

# How To Get Volunteers To Work For You!



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## **Abstract**

Volunteers as well as their management and therefore recruitment often suffer from ignorance. Many organisations underestimate their value and so volunteer recruitment is not the centre of attention.

In order to recruit volunteers who help to improve the efficiency of your organisation you need to follow some basic steps. These are outlined in Part II of this thesis, which is divided into three phases. In the first stage you need to plan your recruitment campaign. In the second phase you have to process your recruitment plans and therefore actively start recruiting. In the last stage you should provide your recruited volunteers with an induction and training. To retain the volunteers you should continuously recognise the value of their work of and let them know that you support them.

In Part III the volunteer recruitment process in organisations in Cambridge is evaluated. The primary research has been conducted through interviews and questionnaires. The results suggest that volunteer recruitment in Cambridge is very formal and that problems mainly occur in small organisations. Furthermore there does not seem to be a real structure in their volunteer recruitment since target groups are partly defined, but are not targeted.

The main problems of volunteer recruitment appear to be a tendency towards overformalisation and an insufficient focus on target groups.

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**‘Over 23 million people volunteer in the United Kingdom each year – some 10 million every week, and yet some organisations are suffering from problems of recruitment and retention’  
(Palmer and Hoe 1997)**

# Part I

## Introduction

### ***Introduction***

The voluntary sector has been growing steadily during the last years and continues to increase. The growing demand for people to offer their time on a voluntary basis creates a market that needs to be satisfied. Especially because of the expansion of voluntary organisations, their management becomes increasingly complex and professional volunteer recruitment becomes essential to provide the best service possible.

However in many areas the voluntary sector suffers from the ignorance of the importance of their work not only from external sources. It is also common that volunteer coordinators are, if existing and paid at all, in comparison to other staff paid poorly. Even though most voluntary organisations, like their name suggests could not exist without volunteers. Therefore the resources invested in volunteer recruitment, retainment and management are often poor. Unfortunately good volunteers usually do not just turn up to help. Organisations need to search them actively.

As mentioned by Gaskin and Smith (1995) the volunteer recruitment procedure is something that causes great concern within organisations. They might be afraid that they will not be able to get enough volunteers or the specific ones they are looking for. Therefore some organisations are scared to even take the step of involving volunteers (Gaskin and Smith 1995). However volunteer recruitment does not have to be a difficult task, if you follow some general guidelines. There are no rules on how to recruit volunteers, only recommendations.

In Britain 44% of voluntary organisations have the perception that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers (Gaskin and Smith 1995). According to Smith (1994) many organisations have an increasing need for volunteers and so the competition in recruiting volunteers has never been higher.

The following work aims to provide some guidelines for voluntary organisations on how to recruit volunteers successfully. There is a variety of literature covering this topic more deeply, which is presented here in an overview. This work examines and evaluates a new approach based on the existing literature and the current volunteer recruitment procedures in place at voluntary organisations in Cambridge.

The work is divided into a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part thoroughly reviews the current literature and explains the common recruitment steps. In the practical part the situation of voluntary organisations in Cambridge will be examined and evaluated. The work therefore presents how organisations are advised to act and how they actually do act. Furthermore it shows where the realistic line for improvement is.

The target audience for this thesis are voluntary organisations. That means that I have assumed you are either working in a voluntary organisation and/or dealing with volunteer recruitment issues. Therefore the term you/your is meant to address you as a voluntary organisation or more specifically the person who is dealing with the volunteer recruitment process.

### ***Aims and Objectives***

In the following work I am going to review current literature concerning the subject of Volunteer Recruitment and suggest which steps are necessary for successful volunteer recruitment. I will review the planning of the recruiting, the actual recruiting process and what needs to be done afterwards to be able to use the volunteers as an effective and efficient human resource in the organisation, without losing them after a

few weeks. Furthermore I will analyse the volunteer recruitment processes that are in place at voluntary organisations in Cambridge and point out the main weaknesses in their recruiting system. This will be followed by recommendations on how the voluntary organisations in Cambridge could improve their volunteer recruiting process.

### ***Methodology***

The theoretical part has been built on works concerning volunteer recruitment and management issues as well as other literature. The material has been reviewed thoroughly and the important information drawn out of it. The research material is partly only available in the Volunteering England Library in London.

The evidence for the practical part of the dissertation (stating the situation of voluntary organisations in Cambridge) has been collected through questionnaires and interviews. The interviews were conducted on a one to one basis, providing sound information about the recruiting process within that particular organisation. The questionnaires were either delivered personally or sent to voluntary organisations with the help of the volunteer centre in Cambridge. The samples represent more than 10% of all the voluntary organisations in Cambridge and were completed by the person responsible for volunteer recruitment in that organisation. Therefore the questionnaires, as well as the interviews, provide qualitative information about the volunteer recruitment process in voluntary organisations in Cambridge.

## **Part II**

### **Recruitment Theories**

#### ***Planning***

Before starting to recruit volunteers you need to be aware of what you are actually doing. Recruitment is a consistent process and therefore most organisations do not start from point zero. Even if your organisation has already been running for years, it is never too late to improve your recruiting process. The following steps should be taken into consideration before you start your next recruitment campaign.

Recruitment is expensive especially in terms of human resources needed (staff time) and therefore it is important to plan a recruitment campaign carefully (Taylor 1996).

#### **Defining a volunteer**

In the 1960s the typical volunteers were wealthy housewives who had a lot of free time, which they used to organise charity balls, benefits, and home tours (Gelatt 1992). The picture has changed dramatically over the last years.

By now volunteers can be found in all age groups, from all ethnic origins and basically from every part of society (Crowe 1990). Also many companies now offer volunteering opportunities for their employees, in which they provide the employees with information about where they could volunteer and either pay them as usual while the employee is volunteering or give her/him the opportunity to make up for the time lost through working longer hours on a different day. These company volunteering schemes provide voluntary organisations with highly qualified volunteers who can help them at higher levels (Ellis 1994).

There are various definitions of volunteering:

A **volunteer** is a person: 'who voluntarily provides an unpaid direct service for one or more other persons to whom the volunteer is not related. The volunteer normally provides his or her services through some kind of formal scheme rather than through an informal neighbouring arrangement' (Darvill and Mundy 1984 cited in Osborne 1996, p.8-9).

**Voluntary work/service etc.:** 'work etc. that is done by people who do it because they want to and are not paid, or are paid very little' (Gadsby et al. 2000, p.519).

**Volunteering** is an 'activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups), other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment' (Lynn and Smith 1991 cited in Billis 1996, p.188).

'**Volunteers** are not angelic humanitarians in any sense ... Some do very positive things for the general welfare; others are harmful, and selfish in the extreme. Altruism is a variable both among volunteers and among voluntary organizations. Failure to admit this constitutes a failure to face known social and individual reality' (Osborne 1998, p.11).

These definitions give an overview of the conception of volunteer work and clarify that people often expect some kind of return. People might just expect to gain work experience, to get to know new people or to contribute to the specific cause (Ellis 1994).

## **Why do you involve volunteers?**

It is essential to be clear about why you need volunteers before you start recruiting.

Often there is a temptation to get volunteers for any task, because they are not getting paid. However, you should have a plan indicating what you actually need them for. According to Gelatt (1992) the days are over where volunteers could be used for envelope stuffing or other menial tasks they need more meaningful activities.

If you cannot find a positive answer to why you involve volunteers it is unlikely that your volunteer program will be successful (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

Think about the purpose of your whole organisation, what your goals are and how volunteers can help you to achieve these (Smith 1994). If volunteers are used in the right way they can help your organisation to fulfil its functions and to carry out its work (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Of course volunteers are a low cost workforce and help to reduce costs of organisation regarding staff issues (Gaskin and Smith 1995).

However it is never good if there is a general feeling that volunteers are only used to save money (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Especially since some organisation could not exist without volunteers (Gaskin and Smith 1995).

It is important that you have a clear idea about which role the volunteers play within your organisation (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Volunteers can be a great asset and bring in new ideas, talents, experience and diversity (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Some reasons to involve volunteers are:

- Do work that otherwise could not be done (Ellis 1994)
- Extend the services of the organisation (Ellis 1994)
- Help to reduce work load of staff (Gaskin and Smith 1995)
- Bring in new skills, spirit and ideas (Gaskin and Smith 1995)
- To draw people towards the organisation and achieve commitment (Gelatt 1992)

- To interest people who might be suitable for future leadership positions (Gelatt 1992)
- Volunteers can often function 'as ambassadors to the outside world' (Gaskin and Smith 1995, p.95).

To run a successful volunteer program it is important to use the talents of volunteers (Gelatt 1992). Volunteers are very flexible and can choose who they volunteer for and will only give their time to a task that they enjoy and an organisation they think is worth it giving their time to. Therefore volunteers can be a valuable asset, but it should be obvious that this asset can be lost easily. Unsatisfied or bored volunteers simply disappear from an organisation (Ellis 1994).

