



Exploring Volunteering in a Recession

Talking with Young People

**FULL REPORT
September 2010**

About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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1. Executive Summary

This report is the first of two strands of a National Youth Agency research project exploring the impact of the recession on young people's volunteering. The research was carried out as part of the NYA's work with the Office for Civil Society (OCS).

The project set out to explore

- whether young people are more likely to volunteer now than before the recession;
- young people's motivations for volunteering; and
- the role of volunteering as part of a pathway to employment.

The project also sought to consider whether volunteering could be seen as offering a lifeline to young people during and after a time of recession, and conversely whether the increased interest in volunteering among people of all ages may make it more difficult for young people, particularly the most marginalised, to find appropriate volunteering opportunities and support.

The research was carried out by Dubit Research for the National Youth Agency and used a variety of online methods to seek young people's views and experiences. These included an initial review of existing research and literature, four online focus groups with volunteers and non-volunteers in two age groups (13 to 15 year olds and 16 to 19 year olds), four video diaries and reports produced by a selection of young volunteers and non volunteers in two age groups (13 to 15 year olds and 16 to 19 year olds), and an online survey of 1,500 13 to 19 year olds across England.

1.1 Key findings

- Young people's perception of the recession was that it had little direct impact on their lives – only 16% said that it had affected them directly (4.2.2). The impact was stronger on older people they knew. Direct immediate impact on young people was limited to having less money, prices going up and a perception of higher costs for education. Older participants felt it was more difficult to find a job (in most cases part-time or summer jobs).
- In spite of this, when asked about the possible future impact of the recession, young participants were quick to express concerns. 85% said that it would affect them when looking for a job (4.2.2).
- The strategies used to address the perceived increased competition for jobs included achieving higher qualifications and doing extra-curricular activities, such as work placements, work experience and volunteering (4.3).
- Around a fifth (19%) of young people agreed that the recession had changed their views of volunteering (4.4), in most cases leading to young people becoming more aware of its benefits.
- Perceptions of volunteering were generally positive. 69% agreed that it is positive because it is about helping others, and 64% agreed that a lot can be learnt from volunteering (5.1).
- Exploring young people's motivations for volunteering, almost half (49%) of young people said that volunteering would look good on their CV, 40% said that it would help

them get experience of a particular type of work, and 40% said that they wanted to help their community and other people (5.4).

- Young people's expectations of volunteering varied for different age groups. The youngest were not expecting much back apart from basic training and appreciation. They did not expect subsistence such as travel expenses. Older young volunteers also mentioned that they expected some appreciation, but also to be treated as adults, and to be involved planning and decision making – more than just 'helping out'. They also expected to receive some training and recognition, but like the younger age group, were not expecting any financial support, like travel expenses (5.5).
- Training and appreciation came out as the two most common expectations with over half of all respondents who had volunteered mentioning they expected these. One-in-three also expected to be involved in decision making and planning but this expectation was only met in around half of the cases. This meant that only around one-in-six volunteers were as involved as they wanted to be (5.5).
- The main skills gained through volunteering were 'social skills' (71%), self-confidence (66%) and teamwork skills (65%). Volunteering also provided useful contacts for around a third of young volunteers (5.6).
- Nearly two-thirds of young people who had volunteered mentioned their volunteering experiences in some sort of application process. This was more common for further/higher education applications than for jobs (5.7.2). A quarter of employers or educators were very interested in volunteering mentioned in job or course applications.
- Around four in five young people were not currently volunteering. The main reasons were having 'lots to study' and 'not much spare time' (5.9.1). Only 8% of previous volunteers had not enjoyed their volunteering experiences (5.9.2).
- Young people of different ages face different barriers to volunteering. Those under 16 years old felt that there were more barriers for them. The 13 to 15 year olds complained of a lack of opportunities and little advertising or volunteering websites for their age.
- The 16 to 19 year old non-volunteers thought that their time was more required to find jobs or to study. This reveals a double-edge effect of the recession: it is important to 'stay above the competition' and volunteering is one way of achieving this, but young people may feel more reluctant to dedicate time to volunteering – especially if they have never tried it and have little awareness of its benefits (5.12).
- One-third of young people who have never volunteered said they could not find any volunteering opportunity they liked (5.12.2). This may indicate that there is some work to be done in understanding what sorts of opportunities could actually attract non-volunteers.
- The idea of alternative 'bite-size' volunteering opportunities, possibly done online and from home, was received with enthusiasm. Participants were clearly interested in knowing more about such opportunities (5.12).
- In the majority of cases, the time young people had to wait from starting to look for volunteering until starting was short, with over two-fifths waiting just for up to one week. For one-fifth it took over a month (5.12.3).

2. Introduction

The project set out to explore the impact of the recession on young people's involvement in and perceptions of volunteering. It also looked at their (changing) motivations for volunteering. The research explored whether there are sufficient opportunities to volunteer and what young people's experiences over the last 12 months have been, both barriers and enablers to engagement. The research was carried out as part of the NYA's work with the Office for Civil Society (OCS).

Finally, the research also addressed young people's awareness of accreditation and the role of volunteering as part of a pathway to employment, and the wider expectations young people have of their volunteering and what organisations provide.

2.1 Objectives

The research project sought to answer the following questions:

- Are young people more likely to volunteer now than before the recession, and what are young people's motivations for volunteering?
- Are there sufficient opportunities for young people to volunteer? What are young people's experiences of volunteering over the last 12 months (barriers and enablers)?
- Is there a greater awareness of accreditation and the role of volunteering as a pathway to employment?
- What expectations do young people have of youth volunteering – what do they get out of it and what do volunteering organisations provide?
- Do young people feel affected by the recession? How has it affected them? How do they think it will affect them in the future?
- What other employability strategies are being used or planned by young people?
- How do young people look for volunteering opportunities?

2.2 Methodology and Research Tools

The project adopted a multi-method approach, consisting of:

- Initial brief review of existing research and literature on volunteering and the recession and related themes;
- Four online focus groups with volunteers and non-volunteers in two age groups (13-15 year olds and 16-19 year olds);
- Four video diaries or video 'reports' produced by a selection of young volunteers and non-volunteers in two age groups (13-15 year olds and 16-19 year olds); and

- Online survey of 1,500 13-19 year olds, spread across England – achieving a representation from different ethnic groups, genders, regions and people with varying volunteering experiences.

2.2.1 Online Focus Groups

Online focus groups were conducted online using an online 'virtual room' where young people from different parts of the country met to discuss volunteering and the recession. A snapshot of the Clickroom is presented below:



2.2.2 Video Diaries

Four young people were invited to produce video footage of their thoughts about volunteering and the recession. Their peers were also interviewed by participants, resulting in over 2 hours of video footage reporting young people's thoughts and experiences.

2.2.3 Online Quantitative Survey

A survey of 1,500 young people aged between 13 and 19 years old was conducted. The data was analysed using an SPSS statistical package, from which Excel tables were produced. Small weights were applied to responses on the basis of age and gender to normalise the spread of respondents according to these variables.

2.2.4 Literature Review

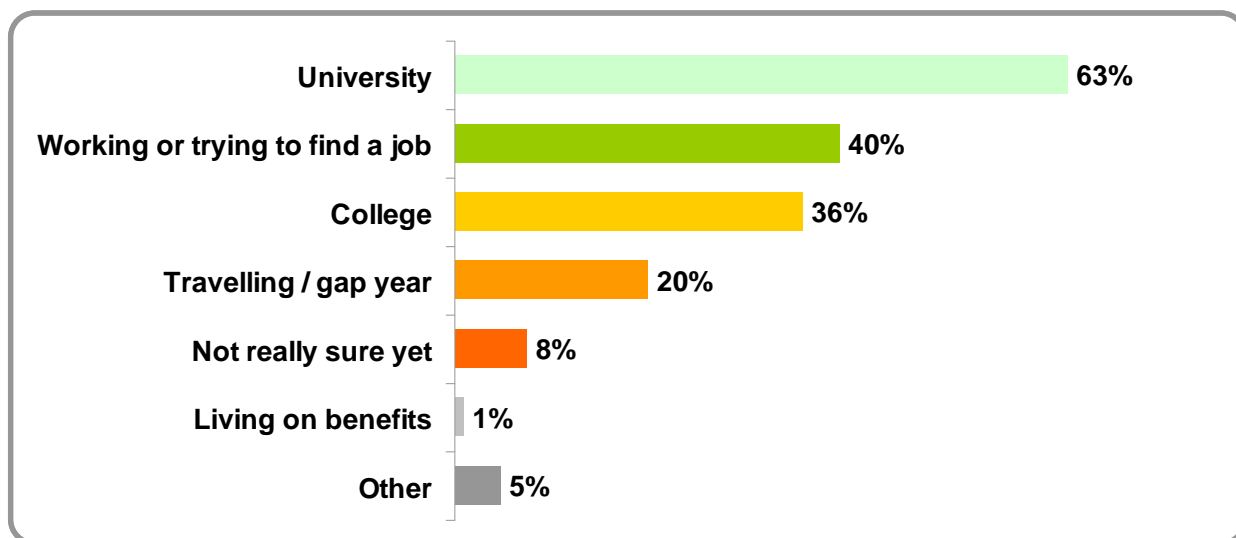
A number of recent research reports were reviewed on the topic of volunteering and the recession. This review is presented in section 7.

3. Findings: the recession and the future

3.1 Plans for the future

The majority of young people surveyed mentioned a higher education course in their plans for the future. It appears that high level of qualifications is seen as an important route into employment.

Question: Have you got any plans for the future, let's say for the next 3 to 5 years or so?



More females thought they would be working/trying to find a job (43%) or travelling/on a gap year (23%) than males (36% and 17%).

Splits by age related to what life stage young people were at. 16-17 year olds had the highest proportion who were considering going to university in the future (81%); 18-19 year olds had the highest proportion who thought they would be working or looking for a job (54%) in 3-5 years time; more 13-15 year olds said they were 'not sure' about what they would be doing (11%) than the other two age groups.

Current (73%) and previous volunteers (66%) were more likely to be considering going to university than those who had never volunteered before (56%).

3.2 About the recession

3.2.1 What does the recession mean to young people?

In the four focus groups we started by discussing what the recession meant to young people.

Most participants in the focus groups thought that they were too young to feel any strong direct impact from the recession. Being in education was like being in a 'safe haven', but not so much for those at university, which was seen as costly and potentially leading to student debt.

Participants were much more concerned with the future impact of the recession and worried that they would find it hard to get a job. A few participants thought that the recession and its after effects would 'be over' by the time they got to that stage in life.

For young people, fewer opportunities in the labour market meant more competition, which in turn meant that they needed to think about ways to 'stay ahead'. Respondents felt this could be achieved through:

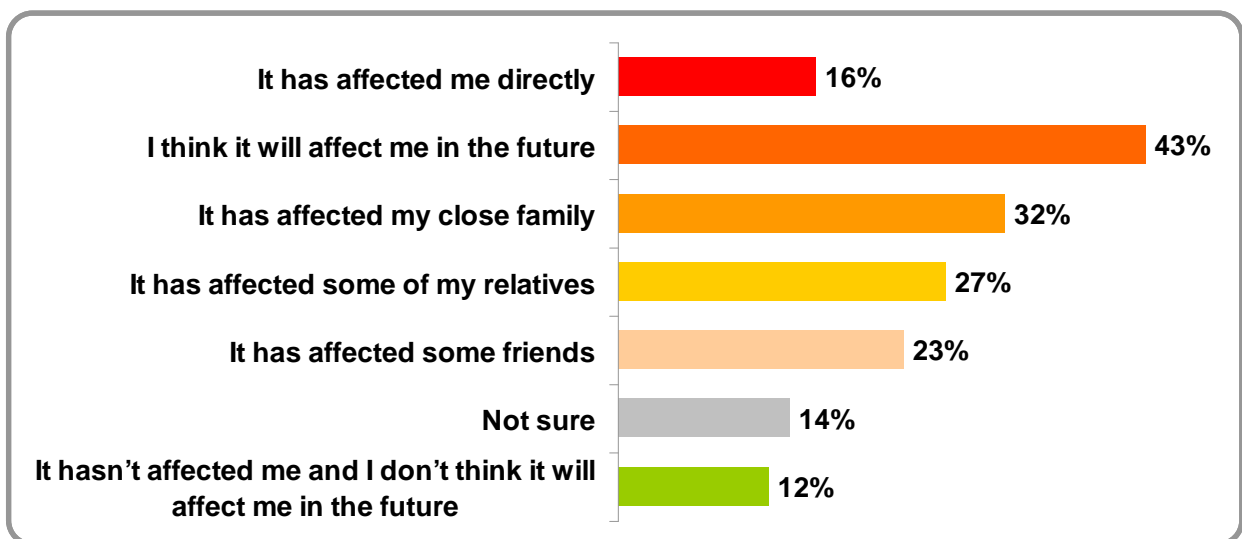
- Staying longer in education, and achieving higher qualifications
- Undertaking work experience/placements
- Volunteering

Volunteering was most likely to be mentioned by young people who were already taking part.

