

Citizenship Review Team
European International Policy Division
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28 March 2008

“Citizenship: Our Common Bond” Response from Volunteering England

Volunteering England is the integrated national volunteering development organisation for England. We work across the private, public and third sectors to raise the impact of volunteering as a powerful force for change. In particular, we are working to improve the capacity of the volunteering infrastructure. We are the accountable body for the Modernising Volunteering strand of the National Support Service and accredit and brand the network of local Volunteer Centres. We are a Strategic Partner of the Cabinet Office (Office of the Third Sector).

Volunteering England welcomes Lord Goldsmith’s recognition of the valuable role that civic participation and volunteering have in today’s society. We are impressed by many of the recommendations outlined in the Citizenship Report, but would like to highlight some areas of concern, particularly where they may conflict with recent recommendations put forward by The Commission on the Future of Volunteering in the “Manifesto for Change” report, which was published in January 2008 by the independent Commission on the Future of Volunteering, chaired by Baroness Julia Neuberger.

The “Manifesto for Change” report offers a comprehensive summary of many of the trends and challenges which characterise volunteering at present and sets out a number of recommendations to be addressed by the government and public, private and voluntary sectors.

We regret that we did not have the opportunity to feed into the review process, but we are keen to highlight how our experiences and contacts may be useful in taking forward any of the recommendations contained within the report, to ensure that such initiatives can be as joined up as possible in order to meet the needs of volunteers and the organisations which they work with.

We have ordered our comments, following the structure of the recommendations in sections six and seven of Lord Goldsmith’s report and have made additional points where necessary where there is specific relevance to Volunteering England and its stakeholders.

Section 6. Enhancing the bond of citizenship

National day

Volunteering England supports the idea of a new national holiday in Britain and would like to highlight our Community Day campaign as a potential model. Alongside our partners, we are proposing a new national bank holiday which aims to encourage people to participate in community activities and develop a shared interest in their local area. The day will also provide a focal point for celebrating the work of voluntary and community organisations, and we welcome the proposal that the government should provide a pool of funds for local committees to plan events around the country.

The campaign is supported by Volunteering England, the TUC, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA).

Civic participation among young people (53-64)

Volunteering England welcomes Lord Goldsmith’s recommendation that the government encourages civic participation among young people by ‘continuing to support capacity-building in the voluntary sector’.

In particular, VE would like to highlight our groundbreaking research on the impact of volunteering within Further Education institutions. The new report, published to mark Student Volunteering Week 2008, underlines the need for a dedicated funding stream for FE volunteering so that college and sixth form students can benefit from greater opportunities to volunteer and be able to find out about these opportunities more easily.

The report, titled “Assessing the Impact of Volunteering on the FE Sector”, highlights a number of existing volunteering schemes and accreditation models which can be used to boost participation and recognise learning amongst students. Furthermore, our research identifies ways for skills development to be better recognised by education providers and employers.

Above all, the report underlines the need for a sector-wide volunteering strategy which could support capacity building and promote the growth of volunteering by students in further education.

We enclose a copy of the report with our response. It can also be accessed on Volunteering England’s website at www.volunteering.org.uk/feresearch

We would also urge the government to reconsider the Commission on the Future of Volunteering recommendation (3.1) that funds be made available to assist with the development of the Volunteer Centre network.

A properly supported Volunteer Centre network can make strong strategic alliances enabling initiatives for young volunteers to complement other targeted initiatives, other age groups or backgrounds.

[Tuition fees and student debts] (59-61)

Volunteering England notes with interest the proposal to encourage students to volunteer by offering a reduction in tuition fees. While we wholeheartedly agree with tackling barriers to

participation, we are concerned that this method could be interpreted as introducing an element of “financial reward” for volunteering.

Volunteer motivations are of course complex, and we are concerned that the broad spectrum of motivations could be distorted by a national recognition scheme based on financial incentives.

In particular, we believe that such a scheme could change the national perception of volunteering for an entire generation of students and graduates. Participants might see volunteering simply as a route to ‘earn’ access to higher education. There is also potential for others, whose volunteering is not eligible to be recognised by the scheme, to feel that their contribution is undervalued.

Furthermore, following discussions with organisations representing student volunteers and the wider student sector, such as Workers in Student Community Volunteering (WiSCV) and the National Union of Students (NUS), there are significant worries about the practical logistics of such a scheme. We note that Lord Goldsmith has already rejected the idea of universal compulsory civic participation because of concerns about lack of capacity and unwillingness by voluntary organisations to host such placements. These issues are equally relevant when considering linking tuition fees to student civic participation or volunteering.

We would also like to suggest that the Volunteer Centre network which specialises in volunteering could start to work with the student infrastructure in the same way they are now starting to work with sport infrastructure.

We do agree that the proposal has some merits, both in potentially widening access to volunteering and in widening access to higher education.

