



LEARNING BY VOLUNTEERING PROJECT REPORT

October 2011

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LEARNING BY VOLUNTEERING PROJECT REPORT

1) PURPOSE OF PROJECT

Traditionally volunteering has been assumed to be an activity that benefits only the recipient of the service. However, the potential benefits of volunteering to the provider of the service, as well as to the recipient, provide the rationale for the Learning by Volunteering project.

The Learning by Volunteering project was established in response to a growing recognition of the benefits that volunteering offers to college students. The aim of the project is to develop and embed a culture of volunteering in Scotland's colleges through a varied programme of practical initiatives designed to raise awareness, develop and share good practice and create associated resources including an on-line Learning by Volunteering toolkit. The project ran from December 2009 until September 2011.

2) STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

Several important strategic documents in the past few years have highlighted the benefits that volunteering can offer to young people and students, for example:

- The Scottish Executive's 'Volunteering Strategy' (2004) noted that volunteering can help provide a route into employment, education and training and recognised that volunteering is particularly beneficial in developing softer skills such as teamwork and communication, of which there is a shortage in Scotland.
- The 'National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement' (Russell Commission 2005) proposed that all education institutions should have a volunteering ethos supported by better information and training, a stronger emphasis on volunteering within the citizenship curriculum and improved links with volunteer centres and local opportunity providers.
- 'Citizenship in Scotland's Colleges' (HM Inspectorate of Education 2006) recognised that volunteering is a valuable vehicle through which learners can develop skills for citizenship and contribute to their communities in a way that also enhances their college courses.
- 'Volunteering in Scotland's Colleges' (Scottish Further Education Unit 2006) was the first report on the extent and nature of volunteering in Scotland's colleges and identified scope for improvement to maximise the benefits which volunteering can bring to students across the whole of the college sector.
- A report by the 'Differences Colleges Make' work-stream within the 'Review of Scotland's Colleges' (Scottish Executive 2007) identified the promotion of volunteering activities in Scotland as one of the twelve outcomes towards which Scotland's colleges, working with key partners, could make a decisive contribution to a smarter Scotland.
- 'Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Learning Strategy' (Scottish Government 2007) noted that volunteering opportunities offer young people the chance to develop confidence, motivation and skills that stay with them for life.

The Learning by Volunteering project has a particularly good fit with the objectives of the Scottish Government's main education policy Curriculum for Excellence in terms of its ability to enhance both vocational skills and people skills. Volunteering by college students has the potential to contribute towards the achievement of almost every aspect of Curriculum for Excellence and its benefits are available to students of all ages, abilities and circumstances. A detailed report on the fit between volunteering in colleges and Curriculum for Excellence is provided in Appendix 4.

3) PROJECT INITIATION

An increasing recognition of the benefits of volunteering to college students prompted the formation of a college sector group in May 2007 called ‘Developing volunteering in Scotland’s colleges’. The group, convened by John Burt, Principal of Angus College, included representation from 25 colleges and its purpose was to promote volunteering in colleges with the aim of embedding volunteering as an integral part of college life. The group noted that a small number of Scottish colleges had achieved broad student participation in volunteering over many years and had established good partnerships with Volunteer Centres and other volunteer organisations. However, the group also recognised that participation by college students in volunteering was uneven across Scotland as a whole and that action to monitor and develop volunteering in colleges was largely uncoordinated at the national level.

In August 2009 the college sector group submitted a proposal (Appendix 1) to the Scottish Funding Council for a ‘Learning by Volunteering’ project that responded in particular to a recommendation from the ‘Differences Colleges Make’ work-stream (see Section 2 – 5th bullet point) stating that *‘More needs to be done to collect and share good practice that shows how volunteering can contribute to key priorities such as citizenship, employability, learner engagement, individual learning plans, exit guidance, personal development and accreditation of prior learning right across Scotland.’* Following confirmation of funding support, the Learning by Volunteering project commenced in December 2009 and a national launch event was held in Stirling on 16 March 2010 to publicise the project and to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering in colleges.

