

Briefing: Programme for Government 2023

July 2023



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.

This briefing was developed following consultation with the Volunteering Action Plan [Policy Champions Network](#) (PCN).

Should any queries arise from our response, please contact our Policy Officer by emailing sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk

Introduction

This briefing has been published to support policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in the development of the 2023 Programme for Government. During consultation with the Policy Champions Network, it was agreed that a briefing detailing the contribution of volunteering to a range of government priority areas would be more beneficial than identifying distinct policy proposals.

Volunteering is likely to play an important role in progressing a number of the Government's priorities detailed in their recent policy prospectus. However, the strategic contribution of volunteers is often overlooked. It is hoped that this briefing will support the meaningful consideration of volunteering as the Programme for Government is finalised.

1. Volunteering in Scotland

In 2021, over [1.2 million Scottish adults](#) volunteered formally for an organisation or community group. The formal volunteering rate has remained static for the past 4 years, with 26-27% of the population regularly giving their time. The estimated value of formal volunteering to the Scottish economy is [£2.3 billion](#). Volunteer-led services are often community-based and offer solutions that are early intervention or prevention focused. As a result, volunteering services usually offer a significant return on investment. For example, Citizens Advice Scotland found last year that the network of Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland, which is heavily reliant on volunteers in advice roles, is worth up to [£245 million in net benefits](#) to Scottish society.

Whilst the formal volunteering participation rate appears to be stable, there are early signs that volunteering is entering a period of decline. Our recent [publication exploring the volunteering experiences of young people](#), based on research conducted in the latter months of 2022, found that formal volunteer participation was down 12 percentage points compared to 2019 from 49% to 37%. Similarly, the latest [Community Life Survey for England](#), based on results from October 2021 to September 2022, found that UK adult volunteer participation was down 7 percentage points compared to 2019/20.

The Covid-19 pandemic followed by the cost of living crisis have placed significant strain on both volunteers and the organisations that engage them. In 2022 we published a [report](#) which found that many volunteers were experiencing 'fatigue and burnout' coming out of the pandemic. This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that volunteers, as individuals, are not immune to the effects of the cost of living crisis. As reported in our [latest bulletin exploring the impact of the crisis on volunteering](#), 24% of adults think that they are not managing well financially and

49% feel that their mental health is negatively affected by the cost of living crisis. This situation is undoubtedly having an impact on individuals' ability and capacity to volunteer, as evidenced in the early signs of decline in volunteer participation rates.

Volunteer involving organisations are also experiencing significant challenges as a result of the current cost of living crisis, also detailed in our most [recent bulletin](#), and this is having an impact on the experiences of volunteers. Organisations have seen an increase in demand for their services, often coupled with less resource to address this. This has led to increased expectations on volunteers, often with less dedicated resource to support them. In the recent [NCVO Time Well Spent survey](#) on the volunteer experience, 26% of volunteers felt that their volunteering was becoming too much like paid work and 24% felt that their volunteering group or organisation had unreasonable expectations.

To conclude, this evidence suggests that volunteer participation is on a precipice. Whilst volunteer-led services offer significant return on investment, they still require dedicated support and resource to succeed.

2. Volunteering Action Plan

In 2019, the Scottish Government launched the [Volunteering for All National Framework](#). This detailed five volunteering outcomes which are mapped to the National Outcomes. Following on from this, the government partnered with Volunteer Scotland to develop a national [Volunteering Action Plan](#), which involved over 100 relevant individuals and organisations from across the volunteering sector. This 10 year 'living plan' includes 47 actions, including a cross-government group on volunteering, clearer standards for funding volunteering activity and relaunching the [Volunteer Charter](#).

Volunteer Scotland are leading the implementation of the Volunteering Action Plan, and this first year has focused on building a solid foundation for wider sector engagement. For example, Volunteer Scotland launched a [Policy Champions Network](#) earlier this year to strengthen policy influence around volunteering. They also relaunched the [Volunteer Charter](#) in June 2023, including an option for individuals and organisations to pledge their support as 'Charter Champions'. We have also already tested the plan's status as a 'living plan' by introducing further actions related to the cost of living crisis and the Just Transition to Net Zero.

