

Volunteering and the Historic Environment

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Volunteer Development Scotland is Scotland's Centre for Excellence in volunteering and works in partnership with the 32 local Volunteer Centres across Scotland to improve the quality of the volunteer experience. Volunteer Centres support organisations locally to engage volunteers including matching volunteers with opportunities.

Scope of the study

- The scope and scale of volunteering in the historic environment;
- Any additional support needs.

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Identifying the scope and quantifying the scale of volunteering in the historic environment in Scotland and examining where additional support might facilitate its sustainability and development.

A similar study was undertaken in the natural heritage in 2005 which demonstrated for the first time the level of voluntary commitment to the sector and suggested ways in which it could be stimulated and supported. HEACS were keen to understand volunteer engagement in the historic environment sector in a similar way.

Definitions used for the terms “volunteering” and the “historic environment” were from the Scottish Government Volunteering Strategy and the Scottish Historic Environment Policy respectively:

Definitions

- “Any or all of the structures and places in Scotland of historical, archaeological or architectural interest or importance”
- “Volunteering is the giving of time and energy through a third party...it is a choice undertaken of one’s own free will, and is not primarily motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary”

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Definitions used for the terms “historic environment” and “volunteering” were from the Historic Scotland Scottish Historic Environment Policy and the Scottish Government Volunteering Strategy respectively

Method

- Postal survey;
- Engage with volunteer involving organisations;
- 897 identified through various sources;
- 233 responses to survey.

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The literature review set the context for the study although there is a limited amount of research available on volunteering and the historic environment, and most of it is England based. It did help us identify gaps in knowledge that the research could potentially fill.

Consultation telephone calls were held with lead staff in historic environment umbrella bodies, as well as other specialists in the field to inform the research.

HEACS provided us with a database of 392 organisations in the sector as a starting point for the research. Through developing a set of keywords and using a range of methods, we were able to identify a further 505 organisations in the sector, bringing our total number of potential research respondents to 897.

A paper questionnaire was then developed in collaboration with HEACS and sent to all organisations on the database. This aimed to gather information on the types of organisations who were involving volunteers, the format of volunteering and the roles undertaken by volunteers, and how volunteers were managed and supported.

After questionnaires had been returned, a sample of six organisations were selected as case studies and telephone interviews were carried out to examine in more depth volunteer management, policy and relationships with other organisations in the sector.

Volunteer involvement

- **18,564** volunteers in **171** organisations;
- **167,721** hours in the average month or **1198** FTE jobs p.a.;
- Economic value of **£28million**;
- The annual budget of Historic Scotland is around £50million (Scottish Government, 2008).

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Important to note that information should be treated with caution – one key finding from the research was that organisations do not collect information on their volunteers, so the figures reported are mainly estimates.

“Active” volunteers are defined as hands on helpers.

“Non-active” volunteers are defined as those who support an organisation in other ways, such as supporting one off events.

Using the average Scottish weekly wage, an approximate economic value can be calculated from the number of hours given by volunteers. To put this figure of £28m into context, the annual budget of Historic Scotland in 2007 was £50m..

Young People

- The proportion of volunteers aged 16-25 in the sample is **23%**;
- More likely to be found in organisations which undertake research and recording or education/training activities;
- Seek career development opportunities.

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This is contrary to expectations and findings from previous literature.

Success in engaging young people seems to vary across the sector but it is notable that young people seem keen to be involved in activities.

It was noted by case study respondents that volunteering is a necessary experience for those seeking a career in the sector and therefore organisations could offer support to individuals trying to enter the sector.

Range of activities

- Multi-faceted roles;
- Organisational support is dominant;
- Professional activities demonstrate the skills of the volunteers involved.

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Volunteers are carrying out a wide range of activities for organisations and almost all organisations have volunteers carrying out some level of organisational support such as being on a management committee, or fundraising.

This demonstrates the skills of the volunteer workforce in the sector, as well as the significant contribution of time that is spent sharing these skills with organisations in the sector.

The sector

- 64% of organisations with annual income less than £10k;
- Volunteering exists across the spectrum;
- Organisations support each other through local responsive networks.

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Organisations therefore wouldn't exist without the volunteers who give time to them.

Many mention links with Historic Scotland who provide support and funding to the sector as well as links with other key organisations in the field.

Volunteer Management

- Mainly through unpaid or peer support;
- Information held on volunteers is sparse in the sector;
- Local Authority a key source of information and advice on volunteer issues.

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A third of organisations have some form of paid position for volunteer management.

12% of the sample reported collecting information on their volunteers beyond basic contact details.

The Local Authority departments contacted varied between different areas, but included Planning, Archives and Community Education.

To stimulate and support

- A collaborative approach to support;
- Working with the natural heritage sector;
- Supporting the gathering of volunteer data;
- Further engagement of young people.

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A key theme emerging from the research is that organisations access help and support from across a range of organisations in both the historic environment and voluntary sectors. As such, we are keen that organisations work together to support one another to stimulate and support voluntary activity in the sector.

When the research was commissioned, it was noted that the sector might have similar volunteer involvement characteristics to the natural heritage sector. Indeed this sector faces many of the same challenges that the natural environment has faced – therefore it would be beneficial to work alongside our colleagues in that sector to support volunteer involvement.

The data gathered in the research is useful but as I said earlier on, is mainly estimated due to a lack of data collection on volunteers. This needn't be an onerous task and can help organisations demonstrate their impact.

Next steps...

- Promotion of these findings;
 - To government, funders and others
- Further research;
 - The volunteer experience
- Themed written papers
 - Young people and the historic environment.

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VDS is keen to make further use of the data collected as part of this research, and to follow up on some of the findings. We have a paper on Young People and the Historic Environment in process, and are keen to follow this up with papers on the role of local and national government in supporting volunteering in the historic environment and volunteer management in the historic environment. If you are interested in receiving copies of these reports as they are published, please see Morven on our stand in the exhibition area.

As I said earlier on, this research has provided a great deal of information on volunteer involvement in the sector, and we are keen that the significant contribution that volunteers make to the sector is highlighted to those who have the power to support this work.

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