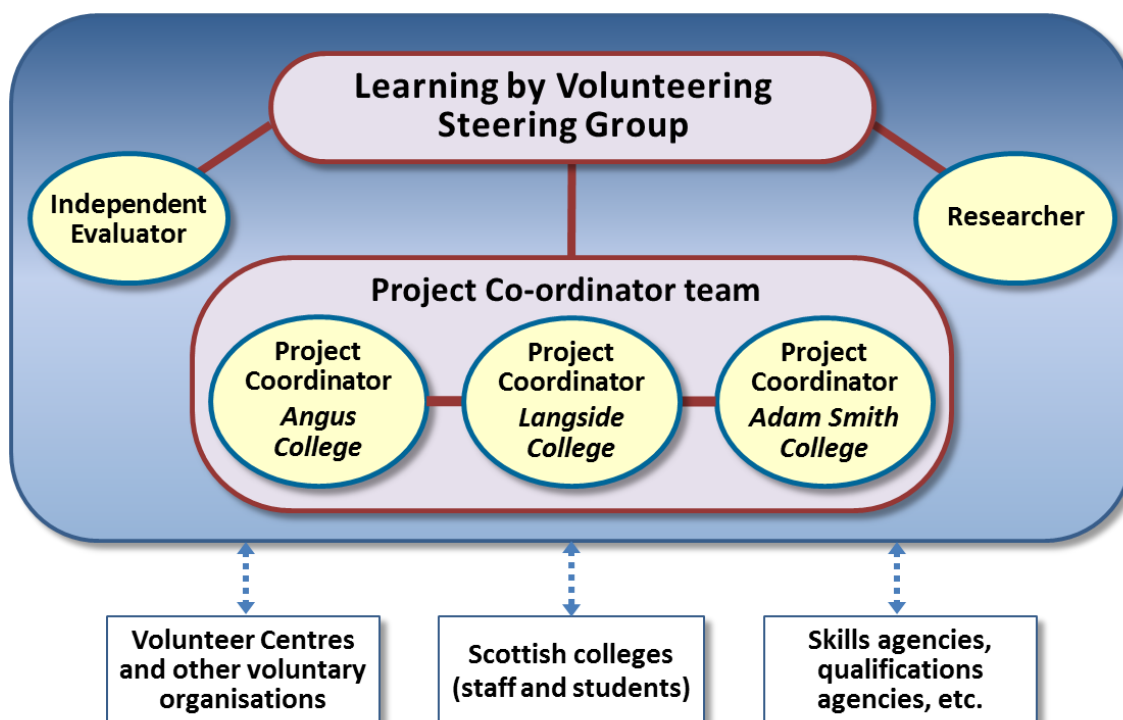
4) PROJECT PARTNERS AND STRUCTURE

4.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Learning by Volunteering project involved four organisations working in partnership:

- **Angus College** – representing the rural context (lead organisation)
- **Adam Smith College** – representing the mixed rural/urban context
- **Langside College** – representing the urban context
- **Scotland’s Colleges** – providing support, co-ordination and links to key organisations

The diagram below shows the organisational structure for the Learning by Volunteering project:



4.2 STEERING GROUP

The membership of the Learning by Volunteering Steering Group comprised senior representatives from the four project partners (Angus College, Langside College, Adam Smith College and Scotland's Colleges) together with an independent evaluator and a researcher.

The Steering Group was chaired by John Burt, Principal of Angus College, and held its first meeting on 3 December 2009.

The steering group met every three months for the duration of the project and was responsible for:

- Ensuring that the overall strategic aims of the project were realised
- Ensuring that each action within the project proposal was delivered satisfactorily
- Bringing the project to completion within budget

4.3 PROJECT COORDINATOR TEAM

Three Learning by Volunteering Project Coordinators – one based at each partner college - were recruited during late-2009 and started work at the beginning of 2010. They worked together closely and met as a group at least once a month.

The Project Coordinators were responsible for:

- Developing and delivering the detailed actions contained in the project proposal
- Ensuring that the overall strategic aims of the project were realised

It was agreed at the start of the project that, whilst there should be a generally consistent approach within the team, the Project Co-ordinators should deliberately explore different approaches and opportunities in order to maximise learning over the course of the project.

At the start of the project a separate 'project working group' was set up comprising the three Project Coordinators plus a steering group member from each of the three partner colleges. However, this arrangement did not provide the best possible communication between the Steering Group and the Project Coordinators and so it was decided to merge the two groups by bringing the Project Coordinators onto the Steering Group. This arrangement worked well and was retained for the remainder of the project.

