

# VOLUNTEERING AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteer Scotland completed this research study over the period January – May 2016. It was managed by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS). The primary objective of the research was to update the 2008 study on volunteering in Scotland's historic environment, which was also conducted by Volunteer Scotland.

### Headline Statistics for 2015

- Scotland's historic environment engaged at least 17,000 volunteers
- The volunteers provided over 121,000 days, an average of 7 days per volunteer
- The economic value of this contribution is £14.7 million
- 40% of organisations surveyed had increased their volunteer numbers in 2015
- 54% would like to increase their volunteer numbers in 2016
- The ratio of paid staff to volunteers is 1 to 1.6
- 46% of organisations surveyed were run entirely by volunteers

## METHODOLOGY

The research comprised the following elements:

- *Desk research* – only a limited amount of relevant information on volunteering in Scotland's historic environment was identified
- *Partner consultations* – key organisations involved in volunteering and the historic environment were consulted
- *Population database* – the study developed a database of 1,044 organisations to contact as part of the online survey
- *Online survey* – a short survey was issued with a focus on quantitative questions and a small number of qualitative questions. 182 valid and high quality responses were generated.
- *Case studies* – ten organisations supported the study by providing invaluable insights into volunteering in the historic environment.

Note: the quantitative data from the 2016 study cannot be compared against the 2008 study to identify trend information. This is due to variations in the identified population, the survey respondents and the refined definitions for both the historic environment and volunteering. A detailed comparison of the methodologies used in 2008 and 2016 is presented in [Appendix B](#).

## DEFINITIONS

*'Historic environment'* – the definition was taken from Our Place in Time (OPiT), the historic environment strategy for Scotland. However, it was simplified for the purposes of the online survey:

*"The 'historic environment' represents the physical evidence of past human activity. For example, a stone circle, a prehistoric fort, a medieval castle, a renaissance garden, a stately home, a battlefield, a shipwreck, and an historic townscape or landscape. It can also include historic collections – artefacts, paintings, maps, drawings, photographs, books and manuscripts that relate directly to Scotland's places and history."*

*'Volunteering'* – to make the quantitative data on volunteering comparable to the Scottish Household Survey data, the online survey asked how many people volunteered in the last year, linked to this definition:

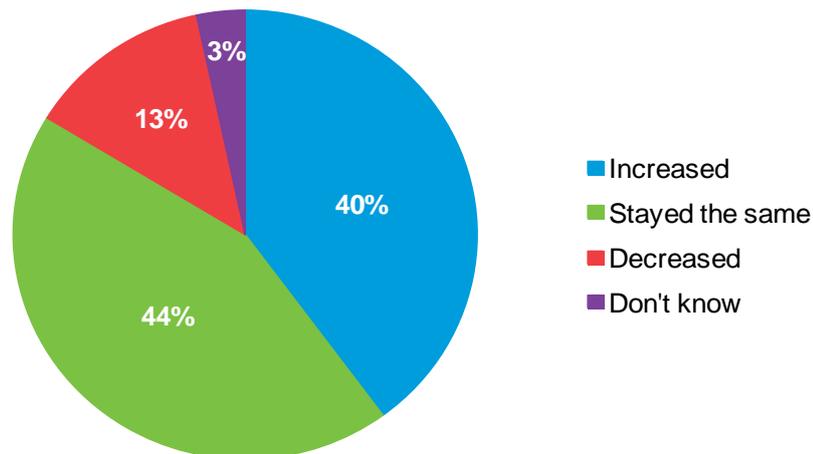
*"By 'volunteer' we mean anyone who gives their time voluntarily, in an unpaid capacity, to your organisation. This could include someone who gives up their time to be a museum tour guide or helps to catalogue an art collection, someone who works on an archaeological excavation or helps to restore Scotland's canals, and let's not forget those people who are trustees!"*

## VOLUNTEERING CONTRIBUTION

The sector was very positive regarding the volunteering contribution which was reinforced by their desire to further increase volunteer numbers, the diversity of volunteers and the roles they can play in the future. Evidence includes:

- The 40% of organisations increasing volunteer numbers in 2015 was very positive. This compares to the [Scottish Household Survey](#) data for the adult volunteering participation rate, which shows a modest decline over the last 5 years from 31% in 2010 to 27% in 2014.

### Change in volunteer numbers in 2015 (n=178)



- Key reasons for involving volunteers to date:
  - 83% of responding organisations believed that volunteers improved their community engagement
  - 77% thought that volunteers improved the capacity of the organisation
  - 75% appreciated the attributes, skills and experience that volunteers brought
- 54% of organisations wish to increase their volunteer numbers in 2016, 44% hope to stay the same and only 2% wish to decrease their numbers.
- Key reasons why organisations wish to increase volunteer numbers in 2016 include:
  - The role volunteers can play in helping to promote the organisation
  - Increasing the organisation's community presence and engagement
  - Providing opportunities for people to increase their health and wellbeing through volunteering
  - Trying to increase the diversity amongst their volunteers
  - There is also a frank admission that volunteers have an important role to play in supporting service delivery in an environment of constrained funding and cutbacks. Interestingly, in 2015, only 4% of organisations used volunteers to fill positions held by paid staff.

