

**Policy report**

March 2015

From *Big Society*  
to the  
*big organisation?*

The role of organisations in  
supporting employee volunteering

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.

# From Big Society to the big organisation?

## Policy report

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# Introduction

*'We know what David Cameron means by his Big Society – lollipop ladies are sacked and replaced by volunteers' (Daily Telegraph 2011).*

Ever since the Coalition Government launched its flagship policy idea of the 'Big Society', it has attracted criticism. This has included highlighting the coinciding cuts to the voluntary sector, as well as emphasising that the type of people who are likely to volunteer will reproduce existing inequalities: *'everywhere it will be disproportionately full of middle-class types with education and time'* (West 2010).

And yet, while commentators may criticise the political ideology of a smaller state and question the fact that this equals a bigger society, many aspects of community-based volunteering and social solidarity transcend political ideologies.

This is also reflected in the way organisations interact with their local community, with employer-supported volunteering programmes becoming more popular for a number of reasons, which we will explore below. In particular the HR community has started to engage with this topic, as part of the wider employee engagement and learning and development agenda, as the link between skills development and volunteering becomes more established. Indeed, as research into this topic for this report shows, four-fifths of HR professionals now believe that volunteering provides a personal development opportunity for staff and over

two-thirds believe that it can form part of staff development plans (CIPD forthcoming). Furthermore, HR professionals also believe that volunteering experience can enhance employability skills, especially when it comes to entry-level candidates: two-thirds of HR professionals who ask potential employees about volunteering experience at some point in the application process believe that candidates with volunteering experience have more employability skills than their competitors.

Traditionally, volunteering fits with organisations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) by acting as a bridge between companies and the community; however, increasingly organisations realise that applying volunteering to their learning and development activities can be very beneficial and that it can be a key tool to foster greater employee engagement, even though there is still a gap between this understanding and the action. At a time when younger generations coming into the workplace look for more than just stability and pay, organisations need to look at new, innovative ways to develop their employees, so employer-supported volunteering (ESV) has become increasingly popular (Lloyd 2010). 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 (Stuart 2014).

However, while volunteering has become more popular with employers who increasingly recognise the 'double benefit' of employee development and giving something back to the community, the integration of this into organisational strategies and HR practices is still limited. There is an obvious intention to action gap, meaning despite believing that employee volunteering is mutually beneficial, many organisations are still not acting on this. Indeed, less than two-fifths of organisations incorporate volunteering into employee development and/or engagement strategies. Similarly, despite being of the belief that volunteering enhances employability, only less than a fifth of employers ask about volunteering experience on application forms.

In this paper we will look at the current state of play of employee volunteering and the benefits this brings for organisations, society and volunteers themselves. We will also examine the barriers to wider adaptation and implementation of these practices, arguing that it is in organisations' own interest to play a more active role in promoting volunteering to their employees and to support them in their volunteer journey. This should be part of the toolbox for HR professionals in the future and we will touch on what the CIPD can do to encourage and support the HR community in taking this agenda forward.

**Katerina Rüdiger,**  
**CIPD**

# The Big Society is dead, long live the Big Society

*'As a concept, the Big Society is a good thing. Nobody could really object to the idea that people should be encouraged to help others. [...] There are sound economic reasons why the Government should be encouraging people to volunteer. But they are not the ones normally used by Cameron and his ministers'* (Elliott 2014).

According to David Cameron, the idea of the Big Society was *'to take power away from politicians and give it to people'*.<sup>1</sup> The Coalition Government wanted to empower communities, open up public service provision to charities and encourage people to take an active role in their communities, through volunteering and other social action activities. To achieve this, it launched initiatives such as the National Citizen Service.

The initial reaction to the launch of the Big Society was positive, with commentators applauding the *'vision of a society rebuilt from the ground up'* (Brogan 2010). But this early enthusiasm quickly turned sour and a few years later the credibility of the policy idea had taken some serious hits. According to the Big Society Audit 2013 carried out by the think tank Civil Exchange, this was mainly because the *'voluntary sector has largely been left out in the cold'*, both in terms of funding, as well as consultation and voice. The audit looked at key indicators and concluded that the Big Society did not yet *'deliver on its rhetoric'* (Sloccock 2013).

However, despite this criticism, the audit also acknowledged that *'although some have declared it*

*[the Big Society] dead, it isn't going away. Not only has it spawned many initiatives with real impact on the ground, many people – politicians, senior business leaders, religious leaders and civil society itself – are also continuing to turn to civil society as a positive force for social change....'* So while the implementation of the political concept of the Big Society may have alienated public opinion and interest groups in the voluntary sector, many initiatives are still being taken forward and are starting to shape the way we see social action.

