

Research report
November 2015



On the brink of a game-changer?

Building sustainable partnerships between
companies and voluntary organisations

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 140,000 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.

On the brink of a game-changer?

A guide for employers

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Acknowledgements

This research was conducted by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). We are grateful to all those representatives of companies and voluntary sector organisations who participated in the research. We are also grateful to the CIPD and Team London for hosting a workshop with companies and to the Bradford Volunteer Centre for hosting a workshop with local voluntary organisations.

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Foreword

Volunteering and social action have been high on the political agenda in recent years, culminating in David Cameron's announcement during the run up to the 2015 general election that employees in larger organisations should be able to volunteer for three days per year. The announcement demonstrates the Government's view that employers (with 250 or more staff) have a role to play in terms of supporting a volunteering culture in the UK.

Previous CIPD research around the benefits of volunteering has shown that there are a lot of potential advantages to be gained by employers who support volunteering amongst their employees. As well as providing a boost to the organisation's reputation and brand, there are a number of HR advantages, including improved levels of employee engagement and huge scope for employees to develop skills, including communication, teamwork and resilience, through volunteering opportunities. However, these advantages will be realised only if employees actually take part and the opportunities that they participate in are of good quality and are having a positive impact on the communities which they are supporting. This can be achieved only through constructive and open relationships between employers and the voluntary organisations providing the opportunities.

Data highlighted in the introduction of this report indicates that the number of people participating in employer-

supported volunteering (ESV) has increased in recent years. However, if ESV is going to take off, along the lines that the Government imagined when it first announced the three-day policy, it is imperative that employers and the voluntary sector are on the same page. There are lots of positive examples of ESV out there, particularly from some large organisations who have well-established corporate social responsibility programmes. However, to date, little has been done to explore the challenges that arise when employers and voluntary organisations work together to implement ESV. We know that these challenges exist, with charities often finding it difficult to express what their needs are, while employers often look for short-term group team-building opportunities, rather than considering how they can add value (on both sides) through longer-term skills-based volunteering.

As the professional body for HR and people development, we want the advantages of ESV to be fully realised and properly integrated into employee development in as many organisations as possible. We want to see employers and voluntary organisations working together in mutually beneficial ways and see this research, commissioned by the CIPD and undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research, as a key step in addressing the underlying challenges that occur. We hope to see those individuals responsible for implementing ESV programmes on both sides take note of the

recommendations, so that they can work together to develop fantastic programmes that deliver for the individual volunteers, their employers as well as the communities that benefit from their time.

Katerina Rudiger,
Chief Community Officer, CIPD

Introduction: a new focus on ESV

The research

In March 2015 the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) was asked by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to explore ways of building sustainable partnerships between companies and voluntary organisations of all sizes to increase the contribution that employer-supported volunteering makes. Employer-supported volunteering (ESV) can be defined as:

*'Employer-supported volunteering provides employees the opportunity to volunteer with support from their employer, whether this is in the form of time off for individual volunteering or in a programme developed by the employer such as a team challenge event or ongoing arrangement with a community partner.'*¹

ESV can be conducted by employees within private, public or voluntary sector organisations, although this report predominantly focuses on private sector involvement. It can include a wide range of activities, from one-day team activities, such as decorating or environmental conservation activities, to a smaller number of volunteers or individuals engaging in more specialised skills-based activities. The timeframe can range from occasional activity lasting minutes to commitment over many years.

The policy context

Over recent years ESV has slowly taken on a more significant role in the volunteering landscape;

however, until recently it had been far from the centre of the debate. Shortly after commencing the work, the public and political profile of ESV was considerably raised when the Conservative Party included a key reference to it in its election manifesto, stating that:

*'We will make volunteering for three days a year a workplace entitlement for people working in large companies and the public sector. People could, for example, volunteer for a local charity, or serve as a school governor.'*²

Significantly, the Conservative Party's policy will apply only to public and private organisations with more than 250 employees. The policy did not feature in the 2015 Queen's Speech, but appears to be on course to be implemented during this government's term of office (that is, by 2020). Interest in the topic, and how best to develop it, continues to build and in June 2015 an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Civil Society and Volunteering focused on ESV and its development. At this meeting, Nick Hurd, former Minister for Civil Society who now co-chairs the APPG, said this meant the sector was 'on the brink of a game-changer'; the APPG also heard that large-scale implementation of ESV requires practical issues such as infrastructure support to be addressed.³ ESV was also the subject of discussion at an NCVO National Volunteering Forum. At the same time national surveys indicate that participation rates are increasing.

