

# Employer-supported volunteering in the civil service

A review by Baroness Neuberger, the Prime Minister's Volunteering Champion  
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## Prime Minister's Foreword



In recent years, the Government has invested in opening up volunteering opportunities for everyone – from the creation of the youth volunteering charity 'V' to our ambition for all young people to undertake service to their community; from new initiatives to promote intergenerational volunteering to enabling jobseekers to

volunteer to help them prepare for work. But I believe that government should lead by example, demonstrating the value of volunteering not just through our policy-making and investment but through the way we run our organisations and manage our staff.

So I am delighted that for her final report in her role as the Government's Champion for Volunteering, Baroness Neuberger chose to focus on employer-supported volunteering within the civil service. As this report highlights, employee volunteering in government can benefit civil servants and their local communities, and above all it can help improve the way government works by enabling civil servants to engage with and understand the needs of the public better and improve the services they offer as a result.

I am very pleased to hear of so many positive and creative examples of volunteering already going on across government and I hope that this report will help to inspire us all to go further in bringing volunteering into the heart of government.

**Gordon Brown**

July 2009

# Introduction

This is my final report as the Prime Minister's volunteering champion, and, whilst my previous reports focused on the role of volunteers within public services, this report reviews a different subject area. Both my previous reviews, of health and social care and the criminal justice system, have recommended that employee volunteering should be rolled out and encouraged across the civil service. If volunteering is to become really integrated into public services, then policy-makers themselves need both to experience volunteering and to lead by example. The focus of this review is, therefore, on the role of employee volunteering in the civil service and how it can be expanded and add greater value.

Like my previous work, this report offers a snapshot of the state of employee volunteering within the civil service. It provides recommendations to policy-makers as to how it could be improved. It is not a thorough audit, nor should it be read as a practical good practice guide for departments who want to implement an employee volunteering scheme, though I hope it will provide them with some inspiration.

For this purpose, employee volunteering does not include any volunteering that civil servants do in their spare time in no way connected to Government. However, my definition is not overly restrictive. I would include any volunteering that takes place during staff working hours (and this would include volunteering outside working hours that is matched with time off by the employer) and has in some way been encouraged or facilitated by Government. The volunteering can be self-organised and might often continue outside working hours.

The snapshot is generally a positive one. Successful employee volunteering should provide benefits to departments, staff and communities. I have come across some excellent examples of employee volunteering practices within Government departments that do just that. Over the past year, I have also detected an upward trend as more and more departments have begun implementing their own schemes. The Time and Talents project at the Westminster Volunteer Centre reports an increased take up of their service from *four* Government departments in April 2008 to

*ten* in April 2009. This coincides with the Prime Minister's and the Cabinet Secretary's concerted push on employee volunteering, and the setting up of the central Volunteering Group, administered by the Civil Service Capabilities Group.

My analysis has focused on central Government, due to a lack of time to review local government and NDPBs. But the benefits of employee volunteering are as relevant to local government, non-departmental public bodies, and other agencies of government such as PCTs. They will recognise many of the challenges I have outlined here, and I hope very much that they will take my messages on board.

## Context

Anecdotally, we know that many civil servants volunteer. Much of this is done in their own time. My research has found that nearly all Departments have some form of volunteering policy, including paid time off to volunteer. However, few departments have reliable data on how many of their employees make use of this allowance formally. Staff frequently use more informal routes. For example, many managers, on an informal basis, allow their staff to work flexibly to accommodate their volunteering, recognising the benefits it can provide. The line between formal employee volunteering and volunteering in people's own time is often somewhat fuzzy. Some departments have embraced this informality and flexibility by, for instance, having no formal allowance for paid time off and instead allowing all leave at the line managers discretion. This approach has produced tangible results in some cases (see DCSF example).

### Department for Children, Schools & Families

DCSF's volunteering scheme is located in the Equalities and Diversity team. Their volunteering strategy is linked to the five key objectives of the children's plan. Around 10% of their staff have engaged directly with their volunteering programme. Opportunities are sourced from a number of organisations, though DCSF has a natural link with schools. Volunteering is promoted, both as a means of skills development and for better policy development. There is no formal leave allowance for volunteering. Staff are encouraged to find their own opportunities, and leave is allowed at the discretion of the line manager and the approval of HR.

