

The Road to Volunteering

Exploring the role of
Jobcentre Plus and
Information, Advice and
Guidance advisers in
promoting and signposting
volunteering to young
people aged 16-25

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Foreword

One of the many benefits of volunteering is that it can be a valuable way for young people to develop their skills and gain employment. But with almost unprecedented levels of unemployment amongst 16-25 year olds, it is more important than ever to ensure that young people are being effectively signposted to suitable volunteering opportunities. Given the challenging labour market conditions that the UK is currently experiencing, **v** The National Young Volunteers' Service and research specialists CFE have come together to produce what we think is a very timely report.

While Government has acknowledged the role volunteering can play in improving education and employment outcomes, the professional information, advice and guidance young people receive often hinders their pathway to volunteering.

This report explores the role of Jobcentre Plus and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisers in promoting and signposting volunteering to young people. Our overarching message is that volunteering can positively impact on young people's skills and employability, particularly the skills needed not only to get a job but also to keep it. However, advisers need to be equipped to communicate the benefits of volunteering and need to be armed with knowledge about the volunteering opportunities available. Government departments and agencies should recognise the value of volunteering alongside other education and training routes.

Government policy in this area should be informed by a clear sense of what interventions work, as well as those that do not. This report makes a number of recommendations and we hope its key findings will be of interest to policy makers as well as the voluntary sector and wider research community. It provides an excellent agenda for action.



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v is committed to research that demonstrates the impacts of volunteering on individuals, communities and wider society. Its research programme is dedicated to exploring new and innovative ways to measure and capture immediate and long term outcomes of volunteering. **v** is committed to sharing its insights with others.

CFE are specialists in education, employment and skills research and have been working on behalf of public, private and voluntary sector clients for over thirteen years.

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Executive summary

Background to the research

This report presents findings from a 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' review to explore the role of Jobcentre Plus and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisers in promoting and signposting volunteering to young people aged 16-25. The research was undertaken by v and CFE following feedback from v's funded network suggesting there is currently a mismatch between national policy and delivery at a local level. Some young people reported that they had not received information about volunteering opportunities or had been incorrectly informed they may face sanctions for undertaking volunteering whilst on Jobseeker's Allowance. Our research responds to this identified knowledge gap by developing understanding and aiding stakeholders in formulating and developing policy in this area.

The research consisted of:

- a desk based review of policy and strategy documents relating to volunteering and a secondary review of existing research;
- 11 qualitative consultations with senior national stakeholders;
- a national quantitative survey of 105 Jobcentre Plus and 132 IAG advisers;
- in-depth research with IAG advisers and service-users in two geographical 'hotspots'; and
- a workshop with key stakeholders and experts to discuss findings and refine the recommendations.

Conclusions

The following points summarise the key conclusions emerging from this research:


- There is strong government support for volunteering and it has become a central part of the Coalition Government's active labour market policy which has explicitly connected volunteering with moving people off benefits and into paid employment. However, organisational targets continue to impose severe restrictions on what organisations can deliver. Stakeholders are passionate about the value of volunteering for young people within the context of a personalised service but they report limited opportunities to instruct advisers to signpost service-users to voluntary activities as a result. At odds with this advisers indicated that they work within the constraints of targets to promote volunteering.
- There is widespread recognition of the benefits of volunteering for young people as part of a personalised support service. Stakeholders and advisers strongly agreed that volunteering can positively impact on young people's skills and employability, particularly the skills directly related to gaining or maintaining employment such as group working, timekeeping, communication and job specific skills. Young people corroborated these findings, although these benefits were not always sufficient to encourage young service-users to undertake volunteering due to other priorities on the part of the young person.

- There is a wider conflict of interest between the motivations of advisers and some voluntary organisations. Voluntary organisations are often reliant on recruiting volunteers to undertake basic aspects of their service which do not necessarily offer development opportunities to young people. The nature of advisers' motivations to signpost young people to volunteering as a way to address employability needs means that there is a possibility that they are likely to cease voluntary activities once they have met their objectives. This attrition could be damaging to the sector and it needs to work with referral organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers, to establish ways to address this problem whilst ensuring that activities provide volunteers with progression opportunities.
- Evidence indicates that there is a reliance on advisers finding information about volunteering opportunities themselves and only limited training from their employer. Advisers' moderate level of awareness about the opportunities available to young people affects their confidence in their ability to promote and signpost volunteering opportunities. Many report that their confidence would increase as a result of having more information about the opportunities in their local area.
- Advisers promote and signpost young people to volunteering opportunities on a regular basis where appropriate based on their personal development needs. This tends to involve 'selling' the benefits of volunteering to clients and signposting them to resources such as do-it.org. Managed referral to specific opportunities is less common and typically reserved for those young people with multiple barriers to engagement due to funding constraints, although advisers recognise the value of this approach.
- The most notable barrier to promoting and signposting volunteering opportunities to young people is the attitudes of young people themselves who often do not understand the benefits of volunteering or have competing priorities such as the need or preference for employment or education opportunities. Advisers spend a considerable amount of time selling the benefits of volunteering to young people and encouragingly there is evidence that young people's attitudes to volunteering changed once they understood these and had experienced the activity first hand.
- Advisers have a varied understanding of the rules and regulations in the DWP guidelines *Volunteering while getting benefits*. Largely this confusion lies with IAG advisers as knowledge of benefits rules is not a core part of their role but there is evidence of some issues in relation to Jobcentre Plus. There is recognition amongst IAG advisers of some gaps in their knowledge and they have sought to maximise the opportunities presented by co-location arrangements to direct young people to Jobcentre Plus advisers to provide appropriate guidance.

Recommendations

The issues for future consideration by stakeholders including national and local policy-makers, senior managers, voluntary and community sector organisations, and researchers emerging from this research include:

- Advisers should be equipped to communicate the benefits of volunteering to young people in a way that is enthusing and captures their interest and imagination. Where this occurs, young people's negative perceptions about volunteering are challenged and this is instrumental in helping to ensure that all young people get the opportunity to participate in voluntary activity and the gains that it brings.

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- Government departments should recognise the value of volunteering alongside other education and training routes and provide advisers with flexibility to promote volunteering to young people through revision of targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This is important not only to enhance service-users' employability and complement skills based approaches, including the raising of the participation age (RPA) and reforms to the education system, but to develop a culture of community engagement.
 - There should be recognition of the importance of localised knowledge regarding volunteering opportunities in order to ensure that they are targeted at the needs of young people in the local area. Senior managers should encourage their advisers to undertake their own research to identify opportunities to support and complement the resources provided at the national level by employers and voluntary organisations.
 - The voluntary sector should work with advisers to create more volunteering opportunities which will develop young people's employability skills and personal skills, in particular confidence, group working, time-keeping and communication skills, and seek to identify where existing opportunities can be adapted to address skills needs.
 - Adopt managed referral for young people with multiple barriers to employment. Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations should seek to adopt a differentiated service which provides higher level support to those young people that need more help and assistance.
 - There is a need to raise awareness of the DWP guidelines among all advisers. Steps must also be taken to address the lack of understanding about the rules and regulations in order to ensure that young people do not receive inconsistent and inaccurate advice and guidance. Fear of losing benefits is a major barrier to participation in volunteering and despite successive attempts to tackle this issue by the Department for Work and Pensions issues remain which must be resolved given the current policy drivers for volunteering.
 - There is significant scope for Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations to share their knowledge and expertise through joint training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities that focus more on the added-value benefits of volunteering opportunities. A new programme of 'core' training and professional development between Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers should be considered linked to the work of the UK Careers Profession Alliance.
 - Engage in further research to obtain an evidence-base to inform future action in the areas of parents' attitudes towards their children's participation in volunteering, the extent and nature of signposting to volunteering by Higher Education Careers Advisory Services, and the attitudes of voluntary organisations towards young people and the demand for volunteers.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by **v**, The National Young Volunteers' Service, and CFE to explore the role of Jobcentre Plus and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisers in promoting and signposting volunteering to young people aged 16-25. The research was conducted between September 2010 and May 2011 and utilised a 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' methodology to examine enablers and barriers to volunteering from the perspective of policy-makers, advisers and service-users.

Project Background

Both the current and previous government have actively promoted volunteering as a way for young people to develop their skills and gain employment, particularly in the context of rising unemployment amongst 16-25 year olds. Following the 2008 Morgan Inquiry, which independently identified a range of barriers and inhibitors to the uptake of volunteering in young adults, a range of policies and services have been developed to address these and support the Government's commitment to increasing the number of young volunteers. These include the introduction of Work Together and the co-location of advisers from The Prince's Trust and other local voluntary organisations with Jobcentre Plus.

Feedback from **v**'s funded network identified a mismatch between national policy and delivery at a local level. Some young people reported that they had not received information about volunteering opportunities or had been incorrectly informed they may face sanctions for undertaking volunteering whilst on Jobseeker's Allowance. Our research responds to this identified knowledge gap. The aims and objectives were scoped in partnership by **v** and CFE.


Scope

The research sought to explore the role that Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers play in promoting and signposting volunteering to young people aged 16-25 to develop our understanding and aid stakeholders in formulating and developing policy in this area.

Specifically, it explored three key areas:

- policy perspectives on volunteering and its ability to enhance employability;
- the customer journey into volunteering for unemployed young people aged 16-25 including transition from IAG providers to Jobcentre Plus as appropriate; and
- organisational enablers and barriers to promoting and signposting to volunteering including targets, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and funding.

The focus of the research was on the provision of IAG to young people by Connexions/local authorities and Next Step, although advisers from Higher Education Careers Advisory Services were invited to participate. Where findings in relation to the higher education sector have been identified they are summarised in the report.



Formal definitions of key terms used throughout the research including 'promotion' and 'signposting' were not developed to take account of the varied and different meaning of these concepts across the organisations that participated in this project. However, for the purpose of this research, promotion typically refers to discussion about the benefits of volunteering and its ability to enhance the employability of young people whereas signposting means referral to a specific resource or volunteering opportunity.