While public funding for the voluntary sector has indeed suffered cuts, there are still available funding streams. One example is the Nesta and Cabinet Office Centre for Social Action and Innovation Fund, which *'supports the growth of innovations that mobilise people's energy and talents to help each other, working alongside public services'*. NESTA is funding and supporting a range of social action projects focused on volunteering that cut across six areas where there is a *'plausible account of how social action can make a difference'*. These six priority areas include:<sup>2</sup>

- helping people with long-term health conditions to live well
- supporting young people to succeed and find employment
- using 'impact volunteering' to support and improve public services
- helping unemployed people improve their skills and get back to work
- using digital technology to get people involved in social action.

*'There are sound reasons why the Government should be encouraging people to volunteer.'*

*‘Volunteering is indeed a component of the Big Society that has struck a chord; it has found cross-societal and cross-party support.’*

NESTA believes that social action has a key role to play in augmenting public services, from community networks supporting older people to live well and peer networks for people living with long-term health conditions, to young people helping their peers navigate job and training opportunities.

**Volunteering: transcending party politics**

Volunteering is indeed a component of the Big Society that has struck a chord; it has found cross-societal and cross-party support and it is indeed one of the few indicators that score positively in the Big Society Audit (with the caveat of only going back to pre-recession levels). At regional level, for example, London now has ambitious aims to rival cities like New York and the long-standing US tradition of volunteering, with Team London, the Mayor’s volunteering programme, which makes it quick and easy for Londoners to volunteer, building on the legacy and success of volunteering at the 2012 Olympic Games.

Another good example of cross-party support for social action and volunteering is the #iwill campaign co-ordinated by the charity Step Up To Serve. The campaign aims to make social action – defined as: *‘practical action in the service of others that creates a double benefit’* – part of life for as many 10–20-year-olds as possible by the year 2020. The campaign also aims to break down barriers for adult volunteers working with young people involved in social action. Although originally initiated by the Government, the #iwill campaign is backed by the leaders of the three main political parties and other key figures from across UK society, led by HRH The Prince of Wales. Within just a year of being launched, the campaign has secured the support

of over one hundred organisations from the business, education, faith and voluntary sectors, which have all made tangible pledges towards the campaign’s goal.

The business interest in this agenda and support for employee volunteering with young people has also been noticeable in recent years. Initiatives such as Inspiring the Future, run by the charity Education and Employers Taskforce, which connects state schools and colleges with employee volunteers, have seen a huge surge in support over a short amount of time. Launched in 2012, the programme now has almost 19,000 employee volunteers registered to give career insights talks and run CV and mock interview sessions in both secondary and primary schools. Similarly, the CIPD’s own volunteering programme, Steps Ahead Mentoring, has been very popular amongst CIPD members, as we now have over 2,000 HR professionals signed up to mentor young jobseekers, working with over 570 Jobcentre Plus offices in England.

Furthermore, technology allows people to volunteer in a different way and to potentially reach large volumes of recipients. Innovative initiatives such as Giveback UK have the potential to transform the way the voluntary sector interacts with the corporate sector. Giveback UK has created an online learning library to support the UK’s 170,000 charities. The non-profit organisation asks thought leaders, corporates and employees from a wide range of organisations to share their knowledge and expertise in front of the camera, developing videos around professional and workplace development to upskill, inspire and motivate people working in the charity sector.<sup>3</sup>

### **Definition of volunteering, legal status of volunteers and number of volunteers**

Despite the emergence of recent national campaigns, it would be wrong to say that volunteering is a new phenomenon; on the contrary, according to the Institute for Volunteering Research, the UK has a long-standing tradition of volunteering, with one of the highest volunteering rates in the world. Indeed, the UK has a thriving voluntary sector, supported by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), which represents and connects voluntary organisations, from the smallest community groups to the largest charities.

The 2013–14 Community Life survey run by the Government showed that 41% of people questioned reported volunteering formally (that is, through a group, club or organisation) at least once in the previous year. This equates to an estimate of 12.7 million people volunteering in England once a month, and 19.2 million once a year. Rates of formal volunteering peaked in 2005, when 44% of respondents to the annual Citizenship Survey reported that they had volunteered in the past year. A lot of research has been done to establish the motivations for volunteering that shows that people volunteer for many different reasons. They may choose to volunteer to develop skills or gain experience, to socialise or to give something back to society. They may also volunteer because they feel a moral duty or compelling reasons to take part in voluntary action or support a particular cause.

This increase in volunteering is evident across most age, socio-economic and ethnic groups, but there has been a particular increase amongst young people (aged 16–19), as it has been seen as a route into work (Cabinet Office

2013). In the context of high youth unemployment, volunteering offers an opportunity for young people to gain experience and develop the all-important skills needed for employment. CIPD and other research shows that volunteering can build teamworking, communication and problem-solving skills as well as help with confidence and resilience (Stuart 2014). It is also notable that people in employment are more likely to volunteer and that, in recent years, there has been a rise in employee volunteering.

