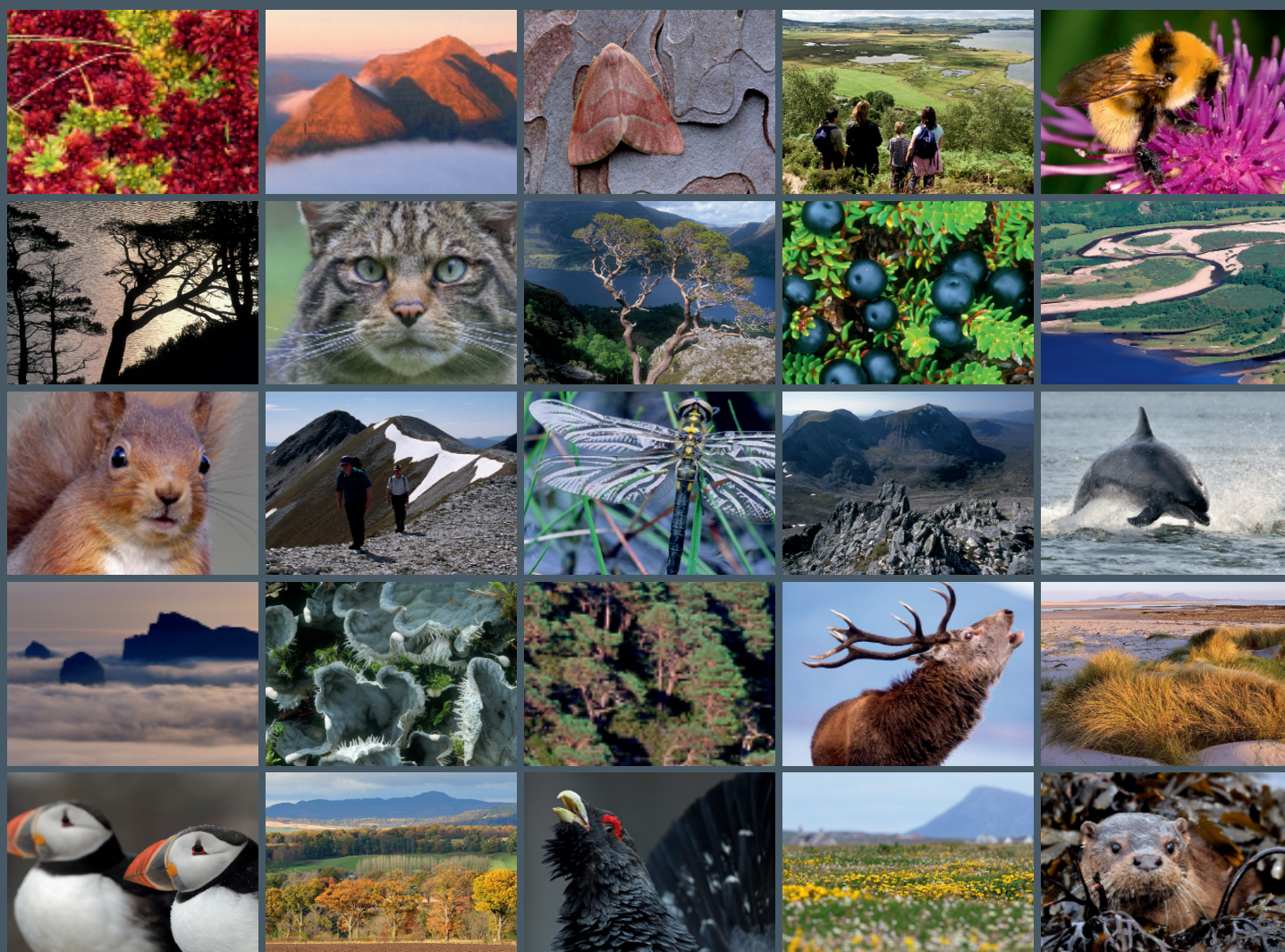


Investigating the roots of involvement in the natural heritage: towards a framework of person-centred outcomes in natural heritage volunteering





Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

ARCHIVE REPORT

Archive Report No. 022

Investigating the roots of involvement in the natural heritage: towards a framework of person-centred outcomes in natural heritage volunteering

For further information on this report please contact:

Alan Cameron
Scottish Natural Heritage
Great Glen House
INVERNESS
IV3 8NW
Telephone: 01463 725317
E-mail: alan.cameron@snh.gov.uk

This report should be quoted as:

Monsen-Elvik, K. & Reilly, C. 2008. Investigating the roots of involvement in the natural heritage: towards a framework of person-centred outcomes in natural heritage volunteering. *Scottish Natural Heritage Archive Report No. 022.*

This report, or any part of it, should not be reproduced without the permission of Scottish Natural Heritage. This permission will not be withheld unreasonably. The views expressed by the author(s) of this report should not be taken as the views and policies of Scottish Natural Heritage.

© Scottish Natural Heritage Year 2015.

Archive Reports

Scottish Natural Heritage is committed to making the findings of all of its research publicly available whenever possible.