### Broader picture

Outside the civil service, we know that, in 2007, 36% of employees had an employer supported volunteering scheme available to them. This has jumped since 2005, when 24% of employees worked for organisations with such schemes (and 18% in 2003).<sup>1</sup> It is reported that approximately 70% of FTSE 100 companies have some kind of employer supported volunteering programme<sup>2</sup>. This is in marked contrast to SMEs, with 20% of employees of medium sized businesses and 14% of employees of small businesses having an employer supported volunteering scheme<sup>3</sup>.

In the private sector, the larger you are, the more likely you are to have an employee volunteering scheme. This relates in part to the increased emphasis amongst larger companies on brand management for their profitability, and the consequent need for a corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy. Government does not have this bottom line driver to protect its brand, though it is, to a lesser extent, concerned with public perceptions and reputation. There is also an underlying presumption within the civil service that, as an institution that operates in the public interest, rather than for private profit, there is less need to prove that it is a responsible organisation. This theme will be explored further within this report.

### Civil service volunteering

The Government has encouraged staff to volunteer on a number of occasions. In 2002 special paid volunteering leave was introduced in central Government Departments to enable staff to take time off to volunteer. This was followed by work in 2003- 2004, in which the Active Community Directorate (now part of OTS, then part of the Home Office) worked with a range of Government Departments to develop volunteering strategies for Departments. These set out how they intend to encourage their staff to volunteer. The strategies were implemented with mixed success, but led to the creation of a number of staff volunteering programmes, including the one in the Home Office. There was also significant work in 2005, the Year of the Volunteer.

<sup>1</sup>2007 *National survey of volunteering and charitable giving* by the Institute for Volunteering Research

<sup>2</sup>Business in the Community

<sup>3</sup>2007 *National survey of volunteering and charitable giving* by the Institute for Volunteering Research

During the year, the volunteering organisation Community Service Volunteers were provided with funding by the Home Office to work with a number of government departments to create opportunities for staff to volunteer and refresh departmental volunteering strategies.

### Home Office

The Home Office recognises that staff who undertake voluntary work not only benefit the communities in which they live and work but also bring back skills and experience into the workplace. In addition, volunteering has an important part to play in the personal development of staff.

The Home Office encourages its staff to undertake volunteering opportunities in the community, especially in those areas of activity which have links, direct or indirect, to the delivery of Home Office aims and policies. It does this by:

- Allowing up to five days (or the equivalent in hours) paid leave to undertake volunteering in work time. This can be done on an individual basis or as part of a team.
- Recognising the importance of staff volunteering for personal development by embedding volunteering into the Personal Development Plan of the staff appraisal system – Performance Development Review (PDR).
- Regularly inviting charities and/or volunteering organisations into Home Office buildings to hold seminars or provide to set up stands to distribute promotional material.
- Helping staff to identify suitable volunteering opportunities.

- Promoting seasonal charitable activities, such as:
  - Jeans for Genes Day
  - The Westminster City Challenge
- Promoting various volunteering opportunities through features in the staff magazines and on HOT.
- Providing funding for employees to participate in the Prince's Trust Team Programme, both as Team Leaders and Team Members.
- Running an annual programme of up to fifty 3 – 6 month fully-funded secondments to the voluntary sector.

In early 2008, the Cabinet Secretary wrote to all departments, at the Prime Minister's request, to urge them to consider the importance of employee volunteering and to ensure that they have a formal employee volunteering policy in place. He also announced that a new cross-Government volunteering group was to be set up in the Cabinet Office, administered by the Civil Service Capabilities Group (CSCG) and chaired by its head, Gill Rider.

The Civil Service Volunteering group was set up with the following objectives:

- To ensure that all departments across government have an approach to volunteering in the Civil Service which is up to the level of the best, and
- To provide a vehicle for developing and sharing best practice and informal information exchange.

The group has so far begun to establish and share best practice, encouraged an informal buddying system between departments, collected initial data about departmental levels of engagement in employer-supported volunteering, and encouraged collaborative working with third sector stakeholders. From my conversations with departments, it appears that this group has been a very useful resource for HR leads within departments. Its location within the Cabinet Office, and within the CSCG, has been a crucial ingredient to its success. For the success of employee volunteering is crucially dependent on the extent of buy-in and enabling of HR departments. The CSCG group, unlike previous volunteering groups, has this vital reach within HR departments, and has been able to equip HR leads with the tools to implement good employee volunteering practice.