### **What is volunteering?**

The Compact Code of Good Practice on Volunteering, based on a commitment between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, currently defines volunteering as *'any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment'* (COI 2005). There is a differentiation between formal and informal volunteering: the former refers to people who volunteer with official groups, clubs or organisations and the latter to people who give unpaid help to other people, usually friends or neighbours. However, there is no legal definition of a 'volunteer'. But a volunteer agreement differs from the employment contract in the following ways: volunteers should have the freedom not to work and to refuse training, and duties and benefits should not be fixed or mandatory. However, organisations do have the right to ensure that volunteers have the necessary skills to be of use to them. The agreement should stipulate that there is no intention for it to be legally binding (Suff 2012).

The recent rise of volunteering as a means to support people (back) into employment, and public discussion around the differences

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between volunteering and work experience, led the Greater London Authority to bring key voluntary sector stakeholders together to establish the principles behind the term ‘volunteering’. They conclude on the following key characteristics for volunteering:

- is mutually beneficial (to the individual and the organisation)
- is independently chosen and freely given
- is enabling and flexible wherever possible
- has a community or social benefit.

Indeed, differentiating between work experience, internships and voluntary work is an important issue, as many employers are nervous about being seen as exploitative. The main difference between these are that with the former the emphasis is on learning and workplace discovery, whereas volunteering is work carried out voluntarily for a charity, voluntary organisation or fundraising body. The CIPD has developed best practice guides on work experience placements and internships, and Acas has produced some useful guides around what employees on each of these are entitled to, but

some further, more detailed advice in this area would probably be useful.<sup>4</sup>

### The social and economic value of volunteering

*‘...the societal gains from volunteering are potentially large – and also largely under-appreciated. Certainly, they are not well measured. At least in official GDP statistics, they are not captured at all. This failure to recognise fully the value it creates means that volunteering suffers from a market failure problem ... very little of the value created by the volunteer sector is easily visible to statisticians, to policymakers, to politicians, to companies, indeed to the volunteers themselves. This is a vast, but often invisible, army’* (Haldane 2014).

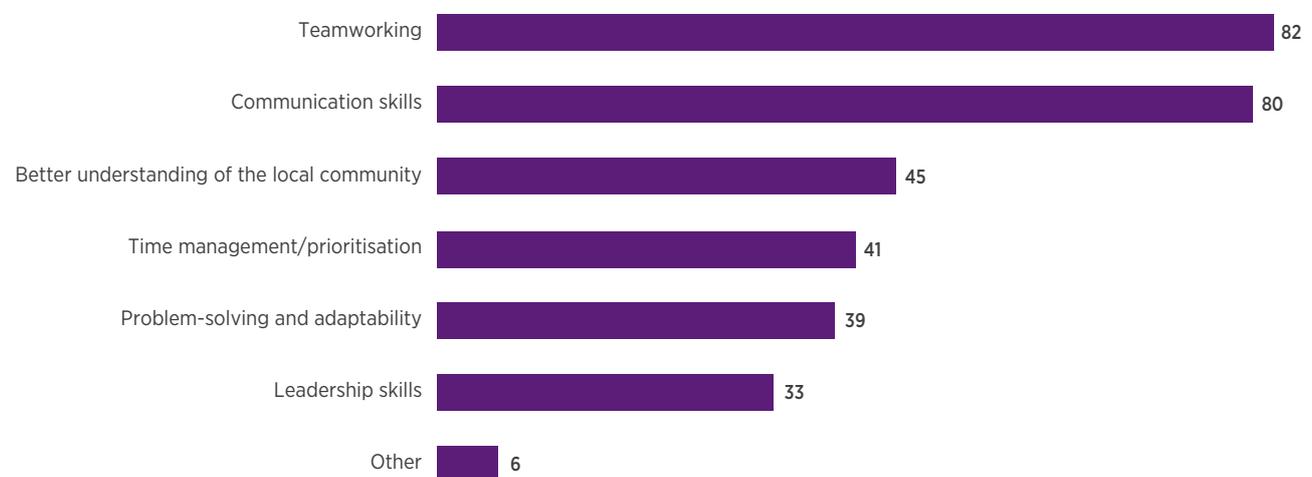
Although the volunteering population in the UK is significant and their contribution to society substantial, this is currently not well measured and is not reflected in official statistics like GDP figures. The Bank of England’s Chief Economist, Andy Haldane – a keen champion of volunteering himself, who has co-founded his own charity that gets economists to offer their skills to charities – has looked at both formal and informal volunteering and has attempted to put a figure on

this contribution. In a recent lecture, he talks about a ‘volunteering onion’ with three different layers: the economic value of goods and services created by volunteers, the private value of volunteering activities (in other words the benefits felt by volunteers themselves) and the social value of volunteering activities, as societal gains may be a multiple of economic and private benefits (for example, if volunteers help to get a homeless person off the street they would be saving society a lot of money in terms of health and other spending).