Methodology

Our approach involved two separate but complementary investigations to compare and contrast 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' perspectives in relation to the role of Jobcentre Plus and IAG in signposting and promoting volunteering opportunities to two distinct groups:

- 16 to 19 year olds (IAG provision delivered by Connexions/local authorities)
- 18 to 25 year olds (IAG provision delivered by Next Step and Higher Education Careers Advisory Services, and Jobcentre Plus)

A Project Advisory Steering Group with representation from key national stakeholders was convened to guide the research and ensure the recommendations identified are actionable.¹

Top-down review

This stage of the research investigated the 'top-down' perspectives of volunteering through a desk-based review of key policy documentation and stakeholder consultation. It sought to identify policy stances on volunteering at a national level, including recent developments in policy; funding and targets relating to Jobcentre Plus and Next Step; enablers and barriers to volunteering; and the rules and regulations for young people undertaking volunteering whilst in receipt of benefits. The top-down review involved:

- Desk based review

The review focused specifically upon policy and strategy documents relating to volunteering both under the Coalition Government and previous Labour administration. A secondary review of existing research was also undertaken, although this was more limited as it is a relatively under-researched area, particularly in relation to IAG provision.

- Qualitative stakeholder consultations

11 in-depth consultations were undertaken with senior national stakeholders from a range of organisations identified by v, CFE and the Project Advisory Steering Group.² They explored stakeholders' perspectives in relation to the three key research themes.

Bottom-up review

This stage of the research involved consultation with advisers and service-users to explore delivery at a local level. It sought to explore advisers' attitudes towards volunteering and the ability of volunteering to enhance the employability of young people; awareness of volunteering opportunities amongst advisers and the resources available to them in their role; advisers' understanding of the rules and regulations for young people undertaking volunteering; and young people's perception of the support they received. The 'bottom-up' review involved:

- Quantitative survey of Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers

A telephone survey of 105 Jobcentre Plus advisers drawn from across each region of England. Advisers were selected by Jobcentre Plus to minimise the disruption to service delivery and avoid survey fatigue due to other research being undertaken within the organisation. This was supported by an online survey of 132 IAG advisers, although a small minority did participate in a telephone survey (n=13) following an invitation to prime contractors from the Skills Funding Agency. The link to the survey was disseminated by a number of membership organisations with advisers invited to participate. The majority of IAG advisers were from Connexions (22%) followed by Next Step (11%). A number of submissions were also received from IAG advisers from other organisations; however, because of their low representation, they have been aggregated as 'Other IAG' for analysis purposes. This group comprises local authority advisers (8%), school or college-based careers advisory staff (7%), Higher Education Careers Advisory Services (3%) and other advisers (6%). Interestingly, the majority of IAG advisers (72%) that participated in the survey had previously undertaken volunteering themselves compared to only 38% percent of Jobcentre Plus advisers. Some self-selection bias in relation to the sample of IAG advisers must therefore be acknowledged.

- In-depth 'hotspot' research

In-depth interviews were undertaken with IAG advisers and service-users in two geographical 'hotspots' to further explore their experiences and capture detailed, descriptive data in relation to enablers and barriers to the signposting of volunteering opportunities for young people. Norfolk and Central and West London were selected to provide coverage of an urban and rural area with high levels of unemployment. A total of nine interviews were undertaken with advisers across both areas including Connexions, Next Step and local community based support groups. The interviews explored the customer journey into volunteering and perspectives on the contribution of volunteering to employment and employability outcomes for young people.

These were supported by 19 interviews with young people drawn from our hotspot areas. Young people were identified in partnership with advisers and, in a small number of instances, via their involved teams in local areas which broker young people into volunteering opportunities. The young people who took part typically had experience of both IAG services and Jobcentre Plus and interviews covered their perceptions and experiences of the support they received from both services.

This Report

Following this introduction the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** presents the findings from the top-down review;
- **Chapter 3** sets out the findings from the bottom-up review; and
- **Chapter 4** summarises our conclusions and recommendations.

2. Top-down review findings

This section presents the findings from our desk-based review and in-depth consultations with senior stakeholders from a range of organisations and government departments and agencies. It explores existing policy documents and research and stakeholders' attitudes towards volunteering to identify policy perspectives in relation to volunteering and organisational enablers and barriers to the promotion of volunteering opportunities to young people at a national level.

Policy perspectives on volunteering

Both the current and previous government have strongly and explicitly connected volunteering with moving people off benefits and into paid employment. Young people frequently credit their volunteering activity with boosting their employability and voluntary organisations are unanimous that voluntary work could help people into paid work. In the last seven years policy has focussed on using volunteering as a means to increase employability in particular targeting young people.

Background


The Russell Commission was established in May 2004 and highlighted the previous Government's commitment to youth volunteering through the development of a new national framework for youth action and engagement. The commission recommended a step-change increase in the diversity and amount of volunteering opportunities available and **v** was set up as a result.

In 2007 the Cabinet Office confirmed the creation of the National Youth Volunteering programme which was included in the then Department for Children, Schools and Families' Aiming Higher strategy. The programme was developed and implemented by **v**.³ This was followed in January 2008 with the report of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering, *Manifesto for Change*, which set out further recommendations for the long-term future of volunteering in England. In particular, it recommended the removal of key obstacles to volunteering and the establishment of clear regulations relating to volunteering while in receipt of welfare payments, including the training of benefit agency staff to incorporate volunteering.⁴

The Morgan Inquiry (2008) highlighted that a key barrier for young people arose from the unemployment benefits system; benefit claimants were discouraged from volunteering through a fear of being denied access to benefit payments. DWP's response to the inquiry recommendations was set out in the 2008 Green Paper *No One Written Off*⁵ confirming the benefits of volunteering and the Government's commitment to supporting volunteering activities within the overall context of finding paid work.

Volunteering policy under the Coalition Government

Volunteering has remained a central aspect of social policy under the Coalition Government. In the context of rising levels of unemployment amongst young people, it has become a key part of the Government's active labour market policy, which to date has centred upon the introduction of the Work Programme, reforms to the education system including raising the participation age (RPA) and the expansion of the Apprenticeship programme. The five priorities outlined in the Coalition Government's response to rising unemployment, *Supporting youth unemployment*⁶, provides further impetus for this approach in addition



to a number of other measures which will be delivered in partnership with business, voluntary groups and communities. Recent developments in policy highlight the Government's intention to increase the level of participation in volunteering both to enhance young people's employability skills and entry into employment, and for the benefit of local communities and to address the under-representation of certain groups in voluntary activity as part as the Big Society agenda.

The Coalition Government's commitment to volunteering is reflected in Work Together, a national initiative launched in October 2010 to encourage unemployed people to consider volunteering as a means of improving their employment prospects. Following a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2011, advisers from The Prince's Trust and other local voluntary organisations will be located in Jobcentre Plus offices to signpost jobseekers of all ages to volunteering and training opportunities in their area. The Government has also extended the period of work experience that young people aged 18-21 can undertake without losing their benefits from two to eight weeks. Collectively these initiatives are indicative of the Government's intention to bolster the employment prospects of young people by providing experience of the working environment.

However, the emphasis attached to volunteering in the Work Programme is likely to be variable. Unemployed young people aged 18-24 in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance will be referred from nine months on a mandatory basis, although those young people with significant barriers may be referred from as early as three months.

Providers in the Work Programme will be given significant flexibility to determine what activities customers should undertake to help them gain and maintain employment.⁷ The extent to which young unemployed people will be signposted to volunteering, given the considerable flexibility awarded to providers, is therefore unclear.

Our stakeholder consultation cited an additional driver for volunteering at a policy level comes in the form of the Big Society agenda and resulting creation of the National Citizen Service. A flagship policy of the Conservative Party and now Coalition Government, Big Society falls under the responsibility of the Cabinet Office and aims to empower local communities and encourage people to take an active role in their communities. This is indicative of cross-government support for volunteering and the Coalition's intention to promote volunteering for altruistic and civic reasons rather than exclusively employment-based outcomes for young people and adults.

The National Citizen Service, which will deliver pilots to 11,000 16 year olds during summer 2011, is a key initiative for engaging young people in the Government's Big Society vision. It is a personal development programme supporting young people to develop the skills and attitudes they need to become more engaged in the community.⁸ This is intended to provide a springboard for future participation in voluntary activity:

"Young people will get a lot of information about volunteering opportunities through the NCS and what is set up around that... in establishing that service you create a space to talk to young people about volunteering that maybe doesn't exist in quite the same way now".

Stakeholder

Context

Unemployment amongst young people

A strong driver for the Coalition Government's emphasis on volunteering is the high level of unemployment amongst young people. There were 935,000 unemployed young people aged 16-24 in the three months to March 2011 – 20.0 percent of the economically active population. Once adjusted to exclude young people who are in full-time education but looking for employment and available to work the unemployment rate for young people stands at 18.3 percent.⁹ This shows a marginal decrease in unemployment from the three months to February 2011 when the comparable youth unemployment rate had arguably only been higher on one occasion in 1993.¹⁰ This was a significant cause of concern for the Coalition Government given the 'scarring' effects of unemployment in youth amid research that indicates it can have a negative impact on young people's social mobility throughout their lives.¹¹ These figures pay no attention to the recent rise in part-time and temporary employment, largely as a result of the recession, whereby young people are working fewer hours than they wish to due to the lack of full-time job opportunities and are therefore under-employed.