The CIPD has contributed considerably to this discussion for a number of years, publishing a series of reports on the subject,⁴ of which this is the latest.

Participation in ESV in the UK

National surveys indicate that between a quarter and a third of employees who have a scheme available to them participate at least once a year.⁵ Analysis of the Citizenship Survey and Community Life Survey also shows that there has been a rise in participation in ESV in recent years, both that which takes place monthly and yearly (see Figure 1). Currently 5% of people in paid work engage in ESV at least once a month and 13% do so at least once a year.⁶

Figure 1: Proportion of people in paid work taking part in employer-supported volunteering, between 2010/11 and 2013/14⁷



Other, older, research⁸ suggested that:

- approximately 70% of FTSE 100 companies already have an ESV programme⁹
- 23% of private sector organisations overall have an ESV scheme
- 20% of employees of medium and 14% of employees of small businesses have an ESV scheme
- 33% of public sector organisations have an ESV scheme.

The participating companies in this research reported having around 20–30% of their staff participating in their ESV schemes, roughly in line with national figures.

The research

This report is based on findings from two workshops and 12 telephone interviews, which took place in the spring and early summer of 2015. One workshop took place in London (representatives from five

companies) and a second in Bradford (ten people, half representing voluntary organisations involved in ESV programmes and half representing intermediary organisations/brokers, including volunteer centres). Telephone interviews were held with representatives of all three stakeholder groups.

While this research is timely and has the potential to inform an important and developing debate, it should be acknowledged that it is comparatively small-scale in its ambitions and adopts more of a scoping overview of some of the important issues faced by companies and voluntary organisations.

Outline of the report

This report looks at examples of companies and voluntary sector organisations' experiences of ESV, both positive and negative. It aims to identify the enablers and the challenges to ESV. Furthermore, it seeks to identify ways that

organisations could better marry different expectations and requirements and benefit from a productive partnership. This report tends to focus on private sector employers, referred to as companies, and a variety of volunteer-involving organisations, referred to as voluntary organisations. This report seeks to inform policy and practice on ESV and inform the debate as to how it can become more effective.

The report begins by setting out the different types of ESV observed (section 1). How companies develop volunteer programmes and policies and form partnerships with voluntary organisations is then examined (section 2). The costs of ESV, often a point of contention, are outlined alongside its benefits (section 3) before the conclusions and recommendations are presented. Any names used have been changed from the original to maintain anonymity.

1 Understanding ESV: identifying different forms of engagement

A spectrum of activity

ESV can take a number of different forms, ranging from employers giving individual employees time off to pursue volunteering opportunities during work time, to specially arranged team volunteering days. There are also other connected activities, such as pro bono help. We found, however, that such skills-based assistance is not always classed or recorded as volunteering by either the employee or employer, but can nonetheless be highly valued by voluntary organisations. There is an additional dimension of length of relationship – whether the volunteering, be it one-day events or more specialised assistance, recurs over a period of time.

Table 1 captures some of this diversity of engagement in a matrix. Each element will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

One-off day-long activities

Such activities were usually perceived by interviewees as the archetypical ESV activity, for example, a group of employees

working together on a single task, often painting or gardening, for a day. This effectively fits the definition of micro-volunteering, which can be defined as *'bite-size volunteering with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality, involving short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete'*.¹⁰

Benefits of micro-volunteering and offering bite-sized opportunities can be wide-ranging, including diversifying the types of volunteering on offer from an organisation, broadening an organisation's base of volunteers (that is, tapping in to people who may not be able to commit to regular volunteering), and improving its reach.¹¹

Voluntary organisations' experience of this type of shorter-term ESV activity varied markedly. We heard that these activities could often be different from the voluntary organisation's day-to-day activities. This could have distinct advantages, including that it can provide a larger pool of labour not usually available who are able to engage in

'ESV can take a number of different forms, ranging from employers giving individual employees time off to pursue volunteering opportunities during work time, to specially arranged team volunteering days.'