The survey highlighted a similar picture: money was mentioned by approximately 46% of the sample, job loss and unemployment by around 25%, and prices, spending and expensive were words mentioned by around 13%.

3.2.2 Effects of the recession

The research tried to understand in what ways young people felt affected by the recession. When asked: 'do you feel affected by the recession?', young people taking part in the research responded:



As earlier findings from the focus groups suggested, for most young people the effects of the recession had not been felt *directly*, although just under half (43%) of respondents felt it would affect them in the future.

Females were more likely to say: 'it will affect me in the future' (48%); 'it has affected my close family' (37%) and; 'it has affected some of my relatives' (31%). These percentages compare with response from males: 39%; 27%; and 23%. Males were more likely to say 'it hasn't affected me and I don't think it will affect me in the future' (15%) than females (10%).

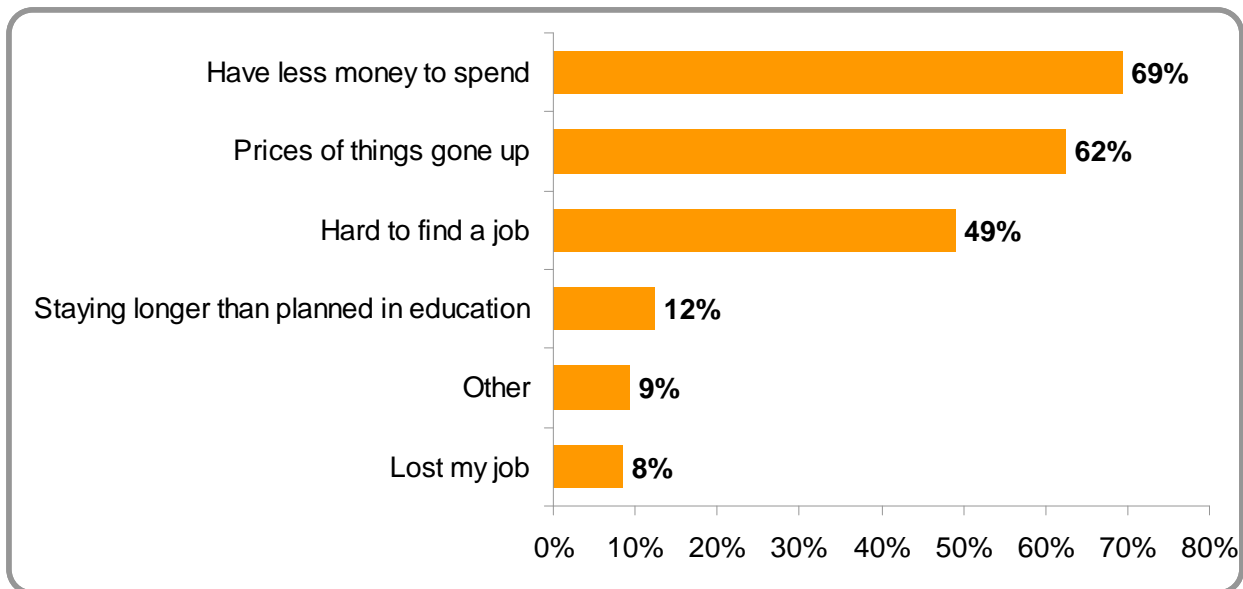
The younger age group were much more likely to say that they were unsure about the affect.

Interestingly, current volunteers were more likely to say they think the recession will affect them in the future (47%) than those who have never volunteered (39%).

During the focus groups, participants began by saying that they did not feel the recession had affected them considerably. However, as the groups continued and we explored aspects such as the impact the recession could have had on the people they knew and whether it could affect them in the future, participants revealed a growing level of concern for what the recession could mean for their future.

Most participants agreed that the situation was worrying and that they had to make an extra effort to get into education, especially when trying to find a job in the future.

Question: How has the recession affected you?

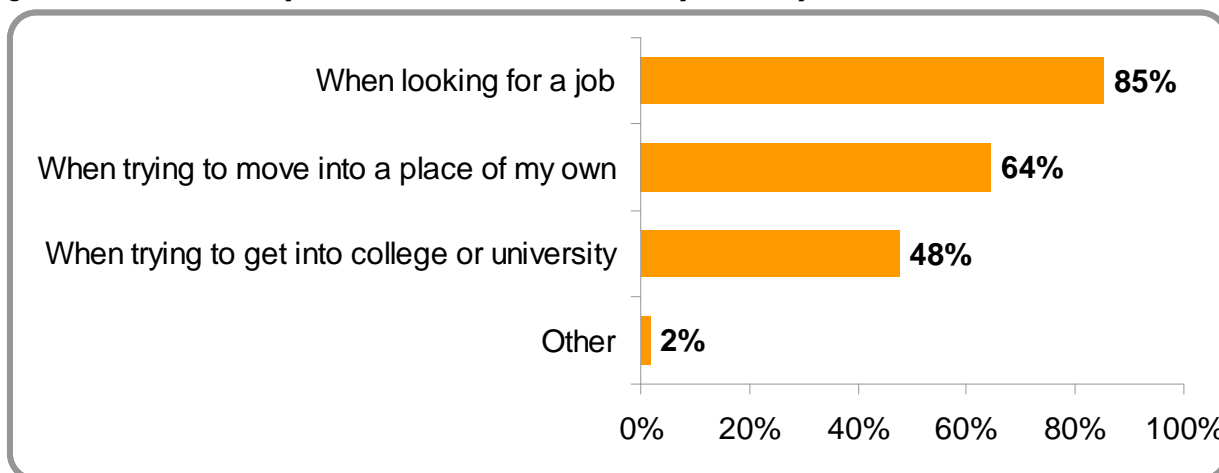


Findings from the focus groups show that the more immediate and direct effects were linked to spending power, followed by difficulties in finding jobs.

17% of current volunteers said they had lost their job, compared to 8% of those who have previously volunteered and 3% of those who have never volunteered.

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) were most likely to say the recession had made it harder to find a job (81%).

Question: *When do you think the recession may affect you in the future?*

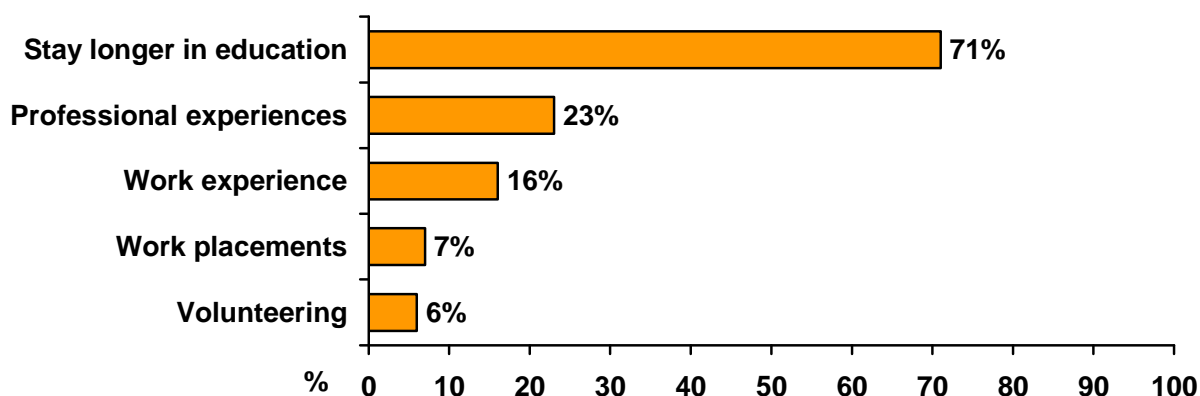


Females were more likely to say that the recession may impact them when trying to move into a place of their own (71%) than males (56%). 13-15 year olds (59%) and 16-17 year olds (56%) were more likely to say they thought the recession would affect them when trying to get into college or university than 18-19 year olds (26%).

Findings from the video diaries offered a more in depth view: participants felt that even in five years time, the effects of the recession will still be present, with none of them thinking that the situation may have improved by then.

3.3 Strategies to facilitate employment

Question: *Which of these strategies do you think will work best to place you 'above the competition' when looking for a job?*



13-15 year olds (76%) and 16-17 year olds (75%) were more likely than 18-19 year olds (61%) to rank 'stay longer in education' as most important. 18-19 year olds placed a higher importance on work experience (22%) and gaining a work placement (11%) than the two younger age groups (both 13% and 5%).

Volunteering was seen as less important. Respondents were presented with three options linked to volunteering (qualification, CV, recognition). The most effective as an employability factor was considered to be doing volunteering leading to a qualification.

Volunteering was not seen as a replacement for education or even work experience in the route to employment, rather an extra piece of experience that could improve young people's CVs.

Current volunteers ranked the strategy of higher education lower than those who had never volunteered (1.9 vs. 1.6).

3.4 The recession and young people's views of volunteering

We asked a series of questions on young people's views about the recession and volunteering.

Nearly one in five (19%) participants agreed that the recession had changed their views of volunteering. 18-19 year olds (24%) were the most likely to say that the recession did change their views on volunteering, with 13-15s most likely to say it didn't (84%).

For some participants, the recession meant that people would have more time (and more of a need) to volunteer due to being unemployed. It meant that charities would need extra help if donations reduced, but it also meant that people in financial difficulties may have to make the most of their available time to work, thus reducing their availability for volunteering. In many cases, volunteering was clearly seen as an employability strategy.

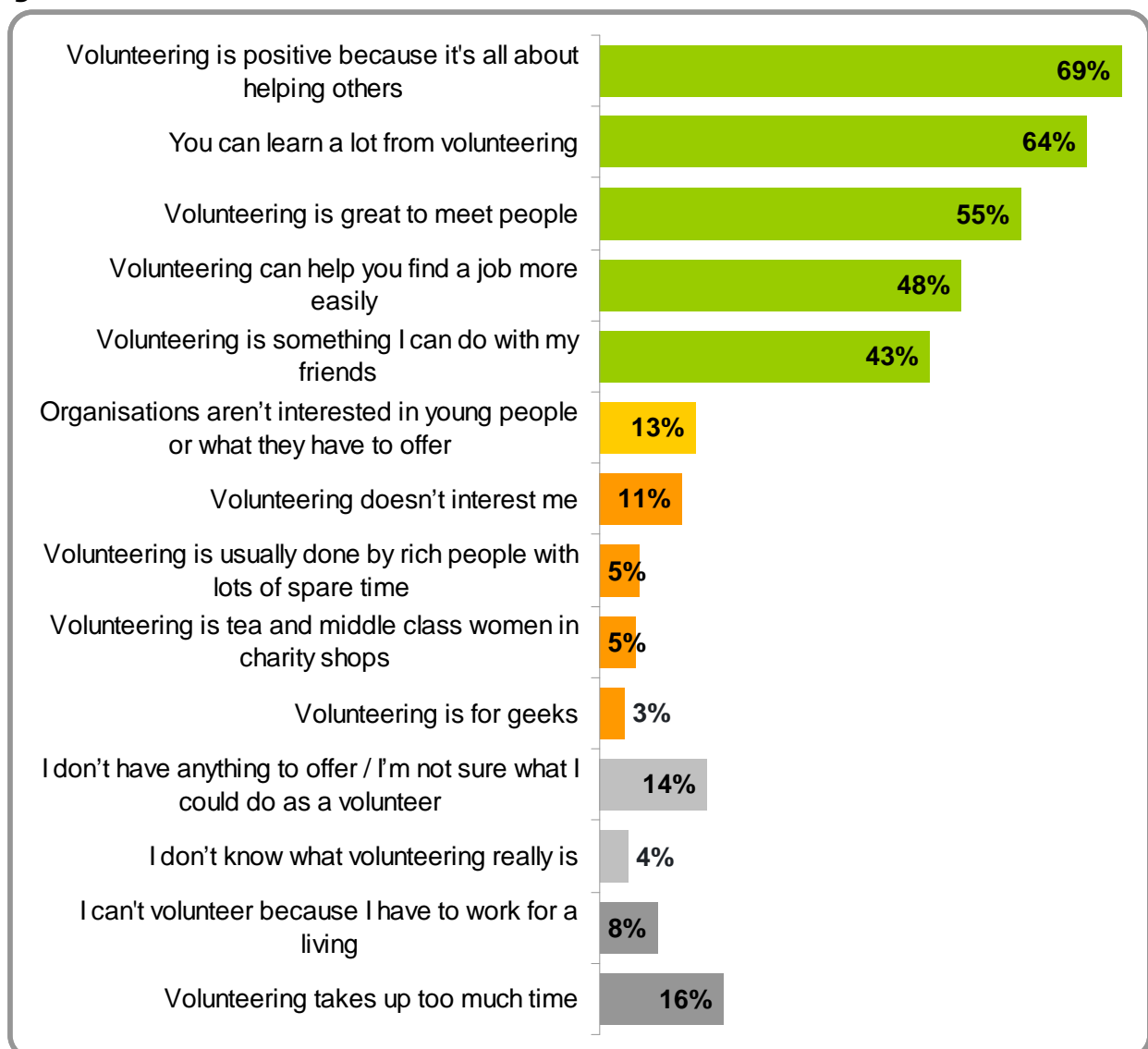
4. Findings: volunteering

4.1 Perceptions of volunteering

In the focus groups it became evident that all young people, even those who have never tried volunteering before, saw it as a positive activity and beneficial for their CV. Current volunteers were particularly positive, saying volunteering was essentially about having fun and a positive experience, whilst also developing skills.

