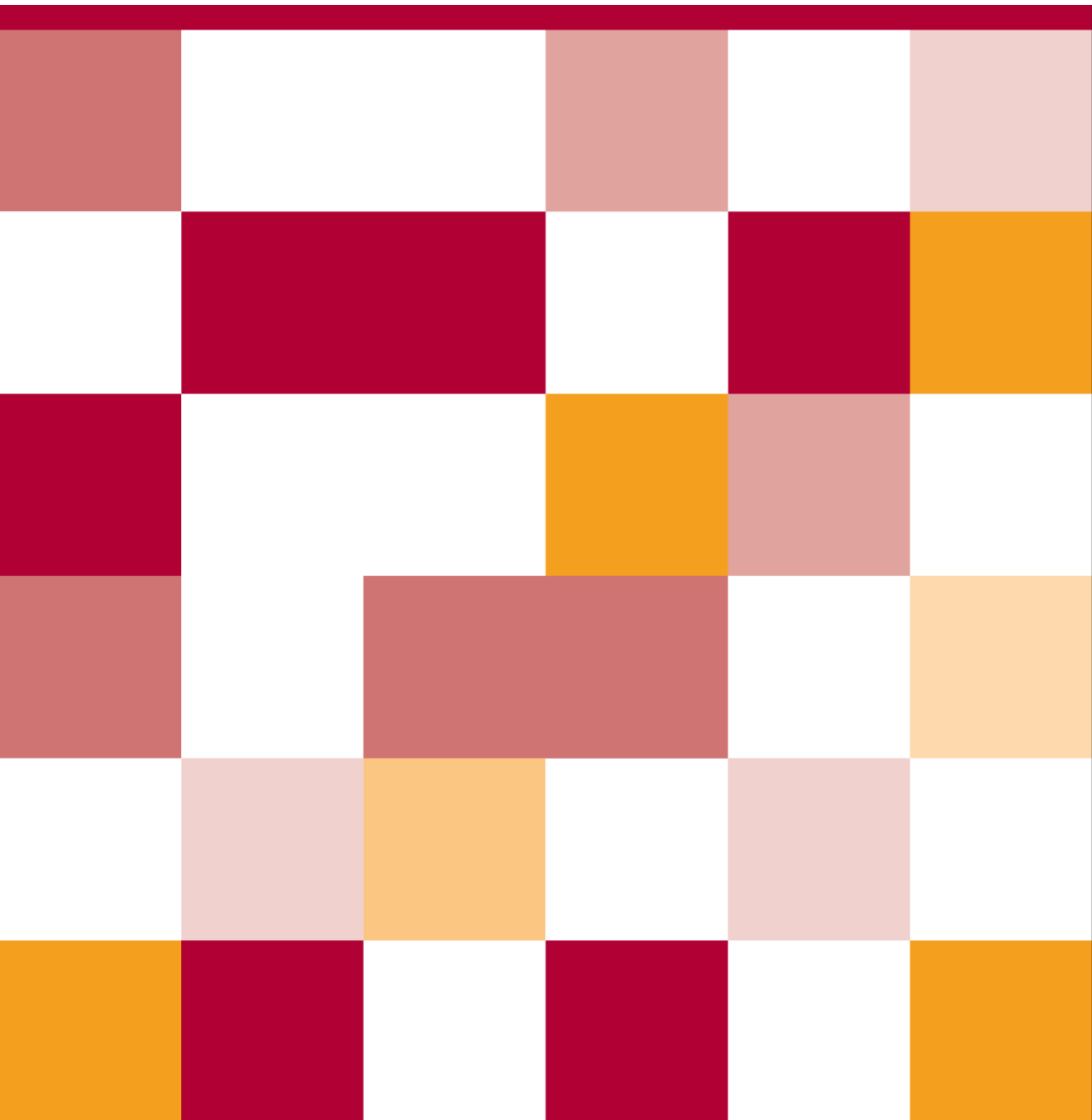


Government response to the Commission on the Future of Volunteering



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Foreword



I strongly welcome *Manifesto for Change*, the final report of the independent Commission on the Future of Volunteering. I share the Commission's vision – I too want to see a society where volunteering is part of the DNA.

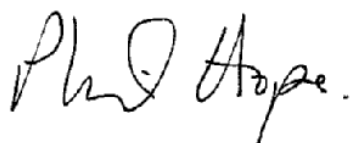
This Government has always valued volunteering and what it can achieve and our investment to support volunteering has significantly increased since 1997.

Volunteering does not just benefit people who receive help, it benefits the volunteers as well. Helping others can be an empowering experience, with the wider benefits being felt in communities up and down the country. Volunteering can bring entirely different sections of society together, encouraging greater understanding between people; the glue that binds society together.

