

**Young People and Volunteering:
Preliminary findings and emerging lessons
from primary research**

**A report by the Institute for Volunteering Research,
in association with Dubit, Kikass, Research,
Development and Statistics Directorate (Home
Office), Youth Action Network, and YouthNet**

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Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the Home Office to inform the Russell Commission on the attitudes of young people towards volunteering. The report presents preliminary findings from new qualitative and quantitative research conducted by youth organisations, and analysis of the Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS), under the overall direction of the Institute for Volunteering Research.

The various research elements produced several clear cross-cutting themes and consensus on many major issues.

A large number of young people volunteer in their communities, although the surveys produced varying findings. The HOCS results suggest that young people volunteer at a similar, or higher, rate when compared to older people. This contrasts with earlier research findings which suggested a slump in young people's voluntary participation. Levels and types of volunteering vary among young people according to age, gender, ethnicity and background.

Young people are involved in a range of voluntary activities, especially sport, hobbies, recreation and arts, and social clubs. They also volunteer in children's activities, both in and outside schools. The setting for their volunteering is both in the community and for charities. Their most common type of activity is organising or helping to run an activity or event, followed by raising or handling money, and offering practical help or giving advice or information and counselling.

Most young people have positive views of volunteering - helping people out, being a good citizen and a way to gain skills and experience. However, perceptions that volunteering is boring and 'not cool' are held by a minority. A narrow, stereotypical view still prevails among many who do not volunteer, particularly among disaffected (hard to reach and marginalized) young people, because of a very limited knowledge of what volunteering involves.

Young people who do volunteer have a wider appreciation of its scope and potential, and are less likely to label volunteers according to the stereotype of white middle class middle aged women. In fact, while some young people continue to see volunteering as the domain of older people, others emphasise that volunteers are likely to be younger people because they have more free time.

There is a general feeling among young people that the volunteering 'brand' needs an overhaul to enlarge its appeal. While the term itself is seen as problematic, the alternatives - such as community service - are no better. Therefore volunteering needs rebranding to reflect young people's lifestyles and its relevance to them, and to emphasise the opportunities it offers to everyone. It should be promoted as being cool, progressive, respected, beneficial, relevant

and enhancing.

Young people volunteer for a range of reasons and get a host of benefits from volunteering. These group broadly into personal feelings, such as satisfaction and meeting new people; personal needs, including gaining a pastime, respect, friendship and interaction with others; altruism expressed in helping others and doing good; experience, skills and career prospects; and personal inducements in the form of certificates, rewards, qualifications and jobs.

The importance of different motivations and benefits vary with age. People aged 14-16 years place greater emphasis on achievement, satisfaction and societal benefits, while those in the upper-age bracket focus more on the personal benefits such as enjoyment and developing a social life. Those who are already volunteering often find that their expectations are exceeded by the experience, particularly in the amount of enjoyment and fun they have.

Young people who are not currently volunteering are often unaware of the potential benefits and this acts as a barrier to involvement. They feel that having more knowledge of what volunteers can gain from their activities might motivate them to become volunteers.

This is just one of several barriers to volunteering for young people. They also blame lack of time; negative peer pressure; lack of confidence; and problems with finding out information about volunteering.

Time is one of the biggest barriers. Volunteering is just one of many competing demands on their time, including studying and work. Their view that volunteering is very time-intensive and also involves a fair amount of travelling time means that it has to justify itself by giving them clear returns for their time investment. This is especially true when they take financial opportunity costs into account. Time spent volunteering is time not spent earning money, and many young people feel they cannot afford to volunteer.

Cost is also a factor in other barriers, particularly travel and childcare. Many young people lack transport and tend to favour volunteering activities close to home. Those with children find childcare and associated costs a major barrier.

Negative peer pressure can be a considerable barrier to volunteering. Many young people are conscious of the low status of volunteering among their age group and speak of the stigma of looking 'sad' or 'not cool'. Tackling this barrier is seen as central to any future efforts to mobilise young people to volunteer.

Some young people are put off volunteering by lack of confidence and fear of rejection. They feel that they have nothing to contribute and that other people will not value their efforts and achievements. This is particularly strongly felt among disaffected young people and those in the youngest age groups, and is a

reflection of a broader feeling of disempowerment and social disapproval.

Access to information is another problem preventing greater voluntary involvement. This has two dimensions: first there is an apparent lack of information but, once found, there seems to be so much information that it becomes confusing and difficult to digest. Young people would welcome easier routes to finding something they are interested in and guidance of what they would be best suited to.

Most young people get into volunteering through word of mouth and being told about it or asked by someone already involved. They feel that this should be used more widely to mobilise others to volunteer. Encouragement by friends, people they know, celebrities and the media would help introduce them to volunteering. Friends are particularly important and peer advocacy is seen as the key mechanism to stimulate volunteering.

Promotional campaigns involving celebrities, not just as national figureheads but involved locally, would help increase public recognition of volunteering and raise its status. Schools are an important site for promoting volunteering, but volunteering should not solely be school-based or school-led, and it certainly should not be 'required' or compulsory.

The message of promotional campaigns should combine all the attractions for young people - have fun, make friends, meet people, give help, get experience, gain skills, be rewarded, do something interesting, exciting and funky. Messages should vary according to the target age groups.

There is no clear consensus among young people on incentives and rewards for volunteering, although most agree that getting training, awards and certificates, and working with friends would encourage more volunteering. Some are concerned that offering rewards would devalue the activity, reduce people's sense of purpose and satisfaction and undermine the essence of volunteering. Most emphasise that recognition and tokens of appreciation would be useful incentives. They want more respect to be paid to the existing contribution of young people, particularly for employers to recognise the value of their volunteering.

Opinion is divided on whether offering cash would act as an incentive to volunteer, but it is generally regarded as being highly problematic. Out of pocket expenses should definitely be reimbursed but most feel that cash incentives would undermine the concept of volunteering, attract people for the wrong reasons, or simply be insufficient to attract them at all. Some, however, recognise that offering some financial support would help those who cannot afford to volunteer and that certain types of volunteering, for example overseas work, should have an associated cash incentive. Many feel that offering educational credits as an incentive would have only limited appeal.

In terms of how they want their volunteering organised, young people show strong support for group and team activities, taster sessions and new forms of opportunity. They place high priority on flexibility in the types of work and the times they can volunteer, but some want a relatively structured programme which they can timetable into their lives.

They feel it is important to have some say in planning and decision making in their volunteering but many do not want to be overburdened with responsibility. They want practical and emotional support and back-up from adults, which allows them to progress to leadership roles at their own pace. However, there are those who do not want the pressure of leadership because of their young age, lack of time or the level of responsibility in other areas of their lives. Clearly it is important that support and opportunities for progression are tailored to each young person's needs.

In conclusion, there is a need to reclaim concept for young people, and this reclamation should be peer-led, using young volunteers to show other young people the diversity of volunteering, its relevance to young people's lives and the benefits it brings to young people. This, however, needs to be backed up by a re-examination of the ways in which organisations are seeking to engage with young people. There is a need for organisations to provide meaningful opportunities tailored to meet needs of young people – opportunities that enable young people to engage with issues of importance to them, in ways which interest them, and which are flexible. A tailor-made package of support and incentives, based on access to training, skills development, and rewards, would further encourage young people to volunteer. Once involved, the rewards provided by volunteering itself are considerable.

Summary of key lessons

- Lesson one: A large number of young people volunteer in their communities
- Lesson two: Levels and types of volunteering vary among young people according to age, gender and background
- Lesson three: Young volunteers get involved in voluntary activities in a range of settings, but sport is the most popular
- Lesson four: A narrow, stereotypical view of volunteering still prevails among young people who don't volunteer, but evidence suggests it is shifting
- Lesson five: Many young people who are not volunteers lack knowledge on the breadth and diversity of volunteering
- Lesson six: Young volunteers have a positive and progressive image of volunteering
- Lesson seven: Young people are challenging the view that only certain sections of the population volunteer, although that image is still persistent among some non-volunteers
- Lesson eight: Young people want to see the volunteering 'brand' given an overhaul, but don't think it should be abandoned altogether
- Lesson nine: Young people volunteer for a range of different reasons, and get a whole host of benefits from volunteering, but these vary according to age
- Lesson ten: Young people who are not currently volunteering lack knowledge on benefits of getting involved; they felt that understanding the benefits of volunteering might motivate them to volunteer
- Lesson eleven: Young people identified a number of barriers to volunteering – with time being the most significant.
- Lesson twelve: Negative peer pressure can be a considerable barrier to volunteering; reversing this was seen to be central to any efforts to mobilise young people
- Lesson thirteen: Other significant barriers to volunteering included a lack of confidence among young people and a lack of access to information
- Lesson fourteen: There was a strong preference among young people for personal, face to face, methods of recruitment
- Lesson fifteen: Peer advocacy was identified as the key mechanism to stimulate volunteering among young people
- Lesson sixteen: Young people respond to celebrities and believe that promotional campaigns could help to increase the public recognition of volunteering and raise the status of volunteering
- Lesson seventeen: Young people felt that schools could be an important site for promoting volunteering and a route into volunteering, but volunteering