### **Why do people volunteer?**

To successfully recruit volunteers it is important to understand what draws people towards your organisation to be able to attract new volunteers and to match them to the right positions (Smith 1994).

As mentioned by David Clutterbuck (1996) volunteers are clearly not motivated through money to work for you. Therefore the question is: Why do people volunteer for you? If you are not sure what the motivations of your volunteers are: just go and ask them (McCurley and Lynch 1998). Otherwise try to evaluate by yourself what the possible reasons could be.

To successfully recruit people you need to know what makes them give up their spare time to volunteer for you (Palmer and Hoe 1997). There are two kinds of motivations the altruistic one (the desire to help someone) and the self-interested one (meet new people, gain experience, have fun etc. (Palmer and Hoe 1997)).

The reasons are equally mixed among the ones that just want to help and the ones that want to meet their own interests or needs (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Even though Hudson (2005) suggests that the motives to volunteer are often self-serving.

According to Handy (1988) motivations are based on needs and expectations.

Usually people expect some kind of return for their effort. Volunteers usually expect intangible returns for their time offered which is connected to their motivation to volunteer. Common reasons to volunteer are: gaining work experience, finding new friends (Ellis 1994), dedication to the cause or belief (Gelatt 1992), to accomplish some goal (Gelatt 1992) or simply to help others (Gaskin and Smith 1995). Many people also just feel the need to give something back (Gelatt 1992). This might originate for example in having received services from your organisation themselves or knowing someone who has (Gelatt 1992).

Understanding the main motivations of your volunteers helps you a great deal in where you should look for suitable volunteers. If you include in your recruitment message the benefits that are likely to be of importance to potential volunteers for your organisation, the chances of success rise (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

The problems with the different motives of volunteering arise when the volunteers feel that their expectations are not being fulfilled (Ellis 1994).

### **Define your target group**

Volunteers come from all social groups with all kind of characteristics, there only seems to be a pattern of increased volunteering among higher social classes (Gaskin and Smith 1995). Men and women volunteer equally, although within the area of social services there tend to be more female volunteers (Gaskin and Smith 1995).

It is always easier if you know whom you would like to recruit to concentrate on where to find exactly these people. This does not mean that you should limit the people you recruit to a specific gender, race, religion or other category (except the clients you work with require specific criteria e.g. only female volunteers).

Defining a target group is more meant to identify who you would like to have as volunteer. Basically who would have the skills you need and therefore would be specifically suitable as volunteer in your organisation (Ellis 1994).

You should always try to find the best suitable person for the volunteer position that is vacant at the moment and not compromise a lot from the beginning. Because only a suitable volunteer can really help you with your work and can improve the service of your organisation. It does not make sense to accept volunteers who only create additional work for you and do not prove efficient. On the other hand you should not reject volunteers that could be of use in your organisation in other areas and you are able to match her/him to different tasks (Crowe 1990).

### **What do you have volunteers to offer?**

As mentioned earlier on people usually do not sacrifice themselves for your organisation, most volunteers at least expect an intangible return for their time.

Therefore to attract new volunteers you need to market your volunteer opportunities and make clear how people gain and benefit from volunteering for you and what the organisation gets out of it (Gaskin and Smith 1995).

Before recruiting volunteers it is always helpful to know what you will be able to give volunteers in return of their time. This can be mentioned for example during the interview or already in the advertisement. A special concern is always the reimbursement of out of pocket expenses, be sure to mention it, if you are able to compensate volunteers for it. Because if this is not the case it might actually hinder people from certain income levels to volunteer for you and it also creates the image that volunteers have to pay for being allowed to work for you (Ellis 1994). But according to Gaskin and Smith (1995) about 71% of voluntary organisations in the UK reimburse out of pocket expenses sometimes or always. Other benefits that you can market are, for example, work experience and therefore the development of the

volunteers' CVs (Gann 1996). If you prefer to approach the informal side of volunteering you can try to sell satisfaction, happiness and fun (Gelatt 1992) in your advertisements and interviews.

### **Be ready**

Finally it is important that you are able to deal with potential volunteers as soon as you start making your recruitment message public. Basically once you have advertised your need for volunteers, you always have to be ready to deal with requests regarding this matter (Crowe 1990). Often the volunteer message will take a long time until the person who is actually interested in helping you receives it.

Therefore it is not enough to expect applicants for a four-week period after you start advertising (Ellis 1994). This means that if your organisation is already operating with volunteers and you have sent out recruitment messages in any form before, you have to know what you will do with people who might drop in tomorrow and ask how they can help you. An important part in this is to constantly update your task descriptions of volunteer assignments and it is also advised to have a list with all the things you wish you could do if you were to have the necessary human resources. This gives you the possibility to offer a potential volunteer a variety of tasks that s/he can assist you with.

### **Writing a job/task description**

To be able to know which skills and abilities you would like a potential volunteer to have, a list of tasks is needed which in larger organisations tends to have the form of a job description (Smith 1994). These can be created by thinking about what the volunteer can do to help your organisation to achieve your goals (Smith 1994).

It is important to write or rewrite a job/task description before you start a recruitment campaign, since the jobs can change over time (Thomson 2002). Job/task

descriptions should be based on the needs of your organisation and not on what the person who did the job before thinks is important; you always have to assess each job description separately (Taylor 1995). A job/task description for a volunteer position should as in any normal job description include: the title of the position, the main purpose of the role, the main tasks and scope of the job (Thomson 2002). Job/task descriptions for volunteers can and should be flexible for a matching approach otherwise recruitment tends to be very formal and comparable to the utilitarian approach (compare p.22) (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

## ***Processing the recruitment plans***

Methods of recruitment should be cost effective and should not discriminate anyone because of her/his sex, race or background (Thomson 2002). Once all the steps of the planning process are completed, you need to start actively looking for people. Nobody will come and volunteer for you, if s/he does not feel like you are asking her/him. Therefore if the recruitment message is too broad, success is likely to be limited, because most people will assume that somebody else is targeted by the message. There are two key elements in advertising your need for volunteers: focus your message and advertise it at the right places (Ellis 1994).

According to McCurley and Lynch (1998) there are three different recruitment Techniques:

1. Warm body recruitment – spread the message as wide as possible, does not require specific recruitment skills – used to recruit many people
2. Targeting recruitment – define who could do the job best and try to find this person – used to bring specific talents or interests into the organisation
3. Concentric circle recruitment – word of mouth, works through people who are already in contact with your organisation – ensures steady flow

## **Advertising**

Advertising open volunteer positions is much different from looking for an employee in a business, even though it has similarities. One of the main differences is that the people usually actively search for job openings, since they need the money to survive. In contrast, volunteering opportunities are more things that people come across and might consider doing. Therefore it is important to have a good recruitment message, communicate it through the right channels and to ask the people who are most likely to positively respond to your request (Crowe 1990). According to Smith

(1994) the more people you reach the lower the response rate and the higher the costs. Another disadvantage of mass media communication channels like local newspaper, radio and television is that it can easily get out of your control and might not send the message you wanted to (Smith 1994).

It is always helpful to be registered with your local volunteer centre if you have one and keep them informed about what kind of volunteers you are looking for and what open volunteer positions you have (Smith 1994).

### ***How to form the right message?***

As suggested by Ellis (1994) the right message on your volunteer advertisement should not contain the word Volunteer in the headline, since some people associate this with a negative image. The message you form should give the impression that it is fun to work for you and therefore sound inviting to potential candidates. Another important element is that you are honest in your message. Do not give the impression that you accept every applicant if that is not what you are doing. If you conduct criminal record checks and/or ask for references it is always recommended to include that in your advertisement, because it will help to automatically deselect unsuitable candidates. To give people encouragement to volunteer for you it can be helpful to include the possible benefits as mentioned earlier on in the recruitment message (Ellis 1994).

Basic information that needs to be included in your message is (Smith 1994):

- Who you are
- What you want
- When you need people
- Why you are worth volunteering for
- What you offer.
- Whom to contact.

According to Smith (1994) you need to sell your organisation to potential volunteers, because volunteers choose whom they are volunteering for (Citizen Advice Bureaux 1993).

### ***How to communicate it?***

According to Gaskin and Smith (1995) there are eleven possible methods to recruit volunteers: personal contacts, from membership, work/occupation, newspaper, radio, television, volunteer bureaux, leaflets/posters, public institutions, church/religion and volunteer fairs. Nowadays most volunteer organisations also have their own website and in addition there are specific platforms on the internet where you can advertise your volunteer opportunities, for example <http://www.do-it.org.uk>.

These channels are usually used to reach the wide public, which might not be exactly helpful for your recruiting process (Smith 1994), if you aim for qualified applicants and not quantity (Harvard Business Essentials 2002). Therefore it is important to define a target group as mentioned earlier to be able to identify the appropriate way to communicate your message. Also depending on the target group you should choose the person who recruits e.g. recruit young with young, women with women etc. (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

Most effective still and always is word of mouth with which if done right thousands of people can be reached, since personal contact is very important (Smith 1994).

