

**(draft)**

## **University Lifelong Learning and volunteering across Europe: reflections from the National Reports (interim report) April 2010**

### **1. Introduction: the National Reports**

One of the core outputs of the VALUE project is the production of a series of National Reports. Each partner country will produce a report which describes the type and extent of collaboration between University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) and organisations that involve volunteers.

This summary is based on National Reports from ten countries which had been received at the time of writing. Throughout the lifetime of the project, the existing National Reports will be added to and additional reports will be produced for the remaining countries. In light of this, the summary report should be regarded as a work in progress which will be revised towards the completion of the VALUE project; the findings are essentially emergent in nature and the evidence included within this summary is not exhaustive.

### **2. The picture across Europe**

In order to make sense of the diversity of interactions between ULLL and volunteering throughout Europe, three working models have been developed. These models present a spectrum of interaction, from a lot to a little. The models do not suggest that one is better than another, but merely demonstrate that practice is different in each case. Each of the models presents a group of countries which best fit within that model. Some countries, however, may be placed within one working model, but nonetheless have something in common with another. Furthermore, the boundaries between the models may often be blurred. Each of the models will be discussed in turn, describing the key characteristics of each.

### **3. Model one: A lot of interaction**

#### **3.1 Description**

This model includes the UK, the Netherlands and Spain where multiple and embedded examples of interaction were observed. These include universities offering accreditation for employees of voluntary organisations and their volunteers. In the UK, for example, a survey by the University of Liverpool found that 23 of the country's 128 universities offered some form of accreditation for the staff or volunteers of voluntary sector organisations.

Interaction can also develop on a much more individual basis. In the UK, universities have a large degree of autonomy to develop their own approach. This has, in one instance, resulted in the University of Liverpool and the National Trust developing an innovative partnership. University staff run lectures and short

courses on the history and architecture of Speke Hall, a local National Trust property, for the public and volunteers. The volunteers subsequently directly apply such learning to their volunteer roles, such as room stewards. The University also offers an accreditation process for volunteers through their Personal and Professional Development Award.

Spain also focuses on training volunteers, with some university courses, such as those focusing on partnership working for volunteer development, specifically developed for volunteers.

### 3.2 Characteristics

Volunteering is a popular activity within Spain and the UK. In England, for example, 41% of people volunteered at least once a year through a group, club or organisation. This can be associated with a long history of volunteering, and trends such as the professionalisation of the voluntary sector, most commonly observed through the rapid increase in the number of paid staff working in the sector. Volunteering within these countries also tends to be well recognised and is often highly valued by national governments. In the Netherlands, for example, the government sponsors the 'National Compliment', and annual prize for the best volunteering project. Governments can also focus their interests on the link between volunteering and employability, something that has become increasingly relevant since the onset of the global recession. In Spain, indeed long before the recession, there has been a focus on providing vocational training for unemployed people, while in the Netherlands, the government has worked with the voluntary sector to strengthen Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) since the start of the economic crisis. While this can often be highly beneficial to those involved, there is some concern that emphasis on the vocational element of lifelong learning may be prioritised at the expense of 'leisure learning'.

While ULLL and volunteering may be well connected, funding and structural issues can remain major challenges. This is particularly pertinent within the UK, where recent policy changes have dramatically increased the cost for an individual to undertake a second degree, directly threatening the existence of lifelong learning provision within some universities.

## **4. Model two: some interaction**

### 4.1 Description

This model includes Austria, Italy and Slovakia. In each case, some level of interaction between universities and volunteering is present, although the majority tends to focus on student volunteering, such as students completing placements within voluntary organisations. There are, however, some other interesting examples which extend beyond the model of student volunteering. In Italy, for example, volunteers and staff from voluntary organisations are invited into universities to tell students about their work. There have also been examples of joint research projects being undertaken between universities and voluntary

organisations. Austria demonstrates a further form of interaction, that of the provision of training by universities to volunteers and volunteer managers.

#### 4.2 Characteristics

Volunteering within these countries can be a highly popular activity, as in Austria (44%) and Slovakia (33%). In Italy, where it currently demonstrates lower levels of participation, it is nonetheless increasing rapidly: the number of voluntary organisations increased by 152% from 1995 – 2003. This is often taking place in the context of government support for volunteering and legislation to support its development. In Slovakia, such support tends to focus on youth volunteering and volunteering by unemployed people, while Italy's Framework Law on Volunteering has provided a definition and principles for the sector to adhere to.