As *Manifesto for Change* states, the government's role is that of an enabler and we want to work in partnership with the third sector to help create an environment that allows volunteering to flourish. The Commission have offered an authoritative roadmap and with over 1,100 contributors this has been one of the largest consultations on volunteering ever. I look forward to working with many of those contributors over the coming months to make the Commission's vision a reality.

The Government has worked hard over the past 10 years to encourage more volunteering, with formal volunteering increasing from 39% in 2001 to 45% in 2007, but there is much more that can be done. The Commission, through their vision of a society where giving and receiving help are the norm, have laid down a challenge for all of us. I am confident that the plans I have laid out in this response are a positive step on the way to creating that kind of society.

I am extremely grateful to Baroness Julia Neuberger and her Commissioners for their hard work and energy. I am also particularly grateful to all of the organisations and individuals that provided invaluable input into this important work.



The policy context

Manifesto for Change highlights that volunteering has never had a higher profile. Recent government statistics support this, the Citizenship survey 2007 showed that 73 per cent of all adults had volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in the last 12 months.

The Government's funding for organisations that support and enable volunteering is also at an all time high through funding to organisations such as v and Volunteering England and support for the national volunteering database- 'do-it'. Increasingly volunteering is seen as a key contributor to the delivery of the government's wider objectives and not just as means in itself. The contribution of volunteers has, for example, been detailed in recent government proposals to improve educational attainment and to increase Community Cohesion.

In addition government support for volunteering is higher than it has ever been. Two developments highlight this. Firstly, the placement of volunteering in the Office of the Third Sector. The Office of the Third Sector was created in May 2006 and sits in the heart of government in the Cabinet Office demonstrating the importance of volunteering and the third sector to government. Secondly, the appointment of Baroness Neuberger, chair of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering, as the Government's Champion for Volunteering in June 2007.

Within this context of a high proportion of people actively volunteering and increased investment, Manifesto for Change sets new challenges to government. The first challenge is to create an environment in which volunteering can thrive. This is not just through setting up and funding new programmes, but also by reducing barriers to volunteering and by supporting volunteer managers. The second challenge is to focus on supporting volunteering by those that may volunteer less than others and to better recognise and reward volunteers. The third and final challenge is for government to be more cohesive and joined up in its approach to volunteering.

Response to the recommendations

Manifesto for Change sets out a number of recommendations for how the public, third and private sectors can ensure that volunteering remains in the DNA of our society. The Government has taken these recommendations seriously and considered them fully. We will take action to address the issues raised by the Commission both through boosting and supporting our existing programmes and by creating new programmes.

1. Raising the profile of volunteering

National events

Manifesto for Change recognises the role of existing events in raising the profile of volunteering and the need to ensure that these events are better recognised amongst the public. The Government-supported Year of the Volunteer in 2005 showed what can be done to increase awareness of volunteering. An independent survey showed that one in four of the population was aware of the Year.

Through the Office of the Third Sector we will continue to support well established events like Volunteers Week and Make A Difference Day, through our strategic funding to both Volunteering England and Community Service Volunteers. Additionally to ensure that both events are better recognised within government the Minister for the Third Sector will write to his ministerial colleagues to raise awareness of these events.

There are also additional opportunities to raise the profile of volunteering and the Office of the Third Sector will work to ensure that we make better use of the 2008 International Volunteer Day in December. This will be through a specific campaign to promote volunteering as part of our existing Volunteering for All programme.

Local events

As Manifesto for Change demonstrates national campaigns are just one part of raising the profile of volunteering and they are most effective when supported by local campaigns and initiatives. The Commission therefore proposes the introduction of local volunteering champions in each local authority area.

Government has considered this recommendation and is pleased that Manifesto for Change recognises the approach that we are taking at a local level.

We are creating a network of local involved and Youth Action Teams. The Youth Action Teams are a network of youth ambassadors to champion volunteering at a local level and inspire their peers to volunteer. Involved teams are a network of youth experts on the ground who will encourage more community organisations to open their doors to young volunteers. Our investment will support volunteering by and for young people and will be an important step in developing future volunteering champions at a local level.

In response to this recommendation the Government will follow the developments of v's local work to learn from their approach.

In addition to our financial investment through v the Government has included a performance indicator on volunteering in the new set of 198 indicators for local authorities. Each local authority will be assessed on performance against these indicators and the indicator provides a real incentive for local authorities to support volunteering at a local level.

2. Making volunteering open to all.

Manifesto for Change states the compelling case for ensuring that volunteering is open to all, particularly those that volunteer less than others.

The Government has already invested £8 million in two programmes focused on making volunteering open to all. These programmes are Volunteering for All and Goldstar and within these programmes we will be taking a number of steps to ensure that volunteering remains open to all.

