Case study: Long-term ESV partnership – Scottish Water and MCR Pathways

Context

Long-term ESV partnerships between employers and volunteer-involving organisations can create deeper, lasting impact. The partnership between **Scottish Water** and **MCR Pathways** is an example of how a long-term ESV collaboration can evolve and grow over time.

The partnership began in 2019, when a Scottish Water employee independently signed up to become a mentor through the MCR Pathways programme. When they identified Scottish Water as their employer, this sparked early conversations between the organisations and highlighted a strong alignment in values and social purpose. It became clear that mentoring provided a practical and meaningful way to deliver against Scottish Water's people, community and social impact ambitions while supporting MCR Pathways' mission to ensure that circumstances do not define a young person's future.

As awareness of the programme grew internally, engagement from Scottish Water employees increased. What began as individual participation gradually evolved into a more structured volunteering programme, formally embedded within the organisation in 2023. Today, the programme reflects a shared commitment to improving outcomes for young people while providing meaningful development opportunities for employees.

Volunteering activity

The Scottish Water Employee Volunteering Programme gives all employees 2 volunteering days per year covering five broad strands - Local Community, Environment, Education, Skills Based and WaterAid (charity partner).

Scottish Water employees can use their employee volunteering days to volunteer with MCR as trained mentors, typically committing around one hour per week during school term to support a young person in their senior school years.

The mentoring programme focuses on helping young people build motivation and resilience, supporting them to broaden aspirations and explore pathways into further education, employment or training.

To encourage participation, Scottish Water hosts internal information sessions and engagement events, where MCR Pathways staff connect directly with prospective mentors and provide guidance on the role. This visible presence helps sustain interest and encourage continued participation across the organisation.

Mentors are supported through a structured framework designed to ensure they feel prepared and confident throughout their volunteering journey. This includes:

- Structured training covering safeguarding and child protection, trauma-informed practice, professional boundaries, confidentiality and effective mentoring approaches
- Regular contact with dedicated coordinators who provide guidance and review mentoring progress
- Access to safeguarding support, guidance materials and clear escalation routes
- Opportunities for peer learning and networking, including termly mentor events and wider programme gatherings

This structured support helps ensure mentors are well equipped to build safe, consistent and positive relationships with the young people they support.

Impact

The partnership reflects what effective employer-supported volunteering can achieve: measurable social impact, strengthened organisational culture and long-term investment in Scotland's future.

For young people

Access to a consistent, trusted adult mentor provides the stability, encouragement and challenge needed to progress in education and beyond. Across Scotland, mentored young people are nearly three times more likely to achieve Higher grades than their care-experienced peers nationally, and 86% progress to college, university, employment or apprenticeships. Through this ESV programme, Scottish Water mentors contribute directly to these wider outcomes by helping young people build confidence, broaden aspirations and sustain positive pathways.

Since the partnership began, Scottish Water employees have contributed over 1,725 volunteering hours to mentoring. As the programme has matured, participation has steadily increased, allowing the partnership to expand its reach while maintaining the consistency that is critical to effective mentoring relationships. This trajectory demonstrates how employer-supported volunteering can grow from individual involvement into sustained organisational impact.

For employees

Mentoring offers a meaningful opportunity to step beyond employees' day-to-day roles and invest in Scotland's next generation. Mentors develop transferable skills including communication, relationship-building and emotional intelligence, while reporting an enhanced sense of purpose and wellbeing. The experience strengthens confidence in navigating complex conversations and reinforces the value of relational leadership.

One participant said: "It gives mentors a chance to break away from our routine for 1 hour a week and do something meaningful. Helping young people connect with resources, build confidence, and achieve their goals brings an additional sense of fulfilment and purpose. This is fantastic for mental health and overall wellbeing, creating a win-win for both mentors and mentees."

For Scottish Water

The partnership supports organisational values in action, contributing to social impact commitments, Public Sector Equality Duty outcomes and early talent engagement. By connecting with young people through mentoring, the organisation helps raise awareness of career pathways and broadens understanding of future workforce opportunities.

For MCR Pathways

Partnerships like this expand the network of trusted adults surrounding each young person. Scottish Water's contribution forms part of a wider national movement that last year supported over 7,000 young people across Scotland through more than 100,000 volunteering hours. Collective employer participation strengthens the mentoring ecosystem and reinforces the shared belief that relationships are central to improving equity in education and life outcomes.

Key learning

Key insights from Scottish Water and MCR Pathways' ESV partnership include:

- **Start with shared purpose:** strong alignment in organisational values creates the foundation for meaningful partnerships.
- **Support volunteers effectively:** structured training and ongoing guidance help volunteers feel confident and supported.
- **Embed volunteering into organisational culture:** recognising volunteering as a valued activity encourages participation.
- **Invest in long-term relationships:** sustained partnerships allow programmes to grow and deliver deeper impact over time.



MCR Pathways volunteers. Credit: MCR Pathways.

Knowledge Gateway

The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

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This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**