

## **VALUE Network – Employability Subgroup Workshop**

Meeting in Jonkoping, SE  
6 November 2009 14.00-15.30

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Matthew Hill (IVR, UK)

Questions posed to participants as per attached handout.

Overarching theme is ‘what do the various stakeholders want from the volunteer- ULLL interaction in terms of employability?’

Question 1 focuses on the different motivations of different groups of volunteers. Question 2 opens up the wider context of the different stakeholders – employers / state/ trade unions / local government and how they perceive this issue.

Ruud Duvekot presentation of NL Case Study attached, re a TU member (volunteer) who wanted to gain APEL for university study and some of the issues this raised.

Matthew Hill then made a number of observations about the motivations of volunteers themselves (stressing that it is important to start with the individual learner):

What do volunteers want out of ULLL (in terms of employability)?

Firstly it is important to note that not all volunteers will be interested in ULLL or employability as part of their volunteering. However, economywide there is an increasing emphasis upon skills development and the accreditation of these skills. Many volunteers will want to accredit and validate the skills they have developed in their volunteering roles. Crucially ULLL offers transferable, recognisable and highly valued accreditation and validation for this learning. However, a key challenge for ULLL is to preserve the flexibility and informality of so much volunteering that is so valued by volunteers.

Different groups of volunteers may place different emphasis on certain wants and hopes for ULLL. For example:

- Age: Younger volunteers tend to place a greater emphasis upon employment-related skills development and thus accreditation.
- Stage of career: The needs will differ between unemployed volunteers and those in very senior positions.
- The previous experience of tertiary education: Those who have already received a degree may be looking for something with added value and may be more ‘fluent’ and comfortable in academic settings.
- The nature of the volunteering role: Some roles will be much more amenable to ULLL (e.g. volunteer manager) than others (e.g. a befriender)

The wider stakeholder context – employers, trade unions, government ( national and local)

RD then commented on the motivation of employers. Some experience in NL re why employers value validation of volunteering – employability. Also perceived to be a good employer through facilitating this. Also for recruitment; professionalization of the volunteer. A 2005 programme collected case studies on validation of prior learning across Europe – 11 countries-employers interest was to professionalise their volunteers. But only Short cycle programmes unless government or another external pressure such as a law requiring volunteers to be equipped to function in their role. This is all about regulations Offering validation could have an effect on finding new volunteers.

Other work in the subgroup had identified that some governments take an instrumental approach – e.g. in Romania it wants volunteers to have qualifications to practise in some sectors but is not that interested in the education/learning involved. Also in some cases trade unions are suspicious of volunteers – who are seen as taking away job opportunities ie paid employment.

Alison Hughes referred to the university response to this and posed some perspectives for workshop participants to consider when looking at the 2 main questions. One prime response of Higher Education is in terms of flexibility – providing flexible delivery with small steps of learning.

Points of interest:

- Many of the UK HE accredited modules offered are for managers of volunteers, rather than volunteers themselves
- Many of these have titles that are very ‘management school’ type eg organisational identity; project management; managing change;
- Flexibility of approach eg Birkbeck in London offer variety of options –Certificate of Attendance / Certificate Achievement / Full award
- Flexibility of modes of delivery eg Lampeter University offers accumulation of credit / distance learning /introduction to university study

Questions identified:

- In providing LLL opportunities for managers in the voluntary sector, is it solely an ‘economy-driven’ model of management that is being offered? If so is this appropriate? We need to recognise that the voluntary sector is very different to the employed sector and the syllabus must reflect this
- Are funding bodies pushing towards professionalization of the sector?
- IVR Research Bulletin ‘Volunteering to Lead’ identified the tension between balancing requirements for managerial training and the informality and flexibility of a host organisation valued by its volunteers
- Some volunteers report they do not receive the kinds of good practice promoted in volunteer management. Many volunteers report they do not receive training for their role. This identifies a need for ULLL for both managers and volunteers. ( See IVR Research Bulletin ‘Managing for Success’

The workshop was then opened up for discussion of the 2 questions in small groups, bearing in mind the introductory comments from the subgroup members. Feedback at the end of the session from the discussion groups included the following points:

- Is the motivation of improving our own career opportunities through being a volunteer a true concept of what volunteering is about? Being honest about our own motives in this scenario - does this then make the volunteering exploitative of the host organisation?
- What is the value that employers put on volunteering being on your CV? How can ULLL help volunteers to encourage the employers to see the value of volunteering and interpret the volunteering experience?
- Issue of unemployed volunteers – host organisations lose them when they become employed. This can become a problem for volunteer bureau, who are encouraging

host organisations to use volunteers. Important that host organisations don't raise the expectations of unemployed volunteers about career progression, and also those employers receiving them as new employees. How can ULLL help re this?

- Older unemployed - eg in Saxony, E Germany there is a workers for free scheme- where the unemployed become volunteers in an organisation and then in due course become employed there. 30% unemployed have re-entered the labour market in this way.
- Is ULLL too academic with its emphasis on theory when asking volunteers to set out skills learned from long-time volunteering? Should volunteers be gently encouraged to theorise/ reflect a little earlier in their learning journey during their volunteering experience? Also should the academics start to think more deeply about what they classify as 'evidence'? Sometimes the academic and practice boundaries are not clear
- A lot of volunteers don't want ULLL and we must be careful that everything doesn't get wound into an economic cycle of quantifying and analysing. Some volunteers may take the view 'let me volunteer for my own reasons'
- yBut at the same time let's provide the opportunities of ULLL for those who genuinely want and need it.