

Exploring Impacts of Volunteering on University Students in London

John Braime & Minna Ruohonen

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Summary

During the academic year 2009/10, volunteering departments at a group of eight London-based universities joined forces in order to measure the impact of volunteering on university students.

A total of 1,039 participants completed the online survey. Our findings included:

Personal Development

Volunteers perceived an increase in their personal development in several areas, including greater self-confidence (84%), interest in 'trying new things' (83%) and self-discipline (71%).

Transferable Skills

Participants felt that their transferable skills increased as a result of volunteering. Most students felt that their communication (90%), interpersonal (87%) and team working (71%) skills improved through volunteering.

Academic Life

Half of all participants (50%) felt that volunteering had benefited their learning in one way or another. Slightly fewer students (45%) had been able to put their academic learning into practice through volunteering, though this is still a significant figure given that most of the volunteering considered in this survey is extra-curricular.

Employability

Volunteering offers students an opportunity to gain an insight into different working environments, and to develop transferable and specialist skills for future employment. The majority of students felt that their general employability had increased and that they had acquired skills required by future employers (67%). A high number of students (80%) also felt confident in using their volunteering experience in job applications and interviews.

Social Impact

Over half of the students (57%) felt that volunteering had increased their 'sense of being part of my university' whereas their 'sense of being part of the local community' increased even more (75%). The vast majority of students (89%) felt that volunteering improved their opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds and 77% felt that their understanding of different cultures had increased.

Service Quality

All of the participating institutions have some form of dedicated volunteering provision. Our survey showed that, overall, these services are well-regarded by both volunteers and non-volunteers.

Why students volunteer

Students find out about volunteering in a variety of ways – whilst campus events like Freshers' Fairs proved most popular overall, there was a fair degree of variation across the eight universities. Students volunteer for a range of reasons, with individuals being motivated by a combination of factors, including 'wanting to make a difference', 'I enjoy volunteering', 'to learn new skills', and 'to enhance my CV'.

Conclusions

A full list of conclusions can be found on pages 19-20.

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Foreword

This research is the product of a collaboration between staff within eight London universities, and came about because of our desire to better understand the impact of volunteering upon students.

Although much anecdotal evidence exists in support of the benefits of volunteering, the formal assessment of the experience is often missing or – at best – has looked only at individual institutions. We took part in this project to address this gap.

We hope that this report will be seen as both a serious contribution to the debate on student volunteering, and an example of cross-institutional working and practitioner-led research.

We would like to thank David Owen at The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, Georgina Brewis from The Institute for Volunteering Research and Amanda Duggan at Volunteering England for their support and guidance.

Particular thanks should be given to Minna Ruohonen for initiating and leading on this project.



Minna Ruohonen
Imperial College London



Martin Crosby
Kingston University
Students' Union



Stavroula Konidari
London Metropolitan
University



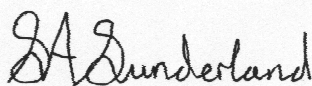
Jen Lowthrop
London School of Economics



Sarah Gifford
Queen Mary Students' Union



John Braime
University College London



Sarah Sunderland
University of Greenwich



Berekhet Berakhy
University of Westminster



Statement of support

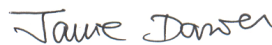
“Volunteering England, the Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR), Workers in Student Community Volunteering (WiSCV) and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) welcome this joint impact assessment from universities in the London region.

As members of the steering group, we have supported the institutions involved from the conception of the project to this final result and welcome the findings of the survey, which will enable a deeper understanding of how volunteering can benefit students. The findings will also enhance our understanding of the impact of volunteering on student development and the importance of funding volunteering provision within Higher Education Institutions.

We encourage universities and colleges across the country to explore the findings of the survey, and consider the value of carrying out similar research within their own institutions and regions. In particular we believe the partnership approach to impact assessment developed by the London universities adds value to the study and could be replicated elsewhere.”



Andrea Rannard
Volunteering England



Jamie Darwen
NCCPE



Jen Lowthrop
WISCV



Introduction

During the academic year 2009/10, staff from eight London-based universities joined forces in order to measure the impact of volunteering upon their students. The staff are all members of Workers in Student Community Volunteering (WISCV), the national network for volunteering professionals within Higher and Further Education. Through WISCV, the group members had already collaborated on a number of projects, such as the London Student Volunteering Fortnight, and on best practice sharing events.

This research exercise was led by Imperial College London which had conducted similar impact assessments previously, based on the Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit devised by the Institute for Volunteering Research.

The participating universities were:

- Imperial College London
- Kingston University Students' Union
- London Metropolitan University
- London School of Economics
- Queen Mary Students' Union
- University College London Union
- University of Greenwich
- Westminster University

This research aimed to study the impact of student volunteering on:

1. **Personal development** including confidence, self-discipline and motivation;
2. **Transferable skills** such as communication, problem solving, teamwork, time management and leadership skills;
3. **Academic life** such as development of understanding of course content;
4. **Future career prospects** including employability, the creation of opportunities and influence on career choice;
5. **Social and cultural impact** such as a sense of belonging and understanding different cultures.

Methodology

An online questionnaire was designed based on Volunteering England's Impact Measurement Toolkit (Institute of Volunteering Research, 2004). This toolkit focuses on five impacts: physical, human, economic, social and cultural. The existing toolkit was modified so that it would be appropriate for use within the Higher Education environment. Group members also gave their input into the design based on their institutions' annual reporting needs during several planning meetings.

The survey was created using the website www.surveymonkey.com. This website was chosen as it allows users to quickly and easily create an online survey, has tools available to let users choose how to collect survey responses and also has user-friendly reporting tools.