In the online survey we presented respondents with a series of statements about volunteering, and which they agreed with. Overall, responses were very positive, in line with other studies that explore perceptions of volunteering.

Question: What do you think about volunteering? Please tick all the statements you agree with:



Findings of note include:

- More than one in ten (13%) young people thought that organisations are not interested in young people or what they have to offer
- Around one in six young people (16%) thought that volunteering takes up too much time – as we will see time is one of the most common perceived barriers to volunteering.
- A similar proportion (14%) stated that they do not have anything to offer or are not sure of what they could do as volunteers

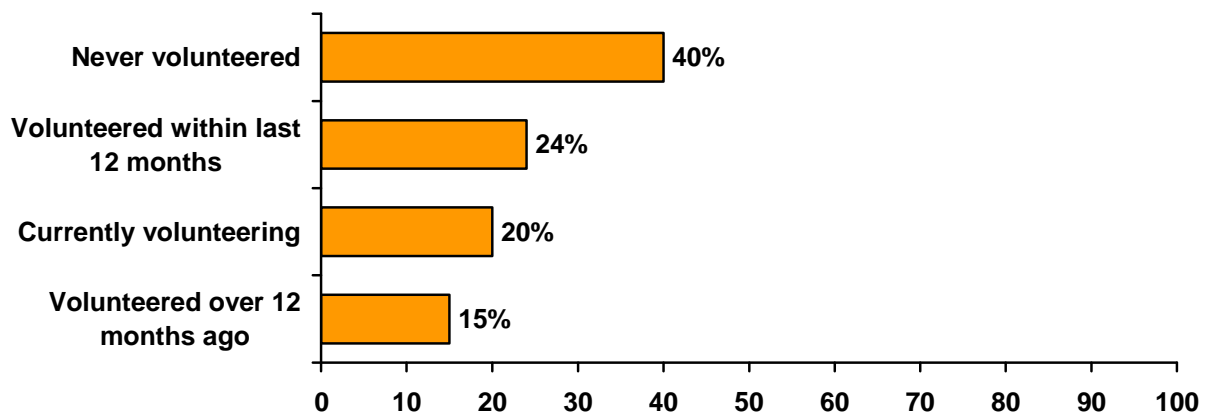
All positive options were selected to a higher degree by females than males and by more current and previous volunteers than those who have never volunteered before.

The biggest gender split occurred with 'volunteering is positive because it's all about helping others': with 80% of females and 57% of males agreeing. Males were more likely than females to say 'volunteering doesn't interest me', 'I can't volunteer because I have to work for a living', 'volunteering is tea and middle class women in charity shops' and 'I don't know what volunteering really is'.

Positive perceptions of volunteering were also more prevalent amongst older age groups.

4.2 Levels of volunteering

Question: have you ever volunteered¹?



Females were more likely to be currently volunteering (23%) than males (17%), and males were more likely to have volunteered over a year ago (17%) or never (43%) than females (12% and 38% respectively).

16-17 year olds were more likely to be currently volunteering (26%) and 18-19 year olds more likely to have previously volunteered (52%). 13-15 year olds were the group who were most likely to have never volunteered, 54%, compared to 32% for 16-17 year olds and 28% for 18-19 year olds.

The groups with the strongest proportion who volunteer are those in part-time employment (29%) and those in college (27%). NEETs are the group with the highest proportion who had never volunteered (63%), followed by those in school (51%).

4.3 Motivations for volunteering

For most young volunteers who took part in the research, there were altruistic motivations behind their volunteering: helping others and/or doing something for the community. But they also did it for fun, experience and to make friends.

For a minority there were more 'instrumental' reasons to volunteer, such as to attain an award and improve their CV. This was more common for older participants who were in higher education and/or working or trying to find a job. All participants agreed that volunteering can be a bit of both: help others whilst improving their CV. Even non-volunteers agreed that the CV element should be highlighted to attract more volunteers, as many had not thought about it in this way before.

Question: How important were each of these factors when you decided to become a volunteer?

The following chart represents the proportion of young people rating each factor as 'very important':

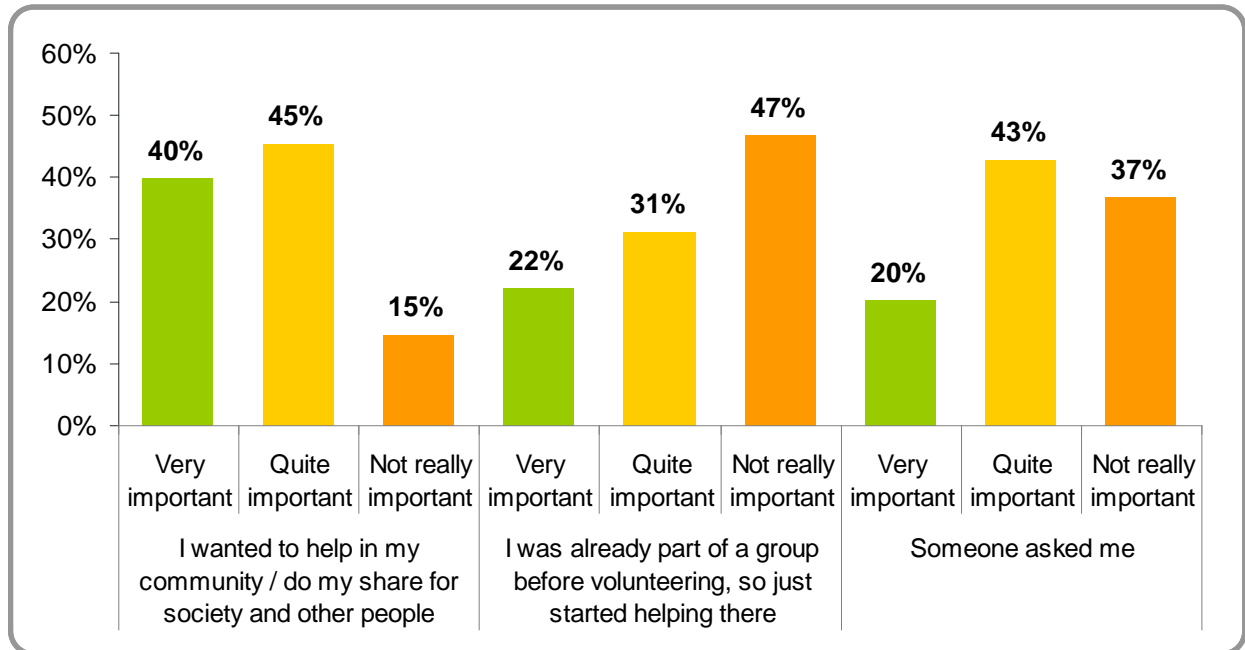


The chart shows that having volunteering on their CV was an important motivating factor driving young people to volunteer. Three other important factors were: 'gaining experience of a type of work'; 'wanting to help in the community'; and having 'fun'. The main motivations for volunteering are a mix of altruistic, social and personal development factors.

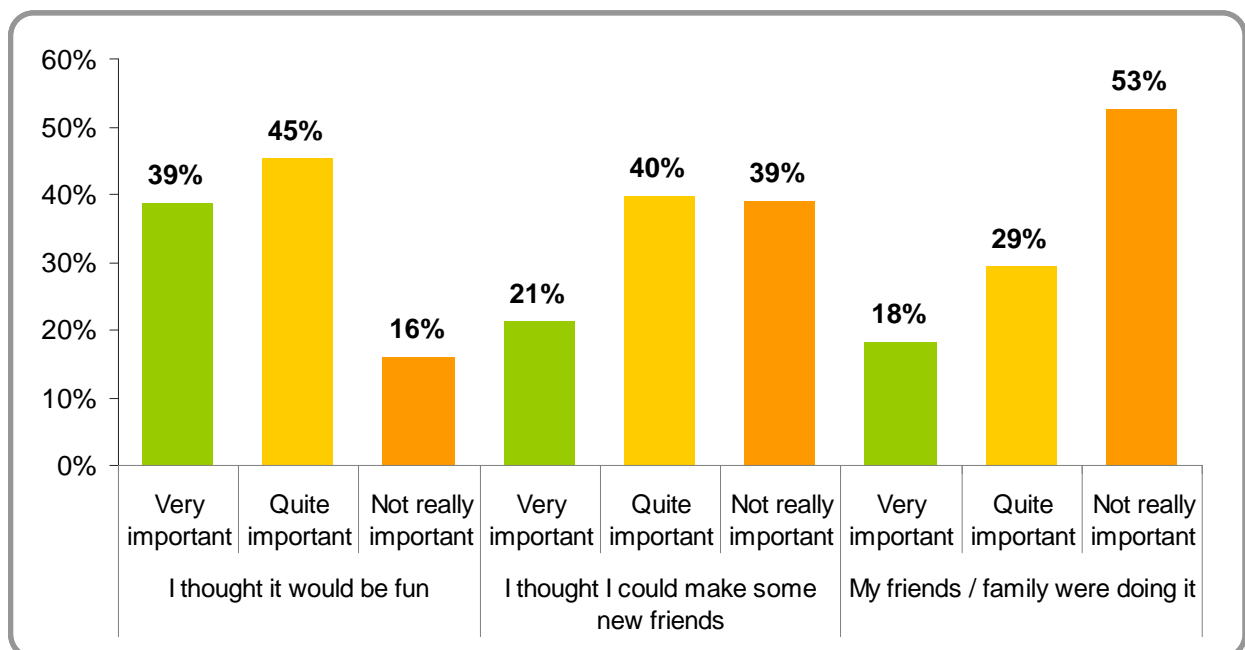
'My friends/family were doing it' was a more important factor for 13-15 year olds (25%) than the two older age groups.

The bar charts below present the three levels of importance allocated to the nine statements, separated into categories: Altruistic and Other; Social; CV/Development.