Table 1: Different types of ESV activities

Activity	Shorter-term/micro activities	Longer-term engagement
Team-based/unskilled	One-day events (for example painting and decorating activities)	Repeated one-day engagement (for example multiple team-building activities with different employees)
Skills-based	One-day skills-based (for example bespoke finance advice)	Ongoing skills-based assistance
Existing volunteering role	An employee is given time off to pursue a short-term volunteering role, such as helping at a fundraising event	An employee is given time off to pursue a longer-term existing volunteering role, such as school governor
Wider corporate engagement	Financial donations/promotion	Ongoing partnership (that is, charity of the year)

activities that are important but not normally considered to be essential or core. It was also able to benefit various stakeholders, including the participating employees:

'It gives people, particularly if they're office-based or desk-bound, the chance to get back to the coal face if you like to see the reality of life or people whose services they are responsible for. ... It doesn't do them any harm to see what that means in the real life of somebody on the receiving end.' (Broker)

We also observed more negative experiences from voluntary organisations that one-off activities could frequently be arranged with little notice and without full acknowledgement of the costs involved (see section 3). The nature of one-day activities can also mean that there is a risk that they may be cancelled at short notice by the company should a higher-priority activity arise; the primary day-to-day activities of the companies remained the ultimate priority. Many of the voluntary organisations interviewed had direct experience of this, although companies also recognised the negative impact of having to withdraw from a commitment at short notice. This could be damaging in terms of the relationship between partners and, moreover, could risk putting off voluntary organisations from engaging in ESV in the future.

Many of the frustrations with one-day ESV are also echoed in broader concerns about 'micro-volunteering'. Previous IVR research on this topic found that while there were benefits from this form of volunteering there were also concerns expressed about developing short-term volunteering opportunities, including the appropriateness of the roles and whether the benefits would outweigh the investment, including

in volunteer management, for the voluntary organisation.¹²

Skills-based volunteering

A second broad type of ESV observed was skills-based volunteering, essentially activities that draw on the distinct and specific skill sets of the volunteers involved (for example the financial skills of bank employees). This can take the form of pro bono help.¹³ We found numerous examples of this in the research, from websites being designed by IT professionals to skilled people in companies running workshops for people in equivalent roles in the voluntary organisation. One potential drawback of this type of volunteering remains, however, that employees may not always wish to undertake volunteering that is so closely related to their paid job.

The skills-based volunteering we heard about often appeared to be more likely to occur where there was a longer-term relationship between the two organisations:

'They did that one day and that has continued, that piece of work continues to inform how we look at things and the structuring of our documents. So that one day was very helpful, but it has to be that kind of high-level advice.' (Voluntary organisation)

This type of ESV appeared to be particularly highly regarded by the voluntary organisations we spoke with, as the following comments illustrate:

'If you want to make a real difference [you need] high-level professionals, and they've come and given me high-level professional advice for a day. That has been incredibly helpful and useful, but that's high-level professional advice that's very specific, and it's specific to my particular needs.'

'It's a long-term relationship. She loves doing the stuff for us, we've also taught her. ... We make sure she has samples of everything, so it all goes into her portfolio. It's a win/win, so that works.'

There was, however, also a connection between skills-based activities and the aforementioned one-off opportunities; in some instances, the ongoing skills-based activities had been initiated as a result of one-off team-building days, with some staff returning to offer more skills-based volunteering on a longer-term basis.

This is an area that could potentially be developed further, with one company we spoke to wanting to refocus in this way. In this example, 10% of the participating employees used their professional skills in ESV, but they had a target to increase this to 40% in the future.

Longer-term relationships

We observed two main ways in which a company may engage with a voluntary organisation over an extended period of time, which are not mutually exclusive: firstly, the organisation can have repeated contact by sending different groups of employees over an extended period of time; and secondly, the same employee could return to a voluntary organisation a number of times. We also heard about different forms of company-voluntary organisation partnerships that go beyond ESV, including donations, both cash and of equipment, or adopting a 'charity of the year'. A longer-term partnership can embrace several forms of ESV, bridging both skills-based and one-day activities. So there might be a one-day activity with a large group and, separately, staff going into voluntary organisations at different times to offer more skills-based assistance.