4.4 KEY LEARNING POINTS

- The simple **organisational structure** (see previous page) adopted by the Steering Group provided an effective method of managing the Learning by Volunteering project and facilitated good communication between partners. As a result of internal reorganisation there was no senior representation from one of the partner colleges at the Steering Group during the second half of the project. Good liaison with the college was maintained through the Project Coordinator though the achievement of a genuine culture of volunteering within the college will require senior level advocacy.
- The **Project Coordinators** worked well as a team and achieved a good balance between consistency and experimentation. The Coordinators used their different personalities and the different circumstances within their own colleges to add breadth and value to their combined achievements. The conditions of the Project Coordinators' fixed-term employment could have been better harmonised between the three partner colleges with regard to the duration of their contracts.

5) PROJECT ACTIVITIES

5.1 PROJECT OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

The outcomes contained in the project proposal are set out below together with a summary of the associated actions undertaken by the project partnership.

Proposed Outcome	Actions Completed
<p>1) A better and more informed understanding of the benefits of volunteering for all learners in Scotland’s colleges, including high achievers, both young and more mature learners and ‘More Choices, More Chances’ learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align volunteering activity to existing national and government strategies • Brief key college staff on the purpose of the project • Raise and maintain awareness of volunteering among students • Explore new opportunities to embed volunteering into the curriculum • Support existing and new volunteering activity by learners • Gather evidence of good practice across the sector • Produce supporting case studies • Deliver a national event to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering in colleges and to publicise the launch of the Learning by Volunteering project • Achieve formal adoption of volunteering policies in the three project partner colleges
<p>2) The development of closer, productive collaboration between colleges and the third sector at local and national levels for the benefit of Scottish society in general</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop formal agreements with local Volunteer Centres to support the Learning by Volunteering project • Develop local steering groups to lead on volunteering • Establish Project Co-ordinators group • Establish project strategic and working groups • Explore and respond to good practice from across the UK • Establish engagement with local Student Associations across all volunteering activity
<p>3) The production of a report to the Scottish Funding Council outlining the development of sustainable cultures of volunteering in colleges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare baseline awareness questionnaires, carry out student and staff surveys and collate results • Monitor and evaluate the project including preparation of reports to steering group and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as required • Carry out post hoc student and staff surveys, collate results and draw comparisons with baseline data • Prepare final project report including project outcomes, case studies, good practice and survey results
<p>4) A dissemination of good practice event and associated resources including a Learning by Volunteering toolkit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and agree a framework for the volunteering toolkit • Develop and launch a dedicated Learning by Volunteering web site hosting a volunteering toolkit for all colleges • Organise and deliver an end-of-project national dissemination event for the ‘Learning by Volunteering’ project
<p>5) The development of a fit-for-purpose volunteering accreditation for college students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out an options appraisal for potential volunteering accreditations • Develop and support local college accreditation processes • Contribute to the design of new Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) volunteering accreditation • Initiate, develop and implement a new Learning by Volunteering national awards competition for Scottish colleges

5.2 ACTION PLAN

The full project action plan containing timescales and detailed notes for each action is provided in Appendix 2. The action plan contains a detailed schedule of all the actions that were either specifically described in the project proposal or were subsequently deemed necessary in order to deliver the overall objectives of the project. The action plan was developed by the Project Coordinators and agreed with the Steering Group in May 2010.

In addition to the actions contained in the project proposal, an important additional action was identified and developed by the partnership during the course of the project. The idea for a volunteering-related awards competition was agreed by the project steering group in December 2010 and this led ultimately to six award winners collecting prizes at the national Learning by Volunteering dissemination event in September 2011. Further details about the competition are provided in section 8.2(10). The competition helped to raise awareness of volunteering in colleges and also yielded sixteen varied case studies.

5.3 KEY LEARNING POINTS

- The adoption of five well-defined **overarching outcomes** provided a clear strategic basis for the project which successfully focussed the work of the partnership team.
- The **project action plan** described in Section 5.2 was a key project monitoring tool. The action plan translated the broad aims of the project proposal into a detailed schedule of practical activities ensuring the required breadth of activity by the partnership team. The updated action plan also provided the Steering Group with a clear indication of progress against timescales.