In the past, a number of reports from staff and contractors were produced as paper documents and lodged in the SNH library or file systems. Some related to Site Condition Monitoring, others covered a range of subjects. These were not published as Commissioned Reports for a number of reasons.

In order to make these reports more available, we have decided to publish them online under the series title of **Archive Reports**. These will be numbered consecutively in the order that they are prepared for web publication. Their publication date, authors and title will be recorded as presented in the original report.

The Archive reports will be published as scanned PDF files of the original reports. They have not been subject to any new editing, formatting or other changes, other than the cover, title page and this page.

Many of the reports published as Archive Reports were produced by contractors and were originally intended as internal documents to inform our policy and advice. As a result they may contain historical information that is no longer current or accurate, and may contain views of contractors or staff which do not represent the current views and policy of SNH.



ARCHIVE REPORT

Summary

Investigating the roots of involvement in the natural heritage: person-centred outcomes, towards a framework of person-centred outcomes in natural heritage volunteering

Archive Report No. 022

Project No: F06AB11(a)

Contractor: Volunteer Development Scotland

Year of publication: 2015

Keywords

Environmental volunteering; motivating volunteers; recruiting volunteers; developing volunteers, managing volunteers.

Background

This research was undertaken during 2008 but remained unpublished until 2015. It is therefore inevitable that many of its findings and observations were out of date by the time of publication, and that details and facts should be treated with caution. Much has changed in the fast-moving field; in particular many of the organisations discussed have developed their practice in working with volunteers, often in line with the report's recommendations.

It was aimed at gaining a better understanding of what motivates volunteers in the natural heritage sector, how organisations in Scotland currently manage volunteers, how the sector compares with UK practice in volunteering more generally, and ultimately in helping SNH to support improvements in the volunteer experience. In practical terms, the aim was to help inform the development of SNH policy and practice in working with volunteers, through increasing understanding of how people become involved in volunteering for the natural heritage, and the ways in which volunteers can be encouraged to develop their involvement.

The study focused on investigating policy and practice in managing volunteers from the volunteer's perspective, and it makes recommendations aimed at improving the quality of the experience for volunteers through a strengthened focus on person-centred outcomes.

Main findings

- Volunteers' management has become more professionalised in recent years with the advent of accreditation and quality standards such as *Investing in Volunteers*.
- Small organisations in the main did not capture information on their volunteers beyond basic contact details. Larger organisations made use of a variety of databases and baseline studies to better understand their volunteers.
- Across the board, organisations felt that recruitment was not a problem for them, and in fact the largest organisations said that their resources were their only limitation in involving people.

- While most organisations felt that initial recruitment was unproblematic, many identified that they ‘could do better’ on volunteer retention.
- Some organisations could not offer progression opportunities due to lack of capacity. Some larger organisations guaranteed that volunteers applying for paid work will get an interview;
- There were felt to be gaps in training for volunteers, and for volunteers’ managers in the sector; many organisations received information from their local Volunteer Centre or Volunteer Development Scotland on training but couldn’t always afford to attend.

For further information on this project contact:

Alan Cameron, Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, Inverness, IV3 8NW.

Tel: 01463 725317 or alan.cameron@snh.gov.uk

For further information on the SNH Research & Technical Support Programme contact:

Knowledge & Information Unit, Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, Inverness, IV3 8NW.

Tel: 01463 725000 or research@snh.gov.uk

Table of Contents	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND	2
3. DEFINITIONS	3
4. METHODOLOGY	4
4.1 Literature search	4
4.2 Telephone interviews	4
5. OVERVIEW OF UK PRACTICE	5
6. THE NATURAL HERITAGE SECTOR	9
6.1 The 'natural heritage volunteer'	9
6.2 The knowledge gaps	9
6.3 Outcome-based approaches	10
6.4 'Natural heritage host bodies'	11
6.5 Natural heritage in the context of general volunteering	12
6.6 The potential roles of SNH	12
7. CONCLUSIONS	14
8. RECOMMENDATIONS	15
9. REFERENCES	16
10. RESOURCES	17
APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS	18
APPENDIX 2: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	19

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2008 Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) were commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to undertake research into person-centred outcomes in natural heritage volunteering. This research aims to identify lessons from UK practice which can be applied to the natural heritage sector, as well as an understanding of current practice in the Scottish natural heritage sector.

The research specifically aims to:

- Examine current UK practice within the volunteering sector, specifically looking at recruitment, retention, and development of volunteers;
- Investigate, describe, and evaluate policy and practice in managing volunteers from the volunteer's perspective, and make recommendations for the natural heritage sector based on this evaluation;
- Make recommendations on how volunteer-centred approaches to managing volunteers (based on outcomes for individuals) may be applied to broaden participation in, and improve the quality of, volunteering in the natural heritage;

2. BACKGROUND

Of the 32% of adults in Scotland who volunteer (Volunteer Development Scotland 2007b), 12% are involved with 'working in the environment'. According to statistics from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations 2007), organisations in Scotland relating to the environment and animals make up 3% of the regulated (charities or mutuals) voluntary sector and are in receipt of 4% of the sector's income.