In addition, the increase in the unemployment rate has not just affected those young people typically at risk of unemployment, such as the low skilled, but those with higher level skills including graduates.¹²

Attitudes of employers

The most recent National Employers Skills Survey in 2009 indicated that in the 12 month preceding the survey six percent of employers had recruited 16 year olds directly from school, 11 percent had recruited 17 or 18 year olds directly from school or college, and 10 percent had recruited higher education leavers under the age of 24 to their first job. Poor understanding of the working world was an issue common to all young people recruited directly from education, whilst responses relating to the personality of young people, such as attitude and lack of motivation, were common for school and school or college leavers compared to lack of specific skills or competencies for higher education leavers.¹³

Research undertaken by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills indicates that employability skills and a lack of understanding of competency-based recruitment methods is a significant issue for employers who recruit via Jobcentre Plus. This indicates a lack of experience and/or information and advice.¹⁴

Enablers and barriers to signposting and promoting volunteering

Awareness of the benefits of volunteering

There is widespread recognition of the benefits volunteering can offer to young people and stakeholder interviews highlighted decision-makers' appreciation of the range of impacts that it can have on a young person. In this context, volunteering was perceived by stakeholders from the IAG sector as an integral part of a wider package of support that they can offer to young people as part of a highly personalised service. The benefits of volunteering are summarised in Table 1:

Benefits to the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn new skills and gain knowledge, such as leadership skills, communication skills, team working skills, decision making skills, time management skills and job related skills¹⁵. Generally, young people report gaining and valuing new skills and qualifications much more highly than any other age group¹⁶ • Increased employability via an enhanced CV and personal profile: Young people perceive enhanced employability as a result of volunteering^{17,18,19,20} • Opportunity to network with other like-minded individuals • Increased awareness of organisations that provide help and support²¹ • Increased feeling of being part of their local community²² • Staying healthy and meeting people
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved leadership capability of staff • Improved communication skills • Improves self confidence of employees • Provides experience to employees of working in a team-based environment
Benefits to wider society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic benefits to private and public sector • Increased social cohesion • Greater social mobility and higher rate of employment • An increased interest from young people in doing further volunteering²³

Table 1: The benefits of volunteering to the individual, employers and the wider society

There is a growing body of research which points to the positive impact of volunteering on the employability skills of young people, although it is less clear what impact it has on their long-term employment outcomes. **v** commissioned NFER to examine the impact of youth volunteering through existing longitudinal research data in response to this.²⁴

All of the stakeholders consulted similarly discussed the positive impacts of participation in volunteering for young people, particularly in relation to employability outcomes. Many went further to express the view that recognition of these benefits amongst advisers is crucial to enabling them to successfully signpost young people into volunteering opportunities. It was noted during interviews that often young people do not understand the benefits of volunteering and advisers regularly spend time during their consultations communicating these.


All the stakeholders consulted believed that volunteering was a good way to develop not only young people's employability skills but also the softer skills necessary in order to get them to a point where they can pursue job opportunities:

"When you see young people and you know they would benefit from some kind of volunteering activity to increase their self-confidence, their self worth and their ability to believe they actually can do things – we're absolute fanatics in support of it."

Stakeholder

Organisational structures

Government support for volunteering as an activity for people who are unemployed or low skilled is reflected through the core offer of advice and support provided by Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers. Policies and internal quality procedures require advisers to deliver impartial information about the range of options available for young people including volunteering. This includes as part of the job search activities that unemployed people are required to undertake for Jobcentre Plus and as an option that Next Step



advisers are required to have knowledge of and present to clients. There is flexibility in the nature of job search activities that can be undertaken following the operational shift within Jobcentre Plus from past programmes to the Work Programme.

However, the advice and support services available to young people in England provide a highly personalised offer whereby the package of support is tailored to individual requirements: “*Everybody’s needs are different... we see the difference in the services we offer*” (Stakeholder). There is not a checklist that advisers work through, instead signposting clients to volunteering only where it is appropriate to their personal development needs; for example, if they need to develop certain skills or attributes in order to obtain work:

“It might be that a young person might not be able to get out of bed in the morning or have the discipline to arrive on time. By engaging them in a programme they begin to develop disciplines around this which can then be cascaded into an employment opportunity.”

Stakeholder

Recent research with Jobcentre Plus identified that despite volunteering being a constituent part of the work-related activities within the 6 month offer, volunteering is not always offered at this stage. Whilst most advisers supported the idea of volunteering, they only offered it if it was deemed appropriate for the customer.²⁵

Moreover, stakeholders acknowledged that awareness of volunteering opportunities can vary significantly between advisers depending on how frequently they update their knowledge and contacts. The way in which advisers do this can vary between services and service access points; for example, the current Connexions and Next Step models offer locally available face-to-face support and national telephone and web services staffed by different advisers who have differing levels of local and national knowledge. Work is being undertaken to address differences in knowledge by creating nationally available resources, such as the Next Step website.

The development of advisers’ knowledge of volunteering opportunities is supported by the increased co-location of services. The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended a more integrated system to offer a seamless journey from worklessness to sustainable employment and further progression. The subsequent policy developments notably established a requirement for the co-location of Next Step advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices. Some stakeholders identified that these partnership arrangements have led to an increase in understanding and shared communication regarding possible impacts of undertaking volunteering opportunities on a person’s benefits.

Stakeholders noted that further to this many Next Step and Connexions services had established strategic links between them and voluntary organisations to better facilitate the promotion and understanding of volunteering opportunities amongst their advisers. For example, some Connexions services offered links to v funded programmes and many services promoted links to volunteering websites and local voluntary organisations.

Organisational targets

The organisational targets set by government to measure contractors’ performance pose a barrier to advisers’ signposting volunteering opportunities to young people:

"We're big fans of volunteering; we think it's magic, wonderful... what we're currently required (to report on) by government means that it's a negative outcome for young people and of course that hurts our targets."

Stakeholder

Volunteering is not categorised as a 'positive destination' within the Connexions service. This impacts upon targets associated with reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and related initiatives including the September Guarantee, which guarantees a place in learning or job with training for all young people under the age of 18. Connexions have specific targets and KPIs relating to the September Guarantee, the achievement or non-achievement of which can impact on their contracting arrangements with local authorities and subsequent funding:

"If we set someone up in volunteering that counts as not delivering under the September Guarantee. In short we'd be criticised by government for not getting them into a formal learning opportunity."

Stakeholder

This has led Volunteering England and other organisations, including the Local Government Association, to call for a review of the NEET categorisation, which currently does not recognise volunteering as 'participation' despite the positive benefits this can have for young people.

Similarly, there is an expectation within Next Step that 50 percent of customers of the integrated service who create an action plan with an adviser should enter training, obtain sustainable employment or progress in work. Although seemingly at odds with the promotion of volunteering to service-users, advisers can signpost their clients to volunteering in order to help achieve the above outcomes. Volunteering is a recognised option on their national Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and a recordable outcome for advisers in support of this.

Stakeholders highlighted the conflict between wanting to instruct their advisers to promote volunteering to young people and their organisational targets which do not sufficiently support this as a course of action. Stakeholders reported that advisers themselves are aware of the need to deliver against targets, with some promoting those options which contribute to the achievement of their organisational targets to the detriment of others as a result:

"Under the previous government we were working under a very target oriented system and if you set targets people will try to meet them and prioritise those things above other things."

Stakeholder

Similar barriers previously existed within Jobcentre Plus in the form of a Job Outcome Target. However, this has been abolished in addition to the individual targets for advisers that sat alongside the Job Outcome Target and is indicative of a shift in emphasis within Jobcentre Plus to a less target driven approach. Instead Jobcentre Plus has an off flow into employment target which affords advisers freedom and discretion to signpost unemployed people to a variety of options, including volunteering, if they believe it will contribute to the achievement of this objective. A relatively recent shift within the organisation it will take time for the true impact of this change to be felt. In this context, unemployed young people are signposted to volunteering with the overall aim of finding employment, although the targets that characterised Jobcentre Plus until relatively recently are starting to change.

Awareness and understanding of guidelines to volunteering while on benefits

Stakeholders reported that in some instances where volunteering programmes had fixed durations and tangible qualifications it had raised some ‘alarm bells’ with Jobcentre Plus advisers as they believed that while the young person was undertaking the opportunity they would not be actively looking for work. These concerns were subsequently addressed by employees from the voluntary organisation who facilitated discussions with Jobcentre Plus advisers to prevent young people’s benefits from being stopped when taking part in their programme.

The 2005 report *The Benefits Barrier: What impact do welfare benefits have on volunteering?* identified significant concern amongst claimants that volunteering would affect their welfare payments, and pointed to a communication gap relating to rules and regulations from Jobcentre Plus.²⁶ Prior research had confirmed that legislative changes and current policy was poorly communicated within Jobcentre Plus, resulting in some staff being unaware of the latest policy, in particular the 48 hour rule change.²⁷ This was echoed by the Russell Commission report and later by the Commission on the Future of Volunteering and Morgan Inquiry.

Community Links highlighted that in 2008 confusion was still evident among Jobcentre Plus staff and voluntary and community organisations, as well as the benefit claimants themselves.²⁸ The fundamental problems are outlined in Table 2:

Jobcentre Plus Staff	Many staff, including personal advisers, at Jobcentre Plus have a poor understanding of the regulations and inform clients in an ad hoc manner that they are not allowed to volunteer, or not allowed to exceed 16 hours, or that they must take a job as soon as it is offered
Benefit recipients	Most claimants are very reluctant to challenge Jobcentre Plus staff
Voluntary and community organisations	Some voluntary and community organisations are not clear on the regulations and advise potential and existing volunteers incorrectly


Table 2: Regulatory confusions acting as barriers to volunteering

However, the application of Jobcentre Plus guidelines is still considered by many to be a key barrier for individuals becoming involved in volunteering. Whilst there was a high level of awareness amongst stakeholders of DWP’s guidelines *Volunteering while getting benefits*, it was acknowledged that some confusion may still exist amongst IAG advisers delivering services to young people. There is a perception among stakeholders that how the guidelines are interpreted by Jobcentre Plus is frequently dependant on the individual adviser’s understanding of the volunteering opportunities.