should not solely be school-based or school-led

- Lesson eighteen: Young people think they should be encouraged to volunteer, but do not want to see volunteering becoming compulsory
- Lesson nineteen: There is no clear consensus among young people on incentives and rewards – they can see positive and negative effects
- Lesson twenty: Young people tend to agree that offering incentives such as training, the opportunity to get involved with a group of friends, awards and rewards, would encourage more volunteering
- Lesson twenty-one: Opinion is divided on whether offering cash would act as an incentive to volunteer, but generally this was regarded as being highly problematic
- Lesson twenty-two: Young people want their volunteering to be organised in ways which enable group activities, taster days, and encourage new forms of opportunity
- Lesson twenty-three: Young people want flexibility, but some people want that flexibility within structured opportunities
- Lesson twenty-four: Having a say in planning and decision making was important to many young people, but with adult support and back-up
- Lesson twenty-five: The location of volunteering is important to young people, many of whom want to volunteer close to home

1. Introduction

1.1 Research aims and objectives

The research that informs this report was commissioned by the Home Office in order to explore the attitudes of young people towards volunteering. The call to undertake the research followed the announcement by the Chancellor in his budget statement of an initiative to stimulate volunteering among young people, and the subsequent establishment of the Russell Commission to take forward this initiative.

The research focused on the following key themes:

- 1 The image of volunteering – what do young people think of volunteering, its language, image and associations? What can be done to project a more positive image of volunteering?
- 2 The barriers to volunteering – what are the barriers, both psychological and physical, which prevent young people from getting involved in volunteering? Is concern over personal safety an issue? Or the fear that young people may lay themselves open to litigation if something should go wrong? What can be done to overcome these barriers?
- 3 Motivations and benefits – what do young people want from volunteering? How important are instrumental factors such as skills development and enhanced employability versus social factors such as meeting people and making friends?
- 4 Routes in - how do young people get involved in volunteering? What can be done to improve access, especially from more marginalized groups in society? How important are school and family in introducing young people to the values and experience of volunteering?
- 5 Incentives and rewards – what incentives would open up access to volunteering to a broader, more diverse group of young people? Do financial incentives have a role to play? What do young people think about the idea of being offered education credits as part of their volunteering or gap year engagement?
- 6 The organisation of volunteering – how should volunteering be organised and managed to maximise take up by young people? How important is youth-leadership as a concept? What types of opportunities do young people want to get involved in?
- 7 Full-time or part-time – what are the relative merits of full-time volunteering versus part-time, episodic volunteering? What lessons can we learn from

the experience of full-time volunteering in other countries, for example the Americorps programme in the US?

- 8 Volunteering and civic engagement – how does volunteering fit in with other forms of civic engagement by young people? Is there a link between active involvement in volunteering and active citizenship?

This report is one of three that have been compiled in connection with the project. The other reports looked at:

- 1 Evidence from existing literature on young people's attitudes towards and experiences of volunteering;
- 2 The provision of volunteering opportunities specifically for young people in England.

This report focuses on **preliminary** findings from primary research and findings from a major survey (2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey) into young people's attitudes towards, and experience, of volunteering. It considers young people's perceptions of volunteering, routes into volunteering, their motivations for volunteering and the benefits they receive, the barriers to volunteering, incentives and rewards for volunteering and the organisation of volunteering.

The aims of the research were to: produce a report which gives full voice to the experiences and ambitions of young people, both existing volunteers and non-volunteers, with an emphasis on identifying the key implications for policy and practice. The age group to be researched was primarily the 16-24 year olds, although a limited amount of research was also conducted with 14-16 year olds.

1.2 Methods

The research that informs this report involved three separate elements (qualitative, quantitative, secondary analysis), each undertaken by a number of different research agencies and youth organisations on behalf of the Institute.

1.2.1 Qualitative research

The most substantial phase of the research involved qualitative methods. In total over 400 young people were involved in this stage of the research. Four organisations were involved in conducting the research, each using slightly different methods and focusing on different target respondent groups:

- 1 Kikass.tv (referred to throughout this report as kikass) consulted 267 young people in 11 locations throughout England, within 35 'storm sessions'. Storm sessions are designed to elicit the views of young people by creating an informal environment in which Kikass Street Team Volunteers stimulate discussion and debate around a given subject (in this case volunteering). The Kikass storm sessions involved both volunteers

- and non-volunteers. Seventy percent of the participants were white; 30 percent were from black and minority ethnic groups. A majority of the respondents were 16-25 year olds, but a few were younger and a few older. A majority of respondents were either in employment (45%) or in education (42%).
- 2 Dubit conducted 14 focus groups, each with 6-8 young people in locations across England. Half of the respondents were volunteers and half were non-volunteers. Many of the participants in the Dubit focus groups were disaffected young people – people who are marginalized or hard to reach¹. The research included young people aged between 14 and 24 years;
 - 3 Youth Action Network conducted five focus groups, involving a total of 56 young people. The respondents were volunteers from Youth Action Network’s membership organisations. The focus groups were split into three sections – a free discussion, a board blast activity, and a reaction sheet in order to stimulate young people’s thinking about volunteering;
 - 4 YouthNet conducted an online user panel, which ran for one week with 16 members, all of whom were in the 16-25 year old age group. During the week various questions were posted on the discussion board to stimulate responses and discussion between the panel members.

Full reports from each of these pieces of research are available upon request (see appendix for details).

1.2.2 Quantitative surveys

In order to supplement the qualitative data, three separate quantitative surveys were undertaken by different agencies:

- 5 Dubit undertook an online survey of members, which elicited 733 responses. Sixty-five percent of respondents were under the age of 16, 31 percent were aged 16-19. A majority of respondents were in education (83% were in school and 11% were at college), and nearly two-thirds (65%) were female;
- 6 YouthNet conducted an online survey of their users, which generated 68 responses. Forty-two percent of the YouthNet respondents were aged 16-19 years, whereas 45 percent were 20-25 years. Just over half (56%) of the respondents were in education, 23 percent working full time, 13 percent working part time, and 8 percent unemployed. Two-thirds (65%) of the respondents were female;

¹ ¹ Based on the definition used within Dubit’s research, throughout the remainder of the report we use the term ‘disaffected’ young people to refer to hard to reach and marginalized young people.

- 7 As part of a large omnibus survey undertaken by the Metro newspaper (conducted by BMRB), a series of questions were included on volunteering. In total 789 responses were received from 18-24 year olds. All the respondents were in full time work, and two-thirds (66%) were male.

While the three surveys used some common questions, there were slight differences in content and methodology, making comparisons difficult.

1.2.3 Primary analysis of the Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) 2001

In order to provide comprehensive statistical data on young people's experience of volunteering, the HOCS 2001 survey was analysed by Communities Research, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate within the Home Office. The analysis focused on the formal volunteering and informal volunteering modules within the survey. It broke down the responses according to age, allowing a comparison between young people aged between 16 and 24 years, and people aged 25 year or older. The data also allowed for comparisons of the extent of involvement in informal and formal volunteering between the age groups: 16-17 years; 18-19 years; and 20-24 years.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report draws together data from all three stages of the research.

The report is separated into three sections – introduction, findings, and conclusions. The findings section is further divided into seven themes: levels of volunteering by young people; perceptions; motivations and impacts; barriers; mobilising volunteers; incentives and rewards; and the organisation of volunteering.

2. Young people's attitudes towards, and practice of, volunteering

The various research elements produced several clear cross-cutting themes and issues, with a clear consensus emerging on many of these. However, the following section contains interim findings from a preliminary analysis of all the data, and this must be kept in mind when reading the remainder of the report.