# Why encourage employee volunteering?

I believe passionately in the power of volunteering. In a previous role, as the Chair of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering, I stated that I would like to see volunteering become part of the DNA of our society. I would like to see all civil servants taking part in volunteering activities, so that they understand it and lead by example. However, I also recognise that not all people share this passion, and may be thinking, quite reasonably 'what is the business case for our department encouraging employee volunteering?' It is a fair question, especially, as like all the business of Government, it concerns the use of tax-payers' money. So, before analysing the challenges facing the rolling out of employee volunteering, and how we can overcome those challenges, I need to take a step back and explore why it should be rolled out at all.

There is a real business case for employee volunteering that can apply equally to all departments. Essentially, this boils down to three main benefits:

- 1) Outreach and community engagement enables government to be more responsive
- 2) Volunteering is in itself a way of enabling practical learning and development
- 3) It boosts staff morale and builds teams

There are clearly other, broader, benefits for communities and society as a whole.

## 1) Outreach and community engagement enables more responsive government

The success of Government is dependent upon its relationship with its stakeholders, and in particular, with the communities it serves. If civil servants get out there and are seen to engage with the communities they serve, this enhances the reputation of a department, rather in the same way as private companies develop CSR strategies. However, there are in fact more important and complex reasons for engaging with communities, that go beyond image and reputation, and go to the heart of responsible government.

There is, as I stated earlier, something of a presumption in the civil service that, as an organisation that operates in the public interest, rather than private profit, there is less need to ensure that the civil service is a responsible organisation. Civil servants are duty bound to act in the public interest. They develop policies and deliver services in the best interests of the public. And yet how can they always know what that public interest is? The accusation of the Whitehall 'ivory tower' is all too familiar and frequent. It unfortunately remains true that some civil servants don't really know, or understand, many of the communities they are supposed to be serving.

The civil service frequently engages in consultation, and it often alludes to research and evidence based policy-making. But volunteering can facilitate a more holistic approach to policy-making. Volunteering has the potential to enable civil servants to get to know service users in their own environment, and it allows them to see things from their perspective. The example of the Office for Disability Issues shows a department really engaging with its service-users, in a way that formal consultation and dry statistics could never achieve. HMRC's award winning volunteering programme in Preston allowed civil servants new insights into their service delivery, by viewing the world from the perspective of those who were on the receiving end.

In my first two reports I recommended that civil servants should volunteer in order to understand volunteering properly and integrate it into policy-making. But it can also be harnessed to help understand innumerable policy areas. It may be viewed as a form of outreach or community engagement. By engaging in such activities, by diversifying staff experience and creating networks with potential service-users and partners, departments will ultimately develop better policies and deliver improved services. At best, it can enable more responsible and more effective Government.

### Office for Disability Issues

A team of ODI staff recently embarked on a volunteering project to help a Westminster self advocacy group called Our Choice promote their self-made DVD on bullying. The group wanted to promote the use of their DVD to other organisations of learning disabled people in London as a tool to identify and stop bullying.

ODI staff helped the group to organise the launch of the DVD including choosing a venue, deciding on the agenda, preparing and practising a presentation, putting out a press notice, contacting other groups, and doing tasks on the day such as teas and coffees, and registration.

The volunteers also supported Our Choice to invite the Minister for Disabled People to speak at the event, which was a great success. Groups of learning disabled people from across London attended and gave really positive feedback. They particularly enjoyed speaking to the Minister.

Our Choice really enjoyed working with the volunteers from ODI because they felt the event was better for their support; they made connections with other groups they had never met before. The volunteers from ODI enjoyed the opportunity to work with the people at whom their policies are aimed, and they learned valuable lessons about communicating accessibly. They felt that they learned skills central to ODI's need to be an effective cross-government organisation with delivery at its core, particularly in terms of its aim to involve disabled people in its work and to develop a strong sense of team. They were also able to use information and advice from Our Choice by linking them with policy makers working on hate crime.

## 2) Learning and development

Volunteering has long been recognised as a great way to develop skills and learning. A recent survey of 261 people who volunteered between 2000 and 2009 showed that 89% believed their employment prospects had improved as a result.<sup>4</sup> In a survey of KPMG staff who volunteered, 85% said they engaged to develop their skills in a non-work environment. The top skills used sometimes or every time they volunteered were: influencing skills (93%), integrity (91%) and being adaptable (88%).<sup>5</sup> Volunteering often has the most impact on developing the softer skills – it can build self-confidence and social skills, and enable individuals to relate to more diverse groups of people. These are skills it can be very difficult to pick up from traditional training courses. It is a more practical form of 'action learning'.

