

CETL Briefing Papers: Active Volunteers & Volunteering in the Curriculum.

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Aims of the Initiative

Active Volunteers aims to promote volunteering as an integrated part of undergraduate life. This activity can be as extra curricular activity, but also as part of the undergraduate curriculum. Through engaging with volunteering activities in organisations outside the University, the undergraduate student gains experience and skills that enhance employability in the graduate employment market, whilst the University make contribution to the community in which it is based.

Description of the Initiative

The programme supports the University in the volunteering process in two ways. Firstly, Active Volunteers facilitates the volunteering process by matching students who wish to engage in volunteering with organisations who offer volunteering opportunities. This includes vetting the organisation and initiating Criminal Records Bureau checks. Secondly, through promoting volunteering in the curriculum, student volunteering has become a recognised and accredited activity that counts towards their degree qualification in many subject areas. Initially, this started as a third level elective within the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences (*Student Link*) which supports applied project based activities within an external organisation. This has benefits for the student researcher and for the organisation. The success of this led to accredited modules at levels 1 and 2. The School of Legal Studies (SLS) followed suit with their own community-based learning modules, centring around activities with the CAB, Witness and Victim Support. With HEACF fund from HEFCE (2002-2006) these opportunities were offered university wide.

Evaluation and impact of the Initiative

While students can access volunteering as an extra curricular activity, the initiative has focused on developing and embedding volunteering in the curriculum through accredited modules across a number of schools. These include:

- School of Sports, Performing Arts and Leisure. EG Sports Coaching, After School Clubs and dance activities.
- School of Applied Sciences. In 2008-09 the school utilised SL1008 (Volunteering in the Community) for Psychology students to experience learning outside of the classroom, while developing a practical and applied understanding of their discipline. The School is looking to develop their own accredited module(s) within the new 20 credit framework. Psychology tutors report very favourable feedback from the students who opted for this module.
- School of Computing and Information Technology. Again, this School is seeking to include voluntary activities within the curriculum for students to gain experience of technology based learning within a voluntary, community, or public sector organisation.
- Wolverhampton Business School have recently revalidated programmes which now include (and encourage students to take) the current community-based learning modules within HLSS (SL1008 and IS2002 Volunteering in Action).

Other Activities include:

- Launched in 2008-2009, Active Volunteers now offer certification for all student volunteering activities. This is proving very popular, since the certificate(s) of achievement are also recorded on the student transcript, outlining the transferable skills enhanced or developed and extent of community engagements.
- At the same time the University of Wolverhampton Volunteer of the Year award has been introduced, which goes to the student who demonstrates outstanding commitment and ability to make a difference in the community. This Award has been developed in sponsorship with Midcounties Co-operative, who have provided the prize to the finalist, together with a cheque for the organisation for whom the award winner has been volunteering. The inaugural award went to Jodie McCaughan, a first year student of Sociology and Social Policy, who has, in the words of her volunteer organiser at Sandwell Advocacy, been “one of the most outstanding young people it has been my pleasure to work with. Her contributions to the development of volunteering within our organisation have been truly remarkable”.
- These activities and achievements have ensured that community-based learning is a valuable experience for students who, when embracing it in their first year, can develop a remarkable skills set together with experience that will stand them well in graduate employment.
Pat Green, Principal Lecturer and Co-ordinator of Active Volunteers, has recently published (with co-authors Nicole Matthews, David Hall and Irene Hall) *‘The role of volunteering in the transition from higher education to work’* a chapter in Rachel Brook (ed) Transitions from Education to Work (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) ISBN 13: 978-0-230-20163-7
 - Earlier publications include ‘Student volunteering and the active community: issues and opportunities for teaching and learning in sociology’ with David Hall, Irene Hall and Andrew Cameron in LATISS (Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences) (2004) 1.1. ISSN 1740-5866

Policy Implications

Stakeholders:

Key stake holders are Students, Higher Education Institutions and the Voluntary and Community sectors.

Students: Research (Matthews et al 2005) reveals that the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) welcome student volunteers as part of a valuable, two way knowledge exchange. Student Volunteers broaden and diversify their volunteer base, bringing with them knowledge and skills that benefit the work of organisations.

Higher Education: University of Wolverhampton benefit from the embedding this university/community collaboration thus realising part of its mission.

Students benefit from enhancing and developing core skills such as time-management, organisational and interpersonal skills, but also develop holistically in

terms of their broader understanding of social issues and awareness of individual civic responsibility (Matthews et al 2005; Matthews et al, 2009; Green, 2010).

International Market: International students are able to get out of the University bubble and make connections with the local community, understand social issues within region and British social life. Pat Green has published on this work with David Finn ('Global World: Global village? Impact of volunteering for international students' with David Finn in ELiSS (Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences) 2:2 ISSN 1756-848X)

Business Case

▪ Opportunity

Recent and current research suggests that accredited provision has the potential to offer an holistic approach to learning which provides practical and applied community based learning together with theoretical knowledge and understanding of social issues and civic responsibility.

▪ Risk analysis

The risk of not continuing the programme is to damage the collaborative relationship currently enjoyed across more than 150 voluntary and community organisations across the region. This could also be detrimental to the employment prospects of students who may go on to work in these and the public sectors.

▪ Threats

This threatens the reputation of the University, in terms of its reliability, and ability to collaborate with the VCS

▪ Resource implications

The University's Active Volunteer Unit is a vital resource for student volunteering. It provides support through

- engaging with VCS and registering voluntary opportunities
- carrying out necessary CRB checks
- liaising with students to support them in identifying appropriate placements
- co-ordinating University of Wolverhampton voluntary certificate scheme and Volunteer of the Year Award
- organising and hosting the Volunteer of the Year Award celebration event
- coordinating volunteer fairs for VCS and students to come together
- monitoring and recording student volunteering progress

Expert Contacts

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National:
WiSCV (Workers in Student Community Volunteering)
<http://www.wiscv.org/>

Volunteering England
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>

References:

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