2.1 The extent of volunteering by young people

Lesson one: A large number of young people volunteer in their communities

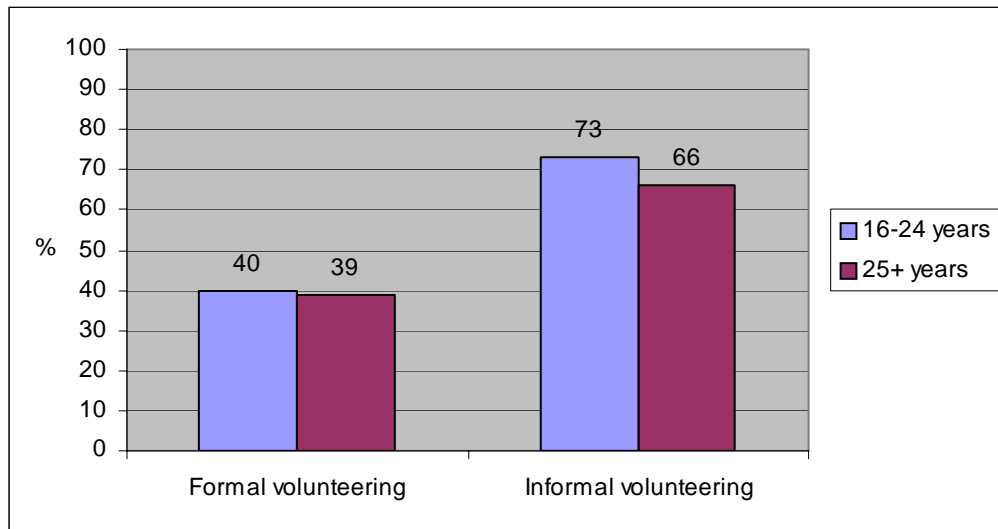
Previous research evidence had suggested that the number of young people volunteering was declining, and that young people volunteered less than their older counterparts (see, for example, Davis Smith, 1998). While the data is not strictly comparable, evidence from the more recent HOCS 2001 found that, in fact, young people volunteer at a similar, or higher, level to older people.

Overall, HOCS 2001 found that 40 percent of 16-24 year olds had been involved in formal volunteering in the 12 months before interview. Among these, 37 percent volunteered at least once a week. In addition, 73 percent had been involved in informal volunteering, with 21 percent doing so on a weekly basis. Twenty-eight percent of young people aged between 16 and 24 years had been involved in civic participation activities in the 12 months before interviewing.

The findings show that 16-24 year olds were **equally** as likely as people aged 25 years and older to be involved in formal volunteering, but that they were **more** likely to be involved in informal volunteering than those in the older age group (see Figure 1).

The three quantitative surveys undertaken during this research provide a rather confusing picture of volunteering among young people. The Dubit survey found that 32 percent of respondents had volunteered at some points in their lives, the Metro survey put the figure at 41 percent, while the YouthNet survey found that 69 percent of respondents had volunteered. These different levels of volunteering are likely to reflect the different sample groups involved in the surveys and the different methodologies employed. But each of the surveys points to fairly significant levels of involvement by young people.

Figure 1: HOCS 2001: Percentage of respondents involved in formal or informal volunteering at least once in the 12 months before interview.



Notes on Figure 1: Respondents in England and Wales: 9,135 (25+ years); 878 (16-24 years) for formal volunteering; 9,135 (25+ years); 878 (16-24 years) for informal volunteering.

Lesson two: Levels and types of volunteering vary among young people according to age, gender and background

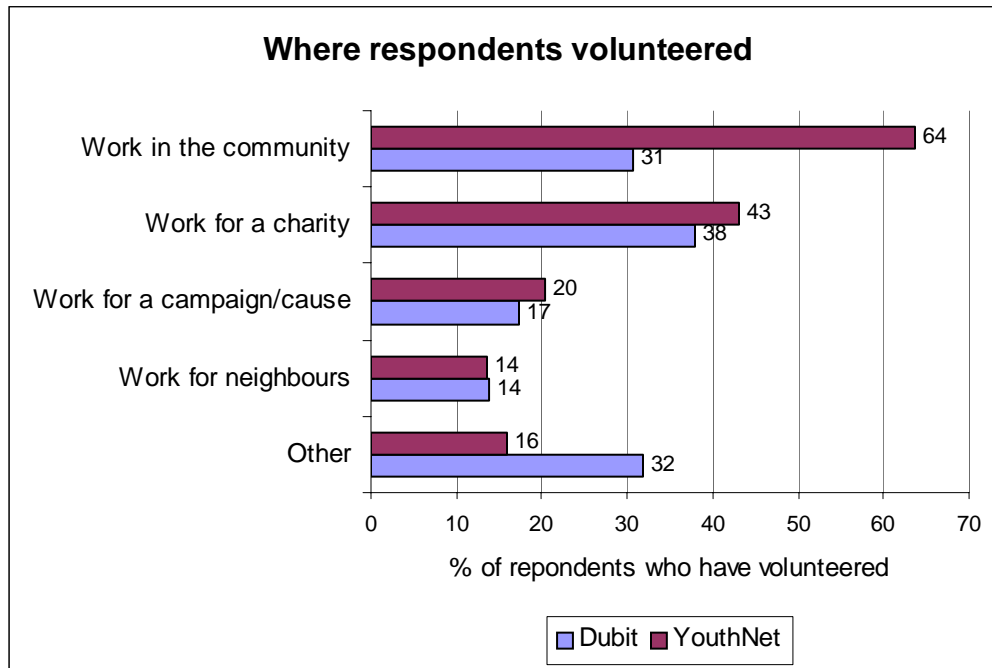
Not all young people, however, participate equally. While HOCS 2001 found that men and women in the 16-24 year old age group were equally as likely to have volunteered (40% in both cases), it also found that they tended to get involved in different types of activities – with young men being almost twice as likely as women to get involved in sports/exercise-based volunteering activities (60% of men got involved in sports/exercise based volunteering compared to 34% of women).

HOCS 2001 also found that different age groups within the 16-24 year old band participated to different extents. Among 16-17 year olds, 50 percent had been involved in formal volunteering at least once in the 12 months before interview; 42 percent of 18-19 year olds had done so; and 35 percent of 20-24 year olds had done so. There was less variation according to age, however, with regard to informal volunteering (73%, 70% and 74% respectively).

Lesson three: Young volunteers get involved in voluntary activities in a range of settings, but sport is the most popular

The Dubit and YouthNet surveys both asked respondents where they volunteered. As figure two shows, most young people either volunteered in their communities or for charities.

Figure 2: Where young people volunteer



Notes on Figure 2: Some respondents had volunteered in more than one area: Dubit respondents selecting an average of 1.3 areas each, and YouthNet respondents 1.6 each.

The HOCS 2001 survey gives a more detailed picture of the fields and types of formal volunteering that young people are engaged in (see Table 1).

Among 16-24 year olds, the most popular *field* of interest was sports/exercise – with 47 percent engaging in this. However, sports-based volunteering was more popular among men (60%) than women (34%). The second most popular field of activity was hobbies /recreation/arts /social clubs (28%), followed by children’s education/schools (26%)², and youth/children’s activities, outside schools (25%).

The most common *type* of activity undertaken by young volunteers was organising or helping to run an activity or event (undertaken by 55 percent of respondents), followed by raising or handling money (49%), offering ‘other’ practical help (32%) and giving advice / information / counselling.

The survey found that 16-24 year olds were engaging in similar activities to those aged 25 years olds and over.

² Children’s education/schools was the most popular activity among women aged 16-24 years (35%).

Table 1: HOCS 2001 data on participation in formal volunteering at least once in the 12 months before interview, by field of interest and by age and sex

Field of interest	Respondents aged 16-24 (%)	Respondents aged 25+ years (%)	Respondents aged 16-24 years		Respondents aged 25+ years	
			Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Sports/exercise	47	32	60	34	42	22
Children's education/schools	26	31	*	35	23	38
Hobbies /recreation/arts /social clubs	28	25	33	24	29	20
Youth/children's activities (outside school)	25	17	24	26	17	18
Health/disability/ social welfare	11	16	*	*	12	20
The environment/animals	9	12	*	*	11	14
Education for adults	15	10	*	*	9	11
Respondents in England and Wales	334	3,494	147	187	1,498	1,994

*Notes on Table 1: *=unweighted number of respondents <30, QV3.3*

2.2 Perceptions of volunteers and volunteering

The Dubit and YouthNet quantitative surveys asked respondents about their perceptions of volunteers and volunteering. In both surveys the top three responses to the question of 'when you think of volunteering, what comes to mind' were: helping people out, being a good citizen, and a good way to get skills and experience (see Table 2 below).

Negative perceptions were evident, but less common. For example, 32 percent of the Dubit respondents and 18 percent of the YouthNet respondents perceived volunteering to be boring, while 23 percent of Dubit and 11 percent of YouthNet respondents said volunteering was 'not cool'.

The difference in responses between the Dubit respondents and the YouthNet respondents are likely to be due to the different characteristics of their sample populations, reflecting differences between views of young people who are volunteers and those who are not - differences which were also highlighted in the qualitative research.

Table 2: When you think of volunteering, what comes to mind?