Certain departments are well aware of the development potential of employee volunteering for their staff. The Department for Transport recognises this and states that volunteering is a key means of developing the core skills outlined in Professional Skills for Government. They have developed their scheme accordingly – responsibility for employee volunteering resides with their Learning and Development Team, and they are currently piloting a mentoring programme in the local community that will enable fast-streamers to develop the skills they need to become managers in the near future (see example).

<sup>4</sup>Community Service Volunteers, March 2009

<sup>5</sup>KPMG, 2005

## Department for Transport

Volunteering in the Department for Transport is run by the Learning and Development team, in recognition of the role that volunteering can play in developing skills in staff. Their volunteering strategy is linked to their department's strategic objectives of enhancing access to jobs, services and social networks, including to the most disadvantaged. They offer staff up to 3 days per year to undertake volunteering activity, and they have a contract with Volunteer Centre Westminster to provide brokerage and some bespoke schemes.

In partnership with the Volunteer Centre Westminster they have introduced a six-month pilot project for encouraging fast streamers to volunteer as mentors to job-seekers living in a deprived area of Westminster (the Churchill Gardens Estate). Fast Streamers provide job seekers with guidance on completing job application forms, CVs, and interview techniques to help them back into the job market.

The pilot also provides a good opportunity for fast streamers to develop some of the softer competency skills such as leadership, people management, and communication.

The pilot was launched in February 2009 with 10 fast streamers trained as mentors. The scheme has received positive feedback so far both from mentors and mentees, and DfT is looking to roll out the programme to other members of staff.

## 3) Boost staff morale and encourage team-building

As well as enhancing stakeholders' opinions of the civil service, volunteering can also play a key role in enhancing civil servants' own views of their employer. A recent survey by Mori explored the link between employee involvement in CSR activities and their advocacy of the company. Two thousand employees were asked the question: 'Which comes closest to your opinion of your company as an employer?' Respondents were ranked in terms of their awareness of the company's CSR programme. 82% of those involved in their companies' CSR programmes said they would speak highly of them, whilst only 50% of those that were not aware of their CSR programmes said the same<sup>6</sup>.

Employees involved in volunteering schemes may ultimately be inclined to recommend the civil service as an employer of choice. A recent survey of Barclays' volunteering scheme by IVR found that more volunteers than non-volunteers would recommend Barclays as an employer (67% of volunteers compared with 58% of non-volunteers).

Employee volunteering is also a well known tool for team building. 49% of managers saw employer supported volunteering as "very effective as a team building exercise", while a further 39% rated it as "quite effective".

<sup>6</sup>CSR and employees – Mori research, 2000

### Department for Work & Pensions – Community 5000

Community 5000 gives DWP staff the opportunity to volunteer their time and skills to a local voluntary or community organisation which is linked to DWP's customers. For the participant it is a single working day paid for by the department with full reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

So far, DWP have worked with over 300 organisations across the UK on small placements. For example, individual staff members have helped out in charity shops and shopped for the aged. They have also volunteered at large events such as Older Persons' Day. The activities are varied but, in the main, all involve working, in some way, with their customers.

Over 5,000 staff have already experienced a Community 5000 day, with some making it an annual commitment. All evaluation shows that staff believe the experience to be beneficial and they certainly share the experiences with their colleagues on their return to work. Feedback from the Third Sector is also equally positive, with many smaller charities highlighting that, without our help, they could not have achieved their objectives. The DWP have 300 senior civil servants, of which 59.3% have attended a Community 5000 event. There is also anecdotal evidence that the Community 5000 day inspires staff to volunteer in their own time.

The Department intends to continue with the initiative, extending their partnership base with the third sector and providing more opportunities, including offering "taster" days designed to encourage staff to try out a specific volunteering activity. A recent internal survey has indicated that up to 18% of staff would be interested in volunteering on a Community 5000 day. Their long term aim is to ensure that all who want to give a day are given the opportunity to do this, and to build positive and sustainable partnerships.

### 4) Leading by example

For many years, the Government has been trying to encourage a culture of volunteering. This is demonstrated by initiatives such as the investment of £117million in youth volunteering charity 'v' to create a 'step change' in young people's attitude to volunteering, as well as by my own appointment as the Prime Minister's Volunteering Champion. Yet, if the Government is serious about building this culture of volunteering, then it must lead by example. Civil servants and ministers must volunteer and be seen to be volunteering.