Problems with that occur for example if you need people with new skills, your 'traditional' source of volunteers is disappearing or you need new groups (Citizen Advice Bureaux 1993). It is always important to remember that people will not volunteer if they do not feel that they have been asked (Smith 1994). Many organisations find it useful to present volunteer possibilities at or after a public speaking event in which they might have given a lecture about the work they do which is also a direct approach (Ellis 1994). Another method is to have a good

informative leaflet and identify places to distribute it at. The fact is that it is always more effective if a potential candidate gets a first hand contact. This provides the possibility to ask questions right away and makes clear that you actually approach her/him personally to volunteer and not just anybody.

You should choose a way to communicate your message, which is economical, but still reaches the groups of people you are aiming for and hope to reach the most potential volunteers (Smith 1994).

### ***Where to advertise it?***

To identify the most effective places where you can communicate your recruitment message you need to have identified your target group (Ellis 1994). Because once you have identified who you are looking for, it is much easier to figure out where to find exactly these people (Ellis 1994). For example if you are operating a help line that is working 24 hours a day and is for women who have been sexually abused. First of all you might only want female volunteers and secondly you need to find people who will be able to work at night. One possibility could be to target female students with your recruitment campaign since students often have a flexible timetable and you might be able to find enough who do not mind working during the night. This means you should communicate your recruitment message in universities. You can ask universities if you can have a stand at the 'freshers fair' and if you can put leaflets in certain areas and so on.

### **Screening**

To gain background information about the volunteers many organisations use application forms, but it is not a necessity, it formalizes the recruitment process. The best way to gain information is through an informal interview with the potential volunteer. This will give you and the potential volunteer the opportunity for personal

contact and to ask questions (Smith 1994). You can learn more about the potential volunteer personally through direct screening (Weldon 2001).

If you think it is necessary you can also conduct indirect screening through asking the potential volunteer for references or if you work with sensitive clients even conduct Criminal record checks. You do need to be aware of the confidentiality of the information received (Weldon 2001).

### ***Self Screening***

The message you advertise and the procedures afterwards should be constructed in a way that people who are generally unsuitable for your organisation or the type of work deselect themselves (Ellis 1994). As mentioned before this can partly be achieved by including in the recruitment message that you require references and/or conduct a criminal record check. If it is not appropriate or possible to include this information in the message being advertised, it should be provided during the interview or stated in the volunteer application form (Crowe 1990). This is important since it will save your volunteer recruiter a large amount of time and is only fair towards potential volunteers. Given that in most cases as soon as this information is provided, potential candidates will realise by themselves that they are unsuitable for your organisation and will not apply. This saves you and the volunteer from rejecting a volunteer, which you should always try to avoid if possible (Ellis 1994).

### **Interviewing**

According to Rankin (1994) the interview is often the key to the selection of the candidate, therefore he advises that you change the name to for example 'meeting' or 'talk' since people could associate something negative with 'interview'. The aim of the interview is to select the best suitable person (Thomson 2002) with the difference that in volunteering most people are recruited in some way.

One possibility is to interview each candidate to find the best suitable person for the open assignment (Recruitment Approach compare p.22). However, the preferred method for interviews with volunteers is to find out the skills of the potential volunteer and her/his motivations, so that when s/he is still interested after the interview, you can match her/his skills and motivations to a task (Matching Process Approach compare p.22). From that point on write a personal job/task description for this volunteer and monitor it regularly.

The interview should take place in a comfortable setting and should be clear from distractions (McCurley and Lynch 1998). To run an effective volunteer program, it is recommended to interview volunteers and not to accept everybody. Because an unsuitable volunteer can cause you more work than s/he is actually helping.

According to Thomson (2002) one reason why interviews are unreliable is that only a few of the interviewers are trained in interviewing skills. There are several steps towards a successful interview. First of all you should make sure that the candidate is at ease during interview (Gann 1996).

Always keep in mind during the interview that the potential volunteer has not been recruited yet, therefore it is important to show her/him how s/he can contribute and the importance of the volunteer position. In a way you still have to sell the organisation to the volunteer (McCurley and Lynch 1998).

### ***What are her/his motivations?***

Volunteers want to be able to see that their work makes a difference (Gelatt 1992).

Knowing someone's motivations is essential in keeping her/him motivated in the future. Volunteers can easily choose whom they want to volunteer for and will only volunteer for someone who makes them feel good about themselves and meets their needs. For example, if the motivation of Volunteer A was getting to know new people,

but the position involved constantly working alone, it is obvious that she is not going to stay long in the organisation.

### ***What are her/his skills?***

During the interview you should determine the skills of the potential volunteer. This can be achieved by asking about former work experience or volunteer work and also through asking about hobbies. Try to have a casual conversation with the potential volunteer about what s/he likes and does not like to do. It is important that the candidate feels at ease during the conversation, because otherwise it will be difficult to get useful information from her/him. If you have the feeling that you tried everything to make the potential volunteer comfortable, but still s/he hardly talks to you, try to reschedule the interview for another day (Ellis 1994).

Do not be afraid to recruit someone who does not have all the skills, if you think s/he fits into the organisation and is competent. Because skills can be learned and new ideas are often even more valuable (Gelatt 1992).

### ***Does s/he fit into the organisation?***

Besides evaluating the persons' skills it is also important to assess the character and the interpersonal skills of the person. Since this will be important for the working environment. Skills can be learned, but if a person seems to be unsuitable for the organisation as a whole it will be difficult to work with her/him. Therefore the interpersonal skills can often be more important than other qualifications (McCurley and Lynch 1998). This is a difficult criterion since it is easy to be judgmental about people and you have to be careful to still apply equal opportunities.

### ***Can they be used in the organisation?***

Once the skills and character of the potential candidate have been identified, you should evaluate if these are helpful for your organisation.

Recruitment Approach: The technique is adopted from staff recruitment. You look for the best possible person that suits the job description and person specification (Palmer and Hoe 1997). It is also called the utilitarian approach and is often found unsuitable for volunteer recruitment, because it is not flexible enough (Rankin 1994).

Matching Process Approach: This method is more suitable since the skills of the volunteers are matched with the needs of the organisation (Rankin 1994).

### ***What do you do if someone is unsuitable?***

If you accept everybody there is a danger that the quality of your organisations service suffers, if the person is not competent enough (Smith 1994). This puts the importance of volunteering before the needs of your organisation (Palmer and Hoe 1997). On the other hand volunteers get demoralised and unmotivated quickly if they do not have enough to do (McCurley and Lynch 1998).

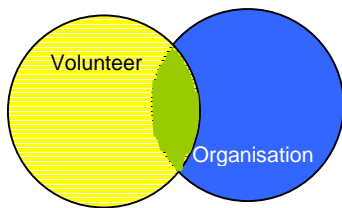
If someone is not suitable for your organisation you need to be able to tell the volunteer that they have not been accepted. It is recommended to be honest with the person and explain to her/him why you think s/he is not suitable and if you know an organisation or volunteer centre for which s/he could be suitable address her/him to it (Palmer and Hoe 1997). Do not in any circumstances tell the volunteer that you will call him even though you know you never will. This is bad for the image of your organisation and is unfair towards the person who offered you her/his time (Ellis 1994).

### ***Suitable: match to a position***

The better the organisation is able to match the interests of the volunteer with available volunteer functions, the better the volunteer program runs (Gelatt 1992).

If you identify the persons skills and characteristics as suitable for your organisation there are two options: you can match her/him to an open volunteer assessment or

you can write up an individual new volunteer job/task description in which you match the skills and interests of the new volunteer to tasks that need to be done and patch them together in a new description (Palmer and Hoe 1997). It is always helpful to have a job/task description for each volunteer, because it gives you and the volunteer an idea of what the volunteer is supposed to be doing. It also assures that the volunteer actually has a task to fulfil.



*Diagram 1: Matching Process Approach adopted from McCurley and Lynch (1998)*

The area that overlaps between the two circles shows according to McCurley and Lynch (1998) where the expectations and interests of the volunteer meet the organisations needs. In this area therefore lies the most efficient volunteer job that satisfies both parties and should be identified during the interview (McCurley and Lynch 1998).

## ***Follow Up***

### **Induction**

All new volunteers need an induction (Palmer and Hoe 1997). In this you should provide them with information about the organisation as a whole, details on the programs and projects that are run, policies and conditions (Edwards and Fowler 2002). A good induction gives your volunteers a better understanding of your organisation and her/his role (Gelatt 1992). It should address the history, mission and purposes of your organisation, how important volunteers are for your organisation, give an overview of the structure of your organisation and explain rights and responsibilities of the volunteers (Gelatt 1992).