2 Developing effective programmes and partnerships

Securing and developing volunteer engagement

ESV policies inevitably tend to vary considerably between different companies. In many cases, employees may be given time off, from a few hours at a time to whole days, to pursue volunteering activities of their choosing. There may also be activities organised by the company, while some organisations allow employees to do both types.

In terms of the amount of time off that is provided, this could range from none (that is, the ESV would occur in work hours but the time needed to be made up as part of flexitime policies) to multiple days that were offered within normal working hours with no expectation of making the time up. In reality, we frequently observed flexibility, with the ESV leave often not needing to be taken in a day-long block:

'As an organisation we offer three days per year which we convert into 24 hours so that they can do hourly activities, half-day activities or full-day activities.' (Company)

ESV as a concept can raise some definitional challenges around volunteering, particularly on issues of free will and payment; for example, that it does not take place in someone's free time but during their (paid) work time, and it can form, in some instances, effectively a compulsory activity for staff to engage in. This is not to say that it does not qualify as volunteering, but it should be recognised that it has these distinctive elements. It should

also be acknowledged that it is a matter of degree. ESV is rarely mandatory in the sense that not all employees take up the offer to participate.

Motivations for volunteering tend to be altruistic and community-minded. The most cited reason for starting to volunteer is consistently a desire to improve things and help people, the cause being important to the volunteer.¹⁴ We observed some companies attempting to respond to this driving motivation by engaging staff in helping to select the ESV partners.

There can be various challenges to employees participating in their company's ESV schemes. This included feeling 'pushed' into volunteering opportunities and not having the time to get away from the office, despite the official policy. In addition, the volunteering opportunities were not always appropriate, especially those requiring a longer-term commitment.

An example of a company developing its ESV work is presented in the case study box below.

'The most cited reason for starting to volunteer is consistently a desire to improve things and help people, the cause being important to the volunteer.'

Case study – developing ESV projects

This company had recently started operations in the UK. It had worked extensively in the US on ESV, where it currently has high engagement, with 80% of employees participating. It is currently developing its UK ESV work.

The company was conscious that employees should not feel pushed into ESV activities. Therefore it engages the employees from the outset:

'We made a decision as a firm to address the employee volunteering a bit differently, where we partnered with very specific organisations that we had the employees help choose.'

They initially chose two local organisations in the UK and have looked to build that partnership over time:

'We wanted to find organisations, small ones that were willing to partner for a long term with more of the skills-based volunteering.'

Being local was important to the company in order that they can see their impact:

'We want them to be close by. We wanted them to be small so we could actually see a difference in the work that we were making.'

They are seeking to build the same active ESV culture in the UK as there is in their American office:

'I think for us it's all been about the culture that we built in our [American] office. ... You walk into [the office] and there's any day you walk in someone's talking about some volunteering that they did that day.'

Identifying partners and initiating contact about ESV

We heard from both voluntary organisations and companies which had developed diagnostic systems, with varying degrees of complexity, to assess the suitability of organisations they want to work with on ESV:

'We do a diagnostic on each of the [voluntary] organisations, where we look at what the potential opportunities are, then we introduce the volunteers to the organisations, we do a skills audit on our staff so that when we're matching them, we're trying to match them in a way that is as sophisticated as it can be.'
(Company)

This is very much in line with good practice set out in an existing ESV toolkit from Volunteering England which focuses on the importance of understanding and matching motivations and practical requirements. It recommended that employers identify voluntary organisations which:

- have values and objectives they can support
- have needs the employer organisation can meet
- can support volunteers well
- can give feedback and evaluate the difference the volunteers make.¹⁵

We observed that the driver for ESV development predominantly came from companies rather than voluntary organisations, frequently contacting brokers or hosts directly. In reality that can often mean that a representative of a company is looking for a placement for 20–30 people at relatively short notice, to take place on a single day.

Most of the negativities and difficulties we observed, from both voluntary organisations and companies, were usually focused around the contact that happened at this point. Table 2 features some of the tensions that can emerge.