[Jobseekers’ Allowance] (62-63)

Volunteering England echoes Lord Goldsmith’s observation that a clearer policy on volunteering is needed for people claiming Jobseekers’ Allowance, as well as other state benefits such as Incapacity Benefit. Our members often highlight that this is still an area of confusion for both their new and existing volunteers. We urge the Department for Work and Pensions to work with the volunteering sector to carry out the Commission on the Future of Volunteering recommendation (2.2) to develop new guidance on volunteering and benefits.

In particular, we would like to stress that clarity is needed on the existing rules which allow claimants to volunteer within public services like hospitals and local authorities. Anecdotal evidence from our member organisations suggests that claimants are often dissuaded from volunteering in these settings by Jobcentre advisors who narrowly restrict the definition of volunteering for benefit claimants to “charitable organisations”. This directly contradicts significant pieces of work being undertaken to widen and improve involvement of volunteers in appropriate and valuable roles within the public services. Two current examples are the review of volunteering in the public services being led by Gordon Brown’s Volunteering Advisor, Baroness Julia Neuberger and the numerous projects funded by the Department of Health under section 64.

It may also be helpful for DWP to develop a nationwide training programme for all Jobcentre advisors, so that they are equipped to give more accurate advice to claimants on the benefit rules and on the positive benefits of volunteering. This could contribute to meeting the Commission on the Future of Volunteering recommendation (5.5) that “...public sector staff be trained to enhance their understanding of the role of volunteering.”

The role of the workplace (65-78)

Volunteering England strongly endorses Lord Goldsmith’s proposal that the government funds a national recognition scheme for employers who support their staff to volunteer. We would like to highlight the existence of “Investing in Volunteers for Employers” (liVE) as a national quality mark which employers can use to develop and demonstrate good practice in an employer-supported volunteering programme. This form of accreditation demonstrates an employer’s commitment to best practice through supporting and motivating volunteers and their managers, while complementing and enhancing its business values and objectives.

liVE was recently developed with the support of funding by Capacity Builders through the Volunteering Hub funding stream and builds on the well-established Investing in Volunteers quality mark which is aimed at volunteer-involving organisations. While still at an early stage in its growth, liVE has already demonstrated positive outcomes for employers at a regional and national level.

Furthermore, new research from Volunteering England’s Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and the National Centre for Social Research demonstrates that employer-supported schemes can be an effective method of boosting volunteering levels. As part of the recently published research, “Helping Out: A National Survey on Volunteering and Charitable Giving”, half of the employees questioned about their organisation’s volunteering scheme said that having paid time off would encourage them “a lot” to participate, and nearly as many (42%) would be motivated by a wider range of volunteering opportunities.

We would also like to highlight the role of the CommunityMark national standard developed by Business in the Community which recognises companies that are good investors in the community.

In the context of Lord Goldsmith’s recommendations, Volunteering England urges the government to pledge further support for Investing in Volunteers for Employers as a valuable recognition tool. As a readymade structure for employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors it supports Lord Goldsmith’s call to promote flexible working hours for their staff to volunteer and boost CSR within their communities.

The local community (79-82)

Volunteering England is most concerned at Lord Goldsmith’s proposal that residents should get a partial rebate on council tax in return for activities such as organising neighbourhood recycling or setting up a residents’ association. While we naturally applaud such examples of local participation, we oppose any attempt to incentivise volunteering in such a way.

We are also concerned that such a plan would create a hierarchy of altruism, where some forms of volunteering are better recognised or indeed financially rewarded than others. Equally, by encouraging local councils to develop reward schemes, the government could effectively be seen to promote such a scheme as good practice to other organisations that involve volunteers.

This is a complex area which we believe needs more thought as it may alter the legal status of a volunteer and unintentionally establish an employment relationship between a volunteer and the organisation which offers the ‘payment’. Volunteering England’s publication called “Volunteers and the Law” contains case studies of some organisations which were found by employment tribunals to have established employment relationships with their volunteers. It is difficult to

predict the implications of such a decision, but in some cases ‘volunteers’ have been entitled to employment rights under the National Minimum Wage Act and therefore anti-discrimination legislation.

Lord Goldsmith also suggests that incentives and appropriate activities could be decided on an individual basis by local authorities. We are concerned that such an approach could lead to a ‘postcode lottery’ on volunteering opportunities where residents in different areas of the country would have unequal access to earn and claim a council tax rebate. We are aware of many local authorities which are beginning to embrace promotion and monitoring of volunteering as a key component of their Local Area Agreements. Furthermore, the new local performance framework has been recently redeveloped to include a specific indicator for local authorities to measure “participation in regular volunteering”. In this promising context, we are concerned that the Citizenship Report’s recommendation to directly connect local taxation with local participation is unhelpful.

For further information, a copy of “Volunteers and the Law” is enclosed. The most relevant section is chapter 1 on “Volunteers and Employment Rights”. It is also available to download from www.volunteering.org.uk/law

Faith communities (83-84)

We fully agree with the Citizenship Review’s recognition of the value of faith communities and the forms of civic participation which happen within them. We would like to draw Lord Goldsmith and the government’s attention to a new project which we are hoping to undertake in partnership with the youth volunteering charity v as part of the Modernising Volunteering strand of the National Support Services programme funded by Capacity Builders.