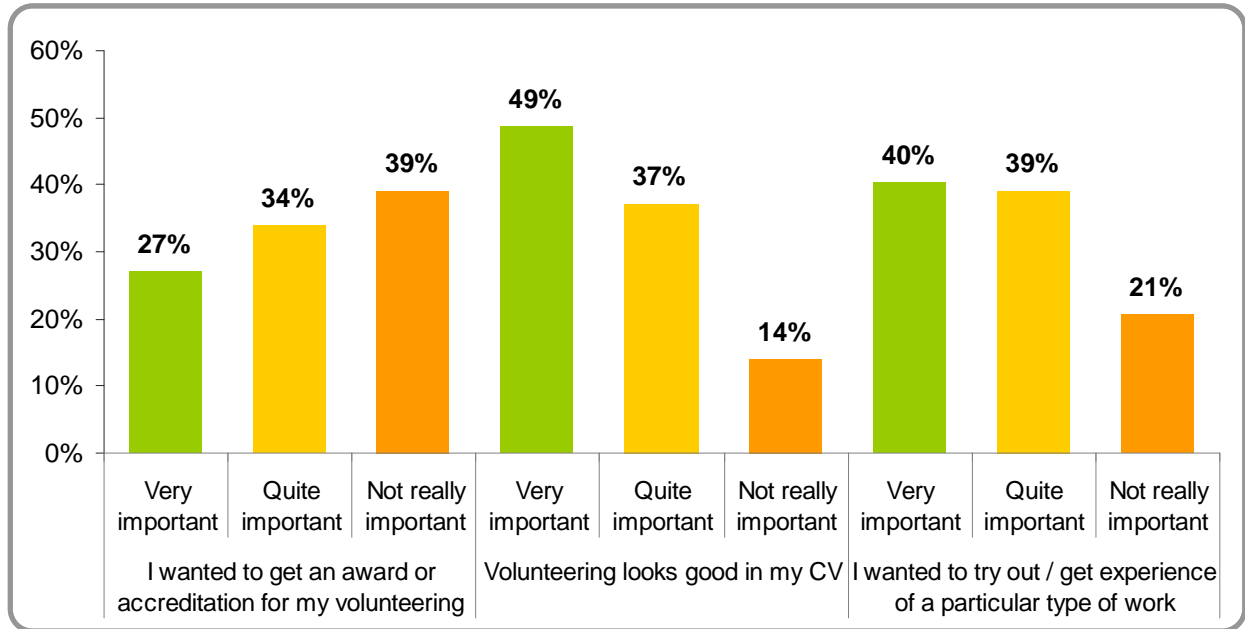
Altruistic and Other



Social



CV / Development



Considering both 'Very important' and 'Quite important' together, these charts tell a consistent story: 'CV' and 'helping community' still on top, followed by 'fun' and 'experience of a particular type of work'.

4.4 Expectations of volunteering

During the focus groups, most volunteers stated that they were not expecting much back from volunteering. They expected to have fun and have a good experience, and essentially just wanted to help their community. However, they also reported that once they started volunteering they realised that they were also gaining from it on a personal level.

As for expectations of volunteering organisations, these varied according to the age groups. Among the youngest most were not expecting much back apart from basic training and appreciation. The main message was that they were volunteering because they wanted to and were not expecting anything in return. Older volunteers said they were expecting some appreciation, to be treated as adults and be involved in taking decisions about the volunteering. Also mentioned was the expectation to receive some training and recognition, but were not expecting any financial support such as travel expenses, although if they were offered such support they would take it.

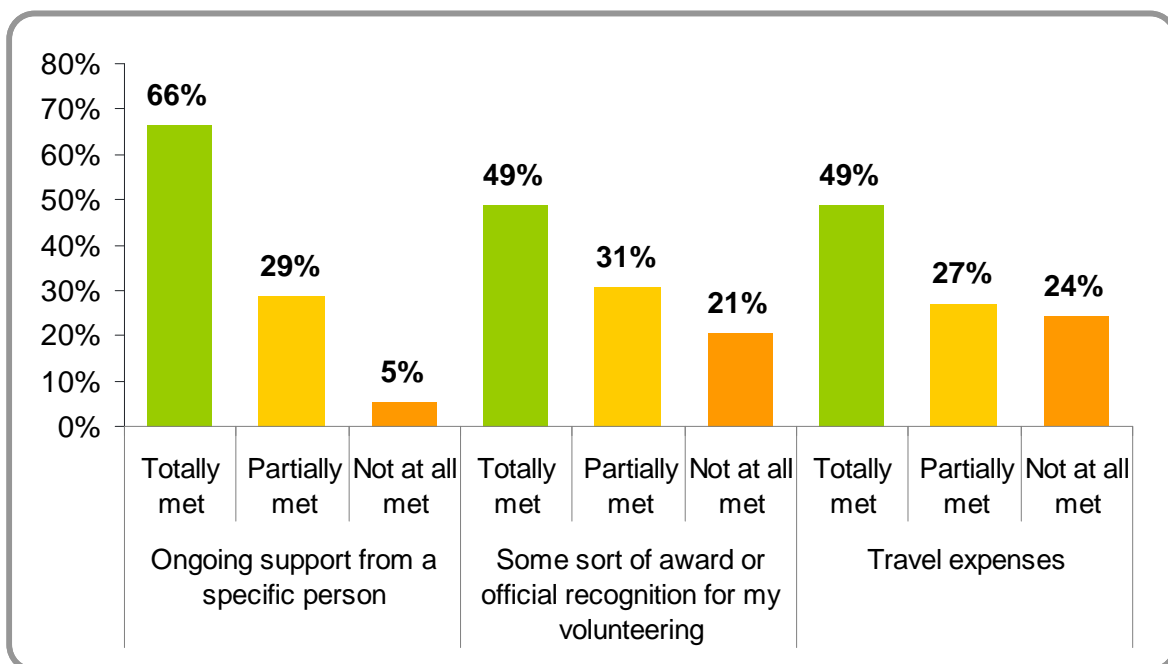
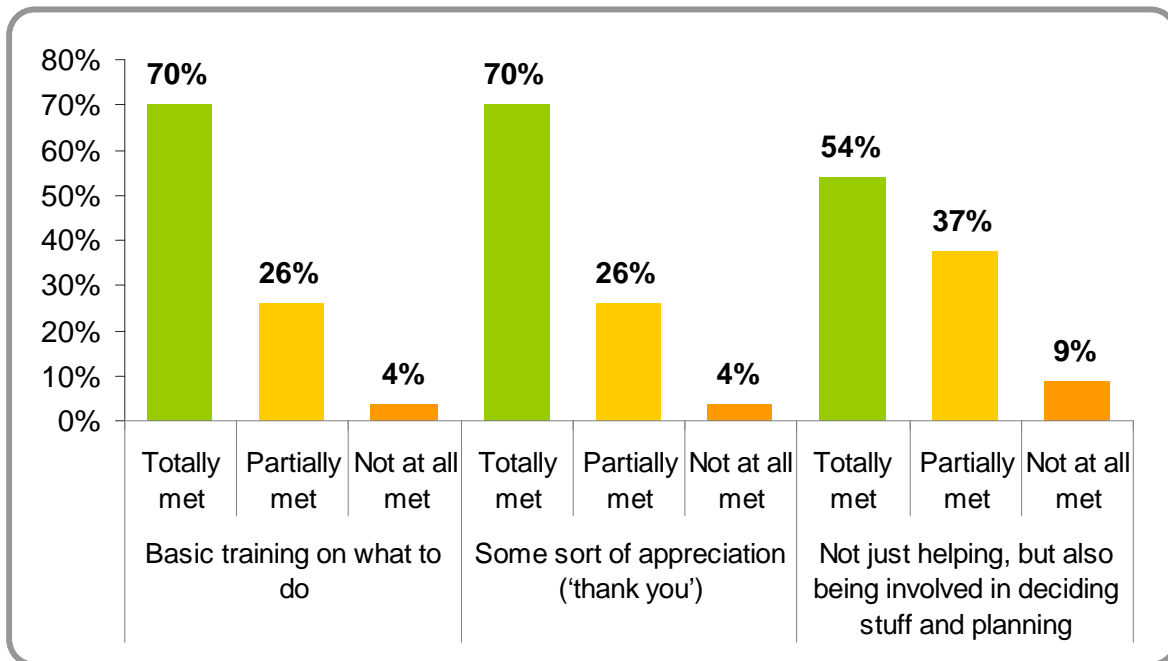
Question: what did you expect from the organisation/group you volunteered with?



Males expected basic training (59%) and travel expenses (13%) more than females (48% and 7% respectively). Females (23%) were more likely than males (16%) to say they weren't expecting anything.

The charts below present the degree to which the expectations of young volunteers were actually met by volunteering organisations.

Question: were your expectations met?



The two common expectations – training and appreciation – were met for 70% of cases of volunteers. The next most met expectation was having ongoing support from a specific person (66%).

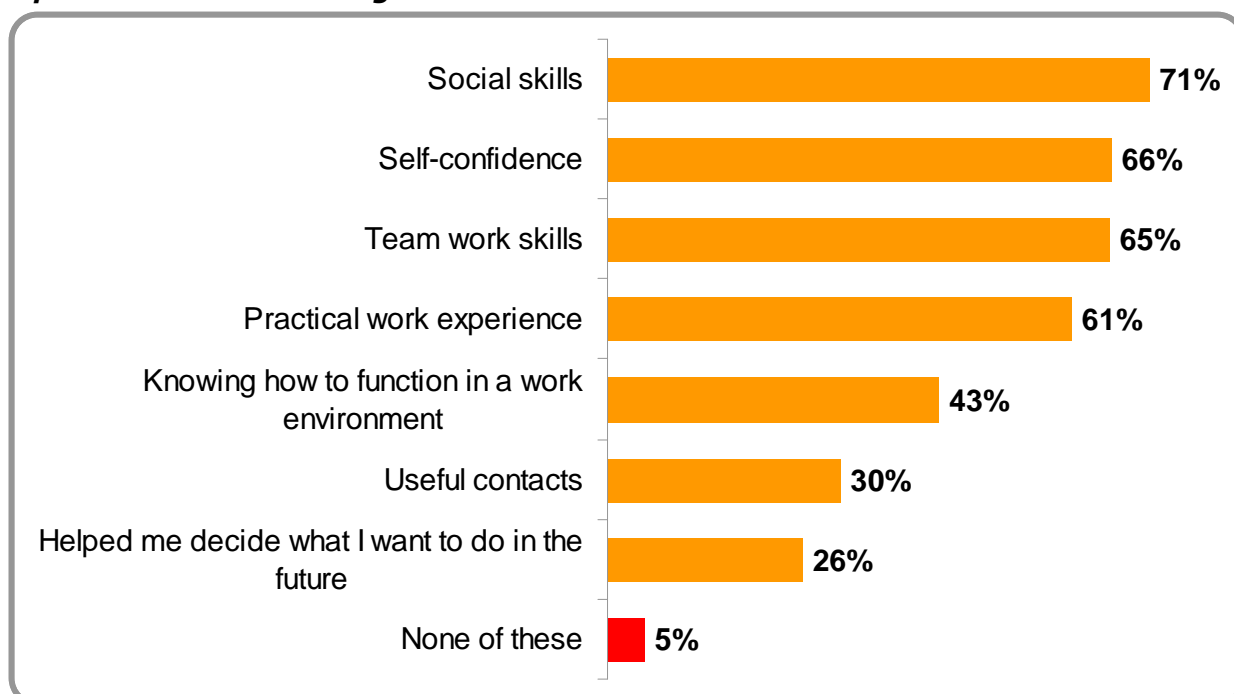
Involvement in decision making and planning, the third most common expectation (36%), was met in 54% of cases. This means that one in every six volunteers had an unmet expectation to be involved at this level.

The largest gap between expectations and how these were met was found with regards to award/recognition and travel expenses, both met in roughly half of all cases.

In terms of 'not just helping, but also being involved in deciding stuff and planning', the two older age groups (16-17 year olds, 59%; and 18-19 year olds, 65%) were more likely than the younger group (13-15 year olds, 38%) to say their expectations were totally met, with 13-15 year olds more likely to say their expectations were only partially met (55%). A likely hypothesis is that volunteering organisations are not as willing to involve younger volunteers in decision making.

4.5 What can be gained from volunteering?

Question: which of the following do you think you have gained through your experience of volunteering?