McCurley and Lynch (1998) divide the induction into three parts:

- Cause orientation (why s/he is working there)
- System orientation (show volunteers how the organisation works)
- Social orientation (how the volunteer fits in the environment of the organisation)

According to Gaskin and Smith (1995) 69% of British organisations provide induction training. Another advantage of informed volunteers is that they can better spread the word about your organisation to other potential volunteers or donors (Gelatt 1992).

Therefore informed volunteers can help you a great deal in recruiting new people (Weldon 2001).

### **Training and Support**

It is sometimes preferred to use the term preparation instead of training, because it is more informal (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

Training can provide the volunteers with information, necessary skills, attitudes or approaches that your volunteers need to know to ensure best quality service (McCurley and Lynch 1998). It is important that volunteers have the opportunity to

learn and to gain the right skills to fulfil their tasks (Palmer and Hoe 1997). It makes volunteers more efficient and effective (Palmer and Hoe 1997). It provides development for the volunteers and shows them that their service is taken seriously and can also serve as a kind of reward (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

Training is a good way to support volunteers and the lack of it is according to Gaskin and Smith (1995) in correlation with high turnover in an organisation. Besides providing training for volunteers it is important to offer support and to create an atmosphere where volunteers know that they can ask for help and who to go to for it (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

## **Feedback and Recognition**

Everybody wants to be appreciated and treated well (Smith 1994). Recognition of volunteers needs to be integrated into the day-to-day business (Gelatt 1992). You cannot say thank you often enough. Recognition events are important, but only to rely on the recognition event once a year is not enough (Gelatt 1992). Recognition needs to be honest (Palmer and Hoe 1997).

There are different forms of recognition for example the attitude of staff (Gelatt 1992). These can usually be divided into two categories: formal recognition (e.g. recognition events) and informal recognition (e.g. saying thank you as often as you can) (McCurley and Lynch 1998). The recognition should reflect what the volunteer has achieved, because if you give everybody the same kind of recognition the ones that worked hardest will be discouraged. This can be in the form of for example writing a personal letter of appreciation to the most dedicated volunteers (Gelatt 1992).

Furthermore volunteers have a right to know how well they are performing (Gelatt 1992) and you should evaluate if volunteers meet your minimal standards. You need to be able to give them feedback if: they are meeting the target, problems are avoided and they have the necessary teamwork skills (Gelatt 1992).

## **Part III**

### **Volunteer Recruitment in Cambridge**

#### ***Introduction***

Part II considers how organisations should approach the recruitment process in theory, but like with any other subject theory often does not equal practice. This section will provide you with information about the general practice applied by organisations in the Cambridge area. You might find some similarities with your own organisation and it can help you realise how you can improve your recruitment process.

The results were achieved with two methods: interviews and questionnaires. It is difficult to define a specific number of voluntary organisations within Cambridge, but research suggests that there are around 100. The questionnaire was sent out through the Volunteer Centre in Cambridge that agreed to e-mail it to their clients. In addition, I distributed about 10 questionnaires to charity shops. In total I received 15 answers, which represent more than 10% of the target group and are qualitative since the questionnaire contained many open ended questions and were completed by the person responsible for the recruitment process. Furthermore I conducted two interviews with randomly selected voluntary organisations that agreed to be interviewed about their recruitment procedure.

#### ***Results of the primary research: Questionnaires and Interviews***

The questionnaire contained 20 questions, each of which was designed under a specific aspect to receive information about the theories mentioned in Part II. If there were relevant answers given in the interviews to a question, they are mentioned at the end of each question.

## Question 1: How old are your volunteers?

This question served two purposes, first of all to see which age groups are represented in the organisation and secondly how many volunteers the organisations has in total.

The number of volunteers in an organisation in Cambridge varied extremely from three volunteers in the smallest organisation and 250 volunteers in the largest one.

The total number of volunteers involved in these fifteen organisations is 720 volunteers; this gives an average of 51 volunteers per organisation. Considering that there are about a hundred voluntary organisations in Cambridge, it can be assumed that about 5100 people are involved in volunteering in Cambridge, which has a population of 108,863 (National Statistics 2001). Therefore about one person out of twenty is volunteering.

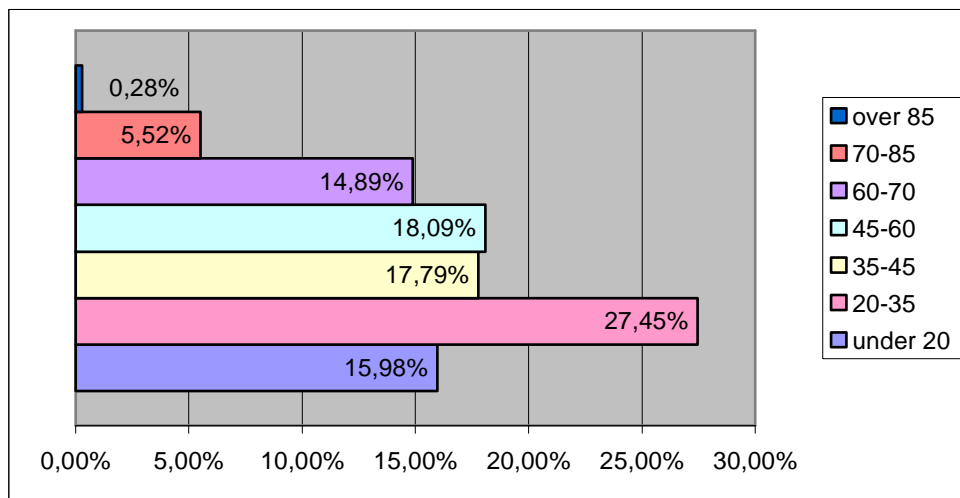


Diagram 2: Age Distribution of Volunteers in Cambridge

The age distribution is relatively uniform, even though there is a clear peak from 20-35. This can probably be lead back to the high proportion of students in Cambridge who make up more than 20% of the population and have a lot of spare time on their hands (National Statistics 2001). From 70 upwards the volunteer involvement decreases dramatically which might be related to changes of health and limited flexibility. In general the pool to draw people from gets smaller from 74 and older

since their group only make 6,89% (National Statistics 2001) of the population and might have handicaps as mentioned above.

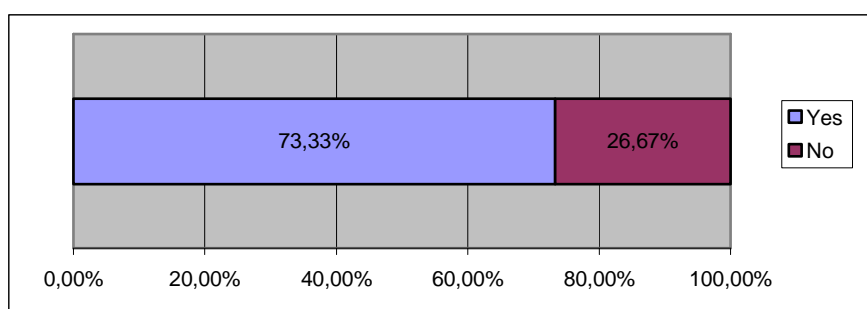
Also the organisations interviewed have an equal age distribution and around the average number of volunteers (53 and 42 volunteers).

## **Question 2: Do you have a statement that expresses why you involve volunteers?**

### **If you answered NO: Why do you involve volunteers?**

The target of the question was to ascertain if organisations are aware of the reason why they involve volunteers and if there are other reasons than saving money.

73,33% have a statement that explains why they involve volunteers. The statements varied from 'to make as much money as possible to overcome poverty and suffering around the world' to 'we use volunteers because they can help many more people than paid staff alone can, and because they bring a wide range of qualities, talents, and experience which benefit our clients'. Some even mentioned that volunteers founded their organisation. All the answers had a quite idealistic sense about them, which of course is good, if they are based on the truth.



*Diagram 3: Statement that expresses why volunteers are involved.*

There appears to be some doubt since the responses that were given in the interviews had a clear different direction 'We certainly wouldn't be able to pay all of those volunteers' (Organisation A) and even more direct 'Cost effective. It's got to be the most immediate reason, they are cost effective' (Organisation B). It is good that

many organisations seem to have other reasons than saving money, at least written in some kind of statement. The question that rises after these different results is if they are still aware of them? Maybe it is good advice to read through your own volunteer policy once in a while and think about why you started involving volunteers in the first place.

**Question 3: State the three main reasons why you think people volunteer for your organisation.**

This question was aimed to find out the main motivations that are assumed by volunteer recruiters. It was difficult to find a consensus in the answers given. The overall picture received was that most recruiters believe in the altruistic motives to volunteer which could lead to a wrong approach in the volunteer recruitment process.