This project intends to focus on the potential role of inter-faith volunteering and on the lessons that regional and local volunteering infrastructure can learn from the more informal approaches commonly found in faith communities.

Creating connections between generations and the value of mentoring (85-87)

Volunteering England notes that Lord Goldsmith has identified the importance of mentoring within several sections of the Citizenship Report. We agree that “good matching is a critical factor in creating successful mentoring relationships”, and would also like to highlight the importance of good training and support for volunteer mentors and their mentees, at an initial stage and on an ongoing basis.

Volunteering England recently worked in partnership with the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation to undertake research and develop good practice resources on the role of the Volunteer Centres involved in brokering mentoring and befriending relationships. We would like to highlight the value of this information resource when the government considers taking Lord Goldsmith’s recommendation forward.

Community mediation (88-90)

Volunteering England is interested in Lord Goldsmith’s proposal to recruit and train more community mediators. We are aware of the powerful role that volunteers can play in sensitive community-based work such as this. Some excellent examples of volunteers’ contributions to local justice issues can be found in the winners and nominees for the Justice Awards 2007.

Indeed, we know that sometimes volunteers can often establish a different level of trust and acceptance in this type of role than a person who is paid.

Recognition (91-93)

Volunteering England plays an active role in promoting better recognition and training for volunteers. We are the national agency which organises and promotes the annual Volunteers’ Week and Student Volunteering Week celebrations in June and February respectively. We also have a strong record of working in partnership on award schemes such as the Queens Awards for Voluntary Service, the Justice Awards and the Guardian Public Service Awards. The Excellence in Volunteer Management programme which was developed with funding from Capacity Builders under the Volunteering Hub funding stream offers a range of learning opportunities for anyone working with or managing volunteers, whether on a paid or volunteer basis themselves.

Above all, Volunteering England supports the principle that recognition, training and skills development opportunities should be open to all volunteers. We are concerned that the proposed National Citizens Corps would potentially create a privileged club of experienced or influential volunteers who are nominated for their presence within their communities. Such a scheme would undoubtedly be valuable in recognising the efforts of some very committed volunteers, but it could also alienate other current or potential volunteers who choose to contribute in a less high-profile manner and will not seek local nomination or assessment on the basis of their volunteering.

We wish to highlight promising advances in training and recognition opportunities for volunteers, such as the recently launched Personal Best pre-volunteer programme for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, SkillsActive’s “Active Passport” which logs volunteer hours in sport and active recreation, the Train to Gain programme which was recently opened up to volunteers, the vpassport accreditation tool which is currently in development by youth volunteering charity v and the Office of the Third Sector’s pledge to commit funding to training for volunteers as part of its response to the “Manifesto for Change” report of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering.

These training and recognition schemes have been designed to target a wide spectrum of people, and in particular those from groups which are at risk of social exclusion. While there is certainly scope to further develop and improve training opportunities for volunteers and volunteer managers in this country, we feel that the proposal for a National Citizens’ Service is restrictive and would not meet the current need.

An Office of Citizenship (109-113)

Volunteering England notes with interest the proposal for the government to create an “Office of Citizenship” to bring together the key central functions related to citizenship.

As the national development agency of volunteering in England, we were very pleased to see the establishment of an Office of the Third Sector and feel that this development has created new opportunities for us to represent the views of our members to government and highlight areas where current government policy could be better joined up. We are concerned that an Office of Citizenship would have some duplication with issues already covered by both the Office of the Third Sector and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In particular, we note that part of the office’s remit would include “commissioning and publishing research on ways to promote volunteering and participation”. This is already a role which the Office of the Third Sector has played in commissioning “Helping Out: A National Survey of Volunteering and Charitable Giving” which was carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research and NatCen and published in October 2007. Furthermore, we are aware that the Office of the Third Sector is in the process of establishing a Third Sector Research Centre and are anxious that all research conducted in the area of volunteering is as joined-up and complementary as possible.

Volunteering England would welcome a remit which focussed on volunteering across all three sectors as opposed to just the voluntary sector as this would be consistent with the Commission on the Future of Volunteering recommendation which calls for a re-organisation across government to ‘better support and promote volunteering’ (as distinct from the third sector).

Section 7. Involving Newcomers

Learning English (4-6)

We note Lord Goldsmith’s recommendations on the role of volunteer language supporters and mentoring in supporting integration and wish to highlight a project which the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) is currently funding. “Volunteers Count” is for volunteers engaging and supporting learners who do not have English as their first language. The project aims to provide a draft framework and good practice guide and Volunteering England is taking part in an advisory capacity. We hope that the resulting resource will be useful in addressing this recommendation in the Citizenship Review.

In conclusion, we hope you have found our comments and suggestions helpful. We are keen to understand how the review recommendations will be taken forward by the government and we would welcome the opportunity discuss these issues in more detail with the relevant office.

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March 2008