The first step is to extend both programmes for an additional year in 2008/09 to enable them to continue their work to increase access to volunteering. As part of this extension the second step is the publication, on 18th March 2008, of a toolkit for the involvement of volunteers at risk of social exclusion. This will provide organisations with practical ways in which they can ensure that volunteering is inclusive. The third step will take place later this year and as part of Volunteering for All there will be specific awareness raising campaigns promoting the message that volunteering is open to all.

In the longer term Manifesto for Change recommends the establishment of a pilot 'Access to Volunteering' fund. The Government accepts this recommendation and through the Office of the Third Sector, we will invest £2million over 2009/10- 2010/11 to implement this recommendation. This will be piloted in three regions and focus on increasing opportunities for disabled people to volunteer. Our commitment to this recommendation links to the Government's Independent Living Strategy, launched on Monday 3rd March 2008. The Office of the Third Sector and the Office for Disability Issues will, therefore, work jointly on this fund, ensuring that they consult fully with volunteering organisations to develop the fund.

Removing obstacles to volunteering.

Manifesto for Change highlights the need for urgent action to remove unnecessary and disproportionate obstacles to volunteering. In many cases these obstacles are due more to the interpretation of legislation or statutory duties and less to the actual legalisation or duty. Where there are issues of interpretation Government will take action to ensure that these are tackled.

We have already funded Volunteering England to provide guidance on risk management for volunteers, in the form of a risk toolkit. In the case of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, the Government is committed to safeguarding and protecting vulnerable groups, but also to ensuring that this is done in a way that does not hamper or prevent positive activities such as volunteering. The Office of the Third Sector, working with the Home Office and other government departments, will produce guidance on CRB checks to ensure that checks are applied proportionately and correctly.

To ensure that individuals in receipt of benefits are aware of their rights to volunteers, the Department for Work and Pensions will be producing fresh guidance making clear the message to potential volunteers and to volunteer involving organisations, that volunteering should not affect an individual's benefits.

The Office of the Third Sector will also continue to strategically fund organisations including Volunteering England and Mentoring and Befriending Foundation to produce guidance for and support to volunteering organisations. The Office of the Third Sector will also continue to work with existing volunteering networks, such as the Network of National Volunteer Involving Agencies (NNVIA) and the England Volunteering Development Council (EVDC) to take intelligence from the volunteering sector about the barriers to volunteering and address these across government.

Employer- supported volunteering.

Manifesto for Change supports the expansion of volunteering by civil servants and many government departments are developing employer supported volunteering schemes at present. The Office of the Third Sector will take the lead in supporting the development of these schemes and will create a cross- government group to provide leadership in employer supported volunteering. The group will meet quarterly to take forward employer supported volunteering and to learn from the best approaches in the private and third sector.

3. Modernisation of volunteering

Modernising the volunteering infrastructure

The role of local volunteering infrastructure organisations is crucial, but as Manifesto for Change reports, it is often under resourced and its contribution under recognised. Manifesto for Change recommends a specific fund to support local volunteering infrastructure. We have considered this, but we will not be implementing this recommendation in the way that Manifesto for Change recommends. Instead Government will be investing in local infrastructure in three ways: -

- In the case of youth volunteering we will be investing significantly to support local volunteering infrastructure through £42.6 million to create Youth Action and involved teams.

- Capacitybuilders have announced an £18 million fund for local and regional priority projects which will invest in changes to the way that support to the Third Sector is delivered - and would expect volunteering infrastructure to be among the range of initiatives supported under this fund. The first tranche of projects will be announced in March 2008.

- Capacitybuilders are also currently working on plans for £5 million of capital investment over the next 3 years which will also be aligned to the transformation and modernisation of sector support.

Aligned to this investment the new local performance indicators on volunteering and the environment for a thriving Third Sector provide a real incentive for local authorities to support local volunteering infrastructure.

Modernising volunteer involving organisations.

We will continue to support organisations to be able to review and improve the way they involve volunteers. Manifesto for Change highlights that there are many organisations that are very good at recruiting and retaining volunteers and Government will continue to help organisations to share their practice. This will be through an extension of our Goldstar programme, which enables organisations to share best practice and to learn from each other.

4. Reward and recognition for volunteers and volunteering

Manifesto for Change stresses the importance of recognising volunteers. In July 2007 the Prime Minister signalled our intention to ensure that the national honours system recognises individuals doing outstanding work in their communities. The Cabinet Office has launched a campaign to promote the national honours to these individuals.

In the Office of the Third Sector we will continue to promote the uptake of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This is equivalent to an MBE and the highest award available for groups of volunteers carrying out work in their communities.