Jobcentre Plus is committed to improving its internal and external guidance and communications to drive up signposting to volunteering. It is also currently working in partnership with Volunteering England to reduce barriers to volunteering for their customers and to promote volunteering and voluntary work as a positive step towards returning to work.²⁹

Barriers to volunteering for young people

Despite research identifying an increase in young people’s awareness of the benefits of volunteering, a range of barriers continue to restrict their involvement. A lack of common understanding amongst advisers about the rules and regulations for young people in receipt of benefits has contributed to low levels of participation in voluntary activities for some



young people. The Future of Volunteering Inclusion Group (Volunteering England) maintains that fear of losing welfare benefits is a real psychological barrier to volunteering due to prevailing myths and misunderstandings both amongst claimants and advisers, despite the introduction of guidance issued by DWP.³⁰

The stakeholders we interviewed expressed concern that the costs associated with volunteering, particularly travel expenses, were a real barrier to young people volunteering and stressed the importance of voluntary organisations meeting the cost of their volunteers' expenses. This finding is supported by The Future of Volunteering Inclusion Group which highlighted that cost constraints are a significant issue.

Some stakeholders also indicated that young people are not always as enthusiastic about volunteering because it does not have the same credibility and recognition as other options, such as entering a training opportunity or employment. Primarily an *'image problem'*, there was consensus that once advisers discussed opportunities with young people, including the types of things they can do and how this relates to their skills, they were generally more enthusiastic about volunteering. One stakeholder commented: *"It just needs to be presented in the right way as something beneficial to them"*.

Research has also found that the nature of the volunteering opportunity is important to young people, in particular if it is something they are interested in or passionate about.³¹ However, where a placement is not available the individual may not participate in volunteering at all.

Voluntary sector capacity

Our stakeholder research identified that voluntary organisations may also have barriers to offering volunteering opportunities to young people. For example, recruiting and maintaining volunteers is often perceived as challenging and time-consuming with a lot of bureaucracy involved, particularly when working with young people.

Another key conflict identified by stakeholders from the voluntary sector related to the need for the opportunities to be made interesting and flexible for volunteers at the same time as ensuring the sustainability of the activity to the individual organisation:

"I think some sector organisations need to think a bit differently about the way that they're involving volunteers and not just think actually we've got this person in now we're going to keep them here 10 years, coming in every Wednesday to do the specific job we want them to do regardless of whether they want to do it or their circumstances change... you need to think why you're involving someone and how you're involving someone and be very clear what the expectations are."

Stakeholder

Agencies recruiting voluntary staff may not wish to recruit unemployed individuals if they drop out as soon as employment is found. There is a high level of interest in volunteering at present amongst the unemployed or those on reduced hours due to the increase in part-time work for young people; however, on return to work they may cease volunteering due to having more limited time or having achieved their employability objectives.



This can have a potentially negative impact on the sector. Stakeholders reported how the sector needs to work with referral organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers to identify ways to address this gap and ensure continuation planning.

People's motivations for volunteering can sometimes be contrary to organisations' reasons for wanting volunteers. Some organisations are reliant on volunteers to undertake very basic aspects of their service that may not involve skill development or progress. However, these types of opportunity are not popular with young people as they do not necessarily see what they are achieving through this. Stakeholders noted that some organisations were better than others at creating a balance of these factors and allowing progression within volunteering opportunities.

3. Bottom-up review findings

This section presents the key findings from the adviser survey and in-depth interviews, alongside key findings from the in-depth interviews with service-users.

Awareness of volunteering opportunities

Awareness of the value of volunteering for young people


There are high levels of recognition of the value of volunteering for young people amongst both Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers. Advisers were provided with a number of statements and asked to rate on a scale of 1-7, where 1 equals less true and 7 more true, how reflective these are of their attitudes and beliefs about volunteering. Agreement was high in relation to the extent to which volunteering helps young people gain skills (6.6), enables young people to make a valuable contribution to society (6.4), helps young people gain employment (5.9), and helps to motivate young people (5.9). However, advisers were more moderate in regard to the degree to which it helps to engage hard-to-reach young people (5.2). Encouragingly, advisers indicated that targets and organisational objectives were not significant issues preventing them from signposting to volunteering. In response to the statements 'volunteering opportunities for young people do not help to achieve set targets' and 'referring young people to volunteering opportunities is not part of my role', advisers provided an average score of 2.8 and 1.7 respectively. However, further examination of the data indicates IAG advisers are more likely to identify that organisational targets impose some restrictions in their work with young people, with Next Step (3.4) and Connexions (3.1) advisers indicating higher levels of agreement with the statement when compared to Jobcentre Plus (2.8).

Furthermore, there is appreciation of the wide range of skills and attributes that volunteering can help to develop. Advisers were most likely to indicate that volunteering develops young people's confidence (76.4%), group working skills (67.1%), timekeeping skills (65.8%), communication skills (64.1%), job specific skills (62.7%) and self-esteem (60.6%). However, there was more limited recognition of the value of volunteering for developing basic skills, including literacy (39.5%), numeracy (38.6%) and IT (40.5%), and also to health and well-being (38.8%) and leadership skills (38.6%).

Data from the in-depth interviews with IAG advisers supports these findings. Advisers were generally positive towards volunteering and how it can benefit young people. Not only was it considered to contribute significantly to the development of young people's skills but it also provided them with tangible examples of work-related activities to include in CVs and application forms and talk about at interview, as well as providing referees:

"If I have a NEET who I can't get a job for in 3 months, I tell him, go and volunteer, go and get the experience and a reference, because then when you are selling yourself you can talk about what you have done."

Connexions adviser



Many IAG advisers further identified that volunteering is invaluable to young people who are unemployed as a way to maintain their motivation and routine whilst on jobseekers benefits: *“Undoubtedly it’s the experience and that work ethos about getting up in the morning and the motivation”* (Next Step adviser). This supports the views expressed by some young people who were finding unemployment monotonous and expressed a desire to do something different to develop their skills and increase their employment prospects: *“Before this I was just sat home on the computer every day looking for jobs and going to Connexions every day looking for jobs”* (Young person).

Our in-depth interviews also highlighted IAG advisers’ appreciation of the wide range of skills that young people can develop through volunteering. However, these skills were generally looked at in the context of how they could improve the young person’s overall employability: *“As careers advisers we see them as a way into employment... and a way of gaining skills”* (Next Step adviser). Advisers found that volunteering could be crucial to helping young people develop softer skills such as confidence and communication but generally considered volunteering most beneficial for developing specific employment related skills such as timekeeping and work ethos.


In some instances IAG advisers reported that Jobcentre Plus advisers are less aware of the benefits of volunteering. They described how when they had previously signposted young people to a volunteering opportunity they received feedback from the young person that Jobcentre Plus staff had queried this activity. As a result some IAG advisers will encourage their clients to contact Next Step to act as an advocate if they experience any such difficulties:

“To a certain extent, I suppose, quite often because they are young, because they perhaps haven’t got the confidence, young people don’t tend to stand up for themselves when they are confronted with “you’re not doing enough to look for work”... this is why I often tell them to pass on my number.”

Next Step adviser

Young people also acknowledged the benefits of volunteering and its potential employability outcomes. They considered that volunteering was a valuable step in improving their chances of gaining employment by developing their CV and, for almost all of the service-users consulted, was their primary motivation for undertaking voluntary activity. One young person described at length how volunteering featured prominently in their CV, whilst another was actively seeking a volunteering opportunity as they felt that volunteering was a good way to limit any gaps in their employment record to make them more attractive to prospective employers: *“This is a big bulk of my CV...because that’s where I’ve learned most of everything”* (Young person).

Furthermore, the majority of young people also agreed that volunteering is a good thing to do as it enables them to make a valuable contribution to society. Several of the service-users interviewed who had undertaken volunteering expressed a lot of passion for the causes they volunteered for, although in most instances stated that they would be unlikely to continue when they obtain full-time employment because of lack of time. The young people had not commenced volunteering because of their interest in the topic or area; however, they developed their interest in the cause when signposted for employability reasons:



"I do it because I like talking, a lot, and I'm very confident, and I feel that I have a passion to make people know when something is wrong. I just feel that if, like me and you know the other people in my group, if we can stand up and say something then it will just hit a couple of people and they could research about it and learn more and teach others."

Young Person

However, a minority of young people dismissed volunteering as they wanted to focus on immediately finding employment or addressing other related issues such as housing needs:

"For me, doing volunteering right now, I could do it, but I need to get a job because I need to find a home. For people our age, we're more looking to find a place to live...before we start thinking about somebody else... I need to think about doing stuff for myself. I'm fed up of making everybody else happy when I'm not happy, so I've decided I need to make myself happy first and then worry about other people."

Young Person

Some advisers found that often young people recognised the benefits of volunteering but sometimes lacked motivation and desire to do 'unpaid work' which would prevent them from taking up a paid opportunity. The majority of young people interviewed did not think this was the case for them personally but indicated that 'doing something for nothing' may be off-putting for other young people and result in lower levels of participation in volunteering.

Those young people interviewed who had volunteered previously frequently reported that they had developed a range of skills as a result, with confidence, communication skills and how to work with others typically cited. It was also identified by one young person who was a recent migrant that volunteering had helped her to develop her English language skills: "I can speak now; before I couldn't speak anything". Similarly to advisers, several young people were focused on the benefits that volunteering could offer them with regard to developing employability skills and acting as a stepping stone to employment: "If you start volunteering somewhere and they like you then they're more likely to take you on as an employee". (Young person).

However, one young person did stress that volunteering was not a magic bullet and despite having undertaken volunteering her employment situation has remained the same:

"Even having that volunteer work on your CV, it really doesn't make a difference, because it's on my CV and to be honest I'm still here, a single mum, no job and on benefits."

Young Person

Awareness of volunteering opportunities for young people

Overall, advisers reported moderate levels of awareness of volunteering opportunities for young people. When asked to rate their awareness on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 equals no awareness at all and 7 is completely aware, the mean score was 5.1. There were only marginal differences between Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers.

