

Older Volunteers as Learners Subgroup Report - Summary

The basic idea behind the sub-group work and report has been that learning based on volunteer work can be a first step on a “learning ladder” for “older volunteers”. Most volunteer organisations do not offer formal learning specifically for older volunteers. If they offer courses as obligatory training for volunteer work, it is usually for all volunteers. When providing formal learning, volunteer organisations involve individual researchers/trainers/tutors, sometimes also at university level. However, volunteer organisations are aware that older learners might need different learning settings/learning methods and it is not always “a course” which is needed. In the countries represented in the sub-group, universities offer lifelong learning by providing regular degree programmes, professional development programmes and learning opportunities (non-credit-bearing) for the general public which includes retired seniors. Older learners are not a homogeneous group and older volunteers are in general not specifically targeted by universities. But some specific case studies could be found which highlight various aspects of the theme.

Based on the group’s collaborative work, the vision for the future is that each sector is aware of the other; that they recognise and appreciate each other’s work and that institutions of both sectors develop stronger institutional links to institutions in the other sector. This should include the development of joint (credit-bearing) learning opportunities based on the needs of older volunteers in order to open up new learning pathways. It is also necessary that universities have or should have well developed links to those volunteer organisations in the local area that provide opportunities for older students to work as volunteers. This involvement of universities could lead to more involvement of volunteers and – in the long run – to more recognition of the contribution of volunteer work to society.