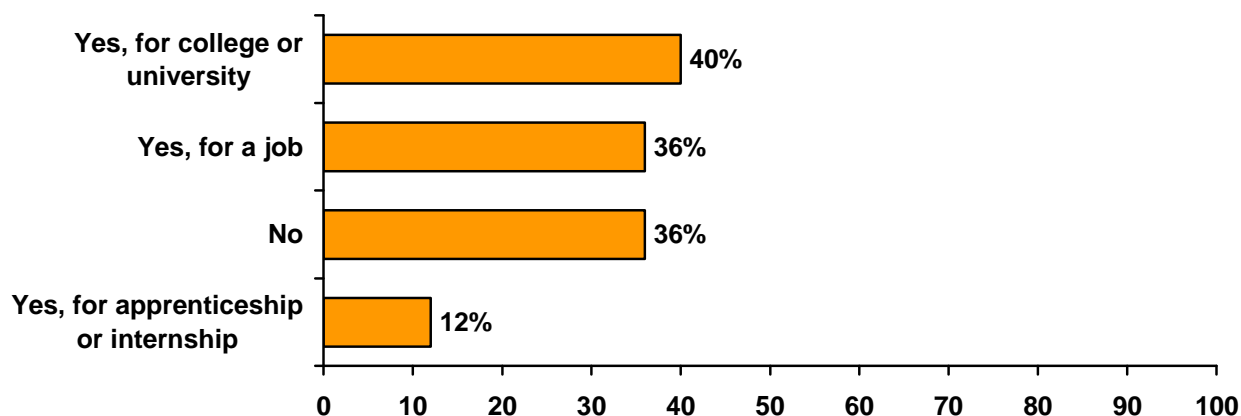


Current volunteers were more likely to select all of these options (excluding 'none of these') than people who had previously volunteered – maybe this is one of the reasons why some people no longer volunteer, because they did not feel they were gaining from volunteering.

Females were more likely than males to say they have gained social skills (76% to 65%), self-confidence (69% to 62%), practical work experience (64% to 57%) and knowing how to function in a working environment (47% to 39%).

4.6 Mentioning volunteering in the CV

During the focus groups, there were some very positive experiences of young people who had mentioned volunteering in application forms and at interviews. We therefore asked in the survey: have you ever mentioned your volunteering experience in a CV/covering letter when applying for a course at college/university, an apprenticeship or a job?



The results follow age trends with each age group increment there is an increasing proportion who have included volunteering work in a CV or covering letter. Only 14% of 18-19 year olds have never included their volunteering on a CV or covering letter (13-15 year olds 27%; and 16-17 year olds 68%).

Of the young people who had never volunteering, one in three said they thought mentioning volunteering in a CV could 'help a lot' in finding a job and 28% said this for entering higher education.

Males (13%) were more likely to say 'it doesn't really help' when applying for a job, compared with females (7%).

4.7 Volunteering accreditation

Focus group participants, especially non-volunteers, revealed low levels of awareness of volunteering awards. Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) was the most popular, v50 and v-awards were also mentioned. For a few, the DofE Award was the main motivation for volunteering. The prospect of an award gave young people something to look forward to.

Some volunteers discussed whether having an official recognition made it any 'better' than unaccredited volunteering. There were comments that awards such as the DofE were overrated, sometimes given without much effort. Another issue raised was that smaller charities could have difficulties in providing official recognition, and this did not mean that their volunteers worked less hard, which was seen as a bit unfair.

Nonetheless, official accreditation was seen as an advantage by the majority: it proved you've been involved, it was 'something to show' and also something to look forward to and provided encouragement. Many participants felt that accreditation should be used more widely to encourage non-volunteers.

One in four young people who had volunteered had received some type of accreditation for their volunteering. Current volunteers were more likely to have received accreditation (34%) than those who had previously volunteered (21%). This could mean that accreditation is becoming more widespread.

4.8 Barriers to volunteering

The focus group interviews revealed important differences across age groups. Those under 16 were more likely to feel that there are multiple barriers to volunteering. 13-15 year old volunteers complained of a lack of opportunities and little advertising or volunteering websites aimed at their age group. There were mixed views with some young people about the levels of opportunities in their area.

13-15 year olds commented that negative stereotypes made organisations reluctant to involve them. They also mentioned that they thought it would probably become harder to make time for volunteering when they went to university or started working.

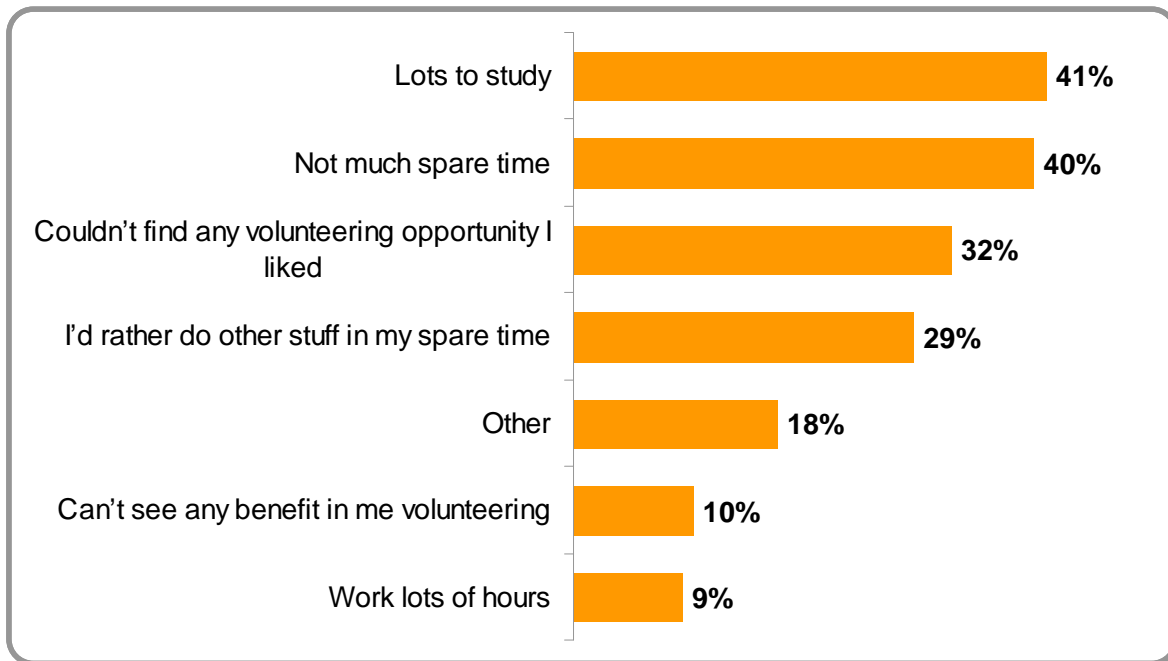
16-19 year olds did not perceive there to be so many barriers. 16-19 year old volunteers felt that there were lots of opportunities that were easy to find. They also said that volunteering was linked to groups they were a part of or through friends. There was a perception that charities are in need of volunteers.

16-19 year-old non-volunteers said they spent their time studying or looking for work. They felt that they could not 'waste time' with less essential things. This reveals a double-edge effect of the recession: on the one hand, it is important to 'stay ahead of the competition', and volunteering is one way of achieving this; but concerns with and experience of finding it hard to get a job meant that young people may feel more anxious to dedicate time to volunteering, especially if they have never tried it and have little awareness of its benefits.

The two video diaries of non-volunteer participants highlighted that time constraints were the main reason why they did not volunteer. However, it emerged that young people would find 'bite-size' volunteering opportunities in accessible formats attractive (e.g.: volunteering from home; flexible timetables; and online forms of volunteering). Offering more 'from home' and 'online volunteering' could assist organisations to overcome bureaucratic barriers and fears.

4.8.1 Perceptions of young people who have never volunteered

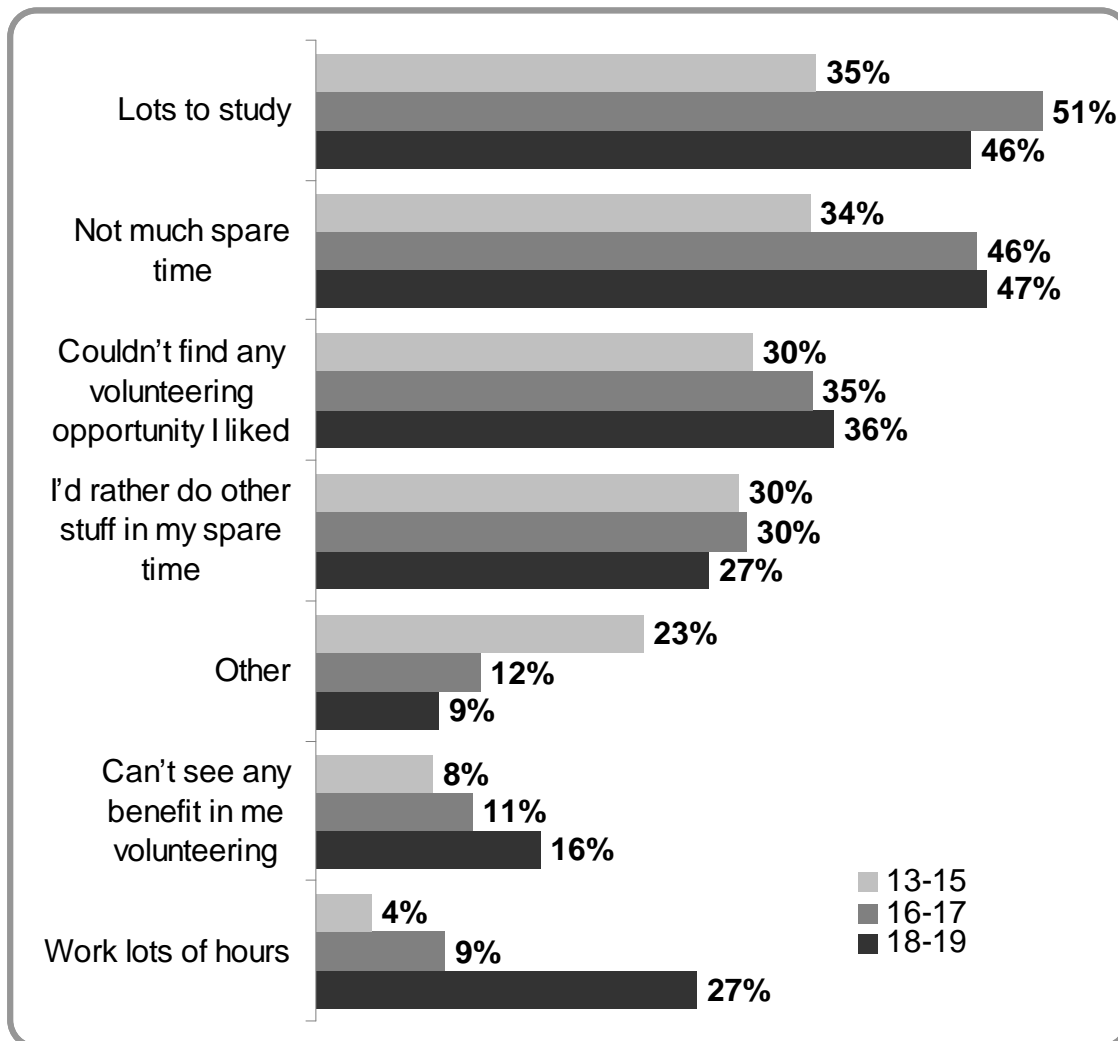
Question: why have you never volunteered?



Males were more likely to say they would 'rather do other stuff in their spare time' (35%) than females (23%). A greater proportion of 18-19 year olds said it was because they worked lots of hours (27%).

It seems that the main reason under 'other' was the feeling that participants were too young or were being told this by organisations. This was expressed particularly strongly by under 16s.