3. DEFINITIONS

Volunteering

The definition used for this research is that used in the Scottish Executive (now Government) Volunteering Strategy: *“Volunteering is the giving of time and energy through a third party, which can bring measurable benefits to the volunteer, individual beneficiaries, groups and organisations, communities, the environment and society at large. It is a choice undertaken of one’s own free will, and is not motivated primarily for financial gain or for a wage or salary”*.

Volunteering in the natural heritage

Activities which encourage and support the conservation and improvement of, education and learning about, access to and enjoyment of the countryside, coastal waters and green spaces around cities and towns.

Volunteer involving organisation

Any organisation, charity, group or club that involves volunteers in its work. Volunteer-involving organisations are found in the voluntary, public and private sectors.

Volunteers manager

Anyone who organises, leads, supports or co-ordinates volunteers. A volunteers manager may be a paid member of staff or an unpaid volunteer. A volunteers manager may hold a paid or voluntary post dedicated to volunteers management, or hold a paid or voluntary post which includes volunteers management as part of the role.

4. METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork for this research took place in March 2008. The following methodology was agreed with the SNH lead officer.

4.1 Literature search

In order to understand current practice within the UK volunteering 'sector', a literature search was carried out to identify relevant documents. This was both a physical search of the VDS library (the largest single collection of volunteering specific materials in Scotland), and an electronic search of relevant online libraries and websites. A resource list is included in the report.

4.2 Telephone interviews

A range of organisations involving volunteers in the natural heritage were selected to take part. These organisations covered a wide range of natural heritage activities; e.g. local bird recording, campaigning, and more traditional forms of 'hands on' environmental work. Organisations were selected from both the Forum for Environmental Voluntary Action (FEVA) membership, and from the natural heritage database developed by VDS for SNH as part of an audit of natural heritage volunteering in Scotland (Volunteer Development Scotland 2007a). Organisations of various sizes from the private, public and voluntary sectors, and with various specialisms took part. Both a list of participant organisations and the telephone interview outline are appended.

5. OVERVIEW OF UK PRACTICE

Recruitment of the right people is viewed as one of the basic challenges of working with volunteers (Volunteering England, n.d). In small volunteer-led groups it was found that personal contact was the main route: 'recruitment tended to rely on word of mouth or personal contact. This could however, risk excluding those outside the immediate social and professional networks of existing volunteers' (Institute for Volunteering Research 2008a). In small local groups, it is felt that the formalised procedures of recruitment; application forms, interviews and inductions were ineffective. However, in larger organisations, good practice takes a more structured format; involving staff across the organisation and ensuring policies for volunteer involvement are in place and adhered to. As volunteers move away from traditional altruism to seeking experiences and skill gain, it has become more important for organisations to consider the interests and motivations of volunteers.

Retention of volunteers is viewed as the next step once volunteers are recruited. A review of retention literature carried out in 2003 (Locke *et al.* 2003) identified some factors that encourage volunteers to stay:

- allowing some autonomy,
- appreciation,
- investment in volunteers, and
- friendships.

Alternatively, volunteers are likely to leave an organisation if they have:

- negative experiences,
- feel overburdened or undervalued, or
- find the costs of volunteering too high.

The most positive volunteer experiences happen when there is 'congruence between the goals of the organisation and those of the individual'. It is also recognised that 'retention' is not always beneficial to the organisation or the volunteer. The organisation always needs new input and may find long term volunteers resistant to change, while individuals may need new experiences to increase their skills and can benefit from a change.

Volunteer development is a factor in retention, but is also a consideration in its own right. Well trained, supported volunteers carry out their roles effectively and may be more likely to remain with an organisation. During induction, if a volunteer's motivations and interests are discussed, training and development can be focussed towards meeting these. Ongoing support which involves reviewing achievements and some form of personal development planning can ensure that volunteers feel appreciated.

Locke *et al* (2003) states that 'different types of organisation, activity and volunteer will have different implications for policy and practice'.

A current issue in the volunteering 'sector' is around the impact of various types of legislation on volunteering (Institute for Volunteering Research 2008b). Health and safety and child protection legislation have particular impacts on the workload of an organisation in preparing volunteers to take part in activities. Legislation can both give and take responsibility; in some cases increasing the burden on leaders, and perhaps taking responsibility from volunteers.

Another issue is the impact of funding. As organisations grow, they need funding for paid staff or for project work. Funding can mean that organisations have to chase 'prescribed outcomes and targets' which can take the focus away from the core work of the organisation.