Figures are %s of base	Dubit	YouthNet
Helping people out	71	92
Being a good citizen	57	62
A way to get skills or experience	45	68
A way to make friends	33	39
Opportunity to do something you are interested in	32	41
Boring	32	18
Doing things the government should do	25	23
Being a goody goody	24	23
A way to have a good time	22	24
Not cool	23	11
Being a mug for doing something for nothing	15	15
Old fashioned	14	14
Something your mum and/or dad does	N/A	14
A female thing	7	3
Other	5	2
Base (number of respondents)	733	66
Average number of selections per respondent	4.1	4.5

Notes on Table 2: "Something your mum and/or dad does" was not an option in the Dubit survey. N/A indicates that the option was not included.

Lesson four: A narrow, stereotypical view of volunteering still prevails among young people who don't volunteer, but evidence suggests it is shifting

When asked what they thought of volunteering, many of the respondents in the qualitative research who did not have experience of volunteering, talked about: helping people in need; unpaid work; doing something out of your own free will; and organisationally based activities (the Dubit research, for example, found that young people regarded informal voluntary activities not as volunteering, but more as a duty). Comments on what volunteering was included:

"Giving time without being paid" (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

"You offering your services, so them not asking you, you asking them, 'can I volunteer for you?'" (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

"Willingly doing something for others, not forced to do unpaid work, so not like slaves, they work for free but that's not volunteering" (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

When these views were expanded upon, it became evident that many non-volunteers have quite a negative view of volunteering. They perceive it as

something that has little relevance to their lives, and something with associated opportunity costs – to get involved in volunteering would mean giving up time to undertake other activities (either paid work or hobbies). As one respondent put it, volunteering involves:

“Boring jobs in charity shops and smelly clothes” (Kikass respondent)

While another summed up their impression of volunteering as:

“Only makes you think of charity shops” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Lesson five: Many young people who are not volunteers lack knowledge on the breadth and diversity of volunteering

This narrow vision of volunteering held by those who were not volunteering is underpinned by a general lack of knowledge on the activities undertaken by volunteers. For example, the kikass research found that young people thought volunteering was either travelling abroad, making cups of tea, helping old people, working with children, or helping homeless people. This limited view is reflected in the following comments:

“Only makes you think of charity shops” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

“Shaking a money tin at people in a city centre” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

The Dubit research found that this was particularly true among disaffected young people, who had a very narrow idea of what volunteering encompasses, reflecting a lack of interaction with volunteers or volunteering. As one respondent said:

“I don’t know anyone who does anything...” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

In addition, the Kikass research found the image of volunteering to be shaped by young people’s views on charities more generally. Some young people are distrusting of charities, believing that any money they donate would be lost in administration rather than reaching the intended beneficiaries, and this impacted upon their perceptions of volunteering. They did not want to see their time also used inefficiently. As one respondent put it:

“Young people are put off by the perceived hypocrisy of those running charities – why volunteer when the people at the top of charities are Merc driving ‘trustfarians’” (Kickass respondent)

Another respondent summed up their perception of charities, arguing they were:

“Badly organised organisations with hidden agendas” (kikass respondent)

Lesson six: Young volunteers have a positive and progressive image of volunteering

Young people who were already volunteering tended to have a less stereotypical image of volunteering. Young volunteers did still talk about volunteering as helping others and unpaid work, and the following comments are indicative of this:

“Helping others for a good cause. And sacrificing some of your own time for a good cause” (YouthNet respondent)

“Doing something to help others for free” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

They also, however, tended to emphasise a broader range of activities and generally saw volunteering as a more positive concept than did non-volunteers. The Youth Action Network research, for example, found that young volunteers used terms such as “opportunities”, “learning”, and “changing the world” to describe volunteering.

Lesson seven: Young people are challenging the view that only certain sections of the population volunteer, although that image is still persistent among some non-volunteers

When asked who volunteers a broader image was presented among the volunteers than the non-volunteers, but both groups held quite a diverse view. The respondents to the Dubit and YouthNet quantitative surveys provided a positive perception of who volunteers are (see Table 3). Instead of focusing on demographic characteristics, they tended to focus on personality traits.

A majority of respondents felt that the people who volunteer are ‘people who like to help’ (74 percent of Dubit respondents, 89 percent YouthNet). Adjectives such as ‘committed’ and ‘trustworthy’ were much more commonly used than ‘busybodies’, ‘middle class/well off people’ and ‘incompetent amateurs’.

However, only 11 percent of respondents from both surveys felt that volunteers were ‘people like me’.

Table 3: When you think of volunteers, what comes to mind?

Figures are %s of base	Dubit	YouthNet
People who like to help	74	89
Committed	58	58
People who want to improve things	56	59
People who care about the environment / animal welfare	55	45
Trustworthy	47	38
Religious people	33	29
Middle aged / older people	30	30
Do-gooders	29	24
People with too much spare time	26	24
White people	32	5
Busy-bodies	14	11
Women	12	11
People like me	11	11
Middle class / well off people	8	12
Young people	8	8
Incompetent amateurs	5	5
Other	5	3
Base (number of respondents)	733	66
Average number of selections per respondent	5.0	4.6

These findings were largely reinforced by the qualitative research, within which responses could again be categorised into those that focused on the background of the people who volunteer (male/female; young/old, for example), or those that focused on personality traits (people who want to help; worthy people, for example).

The respondents who were volunteers in the Dubit research, for example, said that you cannot stereotype and volunteers are people like themselves, while many of the YouthNet respondents thought that anyone could volunteer, and that volunteers were generally people who wanted to help others. Comments included:

“Anybody, from all walks of life. Some people volunteer themselves to every cause which they believe in” (YouthNet respondent)

“Any person, doesn’t have to be a special person, can be any age, young or old, black or white, green or purple” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

However, some respondents went on to add provisos that anyone could volunteer, as long as they had time, or as long as they could afford to do so:

“People who like to help others and can afford to spare some time to help

out” (YouthNet respondent)

“As long as you have some time to spare, everyone’s invited to volunteer!”
(YouthNet respondent)

“People who have nothing else to do, not meant badly, but just that they have lots of free time” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

“For well-off families who can afford the uniform” (Youth Action Network respondent, non-volunteer)

Some young people had a narrower image of volunteers, conforming more to the traditional stereotypical view of the volunteer as the white, middle class, middle age women – typified by one respondent as:

“Like Emily Bishop from Coronation Street” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Some respondents presented a different image of volunteers, but again a rather stereotypical one:

“Dreadlocked hippies who work for Greenpeace” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

While some respondents thought that it was mainly older people who volunteered, others disagreed saying that volunteers were likely to be younger people as they have more free time:

“Old people with nothing better to do” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

“Maybe under 25s? Because as you get older you want to get a job and don’t have the time” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Lesson eight: Young people want to see the volunteering ‘brand’ given an overhaul, but don’t think it should be abandoned altogether
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There was a general feeling, by volunteers and non-volunteers alike, that volunteering needs to be re-branded.

However, while the terms ‘volunteering’ was seen to be problematic due to the stereotypes that some young people still have of volunteering, when respondents were asked about alternative terms for volunteering these were seen to be equally, if not more, problematic:

“Calling it Community Service is terrible, it make it sound like punishment”

(kikass respondent)

“... If you were going to give it a different name though, it'd probably only end up with a tacky slogan / 'brand name' that wouldn't be much better at all! I think the only problem with volunteering is getting people motivated to do it” (YouthNet respondent)

“... I can't see a problem with the volunteering label” (YouthNet respondent)

Many respondents felt that volunteering should be re-branded to reflect young people's life styles and its relevance to them, but at the same time it should also be presented as an opportunity which is open for all to get involved in. Respondents felt that the benefits of volunteering to young people should be encapsulated within the brand, but at the same time it was felt that young people should gain more respect for the volunteering that they are already engaged in (something which some felt was currently lacking).

The kikass respondents, in particular, talked about the need to re-brand volunteering – to give it a 'sexy' and 'funky' image – as they felt this would help break with the stereotype of volunteering as 'little old ladies in the charity shop'. Instead they felt that volunteering should be promoting as being: cool; progressive; respected; beneficial; relevant; and enhancing.

2.3 Motivations and benefits of volunteering

Lesson nine: Young people volunteer for a range of different reasons, and get a whole host of benefits from volunteering, but these vary according to age

The respondents who were volunteering identified a range of motivations for volunteering, and a similar range of benefits gained from volunteering. The Youth Action Network research identified five broad categories of motivation (and subsequently the benefits), and these were reinforced by similar findings from the other research:

- 1 Personal feelings – satisfaction, feel good, desire to meet new people, a desire to 'give something back'.

This volunteer illustrated the beneficial influence of a volunteer role model in early life:

“I had a mentor when I was a child and wanted to be a mentor when I grew up” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

Another spoke of being motivate to volunteer in order to challenge people's perceptions of young people:

“Young people might just live up to that reputation of being troublemakers if they didn’t do it” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

- 2 Personal needs – pastime, respect, friendship, interaction with others.