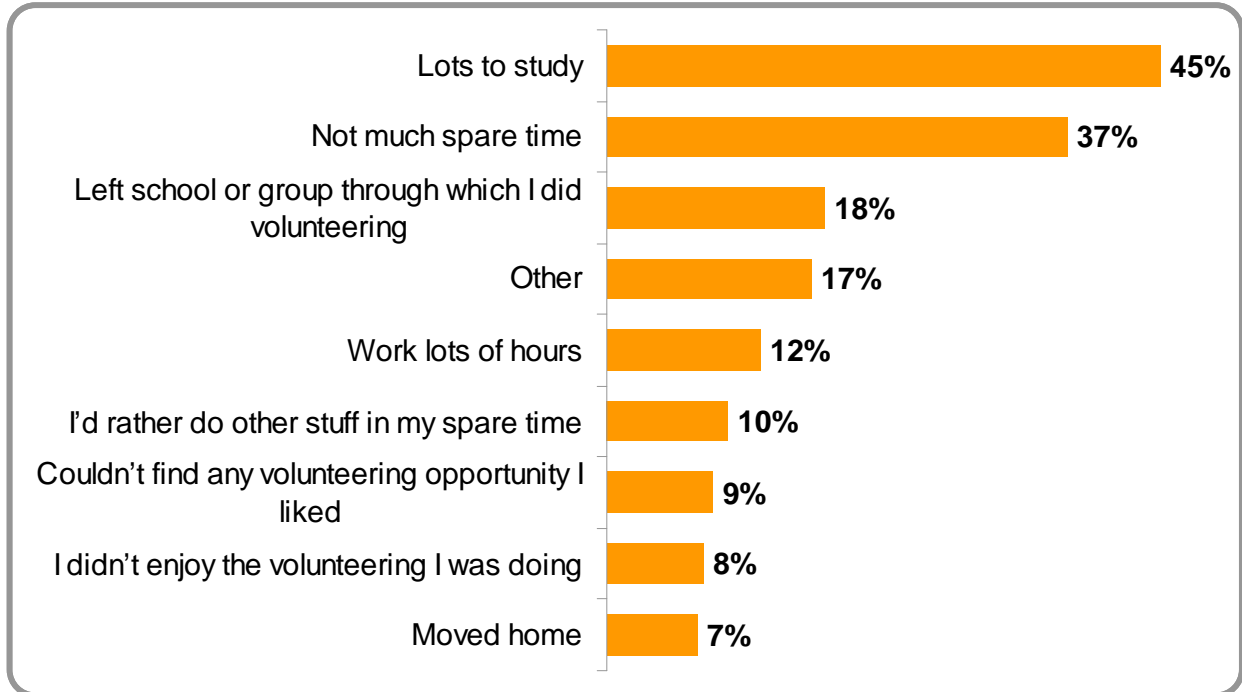
The chart below presents the main differences across age groups:



13-15 year olds seem to be more positive about benefits of volunteering and seem to have, or perceive themselves to have, more time to do it. However, many in this age group seemed to either think, or to have been told, that they were too young to volunteer. Equally, many in this age group said they found it hard to know what to do or where to find opportunities. Negative stereotypes of young people were perceived to represent an added difficulty.

4.8.2 Perceptions of young people who had volunteered before

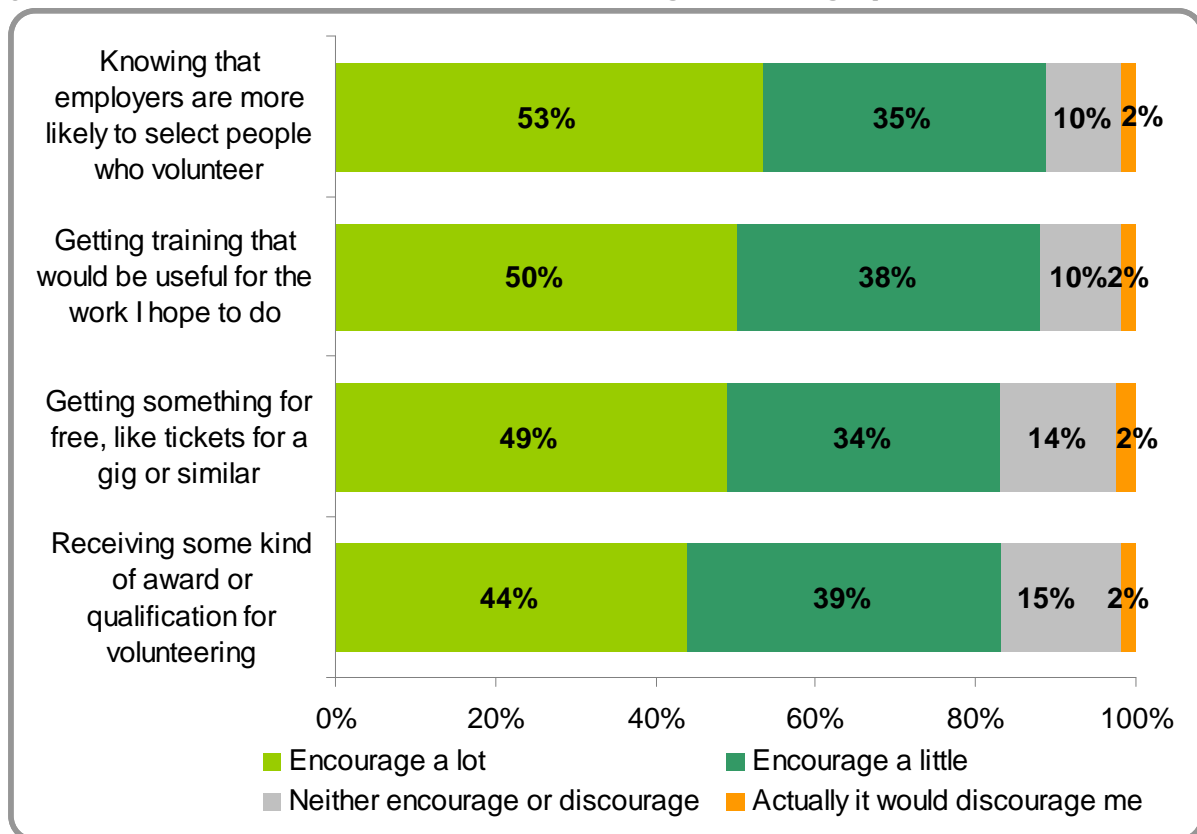
Question: why did you stop volunteering?



Only eight percent did not enjoy their volunteering experiences. Males were more likely to say they would rather 'do other stuff in their spare time' than females (13% to 7%). Work was the reason behind cessation of volunteering for more 18-19 year olds

4.9 Exploring what would encourage non-volunteers to volunteer

Question: how much would each of these things encourage you to volunteer?



Responses to this question were very similar. They do not reveal much about young people's thoughts on how to encourage young people to volunteer, but they do show that knowing employers value volunteering and the opportunity to receive training were the two main ways to encourage current non-volunteers.

Young people NEET were least likely to say that work or training-related benefits would attract them to volunteering, and most likely to say that they would be encouraged by the offer of 'getting something for free'.

Other responses included volunteering with friends, volunteering as part of a course, linking volunteering to a future job within the same organisation, and volunteering for a cause young people felt strong about.

4.10 Reactions to Civic Service volunteering

At the time of conducting the research, the former Labour government had backed calls for compulsory community or 'civic' service to help the UK economy out of recession. This was explored during the focus groups.

There were mixed feelings from participants, and the overall reaction from volunteers and non-volunteers was similar. The immediate reaction from most young people taking part in the research was that volunteering should not be part of a compulsory 'service'.

However, other participants also felt it could also have some positive aspects such as:

- Introducing volunteering to people who would not do it otherwise
- Showing 'privileged people' the realities of the lives of those who were more deprived
- Bringing benefits for the community – more volunteering can only be good
- Gaining experience and skills, and participants may enjoy it and continue volunteering

Participants also expressed negativity or uncertainty about the implications of such a proposal:

- What would happen to people who refused?
- Those who were forced and unwilling could damage the work done by charities – a strong feeling emerged from the video diaries that people who didn't want to do it would 'mess around' and spoil it for the people who did want to do it
- If everyone did it, volunteering would stop being special

All participants agreed that volunteering should be widely recommended by showing how it is done and its benefits. Schools were seen as a good place to do this as virtually every young person would have access to this type of information.

Input from video diary participants echoed this, with everyone opposing compulsory volunteering, saying that the people who want to volunteer, already volunteer. Video diarists felt that more should be done to encourage people to volunteer, but making it compulsory was not the right way to do this.

4.11 Volunteering opportunities

In the focus groups we explored young people's knowledge and perceptions of the volunteering opportunities available to them, both in terms of number and quality.

The majority of volunteers said that they found opportunities through word-of-mouth. Some were aware of websites (do-it, v-inspired) but did not use them to find opportunities. 13-15 year-old volunteers were of the opinion that there were not enough opportunities for them, while 16-19 year olds said there were plenty, but sometimes not in their local area.

In general, non-volunteers were understandably less informed about the availability or suitability of opportunities. For some 16-19 year olds (especially non-volunteers) there were opportunities, but these were not seen as attractive. Non-volunteers said that they did not receive enough information, and were not sure where to go.

Most participants did not know other people who volunteer. This is important since volunteering opportunities are mostly found through family and friends, and consequently not knowing anyone who volunteers is a clear barrier. The challenge would therefore seem to be introducing volunteering into non-volunteering networks.

13-15 year olds (both volunteers and non-volunteers) complained about a lack of opportunities. Some questioned whether they were seen as too young to volunteer, and resented the fact that there was a lot more on offer for people over 16 years old.

The 13 year-old video diarist who volunteers said he struggled to find an opportunity, often being told that he had to be 16 or over.

13-15 year-olds felt very strongly about youth stereotypes, such as 'hoodies' and 'yobs', and explained how some older people in their local area looked down on them or regarded them with fear.

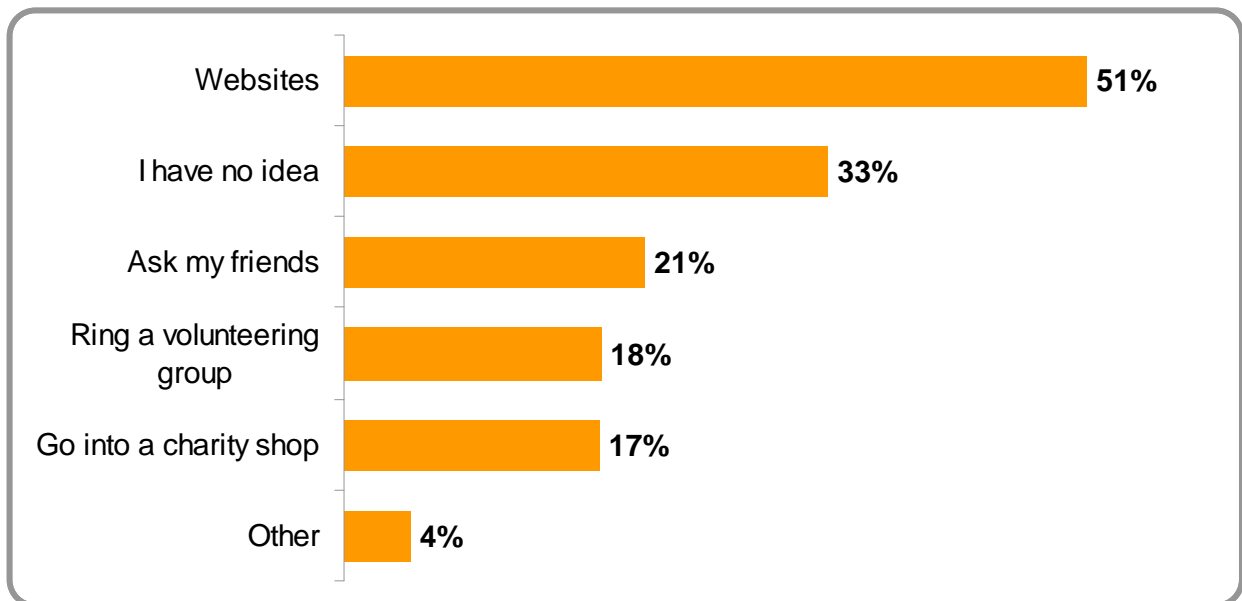
During the focus group with 16-19 year old non-volunteers liked the idea of 'bite-size' volunteering which was suggested by the facilitator. The reactions of participants were very positive. None of them had ever heard about such types of volunteering and thought that these sounded like something they would love to try; some even asked the facilitator where they could go for more information about this.

4.11.1 Perceptions of non-volunteers

One-quarter of young people who had never volunteered had looked for opportunities at some stage in their lives - 17% had done it within the last year.

More females had looked for an opportunity in the last year (21%) than males (13%); with a greater proportion of males who had never looked (81%) than females (69%). 84% of 13-15 year olds had never looked, compared to 67% of 16-17 year olds and 58% of 18-19 year olds.

