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# Consultation Response

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Road to recovery: impact of the  
pandemic on the Scottish labour market

September 2022



# About Us

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland's National Centre for Volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

Should any queries arise from our response, please contact our Policy Officer by emailing **[sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk)**

# Introduction

Volunteering is proven to improve employability outcomes for participants, both for those seeking work and for those looking to progress in their careers. As such, we believe that improving access to volunteering for those who are economically inactive would have a significant positive impact on Scotland's workforce recovery following the pandemic. We would also argue that volunteers contribute significantly to Scotland's economy as part of the unpaid workforce, and that participation in volunteering activity should therefore be celebrated in its own right.

## Policy Context

The Scottish Government have acknowledged on many occasions that volunteering has an important role in the successful delivery of many policy priorities. In 2019 Aileen Campbell MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities, stated that:

*“volunteering is key to us achieving our shared ambition of a fairer and more prosperous country with equality of opportunity for all – a country where everyone has the chance to participate and make a difference.”* ([‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government)

Similarly, in the 2020-21 Programme for Government, it is stated that:

*“[The Scottish Government’s] role must be to create the best conditions for the third sector and volunteering to thrive and contribute to a recovering economy and society.”* ([‘Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland: The Government’s Programme for Scotland 2020-2021’](#), 2020, Scottish Government)

Despite this commitment, volunteering remains fairly elusive in wider relevant policy areas. This was reflected in the 2022-23 Programme for Government where volunteering is not mentioned ([‘A stronger and more resilient Scotland: the Programme for Government 2022 to 2023’](#), 2022, Scottish Government) and in the recent Resource Spending Review where volunteering is also not mentioned and funding for the third sector is due to be reduced by £1 million in 2023-24 ([‘Resource Spending Review 2022’](#), 2022, Scottish Government).

Scotland's national Volunteering Action Plan ([‘Volunteering Action Plan’](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland) was launched by the Scottish Government, Volunteer Scotland and other partners in June 2022 and builds upon outcomes identified in the Volunteering for All framework ([‘Volunteering for All:](#)

[National Framework](#)', 2019, Scottish Government). Both acknowledge the vital role of volunteering in Scotland, with the Action Plan in particular detailing the societal impact of volunteering on promoting wellbeing, addressing inequalities and creating more resilient communities.

## Consultation Response

We have chosen to focus our response on one question in the consultation:

**What policies might encourage people to re-enter the labour market?**

### Contribution of Volunteers to the Workforce

This consultation is exploring the causes of labour market 'inactivity' as a result of Covid-19, but it is important to note the considerable unpaid activity provided by volunteers, particularly since the beginning of the pandemic. Analysis of 2018 Scottish Household survey data found that volunteering contributes 5.5 billion to the Scottish economy (['Economic Value of Volunteering'](#), 2020, Volunteer Scotland). In 2020, 64% of the Scottish population gave their time in some form. This is 16% higher than the total for 2018. It is likely that changing working patterns, including the furlough scheme, had an impact on this total figure but it also reflects the desire for people to give their time to support others in times of hardship.

Volunteers were often at the frontline of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and provided support in a range of ways, both formally and informally. Formal volunteering refers to activity carried out on behalf of an organisation or group, whilst informal volunteering refers to an individual giving their time independently to support an individual that is not related to them. 25% of formal volunteers in 2020 – equating to 250,511 adults - supported groups or organisations focussed on their local community or neighbourhood ('Analysis of SHS 2020 data', 2022, Volunteer Scotland). Additionally, 51% of informal volunteers – equating to 1,299,256 individuals – helped people with shopping, collecting pensions/benefits or paying bills, and 69%, or 1,757,817 people, kept in touch with someone at risk of being lonely ('Analysis of SHS 2020 data', 2022, Volunteer Scotland).

**Given the challenges we are currently facing with the cost of living crisis, it is worth acknowledging the value of our unpaid workforce, in the form of volunteers, and the importance of increasing participation in volunteering for the wellbeing of our economy.**

## Benefits of Volunteering for Employment

Volunteering has significant benefits for making people more employable and thus encouraging people to re-enter the labour market. It offers significant personal development opportunities for participants, many of which will support them in improving their prospects for both gaining paid employment and progressing in existing roles.

In research published by Volunteer Scotland in 2018, it was found that volunteering can assist in the securing of employment through the development of new or enhanced skills, through the improvement in social capital, and through improved performance at interview through enhanced confidence and communication skills. It also found that volunteering can have a positive impact on career progression where the individual is in employment ([‘Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing’](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland). Evidence from NCVO’s ‘Time Well Spent’ survey of over 10,000 volunteers supports these findings, with 71% agreeing that volunteering gives them more skills and experience, and 74% agreeing that it gives them more confidence ([‘Time Well Spent: A National Survey on the Volunteer Experience’](#), 2019, NCVO).