The social side is important to some young people:

“I’ve made lots of friends through this and so you start to think of it as coming to see your friends” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

- 3 Altruism – helping others; doing good.

Altruism and feeling part of a community or collective enterprise are primary reasons for some volunteers:

“Feels really good when all the area is sticking together” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“I find it really beneficial to get me back out and become part of the community. Before I was really lost” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“Knowing that you are doing some good” (YouthNet respondent)

- 4 Experience – skills and work experience to enhance a CV, or career prospects.

The value of volunteering for gaining experience and skills is also important:

“Learning a new skill” (YouthNet respondent)

“Working in an environment one would not normally experience” (YouthNet respondent)

- 5 Personal inducements – certificates, rewards, jobs, qualifications.

There were, however, some differences in the motivations, and recognised benefits, according to the age of volunteers. While younger volunteers (14-16 year olds) tended to focus more on achievement, earning respect, developing their CV, and the societal benefits of volunteering, respondents in the upper-age bracket (who often had more experience of volunteering) focused more on the personal benefits such as developing a social life and enjoyment. The Dubit research also found that there was a difference according to young people’s backgrounds. Among disaffected young people there was a greater emphasis on qualifications, work experience and skills, whereas among young people in full time employment or education there was an emphasis on gaining a sense of achievement, satisfaction, and a social life – skills were of secondary importance.

The Dubit research asked respondents whether the experience of volunteering met their expectations. Generally, young people felt that their expectations were in fact exceeded:

"[I] didn't expect to feel so satisfied and happy at being part of something"
(Dubit respondent, volunteer)

"[I] thought it would be a lot of hard work, but didn't realise it would also be so much fun, [that I would] make so many friends with other volunteers"
(Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Lesson ten: Young people who are not currently volunteering lack knowledge on benefits of getting involved; they felt that understanding the benefits of volunteering might motivate them to volunteer

All the research elements found that among non-volunteers there was a general lack of knowledge on the benefits that volunteering could bring, and that this lack of awareness was seen as a barrier to young people getting involved. There was a strong view that if young people could be made more aware of the likely benefits of volunteering they may be more motivated to get involved.

Certainly when encouraged to discuss the potential range of benefits that volunteering could bring, non-volunteers did identify a range of benefits, such as satisfaction; transferable skills; confidence; long term employment and motivation; networking/meeting new people; and the chance to do something different. Comments included:

"You'd get respect from those you help and more people would like you"
(Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

"Making friends, feel good for helping others, gaining maturity through work, loads of benefits!" (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

2.4 Barriers to volunteering

Lesson eleven: Young people identified a number of barriers to volunteering – with time being the most significant.

Young people identified a range of factors that served to limit their involvement in volunteering.

Time was one of the biggest barriers to volunteering identified throughout the research. Volunteering is just one of many competing demands on young people's time – to get them involved they want to see that it will be time well spent. The 2001 HOCS found that 32 percent of young people aged 16-24 years,

who had not been involved, had been involved more than 12 months previous to the interview, or who had been involved at least once in the 12 months before interview but less frequently than once a month and who had said that they would like to spend time/more time in formal volunteering, reported that what stopped them doing more was a 'general lack of time/being busy'. Additionally, 20 percent said studying commitments got in their way and 13 percent said work commitments got in their way. This was equally as true for men and women.

Respondents felt that volunteering was very time intensive, and time was something they lacked:

"Lack of time as volunteering can be demanding" (YouthNet respondent)

When getting to and from volunteering activities involved extensive travel this created additional time barriers:

"Because I don't have a car I have to spend a lot of time on public transport to volunteer. I don't often have the time or energy" (YouthNet respondent)

A perceived lack of flexibility in the time commitment needed to volunteer was also seen to be problematic, particularly among young people with other responsibilities, such as childcare.

Young people also related time to financial (opportunity) costs. Time spent volunteering was time not spent earning money, and as such many young people felt they could not afford to volunteer. As a couple of respondents put it:

"Next year I probably won't volunteer either, as I'll need all the money I can get from working full time" (YouthNet respondent)

"If you're old enough to work, you go out and get paid for something"
(Dubit respondent, volunteer)

With the competing demands on young people's time, there was a general feeling that if they were going to give their time to something then they needed to see clear returns. The general lack of understanding among young people who weren't involved about the personal benefits of volunteering therefore reinforced the time barrier – it was often not viewed as a worthwhile activity or one that they would get something out of. As one respondent said:

"If I volunteer, I want something out of it, even if it's not financial – something useful to put on my CV, seeing friends, etc. If I don't think it will give me something back, I won't bother" (YouthNet respondent)

Lesson twelve: Negative peer pressure can be a considerable barrier to volunteering; reversing this was seen to be central to any efforts to mobilise young people

Negative peer pressure was also seen to create a considerable barrier to volunteering (this was particularly highlighted in the kikass and Dubit research). Volunteering has a low status among many young people and, indeed, many young people felt that there was a stigma attached to volunteering, which served to put people off, particularly those at the younger end of the age bracket. Comments included:

“I think for younger people there may also be the fear of looking ‘sad!’”
(YouthNet respondent)

“Volunteering doesn’t make you feel ‘sad’ but when your friends saw you, you would be embarrassed” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

“Young people are worried that their mates will laugh at them for volunteering” (kikass respondent)

“Volunteering is not cool. A change in our society, where values shift from, being materialistic – based towards the opposite – where friendships, ideals and altruism are truly celebrated, rather than pretentiously” (kikass respondent)

As this last comment suggests, however, the problem did not lie solely with young people, but with society as a whole.

Tackling this barrier was seen to be central to any future efforts to mobilise young people to volunteer. Many respondents suggested that the way to tackle it was through peer advocacy – getting young people who do volunteer to speak to their peers about their experiences. The following comment highlights the importance of friends in encouraging people to volunteer:

“The only stigma I came across was ‘get a real job!’ from my friends, but quite a few others volunteer and obviously made a real difference in some cases and I thought it was amazing. I don’t think there is much of a stigma attached to it” (YouthNet respondent)

This use of peer advocacy is discussed further below.

Lesson thirteen: Other significant barriers to volunteering included a lack of confidence among young people and a lack of access to information

Some young people were put off from getting involved in volunteering due to a

fear of rejection; this was felt to reflect a broader feeling of disempowerment among young people, a feeling of not having anything to contribute or of other people not valuing the contribution young people can make. This was particularly pertinent among disaffected young people, males, and for those respondents in the youngest age groups. As one respondent said:

“Helping people is a good thing and [I am] happy for them to help us, but we’re too young to help anyone” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

This lack of confidence was heightened when volunteering took place in unfamiliar environments.

Access to information on volunteering was also identified as a considerable barrier. Access had two dimensions – first there was an apparent lack of information on volunteering, but conversely, once found, there was also seen to be so much information that it becomes confusing and difficult to digest. As one respondent put it:

“There’s a paradox. If you ask a young person where they’d start looking to find out about volunteering they don’t know. But once they find somewhere to start looking they’re overwhelmed by the number of options” (kikass respondent)

Young people said they wanted to have easy access to information on volunteering, and guidance on what opportunities they would be best suited to. At present, this is often not perceived to be the case. Some non-volunteers felt they could only get involved in volunteering if they were prepared to put in a lot of personal effort into searching out suitable opportunities; a perception which was reinforced by the experiences of some volunteers in finding their placements. As one respondent said:

“Getting into the specific area of interest isn’t as easy as you think, I applied three times before being accepted” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Other practical barriers identified were associated with the ‘cost’ of volunteering. A lack of transport was felt to be a significant barrier to young people, with respondents tending to favour volunteering activities that were located near their home (both for ease of access, but also confidence and safety). Other associated costs such as childcare provision were also felt to be problematic. As one respondent said:

“I’d love to do a few hours a week, it would be time in the real adult world, but who would look after my kids or pay for childcare?” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

2.5 Mobilising volunteers

Lesson fourteen: There was a strong preference among young people for personal, face to face, methods of recruitment

The 2001 HOCS found that among young people who had been involved in formal volunteering at least once in the 12 months before interview, being told about opportunities by someone else already involved was the most common route into volunteering (46%). This finding was reinforced by the qualitative research, among both volunteers and non-volunteers.