ULLL is often present and sometimes even well established within these countries. It can often, however, be limited to certain sectors, such as education and counseling in Slovakia, and uptake can remain limited, such as in Italy where only six per cent of the population undertook some form of lifelong learning in 2005. Governments within these countries can nonetheless support the development of ULLL. This is perhaps most evident within Austria, where a national strategy on lifelong learning and an Austrian Working Group on Learning in Later Life has been formed. Despite its low uptake, Italy also has a working group of lifelong learning to strengthen the coordination and development of a national and regional system for ULLL.

Mutual awareness of the other sector, however, tends to remain limited. Similarly, there is limited awareness of the learning benefits of volunteering. While there is some good practice evident, these countries often demonstrate considerable variation between regions.

### **5. Model three: more limited interaction**

#### 5.1 Description

This model describes Poland, Slovenia and Turkey. There tends to be limited or no interaction between universities and organisations that involve volunteers. What little interaction there is largely confined to student volunteering, such as internships. These can often be mandatory elements of courses, such as one course in Community Service in Turkey in which students are expected to volunteer 28 hours within a non governmental organisation within one semester. Similarly, some courses in Slovenian universities require students to undertake internships of between one and three months in their field of study in order to graduate.

There are, however, some examples of interactions which extend beyond student volunteering, although these remain less widespread and often isolated. Courses about the voluntary sector are, for example, evident in Turkey, such as the 'Non Governmental Organisations' course at Sakarya University. Poland also demonstrates an interesting example of interaction through its 16 partnerships

between its universities and the Universities of the Third Age. This can, for example, include the accreditation of volunteering. Staff from Warsaw University give their time voluntarily to this process, giving lectures and running courses in the process that is coordinated by the city's Volunteer Centres Association.

### 5.2 Characteristics

These countries tend to demonstrate lower levels of volunteering (for example, 10% of the population in Poland). This can mean that volunteering as an activity is less embedded in society and the wider benefits to the individual are perhaps not widely understood or appreciated. Volunteering also appears to exist in a policy environment which does not consistently offer a great deal of support. There is, however, a sense that this could be changing. In Turkey, for example, the younger population have been described as increasingly appreciating the personal benefits of volunteering and as demonstrating a greater interest in getting involved. Similarly, the recent Polish Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism (2003) may indicate the development of a new policy environment.

While the education sector does offer a wide variety of opportunities for adult education and vocational training, it does not always appear to have been appreciated within the context of lifelong learning. It is, however, possible that this situation is changing, with a greater number of systems to recognise prior learning being developed in recent years. In Slovenia, the Bologna process was described as acting as a catalyst for such development in 2004.

## **6. Factors affecting the level of interaction**

Analysis of the National Reports has highlighted a number of factors that appear to affect the level of interaction between ULLL and volunteering. These factors remain emergent, and are:

- The popularity of volunteering. This includes the level of public participation in volunteering and the extent of government support. Those countries where both was higher tended to demonstrate higher levels of interaction. Historical and cultural factors are also important in this context. The post Communist countries of Eastern Europe often have a strong legacy of 'compulsory volunteering' in which people were required to spend one day a week volunteering for the good of the state. In many instances this has contributed to a degree of suspicion and distrust surrounding volunteering.
- The extent to which the link between volunteering and learning is appreciated and understood, by governments, organisations and individuals. Where this link is made, perhaps through the link between volunteering and employability, higher levels of interaction were frequently observed.

- The enthusiasm, interest and commitment of individuals within universities. To some extent within any of the countries which demonstrated interaction, success could be attributed to the actions of an individual staff member who drove the work with the voluntary sector organisation due to their personal interests and beliefs.
- The extent of mutual awareness between universities and volunteering organisations. In cases where one sector was unaware of the activities of the other, or how to access them, interaction tended to remain somewhat limited.
- The level of funding. This remains a pervasive issue within all countries, something that has been exacerbated by the recession, its prolonged recovery and public spending cuts. This affects even those countries where levels of interaction are highest. Certain countries have also been affected to greater degrees by the recession, for example the UK.

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