In one of the most recent comprehensive reviews of the ‘current state of volunteering in the UK’, Colin Rochester (2006) reviews understanding of volunteering across both practitioner and academic research in an attempt to pin down the ever changing themes and traditions within volunteering. Rochester defines a range of ‘volunteer types’, including the long term volunteer, the short term volunteer, the occasional episodic volunteer and the interim volunteer. Rochester also makes mention of Danson’s ‘transitional volunteer’ who uses volunteering as a path to other forms of activity, e.g. a start in, or return to, the labour market. An analysis of the difference between ‘classic’ and ‘new’ volunteerism is shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Classic and new volunteerism

	Classic volunteerism	New volunteerism
Culture	Identifies with traditional cultural norms	Individualisation
Choice of organisation	Based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional cultural identities • great loyalty • delegated leadership • solid structure 	Personal interest Weak ties Decentralised structure Loose networks
Choice of field of action	Based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional cultural identities • inclusion and exclusion 	Perception of new biographical similarities Taste for topical issues Dialogue between global and local
Choice of activity	Based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional cultural identities • needs of the organisation • idealism 	Balance between personal preference and organisation’s needs Cost/benefit analysis Pragmatic
Length and intensity of commitment	Long term (unlimited in time) Regular Unconditional	Short term (clearly limited in time) Irregular or erratic Conditional
Relationship with the beneficiary	Unilateral, ‘altruistic’, ‘selfless’	Reciprocal

Source: Rochester, 2006 p8

Each of these volunteer types is visible in natural heritage volunteering; from the species surveyors who are involved over a lifetime, to the campaigning volunteer who has a long term commitment to the cause, but carefully chooses occasions on which to help out. In addition, work placements and government supported placements through schemes such as New Deal (not themselves volunteers) take place across the sector, assisting individuals to achieve the skills and experience they need to move on to paid employment.

Rochester describes a move away from the traditional, altruistic volunteer, to the more reciprocal forms of volunteering where growth of skills and employment prospects are an active consideration in the search for volunteering opportunities. Volunteering is no longer seen simply as a way of passing time; there is a move towards a more cause focused experience: ‘...growing number of cause driven volunteers; rather than treating volunteering as a means of spending time, people are increasingly seeking specific experiences and rewards’. For young people in Scotland (aged 16 – 25), there are programmes which reward volunteering such as the VDS MV Awards, which recognise volunteering of 50, 100 and 200 hours. The recently launched Volunteering Passport is a free online resource where young

people can track their volunteering experience including access to a volunteering log, journal, and personal development plan. There are plans underway to extend this passport tool to other age groups so that all volunteers can access tools to help them make the most of their volunteer experiences.

With specific experiences being in demand, motivations to become and remain involved seem to be more complex than ever: 'the cocktail of motives that lead people to engage in volunteering may be very different from the factors that maintain their involvement' (Rochester, 2006). This has implications for the organisations involving volunteers as they try to balance meeting the needs of volunteers with meeting their own aims and objectives. What is consistently clear however is that there remains a narrow view of volunteering amongst those who are not involved. Volunteering is still viewed in some quarters as a female, middle aged, middle class activity.

The IVR (Institute for Volunteering Research 2007) literature review on volunteering in the natural outdoors indicates that volunteering in this particular field fits into the Davis-Smith typology of volunteering; mutual aid or self-help, philanthropy, participation and advocacy. It is clear that the range of volunteering activities undertaken under the natural heritage umbrella fit into one or other of these, e.g. community gardening and environmental activism.

According to the IVR literature review, the motivations of volunteers include; a love of nature, environmental awareness, social and cultural motives and a wish to gain skills and employment. It is believed that 'environmental awareness often appears to be closely linked to wider lifestyle choices of those that volunteer'. This infers that those who are interested in the environment in a wider sense are more likely to be aware of, and seek to meet, environmental needs in a voluntary capacity. In addition to existing awareness leading to voluntary action; 'there appears to be evidence to suggest that volunteering in the natural heritage can help to increase the environmental awareness of those that take part in the activities'. The review also uncovers issues around a 'lack of diversity in the age of volunteers within the natural outdoors and a 'lack of ethnic diversity'.

Volunteers' management has become more professionalised in recent years with the advent of accreditation and quality standards such as Investing in Volunteers (IiV). 'IiV is the UK quality standard for organisations involving volunteers in their work. The standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering' (Investing in Volunteers 2008). While this may be appropriate for large, formally organised organisations with paid staff responsible for volunteers, it can prove to be overly resource heavy for smaller, less formal organisations. The provision of well supported, rewarding and productive volunteer roles is however no less important in smaller organisations, but provision of these may take 'a leadership, rather than management, focus' (Rochester, 2006). There is concern that this professionalisation, and the resulting need for resources can impact on the ability to deliver the fundamental activities of the organisation: 'the formalisation and professionalisation of voluntary sector organisations...has both reduced the scope of these activities and raised barriers against involvement in them' (Rochester, 2006).