### HM Revenue and Customs

HMRC run one of the most comprehensive volunteering programmes in the civil service. Responsibility lies with the Corporate Responsibility team, along with a network of around 20 volunteer coordinators in the various business units. HMRC have begun to develop a number of innovative local schemes that focus on engaging with deprived communities, which present HMRC as an approachable, customer focused organisation, such as the Birmingham case study below:

#### Birmingham Outreach Project

The Tax Credit Birmingham Office have launched an Outreach Project to promote tax credits to residents in areas with a low take-up. The locations are based on research by HMRC's Knowledge, Analysis and Intelligence (KAI) team, which identified the areas with the lowest take-up of tax credits.

"Our aim is to talk to customers in disadvantaged locations, particularly where levels of child poverty are high," said Cheryl Woodruff, assistant director. "We want to help those people, so we need to find out who isn't claiming the benefits they are entitled to, and why."

HMRC staff spoke to 1,336 customers in Birmingham during the four-day event. Some were young men who had no idea they could claim Working Tax Credit because they didn't have children – even though they were earning £12,000 a year or less.

Birmingham's cultural diversity means language is also a barrier for some people. So HMRC made sure there were staff who could speak languages such as Urdu and Gujarati at each location throughout the event.

"It was great to give HMRC a face and let customers know we do other things apart from tax people," says Nicky Green, a TCO quality frontline manager who spoke to customers in across all locations during the four days. "We do give money to customers who really need it, which did surprise a few people."

The event led to 44 new Child and Working Tax Credit claims and 10 Child Benefit claims. The next step is to look more closely at the results from Birmingham, before deciding whether to roll out other similar events across the country.

## 5) Benefits for communities

Finally, employee volunteering can bring benefits to the communities and third sector organisations that host the volunteers. This may seem obvious, but Government needs to remember that volunteering should benefit communities. During the course of my research, I encountered several stories from volunteer involving organisations of employee volunteering episodes that actually did more harm than good. Usually these were one-off events that seemed to be more concerned with outcomes for the participants than for the 'beneficiaries'. It does seem that continued engagement with organisations is far more productive than these episodic events.

When it is done well, employee volunteering can bring enormous benefits directly to beneficiaries. Civil servants can be highly skilled individuals with much expertise to give. In addition, employee volunteering can bring many benefits to the broader volunteering agenda. It can act as a catalyst, encouraging individuals who have not previously volunteered to become further involved in their communities. Research by IVR on Barclays' Bank volunteering scheme found that 21% of participants had never previously volunteered and 47% were not regularly taking part in volunteering. 34% of volunteers went on to undertake other community activities outside work time.

### Department for International Development – ACBI Leadership Mentoring Scheme

The Leadership Mentoring Scheme developed by Department for International Development (DFID) as part of the Africa Capacity Building Initiative (ACBI), has been designed to establish and support mentoring relationships between the most senior civil servants from the UK and from Africa.

The ACBI, which is being taken forward by a Working Group comprising representatives of Whitehall Departments and the devolved administrations, was established to coordinate UK Government efforts to build capacity in Africa and to share UK public sector skills and knowledge with African governments.

The Working Group and DFID have now developed a Leadership Scheme designed to play a key role in meeting the objective of the ACBI by setting up and supporting a series of mentoring partnerships between senior civil servants in the UK and their counterparts in Africa. The primary purpose of the Scheme is to enhance the leadership skills of those involved, and to share experience of leadership development in government.

DFID want to involve UK Permanent Secretaries and Directors General in the Scheme, which will initially be run in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Zambia; and we are looking to set up at least two mentoring partnerships in each country. The Scheme may be expanded, in respect of both the numbers and the countries involved, if it proves successful. The Scheme will also include other aspects of leadership development such as seminars and wider networking and it will be able to facilitate, to a limited degree, wider links between African Ministries and their UK equivalents through arranging and supporting technical assistance projects that might flow from the mentoring relationship.

A consortium of managing consultants has been appointed to develop and manage the Scheme and they have now visited all five countries and drawn up a short-list of African participants. The UK Permanent Secretaries and Directors General participants now need to be identified.

For each partnership, an initial video-conference between the two participants is envisaged, to discuss and agree the basis on which the partnership will operate. Three meetings between the partners will follow – probably over an eighteen month period (one in Africa and two in the UK). Although the participants may wish to set their own pattern of contacts, it is recommended that the first face-to-face meeting is a visit by the UK participant to Africa. This will enable the UK participant to understand better the context and environment in which their partner is working.