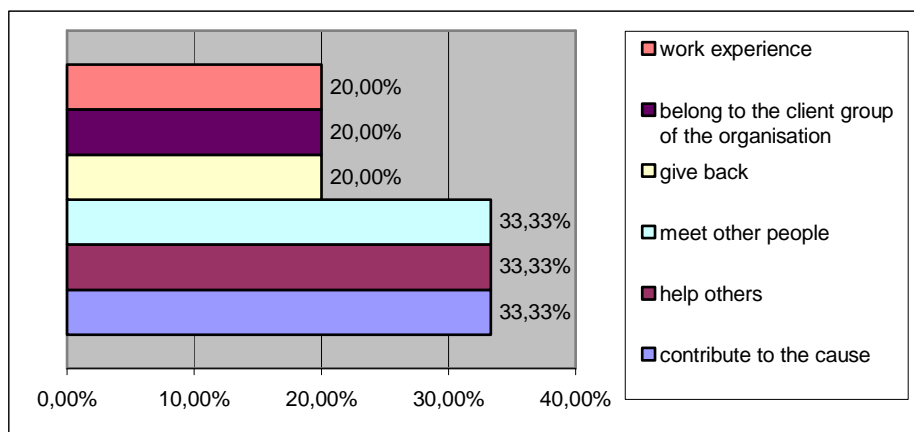


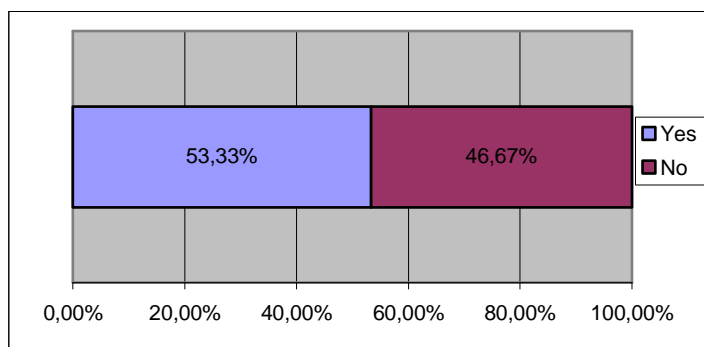
Diagram 4: Motivations to volunteer

To contribute to the cause of the organisation and the desire to help others were mentioned by a third of the organisations asked. Followed by meet other people, give something back, belong to the client group themselves and to gain work experience which were all mentioned by 20% of the organisations. The rest of the answers varied a lot. One answer that was particularly interesting was 'see volunteering as a means of 'getting back to work' and reapplying their social skills with the general public'. This is probably true especially for people who have not been able to work for a long time due to health problems or something similar.

According to the interviewees a main motivation to volunteer is to gain work experience or because they belong to the client group of the organisation and feel connected to the work.

#### **Question 4: Do you have a job/task description for each volunteer position?**

Knowing if an organisation has a job/task description gives two possible indications. First of all it shows how structured the organisation works with volunteers and secondly it implies a formalisation of the relationship between volunteer and organisation. Gaskin and Smith (1995) found in their study from 1995 that 47% of organisation in the UK issued job/task descriptions.



*Diagram 5: Job/Task descriptions for volunteer positions*

The results of the questionnaire suggest that this might have risen slightly. The difficulty that arises with the result of the question is that it is not really clear what the recruiter considers a job/task description. It only gives the answer that they provide some kind of description of the tasks that should be undertaken by the volunteer. Additionally, the organisations that were interviewed stated that they have job/task descriptions for the volunteer roles.

#### **Question 5: What kind of work do your volunteers do?**

As mentioned in Part II it is said that the times are over when volunteers could be used for just any task. Therefore it is interesting to know if volunteers are really involved in other tasks than just administration and are given some responsibility. In

the questionnaire there were ten answers provided to choose from, selecting as many as applied to their organisation.

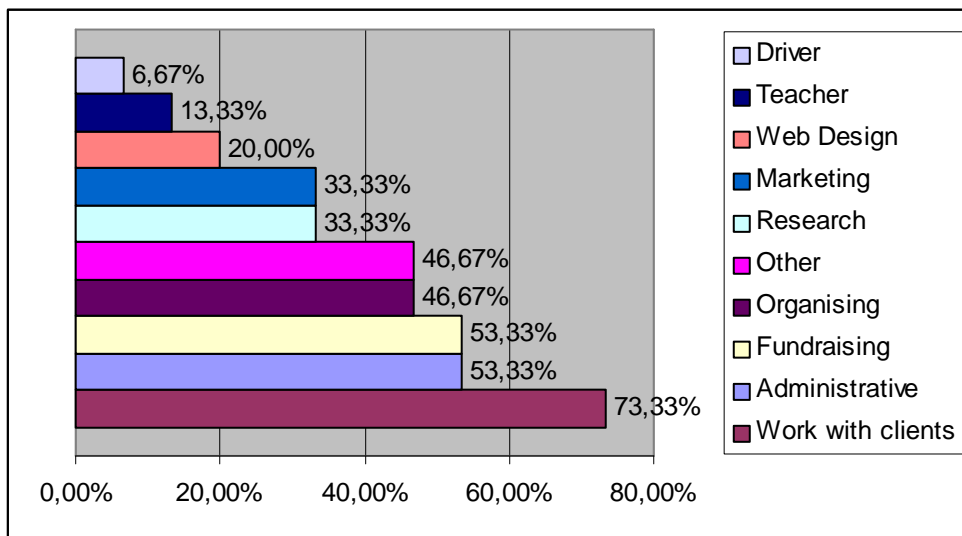


Diagram 6: Areas of volunteer involvement

As the Diagram clearly shows most volunteers are involved in the direct work with the clients of the organisation, followed by administrative and fundraising tasks. It also reflects that there is a large variety of work available for volunteers. Basically if somebody wants to volunteer there should not be a problem for her/him to find a task that s/he is interested in.

The interviewees also pointed out that there are a large variety of tasks in which volunteers are involved.

### **Question 6: In what way would you suggest that volunteers add value?**

In this question four possible answers were provided and as many as suitable for the organisation could be selected.

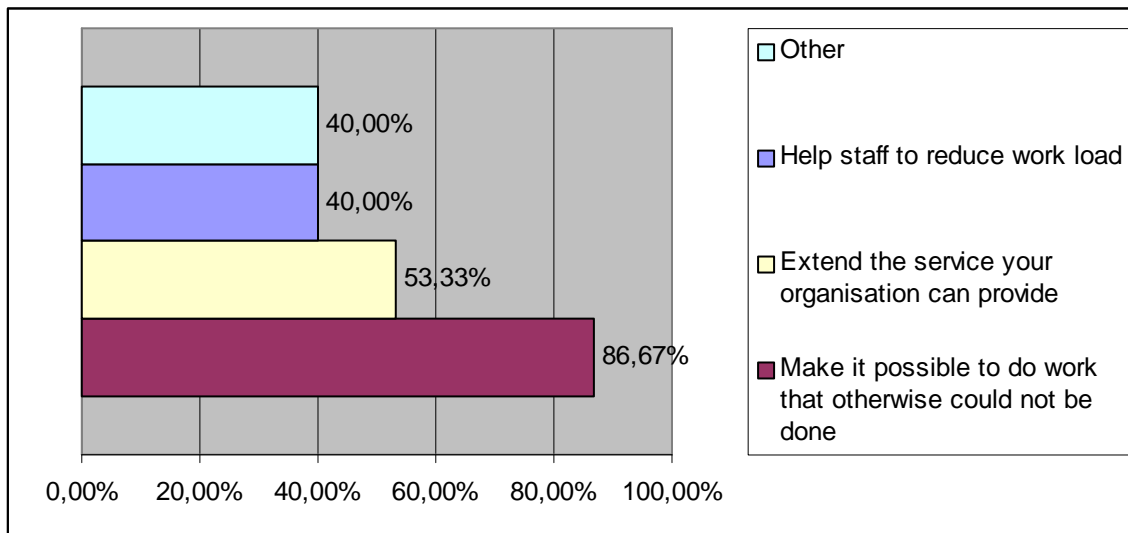


Diagram 7: Value added by volunteers

The importance of volunteers is partly revealed in this question, since many services could nowadays not be provided without volunteers as the answers strongly suggest. Therefore the most common answer was ‘to make it possible to do work that otherwise could not be done’.

**Question 7: Do you have leaflets or anything similar that describe your organisation and the possibilities to volunteer for you which you hand to interested candidates?**

This gives an answer if this method of communication is used by the organisation.

Only 2 out of the 15 organisations said that they do not have leaflets. Therefore 86,67% use this communication channel.