Table 2: Potential tensions between companies and voluntary organisations

Companies	Voluntary organisations
Wanting to place 20–30 people in one go	Wanting smaller groups or individuals
Not being prepared to pay direct costs	Being unable to continue unless full costs covered
Wanting a one-off activity	Wanting a longer-term commitment
Wanting to do non-specialised activities	Wanting to utilise specialised skills of company employees
Primary aim – team-building	Primary aim – benefiting the organisation
Publicity shy	Keen to publicise partnership

Table 3: What makes partnerships work well

Companies	Voluntary organisations
Identifying what they can offer through ESV, for example staff, skills, and so on	Identifying what they can offer in terms of volunteer placements
Being clear what the ESV volunteers can offer to the participating staff	Being clear what the volunteering opportunity entails
Regular communication between partners	Demonstrating impact to participating volunteers
Buy-in, commitment and prioritisation at the top level, meaning that the likelihood of the day being cancelled is minimised	

One example of mismatched expectations and needs was around publicity. Sometimes voluntary organisations were keen to promote their ESV activities and partnership while the company often wanted to be discreet about the work. Companies did not want to be accused of developing the volunteering solely for the publicity it could generate, but there were voluntary organisations interviewed who had found it frustrating they could not publicise the involvement of the company, which they felt could help raise their profile.

Some of the enablers to successful partnerships are outlined in Table 3.

It appeared possible that some of these misunderstandings and tensions could be minimised by the companies and voluntary organisations taking time to understand the motivations of each

other, something that could help in the development of productive relationships, as this comment from a voluntary organisation, which used a broker, demonstrates:¹⁶

‘Dennis was co-ordinating the whole process, we had a very clear conversation about what needed to be done. ... Somebody had come [that Dennis brought], I think a week beforehand ... to have a look and we talked through what needed to be done and what we needed to do in preparation. ... So when people arrived, the whole day, everything was completed because they knew exactly what they needed. If we hadn’t had that initial discussion, it could have been a disaster.’

The importance of individuals and embedding culture

As so often is the case with organisational relationships, having engaged individuals driving the

process could be essential to its overall success. The absence of such an individual, and the resultant relationship, could often contribute to failure, or at a minimum limit its success. Similarly, we observed that the importance of having an individual within a company championing the ESV programme and encouraging involvement was something that could drive the development of a wider culture of participation.

Developing a culture of volunteering in a company – as a result of an individual or a wider team approach – can take time, to a point at which it becomes an accepted part of the workplace life and talked about in the office. Voluntary organisations also talked about companies having established a culture of volunteering, with involvement not limited to discrete volunteering activities.

‘It can take a great deal of time to develop relationships and we heard that developing a suitable match, often so vital to successful ESV, can be time-consuming.’

Linked to this is where in an organisation the responsibility for ESV sits. Among the companies interviewed for this research it was diverse, ranging from marketing and communications teams to units dedicated to CSR. Closely connected was the extent of buy-in from senior management; it was helpful if ESV was supported by the senior team.

‘Getting that support from senior management to continue with providing CSR with a budget, encouraging colleagues to go out, not making them feel guilty maybe. So for us it’s keeping that support going.’ (Company)

The role of intermediaries and brokers

In this research we found instances both of brokers being used and organisations making direct contact, something that is backed up by previous research which suggests that large numbers of employers prefer to use brokers in ESV.¹⁷ Brokers were valued among many of the voluntary organisation interviewees, although most of the larger companies interviewed tended to approach voluntary organisations directly. Brokers were often particularly valued by smaller voluntary organisations, often without the capacity to seek out and manage partnerships with companies.

There was a great variety in the types of brokers we spoke to, ranging from volunteer centres to local associations of companies or charities whose sole aim was placing professionals, such as lawyers, in schools. It can take a great deal of time to develop relationships and we heard that developing a suitable match, often so vital to successful ESV, can be time-consuming.

A matter of scale

We found that it was rarer for the voluntary organisations and brokers we spoke to have engaged with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They are perhaps less likely to have staff dedicated to ESV development and management or to wider corporate social responsibility programmes, and therefore less able to develop ESV. For some voluntary organisations, they felt that smaller companies were likely to require greater assistance. Yet there were those who felt SMEs may have more in common with smaller, more localised charities, certainly in terms of scale. Therefore they felt more affinity with them and believed that matching voluntary organisations and companies of a similar size could be more productive.