When asked how they had developed their awareness of volunteering opportunities, advisers were most likely to state that they searched for information online (89.9%). Other common sources of information were resources provided by either the voluntary sector (69.2%) or their employer (65.0%). Just over half of all advisers (51.9%) reported that clients bring this information with them for discussion; in this context, advisers are not required to have awareness of opportunities as these are identified by service-users. Relatively little training is delivered by organisations in relation to volunteering, with less than one in five (18.2%) advisers indicating that their employer provides training, although training delivered by the voluntary sector is significantly more widespread but still uncommon (36.7%) when compared to other information sources. It seldom features as part of an employers' formal induction process (23.2%).

The in-depth interviews, however, did identify that in areas where volunteering was built into the organisation's human resource processes, such as through a formal induction process and in quality assurance reviews, advisers had a high level of awareness of volunteering opportunities. During reviews advisers are able to reflect upon their use of volunteering alongside other options for young people with support from their manager in order to examine where volunteering might have been offered as an alternative or in addition to other forms of advice.

Figure 1 highlights differences in relation to sources of information by organisation. Jobcentre Plus are more likely to provide their advisers with resources about volunteering opportunities and report that clients have identified volunteering opportunities themselves, whilst Next Step advisers make more use of training delivered by the voluntary sector. Although the provision of training is a marginal activity, this is more likely to be delivered by Connexions and Jobcentre Plus when compared to Next Step and other IAG advisers.

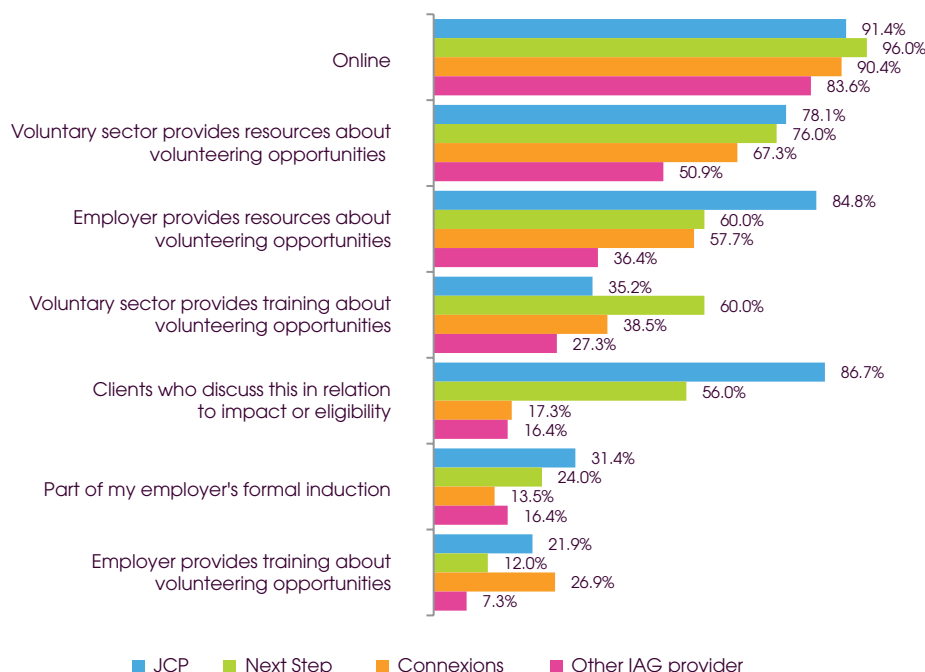



Figure 1: Sources of information about volunteering opportunities by organisation (base = variable)

Respondents were also asked to identify what types of training they had received specific to volunteering opportunities for young people. The analysis highlighted that advisers most commonly reported receiving talks from representatives from voluntary organisations (66.2%). Advisers indicated



that they participated in other forms of training, although these were relatively uncommon at less than half of all respondents. These include: knowledge sharing days or staff meetings (46.8%), receiving information at conferences (37.6%), as part of their performance review and appraisal (21.9%), or as part of their formal induction process (13.1%). Furthermore, it should be noted that other IAG advisers reported participating in each of these types of training less frequently than all other respondents, with only 47.3 percent receiving talks from representatives from voluntary organisations, 30.9 per cent attending knowledge sharing days or staff meetings, 29.1 percent receiving information at conferences and 5.5 percent receiving training as part of their formal induction.

Advisers reported a range of resources that they use to search for information on volunteering opportunities; none, however, are used extensively by advisers in their work with young people. The most frequently reported was the do-it.org website (55.3%), local volunteer centres (49.4%) and local volunteer centre databases (38.8%), promotional materials (34.6%) and the 'vinspired' website (34.6%). A minority of Jobcentre Plus advisers reported using the District Provision Tool (20%) and the Intranet (10.5%), whilst a minority of Next Step (16.0%), Connexions (19.2%) and other IAG providers (16.4%) reported using the Next Step national website.

The in-depth interviews also indicated that advisers have a moderately high level of awareness of volunteering opportunities for young people. That said, in most instances when advisers were questioned further they were more able to cite the resources that they used to signpost young people to volunteering opportunities (such as do-it.org and local volunteer centres) rather than specific volunteering opportunities. Young people provided further evidence of this: "*(Adviser told them) to go onto the internet and search for volunteering jobs and gave me some names of websites and listed them down for me*" (Young person).

However, it was acknowledged that where existing relationships with organisations such as v are present advisers are more likely to signpost young people to specific volunteering opportunities. One adviser in particular ensured that contact details for a local v project were included on client action plans where signposting to volunteering had taken place.

The do-it.org website was a particularly valued resource that IAG advisers referenced in the in-depth interviews. The majority of advisers stated that if a client was interested in undertaking volunteering they would as a matter of course signpost them to the do-it.org website. One adviser in particular commented on the range of opportunities available targeted specifically at young people and its ability to engage service-users: "*It's a nice example of a website that energises people and gets them interested*" (Next Step adviser). However, one of the young people interviewed was less positive about the website and felt it was too much like applying for a job, which they found challenging: "*I think it's a bit hard to get into volunteering, like on the do-it.org website. It's like you're actually applying for a job and then you don't hear anything which disheartens you a bit*" (Young person).

None of the IAG advisers interviewed had received any formal training from their organisation on volunteering opportunities, although advisers in hotspot areas highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing that takes place within their internal staff meetings. These provide the opportunity for advisers to share information and knowledge of specific resources and opportunities. The main source of information the advisers interviewed used to develop their knowledge was online resources. However, these provided some difficulties for advisers in more rural areas where they did not have readily available internet access or were working with young people who did not

have independent access to the internet. To address this, one adviser had developed his own set of hard copy resources which contained links to volunteering websites. The majority of advisers interviewed also felt that it was their personal responsibility to keep up to date on the latest opportunities due to the localised nature of their service: *"I think because we're quite wide-spread over a large area I think it's important that the individual advisers in each area know what's available locally"* (Next Step adviser).

Signposting volunteering opportunities

Regularity of signposting

There are relatively high levels of signposting to volunteering opportunities by Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers. Survey data indicates that over half (51.9%) of advisers signpost some of their clients to voluntary activities, whilst a further 27.4 percent signpost most of their clients. Only a small minority indicated that they rarely (4.6%) or never (0.4%) signpost their clients to volunteering opportunities. Analysis by organisation indicates some notable differences in relation to the regularity with which advisers signpost to volunteering. At 37.1 percent, Jobcentre Plus staff are more likely to report that they signpost most of their clients to volunteering opportunities compared to Next Step (24.0%) and Connexions (17.3%) advisers (Figure 2). It follows that the IAG advisers are over-represented amongst respondents indicating that they signpost some of their clients to volunteering opportunities.

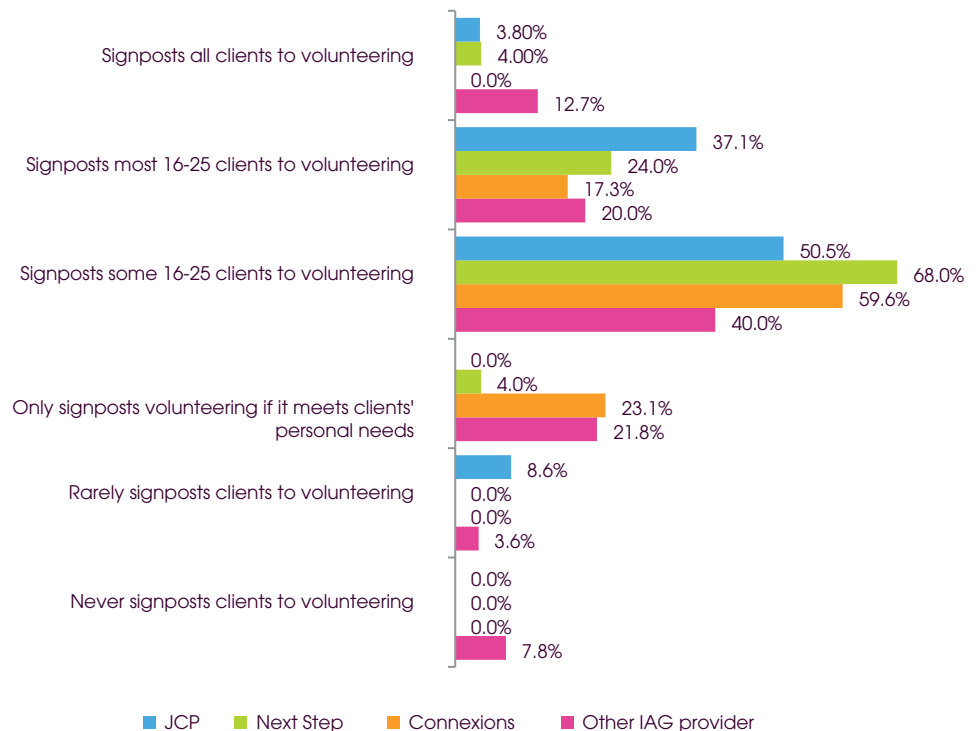



Figure 2: Regularity of signposting by organisation (base = variable)

Interviews with IAG advisers provided insights into the reasons for this, with the requirement to deliver personalised services to young people the primary factor. Advisers reported how they typically signpost some of their clients to volunteering opportunities but this usually depends on the needs of the individual client. Service-users also supported this with several of those who had been unemployed for a long period of time saying they had discussed volunteering with their adviser, whilst others indicated that they had not discussed it as it would not have been relevant to their specific query.