Despite this positive first year, the ongoing success of the Volunteering Action Plan requires a concerted effort from all relevant stakeholders including policymakers and funders. As such, it is vital that the commitment of the government to volunteering through the Action Plan is further reflected in the Programme for Government.

3. Cross-cutting Themes

Following consultation with the Policy Champions Network, we have identified a number of cross-cutting priorities for ensuring that the important contribution of volunteers to a range of government priorities is meaningfully supported.

Legitimate and Sustainable Volunteering

It is vital that the Scottish Government ensures that volunteer deployment (especially in activity that supports government priorities) is both legitimate and sustainable. The government has been clear that the challenging financial environment at present will lead to some tough decisions. However, it is important that volunteers are never part of any cost-cutting solution.

The [Volunteer Charter](#) details 10 principles for ensuring that volunteer engagement is fair, appropriate, and meaningful. These include that ‘effective structures should be put in place to support, train and develop volunteers’ and that ‘volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers, nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services’. We would encourage government teams to ensure that any proposals for the Programme for Government align with the principles of the Volunteer Charter.

Fair and Transparent Funding

As detailed in section 1, the organisations that engage and support volunteers are facing significant challenges at present. This strain on volunteer involving organisations is having cumulative effects on an already stretched volunteer workforce. Some organisations are likely to have reduced their paid resource to support volunteering or might be placing greater responsibility on the shoulders of volunteers. The deployment of volunteers requires dedicated resource and sufficient time to allow volunteers to build the skills, confidence and trust that they need to flourish. Building a successful volunteer programme often takes years.

With this in mind, it is vital that volunteering activity supporting Programme for Government priorities is sustainably funded. We are in full agreement with [SCVO's Fair Funding calls](#), which include:

- Longer-term funding of three years or more
- Flexible, unrestricted core funding, which enables organisations to provide security, plan effectively, and fulfil good governance requirements
- Sustainable funding that includes inflation-based uplifts and full costs, including core operating costs
- Funding that accommodates paying staff at least the Real Living Wage

We are also calling for greater transparency in spending decisions aligned with activity detailed in the Programme for Government. Our Policy Champions Network members reported that it can be difficult to determine how much resource is allocated to support volunteering across different government priorities. As such, we would request that any potential involvement of volunteers is reflected in the implementation plans for priorities detailed in the Programme for Government. This would help to ensure that adequate resource is allocated to support sustainable volunteer engagement.

Infrastructure

Whilst we understand that the focus in the Programme for Government is on new priorities, it is important that the underlying support infrastructure is sustained. This is particularly true for the third sector which is both large and diverse. There are over [46,500 voluntary organisations](#) and over 20,000 of those are community groups that are often volunteer-led. Indeed, all voluntary organisations are reliant on volunteer trustees or board members for their governance, and many rely on volunteers for the delivery of services too.

Supporting such a diverse sector requires significant infrastructure including support and guidance on funding, governance, HR and volunteer management. This is particularly true for smaller organisations that are run by volunteers who might not have the necessary knowledge or skills. Adequate infrastructure also helps to ensure that volunteers are consulted and represented in decision-making. This support is provided by a range of local and national infrastructure bodies, including Volunteer Scotland, SCVO and the network of 32 Third Sector Interface (TSI) bodies in each local authority area, along with Community Development provision by local authorities. In our recent consultation event with the Policy Champions Network, one representative said the following:

‘If volunteering is to have sound local impact there needs to be robust capacity building and support for volunteer involving organisations. It is impossible for TSIs with, for example, one development worker for volunteering to meet all the needs within their Local Authority area.’

Given the overarching focus on community-based and preventative approaches in plans for public service reform, it is vital that infrastructure organisations in both the public and third sector are given adequate resource to reflect this.