The literature indicates that natural heritage volunteering specifically suffers from a lack of funding with regard to volunteer management capacity. Although this may not specifically impact on the existence of volunteers' management, it has an 'influence on the consistency and quality of volunteer support provided and the sustainability of some community projects' (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007). Smaller projects are more generally viewed to have more volunteers in leadership roles, few or no 'selection criteria', and less formal training. The focus in such organisations is recruiting individuals with an interest in the organisation's issues and/or activities to help with specific tasks which meet organisational aims. There is evidence in some small organisations of a core of long term volunteers

supported in specific activities by a larger pool of short term volunteers. The key issue with this scenario is ensuring that the core do not experience 'burnout' from high levels of sustained responsibility. A method of checking the impact of volunteering on stakeholders, including on the volunteers themselves, is the Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit, a tool developed by the Institute for Volunteering Research. The toolkit is made up of a set of pre-designed tools which can help organisations to investigate the impact of volunteering through consultation with volunteers, paid staff, service users and the wider community, categorised by five capitals – social, physical, cultural, economic and human.

Where organisations are linked to a larger national organisation, by funding or association, there can be clashes between pressure from the national body for formalised structures and processes, and 'grassroots participation at the local level' (Rochester, 2006).

6. THE NATURAL HERITAGE SECTOR

The research engaged with eleven volunteer involving organisations across Scotland. These included non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private companies and charities. Smaller organisations involved volunteers in specific types of work, while larger organisations had volunteers undertaking a wide range of tasks in support of their work. This ranged from hands on conservation to administration and from biological survey work to presentations on behalf of the organisation. Some organisations worked in partnership with others to manage volunteers and most had some relationship, direct or indirect with SNH; as a funded organisation or project, via a concordat or through links such as the Forum for Environmental Voluntary Action (FEVA).

6.1 The 'natural heritage volunteer'

Across the range of organisations, it is clear that there is no one distinct 'natural heritage volunteer'. Some activities or organisations seem to appeal to different demographics, but across the board, a good range of the population is represented and most have some level of interest in the environment. Where volunteering opportunities involved hands-on conservation work, those involved had a keen interest in being outdoors and working in the environment. Organisations working on a social agenda seemed to have the widest range of involvement; from young people to long-term unemployed and from those with mental ill health to student placements. Although information wasn't always gathered on volunteers, most organisations were able to give a sense of their main demographic which was older in the case of small local organisations and some survey work, professional in the case of some campaigning work and a wide mix in the more hands-on work.

One large charitable organisation had gathered data on volunteer reasons for starting with them. The main reason was around the organisation itself, stated by around a third of volunteers, but the other reasons were quite generic – to do something different, gain new skills, start a career in conservation. It was felt that these could be furthered in any environmental organisation, but they had chosen that one, perhaps due to awareness or publicity.

Most volunteers in the natural heritage are attributed with:

- caring about the environment,
- seeing things that need done and wanting to contribute,
- a loyalty to the aims of the particular organisation, and
- wanting to do something about the issues that concern them.

Some are seen to be purely altruistic in wanting to help the environment as an end in itself, while others want to help the environment while helping themselves in gaining skills for work, or to open up other opportunities. Some also had an environmental focus in their paid work, and brought associated skills and experience to their volunteering. Volunteers were also involved in other organisations with or without an environmental focus.

6.2 The knowledge gaps

Small organisations in the main did not capture information on their volunteers beyond basic contact details. Larger organisations made use of a variety of databases and baseline studies to better understand their volunteers. One large charity in particular had a comprehensive database of volunteers, which allowed for targeting mailings and long term volunteer tracking. This, coupled with additional research, provided rich data on the motivations, aspirations and expectations of volunteers which could be translated into practice. It was recognised that the capture of such data would assist organisations to

evaluate progress against targets, direct their work, and provide an opportunity for them to promote equality.

Many organisations did some form of counting of volunteer effort. Some calculated volunteer days or hours for use in funding applications or reports. It was felt that volunteer effort kept most organisations going; they were indispensable in helping the organisation to meet its aims.

6.3 Outcome-based approaches

Across all organisations, no matter what size, word of mouth was a well-used and successful recruitment tool. In small local organisations, this was the only means used, and was found to be successful in providing enough volunteers for the tasks being completed. Where organisations were locality based, it was felt that local people were aware of the organisation and its activities, and tended to approach when they wanted to help out. Where advertising had been used, general advertising, for example through the local paper was seen to be less successful than targeted advertising through existing environmental groups or University students on relevant courses. Some larger organisations made use of member distribution lists to alert members to campaigns or activities where volunteers were needed. This was found to be successful as it allowed individuals to opt in and out of volunteering based on their time availability or interest in a particular cause. Volunteer Centres were widely used for recruitment, and a number of the larger organisations had involved Project Scotland volunteers. Others had links with local job centres and took in New Deal participants (as both placements and volunteers). Websites were also well utilised means of recruitment, and some organisations had particularly detailed volunteer information available online for prospective volunteers to read as well as advance programmes of activities. Recruitment materials were viewed as an important means of communicating what was involved in a particular role. Some organisations had a steady stream of volunteers approaching them due to their profile, or their knowledge of work. Some organisations had students approaching for work experience: some could accommodate this, while others were unable as their activities did not lend them to this type of involvement.