The companies we spoke to often placed greater value on working with small, local voluntary organisations. They felt that smaller charities often needed more help and that the difference their company and the volunteers could make would therefore be more impactful. However, an important challenge remains that it is small charities that sometimes struggle most to involve volunteers from companies, particularly on larger one-off activities; they may not always be able to manage and resource one-day visits of larger groups, but told us that they might benefit from smaller, more focused assistance.

3 Balancing costs and benefits

Acknowledging the costs of ESV

One of the single most significant inhibitors to ESV was often around the associated costs and whether it was the company or the voluntary organisation that should pay these. Among the interviewees spoken to there were numerous examples of ESV projects that did not get developed due to disagreements; sometimes the work could not be facilitated without additional funding. Disappointment was also expressed by companies who felt that such disagreements could 'close the door' on the relationship with a voluntary organisation.

Both companies and voluntary organisations described incurring costs through ESV and often felt that these were not fully recognised or understood by the other party. Voluntary organisations could find it problematic that companies approached them at short notice, asking to send a large number of employees to them in a single day. Equally, companies could be left feeling that voluntary organisations were overly dominated by costs; in some instances the relationship had not gone further if the company had not agreed to pay these costs, and this could be the sole contact between the organisations.

Volunteering requires investment for activities such as recruitment, training and ongoing management and support. In ESV not all these costs apply; for example, it is rare for it to involve extensive training, especially for shorter placements. Yet ESV involves

multiple costs, including raw materials (for example decorating), general support (for example refreshments), health and safety training/assessment, managing and supporting the activity on the day (usually by the voluntary organisation), the replacement cost of a company's employees not working on business activities for that period of time, or fees charged by the voluntary organisation or broker (for example to cover costs). While certain costs will be relevant to all forms of ESV (for example loss of company employee time on business activities), it tends to be one-off volunteering opportunities that incur the greatest costs.

Understanding costs in the context of the benefits

Smaller voluntary organisations spoken to as part of the research described a risk that the cost of running ESV activities could considerably outweigh the benefits experienced. At the heart of this are cases in which it was felt the voluntary organisation was effectively expected to host a company's team-building day for free:

'When it's that team challenge space, it's slightly more akin to event management and I think corporate team-building-type experiences which a business would normally pay for. And therefore, just because it's badged as volunteering, there should be an expectation by business that there is a cost to the charity on that because it takes up certain precious resources.' (Broker)

'One of the single most significant inhibitors to ESV was often around the associated costs and whether it was the company or the voluntary organisation that should pay these.'

‘There seemed to be a perception among voluntary organisations that more benefits would accrue from longer-term and ongoing relationships, as well as from more skills-based volunteering, as opposed to one-off volunteering’

However, some argued there were other longer-term benefits that would not appear on the day in one-day activities, which could complicate understandings of cost and benefit:

‘I completely understand volunteering has a cost; however, I think sometimes they miss the potential of partnering with a corporate, even if it’s a one-day opportunity. I think if they can look past that and see in the long run, when we’re renewing our charities, potentially they could become a charity. But because they’re closing the door at the first stage, we never get any further than that.’ (Company)

This resonated with some of the voluntary organisations spoken to who felt that the connections made could yield unexpected returns further down the line. One voluntary organisation hosted an ESV event where one of the participants later became mayor of the town, and subsequently chose them as their charity of the year.