4. Government Priority Areas

As detailed in our [response](#) to the Scottish Government’s policy prospectus launched in April 2023, volunteering continues to have a central role in achieving a

number of government priorities. Volunteers are at the frontline of efforts to address inequality and they have a considerable role in the proposed reform of public services including education and social care. Below are detailed the government priorities where we believe volunteering has a central role. **To fully explore the role of volunteering, and to ensure it is adequately reflected in relevant policy underpinning the Programme for Government, please contact sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk.**

Community Wealth Building

As detailed in our [response to the Community Wealth Building consultation](#), the contribution of volunteers in local communities is vital to the success of this ambition. In particular, the role of volunteers as trustees is central to the land and property pillar of Community Wealth Building, specifically efforts related to community empowerment and land reform. People in local communities accept significant responsibility and liability by becoming trustees for community assets, often in addition to their paid employment.

Also, volunteers are a key part of the Community Wealth Building workforce pillar, with the [2021 Scottish Household Survey results](#) revealing that 30% of Scotland's adult volunteers support activity in their local communities. This equates to approximately 370,000 people. By giving their time, volunteers are making a significant investment in their communities which will often, in turn, generate wealth as well as contributing to wider community wellbeing.

Given this important contribution, recognition and support for volunteering should be better reflected in both legislation and guidance related to Community Wealth Building.

Education and Skills Reform

People learn through volunteering, and are supported to learn by volunteers, in a range of settings. The publication of reports in recent months reviewing Scotland's skills, qualifications and education landscape all suggest that education and skills reform will be a key feature in this year's Programme for Government. These publications shared a range of recommendations with some common themes.

There is considerable evidence that people gain new skills through volunteering. In the [2023 NCVO Time Well Spent research](#), 72% of volunteers agreed that volunteering 'gives me new skills and experience'. Our recent [research exploring volunteering participation and experiences for young people](#) also found that many young people gained a range of skills from volunteering, including being a leader and learning how to overcome challenges. However, this same research also

found that there has been a significant decline in young people participating in volunteering after 10 years of sustained growth.

Volunteers also support a variety of educational experiences for young people typified by, for example, the network of uniformed groups such as Scouts and Guides across the country and in the provision of youth work, but they also support adult learning including English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) courses and digital upskilling. This contribution should be acknowledged in workforce planning for the education and skills sector.

The role of volunteering is particularly important when people are experiencing key life transitions such as leaving school, re-entering the labour market after having children or changing career path later in life. As such, the National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for disabled young people should reflect on the contribution of volunteering.

Given the clear contribution of volunteering to education and skills, and indeed the worrying decline in volunteering participation amongst young people, it is vital that volunteering is reflected in upcoming plans for education and skills reform.

Social Care Reform

In the ongoing conversation around the development of a National Care Service, it is important to acknowledge that volunteers are a key part of the social care workforce. As detailed in our [response to the National Care Service consultation](#) last year, volunteers provide a major contribution to the delivery of social care, with key roles in both statutory and community-based care roles. In the [2021 Scottish Household Survey](#), 15% of adult volunteers reported that they did so in health, disability and wellbeing organisations. This equates to approximately 185,000 people.

Volunteers support the treatment and care of people with health conditions, including long term health conditions and disabilities, in a variety of settings. Many residential or respite care services in the voluntary and statutory sector engage volunteers to provide person-centred support and ensure beneficiaries have rich social experiences.

Volunteers also support social care through the delivery of prevention and early intervention services. In particular, volunteers have a significant impact on social isolation and loneliness and [research](#) has shown that social isolation and loneliness can be both a cause and consequence of poor health and is linked to increased risk of depression, cognitive decline and dementia, amongst other issues.

It is vital that the contribution of volunteers is considered in ongoing discussions about the National Care Service – an ongoing priority of the Scottish Government.

Further Information and Next Steps

Volunteer Scotland have produced a range of consultation responses, briefings and blogs exploring the topics raised in this briefing in more details. These can be found on the [Policy Publications page](#) of our website.

If you would like to explore the strategic contribution of volunteering to a particular government priority, please contact our Policy Officer, Sarah Latto, on sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk.



Volunteer Scotland
Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ
T: 01786 479593 E: hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk
W: volunteerscotland.net



[@volscotland](https://twitter.com/volscotland)



[@volscotland](https://www.facebook.com/volscotland)



[@volunteerscotland](https://www.instagram.com/volunteerscotland)