To explore further how this mechanism could be developed in order to mobilise more volunteers, young people were asked who does, or could, encourage them to get involved. When asked who, in general, influenced them, young people said friends, people they know, celebrities and the media. More specifically, friends were identified as being particularly important routes into volunteering (potential and actual) (see below), while family was seen to be important for people under the age of 16 years old. Organisations and associations that young people are involved in were also important. As one respondent put it:

“being asked via a sports club, so doing something and getting a game of football out of it, coming into assembly and explaining everything and making it sound good” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Lesson fifteen: Peer advocacy was identified as the key mechanism to stimulate volunteering among young people

The qualitative research found that young people talking to other young people was felt to be the best way to mobilise volunteers. As one respondent said:

“Knowing friends who do it is the best way as you believe what they say” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Respondents felt that getting young people to promote volunteering to their friends and peers would help improve the image of volunteering, and to get young people enthusiastic about volunteering. They felt it would help young people to see that volunteering is relevant to their lives, and something which is undertaken by people like themselves. Kikass respondents, for example, suggested that young people could represent volunteering organisations or projects by giving presentations to other young people promoting the benefits of volunteering. Some respondents suggested that this could be done through schools and other educational establishments (see below).

Lesson sixteen: Young people respond to celebrities and believe that promotional campaigns could help to increase the public recognition of volunteering and raise the status of volunteering

Alongside peer advocacy, young people also recognised the value of promotional campaigns and celebrity endorsement in mobilising volunteers through presenting volunteering as something for everyone, increasing the public recognition of volunteering, and raising the status of volunteering. Or as one respondent put it:

“Show it is a less ‘saddo’ thing to do, not looking like a prat in front of your mates” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

The Dubit survey asked respondents for words that would attract young people to volunteer and that could be used in a promotional campaign. The most common were: fun, make friends, meet people, and help. Other terms that were identified included: challenging, competitions, cool, enjoy, exciting, experience, free, funky, interesting, rewards and skills. It was suggested that the language should be targeted specifically at young people and that the format should also be tailored, through, for example, using mediums relevant to young people such as text messaging, or TV for those at youngest end of the age group. It was felt that the messages used in promotional campaigns should vary according to target age groups, rather than assuming all young people are the same.

As for the value of celebrity endorsement, while there was a general consensus that celebrities would be a good route into volunteering, there were concerns that these should be celebrities that young people identify with (David Beckham or Michael Owen were mentioned, for example), and that they should not just be seen on national campaigns, but should also be seen in action in local settings. As one respondent said:

“They should turn up at a local level rather than national level once a year” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

However, a number of respondents felt that politicians should not be used to endorse volunteering, arguing that they would act to deter young people from volunteering rather than attract them.

Lesson seventeen: Young people felt that schools could be an important site for promoting volunteering and a route into volunteering, but volunteering should not solely be school-based or school-led
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Many of the volunteers involved in the research had got involved in volunteering through their schools, colleges or universities (indeed, this was the most common route into volunteering among the Dubit qualitative respondents).

According to HOCS 2001 schools, colleges or universities were the second most common routes into volunteering, with 39 percent of 16-24 year olds having accessed volunteering this way. Non-volunteers also felt that schools had a role in getting people into volunteering, particularly in terms of ‘catching’ them early

(kickass respondent).

There was a general consensus that schools (and other educational institutions) should play a more active role in encouraging volunteering among young people. Suggestions included:

“Get kids in assembly’s at school to recruit each other” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“Our school offered it as an alternative to PE for 6th form and I think that sort of provision for it is fantastic. The teachers should make allowances for people who want to volunteer” (YouthNet respondent)

However, respondents also felt strongly that the role of schools should stop at encouraging people to volunteer – volunteering should not become a compulsory part of school life. The YouthNet research asked specifically whether volunteering should become compulsory within schools. There was very little support for this, but there was a more positive response if the compulsion was removed. Being forced to volunteer could be counter-productive by putting people off the idea for good:

“To be forced to do it would cause resentment and make kids hate it and maybe never volunteer again” (YouthNet respondent)

“I think it would be a good idea to have this option available to school children, however I don’t think it should be compulsory” (YouthNet respondent)

“We were practically forced into serving meals at an old people’s home whilst I was at school and I hated it and it is more likely to put people off doing voluntary work than encourage it, in the long term I mean” (YouthNet respondent)

Lesson eighteen: Young people think they should be encouraged to volunteer, but do not want to see volunteering becoming compulsory

Reflecting the concern about the involvement of schools, there was a general consensus across the research that while volunteering should be encouraged, it should not be compulsory. While a majority of respondents to all three quantitative surveys said that young people should be encouraged to volunteer, around two-thirds of respondents said that voluntary work should not be compulsory for 16-18 year olds (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Do you think all young people should be positively encouraged to volunteer?

Figures are %s of base	Dubit	YouthNet	Metro
Yes	67	83	88
No	9	8	8
Don't know	24	9	5
Base (number of respondents)	733	66	789

Notes on Table 4: Metro asked "Do you think young people (aged 16-18) should be encouraged to undertake some voluntary or community work?"

Table 5: Should voluntary work be compulsory for 16-18 year olds?

Figures are %s of base	Dubit	YouthNet	Metro
Yes	14	24	32
No	72	71	65
Don't know	14	5	3
Base (number of respondents)	733	66	789

Notes on Table 5: Metro asked "Should voluntary or community work be compulsory for all 16-18 year olds?"

2.6 Incentives and rewards

Lesson nineteen: There is no clear consensus among young people on incentives and rewards – they can see positive and negative effects

In general, across the research, there was a lack of consensus on the issue of incentives and rewards.

Many young people could see the potential benefits of offering some (carefully tailored) incentives. The Youth Action Network research, for example, found that offering incentives would remove the perception that volunteers were doing something for nothing; respondents also felt they could help get more people involved in volunteering, and to help volunteers feel valued. Comments included:

"Benefits of incentives are that people like to know they are being valued for what they are doing and they are getting something worthwhile out of it, even if they can't spend it" (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

"More people would get involved if they got something out of it for them" (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

However, many young people also identified potential downsides to offering incentives. There was a general concern, particularly among existing volunteers, that giving rewards would devalue volunteering, and reduce people's sense of purpose and satisfaction:

“But a lot of people do voluntary work because they will get something out of it themselves. Like a good experience, a good time, a laugh, a sense of achievement, an opportunity to travel... Is this no longer volunteering?”
(YouthNet respondent)

“People would do it to get rewards but not get so much satisfaction”
(Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

Offering incentives, and being motivated to volunteer by these incentives, ran the risk of undermining the whole concept of volunteering:

“People might do it for the wrong reasons” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

“Not sure if incentives are a good idea – does show you’re being valued, but the lines between volunteering get blurred” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

“Incentives might make you feel disillusioned” (kikass respondent)

The Dubit research found that among those who were already volunteering the view was that the incentives that are already offered are sufficient. Many mentioned, for example, the value they attached to the MV 200 hour Award of Excellence.

Lesson twenty: Young people tend to agree that offering incentives such as training, the opportunity to get involved with a group of friends, awards and rewards, would encourage more volunteering

When explored in more depth, however, respondents did identify a number of incentives they felt could help to mobilise young people into volunteering.

The three quantitative surveys carried out as part of this research all gave slightly different views on what would persuade young people to do more voluntary work (see Table 6). Averaging the responses across all three surveys shows that the factor most likely to persuade young people to do more voluntary work is the provision of free training (33 percent of respondents said that this would persuade them). Also important was the participation of peers – on average across the three surveys 32 percent of respondents said that they would be persuaded to do more voluntary work if their friends were doing it.

Table 6: What would persuade you to do more voluntary work?

Figures are %s of base	Dubit	YouthNet	Metro
If I got free training as a result	19	55	25
* Nothing, I have no spare time	10	58	28
If friends were doing it	29	39	27
If work gave me paid leave to do it	5	38	35
* If people my age running it	15	20	N/A
* If the voluntary work was modestly paid	16	34	3
If I could volunteer through the internet	N/A	17	N/A
* If work arranged it for me	4	13	18
Other	8	N/A	7
Don't know	14	9	7
Base (number of respondents)	733	64	514
Average number of selections per respondent	1.2	2.8	1.5

Notes on Table 6:

- 1 *Metro asked those who had not volunteered in the last three years "What might persuade you to do some voluntary work for charity?"*
- 2 *There were some differences in the wording for some of the options. The most significant are: YouthNet had "More spare time" rather than "Nothing, I have no spare time" and "If people my age ran the volunteering scheme" rather than "If people my age running it" while Metro had "If I received a small token payment for my voluntary work" rather than "If the voluntary work was modestly paid" and "If my work arranged it for me and my colleagues to do it" rather than "If work arranged it for me".*
- 3 *No survey included all the options listed in Table 1. N/A indicates that the option was not included in the survey.*

These findings are largely in accordance with the findings from the 2001 HOCS, which found that among respondents aged 16-24 years, who had not been involved, had been involved more than 12 months previous to the interview or who had been involved at least once in the 12 months previous to the interview but less frequently than once a month and who said they would like to spend time/more time in formal volunteering, the main incentive for them to get involved would be if their friends or family got involved (53%), if they knew it would help them improve their skills or get a qualification (46%), if someone asked them directly to help (41%) or if they knew it would benefit their job/career prospects (39%).