These benefits were often only fully appreciated when feedback was built into the process, particularly for the volunteers, helping to make the ESV volunteers aware of their work and the impact they had. In one instance a voluntary organisation sent photo montages of the ESV volunteers engaged in activities on the day; such an inexpensive feedback mechanism was well received by the participants and their company. Another example of demonstrating the value of ESV volunteers’ work was taking them back to a house at which they had undertaken some decorating or worked in the garden to see the finished product. Again this was well received and helped address the longer-term nature of the ESV work (that is, that the impact is not always visible in a day):

‘They like to see the garden in bloom in three months’ time or something, so we do that follow-up, so that people then feel that they’ve seen something through to the end.’ (Broker)

A question remains, however, as to what represents the most cost-effective model for ESV. There seemed to be a perception among voluntary organisations that more benefits would accrue from longer-term and ongoing relationships, as well as from more skills-based volunteering, as opposed to one-off volunteering. The vast majority of voluntary organisations participating in this research found this type of volunteering more useful, perceiving it to have a more tangible net benefit:

‘It’s cost-positive; obviously we do invest time into it but what we get out of it well exceeds what we put in, so it does give us access to expertise that we would have to pay an awful lot of money for and I think even just bringing in outside perspectives in where we would do things in house, it’s incredibly valuable.’ (Voluntary organisation)

The benefits of skills-based volunteering to the employee themselves, in terms of developing their own skills, was also highlighted:

‘We see this type of skilled volunteering as a real opportunity for staff to develop as individuals, as leaders or develop their own personal skills.’ (Company)

A mixed model, in which both one-off and skills-based and short- and long-term activities were developed, can be beneficial for both parties. Furthermore, having a number of options also gives employees more choice in how to engage with ESV.

Conclusions: taking ESV forward in a new policy environment

While debate continues about whether the Government's commitment to ESV will be implemented in full and what it will look like in practice, it is possible that it will contribute to an increase in interest and engagement in ESV, although it is interesting to note that ESV rates have risen over the last few years without specific government intervention. While small scale in nature, this research can nonetheless draw the following conclusions, which we hope will add to the continued debate and development of ESV. Four overarching themes are identified below, and recommendations for companies and voluntary organisations are made in Table 4.

Overarching themes about ESV

The following four themes can provide greater insight into ESV and its ongoing development, including for those companies looking to scale up ESV activities in light of the new government policy and for voluntary organisations seeking to partner with them.

A mutually beneficial activity

Our research has confirmed that ESV, when done well, has the potential to create multiple positive benefits for both the company and the voluntary organisation, and for the volunteers themselves. While costs can often be considerable (like all volunteering, it is freely given but not cost-free), they will frequently be outweighed by the benefits experienced, although some of these may only appear over a longer period of time. For it to be as effective as possible, there needs to be mutual understanding

of the full range of costs that are involved and who may – and should – incur these costs.

Understanding the perspective of partners

Both companies and voluntary organisations have different working cultures, challenges and expectations. If time is not taken to understand and examine these, relationships can falter at an early stage. This also emphasises the vital importance of the first contact between the company and the voluntary organisation – perhaps the single most important message of our research – where initial clashes in culture can occur.

Using third-party brokers and intermediaries

Brokers and intermediaries can play a key role here. Because it appears that it can be quite difficult to match the needs of companies and voluntary organisations, a third party can play a vital part. This can be especially beneficial for smaller voluntary organisations and SMEs, who do not have the capacity to field a great deal of enquires or proactively seek opportunities themselves.

Recognising the importance of scale

ESV takes place amongst all sizes of company and voluntary sector organisation, but our research highlighted the particular attraction, from both partners, of working with smaller organisations. From the company perspective, preference could often be given to working with smaller voluntary organisations as they felt the

impact could be greater; and voluntary organisations sometimes preferred partnering with SMEs, which they felt could have more in common with them.

Recommendations for companies and voluntary organisations

The recommendations in Table 4 are for companies, voluntary organisations, or both, and seek to improve the quality and impact of ESV in the longer term.

Table 4: Recommendations for companies and voluntary organisations to take ESV forward