Adviser feedback also suggests that there is limited evidence to suggest that the regularity with which advisers signpost volunteering opportunities to young people varies by sub-group, such as those who are under 18, those who have been unemployed for six months or more, those with disabilities, or those with multiple barriers to engagement. This was to some extent shown to be different in our in-depth interviews where advisers frequently said they would be more likely to refer volunteering to a client who was further away from the job market, had skill development requirements or had been unemployed for a certain period of time:

"My rule of thumb is that if they've been out of paid work for more than three months and they're not currently doing voluntary work then that's something they should consider doing to put something down on their CV. It looks more positive to an employer."

Next Step adviser

Reasons for signposting

Advisers signpost young people to volunteering opportunities for an extensive number of reasons. The most commonly reported were if they thought that the volunteering opportunity would help the young person to develop personal (96.2%) or wider employability (94.5%) skills, enable them to experience the routine of work or develop their work readiness (91.5%), address specific job-related skills (88.1%), or if the young person had an interest in a specific volunteering activity (86.9%) or was highly motivated to volunteer (86.4%). The least reported reason for signposting young people to volunteering was if it contributed directly to achieving targets (35.6%) and therefore provides further support for an earlier finding about the extent to which advisers signpost to volunteering opportunities to achieve organisational targets.

Further analysis to investigate what programme characteristics or factors would make advisers signpost young people to specific volunteering opportunities aligns with the above findings, with 79.3 percent of advisers reporting that they would signpost a young person to a specific volunteering opportunity if they thought they would benefit from the experience. It is interesting to note that, despite recognition of the value of volunteering for young people, advisers reported employment related factors to only a moderate extent. This included if the opportunity was related to an appropriate job type or sector (57.4%), if there was additional support to help young people move into employment (45.1%) or if the opportunity had specific employment outcomes (44.3%). A further 41.8 percent of advisers reported that they would signpost young people to a specific opportunity as a taster for volunteering. Data indicates that formal links with voluntary organisations and/or projects are unlikely to significantly increase the volume of young people being signposted to volunteering opportunities, with less than a third (31.6%) of advisers indicating that this would be a factor which would encourage them.

Some of the IAG advisers interviewed in-depth indicated that they would signpost particular volunteering opportunities if they felt that they would provide genuine development opportunities for service-users. These were considered to be those volunteering opportunities which enabled young people to gain a qualification or develop employability skills. Overall, advisers indicated that these sort of opportunities need to be more widely available. Some advisers in particular suggested that volunteering opportunities should be more employment and progression focused with in-built development opportunities such as regular reviews to identify what else the volunteer would like to do as part of their volunteering.

Signposting versus referral

When working with young people, advisers frequently signpost them to resources as opposed to specific opportunities. One adviser indicated that the chief advantage of this approach is that it enables young people to more extensively research the various volunteering opportunities available themselves at their own pace:

"It gives them the chance to go away, register and spend time looking properly at each volunteering option that they want and that way they can then make a decision what ones they apply for and what ones they don't want."

Next Step Adviser

Young people interviewed who had been signposted to resources by advisers generally found this approach useful and indicated that they would go away and look at the websites. However, advisers were unable to identify how many of their clients had eventually entered a volunteering opportunity through this approach as they did not always see them again. One adviser from a charitable organisation indicated that more young people would enter into volunteering if advisers provided a more 'managed' referral:

"I don't believe in signposting. I think that young people, particularly if they have the initiative and if we catch them in the zone and they display initiative towards progression, then the last thing I'm going to do is hand them a piece of paper signposting them. I'm going to pick up the phone and try and make it happen at that moment, pass it to them once I've done the introduction. It's about staying with them until it happens."

Other IAG adviser

However, it was acknowledged by Next Step advisers that whilst managed referral can have a higher success rate it was not something they were able to offer on a regular basis as organisational time constraints mean that it is an approach that is generally only used if the client is in certain circumstances. This includes young people with confidence or basic skills issues in addition to those with multiple barriers to the labour market:

"I have to manage my time, for instance, if they have a certain level of educational attainment or autonomy then I might say 'this is the number, phone them up'. But if they are a lone parent or I notice they are lacking in confidence then I might support them with arrangements. If they have a difficulty with IT I might assist them with that."

Next Step adviser

Challenges and barriers when signposting to volunteering opportunities

Advisers were asked to indicate whether they had experienced challenges when signposting young people to volunteering opportunities on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 equals less true and 7 more true. The most common barrier or challenge that advisers encounter when signposting to volunteering opportunities is not organisational targets (2.4) or it not being part of their role (1.6) but rather the attitude of young people towards voluntary activity (4.5) and their lack of interest in pursuing a volunteering opportunity (4.3). However, it should be noted that with the average score positioned just past the mid-point of the scale this is not a pressing challenge. Advisers were ambivalent about the extent to which a lack of suitable opportunities (4.1), lack of awareness of the volunteering opportunities available (4.0), and not

having enough understanding of guidelines relating to benefit entitlement for young people undertaking volunteering (3.5) posed a barrier when signposting service-users to these opportunities.


The differences reported by organisation are shown in Figure 3. The attitudes of young people to volunteering and lack of interest in volunteering opportunities are more significant issues for Connexions advisers whilst, unsurprisingly, Jobcentre Plus are significantly less likely to report lack of understanding of the guidelines relating to benefit entitlement for young people.

An in-depth interview with one adviser provided further information in relation to how organisational targets impact on advisers' work. Although young people in volunteering are considered to be NEET, an adviser explained how they do not allow this to affect the way in which they promote volunteering. Young people are recorded as in personal development as they gain valuable experience that will enable them to progress into employment in the future. However, as young people technically remain NEET from a target perspective it is considered as a second order options when compared to other education, training and employment options.



Figure 3: Extent to which advisers experience challenges and barriers when signposting young people to volunteering opportunities (1 = less true and 7 = more true) (base = variable)

Further evidence of the attitudes of young people was obtained from the in-depth interviews with IAG advisers, with many citing this as the principal barrier that they encounter. They demonstrated the complex range of factors that can shape young people's attitudes to volunteering, including their lack of awareness of the benefits of volunteering, a reluctance to undertake unpaid work, and concerns about the financial impact of volunteering both through impact on their benefits and the cost of travelling to volunteering opportunities. Several advisers interviewed described how they are required to explain and sell the benefits of participation to them. However, once the



young people understood these benefits their attitudes would often change, although it is not known if they went to volunteer in all instances: *"You have to sell it to them. You have to sit down and actually sell the volunteering and actually explain to them the advantages"* (Next Step adviser).

IAG advisers and young people also discussed the barriers to volunteering in terms of finance and transport. Many young people who had undertaken volunteering highlighted that if they had not received travel and subsistence funding from the voluntary organisation they would not have been able to undertake the opportunity. This was particularly problematic in more rural areas. Advisers added that it is equally important that this support is available from the beginning of the volunteering opportunity; young people cannot typically afford to wait to be reimbursed by the organisation: *"If they had to wait for a month or even a week to claim it back they could not afford to volunteer"* (Other IAG adviser).

There was a lack of agreement amongst young people about the extent to which the negative perceptions of volunteering amongst their peers would affect the likelihood that they take up an opportunity. The majority of those interviewed did not think these attitudes would affect their own likelihood to volunteer, but identified that it may be more of a challenge for other young people. However, one young person also indicated that some young people would also need to overcome the attitudes of their parents before they could undertake volunteering as they may not always understand why they were undertaking work without being paid to do it.

Our in-depth interviews also identified that often young people's awareness of the benefits of volunteering was higher if they had previously received IAG support or if they had higher level skills. All the young people consulted who either had or were studying for a first degree had already undertaken volunteering which they had identified independently.

Awareness of DWP guidelines

Further evidence of increased awareness of the guidelines *Volunteering while getting benefits* amongst Jobcentre Plus staff is provided by data emerging from the survey. Whilst 71.3 percent of advisers overall were aware of the guidelines, this figure increased to 97.1 percent for Jobcentre Plus staff compared to 64.0 percent of Next Step advisers, 51.9 percent of Connexions advisers, and 43.6 percent of other IAG advisers. Moreover, although advisers overall reported moderately high levels of confidence applying the guidelines when working with clients (5.8), notable differences were once again apparent by type of organisation reflecting the extent to which knowledge of benefit guidelines are a key part of their role. The highest level of confidence was reported by Jobcentre Plus (6.2), followed by Connexions advisers (5.2), Next Step advisers (4.8) and other IAG advisers (4.8).

In-depth interviews revealed that whilst many IAG advisers felt confident in their ability to interpret the guidelines, they would as a matter of course refer a young person to Jobcentre Plus if they had a query about how volunteering would impact on their benefits. The increased co-location of services has been instrumental in facilitating this and the sharing of knowledge on benefit regulations between organisations: *"Things are changing constantly all the time... we've got to recognise our limitations and realise we don't know everything"* (Next Step adviser).

However, some service-users expressed concern about informing Jobcentre Plus about their volunteering opportunity as they were anxious that it may negatively impact on their benefits:

"If I call the people and they say start the opportunity next week, then I have to think about the Jobcentre, they might not let me do the thing because they didn't send me to do it... As long as you're on jobseekers you have to do what they tell you."

Young Person

Other young people felt that clarifying this issue with Jobcentre Plus would involve prolonged discussion about the nature of the volunteering opportunity which was off-putting: *"It would be too much hassle for me; they'd look into it a bit more and have more phone calls"* (Young person). In this context, the requirement to engage in dialogue with Jobcentre Plus about implications for benefits discouraged young people from undertaking voluntary activity.