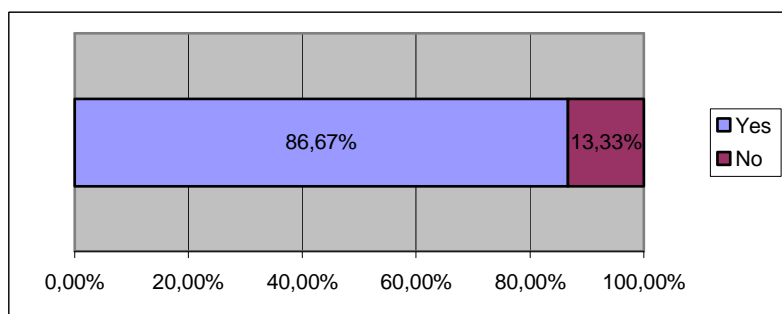
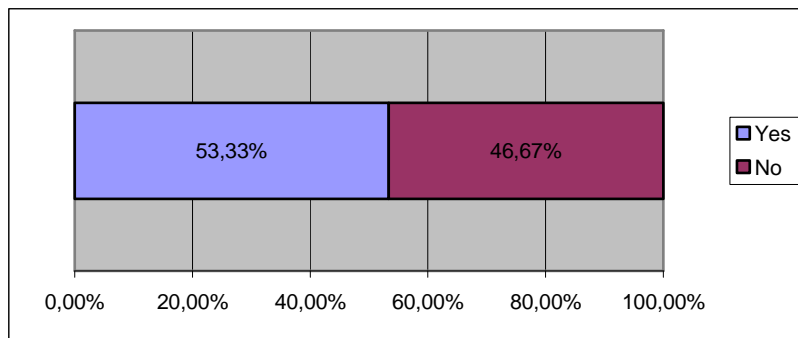


Diagram 8: Distribution of leaflets

### **Question 8: Do you target specific people with your recruitment campaign?**

As mentioned in Part II it is easier to build a successful recruitment campaign if you define a specific target group. Surprisingly only 53,33% define some kind of target group whereas the rest seem to address the public in large.



*Diagram 9: Target a specific group with the recruitment campaign*

Both organisations that were interviewed replied that they do not target specific people with their recruitment campaign. The logic was kind of contradictory with organisation B since they even identified who are the best suitable volunteers, but do not target them actively.

### **Question 9: Do you accept every applicant?**

#### **If not what do you do with unsuitable applicants?**

This question addresses a sensitive issue, since it is always difficult to reject a potential volunteer. There were only 2 organisations that said that they accept every applicant. The answers provided can basically be separated in what is advisable to do and what you should not do. They provide good and bad examples.

DO	DO NOT
'The 'unsuitable' applicant and I usually agree that the organisation is probably not the place for them.'	'The volunteer is informed by letter that they are not suitable for our projects'
'Explain the reason why they would be unsuitable.'	'We tell them that they are unsuitable'
'Discuss the situation and counsel them out.'	'Find a supervised role such as helping with our termly parties'
'Try and signpost on to another organisation or find a suitable way to involve them'	
'Try to help them to find something more suitable'	'They are told that we will keep them on our books and hopefully work will come up that is suitable for them.'
'Say no thank you & give reasons why they may not be suitable for the volunteer role.'	

Table 1: Guidelines on rejecting volunteers

The points listed in the DO NOT section mainly create either additional work for the organisation or a negative image of the organisation, which can damage its reputation.

The best method for rejecting a volunteer would be a combination of the techniques listed in the DO section.

### **Question 10: Do you conduct interviews for each assignment?**

#### **If you answered YES: Why do you do so?**

This question aimed to determine on which areas the interviews are concentrated.

The organisations could choose from eight answers and mark as many as were appropriate. The responses show where the priorities of the organisations lie. Only one replied that they do not conduct interviews. There were four predominant answers:

1. To find out if the person is suitable for the particular job
2. To show the person what the organisation has to offer for her/him
3. To find out if the person has other abilities that might be useful for the organisation.
4. To find out what her/his motivations are to volunteer

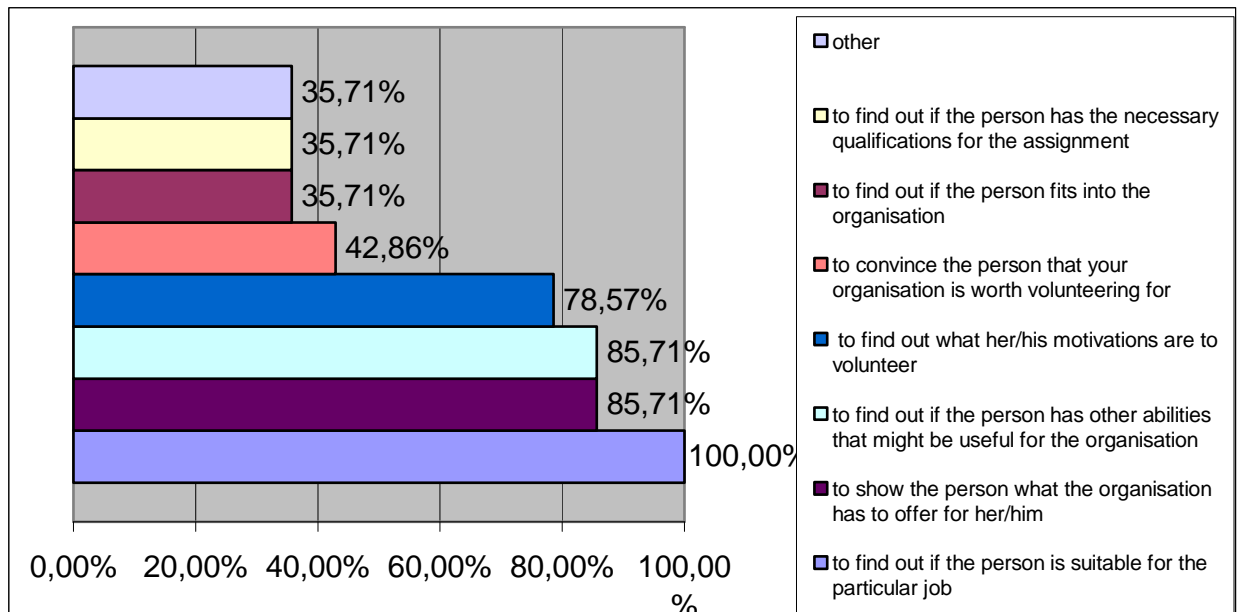


Diagram 10: Reasons to conduct interviews

It shows that there is equilibrium in the interview between determining what the organisation can gain from the potential volunteer as well as showing her/him what they have to offer.

### Question 11: Are your interviewers trained in the field of job interviews?

According to Thomson (2002) interviews are unreliable if the interviewer is not trained in this area. However for a voluntary organisation it might not always be possible to train everybody who conducts interviews in this field and also might not be necessary since the interviews often take a much more informal approach.

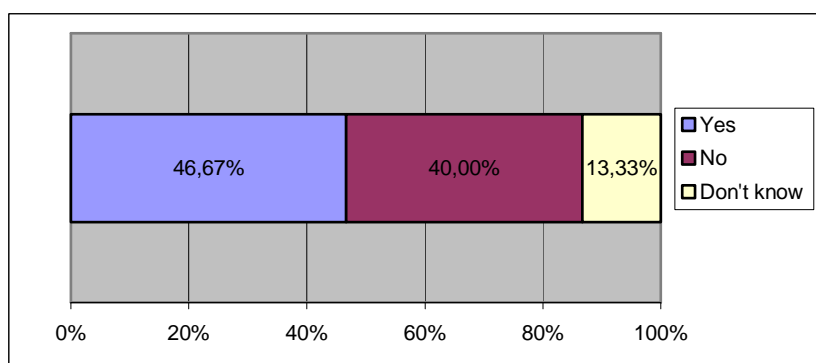


Diagram 11: Are the interviewers trained?

Therefore it is surprising that 46,67% answered that their interviewers are trained. This gives a further implication that the recruitment procedure for volunteers is becoming more and more formal.

### **Question 12: How do you decide what skills a volunteer needs to have?**

This question cannot really be evaluated, since it seems that it was formulated badly. The answers have no real pattern and suggest that the question has been misunderstood. The few organisations that seem to have understood the question right said that they draw these from experience or have a person specification. These are not representative results.

### **Question 13: Do you provide training for volunteers?**

Training is an essential part for effective volunteer involvement. Only 1 of the 15 organisations replied that they do not offer training to their volunteers. This is a surprisingly large number of positive responses, since in the study from Gaskin and Smith (1995) less than 70% of the voluntary organisations said that they provide some kind of training.

This suggests that volunteers in Cambridge are taken seriously and valued highly. The interviewees also replied that they provide training for their volunteers.