To calculate the economic value of volunteering, Haldane looks at labour input. He estimates that the overall contribution of volunteering to the UK economy could exceed £50 billion per year, or around 3.5% of annual UK GDP. He argues that this would place the volunteering sector on a level with the UK energy sector.

When it comes to the private value of volunteering (that is, the value to the volunteers themselves), he says that there are benefits across three categories: enhanced well-being, health benefits and increased skills and employability. This is confirmed by a number of surveys: for example

**Figure 1: Skills demonstrated by candidates with voluntary experience (%)**



Base: All HR professionals who consider candidates with voluntary work to demonstrate more employability skills (n=329)

the 2006/07 Helping Out survey of volunteers found a range of benefits: enjoyment, satisfaction and achievement, meeting people and making friends, broadening life experience, boosting confidence, reducing stress, improving physical health and learning new skills. This is also confirmed by a survey of our CIPD Steps Ahead volunteer mentors, where just under eight out of ten said that they find taking part in the mentoring programme rewarding and 75% saying they think the programme is worthwhile for them as well as their mentees. Furthermore, when we asked HR professionals what the top three skills entry-level candidates with volunteering experience demonstrate, they said teamwork (82%), communication (80%) and an understanding of the local community (45%).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in terms of the social value of volunteering (that is, the value to the community and the recipient), Haldane argues that while an evaluation of the benefits is difficult and often imperfect, there is also clear evidence from a number of studies that the value of social returns are significantly higher than the labour input costs.

### **Volunteering and organisations: what is employer-sponsored volunteering?**

In the context of organisations, volunteering can be looked at from two perspectives: firstly, some organisations – in particular charities – rely significantly on volunteers to carry out their charitable functions. These organisations have to recruit, manage and develop a volunteer workforce. Secondly, there is employer-sponsored volunteering (ESV), where individual employers support and/or encourage employees to take part in external volunteering activities (Suff 2012).

Managing a volunteer workforce comes with its own issues, but in this paper we will focus on the latter, employer-sponsored volunteering and the issues associated with it, that is, how to align this to organisational strategies, how to encourage more interest in volunteering amongst employees, what kind of paid and unpaid leave is offered, how to support line managers in managing staff who volunteer, how to measure the impact and benefits for the organisation, how to support employees in their volunteer journey, how to make this part of personal development plans and how to map the L&D benefits of volunteering.

### **A changing context for organisations**

Organisations have started to engage more with the volunteering agenda for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there has been a change in customer attitudes and expectations. Seventy-five per cent of the public now believe that it is either very important or absolutely essential for companies to act in a socially responsible way (Lloyd 2010). Offering volunteering programmes helps organisations to build their reputation and brand as a socially responsible company. Research on employer volunteering with the education sector shows that this creates a *'virtuous circle, developing staff at low cost, increasing employee satisfaction, making recruitment easier and building a future talent pool, while building corporate reputation'* (Mann and Glover 2011).

Secondly, it's not just consumer expectations that are driving organisations to look at volunteering. Employees have also changed what they are expecting of their employer:

*'When we asked HR professionals what the top three skills entry-level candidates with volunteering experience demonstrate, they said teamwork (82%), communication (80%) and understanding of the local community (45%).'*

*‘There is a trend towards participation in skills-based volunteering activities away from those that are simply altruistic.’*

*‘My hunch is that, over time, more companies will need to recognise the benefits of volunteering, not just among board members but among employees. Why? The two Rs – recruitment and retention. Generation Y, born from the 1980s onwards, place a much greater weight on a diverse career experience, with a strong social dimension, than their predecessors. And Generation Z, the Millennials, are unlikely to buck that trend. Where they lead, companies will surely need to follow’ (Haldane 2014).*

As new generations enter the workplace and lessons from research into employee voice and the psychological contract have been absorbed by employers, employee relations continues to shift from institutions to relationships. As a result, organisations are more proactive in managing the employment relationship (CIPD 2005) – a relationship that includes new ways of gaining and retaining employee commitment and engagement and non-traditional ways of developing employees. Volunteering provides one response to this. A tighter financial climate might also have a role to play, as in the absence of being able to offer pay rises and bonuses, organisations are being forced to find creative ways to retain and engage employees. Research shows that, for example, there are links between community involvement and pride in the organisation (Mann, Lopez et al 2010). Case studies on volunteering clearly show the link with employee engagement; for example a case study carried out by the CIPD a few years ago with Accenture showed that management trainees who had volunteered to serve overseas on six-month assignments to developing countries were more committed when they got back and performed better in their subsequent postings (Redington 2005). Speaking of employee

engagement, there is a lot the corporate sector can learn from voluntary organisations, according to Justin Davis Smith of the UK’s National Council for Voluntary Organisations:

*‘Retaining the commitment, loyalty and enthusiasm of volunteers, in the absence of the wage tie which binds paid staff to an organisation, demands a fantastic array of skills. It calls for the development of a psychological contract in place of the “cash nexus” and the capacity to manage diversity and nurture a level of engagement which would be the envy of any HR manager’ (Davis Smith 2014).*

Thirdly, and connected to that, the way organisations do CSR has been changing: CSR isn’t just seen as something that is done on the side, but in many organisations it becomes more embedded into business practices and HR policies. More organisations have realised that it is in their interest to have a closer engagement with their local communities. Research on employee volunteering, community engagement and the link to social capital has shown that employer-supported volunteering provides *‘a very tangible means of enhancing a company’s trustworthiness’* as well as a means to reach a *‘shared understandings of the values which should govern its [the company] business practices’* (Mutuhri et al 2009).

Finally, employee volunteering programmes are increasingly linked to staff development. There is a trend towards participation in skills-based volunteering activities away from those that are simply altruistic. For example, employees are volunteering for programmes that offer clear and identifiable opportunities to learn and develop, such as becoming a charity trustee, school governor or delivering skills-

sharing workshops and mentoring. This kind of volunteering is seen as more effective in enhancing employee development. It allows employees to both apply and develop their professional skills.

So overall, organisations have started to recognise how employer-supported volunteering can fulfil business objectives beyond the obvious goal of greater community engagement. There are, however, differences across sectors and size in term of how well organisations have adapted these practices.

### State of play of employee volunteering

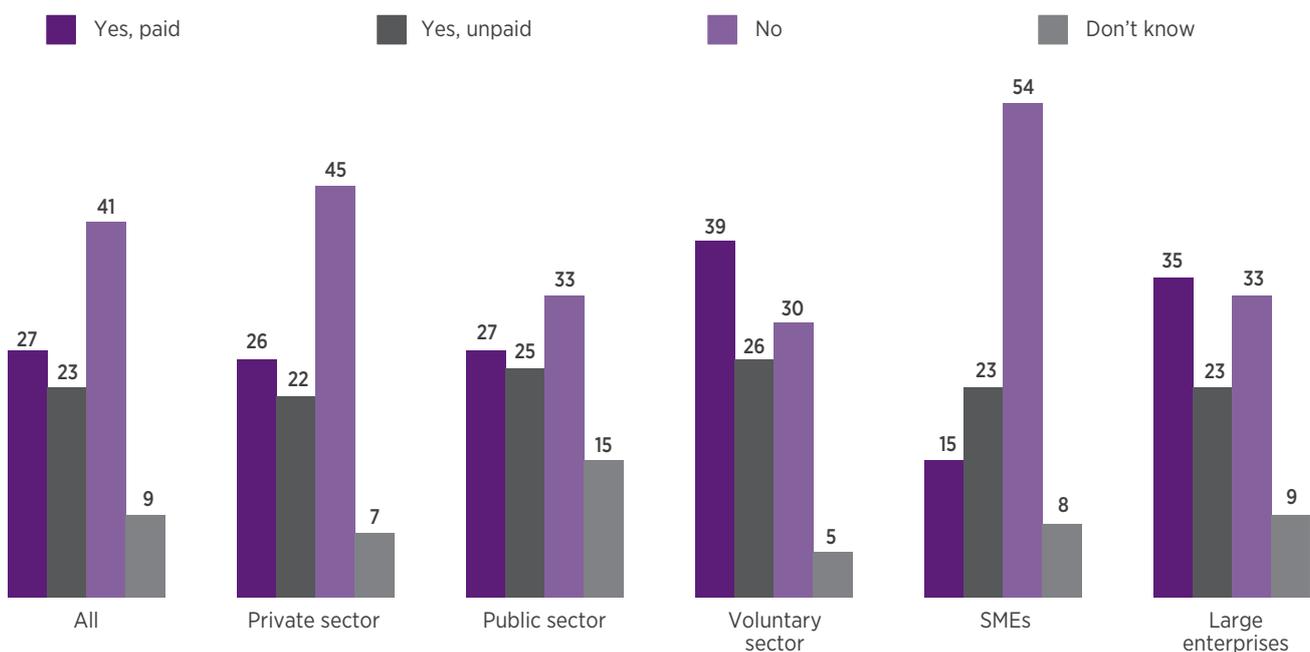
Half of all HR professionals (50%) report that employees within their organisation are able to participate in either paid or unpaid volunteering activities during work time. This rises to two-thirds of organisations within the voluntary sector (65%) and falls to 39% for SMEs. Half (51%) of organisations that allow employees to volunteer

during work hours actively offer volunteering opportunities to employees, through a charity partner or their own initiatives. Of the organisations that allow employees to use work time for volunteering activities, four-fifths (84%) are entitled to up to five days per year.