Advisers' understanding of the specific elements of the guidelines highlights a significant level of confusion about what they do and do not permit in relation to volunteering (Figure 4). Advisers were read a series of statements and asked to state how reflective these are of their understanding of the guidelines by answering yes, no or don't know. This indicates that there is some confusion among advisers, with one in four advisers incorrectly indicating that young people cannot undertake volunteering opportunities whilst in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance. This confusion appears to be primarily amongst IAG advisers with just over a tenth (12.7%) of Jobcentre Plus advisers incorrectly answering this compared to 38.5 percent of Next Step advisers and 40.7 percent of Connexions advisers. Furthermore, 23.5 percent of respondents also wrongly stated that young people can receive wages or other forms of payment for volunteering, whilst one in five advisers inaccurately indicated that young people cannot volunteer for as many hours as they like. This issue was once again more evident amongst IAG advisers, with 53.8 percent of Next Step advisers and 29.6 percent of Connexions advisers incorrectly identifying this compared to just 11.8 percent of Jobcentre Plus advisers. Advisers were most uncertain about the implications of volunteering for other benefits such as housing benefit, with 24.1 percent stating don't know in response to this. Jobcentre Plus advisers were consistently more able to accurately understand specific elements of the guidelines than Next Step or Connexions advisers, although there was still confusion amongst some advisers.

The in-depth interviews also highlighted that detailed knowledge of Jobcentre Plus guidelines was varied and depended on the individual adviser. There is evidence that where Jobcentre Plus advisers were uncertain about the regulations that this negatively impacted on the young person's perception of the service they received. One young person with higher level skills reported how they interpreted the guidelines for themselves and was able to challenge the Jobcentre Plus adviser why their volunteering was a positive activity when incorrectly informed that it would impact on their benefits. However, they did express concern that many other young people would not be able to do so: *"It's not standard, because I knew how to argue my case... but again why should I be allowed to volunteer full-time on jobseekers but why not other people"* (Young person).

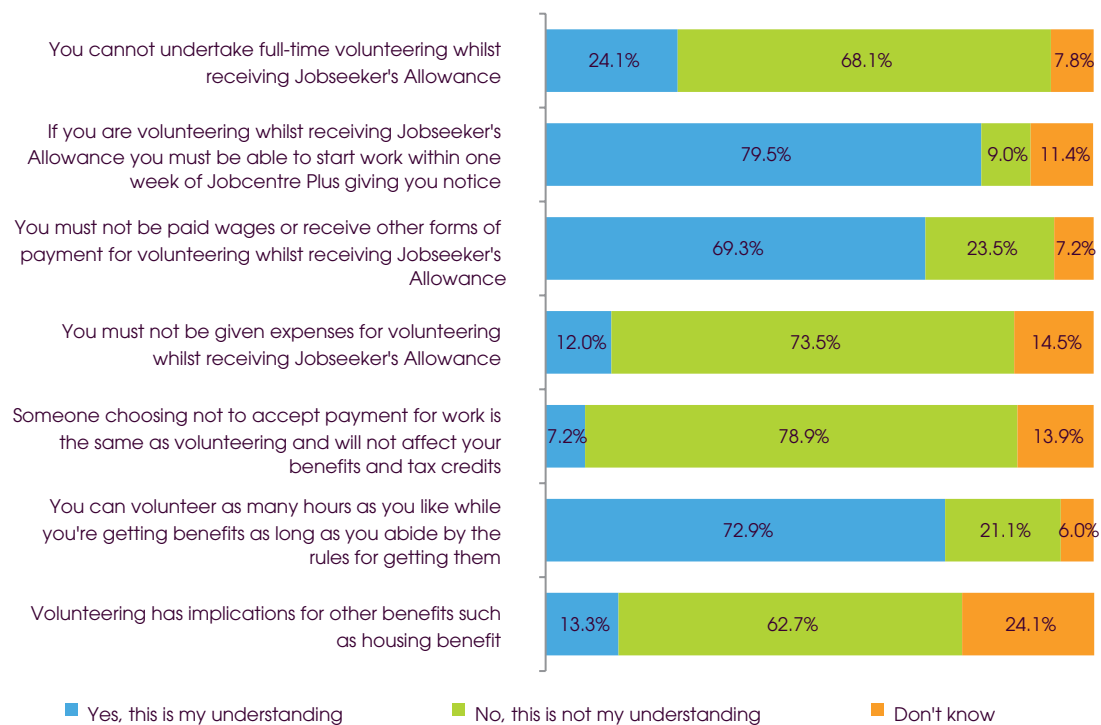


Figure 4: Advisers understanding of specific elements of DWP guidelines

Ability to signpost volunteering opportunities

Advisers are moderately confident in their ability to signpost and promote volunteering to young people. When asked to rate their ability based on the information and resources available to them on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 equals not at all confident and 7 is completely confident, the mean score was 5.33. Further analysis shows that there are minimal differences between the levels of confidence reported by advisers from each of the organisations. Those advisers who reported lower levels of confidence (5 or less) in their ability were asked what would help to improve this. The most commonly reported factors were increased information about the opportunities available in their local area (65.3%) and those that are available for young people (52.5%), and a better understanding of the guidelines relating to benefit entitlement for young people undertaking volunteering opportunities (50.8%). Interestingly, less than a third (30.5%) of advisers require increased information about volunteering opportunities nationally, whilst just over one in ten (11.9%) indicated that a better understanding of the benefits of volunteering would increase their ability to signpost.

However, it should be noted that the proportion of respondents agreeing that their confidence would improve as a result of having a better understanding of the DWP guidelines differed across each organisation. Whilst only 8.1 percent of Jobcentre Plus advisers reported this, the figure increased to 42.9 percent for Next Step advisers, 75.0 percent for other IAG advisers and 77.8 percent for Connexions advisers.

In-depth interviews identified that in many instances advisers required more information and support specifically from the voluntary sector in order to signpost to voluntary opportunities: *"Nobody knows everything, you can't possibly. So it wouldn't do any harm if people from volunteering organisations were to come over and actually give us some insight into things we have not come across"* (Next Step adviser).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents the key conclusions emerging from the top-down and bottom-up reviews and recommendations for consideration by stakeholders including national and local policy-makers, senior managers, voluntary and community sector organisations, and researchers.

Conclusions

Challenges and barriers to signposting and promoting volunteering to young people

The most notable barrier to promoting and signposting volunteering opportunities to young people is young people themselves, as highlighted by both stakeholders and advisers.

Advisers spend a considerable amount of time selling the benefits of volunteering to young people who are otherwise unaware of the value of volunteering. Further interrogation indicated that the attitudes of young people towards voluntary activity and their lack of interest in pursuing volunteering opportunities presented the biggest barriers to promoting and signposting volunteering to young people. However, it is encouraging to note that there is evidence that young people's attitudes to volunteering changed once they understood the benefits of volunteering and had experienced the activity first hand. Furthermore, our in-depth interviews with young people indicated that they see volunteering as a good thing to do as it offers not only individual gains but benefits for the community and society as a whole. This is significant in the context of the Big Society although it must be acknowledged that the primary motivation for most of the young people that participated in the research was employability. In addition, advisers also pointed out that young people sometimes lack the motivation to volunteer and interviews with young people also highlighted that other employment or educational opportunities were often preferable to volunteering opportunities.

Awareness of volunteering opportunities

Advisers have only a moderate level of awareness about the opportunities available to young people. This affects advisers' confidence in their ability to promote and signpost volunteering opportunities to young people, with many reporting that this would increase as a result of having an increased level of information about the opportunities in their local area.

Evidence indicates that there is a strong reliance on advisers finding information about opportunities themselves and/or drawing upon resources developed by voluntary sector organisations which should be seen positively as indicative of their commitment to continuing professional development (CPD). However, organisations rarely provide training for their advisers either on an ongoing basis or as part of their formal induction, although it is notable that Jobcentre Plus are more likely to provide resources to their advisers than IAG organisations. This is of particular interest as the vast majority of advisers indicated that their clients typically identify opportunities themselves. In this context, moderate levels of awareness of volunteering opportunities amongst Jobcentre Plus could be perceived as less problematic than IAG providers, where advisers themselves are tasked with signposting young people to opportunities. Furthermore, the identification of volunteering opportunities by service-users helps to challenge assumptions about the extent of commitment by clients to job search activity.

DWP guidelines

Advisers have historically had a varied understanding of the DWP guidelines *Volunteering while getting benefits* and delivered mixed messages to clients regarding the rules and regulations for volunteering whilst receiving benefits as a result. This has resulted in concern amongst some claimants who are fearful that volunteering will affect their welfare payments and acted as a psychological barrier to their participation in volunteering opportunities.

The DWP guidelines were introduced to tackle this confusion; however, our research suggests that issues still remain in relation to advisers' awareness and understanding of the guidelines. This is particularly applicable to IAG advisers and specifically Connexions advisers where almost half of those surveyed had not previously heard of them. Whilst advisers overall reported moderate levels of awareness of the guidelines and relatively high levels of confidence in applying them, further investigation established considerable confusion amongst advisers regarding the nuances of the guidelines. Whilst the confusion largely lies with IAG advisers there is still evidence of some issues in relation to Jobcentre Plus as not all advisers are aware of the guidelines and some have an incorrect understanding of the rules.

Crucially, there is recognition amongst IAG advisers that they are not as familiar with the guidelines as they should be and have sought to maximise the opportunities presented by co-location arrangements in order to direct young people to advisers more able to provide them with appropriate guidance. However, whilst this approach adds an extra layer of bureaucracy to young people undertaking volunteering opportunities and it does not help to reduce the wider perception shared by young people who fear that volunteering might affect their welfare payments. The co-location of voluntary organisations in Jobcentre Plus offices will inevitably help to address this issue.