The value of volunteering in an employability context is recognised in the Scottish Government’s Young Person’s Guarantee programme. This programme provides targeted support for young people to ensure that they have the opportunity to study; take up an apprenticeship, job or work experience; or participate in formal volunteering ([‘Young Person’s Guarantee: measurement and evaluation framework’](#), 2022, Scottish Government). Funding provided through the Young Person’s Guarantee has created supported volunteering opportunities for young people who face barriers to participation. In Glasgow, the Young Person’s Guarantee is delivered jointly by Glasgow Life and Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS), and provides small grants for host organisations to provide additional support as well as access to training and specialist support if required ([‘Young Person’s Guarantee’ webpage](#), 2022, GCVS).

However, the benefits of volunteering are more far-reaching than just for young people, and more far reaching than just for employability. **We would recommend that the many benefits of volunteering – such as building social capital, improving confidence and developing skills - are recognised when developing programmes for other age groups to help them gain employment.** This reflects the focus on inclusion within the recently published Volunteering Action Plan, and in particular the actions related to developing volunteering opportunities by life-stage ([‘Volunteering Action Plan’](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland). However, it is important to ensure that the ethos of volunteering, particularly that it is

completed freely, is not undermined in employability schemes that are not undertaken by choice.

## **The Fair Work Agenda**

The Scottish Government is committed to a Fair Work agenda, ensuring that Fair Work principles are central to economic policy, labour market strategy and the National Performance Framework ([Fair Work Action Plan](#), 2021, Scottish Government). This encourages employers to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces where workers can develop and utilise their skills.

We know that volunteering has significant value from an employability perspective, both for those seeking work and for those already in employment. However, we also know that lack of time is a key reason many people stop volunteering. In the Time Well Spent survey, 33% of lapsed volunteers said that they had stopped volunteering because ‘I have less time because my circumstances are changing (home, work, study etc)’ ([Time Well Spent: A National Survey on the Volunteer Experience](#), 2019, NCVO).

In the 2020 Scottish Household Survey, non-volunteers were asked what might make them volunteer in future, and 4% selected ‘employer support’ such as flexible working or options for time away from work. This might seem like a low percentage, but it could represent an additional 134,657 formal volunteers and a 3% increase in the formal volunteering rate (‘Analysis of SHS 2020 data’, 2022, Volunteer Scotland).

As a result of this, we believe that employers could make several changes, in line with Fair Work principles, which would allow more people to continue benefitting from volunteering. Firstly, employers could be encouraged to allocate time for their employees to volunteer, known as Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV). Social Good Connect works with employers and their staff to find meaningful opportunities for them to volunteer. One of their employer members stated that:

*“It’s a feel-good initiative that makes business sense and suits both introverts and extroverts. You’re helping employees grow a sense of purpose and wellbeing outside of work, you’re making a big difference to charities who really need skilled help, and you’re helping yourself retain a motivated workforce.”* ([Impact Report](#), 2022, Social Good Connect)

**With this in mind, we believe that further investment in promoting and supporting sustainable Employer Supported Volunteering, in line with action 32 of the Volunteering Action Plan, will support efforts to recover the workforce following the pandemic** ([Volunteering Action Plan](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland).

## **Volunteering on Benefits**

The lack of clarity around the effect of volunteering for those in receipt of benefits is also excluding some individuals from the employability benefits volunteering provides. Volunteer Glasgow has been leading a campaign to address existing barriers to volunteering in the benefits system, particularly for those required to complete Work Capability Assessments ('Will Volunteering Affect my Benefits?', 2022, Volunteer Glasgow). A survey conducted by Volunteer Glasgow found that existing guidance from the DWP around Work Capability Assessments left 70% of respondents afraid or unsure if volunteering would affect their benefits. Given that only 11% of permanently sick or disabled people volunteered formally in 2020, we feel that this barrier needs to be addressed (['Scottish Household Survey - 2020 Results'](#), 2022, Volunteer Scotland).

**We would therefore recommend that the Scottish Government consult with Volunteer Scotland and Volunteer Glasgow on potential barriers to volunteering when they take on additional social security responsibilities in the near future.**

**We would also suggest that they exert influence on the Department for Work and Pensions to clarify guidance around the impact of volunteering on benefits, and request that they adopt a more inclusive approach which acknowledges the benefits of volunteering.**

## **Conclusion**

The promotion of inclusive volunteering has a significant role to play in supporting the recovery of Scotland's workforce – both paid and unpaid. Participating in volunteering increases an individuals' skills, confidence and social capital, this making them more attractive in the employment market. As a result of this, we have made several recommendations to the Scottish Government:

- **Acknowledge the value of our unpaid workforce, in the form of volunteers, and the importance of increasing participation in volunteering for the wellbeing of our economy.**
- **Ensure that the many benefits of volunteering - such as building social capital, improving confidence and developing skills - are recognised when developing programmes to help individuals gain employment.**
- **Invest further in promoting and supporting sustainable Employer Supported Volunteering, in line with action 32 of the Volunteering Action Plan**

- Engage with Volunteer Scotland and Volunteer Glasgow on potential barriers to volunteering when they take on additional social security responsibilities.
- Exert influence on the Department for Work and Pensions to clarify guidance around the impact of volunteering on benefits, and request that they adopt a more inclusive approach which acknowledges the benefits of volunteering.



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