Companies	Voluntary organisations
<p>Value and encourage employee input. Involve them in the selection of the voluntary organisations and give them some control over the type of volunteering in which they will be involved, which can help companies increase their engagement.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Commit sufficient time and resource to volunteer management.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collaboratively develop the activities and partnership, rather than one side driving the process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Commit to assess what difference has been made in the longer term, including designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation activities.</p>	
<p>Support and encourage employee volunteers to revisit organisations to see the long-term benefits.</p>	
<p>Work to ensure a greater understanding – and communication of – the costs involved, from the beginning (for example comparable team-building exercises would incur a considerable fee from a commercial company). Recognition also needs to be given to the fact that in certain circumstances they can risk being loss-making for voluntary organisations.</p> <p>Consider longer-term, skills-based volunteering activities, which were particularly attractive to voluntary organisations. These do not have to replace one-off activities and both could be offered alongside one another.</p>	
<p>Provide as much notice as possible to voluntary organisations for one-off ESV activities, which can be challenging and more costly to organise at short notice.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Develop a good understanding of one another’s motivations and objectives in advance. This could, for example, include spending time with one another prior to the ESV taking place, in particular to learn more about the voluntary organisation’s purpose and the company’s motivations for involvement.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examine why a particular ESV activity is being conducted. It is essential that a purpose commensurate with the company’s and the voluntary organisation’s needs is identified. If, for example, the dominant driver is team-building and the form this must take is inflexible, the company and voluntary organisation should consider whether ESV is the most appropriate vehicle for this.</p>	
<p>Recognise the potential contribution of intermediary organisations as third-party brokers and collaborate as appropriate.</p>	
<p>Acknowledge that smaller voluntary organisations may be less able to accommodate one-off activities and could be more suited to longer-term, skills-based ESV.</p>	<p>Recognise that SMEs may be less able to directly cover costs or send large numbers of staff to volunteer.</p>

Endnotes

- 1 VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND. (2011) *The practical guide to employer supported volunteering for employers [online]*. Available at: http://www.volunteering.org.uk/images/stories/Volunteering-England/Documents/ESV/esv_guide_employers_2012.01.pdf [Accessed 22 June 2015].
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- 3 BIRKWOOD, S. (2015) Staff volunteering 'should be fixed' before government can deliver its three-day promise. *Third Sector*. 15 July. Available at: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/staff-volunteering-should-fixed-government-deliver-its-three-day-promise/volunteering/article/1356081> [Accessed 16 July 2015]. See also: DAVIS SMITH, J. (2015) *From CSR to HR – the future of employer-supported volunteering? [online]*. Available at: <http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2015/07/10/from-csr-to-hr-the-future-of-employer-supported-volunteering/> [Accessed 13 July 2015].
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- 6 Analysis of the 2010/11 Citizenship Survey and 2012/13 and 2013/14 Community Life Survey data.
- 7 Source: *NCVO Almanac [online]*. Available at: <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/dataview/proportion-of-people-taking-part-in-employer-supported-volunteering-200809-to-201314/> [Accessed 10 July 2015]; and CABINET OFFICE. (2015) *Community life survey: 2014–2015 statistical bulletin [online]*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/447010/Community_Life_Survey_2014-15_Bulletin.pdf [Accessed 21 July 2015].
- 8 The following statistics, some dating back a decade, come from a variety of sources and are cited in: BROOKS, K. and SCHLENKHOFF-HUS, A. (2013) *Employee volunteering: who is benefitting now? [online]*. Available at: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/app/uploads/2015/04/CSV-Employee-Volunteering-Who-is-Benefitting-Now.pdf> [Accessed 22 June 2015].
- 9 ROCHESTER, C. and THOMAS, B. (2006) *Measuring the impact of employer supported volunteering: an exploratory study*. Report prepared for the Institute for Volunteering Research.
- 10 BROWNE, J., JOCHUM, V. and PAYLOR, J. (2013) *The value of giving a little time: understanding the potential of micro-volunteering [online]*. Available at: http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/micro_volunteering_full_report_071113.pdf [Accessed 22 June]. p17.
- 11 BROWNE et al (2013) *The value of giving a little time*. pp34–9.
- 12 BROWNE et al (2013) *The value of giving a little time*. p48.

13 VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND.

(2011) *Employer supported volunteering: a toolkit for local government employers*, cites examples including mentoring, finance, board membership, reading programmes, IT support, school governors, befriending, HR, law, employability coaching, fundraising, marketing, project management, CV writing, translation/interpreting.

14 LOW et al, *Helping out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*. p34.

15 VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND,
Employer supported volunteering.

16 Names have been changed.

17 VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND,
The practical guide to employer supported volunteering for employers.

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Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797) and Scotland (SC045154)

Issued: November 2015 Reference: 7155 © CIPD 2015