Recognition of the value of volunteering

There is widespread recognition of the benefits of volunteering for young people as part of a personalised support service. Stakeholders and advisers strongly agreed that volunteering can positively impact on young people's skills and employability, and pointed to an extensive range of skills and competencies that it can help to develop. However, the skills identified most frequently were those directly linked to gaining or maintaining employment rather than for personal development. These comprise group working, timekeeping, communication and job specific skills; basic skills, including literacy, numeracy and IT, were cited by only a minority of advisers. Young people corroborated these findings, although these benefits were not always sufficient to encourage service-users to undertake volunteering due to other priorities on the part of the young person. Linked to this there is some emerging evidence that advisers signpost young people to a volunteering opportunity if they were looking to develop a specific skill.

Volunteering opportunities linked to employability and development

Our research highlights a wider conflict in interest between the motivations of advisers and some voluntary organisations. Whilst advisers intend to develop young people's employability through volunteering opportunities, voluntary organisations often want to recruit volunteers to undertake basic aspects of their service which do not necessarily offer development opportunities to young people. Not only does this mean that opportunities are not always of interest to young people, but it also alludes to a wider issue about the attrition of volunteers. The nature of advisers' motivations to signpost young people to volunteering means that there is a possibility that they are likely to cease voluntary activities once they have met their



employability objectives. Whilst the young people interviewed were positive about volunteering, they highlighted that this would be heavily dependent on the time constraints imposed by their new job or other commitments. Stakeholders from the voluntary sector reported that this attrition could be damaging to the sector and that it needed to work with referral organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus and IAG providers, to establish ways to address this problem at the same time as ensuring that activities provide volunteers with progression opportunities.

Signposting to volunteering opportunities


Our research highlighted that advisers promote and signpost young people to volunteering opportunities on a regular basis where appropriate based on their personal development needs. However, there is evidence of a diversity of practice. In most instances advisers described how they promote or 'sell' volunteering to young people through discussion of the benefits of volunteering for their future employability and skill development. There is also evidence of signposting but this typically relates to resources such as do-it.org rather than a specific opportunities. Managed referral, whereby advisers identify appropriate opportunities and contact the relevant organisation on behalf of the young people, is in the minority and typically reserved for those young people with multiple barriers to engagement. However, this should be seen positively amid concerns about the appropriateness of signposting for this client group as a way of ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to undertake volunteering and gain from the benefits that it can bring. Whilst there is recognition of the benefits of managed referrals for outcomes for young people, funding largely prevents this. The result of this is that advisers often do not know whether young people have even engaged with the resources let alone undertaken volunteering as they often do not see young people again due to the nature of their initial enquiry. Advisers' lack of understanding about the extent to which the opportunity met the needs of the young person may also have implications about the way in which they signpost service-users to opportunities in the future.

Moreover, the lack of specificity in signposting suggests that there are more limited opportunities for advisers to identify voluntary activities that meet the specific needs of a young person which appears at odds with their emphasis on volunteering within the context of their personal development needs.

Policy drivers and organisational targets

There is strong government support for volunteering in the context of almost unprecedented levels of unemployment amongst young people. It has become a central part of the Coalition Government's active labour market policy which has explicitly connected volunteering with moving people off benefits and into paid employment. A variety of measures and initiatives have been implemented, including Work Together and the co-location of Jobcentre Plus and The Prince's Trust or other local voluntary organisations. These mark a shift in emphasis in policy from a focus on skills to providing young people with volunteering opportunities to develop their skills and provide experience in a working environment.

Despite clear recognition of the value of volunteering at a national level, organisational targets established by government departments continue to impose severe restrictions on what organisations can deliver. This is particularly applicable to Connexions due to the obligations they are required to meet as part of the September Guarantee. Whilst stakeholders are passionate about the value of volunteering for young people within the context of a personalised service, they report limited opportunities to instruct advisers to signpost service-users to voluntary activities. Whilst there is some evidence of



a cultural shift within Jobcentre Plus to a less target-driven approach, the introduction of the Work Programme may serve to undermine efforts to promote volunteering further due to the discretion awarded to providers. Furthermore, Jobcentre Plus is a large organisation so it will take time for the true impact of this shift to be felt by advisers.

It is therefore surprising that concerns about organisational targets do not appear to be shared by advisers. Advisers repeatedly indicated that this was not a challenge that they encounter when signposting young people to volunteering opportunities and described how they work within the constraints of targets to promote volunteering to young people. However, there is scope to support advisers further by allowing volunteering to have parity with other education, training and employment options, as volunteering in the Connexions service continues to be considered as a second choice option within the context of organisational targets around the NEET agenda.

Recommendations

Advisers should be equipped to communicate the benefits of volunteering to young people


It is vital that advisers understand the benefits of volunteering and are able to communicate these to young people in a way that is enthusing and captures their interest and imagination. Where this occurs, young people's negative perceptions about volunteering are challenged and this is therefore instrumental in helping to ensure that all young people get the opportunity to participate in voluntary activity and benefit from the gains that it brings. However, advisers should not focus on the benefits of volunteering solely in terms of employability and personal impact but also for the good of the community. This is crucial in order to ensure the change at the heart of the Big Society agenda and the creation of active communities and civic engagement.

Volunteering should have parity with other education and training options

Government departments including the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should recognise the value of volunteering alongside other education and training routes and provide advisers with flexibility to promote volunteering to young people through revision of targets and KPIs. This is important not only to enhance service-users' employability and complement skills based approaches including the RPA and reforms to the education system but to develop a culture of community engagement. To this end volunteering should be classified as a 'positive destination' within the September Guarantee and excluded from the NEET categorisation in recognition of the wider personal, social and economic impacts of volunteering. The same is applicable to the Skills Funding Agency who, through its management of prime contractors for Next Step, should encourage contractors to promote and signpost service-users to volunteering by including it within their overall impact measure and other targets that they must adhere to for contractual purposes.

Advisers should be encouraged to develop localised knowledge of volunteering opportunities

There should be recognition of the importance of localised knowledge regarding volunteering opportunities in order to ensure that they targeted at the needs of young people in the local area. Senior managers within Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations should encourage their advisers to



undertake their own research to identify opportunities to support and complement the resources provided at the national level by employers and voluntary organisations. Jobcentre Plus have attempted to address the requirement for localised knowledge through initiatives such as Work Together where District Managers are given significant autonomy and discretion to work with voluntary, community and public sector organisations that meet their needs.

Voluntary sector should work with advisers to create more volunteering opportunities linked to employability skills and personal development

Young people and advisers value volunteering opportunities which help to develop volunteers' skills, in particular those which will aid their personal development and employability, such as confidence, group working, time-keeping and communication skills. However, evidence suggests that not all volunteering opportunities offer the chance for young people to develop these skills due to the voluntary sector's need to maintain core services. The voluntary sector should work with advisers to develop more volunteering opportunities that will help to nurture these skills, and to identify where existing opportunities can be adapted to address skills needs.

Adopt managed referral for young people with multiple barriers to employment

Young people with multiple barriers to employment are arguably among those that would benefit most from volunteering yet they are the least able to navigate the various resources available and identify an opportunity that is sufficiently targeted to meet their personal development needs. Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations should seek to adopt a differentiated service which provides higher level support to those young people that need more help and assistance. This should take the form of managed referral where budget and time constraints allow in order to ensure that all young people including the hardest to reach have the opportunity to engage in voluntary activity.

Raise awareness of DWP guidelines amongst all advisers

There is a need to raise awareness of the DWP guidelines among all advisers. All Jobcentre Plus advisers should be aware of these, yet our research indicates that this is not the case. IAG advisers should also, as a minimum, have knowledge of these even if they do not feel confident in their application. This is not to suggest that IAG advisers should have a full understanding of the rules and regulations as it is recognised that the Jobcentre Plus advisers are more equipped to provide the advice required; however IAG advisers should familiarise themselves with the guidelines in order to ensure that they signpost young people to appropriate support and help to tackle some of the psychological barriers to participation in volunteering even if this imposes an additional level of bureaucracy.

Furthermore, steps must be taken to address lack of understanding about the rules and regulations in order to ensure that young people do not receive inconsistent and inaccurate advice and guidance which may prevent them from undertaking volunteering. Fear of losing benefits is a major barrier to participation in volunteering and despite successive attempts to tackle this issue by the Department for Work and Pensions issues remain which must be resolved given the current policy drivers for volunteering.



Encourage Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations to recognise the value of CPD

There is significant scope for Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations to share their knowledge and expertise through joint training and CPD activities that focus more on the added-value benefits of volunteering opportunities for young people (and adults). Whilst tensions may exist between pressures on delivery of services, particularly when resources are scarce, continued investment in training and CPD is critical to help strengthen practitioner knowledge and expertise and also to inform and nurture young people's interests and aspirations. A new programme of 'core' training and professional development between Jobcentre Plus and IAG advisers should be considered linked to the work of the UK Careers Profession Alliance. This would enable cross fertilisation of knowledge, experience and expertise working within a shared set of professional standards. As a minimum, senior managers within Jobcentre Plus and IAG organisations should recognise the value of CPD and allow advisers time to engage in it. This is paramount in the context of the finding that advisers develop their own knowledge of volunteering opportunities and is thus vital to ensure the promotion of volunteering.

Engage in further research to obtain an evidence-base to inform future action

Research should be undertaken to further explore findings which emerged from this research in order to aid policy-makers when formulating and developing policy. These include:

- parents' attitudes towards their children's participation in volunteering and the extent to which these facilitate or inhibit their participation;
- the extent and nature of signposting to volunteering by Higher Education Careers Advisory Services and the potential conflict with internships and other forms of work experience; and
- the attitudes of voluntary organisations towards young people and the extent of demand for volunteers, including the potential tension between the tasks that they require assistance with and the development objectives of young people that undertake it.

End notes:

- 1 The Steering Group consisted of representatives drawn from government departments and agencies, local and national voluntary organisations, and independent think tank and research organisations.
- 2 Stakeholders included representatives from professional associations and membership organisations relating to the fields of education and Information, Advice and Guidance; Connexions services; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; Department for Education; Cabinet Office; and a number of voluntary sector organisations.
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