Across the board, organisations felt that recruitment was not a problem for them, and in fact the largest organisations said that their resources were their only limitation in involving people. One participant linked to the 'asking research' carried out by VDS (Baird, 2005) - which found that people were willing to volunteer, but didn't feel they had been asked - he felt that his organisation could 'ask' many more people if they had more resources to manage and facilitate volunteering. Others agreed that there was a great deal of potential, but a lack of resources left that potential untapped. Other large organisations felt that a lack of centralised volunteer co-ordination limited the development of their volunteer programme. In some other organisations, where there was a dedicated post; it had lain empty for a significant period of time, meaning that volunteering was more 'ticking along' than being proactively developed. Volunteers management was not such a consideration in the smaller local organisations, where everyone generally 'mucked in' on a project by project basis, and trustees took a leadership role, supporting new volunteers, and dealing with general volunteering issues. The majority of smaller organisations had a main contact in a co-ordinating role, some paid, some unpaid. In biological survey and recording organisations, this person provided a point of support for surveyors and helped collate data across the organisation.

Where organisations worked on a project basis, 'retention' of volunteers in its traditional sense was not a consideration. For organisations that had ongoing volunteering needs, there was a clear understanding of the policies and practices that kept volunteers' interest. This included the simple 'thank you', volunteer events, service awards, training and regular communication. Many organisations (both community and national) had regular newsletter

communication with members or volunteers which included volunteer contributions. As well as providing the functional information on future work, these contributed to volunteers feeling part of a team or community of interest. There was recognition that good volunteering opportunities were the way to keep volunteers. Where organisations had a large number of similar projects, they were working towards standardised delivery across projects. While most organisations felt that initial recruitment was unproblematic, many identified that they 'could do better' on volunteer retention. In office based situations, it was felt to be important that volunteers felt part of the wider staff team. The main reasons for volunteers ceasing volunteering included;

- moving into paid work,
- changing life circumstances,
- people leaving the area, and
- having achieved what they set out to achieve with the organisation.

Where volunteers were leaving an organisation, there were attempts to gather data on the reasons why so that any issues with organisational practice could be identified. In the main, it was found that there wasn't a great deal of negative feedback, although it was identified that volunteers may not want to be wholly honest about their reasons.

Across all organisations, it was recognised that there were a number of volunteers whose main motivation was to move into paid employment in the environmental sector. Where this motivation was recognised at volunteer induction, this was catered for within the organisation to ensure a good mix of skills and experiences were gained. In the bigger environmental organisations, individuals were offered progression within their volunteering, perhaps to being a volunteer leader themselves or to other, sometimes unofficial, elevated roles e.g. deputy reserve supervisor. It was recognised however, that volunteers should be treated as individuals and the motivations of each taken into account. It was felt that those who sought extra responsibility, and demonstrated motivation to progress were rewarded accordingly although the option for this depended on the capacity of the organisation and the willingness of the direct volunteer manager. In the organisations carrying out biological survey and recording work, there were still progression opportunities for individuals to become local leaders, or area recorders. Some organisations could not offer progression opportunities due to lack of capacity. Some larger organisations guarantee that volunteers applying for paid work will get an interview; others felt that the volunteering experience made them more likely to get an interview. There were various examples of individuals moving into paid work directly from volunteering. In some cases, volunteering continued on but in others it did not, particularly where the paid work was with a different organisation. It was suggested that the long hours characteristic of the environmental sector did not leave much time for volunteering, or that, once an individual had paid employment which met their environmental interests, they may be keen to volunteer in a different field. Some organisations had a policy of referring volunteers on to other opportunities that might interest them, although this was based on the referrer's knowledge of organisations in the sector.

The majority of organisations, in addition to having 'hands-on' volunteers, had volunteers undertaking office based tasks. In some cases, this was structured based on organisational need, but in others it was more *ad hoc*, with members dropping in to do mailings and take enquiries when they had free time. Some volunteers, upon becoming involved had expressed surprise at the unstructured nature, as they had set days in previous volunteering posts but the organisations involved were keen to provide flexibility.

6.4 'Natural heritage host bodies'

The types of host bodies that involve volunteers are diverse. This research has covered a range of these in the hope of better understanding what impact the host body type has on

the volunteer experience. Findings indicate that the way volunteers are managed differs across organisations of different sizes and activities. Small local organisations deal with volunteers in a more informal manner, which seems to attract an older set of volunteers. Larger national organisations attract a much wider range of people, and it seems that volunteers seeking progression into an environmental career choose organisations that are able to provide this, and are very clear of their motivations upon entering the organisation. Where organisations are unable to meet volunteer needs, they use their knowledge of the sector to refer individuals onto more suitable opportunities.

6.5 Natural heritage in the context of general volunteering

The environmental sector was viewed to be growing and it was felt that growth was only limited by capacity. It was indicated across the board that while there remained an outward image of the sector as 'wearing wellies and getting dirty', this was starting to alter as environment and associated issues became more prominent on the policy agenda. Many of the organisations who participated in the research were not just about, or didn't involve, getting dirty. Many respondents felt that the sector had a high profile, positive connotations and had unique selling points. Others felt that there was still some negative imagery about white, affluent older people although most organisations' knowledge of their volunteers indicated that this was not the case in reality. It was suggested that if people felt it was for them and wasn't just about getting dirty, then they might be persuaded to take part. There was viewed to not really be an environmental volunteering 'brand' and that the sector didn't always have a cohesive feel.

