project
- Challenges accessing and breaking down barriers faced by hard to reach and socially excluded groups
- Issues of management, leadership and control between local projects and government
- Conflict over the introduction of new and exciting projects and possible duplication of existing infrastructure

In summary there is a lot still to discover about young people and volunteering, but there is also much learning that can be usefully distilled and implemented from what we already know.

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