The qualitative research also reinforced these findings, showing that young people want incentives to show that they are valued. In particular they wanted training and qualifications, but also certificates giving proof of their volunteering (e.g. certificates rewarded at the completion of a project, or MV-type certificates which show evidence of time spent volunteering, and these were well regarded amongst respondents), and small tokens of appreciation (including, for example, loyalty cards, vouchers, freebies, t-shirts, nights out, discounted use of local facilities such as leisure centres). As one respondent said:

"A certificate or training is more substantial than receiving material goods

and better for the future” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Reflecting the desire to volunteer in friendship groups, one respondent suggested offering group incentives:

“A group prize for local volunteers all competing together, i.e. ‘volunteer group of the month’ award – make it competitive” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Young people also want to know that they would be making a difference if they volunteered, and they felt this in itself would provide an incentive to get engaged. A resounding message coming out of the research was ‘show them what they can get out of it’ – particularly in terms of friendships and skills development. Comments included:

“Make the awareness higher of what you can do [as a volunteer] and what they would get out of it, like skills and personal development” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“Show them it’s a way of meeting same age people who like the same things as you” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“Tell them the selfish good points” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“If I knew that what I was doing was actually making a difference to people’s lives; if people I was working for appreciated me as a volunteer and for sacrificing my time; if it was flexible and I could fit it around my other commitments” (kikass respondent)

Some respondents also stressed that knowing they can get involved in activities that relate to their interests and concerns, and knowing that they can effect change on issues of importance to them, would be an incentive for young people to get involved. As one respondent said:

“You have to be interested in what you’re doing. There wouldn’t be no point otherwise” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

There was also a feeling that more respect should be paid to the existing contribution of young people. In particular, it was felt to be important that employers recognise the value of volunteering and the significance of any forms of recognition awarded to volunteers, something they felt was not always the case at present. Kikass respondents felt generally that employers do look favourably on volunteering experience, while in the YouthNet quantitative survey when respondents were asked to rank the importance of five CV sections – professional experience, qualifications, relevant skills, volunteering, hobbies and interests - by how important they were to an employer, most ranked it as the

fourth (47%) or fifth (20%) most important factor.

Lesson twenty-one: Opinion is divided on whether offering cash would act as an incentive to volunteer, but generally this was regarded as being highly problematic

As to whether or not cash should be offered to young people as an incentive to volunteer, opinion was divided. On average across the three quantitative surveys, less than a fifth of respondents said that being modestly paid would encourage them to do more voluntary work. However, this varied from 3 percent of the respondents in the Metro survey, 16 percent in the Dubit survey, and 34 percent in the YouthNet survey.

Many young people felt strongly that cash should not be offered as an incentive. As one respondent said:

“Incentives should be given, but not cash” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

Some argued that offering financial payments would undermine the concept of volunteering:

“Volunteer: to do charitable or helpful work without pay. By definition volunteers cannot be paid” (YouthNet respondent)

“I used to be paid to work in a charity shop, after I’d been working there a year. When that happened I stopped considering myself a volunteer, I actually felt bad about it. People shouldn’t need that kind of incentive to help others” (YouthNet respondent)

Others felt that it would detrimentally effect people’s motivations to volunteer, or attract people to volunteering for the wrong reasons:

“Paying volunteers might attract more people, but I don’t think that they’d be the same calibre” (YouthNet respondent)

Others were simply unconvinced that offering cash would prove to be an incentive to people who weren’t already volunteering:

“I can’t see how payment schemes could really work – if they pay you it’s not volunteering and I think it would only benefit people who are volunteering anyway” (kikass respondent)

“[I] wouldn’t want to get financial reward, that’s not why we do it, prefer the money to be spent on the project for improvement” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Some, however, thought that offering a small cash incentive might encourage some people to volunteer, especially those who can't afford to volunteer, and that certain types of volunteering could have an associated cash incentive:

"I think it depends on what sort of volunteering it is. I'd love to do one of those programmes abroad helping out in a third-world village but I can't – not because I don't have the time, but because I can't afford it!" (YouthNet respondent)

"I think it would really depend on the type of volunteering and who was doing it... Perhaps some of it needs some sort of material reward (e.g. tax breaks for those who work too, food, travel expenses), but I'm not certain about an actual wage" (YouthNet respondent)

Support for cash incentives most evident among people who weren't currently volunteering.

Offering educational credits, rather than cash, was similarly seen to be somewhat problematic. In particular, respondents noted that these would only act as an incentive to a limited number of young people:

"Education credits are only suitable if it is relevant to you, I don't need them" (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Others felt that if educational credits could not be used outside the UK they would be of less value, and some felt their value would be limited as, they believed, universities were unlikely to take them seriously.

In general, many respondents agreed with the sentiments expressed in the following comment that all out of pocket expenses should be reimbursed for volunteers, but that should be the limit of any financial incentive:

"I don't think they should be paid a wage otherwise it's not volunteering. It makes sense to give them support with expenses" (YouthNet respondent)

2.7 The organisation of volunteering

Young people had a number of suggestions for how volunteering should be organised in order to meet their needs.

Lesson twenty-two: Young people want their volunteering to be organised in ways which enable group activities, taster days, and encourage new forms of opportunity
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Reflecting the importance of friendships in young people's lives, there was strong support for the concept of group volunteering, in which young people could volunteer alongside their peers. As one respondent said:

"If a lot of my friends were, and I knew I was going to have fun then I might consider it. Maybe if I felt more in touch with the local community then I would" (kikass respondent)

There was also a call for new types of opportunities for volunteering – opportunities that would reflect the interests of young people and the issues that they are concerned about. New forms of volunteering were also appealing. For example, the YouthNet research found a considerable level of interest in the idea of online volunteering opportunities. As one respondent answered when asked whether they would be interested in doing some online volunteering:

"Definitely, yeah. I probably underestimate the amount of time I spend online so I'd be willing to give up a bit of that to volunteer in some way" (YouthNet respondent)

It was also suggested that it might help young people to get into volunteering if opportunities could be tested out during 'taster days' or one-off events, enabling young people to sample different activities before committing themselves.

Lesson twenty-three: Young people want flexibility, but some people want that flexibility within structured opportunities

Flexibility was seen to be important among most young people. They said that they wanted flexibility in terms of the opportunities available to them, and having different ways in which they could engage. Young people wanted a range of times when they could volunteer, with no clear preference for when volunteering opportunities should take place – as long as it is not "every Friday or weekends 'coz it puts people off" (Youth Action Network respondent). Some respondents noted that they would find it hard to commit to a regular time slot:

"Yes, because I can't commit to a regular time slot and this implies some kind of flexibility" (YouthNet respondent)

There was also no consensus on whether volunteering should be episodic or full time, although many respondents did feel that if volunteering were promoted as a predominantly full time activity this would exclude certain people. Again, the emphasis was on choice and flexibility.

In addition, young people wanted some flexibility to ensure that they were not pressured to volunteer when they had competing demands on their time, or to do more volunteering than they had already committed to. As one respondent said:

“If you are already volunteering (giving time) you often get put upon to give more time as you are seen as a soft touch” (kikass respondent)

However, some young people felt that they wanted this flexibility within a relatively structured programme, within which they had regular timeslots for their volunteering. By ‘timetabling’ their volunteering, some young people felt that they would be able to develop a routine for volunteering that they were more likely to stick to, and it would enable them to fit their other activities around the volunteering.

Lesson twenty-four: Having a say in planning and decision making was important to many young people, but with adult support and back-up

Young people wanted support for their volunteering, both practical and emotional support. However, they felt this support should be tailored to meet the needs of young people (for example, by using mediums such as internet chat room or by using mentors). Providing support was felt to be particularly important among disaffected young people.

While they recognised the need for adult support, however, many also wanted more of a say in the planning, decision-making and leadership that surround their volunteering. There was a call for more of a ‘partnership approach’ (Youth Action Network) to volunteering, whereby young people could take ownership of their volunteering, but with adult backup and with training. As one respondent said:

“We do most of it but we need the youth workers to help with the big stuff like organising trips - I can’t do that!” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

Many of the respondents who were involved in organisations where this was already happening reflected positively on their experiences.

Respondents who were not already volunteering were less sure about taking on leadership roles. Many disaffected young people, those with no experience of volunteering, and those from the lower end of the age group, felt it would involve too much responsibility, or were concerned about being under pressure to deliver. Their age, the amount of energy they could devote to volunteering, and their other roles in life made them reluctant to become leaders in their volunteering:

“Not very important, work as a team is better, you respect the leader and want to be listened to with your views, but prefer to be a helper as [I am] too young to lead” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“I wouldn’t want to be the leader, haven’t got time for that much effort, the fact I was volunteering is the important thing” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

“I definitely would not want to be the leader, that’s what I do at home all day as mum and wife, I want to enjoy it without pressures” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

However, many did say that while they might not want to take on a leadership role, they did want to be part of a team in which they felt their voice would be heard and valued.