The eight institutions sent a link to the survey out to students registered with their volunteering units, including both those who had volunteered and those who had not. The

survey ran between 19 February and 23 March 2010, and incentives were offered by institutions to encourage students to respond.

Who took part?

1039 participants from the eight universities completed the survey. Responses varied from 52 to 229 per institution, with an average of 130 taking part per institution.¹

30% of respondents were male, 70% female. This is unsurprising, as the survey was targeted at students signed up with their institutions' volunteering units, and most of these units report higher participation levels from females.

37% of respondents had never volunteered, 39% had volunteered in the academic year 2009-10, and 23% had volunteered in a previous academic year. For the purposes of this report, we have combined the two groups of volunteers.

Our survey included very different types of institution. Three (UCL, LSE and Imperial) are members of the Russell Group of large, research-intensive universities. Four (Greenwich, Kingston, Westminster and London Met) are post-92 institutions outside of the University of London. Queen Mary's is a member of the 1994 group of smaller, research intensive universities and is part of the University of London.

A full demographic profile of participants is provided in Appendix A.

Why conduct this survey?

This research had two main purposes. Firstly, a number of London universities in recent years have conducted their own surveys into the impact of student volunteering. It was felt that a collaborative approach would allow for some comparisons between types of institution, as well as providing a more robust data set. Thus, we would have a more rigorous look at claims that volunteering can enhance the student experience.

Secondly it was hoped that, in addition to looking at the impact of student volunteering, the data would be useful in the development and management of our respective services.

This survey should be seen in the context of the much larger and more complex research project being carried out by the NCCPE through their vintpired students programme. This research has been led by the Institute for Volunteering Research, and the report *Bursting the Bubble: Students, Volunteering and the Community* was published in December 2010. This, in turn, will feed into NCCPE's Manifesto for Public Engagement.

We also acknowledge other earlier pieces of work looking at the impact of student volunteering, which we mention in the Bibliography.

All surveys have their limitations. As a practitioner-led study into student volunteering, conducted on a minimal budget and fitted around our other responsibilities, this research is of necessity restricted in its scope. We have enumerated these limitations on page 18. In short, it should be remembered that we have only looked at self-reported impacts upon student

¹ Note that a small number (35) of staff members completed the survey: their responses have not been counted in the analysis presented here. The responses of the 51 recent graduates who took part have been included in the totals.

volunteers from Higher Education institutions. We have not looked at Further Education, nor have we looked at positive or negative impacts upon the community.

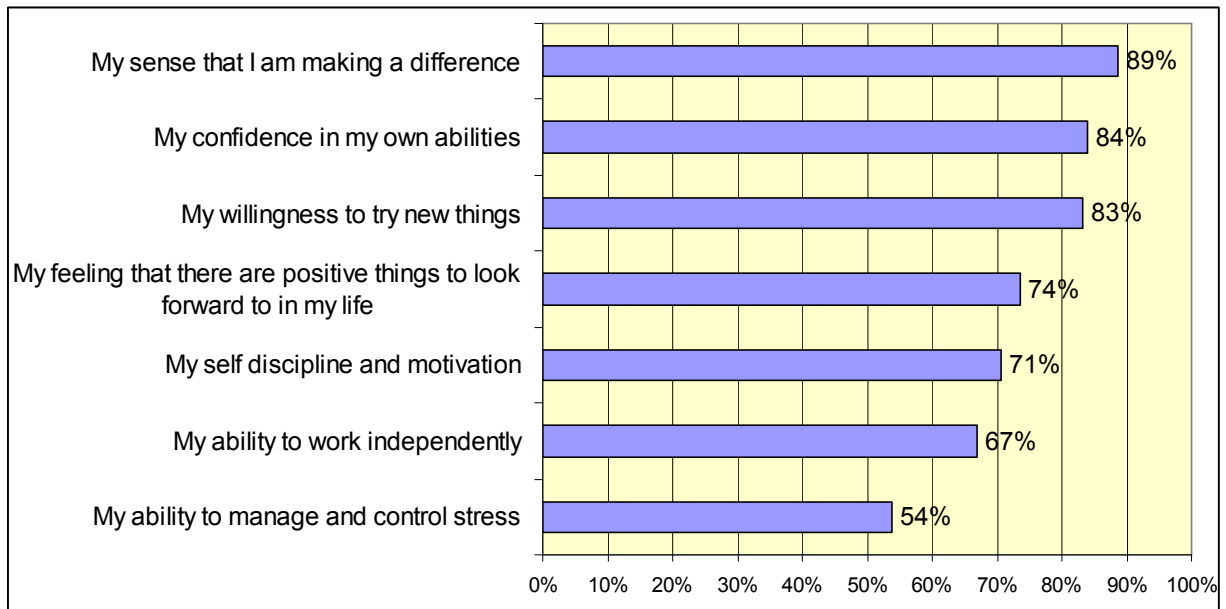
We hope that this report will nonetheless contribute to the wider debate about student volunteering and be of use to the volunteering sector as a whole.

Findings

1. Impact on personal development

We asked students about the degree to which their volunteering had improved various aspects of their personal development, interpreted in its broadest terms. Students reported increases in the sense that they were making a difference (89%), improvement in confidence in their own abilities (84%), and a greater willingness to try new things (83%), as well as a number of other benefits.

Chart 1: % of volunteers who said that this aspect of their personal development has increased or increased greatly. 646 respondents.