### Volunteering to learn: employee development through volunteering

As we have seen above, there is a trend towards more skills-based employee volunteering and we now also have more evidence on how this links to employee learning and development. In our CIPD research, *Youth Social Action and Transitions into Work: What role for employers?* (CIPD 2013) we identified a connection between volunteering and employee development. We have built on this with further research exploring the link between volunteering and employee development to establish what kind of skills employees acquire and

**Figure 2: Employees' ability to participate in volunteering activities during work time, by sector and size (CIPD forthcoming 2015) (%)**



further understand the impact of employee volunteering. Our case-study-based research uncovered ten skills employees developed:

- community awareness and a wider appreciation of diversity
- confidence (having difficult conversations)
- coaching and mentoring
- communication
- networking and relationship-building
- team-building
- enhancing professional knowledge
- self-awareness and reinforcing skills
- workload management
- creativity.

In addition to those skills, the research also found that volunteering helps to inspire, motivate and energise the workforce and that it

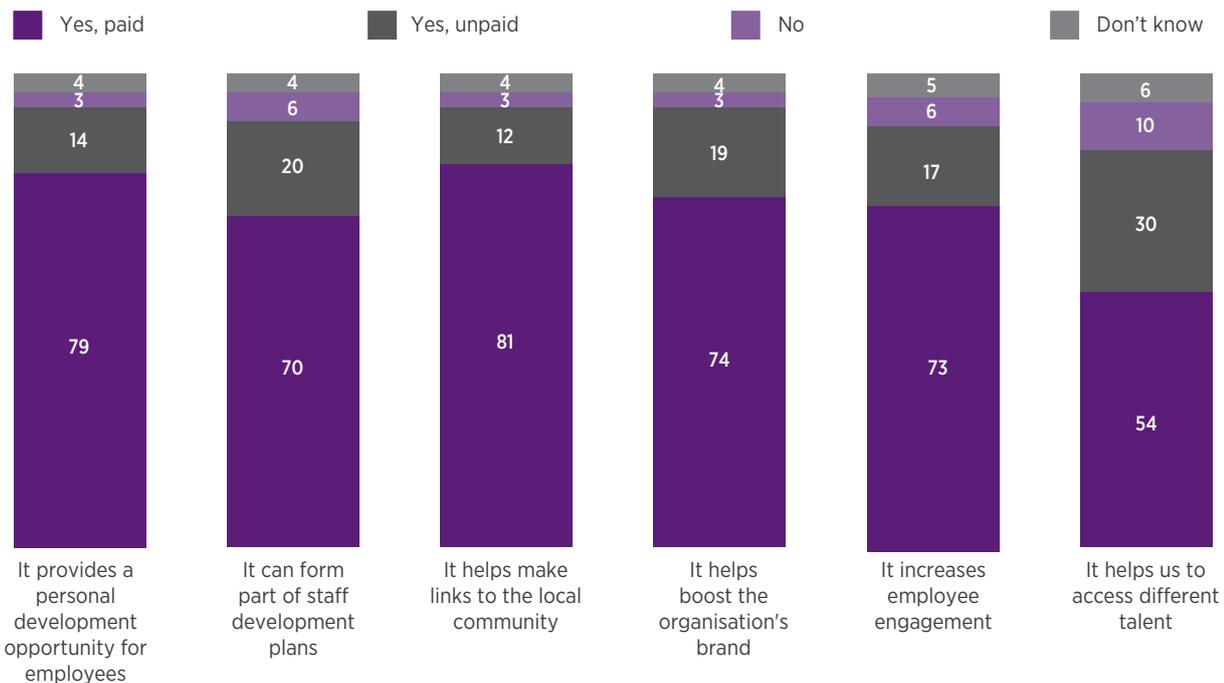
can help unlock potential or prompt a career change.

New CIPD survey data found that over two-thirds of HR professionals (70%) believe that volunteering can form part of staff development plans. A further four-fifths of HR professionals (79%) believe that volunteering provides a personal development opportunity for employees, with 94% of HR professionals in the voluntary sector agreeing.

### Barriers to employee volunteering

Despite the positive trends outlined above, there is a lot more that can be done to make employee volunteering the norm, firmly integrate it into HR practices and ensure that both volunteers and the community get the most out of the opportunities available.

Figure 3: Attitudes to employee volunteering (%)



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements with regards to employee volunteering?

Base: All HR professionals who offer employee volunteering (n=389)

There are still not enough employees who volunteer. According to the Scout Association there is a waiting list of 30,000 young people who want to join the Scouts, but are unable to because of the lack of adult volunteers. The Scout Association's shortage of volunteers could be solved by dramatically expanding 'employer-supported volunteering' (ESV) among British employers. Encouraging employers – whether in the private or public sector – to support their staff to volunteer would 'provide a vital lifeline not only to the Scout Association but also to other voluntary organisations', according to research carried out by the think tank Demos (Birdswell and Wybron 2014). The 2012/13 Community Life Survey found that the most commonly cited barrier to volunteering is 'work commitments', suggesting that more employees would volunteer if the opportunity would be directly provided by the employer. Indeed, a VInspired survey found that 58% of staff are likely to volunteer, if supported by their employer.