Lesson twenty-five: The location of volunteering is important to young people, many of whom want to volunteer close to home

The location of volunteering was felt to be important to many young people, but its importance did vary between groups, with younger and disaffected young people seeing travel as particularly problematic. There was a general consensus among young people that they wanted to volunteer close to home (unless international volunteering, or a one-off exciting opportunity, was the alternative!). The proximity to home meant that volunteering opportunities would be accessible, take place in familiar environments, involve less travel time, and enable young people to feel they were contributing to their own communities:

“The location is key, I have to be able to get there quick on time after work” (Dubit respondent, volunteer)

“The location has to be very close to where my kids are in case anything happened, at most 10-15 minutes from home, or I wouldn’t even consider it” (Dubit respondent, non-volunteer)

Or as one respondent put it, volunteering should be accessible, with:

“transport or the cash for [young people] to get there” (Youth Action Network respondent, volunteer)

Respondents in the Youth Action Network research suggested that volunteering opportunities could be located together in a central, easily accessible location whereby people could get together to undertake several different projects. This would meet the demands of young people for accessible locations, while also facilitating group-based volunteering.

At the other extreme, many young people were also excited by the potential to undertake international travel through volunteering. As one respondent said:

“you get the opportunity to interact with people, places and scenarios that you would not usually be able to access” (kikass respondent)

3. Drawing it altogether

3.1 Conclusions

3.1.1 Volunteering activities, motivations and impacts

Large numbers of young people are getting involved in voluntary activities on a regular basis. While taking part in sports-based opportunities is a clear favourite, young people are volunteering in a multiplicity of fields and types of activity.

They are motivated to volunteer by a range of altruistic and instrumental reasons, with the chance to develop skills and friendships being particularly important, alongside a more general desire to help people and effect change. The motivations for, and experience of, volunteering do however vary according to age – what a 16 year old wants out of volunteering is often noticeably different to what a 24 year old wants.

Once involved, the positive impacts of volunteering on the lives of young people are clear – they gain skills, friendships, satisfaction and enjoyment. Indeed, young people's expectations for volunteering are generally exceeded.

3.1.2 Barriers to volunteering

Evidence suggests that volunteering is not at present open to all young people. A number of widespread psychological and practical barriers serve to put them off. They feel that they do not have the time, but it may be more perception rather than actual lack of time. It is not necessarily that they do not have a few spare hours, but that they have competing demands on their time. Volunteering therefore has to justify taking them from other potential activities by making them feel that it is time well spent.

The poor image of volunteering among young people, and associated negative peer pressure, remains a significant barrier. But the reverse is also true: strong peer advocacy for volunteering by young people who already volunteer can be a powerful influence. The provision of information about volunteering also acts as a barrier, whether it is hard to find or, once found, confusing and difficult to digest.

Lack of confidence deters many young people from volunteering, especially the younger members of the 16-24 year old age group. This emphasises the need to show them that their contribution will be valued and that everyone has something to offer. This may affect certain groups of young people more strongly and there is a need to address other barriers that limit involvement, such as transport, the location of volunteering, and costs, including childcare.

3.1.3 Reclaiming the concept of volunteering

Although some stereotypes about volunteering still prevail among young people, there is evidence of a move away from the idea of volunteering as the preserve

of middle class, white, females. However, they still tend to define volunteering as a narrow range of activities. The problem may not be the term volunteering itself, but a lack of knowledge to counter the persistent myths and stereotypes surrounding it. Rather than abandoning the concept of volunteering, what is required is to reclaim it for young people and replace it with a broader, more realistic image. Volunteering needs to be recast in a way which reflects the interests, issues of concern, and needs of young people.

3.1.4 Perceptions and infrastructure

Recreating the image of volunteering needs to be tackled at both the perceptual and practical levels. It needs youth-led reclamation and peer advocacy in order to build an understanding of volunteering relevant to the lives of young people. This then needs to be backed up by broader campaigns to raise public awareness of volunteering in all its diversity, to increase the status of volunteering, and public recognition of the value of volunteering to society and individuals.

But there is also a need to ensure the infrastructure to support young people is in place once they are mobilised. Having an influx of young people into organisations and programmes which are not equipped to support them would have a damaging effect on their experiences and future perceptions of volunteering.

3.1.5 Routes into volunteering

Word of mouth is most effective in drawing young people into volunteering and being asked or encouraged by their friends and peers is the most persuasive way. Maximum use should be made of young volunteers' experiences and advocacy in putting across a positive message about volunteering.

Schools are also important sites for encouraging volunteering, but it would be counter-productive if this has any element of compulsion or enforcement.

3.1.6 Incentives

There is a need to offer incentives which match young people's aspirations, particularly the chance to receive training and increase their skills, develop friendships and social contacts, and be rewarded for their volunteering. However, it is important that this is balanced by acknowledging young people's altruistic tendencies and that volunteering is not devalued as purely self-seeking. Young people do not generally see cash as an incentive to volunteer, although their expenses should be met, and feel awarding educational credits would have only a limited appeal.

3.1.7 Organisation of volunteering

Organisations need to be more creative in the way in which they design and package volunteering opportunities. Young people show strong support for group volunteering, taster sessions, and new and flexible forms of opportunity. Organisations (and policy makers and funders) therefore need to look carefully

not just at the supply side - how to encourage young people to volunteer - but also the demand side - what they can offer them. They need to address whether they are serious about involving young people as volunteers, and whether they have the capacity to do this effectively for both the young people and themselves.

3.1.8 Leadership

Young people want to have a say in the planning and decision-making in their volunteering, but do not want to be overburdened with responsibility. They do not want to be thrown in at the deep end, but given appropriate support to enable them to build up skills and confidence to assume responsibility and leadership roles, if and when they want to. Encouraging the development of youth-led opportunities is therefore important, but requires sensitive and skilled adult back-up which can provide a clear line of progression when the young person is ready.

3.1.9 Compulsion

Young people feel strongly that volunteering should not be compulsory. They are happy to have schemes set up to encourage young people to volunteer, in fact most are in favour of this. But forcing people to volunteer is likely to turn them off the whole idea.

3.1.10 Recognising diversity

It is evident from the research that the promotion, incentives and opportunities of volunteering need to be tailored to young people in order to increase their participation. It is equally clear that 'young people' are not a homogeneous group but vary hugely in their characteristics, backgrounds, needs and wishes. Messages, incentives and opportunities need to take account of their different situations and views. This particularly affects disaffected young people and people at different stages within the age range. Views and needs can vary considerable between someone in their early teens versus late teens or early twenties.

3.2 Recommendations

A number of specific substantial recommendations for encouraging and increasing young people's volunteering emerge from the research findings.

3.2.1 Peer advocacy

Young people listen more to people of their own age, especially when they are being told what is good for them! A peer advocacy campaign in which young people who volunteer talk about what they do, how they feel and what they get out of it, would be a persuasive strategy.

3.2.2 Promotion

Promoting new perceptions and awareness of volunteering is essential but requires different components. A promotional campaign, of which bottom-up peer

led work is a key element, would help challenge the negative image of volunteering and replace it with a livelier, richer image. Any campaign should aim to dispel the myths about volunteering, highlighting, for example, the range of opportunities available, the diversity of people involved, the time commitment required, flexibility, the benefits of volunteering, and the reimbursement of expenses.

At the same time, the development of the infrastructure for young people's volunteering would be essential in ensuring that new expectations are met.

3.2.3 Incentives

Organisations should look very closely at what they are offering young people and how they can pick and mix from a package of incentives and rewards. The evidence suggests the need to concentrate on developing opportunities to gain experience, receive training, encourage the development of social contacts, and get recognition for their efforts and achievements.

3.2.4 Management capacity

There are considerable implications for organisations in the management and support they offer to young volunteers. Special attention should be paid to their needs and preferences and how these may vary from those of adult volunteers. In particular organisations should look to develop opportunities which reflect the interests of young people, that facilitate group participation, and that enable a progression from adult-led to young person-led volunteering. Organisations need to re-examine the ways in which they recruit and involve young volunteers, and be prepared to put in the necessary resources to develop the infrastructure and capacity to do this.

References

Davis Smith, J. (1998) *The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering*, The Institute for Volunteering Research: London

Appendix

Although not included in this report (due to size), separate reports are available on each of the research elements upon request. The reports are as follows:

- 1 A review of the literature on young people and volunteering
- 2 HOCS 2001 findings
- 3 Kikass
- 4 Dubit
- 5 YouthNet
- 6 Youth Action Network
- 7 Analysis of Metro, Dubit and YouthNet quantitative surveys