Although there are some advantages in matching participants from the same sectors in government, DFID will not be looking to do that in all cases – the Scheme is primarily about leadership development, rather than about providing policy advice which may not easily transfer. There is, therefore, flexibility in the choice of possible partners.

# What are the problems?

So, whilst I have found a positive and improving picture of employee volunteering in the civil service, I have also found that there are two ongoing challenges in relation to employee volunteering becoming fully operational, and to communicating what the civil service does effectively.

## 1) Lack of buy-in

If employee volunteering is to become fully operational within the civil service, and bring about the real business benefits outlined above, then it needs the buy-in and support from several levels within departments. A fundamental barrier in allowing employee volunteering to become fully integrated is a lack of endorsement from the relevant tiers of authority, be that departmental, corporate/HR or within line management structures. I will deal with each in turn. As well as a lack of buy-in, there is a parallel problem, of a lack of resources, to be addressed.

### Departmental

Certain Government departments are currently not persuaded of the merits of employee volunteering, particularly foreign focused and smaller departments. There are inevitable challenges for smaller departments in all this, as they lack the economies of scale and resources that allow larger departments to develop bespoke schemes. However, some smaller departments have found imaginative ways round a lack of resources, and underfunding should not prevent a department from having a positive volunteering policy.

Foreign orientated departments may think that the business benefits that apply to other departments will not apply to them. Yet the evidence suggests that all departments can benefit from the learning and development opportunities, and the morale boosting effect that volunteering can have. And it is a fact that all policy-makers have stakeholders. In my view, engagement with the communities they serve can only enhance civil servants' ability to make and deliver policy.

### Corporate services/Human resources

If employee volunteering is to become fully integrated across a department, it needs the full buy-in from the HR or another corporate unit. I have found examples of excellent volunteer practice in many sections of HR. For example, in learning and development teams or equality and diversity. I have also found excellent examples in Corporate Responsibility units. However, locating responsibility within policy teams, most notably those with a responsibility for third sector issues, does sometimes take place, and this is really a non-starter in terms of developing long-term sustainable volunteering practice. Whilst it may be useful as a stop-gap measure, if employee volunteering is really going to be rolled out, and bring the benefits outlined above, it needs to be taken on as a corporate responsibility.

I have come across some wonderful examples of HR units and other corporate teams who understand what volunteering can do to enhance the capabilities of their department. In the most successful examples, they are attempting to mainstream it into the very business of the department. They have written a clear and positive volunteering policy. Staff are encouraged to find volunteering opportunities that are aligned with their professional development needs, and line managers are encouraged to allow their staff to pursue these activities. If they have the resources, they may offer a brokerage service or develop bespoke schemes for staff.

However, some HR units give no priority whatsoever to volunteering and are not convinced of its benefits. In many cases, the volunteering brief is simply tagged on to someone's job. Often this staff member is not told why they should be developing an employee volunteering strategy at all, so the role is simply seen as a burden. Departments with this approach may pay lip-service to employee volunteering, but if they do not invest time and energy in it, they will receive remarkably few of the benefits.



So I am eager to see the rationale for employee volunteering explained better to these HR departments, as well as to the staff that assume responsibility for its implementation. The constructive approach that has been adopted over the past year does seem to have had a positive impact, but if we really want to create a sustainable step change in the way that the civil service approaches volunteering, then this needs to be communicated to HR units more convincingly.

### **Line managers**

The buy-in of line managers is a prerequisite for staff actually being released to volunteer, and sometimes, even in the most supportive departments, this can be a challenge. It is line managers that have to provide coverage when staff do volunteer, so unsurprisingly it is often seen as a burden. Line managers need to be helped, in some way, to see that employee volunteering, when done correctly, will actually be in the long-term interests of their staff, by providing them with improved skills and abilities to do their job, or boost their team morale.

If line managers are really to buy in to the benefits of volunteering then, once again, the instructive approach demanding that line managers release their staff to go on some unspecified 'volunteering day' will only get us so far. If we want line managers really to get on board, then a more sophisticated approach is needed. Volunteering should be advocated as a development activity that allows staff members to gain the skills and insight needed to do their jobs more effectively. Managers should use volunteering to develop skills where gaps have been identified in staff's performance appraisals. Volunteering should be seen as an alternative, often more practical, version of training. Of course, some line managers could adopt this approach independently, but for this approach really to be effective, it needs to be embedded and advocated by the corporate team responsible for employee volunteering.