While natural heritage volunteering was viewed to have many rewards in common with wider volunteering such as enhanced confidence, skills development and meeting new people, there were additional rewards specific to the sector. These included; being outside, mental and physical health benefits, visiting reserves and doing something constructive.

Some barriers were similar to those within wider volunteering such as the need for Disclosure, time, confidence and lack of knowledge. There were also some barriers that were specific to the sector, which included; age, timing of opportunities, finding out what is going on, health/safety/insurance and perception of the activities or the people involved.

The Disclosure and safety issues seemed to have more impact at local level which led to fewer young people becoming involved and therefore not developing an interest in environmental work at so early an age. Schools were an option for involving younger groups, but this was dependant on the interests of local teachers. Some organisations felt that there was a danger in not enthusing young people about the natural environment at an early age, and indeed research suggests that 30% of adults started volunteering at school age (Volunteer Development Scotland 2005).

6.6 The potential roles of SNH

SNH currently provides funding, or has in the past, to some of the organisations consulted. There was feedback around the availability of long term funding which would demonstrate a commitment to projects and 'show support, respect and value to the work'. There were some quite specific issues in some organisations around a clash between their interests and the targets set by funders such as SNH. It was felt that SNH had a key role to play in supporting projects through funding or matched funding support.

SNH was viewed by many to provide useful good practice support and research on the issues affecting the sector. It was felt that this should continue, although there were some reservations about funding research instead of funding projects that could deliver on

volunteering. SNH's role was seen as showcasing the sector, while supporting those who directly involved volunteers.

There were felt to be gaps in training for volunteers, and volunteers' managers in the sector; many organisations received information from their local Volunteer Centres (VC) or Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) on training but couldn't always afford to attend. SNH may have a role in provision or co-ordination of training for the sector that is affordable to all. In addition to training provision, volunteers managers in the sector would value opportunities to get together and on a similar note, to make funding available for organisations team building between staff and volunteers.

Many organisations had involved Project Scotland volunteers and felt it was unfortunate the scheme had lost funding. It was suggested that SNH might fund a similar project for the sector which would provide full time volunteers to the larger organisations who could make use of them.

It was identified that organisations sometimes had to refer volunteers onto other organisations and that this was done based on the knowledge of the volunteer manager. It was suggested that SNH might provide a web based one-stop-shop for potential volunteers, which categorises opportunities by organisation type and would also be a resource for the sector. A similar database, Volunteer Scotland, exists which brings together opportunities from across the 32 Volunteer Centres in Scotland. There is potential for SNH to work with VDS and the VCs to meet the specific needs of natural heritage organisations.

Small local organisations had concerns around bureaucracy and the impact of Disclosure on their ability to work with local young people.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Natural heritage volunteers have an interest in the environment, are typically involved in more than one organisation and carry out a range of activities to support the environment, beyond 'hands on' tasks.

Many younger volunteers are seeking a career in the natural heritage and therefore wish to use their volunteer experience to this end. Across the organisations involved, the ones which had these types of volunteers tended to be in a position to help them to gain relevant skills and experience by utilising outcome based approaches to meeting volunteer needs.

Organisations know who their volunteers are. In small organisations this is through one to one contact as detailed records are not kept while in larger organisations, central databases are used to track volunteers. Many organisations use volunteer data to attract funding, and some larger organisations use volunteer information to steer their agenda.

Word of mouth and targeted recruitment have brought most volunteers into natural heritage organisations. Organisations could involve more volunteers if they had the capacity; there is a feeling amongst larger organisations that there is untapped potential due to lack of resource.

A volunteer will have a different experience volunteering with the different types of organisations. In small local organisations they may be helping out alongside others and learning as they go. In larger organisations, they may be part of a hierarchy, led by more experienced volunteers, with opportunities for progression and development within that organisation, eventually perhaps leading to paid employment.

'Retention' of volunteers in the traditional sense does not seem to be such an issue in this sector as many volunteers sign up for information and then select to participate in activities of interest. In this case volunteers don't leave – they become inactive for a period but remain in contact with the organisation.

There is an opinion in the sector that natural heritage volunteering still has a 'beard and wellies' image although this is seen to be starting to wear off with the increasing coverage of environmental issues in the media and increasing interest by the government. It is felt that overall the image is positive and involvement would increase if it were clear that individuals could support the natural environment in ways other than 'getting dirty'.

Natural heritage volunteering has commonality with volunteering in general as far as rewards and barriers are concerned although there are some additional rewards and barriers that are specific to the environment. The barriers are not insurmountable by the sector.

There are clear roles for SNH in supporting the sector to improve the volunteer experience, particularly around support for volunteers' management training and funding for initiatives to support the sector.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that:

SNH support and facilitate networking between volunteer involving organisations in the natural heritage for the purpose of support and increased knowledge of volunteering opportunities, thereby enabling organisations to refer volunteers onto suitable opportunities where they are unable to meet specific needs.