Furthermore, volunteering is not yet fully integrated in organisations' staff development agendas. Despite support for employee volunteering and links to learning and development, less than two-fifths (39%) of organisations incorporate volunteering into employee development or engagement strategies. CIPD research identifies a clear link between volunteering, skills development and wider career benefits; however, it also shows that 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 experience they do have. Some may also need help identifying which opportunity is right for

them in their current role or career change (Stuart 2014).

Connected to that, there is an 'information gap' when it comes to communicating the benefits of volunteering to the volunteers themselves. Research has shown that people tend to underestimate the positive impact participating in volunteering can have on their own lives and careers. The benefits need to be communicated to employees to incentivise more to take up the volunteering offer. While it is positive that many organisations do offer more volunteering days to their employees, in many organisations take-up of this is still very low, with employees often not being aware of the opportunities on offer.

Furthermore, many people may think they don't have much to offer in terms of their skills and experiences – we hear this frequently when it comes to the CIPD's mentoring programme (Steps Ahead Mentoring) – when actually the opposite is true: all HR professionals have something incredible to offer to jobseekers by just drawing on their professional experiences and insights around recruitment and job search. As our mentees report, just a few sessions with their mentors can transform their lives. So it is important to de-mystify volunteering activities like mentoring and to provide support and encouragement to individuals who are thinking about participating but are not sure about what they have to offer.

When it comes to recruitment, although employers do look favourably on volunteering experience amongst potential candidates and a third of HR professionals ask about it during the interview stage, only less than a fifth of organisations have integrated questions around volunteering in

*'Despite support for employee volunteering and links to learning and development, less than two-fifths (39%) of organisations incorporate volunteering into employee development or engagement strategies.'*

their application forms. Interestingly, organisations that recognise volunteering during recruitment are also more likely to have staff volunteering in schools and colleges. This suggests that when volunteering is integrated into recruitment practices, it is more likely to become part of an organisation's DNA.

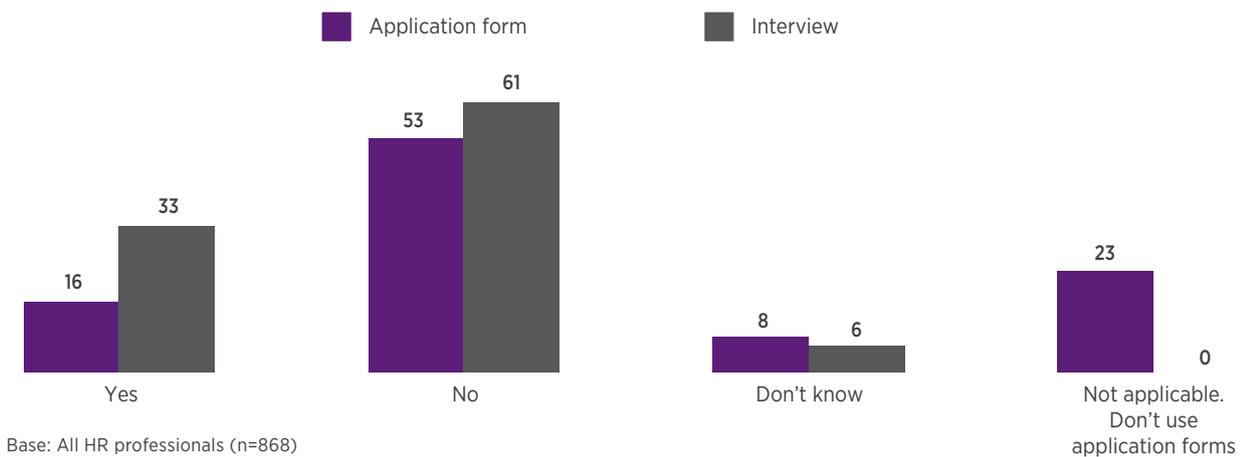
There is also an issue as to where responsibility for employer-supported volunteering lies. Only one-third (32%) of organisations that allow employees to volunteer during work time place the responsibility for the management of volunteering activities within

the HR department. This means that it is not fully integrated in HR and management policies. It is therefore unsurprising that a survey conducted by Vinspired found that less than four in ten (39%) managers rated their organisations as good or very good at supporting staff to volunteer.