Comparing different universities here (and in the subsequent questions of impact) is difficult because students may have different expectations or have started from different levels. For a proper comparison, we'd need to survey students before and after volunteering. This said, there is a noticeable trend in many of the questions: more students from post-92 institutions (Greenwich, London Met, Kingston) report improvements to their personal development than those at Russell Group Universities (Imperial, LSE, UCL).

Table 1: % of volunteers who said that this aspect of their personal development has increased or increased greatly. 592 respondents.

Answer Options	Russell Group	Post- 92
My confidence in my own abilities	80%	92%
My sense that I am making a difference	88%	90%
My self discipline and motivation	63%	83%
My willingness to try new things	81%	88%
My feeling that there are positive things to look forward to in my life	69%	83%
My ability to work independently	61%	78%
My ability to manage and control stress	46%	68%

Greenwich scores particularly highly here – this may be due to the fact that they offer a programme encouraging students to reflect upon their volunteering experiences and identify the skills they have learnt. Reflective activities take place through a number of methods including handouts, drop-in sessions, referral to careers advisors, via email and workshops.

We would stress that these results do not necessarily show that students at Russell Group universities are gaining less from their volunteering – their expectations or previous experiences may have affected their responses. Certainly, this is something that could warrant further research.

Respondents were also asked to give additional comments about how volunteering had affected their personal development. We have included a representative selection below:

Please include any comments on how volunteering has affected your personal and / or professional development:

It has made me more aware of the difficulties other people go through and made me appreciate the simple things in life. My volunteering outside of the service as an appropriate adult has made me confident and has made me realise the difference I can make.

I have gained experience of working with children which could be helpful if I consider a career in child psychology.

I now have new career aspirations and the confidence to take forward these new ideas. Since starting mentoring at IntoUniversity, I went on to do a teaching assistant course and looking to go into teaching or youth work in the future. My research project will be to build a spatial web application which was inspired by the volunteering I do for another not-for-profit organisation that seeks to promote socially inclusive sport and activity.

My voluntary placement at an animal shelter is neither connected to my studies nor to my career interests. I do it purely for pleasure, satisfaction and the feeling that I can help somebody.

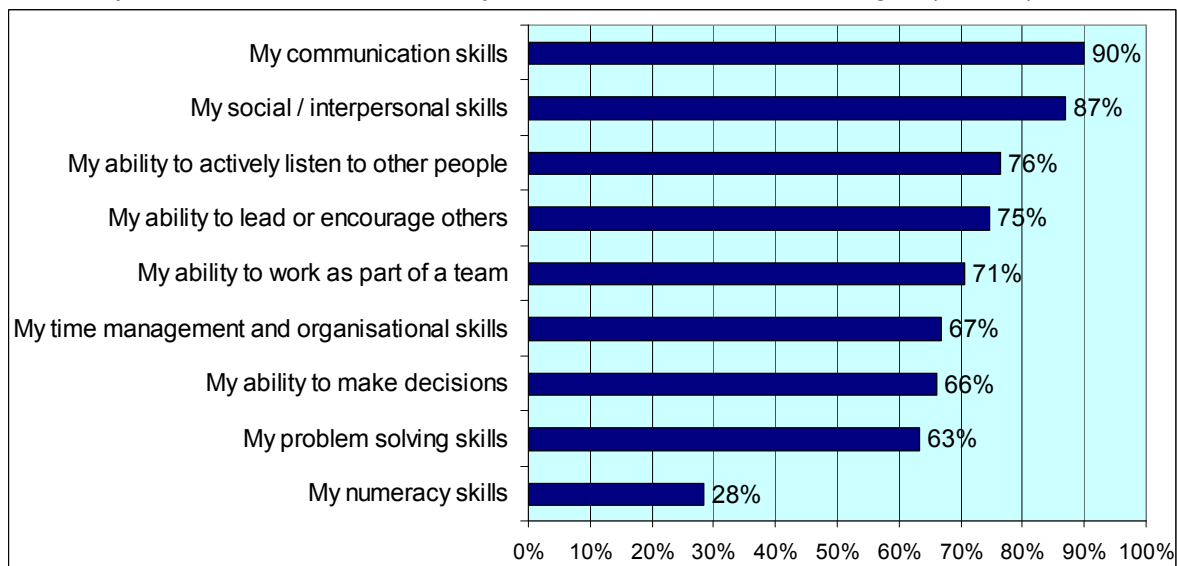
It's made me a happier person, and I wouldn't have got this far at uni without it.

2. Impact on transferable skills

Skill development was given as a reason for signing up by just over half of volunteers (see page 13-14). To what extent, then, does volunteering help students acquire new skills?

We asked students whether they felt they'd improved in a number of skill areas. Communication and interpersonal skills were the most popular responses, though in all areas apart from numeracy, more than 60% of students said there had been improvements.

Chart 2: % of volunteers who said that these transferable skills had increased or increased greatly. 646 respondents.



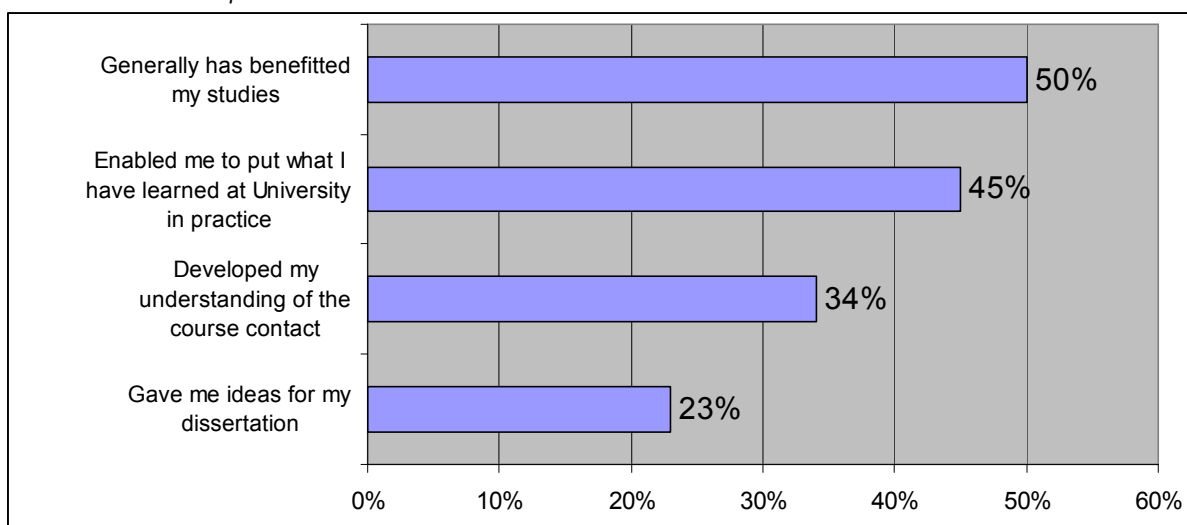
Again, there was a difference in responses for students in Russell Group and Post-92 institutions, with the latter more likely to report an increase. This did not hold for communication and social / interpersonal skills though, which were roughly the same.

3. Impact on academic life

We were also interested in seeing how volunteering had impacted upon students' academic work. We expected to see some variability here – some volunteering units have formal connections with academic courses, whereas some do not. Also, the types of degrees offered by institutions would be expected to affect results to this question.

This difference was indeed observed. For instance, LSE (where the volunteer coordinator is based within the Careers Service) saw more students citing benefits to studies than Imperial or UCL – this may have also been because of large numbers of development studies students participating in volunteering. Imperial saw relatively few students citing benefits, perhaps because of the university's emphasis upon Science, Engineering and Technology. Similarly, Greenwich and London Metropolitan, where the departments are based within the institution, generally saw more students state that volunteering was of benefit to their studies than those at Kingston, where the Students' Union leads on volunteering.

Chart 3: % of volunteers who agreed or agreed strongly that volunteering had benefited different aspects of their academic work. 611 respondents.



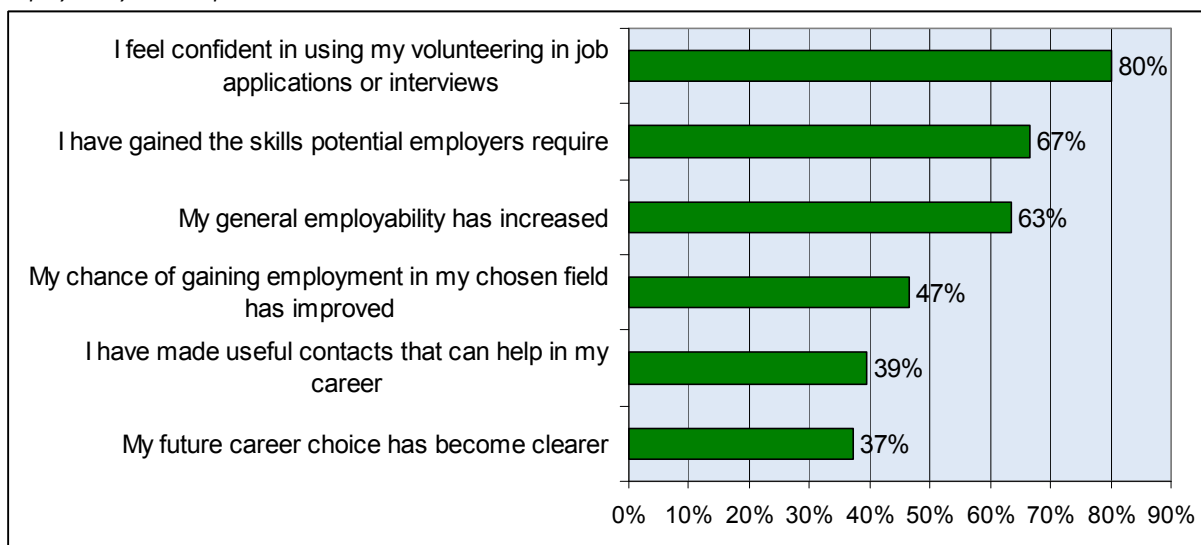
Half of the respondents stated that volunteering had benefited their studies in general, and 45% had stated that it had enabled them to put what they have learned at University into practice. The importance of this cannot be undervalued – employers state that students require more than just a degree. They want to see that potential employees have experience too. The Higher Ambitions (p13: 2009) report stated ‘it is a top concern for business that students should leave university better equipped with a wider range of employability skills. All universities should be expected to demonstrate how their institution prepares its students for employment.’

4. Impact on employability

Volunteering is often promoted to students as a way of ‘boosting your CV’. To what extent, though, are these claims grounded in students’ experiences?

To go some way towards answering this, we asked students how their volunteering had improved their employability. The answers did indeed show that significant numbers of students felt that volunteering was of benefit to them, with 80% stating that they felt confident using their volunteering in job interviews and 67% and 63% respectively saying that they’d gained skills that employers require and that their general employability had increased. Once again, a higher number of students from post-92 universities answered in the affirmative than those in the Russell Group.

Chart 4: % of volunteers who agreed or agreed strongly that volunteering had benefited different aspects of their employability. 640 respondents.



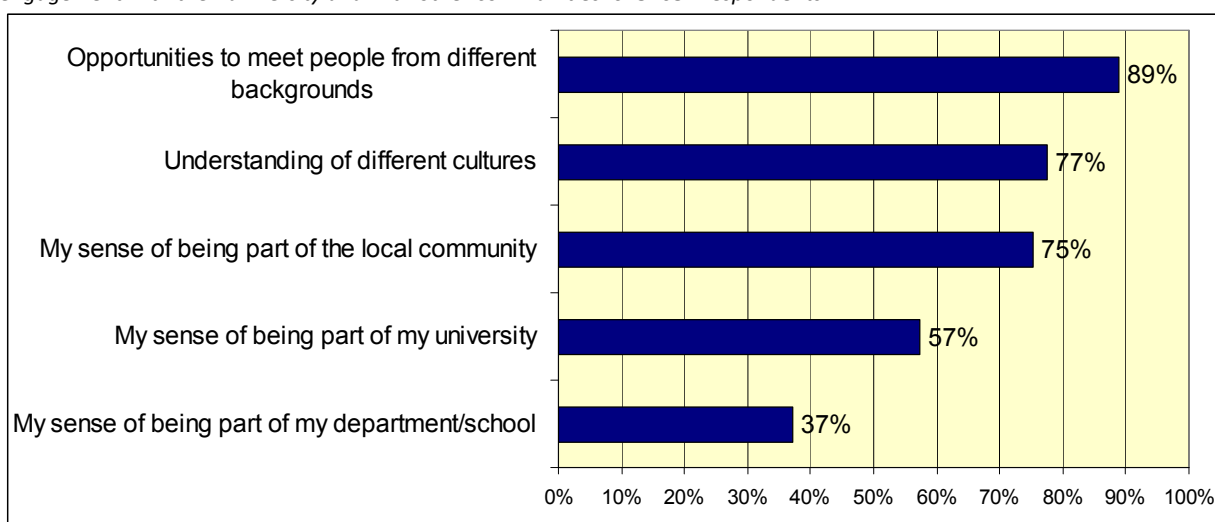
5. Social and cultural impacts

Finally, we asked students if volunteering had helped them connect with other communities – both within and outside of their university.

Our results suggest that volunteering does have a positive impact upon students' sense of belonging to their own institution, with 57% saying that their sense of being part of their university had increased, and 37% saying that they felt more part of their department.

Even larger numbers cited improvements in their connectedness to external communities, with 89% saying they'd had more opportunities to meet people from other backgrounds, and 77% saying they had increased their understanding of different cultures. Interestingly, these figures did not significantly differ for students in different types of institution.

Chart 5: % of volunteers who agreed or agreed strongly that volunteering had benefited different aspects of their engagement with their university and with other communities. 613–632 respondents.



6. Barriers to volunteering

As noted above, our survey included students who'd signed up with their institutions' volunteering service but had not actually participated in any volunteering activities.

We asked this group to say what had prevented them from volunteering (respondents were allowed to select more than one option). The most prevalent response was 'I am / will be too busy with academic work', with 49% giving this answer. This was the top response for all institutions apart from Westminster. Other popular responses were : 'Projects are at unsuitable times' (29%) and 'Could not find volunteer role linked to my future career' (29%).

Students from Russell Group institutions were more likely to state that projects were at unsuitable times, whereas those from Post-92 institutions were more likely to cite the difficulty in finding a link to their future career.

Fairly small numbers overall cited problems with waiting for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to come back (4%).

Interestingly, undergraduates were more likely to say they were too busy compared to post-graduates (51% compared to 41%), though it was the top option for both groups, and it should be noted that for some reason undergraduates selected more options than postgraduates when answering this question (an average of 2.8 responses compared to 2.2).

Male students were more likely to say they were busy with their studies compared with female students (53% compared to 44% – though it was the top option for both). Male students were less likely to say that projects were at unsuitable times (25% compared to 31%).

Table 2: Which of these factors have prevented you from volunteering? Number of respondents 503.

Which of these factors have prevented you from volunteering? (Tick all that apply).	ALL NON-VOLUNTEERS
I am / will be too busy with academic work	49%
Projects are at unsuitable times	29%
Could not find volunteer role linked to my future career	29%
Not finding any roles relating to my course	18%
Projects require too much time	17%
Unsuitable location of projects	16%
Not finding any interesting projects	15%
I am / will be too busy with paid employment	15%
I don't think I can afford volunteering	11%
Other (please specify)	10%
My social life is too busy	10%
I am / will be too busy with clubs & societies activities	9%
Language barriers	8%
Family commitments	8%
Lack of support from academic department	8%
I didn't have a good experience from previous volunteering	5%
I just don't want to volunteer	4%
I am waiting on CRB to come back	4%
I was unsuccessful at the volunteering interview	2%
Illness	1%
I have a disability and I don't think volunteering is accessible	0%

7. Finding out about volunteering

We asked respondents how they had found out about their institution's volunteering services. Freshers' fairs, campus events, university websites and students' unions were overall the most popular four, though there was some variation in ranking across institutions. Unsurprisingly, those services based in students' unions scored highly under this category. The use of Freshers' Fairs varied widely, with between 8% and 65% of volunteers citing this as a means of finding out about their volunteering services.

Comparing the responses from volunteers and non-volunteers show up some interesting differences. Non-volunteers were much more likely to have heard via their university website (39% compared to 29% of volunteers) and much less likely to have heard through a friend (11% compared to 19%). This suggests that students recruited by word of mouth are more likely to take the next step and actually volunteer.

Table 3: Where did you hear about your university's volunteer service?

Where did you hear about your university's volunteer service?	VOLUNTEERS	NON-VOLUNTEERS
Fresher's Fair	43%	43%
Campus events (workshops, presentations or lectures)	32%	36%
University website	29%	39%
Student Union	24%	24%
Volunteering leaflet/poster	20%	20%
Volunteering website	20%	18%
Friend	19%	11%
Volunteering newsletter	17%	18%
Volunteering info stand	15%	13%
Departmental notice boards	7%	9%
Volunteering notice board	6%	6%
Career Consultants	5%	4%
Other (please specify)	4%	4%
Tutor	3%	2%
Number of respondents	787	337

We also asked students why they had signed up with their volunteering service. The most popular four responses from volunteers were: To make a difference; I enjoy volunteering; To learn new skills; To enhance my CV. Again, the most popular reasons varied between institutions:

To make a difference - Imperial College, LSE, Queen Mary, UCL, Kingston

I enjoy volunteering - Imperial College, LSE, Queen Mary, UCL

To learn new skills - Imperial College, Greenwich, London Metropolitan, Kingston

To enhance my CV - Queen Mary, Greenwich, London Metropolitan

Non-volunteers were more likely to have signed up to learn new skills. Perhaps they registered and then failed to proceed further because they were not presented with roles in which they felt they could develop those skills, or that this aspect wasn't sufficiently communicated to them. They were also much less likely to have signed up because they enjoyed volunteering.

Male students were slightly more likely to have got involved to improve their CV (60% compared to 53% for females), and less likely to make a difference (56% compared to 62%).

Table 4: What was your initial reason for signing up to your university's Volunteer Service?

What was your initial reason for signing up to your university's Volunteer Service?	VOLUNTEERS	NON-VOLUNTEERS
To make a difference	60%	55%
I enjoy volunteering	56%	31%
To learn new skills	55%	55%
To enhance my CV	55%	31%
I wanted to improve things/help people	48%	1%
To have fun	42%	53%
To give something back	36%	17%
I wanted to meet people, make friends	34%	12%
To help improve my career prospects through voluntary experience	33%	36%
To use existing skills	27%	5%
I had time to spare	26%	5%
Part of my philosophy of life	24%	31%
The cause was important to me	21%	63%
Connected with my hobbies/interests	19%	19%
There was a need in the community	11%	6%
Part of my religious belief	5%	41%
My friends do it	5%	2%
To get a recognised qualification	4%	9%
Connected with needs/interests of family or friends	4%	1%
Already involved in the organisation	3%	17%
I was already involved in the Students' Union	3%	32%
Had received voluntary help myself	2%	0%
Other (please specify)	2%	2%
Number of respondents	750	284

8. Quality of service provided by the volunteering units

We asked students how they rated different aspects of their volunteering service. The picture painted is one of well-regarded, well-run operations. Notably, responses from non-volunteers are not significantly lower than those for volunteers

As might be expected there is some variability across institutions – in this way, our survey will help the volunteering coordinators in all eight universities to identify ways in which they can continue to improve their services, and to highlight ways that good practice might be shared between them.

Table 5: % of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with statement about quality of volunteering services. Number of respondents: Volunteers 665–678; Non-Volunteers 171 – 187

If you have used your university's volunteer service how would you rate the following?	VOLUNTEERS	NON VOLUNTEERS
I believe that the support/services are good	95%	95%
I believe the opening hours and access to information is good	90%	89%
I believe there are effective communication channels to discuss my volunteering needs	90%	87%
My enquiries are handled professionally and promptly	93%	91%
The staff are helpful and friendly	98%	96%

Additionally, we asked students what other support they wanted to see from their volunteering service. The three most popular options were: Wider range of volunteering opportunities; Training session in areas of volunteering; Frequent one-off volunteering opportunities. Again, the results varied slightly across institutions.

The high response for training was surprising, as many volunteer coordinators on the survey group have found that this is a niche interest; when they have offered additional training, it has often not been taken up. These results may suggest that some students feel they have not received adequate training or induction from their projects or placements, or even that they are unsure about who should provide this training.

Table 6: How could your university's Volunteer Service support you and your volunteering in the future?

How could your university's Volunteer Service support you and your volunteering in the future?	VOLUNTEERS	NON-VOLUNTEERS
Wider range of volunteering opportunities	50%	52%
Training session in areas of volunteering	43%	45%
Frequent one-off volunteering opportunities	37%	43%
Social events/networking with other volunteers	37%	30%
Opportunities to gain recognition for my volunteering	36%	27%
Increased publicity of services available to me	35%	36%
Increased publicity/awareness on campus	27%	25%
An introductory volunteering session before starting ('taster session')	21%	26%
Incentives	21%	20%
Access to the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Check	18%	15%
Support and funding in setting up my own volunteering project	15%	9%
Other (please specify)	3%	3%
Number of respondents	743	295

9. Challenges and rewards

Finally, we used two open questions to ask students about the best and most difficult aspects of their volunteering. We then coded the responses to investigate whether any themes emerged.

Table 7: What has been the most challenging part of your volunteering?

What has been the most challenging part of your volunteering?

Response category	% of responses in this category
Learning new skills/adapting to environment/training	35%
Time-management	28%
Working/dealing with challenging population (children/disabled) or people from different background (class/ culture/language)	25%
Communication and language	8%
Job-specific challenges	5%
Promoting cause or getting others to volunteer	5%
Commitment	4%
Travel	3%
None	3%
Funding/Monetary issues e.g. travel cost	3%
Finding motivation	2%
Weather	2%
Initiating/Recruitment process	2%
Bureaucratic issues, e.g. CRB	1%
Finding the right place to volunteer	1%
Number of respondents	485

Two of the three most cited reasons relate to dealing with new environments, or with groups of people the students hadn't encountered before. Some students found the emotional aspect of working with some clients particularly difficult. Over a quarter of students also said that juggling their time commitments was a challenge.