Volunteer involving organisations continue to utilise and develop outcome based approaches to involving volunteers to further development within the sector.

Where relevant, organisations are supported to measure and evaluate volunteer involvement in relation to targets and outcomes.

Organisations are supported to suitably resource involving volunteers thereby 'tapping' the untapped potential that organisations recognise exists in the sector.

Work is undertaken to further remove the 'beard and wellies' image that natural heritage volunteering has, and to promote the existence of volunteer roles that don't fit this stereotype, yet are supportive of the natural environment.

Volunteer involving organisations are supported to remove the barriers to natural heritage volunteering through learning from the wider sector.

SNH support the existing good practice in the sector and seek to improve practice by facilitating access to volunteers management training and support.

9. REFERENCES

Baird, L. 2005. The role of asking. Volunteer Development Scotland, Stirling.

Investing in Volunteers. 2008. Investing in Volunteers home [online] Available at <http://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk> [Accessed: 5 April 2008].

Institute for Volunteering Research. 2007. Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland: A literature review. Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

Institute for Volunteering Research. 2008a. Volunteering to lead: a study of leadership in small volunteer-led groups. Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

Institute for Volunteering Research. 2008b. The impact of public policy on volunteering in community based organisations. Institute for Volunteering Research, London.

Locke, M., Ellis, A., & Davis Smith, J. 2003. 'Hold on to what you've got: the volunteer retention literature'. *Voluntary Action*, 5(3): 81-100.

Rochester, C. 2006. Making sense of volunteering: A literature review. Volunteering England. London.

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. 2007. Scottish Voluntary Sector Statistics 2007. Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Edinburgh.

Volunteer Development Scotland. 2005. Young people volunteering. Volunteer Development Scotland, Stirling.

Volunteer Development Scotland. 2007a. Volunteering in the natural heritage: an audit and review of natural heritage volunteering in Scotland. *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 219 (ROAME No. F05NC07)*.

Volunteer Development Scotland. 2007b. Annual Statistics on Volunteering 2007. Volunteer Development Scotland, Stirling.

Volunteering England. n.d. The Recruitment Guide. Volunteering England, London.

10. RESOURCES

Investing in Volunteers (iV)

iV is the UK quality standard for organisations involving volunteers in their work. The standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

MV Awards

A programme which rewards volunteering by young people in Scotland (aged 16 – 25) by recognising volunteering of 50, 100 and 200 hours.

MV Volunteering Passport

The recently launched Volunteering Passport is a free online resource where young people can track their volunteering experience including access to a volunteering log, journal, and personal development plan. There are plans underway to extend this passport tool to other age groups so that all volunteers can access tools to help them make the most of their volunteer experiences.

National Occupational Standards in Managing Volunteers

Benchmarks of good practice which underpin both the National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQs) in Management of Volunteers.

SQA Awards

Work based awards that provide individuals with recognised accredited qualifications and opportunities to learn and develop skills in volunteers management. The awards are aligned with the National Occupational Standards in Managing Volunteers.

Student Volunteering Scotland Gold Awards

An awards programme which recognises excellence in student volunteering and involves students in the judging process.

Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit

A set of pre-designed tools which can help organisations to investigate the impact of volunteering through consultation with volunteers, paid staff, service users and the wider community, categorised by five capitals – social, physical, cultural, economic and human.

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Biggar and District Community Heritage
BTCV
Caithness Biodiversity Group
Friends of the Earth
Forestry Commission
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
RSPB
Scottish Badgers
Scottish Ornithologists
Scottish Wildlife Trust
WWF

APPENDIX 2: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Profile of the organisation?

Size (no. of vols)

Area of work

Recruitment, retention and management of volunteers

What approaches are taken?

What practice is this based on?

Are there any difficulties?

Are volunteers involved in self-assessment?

Opportunities for progression?

About the volunteers

What do we know about them?

Why do they get involved in environmental volunteering?

How is their involvement furthered over time?

Why/how do they cease environmental volunteering?

What do you know about?

Volunteer expectations, aspirations, motivations, values?

The routes into volunteering – any gateways or barriers?

And how is this taken into account?

What impact does your knowledge of ‘the natural heritage volunteer’ have on your volunteers’ management practices?

Natural Heritage Volunteering

What are the specific rewards in environmental volunteering?

What are the specific barriers in environmental volunteering?

What are volunteers’ perspective of policy and practice?

What do you think about the image, perception and branding of environmental volunteering as compared to the wider volunteering sector?

Improving Environmental Volunteering Project

Have you had any support from this project, or has it otherwise impacted on your work?

Scottish Natural Heritage

How can SNH support the sector to improve the volunteer experience?

What potential roles do SNH have in supporting and developing involvement?

www.snh.gov.uk

© Scottish Natural Heritage 2015
ISBN: 978-1-78391-304-6

Policy and Advice Directorate, Great Glen House,
Leachkin Road, Inverness IV3 8NW
T: 01463 725000

You can download a copy of this publication from the SNH website.



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad