

Research report
September 2014



**VOLUNTEERING
TO LEARN:
EMPLOYEE
DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH
COMMUNITY
ACTION**

TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE, TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 135,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Volunteering to learn: Employee development through community action

Research report

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Foreword

Employee volunteering activities, especially with young people, have increased over the last few years. This is partly in response to the recognition that youth unemployment is an issue that we all, employers in particular, have a responsibility to help tackle. It is also a result of a different and, in some cases, more joined-up approach towards organisational learning, corporate responsibility and the wider HR agenda.

This research report seeks to add to the body of evidence and best practice in this area by outlining the key characteristics of different volunteering activities, how they are best embedded within an organisation's learning and development agenda and highlight the key benefits of volunteering for employees. The report also reflects the CIPD's commitment to the Step Up To Serve campaign, as an increased number of adult volunteers are required to help support young people and achieve the campaign's aim to increase participation of 10–20-year-olds in meaningful social action to 50% by 2020.

At the CIPD we have developed and rolled out our own volunteering programme that offers our members, HR and L&D professionals, the opportunity to use their skills and experience to help young people. Via our Steps Ahead Mentoring programme, our volunteers enable young people to make informed choices about their career pathways, develop their ability to sell themselves to prospective employers and secure that all-important first job. We have been overwhelmed by the positive

response and the high uptake of HR professionals volunteering to join the programme and have had equal success as a result of our formal partnership with the Education and Employers Taskforce on the Inspiring the Future initiative. Inspiring the Future provides the opportunity for our volunteers to go into schools to deliver career insights talks, as well as CV and interview workshops.

The impact that volunteers are having in terms of the benefit to the young people they work with is clear. During the extended pilot, 73% of the young jobseekers who completed our Steps Ahead Mentoring programme went on to find employment. Research has also revealed a positive correlation between contact with employers while at school and a young person's employment chances (Mann 2012).

However, we consistently hear from the volunteers involved that the benefits are not all one-sided. Many have highlighted how their volunteering activities have helped them to develop their own skills, leading to further progression in their careers. In our previous report on youth social action (*Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?*) we explored the beneficial impact volunteering has in terms of organisation-wide outcomes such as employee engagement and company brand. We now want to build on this and examine the positive impact volunteering has in terms of employee learning and development.

Our case study research clearly highlights the 'double benefit' of

volunteering and identifies ten key skills and behaviours employees can develop through these activities, such as coaching and mentoring, confidence, communication, team-building, self-awareness and creativity. Having these benefits so clearly defined is helpful when it comes to making the business case – at organisational and individual level – as to why more employees should get involved in this agenda.

Articulating and communicating the link between volunteering and skills development is also important. Some of the organisations featured in this report are leading in this area, and have developed clear communication tools to demonstrate the benefits of volunteering to employees. To support this we have produced an example volunteering skills framework that will help more organisations make the case for getting their employees involved in volunteering activities and help them to select the right activity for the skills they seek to develop in their employees.

Finally, we welcome the trend for CSR, HR and L&D teams to work together on this. However, it is also clear that more needs to be done, not just to maximise the development potential of volunteering but also to ensure that what an organisation does within its CSR activity is connected to a more strategic HR and L&D agenda around growing your own workforce and building talent pipelines.

Katerina Rüdiger, Head of Skills and Policy Campaigns, CIPD

Introduction

‘The research is relevant for L&D, HR and CSR professionals seeking to maximise employee development.’

Background to the research

This report forms part of the CIPD’s Learning to Work programme, which aims to promote the role of employers in reducing youth unemployment, and build the business case for investing in the future workforce. The programme also promotes direct contact with young people via two youth volunteering programmes: Steps Ahead Mentoring and Inspiring the Future.

Research exploring volunteering typically focuses on the impact on the recipient organisation or individual. This research turns the tables by considering the impact on the employee. In our November 2013 report, *Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?*, we identified a connection between volunteering and employee development. The aim of this research is to delve deeper into this link to understand how employees develop through participating in volunteering schemes. Given this aim we felt it was appropriate to conduct case study research, to draw on the practical experience of organisations.

The research is relevant for learning and development (L&D), HR and corporate social responsibility (CSR) professionals seeking to maximise employee development. It provides insight alike for those who are new to employee volunteering or those with established employee schemes. It also provides insight for charities and not-for-profit organisations seeking to connect with employers.

Steps Ahead Mentoring

Steps Ahead Mentoring is a free mentoring programme run by the CIPD that matches HR professionals with young jobseekers aged 18 to 24. The nationwide programme offers young people one-to-one mentoring sessions to help them improve their employability, boost their confidence and find work.

Inspiring the Future

The CIPD is working with the charity Education and Employers Taskforce on a free initiative to get HR professionals to volunteer in schools. Inspiring the Future allows volunteers to be matched with local state secondary schools and colleges to help students with their CVs, conduct mock interviews, conduct career insight talks and give them a greater understanding of how they can prepare for work.

The research was conducted between April and June 2014 with 13 case study organisations (Table 1) of a range of sizes and industries. Interviews were held with senior CSR and L&D/HR professionals. Focus groups and interviews with employee volunteers were also held in five organisations, and interviews were conducted with seven charities (Table 2).

Within each case study organisation we have explored the impact of employee volunteering schemes, to understand the link between volunteering and employee development. In this report we primarily focus on volunteering activities which seek to build the skills of young people, for three main reasons. Firstly, employers are increasingly recognising that they have a critical role to play in tackling youth unemployment, a key issue affecting communities across the UK. Secondly, there are widespread opportunities for employers to support youth volunteering through a variety of accessible schemes, meaning that organisations of any size can participate. Finally, there are additional development benefits of volunteering with young people. However, we have not exclusively focused on youth volunteering. Many of the organisations involved in the research do also offer non-youth volunteering opportunities and examples have been highlighted where relevant.

Report overview

The report is organised into six sections. Following the introduction we explore existing research into volunteering and learning. We then provide an overview of the key trends associated with employee volunteering schemes, and identify the primary reasons why employers decide to introduce them. Section 3 reviews the

link between volunteering and learning, and Section 4 identifies the key skills and behaviours employees can build. We then explore how organisations measure the impact of their volunteering schemes, before in Section 6 providing hints and tips for how organisations can facilitate and maximise the development benefits of volunteering, along with specific learnings for SMEs and the L&D function. Our findings are summarised in the concluding section and an example volunteering skills framework is included as an appendix.

‘In this report we primarily focus on volunteering activities which seek to build the skills of young people.’

Table 1: Case study organisations

| Case study organisation | Who they are | Volunteering activity |
|--|---|---|
| HIT Training | HIT Training is a specialist training and Apprenticeship provider for the UK's hospitality, hotel and catering industry. | All staff are encouraged to take part in Inspiring the Future, to help young people understand different career routes. Staff also take part in a range of other voluntary activity, ranging from teaching martial arts to volunteering in care homes. |
| Home Group | Home Group is a social enterprise and registered charity, with a head office in the north-east of England. They are one of the UK's largest providers of housing and supported housing services and products. | Home Group encourage all of their colleagues to volunteer in a range of different activities, such as participating in the Steps Ahead Mentoring scheme or supporting Kids Kabin. They also promote Volunteers' Week and hold a 'National Volunteering Day'. |
| John Laing | Founded over 160 years ago, John Laing is an international infrastructure investor and asset manager. | John Laing primarily work with the Prince's Trust, BitC and Envision to facilitate volunteering opportunities. Two of their key programmes are the BitC Business Class and Give and Gain Day. John Laing also have an established charitable trust. |
| King & Wood Mallesons (KWM) | KWM is a global law firm with over 2,700 lawyers in 30 international offices. | A variety of volunteering opportunities are offered through the European office, as part of the community strategy. These range from primary school reading schemes to supporting a community group called Southside Young Leaders Academy. They also work with secondary schools, offering mentoring and skills workshops. |
| Lend Lease | Lend Lease is an international property and infrastructure group with over 50 years' experience. | Lend Lease conduct voluntary activities through their Lend Lease Foundation. They have recently launched Community 365, a volunteering platform which promotes skilled volunteering. Employees can participate in Envision and Pilotlight programmes, or upload details of their own additional volunteering activity. |
| Linklaters | Linklaters is a global law firm with a history spanning 175 years. | Linklaters hold the BitC Global Community Mark. They have two established core community programmes: Learn for Work (raising the aspirations of young people) and Venture Catalysts (growing the capability of not-for-profit organisations). |

| Case study organisation | Who they are | Volunteering activity |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Marks & Spencer (M&S) | Founded in 1884, M&S is an international, multi-channel retailer selling clothing, home and food products. | M&S is very focused on tackling youth unemployment, as part of its Plan A ethical and environmental programme. M&S encourages employees to support young people in their community, either through Make Your Mark, its youth employability programme run in partnership with The Prince's Trust, or by volunteering with a local charity which supports young people in their area. This year, it also launched a programme offering young unemployed people the opportunity to gain work experience in the food supply chain department. |
| National Grid | National Grid is an electricity and gas company that connects consumers to energy sources through its networks. | Community action is at the heart of National Grid's CSR strategy. Employees are encouraged to participate in volunteering activities which have a dual benefit for the employee and community. They can select activities which match their interests and development needs, such as supporting the City Year Bridge Builder programme or volunteering with Teach First. |
| Nationwide | Nationwide is the world's largest building society, with over 160 years of experience. | Nationwide have a target for 65% of their employees to be involved in citizenship this year. Volunteering activities range from involvement in youth clubs, schools, Scouts/Brownies and using their professional skills to support local charities. They also have a targeted education strategy and associated 'Number Crunchers' volunteer programme. |
| Octink | Octink delivers creative display solutions to connect people with brands across the UK. | Octink is a small business and holder of the BitC Community Mark. They focus on giving their time to support the local community. This can involve working in-kind, holding industry half-days for school students, and sitting on the board of local charities, such as Cultivate London. |

| Case study organisation | Who they are | Volunteering activity |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| PwC | PwC LLP is a network of firms in 157 countries, providing professional services to clients through four lines of service: Tax, Assurance, Consulting and Deals. | PwC encourage all employees to volunteer in activities connected to one of their three key CSR areas of focus: education, employability and the environment. Employees can select from a broad range of activities through a volunteering brochure. Activities encourage skills-based volunteering, such as mentoring young people or helping people with their business awareness and interview skills. |
| UBS | Headquartered in Zurich and Basel, UBS is a global financial services firm with offices in over 50 countries. | The majority of employee volunteering focuses on supporting the education and social mobility of young people from disadvantaged communities close to UBS offices. In the UK UBS has a partnership with the Bridge Academy where significant numbers of employees provide wide-ranging support to the school. |
| Veolia | Veolia is a global company which provides an array of solutions related to water, energy and materials. | Volunteering is incorporated into the Graduate Water Programme. The graduates participate in a community project, working with the Legacy Project, during their first year. This is viewed as a vital part of their development. |

Table 2: Featured charities

| Charity | Who they are |
|---|---|
| Business in the Community (BitC) | Business in the Community stands for responsible business, promoting a new contract between business and society. BitC works to inspire, engage, support and challenge its 800+ business members, influencing thousands more through its broader network. Its work in the most deprived communities focuses on employment, enterprise and education. Much of the impact is achieved through the efforts of employee volunteers – some 46,000 in 2013. This includes volunteers with young people in schools, job coaching for people who are long-term unemployed and sharing expertise to help social enterprises to grow. |
| City Year UK | City Year UK tackles educational underachievement and the lack of social mobility amongst disadvantaged children, as well as high unemployment levels amongst young adults. It recruits 18–25-year-olds who spend one year volunteering in inner city schools as mentors and role models, increasing the aspirations, behaviour and academic attainment of children. Alongside this, the volunteers partake in a leadership development programme designed to improve their own employability prospects. |
| Envision | Envision was set up by four young people in 2000 to challenge the stereotype of ‘the youth’ as apathetic and disengaged with the issues going on around them. Today Envision’s programme supports 16–19-year-olds from over 130 schools and colleges in Birmingham, Bristol and London. Last academic year they worked with over 2,000 young people across the country through ten-month-long social action programmes. Organisations can sponsor a school and volunteer in skills workshops and mentoring sessions. |
| Kids Kabin | Kids Kabin runs creative activities for young people, aged 8–13, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The charity is based in a purpose-built arts centre in Walker, with satellite centres in Cowgate, Pottery Bank, Daisy Hill, and Byker. These centres contain workshops where local kids can take part in woodwork, cookery, pottery, art, dance, drama, glasswork or bike repairs. The activities are run by teams of project workers and volunteers. |
| The Legacy Project | The Legacy Project was founded in May 2010 by Tiffany Newell and Adam Gibson. They now have a team of volunteers and project workers providing support, resources and ideas for young people across the UK that would like to positively connect with their local community and deliver projects that really make a difference. |
| Pilotlight | Pilotlight is a unique capacity-building charity that harnesses the skills of business people to offer tailored strategic planning support to charities and social enterprises that are tackling disadvantage in the UK. They match directors from charities and social enterprises with teams of senior business people, and facilitate a year-long engagement to plan for sustainability, development and growth. |
| Step Up To Serve | Step Up To Serve is a national campaign aiming to inspire a generation of young people by increasing the quality, quantity and frequency of social action for all young people aged between 10 and 20. The goal is to double the number of young people participating in social action to over 50% by 2020. The campaign highlights the crucial role employers can play in raising the number of young people getting involved in their communities. |

1 Existing research into volunteering and learning

‘This growing body of research firmly supports the link between volunteering and employee development.’

In this section we provide an outline of key research publications exploring the link between volunteering and learning.

In recent years there has been significant interest in voluntary activity, perhaps in part due to the Big Society agenda and increased focus on CSR in many organisations since the economic downturn. Given that in 2012–13 44% of adults in the UK volunteered formally (at least once a year), there is certainly significant scope for exploration of the impact of volunteering on employee development (Institute for Volunteering Research 2014). There is also recognition that employee volunteering schemes are on the rise (Social Market Foundation 2010).

Much academic research on the topic has been conducted in the United States, and has been largely focused on motivations for volunteering. However, a small number of studies have explored the skills employees can develop through volunteering. For example, Geroy et al (2000) report that volunteers typically develop ‘people skills’, and that volunteering helps them develop new ideas and understand how others live. The impact of these new skills leads Geroy et al to conclude that *‘employee volunteer programmes are positive interventions and have much to offer employees and employers alike’* (Geroy et al 2000, p285). Interestingly, there has also been an acknowledgment that the link between volunteering and learning is a gap in academic research, and in fact practitioners have led the way (Grant 2012).

A key practitioner report is *Volunteering – The business case* (Corporate Citizenship 2010). This study identifies the key competencies that employees can develop through participating in volunteering programmes in education. These are grouped into the following key areas:

- communication skills
- ability to coach and support others
- adaptability
- influencing and negotiation skills.

Alongside these skills, the report also identifies a significant link between employee engagement and volunteering.

Other studies also identify a clear link between volunteering and learning. A Roffey Park Institute management survey of 1,000 people finds that 76% agree that volunteering is a personal development opportunity for employees (McCartney 2006).

Likewise, a 2013 Deloitte study, exploring the views of HR professionals, finds that volunteers may benefit from accelerated development through gaining alternative experience and new skills.

More recently, a Demos report, produced with the support of the Scout Association, identifies that volunteering for the Scouts helps build a range of skills, including teamwork, emotional intelligence, resilience and communication (Birdwell and Wybron 2014).

Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?

Published in November 2013, this CIPD report examines employer activity in youth-led social action through case study research, with employers such as EDF Energy and The Co-operative Group. The research identifies key benefits for young people and employers:

- Involvement in youth social action programmes can help increase employee motivation and build people management skills.
- It can have a positive impact on company brand.
- Young volunteers gain employability skills.
- The schemes help shift damaging stereotypes about young people.

This growing body of research firmly supports the link between volunteering and employee development. However, the existing literature does not fully explore the connection between volunteering and an organisation's wider L&D strategy. This means that volunteering activities are often viewed in isolation, or as part of the CSR agenda, rather than central to people development. This highlights the need to delve further into the key skills and behaviours that volunteering can build and how L&D and HR practitioners can use community action to drive development.

2 Overview of employee volunteering schemes

This section identifies why our case study organisations offer volunteering schemes, and highlights trends in the types of opportunities offered.

Why offer employee volunteering schemes?

The decision to introduce employee volunteering schemes is often guided by a range of inter-connected factors. However, six key themes emerge, which reflect the findings in our *Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?* report.

1 Giving something back to the community

'We want to respect the communities that we work, live and operate in. One of the ways we can do that is by offering our skills back to those communities.'

Gemma Bourne, Lend Lease

2 Enhancing employee development

'We are using community action as a recognised tool for personal development.'

Kate Van der Plank, National Grid

3 Driving employee engagement

'Volunteering activities are effective in boosting employee morale, which is particularly important in challenging times.'

Patsy Francis, UBS

4 Building reputation and brand

'Clients are asking more and more about our social contribution.'

Matt Sparkes, Linklaters

5 Supporting future workforce recruitment

'I think increasingly young people are more and more looking to business for a lot of inspiration and role-modelling, but also to be responsible. So they want to work for people who they feel proud to work for.'

Charlotte Hill, Step Up To Serve

6 Linking to the organisation's core values

'Kids Kabin is very close to the things that we do. Home Groups' mission is to "help our customers and clients to open doors to new opportunities and healthy lives." Volunteering with Kids Kabin has allowed our colleagues within a corporate function to re-engage with that and re-energise the work that they are doing.'

Elouise Leonard-Cross, Home Group

Why youth volunteering?

Youth volunteering refers to activities which seek to build the skills and confidence of young people and/or help reduce youth unemployment. Examples could include mentoring a young person, holding a careers talk in a school or supporting a community project led by young people.

Our case study organisations shared the following key reasons why they have specifically decided to engage in youth volunteering.

- 1 Tackling youth unemployment is a significant issue, and responsible employers have a key role to play.
- 2 Youth issues directly connect to the organisation's employee demographic, values and culture.
- 3 Working with young people can be energising and motivating.
- 4 Engaging with young people supports the organisation's future talent pipeline.
- 5 Youth volunteering has additional development benefits (see page 16).

Trends in volunteering schemes

Types of activities

The range of volunteering activities which employees can now participate in is huge. From mentoring an unemployed young person to supporting

the development of a charity's infrastructure, employees can select the opportunity that best meets their interests and/or development needs. Table 3 summarises ten of the most frequently referenced activities by our case study organisations.

Table 3: Ten most frequently mentioned volunteering activities

| Volunteering activity | Summary |
|--|--|
| One-to-one mentoring | Many organisations provide the opportunity for employees to mentor a young person. This may be within a school, or with a young unemployed person (for example through the CIPD's Steps Ahead Mentoring scheme). |
| Skills workshops | Participating in skills workshops enables employees to use their experience to build the skills of young people, in areas such as public speaking. |
| Schools career talks | This can involve employees visiting a school to share their career experiences. The main objective is to inspire students to consider different career paths. This may be directly with a partner school, or through a programme such as Inspiring the Future. |
| Community youth projects | These activities typically involve mentoring a young person to support them in delivering a community project (often referred to as youth social action). |
| Mentoring charity leaders | Senior business leaders are connected with charity leaders to develop a mentoring relationship. This may be a one-to-one relationship, or could involve a group of senior leaders supporting a charity. |
| School governor/trustee position | Organisations can encourage senior or emerging leaders to take up school governor or trustee positions. |
| Supporting charity infrastructure | Employees may support charities with particular infrastructure challenges, such as developing effective HR policies and practices. |
| Pro bono work | Some organisations offer their time and services for free to support local charities or not-for-profit organisations, such as providing free legal advice. |
| Offering work experience | In some cases work experience is firmly seen as part of the organisation's corporate social responsibility agenda. |
| Volunteer days | More traditionally, many organisations still engage in company or team-wide volunteer days, such as helping refurbish a local youth centre. |

‘The majority of volunteering activities highlighted are skills-based, and these are seen as highly beneficial by the case study organisations.’

A move towards skills-based volunteering

The majority of volunteering activities highlighted are skills-based, and these are seen as highly beneficial by the case study organisations. Sophie Brooks of M&S describes skills-based volunteering as *‘using your skills to volunteer in a way that suits you but also is really helpful to a charity or a group of people who might be able to benefit from what you do in your everyday job.’*

A number of the organisations involved in the research spoke about a shift towards skills-based volunteering. Stephen Hogan of PwC describes *‘moving away from volunteering as altruistic, philanthropic and unskilled, towards volunteering which is much more reliant on the skills, the experience, and the qualities of the people who are here.’*

Some feel that this type of volunteering is more effective in supporting employee development:

‘Employees often feel very positive about giving back to the community through fun activities like painting or decorating a charity centre. Some employees prefer to use their professional skills to support their local charity; for example strategy planning or communications support. Not only does it make a real difference, it also helps them develop their skills too.’ **Chloe Keen, Nationwide**

Broad or focused?

The larger case study organisations and those with more established volunteer programmes typically provide a broader range of volunteering activities:

‘People have a broad range of opportunities to get involved in volunteering, and that reflects the fact that we know that people don’t do the same job here, but that they do a really wide range of things offering different skills. The amount of time that they have got available will be very variable.’

David Adair, PwC

Smaller organisations tend to have a more focused approach. Mike Freely of Octink describes how he needs to *‘be realistic about what we can do and how much time we can ever invest’*, and therefore prioritise activities.

For the many or for the few?

Whether the range of volunteering opportunities is broad or focused, many organisations offer volunteering activities to all employees.

‘We have a variety of all levels of people who get involved in the activities and that ranges from our board, through to anybody and everybody within the business.’ **Liz Cook, John Laing**

‘At National Grid, a direct effort is made to make sure that everybody has the same access to volunteering.’ **Kate Van der Plank, National Grid**

In some cases this open approach is accompanied by specific volunteer programmes for high-potential employees, graduates or senior leaders.

'We encourage our top 100 managers to link with a charitable organisation. This not only benefits their career, but is benefitting the company and our community.'

Jane Daly, M&S

Open or time-bound?

Some of our case study organisations have implemented a fixed-hours policy, although in practice there may be a degree of flexibility.

'We give every employee at least one day's volunteer time a year.'

Jane Daly, M&S

'We offer three and a half hours a month to volunteer, with the caveat being that it has to be on one of our programmes that focus on education, employability and the environment.' **David Adair, PwC**

Others take an open approach, encouraging employees to determine for themselves how much time they can commit.

'There's no ceiling to how long you can spend, but it needs to be something that's really focused and blended into your personal development plan.' **Kate Van der Plank, National Grid**

'Many organisations offer volunteering activities to all employees.'

3 The link between volunteering and learning

‘Overwhelmingly, the interviewees identified a clear link between volunteering and employee development.’

The double benefit of volunteering

Overwhelmingly, the interviewees identified a clear link between volunteering and employee development.

Some spoke about the double benefit between employee development and giving back to the wider society.

‘We have selected really great community activities that have that dual benefit. We see that they have an incredible social impact. It has got a business benefit, and it is a great learning opportunity for our staff.’ **Kate Van der Plank, National Grid**

‘I think it’s a double-edge: development-led, and just actually giving something back as well.’ **Liz Cook, John Laing**

Those that did not define employee development as a primary driver nevertheless highlighted it as a welcome secondary or unexpected benefit.

Experiential learning

Interviewees from both the case study organisations and charities recognised that there was a clear link between experiential learning and volunteering.

‘I think increasingly we recognise that learning is not just about attending formal training programmes, or taking part in formal e-learning or different learning technologies, but also is what they are driving themselves, through their own personal

motivations or development. ... Volunteering in supporting other people is all a very rich learning experience, and I think adds to the collective sense of people learning through doing.’ **Wendy Tomlinson, Linklaters**

‘Experiential learning is fundamental to the work we do with young people, but it is actually something that our volunteers undergo also. They receive training, have the opportunity to practise what they’re doing, and then they get considered feedback from our staff.’ **Laura Hampson, Envision**

Additional development through youth volunteering

A number of the research participants recognised specific development benefits for employees volunteering with young people.

‘I think that when you are working with young people, you need an entirely different communication skill-set. Kids ask questions that you might not always think of, and you need to explain yourself and communicate in a completely different way to help them understand.’ **Lucy Hale, City Year UK**

‘Working with the young people is really quite refreshing. Because they see the world through a different lens, which can actually make you think differently about a particular challenge or topic or what’s going on in the external environment or economy. This is a really powerful insight to get, actually.’ **Gemma Bourne, Lend Lease**

Graduate development at Veolia

The research participants frequently spoke of the capacity for volunteering to develop general management and leadership skills at the start of an individual's career.

Veolia have introduced volunteering into their graduate programme and have identified a 'triple benefit': for the young person, employee and the impact on wider society. They see a clear link to graduate development.

'I think as a company we are teaching the graduates about themselves, but also giving them the leverage to learn and develop through teaching others, instead of just dictating to them what they need to learn.'

Rebecca Wheeler, Veolia

The projects the graduates work on are facilitated through the Legacy Project. Tiffany Newell describes the knock-on effect of developing the graduates and young people involved in the project.

'We're developing the skills of the graduates, in terms of getting them to be coaches, mentors, leaders and so on, and they are actually providing positive role-modelling. They're empowering. They're giving confidence to young people.'

This is clearly having an impact. Adam Marchant of Veolia volunteered in a youth community project as part of his graduate programme. He reflects on how he has developed his leadership skills:

'It is not just about being a dictatorial leader in that sort of sense, in terms of telling people what to do and how to do it. It is getting people to the result in their way, and letting them find out how to do it, and that is how people learn best.'

Executive development at Lend Lease

While volunteering has significant benefits for people at the start of their career, our findings suggest that development is not limited to this population.

Lend Lease have made a tangible link between senior leadership development and volunteering, through Pilotlight.

'We have a number of employees on Pilotlight who utilise their skills to mentor a charity. So if there's an existing charity that is going through an HR change process, or they're developing their new business plan and they want access to some expert skills, Pilotlight will put together a small task team that's available to them over a period of time. That task team is made up of a whole array of people.'

Gemma Bourne, Lend Lease

The scheme provides the potential for senior leaders to develop their strategic thinking skills and provides networking opportunities.

'In terms of our members' development and personal satisfaction the mix of backgrounds found in one team is really positive. Just looking at one issue from such different perspectives and using different organisational approaches contributes greatly to each member's professional, as well as personal, learning and development.'

Shenley Connolly, Pilotlight

4 Development of skills and behaviours

‘Gaining community awareness and a wider appreciation of diversity was most frequently cited by participants as a development benefit.’

This section highlights the top ten key skills and behaviours that employees can develop through volunteering and identifies additional benefits and communication tools.

1 Community awareness

Gaining community awareness and a wider appreciation of diversity was most frequently cited by participants as a development benefit.

Linklaters have found that employee volunteering is a way of encouraging diversity and preparing new employees for interacting with a range of different people. Matt Sparkes of Linklaters describes how volunteering might actually be more effective than a formal diversity training programme:

‘In a way we can do a lot worse in terms of diversity training for people than sending them down the road once a week, to volunteer in Hackney. Not because it’s Hackney, but because they meet a very different set of people. ... It just gets them used to talking and dealing with different types of people.’

Likewise, Patsy Francis of UBS makes a direct link between volunteering and community awareness. She explains that *‘part of volunteering is about broadening horizons, by working with people from different backgrounds, and those who might be less privileged’*.

Our interviewees from the charity sector also highlight the importance of voluntary activity

in driving greater community awareness. Will Benson of Kids Kabin reflects that many of us *‘probably rarely experience other lifestyles’*, and so there is value in volunteering to gain an appreciation of the challenges that many people face.

2 Confidence

In our *Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?* report, we identified that volunteering can help develop a young person’s confidence. Our findings suggest that this can be equally beneficial for employees.

‘Those people that do get involved in volunteering, they’ve generally got a slightly wider perspective on life. It certainly helps to boost their own self-esteem and confidence.’

Chris Waples, John Laing

‘It’s greatly increased my confidence in having difficult conversations. ... It’s just the ability to react to a situation on the spot, and then manage that carefully in a challenging environment.’

Gemma Cross, PwC and volunteer mentor

3 Coaching and mentoring

Development of coaching and mentoring skills is also frequently cited as a primary benefit of volunteering.

‘Because you’re playing a coaching or mentoring or supporting role, you’re also really developing a lot of your own skills in that space, which are really transferable skills to then use in the workplace.’

Charlotte Hill, CEO, Step Up To Serve

Developing through Steps Ahead Mentoring

Simon Collins of Caterpillar and Sarah Austin of Home Group are both Steps Ahead mentors.

Simon has been a mentor since November 2012 and signed up through a pilot in the Midlands. He focuses on helping mentees understand how they can sell themselves through their CV and in interviews, to help unlock opportunities.

Sarah has mentored a range of individuals in the scheme since January 2013. One of her mentees was 19 and had been unemployed for some time. Through Steps Ahead Sarah was able to support him to secure a fantastic opportunity and he has since been promoted.

Here Simon and Sarah explain how being a mentor has supported their development:

'The Steps Ahead programme in particular gave me an opportunity to enhance my skills with regard to interpersonal skills with young people.' **Simon Collins**

'Mentoring a young person is so different from mentoring someone within an organisation ... it has made me hone my skills in terms of building a rapport and building relationships with people who haven't had an employment background before.' **Sarah Austin**

Interestingly they both also feel that Steps Ahead mentoring has supported their professional development.

Simon explains how mentoring is *'helping me to bolster my skills in the future talent development role'* by gaining a greater understanding of the challenges young people face in the employment market.

Likewise, Sarah explains how mentoring an individual with no work experience helped broaden her recruitment approach, *'just because people hadn't worked during their qualifications, it doesn't mean they won't actually make good employees for the future.'*

Both would recommend the scheme to others.

'As HR professionals this is an opportunity for us to utilise our skills and experience. It's not as if we have to go out of our comfort zone, it's an area that we are very knowledgeable and experienced in.' **Simon Collins**

'I think you can talk yourself out of doing those things, because they do seem an addition to your workload, but what you get in return far exceeds what you have to give out in terms of your time. So if anyone was thinking about doing Steps Ahead, or another volunteering programme, I would say definitely commit to it and go for it, because you do get so much back.' **Sarah Austin**

Kate Van der Plank of National Grid describes how helping people understand *'how they can build a rapport with young people really has tremendous benefits if, further on in their career, they're going to be a line manager or even just wanting to interact with other young people within the business.'*

4 Communication

Many of the organisations involved encourage their employees to participate in school careers talks. These experiences are frequently linked to the development of public speaking and presentation skills.

'Communicating and influencing is one of our key competencies and therefore, to be able to communicate to a wide audience who are a mix of ages and at different stages in their education or career is a great skill that we want to see our employees develop. It could be doing a career talk in a school, taking part in an assembly with hundreds of students, or to a more intimate class of ten but, whatever the opportunity, this really improves presentation skills, confidence levels and employees' ability to communicate to different audiences.' **Sophie Brooks, M&S**

5 Networking and relationship-building

Many of the research participants describe how volunteering has provided networking opportunities and helped foster internal relationships.

Dawn Badminton-Capps of Home Group outlines how HRD participation in companywide volunteer days is helping to break down barriers between functions, enabling the team to *'understand the other business areas and how your work impacts on their work'*. Dawn sees relationship development as a critical benefit of volunteering: *'The relationships you're building within your teams, the relationships you're building with external partners, and your customers, and clients, the impact is massive. It's just too beneficial to not do it.'*

Inspiring the Future at Home Group

The HRD team at Home Group participate in school career talks and skills workshops through Inspiring the Future.

Tinneke Castro shares the benefits:

'I think from a development side of it, you just get a chance to broaden your horizons. Then also, at the same time we're able to help younger students and younger people to find an idea of what they want, because at that age it's really, really hard. Even if it is just to give them a light bulb moment, or some sort of an idea, or an avenue, or role that they've never heard of before, it just really helps.'

Jane Seymour explains that volunteering can seem daunting at first, but initial fears are easily overcome with practice.

'I'd never been so terrified walking into the playground in my entire life. There were literally hundreds of students and I had to walk through the middle of this playground to the sports hall. It was the most dominating bit of the entire day, but once you've done it once you'll be fine for the rest.'

Jane and Tinneke both also highlight how the scheme can help build communication and presentation skills.

'If you haven't done public speaking before, there's an opportunity there to stand up and talk in front of students.' **Jane**

'The younger students through Inspiring the Future have got no qualms; quite a lot of them are just putting it out there, saying what their questions are, and you have to be ready with a response.' **Tinneke**

In KWM the potential for networking is actively promoted:

'When you work in a large global organisation, where there are over 500 people working in your office, your network of contacts tends to be focused on areas of specialism. In volunteering you're meeting people and finding a common interest with people you wouldn't otherwise connect with. You're therefore having a conversation that you wouldn't otherwise have. You can develop yourself and your career in that way and develop new friendships and new networks.' **Dawn Holden, KWM**

Some also feel that the networking benefits extend beyond the organisation. David Micciche of John Laing describes how chairing the Westminster cluster (a group of businesses involved in community action) is beneficial: *'There is a lot of learning within and sharing within the cluster itself.'*

6 Team-building

Team volunteering events are frequently mentioned as a method of building team spirit and bringing teams together, particularly during times of change.

Melanie Edwards of John Laing describes the highlights of participating in the team 'volunteer day': *'Everyone was working with everybody, interacting with people that you don't tend to on a day-to-day basis.'*

Laura Hampson of Envision reflects that in some cases group volunteering may be more beneficial than traditional team-building exercises: *'Team volunteering events with a charity partner are fantastic initiatives. You get the team-builder experience that you would ordinarily be paying for, with the benefit of the cost funding a charity instead.'*

This link was also discussed in the Home Group focus group:

'It's really nice to see everybody and work with people that we don't necessarily always work with on a day-to-day basis, and take us out of our comfort zone, and push ourselves, and do it together. It's really, really good for morale within the team.' **Tinneke Castro, Home Group**

7 Enhancing your professional knowledge

Some of the interviewees highlighted a link between volunteering and gaining additional professional knowledge or experience.

Dawn Holden of KWM promotes pro bono work as an opportunity for trainees to develop their knowledge: *'By stretching yourself and working in an area you probably wouldn't otherwise work in, it gives you an opportunity to develop yourself in that area of law.'*

Likewise, Matt Sparkes of Linklaters explains that pro bono work enables employees to gain more experience: *'There are several things they do through that process that it might be five years before they do that for a fee-paying client, so it really is a terrific responsibility, but a fantastic experience.'*

8 Self-awareness and reinforcing skills

In some cases volunteers report that they had not necessarily developed new skills, but that volunteering has helped to reinforce their existing skills or enabled them to reflect on their own careers.

'When you're telling kids to think about their careers, you end up having a better articulation of your own too.' **Matt Sparkes, Linklaters**

Others describe how volunteering can lead to greater self-awareness, by stepping back and getting involved in activities which are outside of your comfort zone.

'One of the things that people do through volunteering is that they remember what it is like not to know stuff.' **Elouise Leonard-Cross, Home Group**

9 Workload management

The ability to manage competing workloads was also described as a benefit of volunteering.

Rebecca Wheeler of Veolia describes how participation in community projects can help graduates to develop time management skills: *'They've got their business project. They've got their community project. They've got their training. They have to balance it all.'*

Liz Cook of John Laing also makes this link, noting that if employees want to develop their planning and organisation skills there will always be a volunteering opportunity which supports this.

10 Creativity

A number of the interviewees feel that volunteering has enhanced their creativity and adaptability. Victoria Rendles of Home Group explains that volunteering in a primary school has enhanced her creativity: *'It was definitely a learning curve in trying to think of ways to keep everyone engaged.'*

Kate Van der Plank of National Grid also describes how a volunteering programme for senior managers *'really helps test and strengthen the skills of our people, and gets them to think creatively in a different context and environment.'*

Shenley Connolly of Pilotlight also reflects on this benefit: *'Many of our members come to us with no*

‘A number of the interviewees feel that volunteering has enhanced their creativity and adaptability.’

knowledge of the charity sector. So, volunteering allows them to adapt their set of skills to a completely different set of resources and challenges, which in itself is another way of learning.’

Additional benefits

In addition to these specific skills outlined, our case study organisations also spoke about additional benefits.

The capacity for volunteering to inspire, motivate and energise

‘From a staff perspective, they get a lot out of volunteering. They are very enthusiastic and come away from these activities really buzzing. As an employer, having enthusiastic people in your organisation is a dream.’ **Jill Whittaker, HIT Training**

Cost benefits of volunteering as an alternative to traditional learning interventions

‘You see businesses spending hundreds of thousands of pounds on training that you’re sending people off on. Well actually they could get all of that value out of volunteering, without it costing you loads of money, and you’re also ticking another box of doing some good in your community.’

Charlotte Hill, Step Up To Serve

How volunteering can help unlock potential or prompt a career change

‘This [volunteering] enabled me to transition into the role that I have got now, which is looking at the impact of our community work and our volunteering programmes, and making them more strategic and

more impactful. ... That wouldn’t have happened had I not taken part in volunteering. I know that has enabled me to develop in a way that I would have wanted to, but which I wouldn’t have been able to do otherwise.’ **Stephen Hogan, PwC**

Communicating the link between volunteering and learning

Our research identifies a clear link between volunteering, skills development and wider career benefits. However, if employees are not aware of this link they may disregard volunteering as a development opportunity or may not get the most out of the experiences they do have. Some may also need help identifying which opportunity is right for them in their current role or career stage.

Many of our case study organisations have come to this realisation, and have specifically focused on producing communication tools which enable employees to understand how they can develop through volunteering.

For example, UBS have introduced a skills matrix called Volunteer +:

‘We created a skills matrix ten years ago to demonstrate the link between skills gained and volunteering activities. The matrix, which reflects our values and key employee competencies, can be used by employees to select volunteering activities based on their development needs and skills they wish to use/practise or develop.’ **Patsy Francis, UBS**

PwC have taken a similar approach and created a volunteering brochure, which means, as Stephen Hogan of PwC explains, *'people can see the opportunities and can see what they might be interested in.'* This means they can select opportunities that best meet their area of interest and their development needs.

As with any L&D initiative, getting communication right is critical to enabling employees to maximise their learning. In the Appendix we share an example volunteering skills framework, which reflects our research findings and could act as a starting point for organisations seeking to communicate the link between volunteering and learning.

'...getting communication right is critical to enabling employees to maximise their learning.'

The National Grid Community Action and Skills Hub

National Grid have developed an online portal where employees can directly see how different volunteering opportunities link with skills development.

Kate Van der Plank explains how it works:

'The idea of our Community Action and Skills Hub is that people can choose their volunteering activities, either because they've got an idea about what things they want to do ... or because they have skills that they want to develop. [For each volunteering activity] it tells you what skills and behaviours it will help you develop. Then, you can have a look at some case studies.'

Kate sees this as a vital part of career development:

'All of our jobs have a defined competency matrix which includes levels of skill from foundation to advanced; so for the particular role that you're currently in, or if there is a role you are aspiring to, you can have a look through the Hub and see the different community programmes you can do that could help you get to that skill level.'

5 Measuring impact

‘...while gathering data and measuring impact can be challenging, it is recognised by our case study organisations as a necessity for building a firm case for investment and engaging senior leaders.’

This section outlines the key methods of measuring the impact of volunteering on employee development and the challenges faced. We focus on measuring the value of individual learning (for insight on organisational impact please see *Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?* (CIPD 2013)).

The case study organisations have a clear understanding of the link between volunteering and learning. Many have reached these conclusions through effective measurement of volunteering.

‘The thing I think we are particularly good at is measuring the impact on our people. We are into our third year now of really detailed analysis of the skills development that volunteering has brought, and the engagement and motivational benefits gained from getting involved.’ **Kate Van der Plank, National Grid**

Some of the case study organisations use surveys to understand the impact of volunteering:

‘A 2003 staff survey found that when comparing employees who volunteer with those who hadn’t there is a strong correlation between volunteering and high performance in terms of UBS’s standard core competencies. Volunteers outperformed in the areas of teamwork, communications, and problem analysis. This exercise has been repeated in 2014 and the initial findings reveal similar results.’ **Patsy Francis, UBS**

Others encourage employees to share their volunteering experience in review meetings, as Dawn Holden of KWM explains: *‘We have a section within their appraisal where they have the opportunity to detail the corporate responsibility work they do.’*

Dawn does, however, recognise that getting tangible data on impact can be difficult (just as with many traditional L&D initiatives): *‘You tend to get some very nice, fluffy, warm quotes about how wonderful it is and how rewarding [volunteering] is and the community establishments are always extremely grateful and full of praise. Measuring is a bit trickier.’*

Often formalised volunteering programmes can be easier to track and measure. However, learning can also arise from personal volunteering experiences and it may not always be appropriate to measure these forms of activities.

Wendy Tomlinson of Linklaters explains: *‘I think there’s a question in my mind as to what’s the link between the organisational development agenda and what someone is very personally wanting to do and potentially wanting to keep private and separate from their work life.’*

It seems that the key is balance: establishing simple ways of measuring impact, but respecting an individual’s need for privacy in a way that supports the values of the organisation.

Going further and faster at PwC

PwC place significant time and attention on evaluating the impact of volunteering.

Surveys are conducted before and after employees volunteer. Stephen Hogan explains what the results show:

'We are looking to understand how volunteering has affected [employees] in four main ways. We are looking to see what it has done to their skills. We are looking to see what has happened to their engagement with the firm, to their awareness of wider social environment issues, and what it has done to their networks, both internally and externally.'

'It has been very clear, coming back from the surveys, that people are getting this personal development from their volunteering experiences. It is the kind of thing that people would have been saying anecdotally, but now, we have actually got some evidence to back it up.'

'People, before they start volunteering, think that they are pretty highly skilled. They tend to score themselves pretty well. Even so, they score themselves higher after they have volunteered, which is great because it means that we are taking people that are already highly skilled, or think they are highly skilled, and giving them something extra. ... People tell us that they wouldn't have got that elsewhere and that it has helped them to develop further or faster.'

What's clear is that while gathering data and measuring impact can be challenging, it is recognised by our case study organisations as a necessity for building a firm case for investment and engaging senior leaders. As Tim Foster of John Laing explains, *'you have to be able to articulate it in terms of business benefit, or else if you're a business with shareholders you shouldn't be doing it.'* The value of learning and employee development can form a primary part of this business benefit, with the right insight and data.

6 Facilitating volunteering and maximising the benefits

‘The potential development benefits of volunteering can be enhanced if there is a robust link to L&D strategy.’

This section outlines the key hints and tips shared by the case study organisations for maximising the development potential of volunteering.

Business buy-in

Many of the interviewees spoke about the critical need to gain business engagement in volunteering: *‘As with many corporate programmes, management buy-in is essential.’*

Patsy Francis, UBS

Building relationships

Having a consultative and open relationship with your charity partner was frequently highlighted: *‘Be very clear about what you want from the relationship.’*

Will Benson, Kids Kabin

Overcoming employee obstacles

Employees may have reservations about volunteering, because of time constraints or lack of confidence. Often making things simple is the solution: *‘It is a balance between finding meaningful opportunities for people to participate in, and not making it too onerous.’*

Chloe Keen, Nationwide

Be clear on what you can offer and the skills you want to build

If working with a charity partner, spend time identifying the right partner and look for a match between the skills you can provide, and development the charity can offer: *‘If it’s not relevant to your business sector and all the skill-sets that you’re trying to enhance for your employees and your organisation, the chances are that you’re not going to give that volunteering organisation, or that community body, the best value*

and the best skill-set. Matching organisational attributes is tremendously important.’

Gemma Bourne, Lend Lease

Training volunteers

In some cases it may be appropriate to train volunteers: *‘We make sure that our corporate volunteers go through a robust training session. This ensures that they get the most out of the experience, and understand how to put the most in too.’*

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Integration into L&D practice

With such a clear link between volunteering and employee development, the lines between corporate social responsibility and learning and development are beginning to blur.

This has even resulted in transition of roles. Dawn Holden of KWM explains how her Corporate Responsibility role *'has moved from business development into the HR team'*.

In some of the case study organisations the teams are separate, but the HR or L&D team are deeply involved and connected to community activity and volunteering:

'I actually work really closely with HR, so although I am part of Corporate Affairs, I am actually probably more aligned, on a day-to-day, in terms of working with HR. I have to say, I think our HR team are really enlightened on all of this and very supportive.' **Kate Van der Plank, National Grid**

However, this is not always the case, as Laura Hampson of Envision highlights: *'I think it's important that the developmental impact volunteering can have is emphasised more. I get the impression that this is not always acknowledged by businesses' HR departments.'*

There are, however, signs that HR/L&D and CSR teams are becoming more integrated:

'There's a general trend for CSR and HR teams to work more closely together, because there are obvious benefits to the business in using and developing employee skills in a non-office/different environment.'

Patsy Francis, UBS

This is perhaps based on a recognition that in order for organisations to truly maximise the development potential of volunteering, a consistent and joined-up approach is needed.

Learnings for SMEs

Our research findings suggest that employee volunteering can be incredibly advantageous for organisations of all sizes.

Some of our interviewees reflected on the benefits of volunteering for SMEs, but also the lack of awareness:

'If you were to canvas SMEs nationally there wouldn't be many that would be doing it like us. The shrewd ones should, I think, because of the value that you can get out of it, both from employees like you doing it, the community which likes you being a part of their community, and through the business case. ... We've grown our company, partially, on the back of what we're doing.' **Mike Freely, Octink**

'I wonder whether people from small businesses might even know about the opportunities for volunteering that actually could support the development of their people, because with smaller budgets and time constraints from a development perspective, it's an interesting way in which people can actually develop skills that they can draw upon when they return.' **Liz Cook, John Laing**

Perhaps this is because of a perception that you need to have substantial resources to support employee volunteering. While this is undeniably beneficial, it is certainly not a necessity or a barrier, as Charlotte Hill of Step Up To Serve explains: *'There are often really small, local voluntary organisations out there who are really perfect to match up with small businesses.'*

Stephen Hogan of PwC shares this view:

'The things that we do are very much aligned to our organisation, the values it has, and what our organisation wants to do. Those principles would hold for any organisation of any size. ... There are also platforms now where you can team up with other organisations that might also be small and collectively do something bigger together. Just because an organisation doesn't have the size or the scale of PwC, it is an important message to get out that that doesn't mean that they don't have something useful to offer.'

Stephen Hogan, PwC

There are also programmes which directly connect an individual with a volunteering opportunity, without the need for organisational management or a charity partner (such as Steps Ahead Mentoring or Inspiring the Future). For an SME with limited resource, this can be a really simple method of introducing volunteering.

Conclusion

‘Our findings demonstrate that volunteering provides a viable alternative to traditional forms of employee development.’

‘These benefits are not restricted to those at the start of their career, and can be just as applicable for established leaders.’

A clear link between volunteering and learning

This report explores the link between volunteering and learning through case study research. Our findings demonstrate that volunteering provides a viable alternative to traditional forms of employee development. In a working environment characterised by increasing change, uncertainty and the need to innovate, volunteering can develop the skills individuals and organisations need to be fit for the future.

We have specifically focused on exploring the key skills that volunteering can develop. This is a conscious decision to move away from a perception of volunteering as ‘generally good for your development’ to an activity which is viewed and utilised as a targeted learning intervention for a specific skill gap or behavioural need. We have also particularly focused on youth volunteering, in recognition of the key challenge of tackling youth unemployment and additional development gained through volunteering with young people.

Key skills and learning

One of our most striking findings is the overwhelming link between employees volunteering and developing a wider perspective about the world around them and their community. The value of this tacit knowledge cannot be underestimated in an age where we are increasingly working cross-culturally. This is particularly apparent when volunteering with young people, who may have a slightly different way of thinking or acting.

Volunteering can also help develop key skills vital for leadership and management roles, such as coaching, mentoring, communication, creativity, team-building and time management. It can also have a powerful impact in increasing confidence, building greater self-awareness and in some cases enhancing professional knowledge. There is also significant potential for networking, both within and outside the organisation.

These benefits are not restricted to those at the start of their career, and can be just as applicable for established leaders.

Unlocking potential

Interestingly some of our case study organisations spoke about the learning potential of employees’ involvement in volunteering projects or tasks that they would not be perceived to have the experience for, or opportunity to do, in their existing role. This is an undeniable benefit to those organisations with limited room for career progression or role stretch. However, for those who do have this capacity, perhaps there is a greater need to take a chance and recognise this unlocked potential at an earlier stage by also providing stretching opportunities within the workplace.

Changing perceptions of L&D

The value of experiential learning is increasingly being recognised by organisations, many of which are adopting the 70/20/10 model to L&D. Introducing volunteering as part of that 70% has the potential to bring a host of new skills and perspectives into the organisation.

In this respect volunteering has enormous potential as an integrated part of an organisation's L&D strategy, rather than a replacement for traditional development or a standalone option. For example, an employee wishing to develop presentation skills for an upcoming client pitch could watch a curated TED talk online, volunteer to hold an Inspiring the Future careers talk in a school, and then reinforce and reflect on her learning through a peer action learning set.

Clear communication

The value of volunteering is evident. But the development benefits may not be obvious to employees who have never volunteered, or never considered volunteering as a learning opportunity. This means that clearly communicating the link between volunteering and learning can have a really powerful effect. There is a particular opportunity in ensuring that people managers have a robust understanding of the development benefits of volunteering. This can help volunteering to become a common form of experiential learning, which targets a specific skill or behavioural development need.

Respecting personal motivations

It is important to note that our findings do not necessarily suggest that development is always the primary driver for a volunteer. In many cases the decision may relate to a close personal identification to a particular cause, or a fundamental desire to 'give back'. Organisations therefore need to tread carefully when promoting the link between volunteering and learning. This means respecting individual motivations when introducing an employee volunteering scheme.

However, organisations should not shy away from explicitly outlining the development benefits of volunteering. Having a greater

awareness of how volunteering can develop key skills (and how they will be recognised in the workplace) can help employees choose the best activity – one which meets both their personal motivation and desire to learn.

A joined-up approach

Realising the full organisational benefit of volunteering fundamentally requires robust collaboration, and an understanding of the true value of activities, by L&D, HR and CSR professionals. Only by working together can volunteering add true strategic value to an organisation, otherwise activities run the risk of being isolated and labelled as purely community or learning initiatives. This does not need to involve complex governance, but a recognition of the need to build strong internal and external relationships and continually connect the dots between activities.

Starting out

There are a wide range of charities and other not-for-profit organisations which welcome connections with employers. These partnerships can create opportunities which provide a clear double benefit for the community and employees. In particular there are many schemes designed to help employers connect with young people, to help reduce youth unemployment. The development opportunities are vast, and if you start small with targeted activities it can be simple to manage. And if you are not currently volunteering, in the words of Laura Bailey of Home Group, *'you're missing a trick.'*

'...volunteering has enormous potential as an integrated part of an organisation's L&D strategy.'

Top five recommendations for L&D practitioners

- 1 Experience volunteering for yourself to understand the development opportunities.
- 2 Engage your business leaders in the value of volunteering.
- 3 Work collaboratively with your L&D, HR and CSR colleagues to develop joint initiatives.
- 4 Introduce simple tools which help employees understand the link between volunteering and learning.
- 5 Start small, and demonstrate the benefits by measuring impact.

Appendix: Volunteering skills framework

The framework below provides a simple overview of key volunteering activities and development areas identified through the research.

This is not an exhaustive list, but is designed to provide a starting point

for you to adapt to reflect your own competencies and volunteering activities, or to plan which activities you wish to start. The majority of the activities highlighted relate to youth volunteering, reflecting the focus of the research.

| Activity \ Skill | Community awareness | Confidence | Coaching and mentoring | Communication | Networking | Team-building | Professional knowledge | Self-awareness | Workload management | Creativity |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|
| One-to-one mentoring | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | | |
| Skills workshops | X | X | | X | X | | | X | | X |
| Schools career talks | X | X | | X | | | | X | | |
| Community youth projects | X | X | X | X | | X | | | X | X |
| Mentoring charity leaders | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | X |
| School governor/trustee position | X | X | | X | X | | X | | | |
| Supporting charity infrastructure | X | | | | | | X | | X | |
| Pro bono work | X | | | | | | X | | X | |
| Offering work experience | X | X | | | | | | | X | |
| Volunteer days | X | | | X | X | X | | | | X |

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Learning to Work Advisory Group

The Learning to Work Advisory Group consists of leading organisations from a wide range of sectors that champion young people, pioneer innovative youth engagement practices in their industries and provide invaluable insight, expertise and best-practice case studies to the CIPD's youth employment programme.

- Alan MacKinnon, IHS
- Alison Thorne and Emma Shuttleworth, The Body Shop
- Anouska Ramsay, Capgemini
- Cerian Morgan, Deutsche Bank
- Dominic Gill, Microsoft
- Elizabeth Carter and Ann Pickering, O2
- Emma Wordsworth, Certas Energy
- Fiona Miller and Jo Ward, Nestle
- Gemma Robertson, Asos
- James Lawrence, Visa
- James Watts, KFC
- Jane Daly, Marks & Spencer
- Liz Eddy, NHS Employers
- Marcus Lee and Debbie Reeves, Santander
- Marguerite Ulrich, Veolia
- Martha Jennings, Sky
- Mike Thompson and Shaun Meekins, Barclays
- Neil Morrison, Penguin Random House UK
- Rob Zajko, Hilton Worldwide
- Richard Marsh, Capita

Learning to Work Youth Group

The Learning to Work Youth Group is made up of young people aged 16–24 who meet regularly to share their experiences of transitioning from education to work in the UK. Our thanks go to:

- Carlo Rowe
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CIPD | Learning to Work

The **Learning to Work** programme is led by the CIPD to promote the role of employers in reducing youth unemployment. The CIPD's purpose is to **champion better work and working lives**, which starts with young people being able to access the labour market.

The overall aim of the programme is to promote the business case for investing in the future workforce. We encourage HR professionals to offer a wide range of access routes into their organisations and ensure their recruitment and management practices are youth-friendly. We also promote direct contact with young people via two youth volunteering programmes, **Steps Ahead Mentoring** and **Inspiring the Future**.

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