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Implementing Russell Commission Recommendation 4

Report on a workshop for volunteering organisations

Held on 24th May 2007, DfES

Implementing Russell Commission Recommendation 4 **Report on a workshop for volunteering organisations** **24th May 2007, DfES**

On 24th May 2007, Changemakers and ContinYou, on behalf of the DfES and Cabinet Office, convened a workshop for volunteering organisations to discuss the implementation of Recommendation 4 of the Russell Commission. The workshop was chaired by Adam Nichols, Chief Executive of Changemakers.

Recommendation 4 states:

It should be commonplace for young people to volunteer whilst they are at school, college or in higher education. All education institutions should have a volunteering ethos. This will require:

- Better information on volunteering opportunities through access to the “portal” and targeted awareness campaigns;
- A stronger emphasis on volunteering within the citizenship curriculum and training for citizenship teachers;
- Making the most of the opportunities for volunteers within extended schools, community schools, and their equivalents, providing leadership on new volunteering roles for the schools sector as a whole;
- A new role for young volunteers working with local advisors to link schools, sixth-forms, further education colleges and higher education institutions with volunteer centres and local opportunity providers.

Recommendation 4 falls outside the remit of v, the Russell Commission implementation body.

The workshop was focused on those aspects of Recommendation 4 that relate to schools.

Invitees to the workshop were as follows:

- Russell Commission Team, Office of the Third Sector, Cabinet Office - Araba Webber
- Changemakers - Claire Aylett, Herbie Cooper and Adam Nichols
- ContinYou - Bill Malley
- CSV - Peter Hayes
- DfES Citizenship Team - Elaine Sweeney
- DfES Youth Strategy and Projects Team - Cath Rourke
- Duke of Edinburgh Award – Sarah Lindsall
- Fruitful Consulting - Graham Allcott
- Gemin-i.org - Henry Warren
- KPMG - Justine Bentham and Katie Briggs
- Mentoring and Befriending Foundation - Sarah Willy
- Princess Diana Memorial Award - Maggie Turner
- Prince's Trust – Ginny Lunn

- Student Volunteering England - Eleanor Wallace
- Time Bank - Dave Rinaldi and Anne Breivik
- v - Terry Ryall

This report provides a summary of the discussion amongst participants at the workshop. The discussion is divided into issues relating to stakeholders (schools, young people, communities and the third sector, employers, FE and HE institutions and policymakers), practical issues (accreditation/recognition and marketing/brand) and other issues. There is also an outline of and next steps agreed by participants.

We hope that this workshop will provide a catalyst for the implementation of Recommendation 4.

Stakeholders

Schools

There is currently a mismatch between the publicity and hype surrounding citizenship and how schools perceive it. In general, Citizenship is not a priority in schools.

Barriers often cited by schools include teacher time, senior management support, a skills gap, funding and resources, the credibility of the subject, 'initiative overload', a lack of linkage to issues of priority within a school, a view that this is one of several curriculum topics 'dumped' on them and a sense that it is seen as an 'added extra' rather than core.

What are the incentives for schools to do it? These need to be more clearly defined. We should provide a better mix of carrot (training) and stick (OFSTED).

Many schools claim that they provide 'cross curricular citizenship education' but in reality this can mean that nothing is actually happening until their OFSTED inspection. However, when a cross curricular approach works it can actually create the best projects. For example, some of the most successful ACiS projects were interwoven with other subject areas. However, this is time consuming, as all teachers need to be trained and aware of how to facilitate and what the options are.

We need to ensure that volunteering doesn't just become a tick box activity.

The citizenship curriculum has 2 strands – it is an independent subject but also needs to be built into school life. Schools need to be supported about what this means. Volunteering can't be compulsory but also we're aiming for it to be taken for granted. How can we balance these expectations in the citizenship curriculum?

Volunteering schemes are not always viewed as being able to add 'hard' learning outcomes.

There is a common view that primary schools are more driven to broker volunteer opportunities with secondaries.

Volunteering can be an effective way to bridge relations between secondary and primary schools.

We must be careful of raising expectations in schools – what happens when a project ends? Opportunities must be sustainable. How can this be ensured?

Teachers need to upskill to be able to deliver effective active citizenship education. There is also a need to provide support networks for schools, teachers and their volunteers

There should be better links between volunteering at different levels of education.

The Russell Commission report says that schools should encourage volunteering, but how can volunteering remain voluntary if it is promoted in schools?

It would be great to create a new role integrating 2 posts – a combination of a citizenship teacher in a school and a volunteer developer in a voluntary sector organisation – to act as a broker between school and community. These 'Volunteer Co-ordinators' could create individual opportunities tailored to community and pupil needs.

We could promote a model of a 'School Volunteering Council', similar to a School Council.

Young people

Why do we want young people to volunteer? It needs to be explicitly stated.

Young people don't necessarily understand what 'volunteering' is – both in terms of what they could do and what they already do that is volunteering. Informal volunteering is not always recognised as such.

Young people often say they don't know where and they don't know how to volunteer. They can be self-doubting and cynical. These attitudes need to be challenged and dispelled.

How can we get 'normal' young people involved instead of the usual suspects – the 'professional young people'. We need to engage young people from different socio-economic backgrounds - "aspiring citizens as opposed to aspiring politicians". There is a gap in the provision for engaging everyone.

Opportunities need to be inclusive and get rid of the image of volunteering belonging to the middle classes. To achieve this there also need to be flexible models which make opportunities available to all.

A successful programme will always bring issues of in/out groups with it. To counter this we need to be able to offer a range of volunteering opportunities. However there will always be a problem with the 'out' group – whether they elect to be the out group or whether they are hard to reach/engage or feel excluded and different to the in group.

We need to create opportunities that match young people's passion with action.

Older pupils and young people from outside the school can help to engage the level below. Peer support and mentoring creates successful youth led volunteering projects. However, 11-12 year olds are the youngest in the school and therefore difficult to mentor in the same way as under 16s.

We need to consider the sense of empowerment in getting involved in local issues versus the glamour and publicity of high profile international issues. Where are the national opportunities?

Volunteering offers good intergenerational and socialising opportunities and these benefits need to be promoted to young people.

There may be a gender divide in terms of which young people participate in volunteering.

There is often a disconnection between young people and funders' understanding of their attitudes and motivations. It is very difficult to bridge the gaps in communication or make it clearer.

Communities and the third sector

Citizenship should be heavily influenced by the needs of the community rather than DfES recommendations. Schools should link their work in this area with the community agenda

We need to be careful of overloading schools – we need the voluntary sector to engage with extended schools and not rely on teachers to organise and promote the opportunities.

Schools need to be looking outward for opportunities. We need to encourage schools to build sustainable relationships with community organisations rather than ticking target boxes.

Third sector organisations could focus on tapping into existing funding as well as looking for new monies. We need to get better at influencing and accessing school expenditure.

There is a need to sell volunteering to schools and promote greater understanding of what volunteering is.

Volunteering is a fragmented and confusing sector. This makes it difficult for schools to navigate their way to appropriate programmes and partnerships. Schools and young people need to have a specific idea of what they would like to do before they can access the external support available.

We need to create a simpler picture so that schools can more easily access our services.

Employers

Employers need to better understand young people's volunteering and its benefits, especially those employing school leavers. The graduate market has a better understanding of young people's volunteering and its value.

Employers need to consider the sustainability of individual's voluntary activity once they are formally employed.

We should promote the economic value of volunteering to the community - KPMG has done some work in this area.

Further and Higher Education

There is an untapped potential for university students going into schools to support, and particularly lead, on the citizenship curriculum.

Using the Aim Higher model it should be easy to develop a similar best practice model for citizenship and volunteering.

Policymakers

How do policymakers join up effectively, especially across government departments. It is not currently clear who is taking lead responsibility for volunteering and community action in schools and there is a danger that this may fall between the DfES and the Office of the Third Sector.

Although we may be able to make better use of existing funding, especially at a local level, there is still a need for further investment if Russell's 'step change' is to be achieved at school level. Direct support should be available to LEAs and schools that need it, and this incurs cost.

Government could help to link volunteering more effectively with the sector skills councils.

How can we build infrastructure without creating unnecessary bureaucracy?

We need to build on the third sector review and other government work. Volunteering could be included in the youth offer and related to Every Child Matters.

Public sector volunteering and policy driven opportunities need to be opened up to young people.

It would be helpful for the DfES to run workshops for volunteering organisations to enable them to ensure their programmes compliment the citizenship curriculum.

Practical issues

Accreditation / recognition

There is a debate to be had about whether volunteering and community action should be recognised or accredited. Time Bank and Changemakers demonstrate the potential for accreditation, whereas the Diana Award shows the potential for meaningful recognition.

Existing citizenship qualifications are not sufficiently understood or valued by higher education institutions or employers. This is a disincentive for schools to offer these qualifications and for young people to choose to study for them.

Higher Education students see volunteering as a bonus, partly because employers acknowledge voluntary activity. As a result, volunteers are becoming more aware of the hard outcomes but not until they reach later stages of education. School age young people don't necessarily have this realisation or need the same hard outcomes.

Volunteering should be placed outside the success/failure framework schools, and especially exams, rely on. Part of the success of ACiS was that participants learn from taking part, whatever the outcome.

There is a worry that by taking volunteering into schools it imposes a structure. Young people must want to do it and enjoy the activities rather than having it forced upon them. Volunteering should be a choice, not something that has to be done for accreditation.

Not all young people want accreditation. Recognition is often enough to motivate participation.

Marketing and brand

It is necessary to think carefully about how to market volunteering for young people. How can we make this agenda stand out?

The image of volunteering needs to change. It must move away from being seen as a way to fill low level, unskilled gaps. It is rather a step on the way to what you want to achieve. High level volunteering needs to be sold and publicised better. But those opportunities also need to be opened up to young people.

There is lots of volunteering taking place but not all of it is recognised as such. Many people do not identify community activity with 'volunteering'.

There is no map of what is currently happening in schools. Although the Russell Commission report gave case studies and snapshots it needs updating.

Young people's perception of the word 'volunteering' is often negative. This should be addressed.

Direct marketing to young people via third sector organisations can be very effective. The success of MV and initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is that young people identify with the group and the movement. They are successful brands with a known identity.

Connections need to be stronger between the issues on the ground and globally.

Other issues

We need to think carefully about schools and young people's perceptions of and relationship with risk.

The link between democracy and volunteering could be emphasised more strongly to schools and funders.

Volunteering involves teachers and young people in decision and policy making and this benefit is often not recognised.

All future activity should build on existing models – for example, volunteer facilitators working in schools to facilitate activity.

Next steps

Participants at the seminar identified six immediate priorities for action:

- 1) Find out what is going on the ground through a mapping exercise.
- 2) Discuss further the relative merits of recognition and accreditation for young people's volunteering.
- 3) Gain a greater understanding of funding and resources. What is the existing market for volunteering programmes in schools and how can we make better use of it. What additional funding might be required from government and how should this be targeted.
- 4) How can we link volunteering in schools with the community cohesion agenda, which is where future funding is likely to be targeted (Ajegbo report).
- 5) What the vision and brand for volunteering in schools? How should volunteering be pitched to young people? This needs to be established early on and used to drive the work on Recommendation 4.
- 6) Run a similar event for organisations with an interest in FE and HE volunteering.

Changemakers, ContinYou, the DfES and Office of the Third Sector have agreed to meet before the summer recess to discuss how this agenda might be taken forward.

Changemakers and ContinYou also agreed to write to the new Prime Minister to inform him of our objectives for volunteering in schools.

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Participants at the seminar expressed a strong desire to see the group meet again to develop a collaborative approach to meet this challenge.