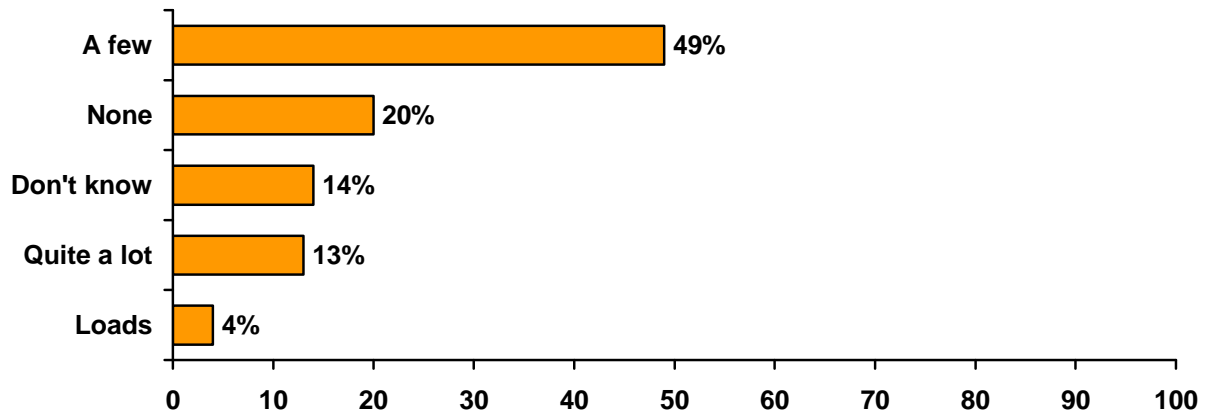
Question: where would you start looking if you wanted to volunteer?



Young women were twice as likely to go into a charity shop than young men (24% compared to 12%).

4.11.2 Looking for volunteering opportunities

Question: do you know of any volunteering opportunities that are available in your area?



One-third of respondents thought that there were enough opportunities for them, but a larger proportion (42%) did not think so. One-quarter were not sure.

13-15 year olds (53%) were more likely to say that there are not enough volunteering opportunities, which matches with the opinions of participants from this age group in the focus groups and the 13-year-old volunteer video diarist, who reported he had struggled to find an opportunity, with many organisations saying they are only open to having volunteers aged 16 or over.

Opinions about the suitability of opportunities were a little more positive with 42% agreeing that the opportunities available met their needs. 31% were not sure and 27% thought they did not meet their needs.

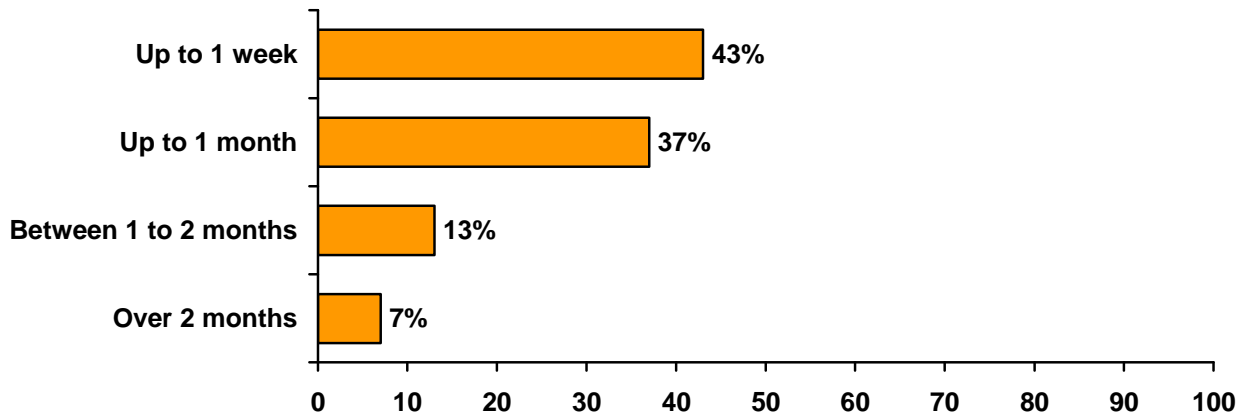
Males (47%), 16-17s (44%) and 18-19 year olds (47%) were more likely to say that the available volunteering opportunities met their needs than females (37%) and 13-15 year olds respectively (34%).

Those who felt that existing opportunities did not meet their needs (19%) were asked why. Many participants said that opportunities were either very few or there were none at all. Others said that they were not aware of what opportunities were available, and some said that there is not a wide range of opportunities to choose from.

Some participants felt that volunteering is for older people, or that when they do volunteer they do not feel appreciated. There were also concerns that they either did not have the time or were not interested.

4.11.3 Volunteers

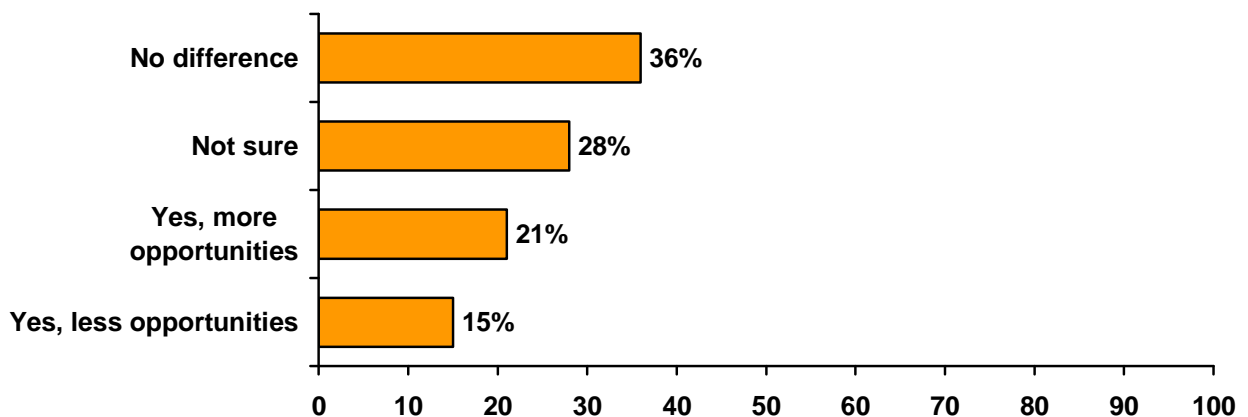
We also asked volunteers to say long it took them to find an opportunity:



The two volunteer video diarists had different experiences of the time it took to find an opportunity. The 18 year-old volunteer found the process to be quite quick, taking a couple of weeks. However he did not like the amount of forms he had to fill in, saying this could put some people off.

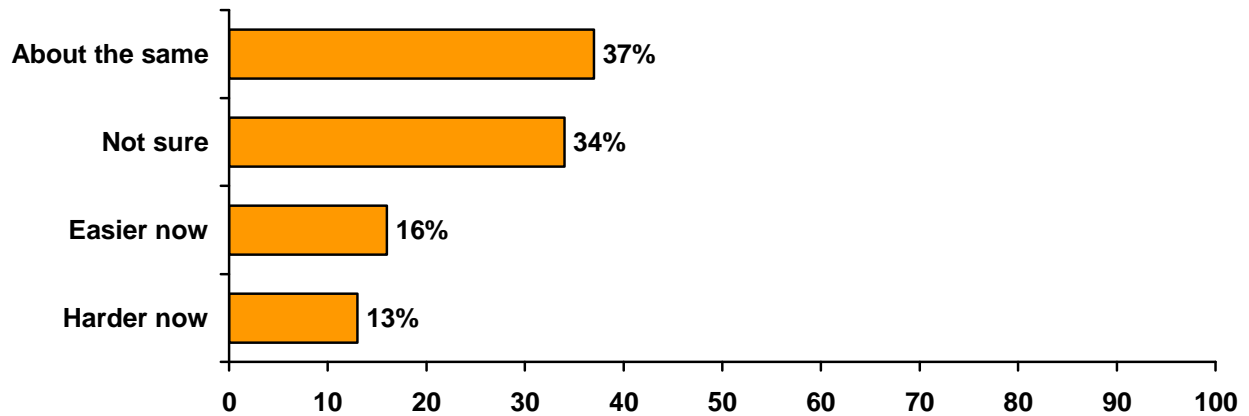
The younger volunteer (13-year-old) experienced difficulties finding a volunteering opportunity, often being told that many roles were only for people aged over 16. When he an opportunity did present itself through a local community centre, it was for a project that was 12 miles away, which was too far away. He eventually got involved in a project at the primary school where his mum worked, with this being quick (2-3 weeks) to organise.

Question: in the last year or so, have you noticed any difference in terms of numbers or types of volunteering opportunities available?



Males (18%) were more likely than females (12%) to say that there were less opportunities. More opportunities were more likely to be selected by older respondents: 18-19 year olds, 26%; 16-17 year olds, 21%; 13-15 year olds, 16%

Question: is it easier to find an opportunity to volunteer now than it was about 1 year ago or so?



4.11.4 Types of volunteers

Participants were asked whether they had noticed any changes in the types of people volunteering in the last year. 41% of respondents thought that the types of people who volunteer had not changed. 36% were not sure and 23% said they had noticed some changes. Below are some quotes:

- *I think more young people are volunteering because it has been widely advertised, plus it is now harder to get a paid job.*
- *It's mainly the young people that can't get a Saturday job because adults have taken them spots.*
- *More 'normal' teenagers rather than just the 'high-achievers'*
- *More teenagers are starting to volunteer*
- *More young people*
- *People want it for their CV*
- *There are more people who need something like this, for applying for a job/university volunteering*
- *Younger people are more likely to volunteer now because of awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh*
- *Younger people looking to gain experience as getting jobs is tougher*

The 18-year-old male volunteer video diary participant said that he had noticed a slight difference in the types of people who volunteer, saying that:

Initially it was just the people who wanted to volunteer, but now there are people who are doing it to get the rewards or put on their CV as their main motivation.

This matches with the 19-year-old female non-volunteer video diary participant who talked of her friend who is currently spending one afternoon a week volunteering in a school, for the sole reason of having something extra to put on her PGCE (teacher training) application form.

The two main trends appear to be more younger people trying to volunteer, and more people volunteering motivated by reasons related to personal development and CV improvement.

5. Effects of taking part in the research

At every stage of the research young people were asked whether taking part had changed their views on the recession and/or volunteering.

In the focus groups there were mixed feelings. For the majority, the discussions had changed their views a little. Many who were positive about volunteering said that it had not changed their minds much, but they did think it good to know other people who also enjoy volunteering, which made them realise how much they enjoy it.

Among non-volunteers there were also mixed views. For some it made them have a stronger appetite for volunteering, as they saw it as less boring and more beneficial, especially in helping to get a job. Among 16-19 year old non-volunteers, all but one changed their opinion, especially from the discussion around the benefits of volunteering and the introduction to the concept of 'bite-size' opportunities.

Overall, 20% of all respondents thought that taking part had changed their views on volunteering and/or the recession.

Those respondents who said their views had changed were asked to elaborate. Many of them said that they did not realise the benefits that could be got from volunteering. The main benefits respondents came to recognise were in helping others and improving their CV. Another expressed view was that accreditation makes volunteering attractive. Another respondent came to realise that they might have something to offer and would look into volunteering.

6. Review of existing research

6.1 *How are Higher Education Career Services Experiencing the Recession?* (HECSU, 2009)

The research report *How are Higher Education Career Services Experiencing the Recession?* focused on how university careers services think the recession has affected graduate vacancies and what kinds of strategies final year students and recent graduates have adopted in response to the recession. The research comprised of an online survey of university careers services.

Overall, 78% of careers advisers consulted said that the number of job vacancies they were advertising had decreased due to the recession. About 9% said there has been no change and 4% said that job vacancies have increased.

However, on their own these figures do not give the complete picture. The comments made by careers advisers describing the kinds of employers they are dealing with suggested that there are a number of 'trends' in the kinds of vacancies being advertised.

Observations made by careers advisers included:

- No change in the kinds of employers advertising but fewer vacancies
- A change in the size of the employers advertising vacancies or contacting careers services about graduates:
 - Fewer large national employers
 - More small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- A change in the kind of employers advertising vacancies or contacting careers services about graduates:
 - More community/voluntary organisations
 - More local employers
- More of an impact on some sectors than others. Many had seen a decline in the number of vacancies being advertised by firms in banking, finance, law and construction, but reported that other sectors, such as the public sector, social care, education and engineering, were still going strong.

The survey also explored the kinds of strategies advisers had seen students adopting in response to the recession, and also whether they think the number of final year students using their careers service has gone up or down.

Only a third reported that the number of students using careers services had increased. Another third of the careers advisers said there was no change in the number of students using the careers services, and 17% felt that there had actually been a decrease as a result of the recession.

Some students had actively tried to 'make themselves more employable' in an attempt to compete effectively within the existing labour market, some students had tried to find ways of 'riding out the storm' in order to postpone finding a job until the economy is less turbulent, and some students had been 'bewildered at the lack of opportunities' and had given up any notion of finding a job altogether.

The strategies that final year students were adopting in response to the recession included: continuing studies (81%); getting more work experience (63%); and engaging in voluntary work (42%).

The survey also asked the careers advisors what their 'top tips for students graduating in 2009' were. This included a section which recommended that job seekers build their CVs through work experience and volunteering. It said 'do something with your time – volunteering is impressive on any CV,' and 'remember that voluntary/temporary work might even lead to a permanent paid position.'

6.2 Weathering the Recession – Young People's Experiences of the Recession (British Youth Council, 2010)

This report from the British Youth Council looked into young people's experiences during the recession and what impact the recession had had upon them. The research was conducted through an online survey.

The findings of this survey were categorised into five key areas:

- 1) Young people are still planning for employment despite gloomy forecasts
 - Two thirds of young people have a career or ideal job in mind for the future
 - Eight out of ten young people studying full time feel confident that they will be able to move on with their future plans
 - Three quarters of young people are happy with what they are doing – whether this is work, training or study
 - 34% of unemployed young people felt pessimistic about their chances of getting work in the near future
 - Most unemployed young people (74%) felt the main barrier to them getting work was the amount of jobs available, coupled with their lack of experience (57%)
- 2) Young people are taking action to "recession-proof" their lives
 - With huge levels of youth unemployment and high competition for jobs it appears that young people are handling these situations in a practical way and putting lots of effort into building a better future for themselves; whether this be through building a better CV or university application or taking measures to recession-proof their job
 - Two thirds of employed young people believe they have opportunities to progress in their jobs but one third do not feel they have job security
 - Eight out of ten employed young people have taken measures to "recession proof" their job with 44% going beyond basic job responsibilities and 9% not taking holiday
- 3) Young people's saving plans are overshadowed by the need to pay bills and debts
 - Nearly two thirds of young people (63%) say they save money regularly
 - Half of young people say bill payments have become more of an issue for either themselves or their parents/carers/guardians
 - Half of respondents say debt features in their lives, predominantly student loans, overdrafts, credit cards and store cards
 - A third of young people are unhappy with the state of their finances
- 4) Costs are a barrier to leisure and sport activities

- The survey has found that young people are still doing lots of positive things with their leisure time in the recession but seven out of ten young people say cost is holding them back from participating in organised activities
- 5) Young people prioritise “new job opportunities” as their preferred Government recession initiatives for young people
- When asked to rate 12 government initiatives on how helpful they could be to young people, the promotion of volunteering opportunities came fifth, with creation of new jobs, creating more apprenticeships, funding to stay in education and funding to support internships being the four initiatives with the highest importance attached

6.3 *Volunteering in the Recession: Outline Report for the Recession Summit (Volunteering England, 2010)*

This outline report was compiled by Volunteering England and was drawn up from reports from Volunteering England staff, internal reports, and from press coverage.

It reports a major increase in volunteering seen through an upturn in enquiries about volunteering and in numbers of volunteers taken on. With a 30% year-on-year increase in enquiries and placements reported by Volunteer Centres in 2008-09 with nine out of ten Volunteer Centres seeing an increase in number of enquiries between March 2009 and August 2009.

Despite this, negative developments have arisen as increased demand places large stresses on volunteering services who have not received any additional funding. Problems are reported in finding enough placements to cope with all the enquiries and even in finding time to answer enquiries. Any negative experiences of volunteering could alienate thousands of potential volunteers, leaving a long-term negative impact.

Unemployed professionals who volunteer may be highly motivated to return to work, and volunteer-involving organisations are reported to be wary of taking them on in case they get re-employed and stop volunteering; one local study proposes that a more flexible approach is needed.

Positive steps were seen in: the Department for Work and Pension’s (DWP) volunteering brokerage programme to enable 34,000 people who have been unemployed for six months or more to take up volunteering opportunities as a means to stay in touch with the job market and improve their employment chances; Volunteer Centres running programmes on employability; and Volunteering England and Job Centre Plus reaching an understanding to promote working relationships between the two organisations.

The report identifies ‘crisis points’ in volunteering at the time when it says its value has become most apparent in assisting the national economy and contributing to social policy goals. A deep concern is identified in fitting the supply of volunteering opportunities to demand from would-be volunteers. Thousands of people may be turned off volunteering because when they seek to offer themselves, no-one can make the time to talk or find them an opportunity. Others may be taken on to under-resourced programmes which leave them dissatisfied and less likely to volunteer again.

It goes on to say that the ‘crisis points’ in the volunteering system can be tackled through increased investment at a local level and from policy sectors as well as the creation and diversification of volunteering opportunities.

6.4 *Recognise and respect us – Overcoming barriers to youth volunteering (British Youth Council, 2008/2009)*

This research was conducted in 2008 with the aim of looking to overcome barriers to volunteering for young people. The methodology used a mix of online and paper based questionnaires, in-depth telephone interviews and focus groups to talk to a diverse group of 12-26 year olds from across the UK.

The main barriers to volunteering are “cost”, “knowing what is available” and “time”. The research identified a number of barriers to volunteering, but the most significant appeared to be cost; young people commented that they were worried about the costs associated with volunteering for example having to pay for their own travel and accommodation.

The research reveals that to help overcome barriers to volunteering, there needs to be a move towards better remuneration for volunteer expenses and more formal recognition of the time they put into volunteering.

The research identifies the need for more flexible volunteering opportunities and better information, peer-marketing and promotion of the volunteering opportunities available.

The majority of young people are engaging in both formal and informal volunteering activities. (Formal volunteering was defined as getting involved in community type projects or in the work of organisations compared to informal volunteering which can involve helping friends and relatives with chores like shopping or gardening). The majority of respondents are volunteering every week.

6.5 *Volunteering among groups deemed at risk of social exclusion (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2008)*

This research bulletin was part of a series published by the Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) to explore and disseminate aspects of ‘Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving’ (2007).

The bulletin defined those at risk of social exclusion as individuals who belong to certain black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, have a disability or limiting, long-term illness, or have no formal qualifications.

Among the groups deemed at risk of social exclusion the level of regular formal volunteering in the previous twelve months was 32 per cent, as compared to 42 per cent for those not at risk.

Volunteers from at risk groups were overrepresented in the voluntary and community sector, and underrepresented in the public and private sectors. They were more likely than the core sample to volunteer in religious organisations (although this was almost wholly attributable to BME groups), and also in the field of health and disability, particularly those volunteers with a life-limiting illness. Volunteers with a life-limiting illness were also overrepresented in local community groups. This may be attributable to people being involved in self-help groups relating to their disability.

Volunteers from all at risk groups were underrepresented in sports volunteering and were relatively excluded from volunteering in the conservation field

At risk groups were less likely than the core sample to volunteer in roles requiring managerial and/or organisational skills. Those with no qualifications were unlikely to be involved as a committee member. Only 17 per cent of Asian volunteers were involved in this capacity. Whereas Black people were more likely to help by organising or running events, relatively few (35%) of those with no qualifications were involved in this way.

Generally at risk groups' motivations for volunteering were similar to those of the core sample. However, at risk groups were more likely to start volunteering as part of their religious belief, or because they saw a need in the community. The difference is largely attributable to the high proportion of Asian and Black people actively practising their religion. Asian and Black volunteers were more likely to cite a need in the community as a reason for starting to volunteer. This was also a high motivating factor for 39 per cent of volunteers with a life-limiting illness.

Volunteers with no qualifications or a life-limiting illness were more likely to recognise the personal benefits of volunteering than those not at risk of exclusion. Members of at risk groups were more likely to cite personal achievement, gaining new skills and enhanced employability as a benefit. Volunteering may be perceived as a more accessible way of gaining skills and experience, which is particularly important for entry into the labour market for these groups.

At risk groups were less likely to cite not having enough spare time as a reason for not volunteering, perhaps because a higher proportion were not in employment. Those with a life-limiting illness, and to lesser extent, with no qualifications were more likely to cite illness or disability, and/or being too old as a reason for not volunteering.

6.6 *Young people speak out: attitudes to, and perceptions of, full-time volunteering (v, 2009)*

This report used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to talk to young people aged 16-25 in England, to explore their views and experiences relating to volunteering, in areas such as motivations, barriers and within the context of the current economic climate.

When asked how they felt about the prospect of volunteering, unpaid, on a full-time basis, five percent of young people said they were planning to volunteer full time in the future. Around three in ten (31%) said they might consider volunteering full time at some stage in the future, but a similar proportion (30%) said they would never consider it and a third (34%) said they did not know whether or not they would consider it.

Gaining work experience would be the key draw of full-time volunteering for many, and is particularly important for younger groups with little or no work experience. The research highlighted young people's interest in training and being able to show references on CVs from volunteer organisations, particularly among groups with no formal qualifications.

Some participants made a distinction between work experience and volunteering: they felt internships or unpaid work experience were likely to be more valuable in forwarding their career, while they associated volunteering with more traditional (and less useful in terms of career) types of volunteer work.

The report says that ensuring that the benefits of volunteering with respect to gaining work experience, accreditation and training are effectively conveyed to young people are key areas which need to be addressed.

Financial concerns are a major barrier to involvement in full-time volunteering, and support with finances was seen as more important than other types of support in making volunteering full time a practical possibility. Realistically, many young people cannot volunteer full time due to their financial circumstances, and exploring ways that attractive financial support packages can be made available to young people would also be of obvious help.

There are specific needs to address among particular groups of young people. For example, the possible loss of benefits was a key concern for unemployed and disabled young people.

Over half (57%) of young people who took part in the online survey believed their peers would be more likely to consider volunteering as a result of rising unemployment.

The EET (in Employment, Education or Training) group participants felt that the recession, and a subsequently more challenging jobs market, may lead to graduates feeling they need to start looking for paid work as soon as they leave university, rather than taking time out for other things like travelling or volunteering.

Elsewhere in the online survey we asked young people who did not currently volunteer, and who were not planning to do so, what might encourage them to consider volunteering full time. A quarter (25%) said 'if I couldn't find a job' they might consider volunteering and 12% if they lost their job. Taken together, the findings suggest that volunteering may become increasingly appealing to some young people who cannot find work.

Peer group advocacy appears to be a particularly effective way of engaging young people and conveying the benefits of full-time volunteer work. During the group discussions, many who had been uninterested in volunteering at the start of the discussions became much more enthused when they had discussed volunteering with other participants who had experience of volunteering. The group participants also stressed that they would prefer to hear about volunteering opportunities from their peers rather than older people who they would find it more difficult to relate to.

7. Appendices

7.1 Participant profiles

7.1.1 Focus Groups





The table below presents the profiles of young people who took part in the online focus groups.

13-15 Vols	13-15 Non-Vols	16-19 Vols	16-19 Non-Vols
All at School		Majority in education (school, uni and college); working P/T; NEET	
Good mix across gender, region and ethnicity; Most Non-volunteers 'never volunteered' but also some 'volunteered before'			

Participants in the focus groups were selected from a pool of nearly 400 respondents to an initial recruitment survey. The recruitment of participants aimed at an overall spread of socio-demographic characteristics as described in the table above.

7.1.2 Video Diaries

The table below presents the profiles of young people who took part in the video reports.

 14 Vol	 13 Non-Vol	 18 Vol	 19 Non-Vol
Some vol experience	Never volunteered, positive perceptions	Extensive vol experience / promotion	Vol over 3 years ago – time as barrier
School	School	College	University

7.2 Online Survey

This section provides information on the socio-demographic profiles of respondents to the online survey.

7.2.1 Age and Gender

	Total	Male	Female	13-15	16-17	18-19
Weighted ¹	1,500	750	750	643	429	429
Unweighted	1,518	698	820	588	488	442

7.2.2 Occupation

	School	College	University	App / Training	FT Job	PT Job	NEET
Weighted	728	511	165	25	42	132	45
Unweighted	689	570	163	24	42	144	48

7.2.3 Ethnic Groups

	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other
Weighted	1,165	116	85	66	27
Unweighted	1,176	118	91	64	28

7.2.4 Volunteering (by 3 age groups)

	Current	Previously	Never
Weighted	307	588	605
Unweighted	321	608	589

7.2.5 Regions

	N.East	N.West	Yorks	E.Mids	W.Mids	East	S.East	S.West	London
Weighted	57	195	157	122	167	118	292	140	250
Unweighted	55	196	163	123	160	120	297	144	260

¹ Data has been weighted for age and gender