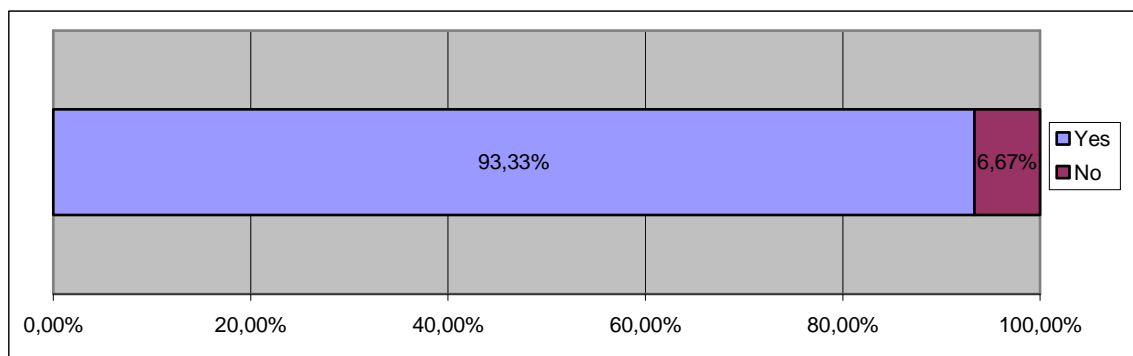


Diagram 12: Provision of training for volunteers

### Question 14: Where do you advertise your volunteer opportunities?

The question aimed to find out which are the preferred communication channels of voluntary organisations in Cambridge. It was an open-ended question and therefore the results were difficult to categorise since there are many places where volunteer opportunities can be advertised. The most common answers were through the Volunteer Centre and at Universities. This strongly correlates with the results of Question 1, that most volunteers tend to be in the age of students.

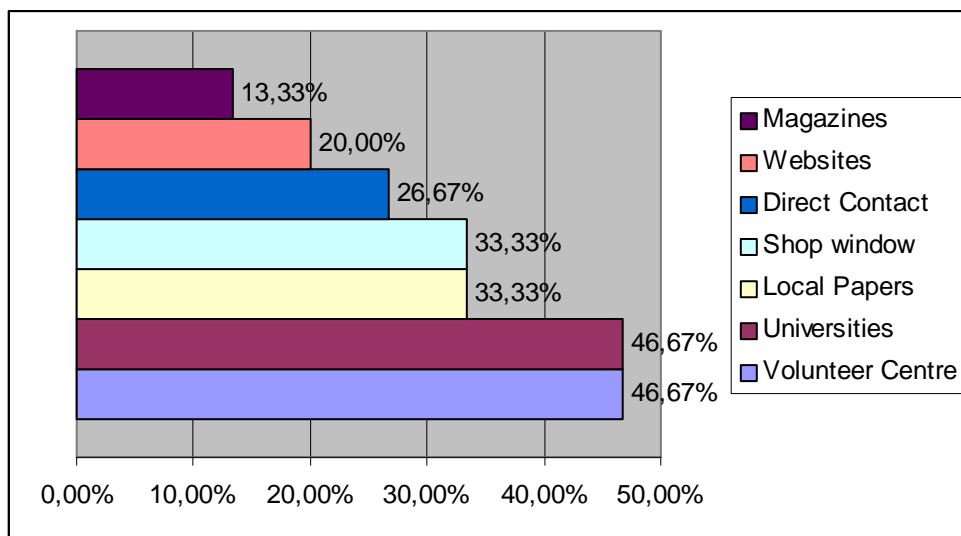


Diagram 13: Places to advertise volunteer opportunities

In addition the Interviewees mentioned that word of mouth in their opinion proved most effective and that they also use the internet as a predominant communication method.

### Question 15: Did you ever ask your neighbours to volunteer within your organisation?

As suggested by Ellis (1994) neighbours are always a potential pool for volunteers. The advantage of neighbours is that they are close to your office and that if you explain to them what you are doing and which help you need; they might have an interest in getting involved.

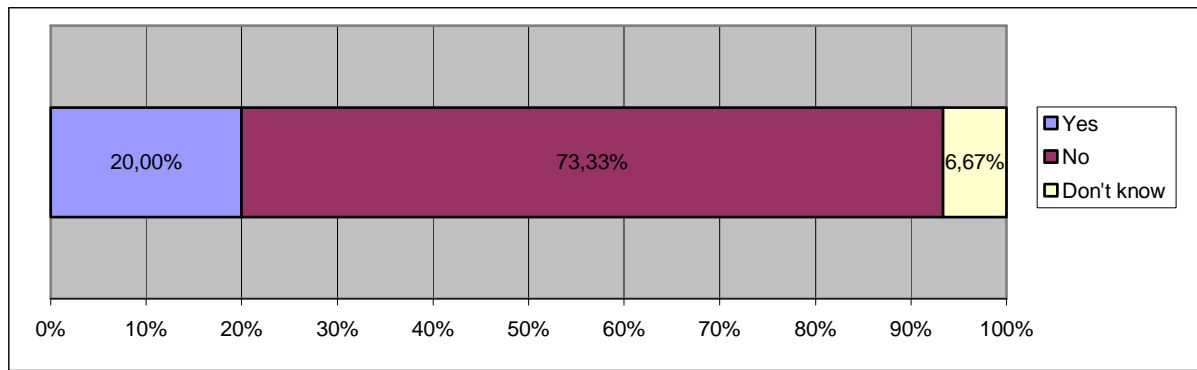


Diagram 14: Asked neighbours to get involved in volunteering

Therefore it is astonishing that only 20% of the organisations ever asked their neighbours.

### Question 16: Where did you distribute your recruitment message over the last three months?

This question was designed to check if the recruitment message is being renewed regularly by the organisation. Most of the organisations could not name 5 locations where they have distributed their recruitment message over the last three months. Only 5 out of 15 were able to name five locations. According to Ellis (1994) if an organisation is not able to name five locations this is evidence that the organisation does not renew its recruitment message often enough.

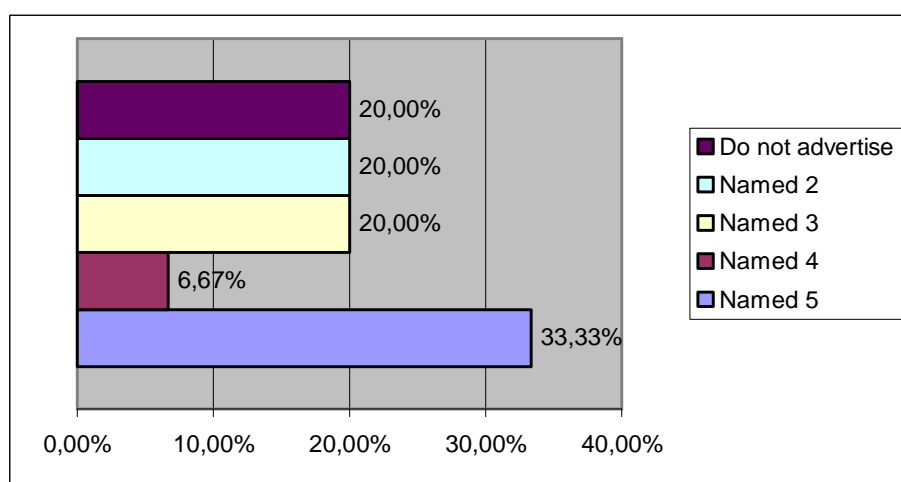


Diagram 15: Number of places where volunteer opportunities were advertised in the last three months

### Question 17: Are you registered with a volunteer centre?

It is always advisable to be registered with a volunteer centre, because volunteer centres can be of great help for your organisation in finding new volunteers.

According to the results this does not seem to be a problem in Cambridge since only one out of fifteen replied that they are not registered with a volunteer centre. This result could be biased, because of the fact that the questionnaire has been sent out through the volunteer centre. It is therefore likely that it does not represent the majority of voluntary organisations.

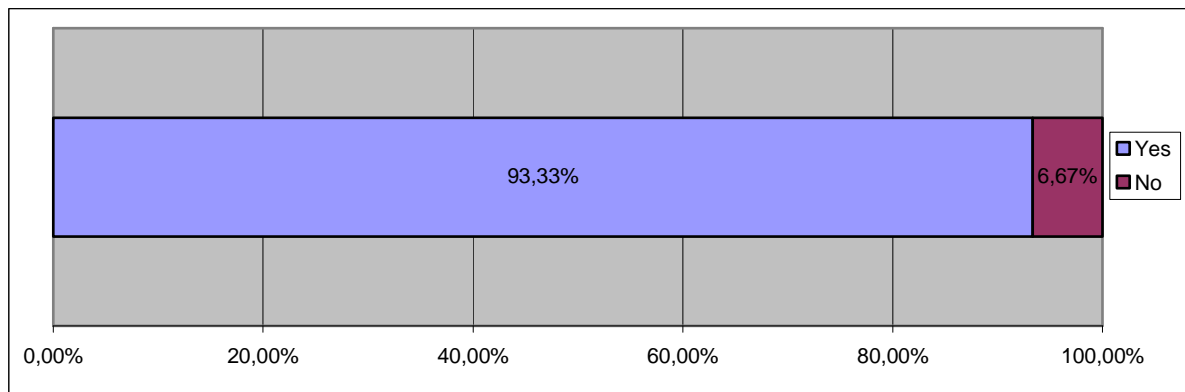


Diagram 16: Registered with a volunteer centre

Nevertheless the interviewees as well as most of the organisations that were given the questionnaires in a different way are registered with the volunteer centre.