## **2) Communicating what the civil service does**

Thus far, I have addressed the issues to do with rolling out employee volunteering fully in the civil service. However, even if it became operationally perfect, the question remains of how, if Government wants to lead by example, it should communicate its employee volunteering to the general public outside Government.

People often argue that the private sector is way ahead of the public sector in terms of employee volunteering. This is not to say that volunteering levels are actually higher in the private sector. Indeed, anecdotally, it would appear that volunteering levels are higher in the public and third sectors, and that public sector employers are more willing to accommodate self-organised volunteering duties amongst their staff. But the private sector appears to have more branded volunteering programmes, and they are certainly better at marketing what they do. Their volunteering programmes are usually part of a broader CSR strategy, which has reputation and brand management at its very core.

Meanwhile, it seems that the civil service is less forthcoming about promoting the employee volunteering schemes that do exist. As a public interest organisation, the presumption exists that there is no need to prove that it is a responsible organisation. There may even be a fear that marketing our employee volunteering could possibly turn out to be counter-productive, as the public may regard civil servants' time spent on voluntary activities, and not getting on with the job in hand, as a waste of tax-payers' money.

However, as explored earlier, the perception still exists of a 'Whitehall ivory tower' that does not fully understand or engage with the communities it serves. There is still a need, even within public interest organisations, that those who govern should be seen to be governing responsibly. Any negative perceptions of wasted tax-payers' money can be counteracted by the positive perception that civil servants might actually understand their communities better.



## Conclusions and recommendations

From this analysis, it appears that the case for employee volunteering in the civil service is seriously compelling. However, if the benefits that it can bring are to be fully realised, this case needs to be made to all levels of management in all departments. The message needs to continue to come right from the top, from the Prime Minister, Ministers, the Cabinet Office and Permanent Secretaries. Thus far these messages have been espoused effectively by some particularly at the very top, and I have heard many positive reports about the volunteering group that is administered by the Cabinet Office. But more work needs to be done. Other tiers of authority, lower down the system, need to understand why they are being asked to implement such changes.

The perennial issue of a lack of resources has been raised frequently with me. Both in terms of the costs of setting up schemes and with the cost of releasing staff, and with further funding cuts now looming on the horizon, this will become all the more pertinent. Yet volunteering can be a great source of training, team building and development for staff. The civil service is already acknowledged as a great provider of training, an organisation that invests in its employees' future. Some departments are now beginning to acknowledge this training role and they are allocating parts of their training budget to sourcing or developing volunteering opportunities in line with employees' performance objectives. I really think that training and development budgets are the key source of funding for employee volunteering schemes.

This begs the question as to why other departments do not also recognise these benefits and invest some of their own training and development budgets in volunteering. Perhaps departments would be more willing to put resources in if volunteering placements were renamed 'community learning placements'. I often hear claims that volunteering has an image problem more generally and that we should stop using the term 'volunteering' altogether. I find such arguments unconvincing. People understand the term 'volunteering', so any gain we might achieve

through a name change, we would lose through a lack of comprehension. However, in this one case, within the civil service, I think there may be the bare bones of a justification for some renaming.

On the resources point, it is important to state that a good employee volunteering scheme can cost very little. All it really needs, at its most basic level, is a corporate staff resource who can write a positive and sensible volunteering policy, promote that same policy, and monitor and approve volunteering placements. Managers and staff can then find their own volunteering placements on an individual basis. However, departments should remember that there is a resource cost for organisations that are hosting volunteers. In addition, such an arrangement would not be a useful means of procuring 'team challenge' events and bespoke schemes. And, if departments want their staff really to make the most of their allotted volunteering leave, then it is worth investing some resources to develop such schemes and provide a brokerage service. This sort of service can be outsourced from volunteering organisations such as Time & Talents at the Volunteer Centre Westminster for as little as £5000 per year. I have even come across departments where members of staff are volunteering to set up these schemes. For example, the DIUS volunteering programme is run by a group of fast-streamers. The DfT mentoring scheme involved some set-up work, but it is now largely self-managed by the volunteers themselves. A huge amount can be done with a little imagination and a large dollop of enthusiasm.