What has been the most challenging part of your volunteering?

Working with very young children in a non-schooling environment. Trying to get young people to open their minds, become creative and engaging young people's interest in serious issues

Understanding the differing viewpoints of the disadvantaged.

Time commitments - juggling volunteering with sports and schoolwork.

Seeing how many homeless there were in my country. The saddest part was also that I couldn't do much for them apart from helping them get food.

Overcoming various unexpected issues that can occur as part of working with people.

Not wanting to let people down even when academic focus is needed.

Moving outside your comfort zone in order to do whatever is necessary to promote the charities I work for. The experience I gain from this has made me become more open in the tasks that I am willing to do.

I worked with the elderly, so there were occasional communication problems.

Managing to keep back tears/emotions when seeing things not used to.

In terms of what students liked most about their volunteering, many responses related to the social aspect, with 38% of answers falling into this category. 22% gave answers relating to skill development or employability, and 19% said that the best part had been being able to help others.

Table 8: What has been the best part of your volunteering?

What has been the best part of your volunteering?

Response category	% of responses in this category
Meeting and socialising with new people and those of different background and making friends	38%
Developing and learning new skills/knowledge for employability	22%
Helping People	19%
Working with Children & Young people or in education setting	14%
Satisfaction, sense of reward, achievement and fulfilment	12%
Seeing the impact or outcomes of the activity and/or getting positive feedback	10%
Experiencing something new/fun	8%
Making a difference	8%
Having fun, Enjoyment	7%
Getting involved in local community and contributing to the society	7%
Practicing or enhancing existing skills or boosting confidence levels	5%
Working with elderly, disabled, homeless or another disadvantaged group	3%
Working with animals or environment	2%
Learning about myself	1%
Number of respondents	528

What has been the best part of your volunteering?

You get to know really cool people and you know that you are helping people who really need your help. I also like to see the way all the volunteers do their best to give all the users a good service.

Working with a different background of the elderly, compared to previous volunteer work with young people and children. Expanding on interests and sharing knowledge.

The feeling of accomplishment afterwards.

The cause I was involved in, the people I got to work with, it was also a good professional experience which added to my CV.

Networking with like minded people and the feeling that you are making a real life difference in the lives of young people and the local community.

Meeting new people, doing something out of uni that is fun and meaningful.

Learning new things about gardening as well as participating in different events around London while helping other people.

Limitations of the survey

This survey is not intended as a comprehensive assessment of the issue of the impact of student volunteering. In particular, it should be noted that:

- The survey measures self-reported impacts on skills, community engagement and so on. Obviously, this requires self-reflection on the part of the respondents. The degree to which students have been taught to do this, their expectations and previous experiences may well affect results.
- We were unable to look at longer term impacts, such as the lasting difference volunteering makes to employability. For this, some form of longitudinal study would be required.
- The survey only covers students in Higher Education.
- The survey does not look at the impact of student volunteering upon the community.
- The survey only looks at volunteering organised through universities' volunteering units and does not deal with self-organised activities.

Nonetheless, we feel that the research has value if it is regarded for what it is – a focused look at self-reported impacts of volunteering. Certainly, by working collaboratively, the eight institutions have enabled a larger data set to be created, which has enabled some more in-depth analysis of the responses than would have otherwise been possible. It should also be noted that there is further analysis that could be done upon our data, such as whether the amount of volunteering correlates with the impact upon the student, on differences between subject areas, and on differences between students of different ages and ethnicity. The authors would welcome approaches from researchers who may wish to use our data set to these ends.

Conclusions

Impact upon students

Our survey collates responses from over 600 active student volunteers; they overwhelmingly report that volunteering has benefited them. Volunteering uniquely brings students into contact with the wider community – thereby diversifying their social circles – but also strengthens their ties with their institution. It also builds skills, employability, and opportunities for personal development.

The challenges and rewards of volunteering

Volunteering is not necessarily an easy option for students. They can experience difficulties adapting to the volunteering environment and have trouble juggling their involvement with other demands on their time. Institutions should consider whether they are doing enough to help students with these challenges.

Our survey also recorded the great enjoyment and reward students gain from their participation, particularly in terms of building social networks, developing new skills, and feeling that they'd made a difference.

Value of support from institution

The IVR's report into student volunteering, *Bursting the Bubble*, shows that students who are supported by their university gain greater benefits than those who are not. We have not been able to look into this issue (our sample was drawn from students registered with their volunteering service). However, our survey does indicate that the volunteering services of the eight participating universities are well-regarded and do a good job of enhancing the experience of volunteering for students. It also identifies ways students would like to see those services improve – particularly in offering a wider range of opportunities, training, and chances to meet other volunteers.

Getting students involved

Students get involved in volunteering for a wide variety of reasons, and derive different benefits. Institutions should be wary of purely pushing the employability message – the wish to make a difference, to meet new people, and to have an enjoyable experience are also strongly motivating factors. In addition, our results indicate that volunteering is seen as something of value in itself by students.

Institutions should consider the diversity of ways students can get involved. Our results do suggest that reliance purely on online promotion may lead to lower rates of progression from enquiry to volunteering, and that word of mouth is very important.

Whilst most institutions already do this, it is worth looking at the availability of one-off volunteering, flexible roles, and at opportunities related to courses and career aspirations.