### Question 18: Do you have events to recognize the work of your volunteers?

This question aimed (as well as Question 19) to explore what efforts the organisations make to retain volunteers that are already in their organisation.

Because if you have a good volunteer management that motivates volunteers to stay in your organisation, turnover will be low and the need for intensive volunteer recruitment efforts will decrease. This is always the cheaper strategy in the long run.

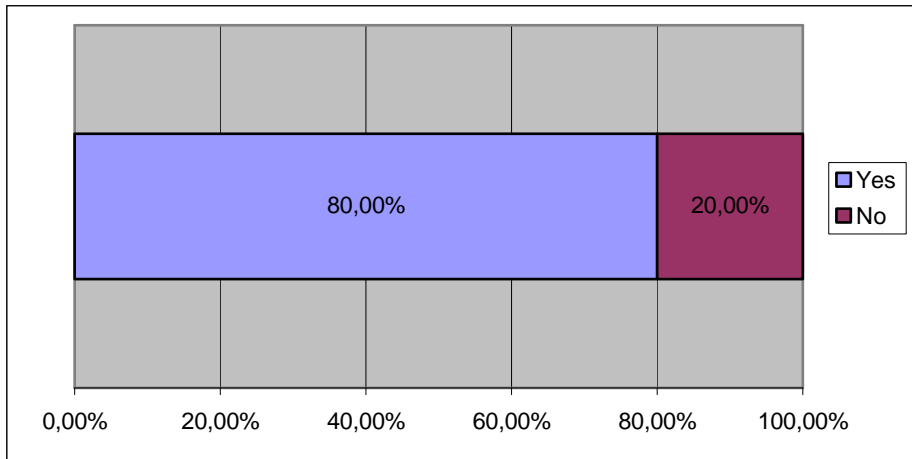


Diagram 17: Recognition events for volunteers

The voluntary organisations in Cambridge seem to be aware of this fact since only 20% do not have any recognition events. Also the interviewed organisations have volunteer recognition events. Organisation A said that 'specific awards are given out each year to recognise their hard work'.

**Question 19: Do you organise social events for staff and volunteers together?**

This question as already mentioned above besides recognition shows the integration of volunteers within the team, which is important to create a positive working environment.

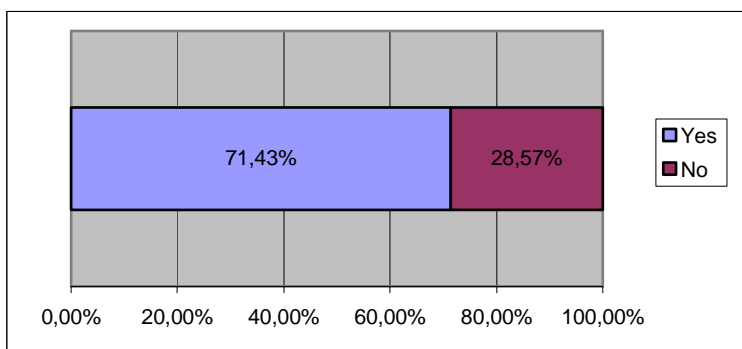


Diagram 18: Social events for staff and volunteers together

As well as in Question 18 most organisations (71,43%) do organise this kind of events.

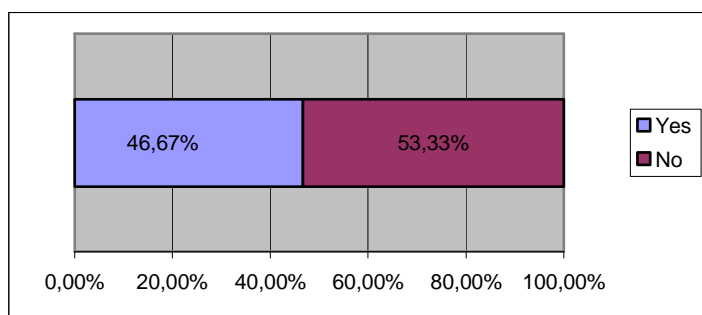
**Question 20: Do you have problems to find suitable volunteers for your assignments?**

**If you answered YES above: Why do you think that is the case?**

This is actually the most important question which might correlate with results of other questions since it provides an answer as to whether or not the organisation has problems with volunteer recruitment or not, since it is unlikely that the number of potential volunteers is not large enough in Cambridge.

Some of the reasons given for the difficulties to find volunteers were:

- 'Not enough people with the time, interest and skills'
- 'Due to the nature of the calls that we take'
- 'As the population changes (aging population & more people working longer) it is becoming more difficult to recruit 'traditional' committee roles'
- 'The client group has a stigma attached to them'.



*Diagram 19: Recruitment problems*

The results suggest that 46,67% do have volunteer recruitment problems, which mainly arise in organisations with few volunteers. Only one of the seven organisations with problems to find volunteers has more than twelve volunteers. Two of them have no job description (Question 4); this suggests that their recruitment procedure is more formal and that they might have higher requirements. This could originate in the work that is done by volunteers; according to Question 5 they involve volunteers strongly in work with clients. Three organisations even involve volunteers exclusively in work with clients. This is further undermined by the fact that none of

them accepts every volunteer (Question 9). In addition, they rely heavily on volunteers, which is revealed by Question 6. One organisation even said 'we only have volunteers'. Even though most of them apparently have some kind of target group (Question 8), that does not mean that the recruitment theories are applied in the right way, as the results of Question 14 suggest. Since the places where the recruitment messages are distributed are mainly for broad audiences and do not target a specific group. Another reason for their problem to find enough volunteers could be that they do not update their recruitment message regularly enough. Only three organisations could name five locations in Question 16. An additional factor could be the social integration of volunteers, since three do not have events for staff and volunteers together.

## Part IV

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### ***Conclusion***

Volunteer recruitment needs some general guidelines to be effective and work in the favour of your organisation. Not all recruitment steps are equally useful for each organisation. Therefore your organisation should only apply the rules that you think are useful for a successful recruitment process within your organisation. It is important to plan your recruitment carefully; otherwise you risk aiming at the wrong audience and create additional work and costs for your organisation. Once you have established a useful recruitment system for your organisation it is likely that it can be used over and over again with some adaptations in between.

The formal recruitment steps should be treated with care, since there seems to be an overall tendency towards overformalisation of volunteer recruitment. This could create recruitment problems for voluntary organisations in the future. Since the bureaucracy makes the recruitment process longer than it has to be and bears the risk to put potential volunteers off from even considering volunteering.

Volunteering should not lose its reputation of being available to everyone. An overformalised approach gives the impression that volunteering opportunities are, if said harshly, only for academics. Providing references, undergoing formal interviews and criminal record checks have a lot in common with applying for a job. You should not forget that people who want to volunteer offer their free time to help you.

Therefore you should evaluate the benefits of formal recruitment techniques strongly against the risks that they are bearing.

The tendency of overformalisation of volunteer recruitment seems to especially create problems for smaller organisations as the research in Part III Question 20 suggests. Most of the organisations that have recruitment problems seem to have a very formal recruitment process and demand a great deal of potential volunteers. This could lead to discouragement of potential volunteers.

If you focus your recruitment message and handle formal recruitment procedures with care, you should be able to get as many volunteers as you need without harming the image of your organisation.

## ***Recommendations***

To avoid volunteer recruitment problems due to overformalisation or using the wrong communication channels, you have to 'FOCUS' as perfectly expressed by Ellis (1994) again and again. Mostly problems arise because you are either not targeting your recruitment campaign at anyone or you are not targeting the right people.

Planning and targeting the recruitment campaign carefully are key elements to successful recruitment. It does not help you to randomly distribute thousands of flyers saying that you are looking for volunteers at any street or place in the city. Most flyers will end up in the bin anyway. The research suggests that most organisations either have not even identified a target group or have identified one, but do not use this information successfully.

A perfect example provides Organisation B. They themselves know who the best volunteers are, but when they were asked if they target anyone in their recruitment campaign, the reply was that they do not. According to their information people who belong to their own client group also make up the group of the best potential volunteers. Therefore if you have this information then why not use it? Just think about where this group can be found. Distribute your recruitment message where it is most likely to be read or received by your target group. For example if you are dealing with a disease why not distribute a flyer that on one hand contains information about your services and on the other hand your need for volunteers in a hospital? A main point in volunteer recruitment is that you have to be creative and have to think outside the box. There are no borders or limits on how, where, whom and when to recruit, of course as long as you do not harm anyone with it.

A further advantage of focusing your recruitment campaign at the right people is that it can reduce the need for too much formal recruitment steps. Since you will get focused qualitative applicants over quantitative ones.

Targeting can also reduce the costs of recruitment dramatically, because you will need less leaflets, posters, etc. to reach valuable potential volunteers. Therefore no matter which way you put it: targeting always works in your favour.

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