There is also the separate issue of how the Government can actually lead by example, by promoting the employee volunteering that is taking place, and by telling the story of volunteering in the civil service to the outside world. The civil service can learn many lessons from the private sector in this area. I have come across some truly innovative schemes, and I really think more could be done to promote these initiatives to the public. It is no business of government what its employees do in their spare time. Promoting the fact that they volunteer is not something that the Government should be taking credit for. But I

would like to see the Government promoting the innovative practice that has taken place in employee volunteering, and celebrating the benefits that it has brought, which might in turn encourage other organisations to implement such programmes.

I would therefore like to make the following recommendations:

### **1) The Cabinet Office Volunteering group should continue and be provided with adequate resources**

The central support and networking opportunities that have been provided by this group have received very positive reviews. It needs to continue. One of the key advantages is that, unlike previous attempts, the group is located in the Civil Service Capabilities Group and has access to the relevant HR networks and contacts, which are so crucial, and has corporate rather than policy expertise. It has suffered from a lack of adequate staff resource. I would like to see a part time resource at least dedicated to supporting the group.

There is also scope for other Government departments to lead many of these central strands of work. The Cabinet Office group should have more of a co-ordinating and facilitating role. For example, I would like to see a series of seminars take place on overcoming the challenges outlined above, such as getting line managers' buy in. These seminars could be led by departments which have actually managed to overcome them.

### **2) Central guidance should continue to be produced on how to write a volunteering policy, how to set up bespoke schemes/brokerage, and which outside organisations could be approached**

The Cabinet Office has already begun to provide this kind of central resource and it has proved invaluable. It makes things much easier for any government agencies that are starting from scratch, and avoids the reinvention of the wheel. Whilst this guide would be coordinated by the Cabinet Office group, large parts of it could be written by departments who have already succeeded in these areas

### **3) An internal promotion campaign across government should be implemented to demonstrate the benefits of volunteering**

As I have stated repeatedly throughout this report, the case for volunteering needs to be sold to all tiers of authority in the civil service. Otherwise, it will be seen as a burden and will never become sustainable.

The Cabinet Office could coordinate such a campaign, but contributions need to come from other key government departments. The campaign could include activities such as stalls in Government buildings, lunchtime seminars and a presence at key events such as Civil Service Live.

#### **4) All departments should have some sort of employer supported volunteering scheme in place by 2011**

Working on the promotion and resources that will be developed over the next year, all Government departments should have a scheme in place by 2011. Ideally I would like to see this rolled out across all government agencies (local government, NDPBs, PCT's and others) by 2012. As I outlined earlier, this does not necessarily have to cost anything bar some staff time, although the inclusion of more resource intensive brokerage/bespoke schemes makes such programmes more exciting and often more sustainable. Indeed, investing in a more comprehensive volunteering scheme would allow staff to make more of their volunteering leave.

#### **5) All civil servants should be given up to 5 days off per year to volunteer**

Although I believe that the instructive approach will only get you so far, the strong central message that has been sent out over the past year has been effective. Building on this, I would like to see an announcement guaranteeing that all civil servants should be allowed up to 5 days off to take part in volunteering.

I understand that there may be some departments that are concerned about the cost implications of such a proposal, and a costing exercise would need to be completed. However, it should be remembered that take-up will not be 100%. In fact, evidence from the private sector indicates that even the best companies are lucky to achieve 30%. It must also be remembered that the costs will be offset by enhanced staff development and morale.

#### **6) Volunteering should be encouraged as part of employees' personal development plans**

The implementation of this recommendation is crucial to employee volunteering becoming mainstreamed within the civil service. I do not mean that employees should be shown to have volunteered as some tick-box exercise, but, during the course of this review, I have been struck by the benefits that volunteering can bring to staff development. When a training need is identified by a manager, then volunteering should be advocated as a way of developing those skills, in the same way as traditional training courses. Even if there are no specific schemes in place, employees can be encouraged to find their own opportunity, and be allowed time off to complete it (in the same way as they would be allowed to with a training course)

#### **7) Civil service employee volunteering schemes should be promoted by Communications departments**

There is far more scope to promote existing schemes to the media. I would even like to see communications teams taking a role in the development of some schemes (as they do in the private sector). Some of the programmes I have come across are quite innovative, and could easily provide the vital human interest angle that the media craves. These are good news stories that could boost departments' reputations, and encourage other organisations to set up similar schemes – a good news story for Government!

Office of the Third Sector  
2nd Floor, Admiralty Arch, The Mall,  
London SW1A 2WH

T: 020 7276 6400  
E: [OTS.info@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:OTS.info@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)  
W: [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector)

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