The case studies also provide a rich source of evidence on the benefits volunteering can bring to the volunteer involving organisations, their beneficiaries and the volunteers themselves.

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The open questions from the online survey provided a wealth of data on the challenges facing volunteering in the historic environment sector as well as constructive solutions.

Challenges	Possible Solutions
<b>Diversifying the volunteer profile</b> (Perceived as an older age profile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth – improving engagement with schools and universities</li> <li>• Working age – demonstrating the benefits of volunteering</li> <li>• ‘High need’ – making a conscious effort to recruit volunteers from deprived communities, those suffering from mental/ physical health problems, ethnic minorities, long term unemployed, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving volunteer recruitment and management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment – improving communications through marketing campaigns, social media, the use of ‘volunteering champions’, etc.</li> <li>• ‘The offer’ – providing more interesting, meaningful and relevant volunteering roles which widens the organisation’s reach.</li> <li>• Skill levels – moving beyond the narrow ‘technical’ focus to encompass other roles</li> <li>• Succession planning – making room for ‘new blood’</li> <li>• Volunteer status – ensuring the whole organisation recognises and respects the role and contribution of volunteers (in particular the Board and Senior Management Team)</li> </ul>
<b>Reducing budget &amp; resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funders &amp; decision makers (including national government) – improving their awareness and understanding of the contribution of volunteers and the fact that this is not a ‘free’ service. Effective volunteer management has to be invested in.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving the public’s awareness of volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of historic environment – to improve its image and counteract perceptions of being ‘very stuffy and middle class’</li> <li>• Understanding – improving the public’s understanding of the historic environment and the roles volunteering can play</li> <li>• Showcasing – profiling exciting and innovative volunteering opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>Improving accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport – volunteering opportunities are often in remote locations and require additional support to help volunteers travel to the site</li> <li>• Facilities – basic things such as access to toilet facilities</li> </ul>

Challenges	Possible Solutions
<b>Dealing with legal compliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance – improved guidance and support from national bodies relating to health and safety, Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) legislation, etc.</li> <li>• Recruitment – volunteer involving organisations to work with the national bodies to minimise the compliance barriers to volunteering</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing competition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing the volunteer pipeline – avoid reliance on the same core of volunteers – fatigue and burnout issues</li> <li>• Grow the ‘volunteer pie’ – attract new entrants rather than poach existing volunteers</li> </ul>
<b>Community engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment – to make connections between communities and the professional heritage sector. ‘Listen to what communities want, rather than telling them what they want’.</li> <li>• Support – volunteer involving organisations to help facilitate community actions by arranging local meetings to show how communities can help themselves</li> </ul>
<b>Improving networking across the sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships – more partnership working and collaboration</li> <li>• Sharing – organisations to share good practice and pool resources: examples include joint training, sharing volunteers and equipment</li> </ul>

## CASE STUDY THEMES

The ten case studies provide detailed evidence of good practice and lessons learned from volunteering in different organisations. Seven themes were identified, which reinforce the qualitative evidence presented above:

- **Youth volunteering** – 7 out of the 10 case studies have a specific youth focus. Given the anecdotal evidence that the historic environment sector has a disproportionately high reliance on the older age demographic, this was an encouraging finding.
- **Inclusive volunteering** – only 2 out of the 10 case studies have a specific focus on inclusive volunteering, outside the engagement of youth volunteers. This may indicate the potential for the sector to do more to support volunteering within marginalised and disadvantaged groups in society.

- **Innovative volunteering** - there is a very rich body of evidence to draw upon relating to innovation and good practice for volunteering roles, skills and outputs. Examples include live music and the performing arts linked to costume interpretation; specialist skills such as aircraft engineering, building interpretation, textile conservation and needlework.
- **Community engagement** – 3 case studies were dependent on the community taking ownership and leadership of historic environment projects in their locale. This includes examples of good practice in the development, management and day-to-day operation of local volunteer groups and their wider community engagement.
- **Partnership working** – a wide range of partner relationships were identified which shed light on the types of contribution partners offer. This provides an interesting insight into the rationale for, and benefits flowing from, partnership working. Unsurprisingly, delivery partners and funding were the most frequently cited.
- **Volunteer management** - as one would expect we did not find the single 'silver bullet' to deliver effective volunteer management across the board. This reflects the fact that our case study organisations were very varied: from major players such as National Trust for Scotland and National Museums Scotland to micro organisations employing few or no paid staff. Hence, what works for one organisation may not be appropriate for another.