Collaborative approach

We certainly feel that there has been value to working collaboratively across eight institutions on this report. This has not only allowed for a larger data set, but has also cemented existing links between our services, and given us an opportunity to highlight our work.

Further Research

Our research has highlighted several areas for further research – specifically:

- Why students from post-92 institutions report higher levels of improvements to personal development and employability.
- The training needs of student volunteers and how universities and organisations can best address these.

As mentioned on page 18, there are also areas we didn't address, either through survey design, or through lack of time to analyse our survey data.

Next Steps

From the outset, we wanted our research to have a practical application – thus, each member of the research group has been asked to delineate how they might change their services.

Imperial College London

- Plan to spend less time on follow up.
- Increase online opportunities.
- Spend more time on reflection activities including the CV2012 programme.

Kingston University Students' Union

- Increase opportunities for social interaction between volunteers, nurturing volunteers' feelings of group/community and their sense of belonging.
- Improve connections with the employability service and help increase the awareness of volunteering as an employability tool, working on skills development.
- Use the survey results to "sell" volunteering.
- Continue the use of paper-based marketing in the light of survey results (it had generally been considered a less-effective method and thus potentially under-utilised).

London Metropolitan University

- Spend more time on reflection activities such as the 'Make Your CV Sparkle' session.
- Develop reflective tools to improve students' ability to articulate skills gained through volunteering.
- Create downloadable materials in collaboration with the Career Development & Employment Service.
- Use the results to promote volunteering.
- Continue with paper-based marketing.

London School of Economics

- Provide further information and training sessions for perspective new volunteers.
- Develop the Volunteer Centre website and promote this more to students.
- Continue to promote volunteering in different ways to students with different motivations.
- Further widen the range of volunteering opportunities available to our students.

Queen Mary Students' Union

- To research and provide more volunteering opportunities outside of core university hours, i.e. on evenings and weekends, to attract those who are not active volunteers.
- To ensure we continue having a good presence around campus as the two most popular avenues of finding out about Provide Volunteering were through the Freshers' Fair and campus events.

- To continue to accommodate different students' motivations to volunteering: those who want to make a difference, who enjoy volunteering, and who want to enhance CVs.

University College London

- Increase number of presentations around campus.
- Increase traffic to volunteering webpages www.uclu.org/volunteering .
- Provide more opportunities for students to reflect on volunteering experience through 'Volunteering and Your CV' sessions.
- Increase number of one-off volunteering roles, and profile of one-off volunteering programme.

University of Greenwich

- The positive feedback about the service should be used to help market the service.
- The marketing methods used to promote the service and volunteer opportunities should be developed. The results highlighted that other HEI's find using a newsletter to be effective and respondents also suggested this so it is recommended that a regular newsletter is produced throughout the 2010/11 academic year.
- Reflective tools to improve student's ability to articulate skills gained through volunteering should be developed further and resources made available online and during workshops.
- A calendar of more frequent one-off and taster volunteer events should be created for the next academic year as respondents have suggested that this is what they would like and previous one-off events have been successful.
- Finally more staff time should be allocated to development of high quality volunteering opportunities. In particular sourcing roles related to programmes of study and students career aspirations.
- A detailed individual report for survey data collected from the University of Greenwich is available. If you would like to request a copy, please email Sarah Sunderland, the Volunteering and Mentoring Administrator, s.a.sunderland@gre.ac.uk

Westminster University

- Increase the level of publicity of the service .
- Increase the number and range of volunteering opportunities offered.
- Better recognise student volunteers.

Appendix A: Profile of survey respondents

What is your academic status?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Foundation student	1.5%	16
Undergraduate student	68.2%	709
Postgraduate student	21.9%	228
Graduate / Alumni	4.9%	51
Staff	3.4%	35
answered question		1039

What is your fee status?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
UK	59.5%	413
EU	14.3%	99
Overseas	26.2%	182
answered question		694
skipped question		345

Which is your undergraduate course year?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
First year	35.7%	253
Second year	29.2%	207
Third year	26.1%	185
Fourth year	6.3%	45
Fifth year	2.3%	16
Sixth year	0.4%	3
answered question		709
skipped question		330

Postgraduates: Are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Phd student	21.4%	49
Taught Masters student	69.0%	158
Other PostGraduate student	9.6%	22
answered question		229
skipped question		810

Are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	29.9%	303
Female	70.1%	710
answered question		1013
skipped question		26

What institution do you attend?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Imperial College	22.0%	229
LSE	8.8%	91
Queen Mary	10.3%	107
UCL	18.1%	188
Greenwich	7.4%	77
London Metropolitan	21.6%	224
Kingston	6.8%	71
Westminster	5.0%	52
answered question		1039
skipped question		0

How old are you?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
18-20	33.0%	338
21-23	32.8%	336
24-26	16.2%	166
27-30	8.8%	90
31-40	6.0%	61
41 or over	3.3%	34
answered question		1025
skipped question		14

What is your ethnic origin?	Response Percent	Response Count
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	3.4%	34
Asian or Asian British - Indian	7.6%	75
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3.4%	34
Chinese	14.6%	145
Other Asian background	8.2%	81
Mixed - Asian & White	1.5%	15
Mixed - Black African & White	0.5%	5
Mixed - Black Caribbean & White	0.5%	5

Other Mixed background	1.5%	15
Black or Black British - African	5.5%	54
Black or Black British - Caribbean	1.1%	11
Other Black background	1.2%	12
White - British	23.7%	235
White - Irish	0.9%	9
Other White background	18.5%	183
Other ethnic background	2.4%	24
Do not wish to answer	5.4%	53
Answered question:		990
Skipped question:		49

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