The Government's investment in v will also create a new national resource to enable all young volunteers across England to keep an online record of their skills and achievements. v will work to ensure everyone recognises skills gained through volunteering including employers.

5. Training

Manifesto for Change recognises the importance of training within the volunteering sector and through the Office of the Third Sector one of the Government's key priorities will be to improve skills within the Third Sector.

The Government has already taken action in this area and in November 2007 the Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills announced that the Government's Train to Gain programme will be extended to volunteers. This is an important step in ensuring that volunteers as well as paid staff are able to access training. Further details on this extension have been made available on the Learning and Skills Council website at [Train to Gain requirements for funding](#).

In addition to this the Office of The Third Sector will invest £4 million over the 2007 CSR period to support the Manifesto for Change recommendations on training, focusing particularly on training for volunteers and volunteer managers. We will consult with the volunteering sector and statutory skills providers, such as the Learning and Skills Council on the best way of delivering this and the potential for leveraging in other sources of funding to support this recommendation. Further details will be available in summer 2008.

6. The contribution of government

Responsibility for volunteering

The Office of the Third Sector takes cross government responsibility for volunteering, working with departments across government to support volunteering. The Office of the Third Sector is situated in the Cabinet Office to ensure that it can support and coordinate volunteering across government. Manifesto for Change recommends that one Cabinet Minister take responsibility for volunteering. This already exists with the Minister for the Cabinet Office having policy responsibility for volunteering as part of the Cabinet Office's wider responsibility for the third sector.

Manifesto for Change highlights that volunteering does not just occur in the third sector, but can and does play a role in the public sector. The report highlights the appointment of Baroness Neuberger as the Government's Champion for Volunteering and this is an important demonstration that the Government understands that volunteering can and does play a significant role outside the third sector.

Manifesto for Change recommends that a parliamentary select committee take responsibility for volunteering and community championing. A number of existing select committees are well placed to look at volunteering in relation to government policies and many have done so. For example, the Select Committee on Home Affairs looked into the role of volunteer mentors in supporting young black males. The Transport Select Committee focused on volunteering when looking at search and rescue.

We believe that this approach ensures that volunteering is considered as a part of the scrutiny of government policies, rather than in isolation. To ensure that the impact and contribution of volunteers is considered within the existing select committee structure the Minister for the Third Sector will consider writing to the chairs of existing committees to ensure that the role of volunteering in their policy areas is considered in their work.

The role of regulators

Manifesto for Change points to the potential for ensuring that the involvement of volunteers is included in inspections by regulatory bodies. This is a positive recommendation, but one that the Government will need to investigate further. Government is committed to focusing not just on the quantity of volunteering that is undertaken, but also on the quality of the volunteering that individuals undertake.

We would not want to include volunteering in inspection frameworks if it meant that volunteering became a 'tick box' exercise and driven by targets. In response to the recommendation in Manifesto for Change, the Minister for the Third Sector will write to his counterparts in Department of Health, Communities and Local Government and Department for Children, Schools and Families to explore the best way of taking this recommendation forward.

The Compact and Volunteering Code of practice

Manifesto for Change highlights the need to strengthen the use of the Compact and the Volunteering Code of Practice. The Compact remains important in ensuring that Government supports volunteering nationally and locally.

The Government is committed to strengthening the Compact and to closing the gap between good intentions and delivery in practice. This is a priority and we will be working with the Commission for the Compact and with Compact Voice to evaluate the Compact and all the Codes to ensure these are fully up to date and relevant in relation to changes in the policy environment.

At a local level the new indicators on volunteering and an environment for a thriving third sector provide incentives for local authorities to apply the Code of Practice on volunteering.

7. Timetable

Recommendation	Action by Government	Timetable
Making volunteering open to all- Access to Volunteering Fund	Work led by the Office of the Third Sector and Office of Disability Issues in consultation with third sector organisations.	- Fund to be launched by April 2009.
Making volunteering open to all- removing obstacles to volunteering	Guidance on Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and benefits issues.	- CRB guidance published in May 2008. - Updated benefits guidance published in summer 2008.
Making volunteering open to all- employer- supported volunteering.	Office of the Third Sector to create a cross- government employer supported volunteering group.	- First meeting in May 2008.
Modernising the volunteering infrastructure.	Support from Capacitybuilders	- Details of Capacitybuilders £18million fund made available in March 2008.
Training.	Work with the third sector to design programme. Work with statutory training providers to explore links to statutory funding.	- OTS led training programme begins in October 2008.
The role of Government- the role of regulators.	Cross-government work to explore the potential for the inclusion of involving, supporting and managing volunteers in inspection assessments.	- Minister for the Third Sector to write to ministerial colleagues in April 2008. - Fuller response to the recommendation in September 2008.