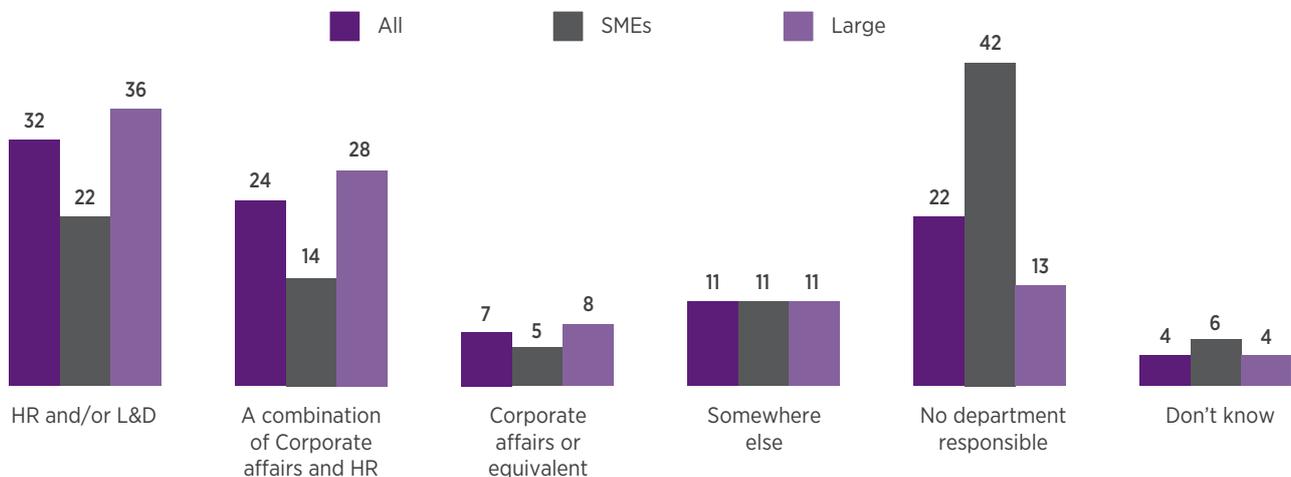
Finally, while some organisations have started to measure the impact of their volunteering activities and the benefits they bring to the organisation, this is still very limited. Measuring impact (via staff surveys and so on) is not straightforward, but it is useful

to build the business case for investment. The more insight and data that is available, the easier it is to engage senior leaders in an organisation on this. Whether an organisation manages their volunteering activities in-house, or works with a charity or another brokering service, it takes time and resources to manage these activities, including sourcing volunteering opportunities, liaising with the charities involved and supporting and briefing volunteers. Employee volunteering should not be seen as a no-cost alternative to formal skills training, even if it can be a cost-effective option.

**Figure 4: Organisations that ask about voluntary experience during the recruitment process (%)**



**Figure 5: Department responsible for management of volunteering activities, by organisation size (%)**



Q. Where does responsibility for the management of these volunteering activities sit within the organisation?  
 Base: All HR professionals who allow staff to volunteer (n=389)

# Conclusion

To conclude, there is overwhelmingly positive evidence that volunteering has a beneficial impact on our economy, society and individuals themselves. In addition, it can contribute to helping organisations to achieve their business objectives and engage and develop their employees. Indeed, volunteering is something that has not only crept up the political agenda but also has cross-party support and has become increasingly popular with employers. While the political idea of the 'Big Society' has struggled to make an impact in the real world, it has highlighted the fact that organisations can and need to play a bigger role, not just in their communities, but also in encouraging and supporting their employees to volunteer.

Employer-supported volunteering can be promoted as an excellent way of developing employee skills as part of a wider, more holistic training agenda. It can also form part of a new relationship between organisations and their employees, helping with attracting and retaining the right talent as well as ensuring that organisations are better rooted in their communities. It clearly brings with it a double benefit – employee development and giving something back – that contributes to achieving better work and working lives.

In order to fulfil this potential, however, employee volunteering needs to be well thought through, well supported and promoted to employees. Most importantly, it needs to be embedded into organisational strategies and HR practices. HR professionals are clearly best placed to take this agenda forward and the CIPD will work with its members and the voluntary sector to establish what it can do as the professional body for HR to help organisations make progress in this space.

We will therefore set out to take a closer look at where the existing gaps and challenges are when it comes to employee volunteering and how we can help both organisations and employees themselves to overcome those and maximise the benefits of employee volunteering.

*'HR professionals are clearly best placed to take this agenda forward and the CIPD will work with its members and the voluntary sector to establish what it can do to help organisations make progress in this space.'*

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## Endnotes

1 Words at an event to launch the initiative at Downing Street, 18 May 2010.

2 Find out more at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-social-action-innovation-fund>

3 See [www.charitylearning.org/givebackuk/](http://www.charitylearning.org/givebackuk/)

4 See [www.cipd.co.uk/learningtowork](http://www.cipd.co.uk/learningtowork) and [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) for guides and best practice.

5 On behalf of the CIPD, YouGov undertook a survey looking into views of HR professionals in relation to volunteering. The survey was carried out between 7 November and 30 November 2014 and findings are based on responses from 868 HR professionals and employers.



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