6) MONITORING AND EVALUATION

6.1 RESOURCES

An independent evaluator (an education consultant) was appointed at the commencement of the project in November 2009 to monitor the project and prepare interim and final reports and a researcher (from Adam Smith College) was appointed to carry out detailed baseline (pre-project) and final (post-project) surveys and interviews with college staff and students.

6.2 MONITORING

Quarterly project monitoring reports were prepared by the Independent Evaluator in liaison with the Project Coordinators and submitted to each steering group meeting. The quarterly reports captured two different aspects of the project:

- (a) In order to monitor overall progress, the quarterly reports recorded the detailed activities undertaken by the Project Coordinators both individually and as a team.
- (b) In order to identify key learning points arising from the project, the quarterly reports also recorded the various issues (challenges, successes, barriers, etc.) experienced during the course of the project. The key learning points deriving from this monitoring process are set out, where applicable, at the end of each section in this report.

The quarterly project monitoring reports included detailed activity reports from each of the three partner colleges.

A mid-term progress report was prepared by the independent evaluator and Project Coordinators in December 2010 for submission to the Scottish Funding Council. A detailed end-of-project action plan (Appendix 2) was completed in September 2011.

6.3 EVALUATION

Volunteering takes place in many different forms, locations, durations, etc. and is performed by a broad range of people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds. This rich variety is part of the appeal of volunteering but also makes it extremely difficult to identify a conclusive definition of volunteering. The lack of such a definition restricts the ability of an evaluation exercise to gather robust quantitative data on the numbers of people taking part in volunteering and so the evaluation work carried out for this project is based largely on changes in *awareness* of volunteering rather than quantifiable *participation* in volunteering.

Key findings

A full impact evaluation report is available in Appendix 3 containing the findings from the surveys and interviews carried out with staff and students at the three partner colleges at the beginning (baseline) and end (final) of the Learning by Volunteering project. The report also contains case studies taken from staff and student interviews, a literary review, notes on good practice and a 'conclusions and recommendations' section.

The key evaluation findings are:

- Over the course of the Learning by Volunteering project there appears to be an improving awareness of volunteering among college staff
- There has been much volunteering-related activity in the three colleges and many activities are linked directly to the Learning by Volunteering project
- Positive attitudes towards volunteering among staff and students have increased significantly over the lifespan of the project
- Students' belief that volunteering can enhance employability and that it is important in relation to their course of study increased slightly over the duration of the project (Angus and Langside colleges only)
- Students reported benefits such as increased confidence, feelings of accomplishment, greater maturity and being galvanised into further action through volunteering
- Many students responded well to having their volunteering recognised either through award schemes or formal accreditation
- Staff perception of support for volunteering at senior management level has decreased over the course of the project
- There appears to be an increase in college departments incorporating volunteering within departmental strategic plans
- In terms of behaviours, there appears to be an increase in college departments supporting students' participation in volunteering
- Key barriers to staff supporting volunteering are time constraints, lack of knowledge about volunteering and practical barriers such as funding
- Key enablers to staff supporting volunteering are good partnership working, college support systems, incorporation into the curriculum and accessible information
- Over the duration of the project there appears to be an increase in the number of students taking part both in volunteering that links directly to their course and external volunteering outwith college
- There appears to be a significant increase in students being encouraged by college staff to become involved in volunteering

It is encouraging that the evaluation findings are positive across a broad range of volunteering issues including awareness, participation, attitudes, employability, confidence, accomplishment, maturity, motivation, recognition and departmental strategy. With just one exception, there is a positive trend across all the evaluation findings.

6.4 KEY LEARNING POINTS

- It is important that the gathering of **pre-project evaluation data** is carried out prior to any effects of the project being realised. Ideally the pre-project data for this project would have been gathered before the Project Coordinators commenced work but, for practical reasons, the Coordinators carried out the student surveys as part of their first month’s work. In practice it is felt that this did not significantly influence the reliability of the data. The gathering of post-project data was carried out following substantial completion of the project and therefore the data can be considered robust.
- The positive findings in the **impact evaluation report** provide good evidence in support of an emerging culture change regarding volunteering within the three partner colleges. The single negative finding regarding the perception by staff of a lack of support for volunteering at senior management level is not easily explained and is worthy of consideration at the appropriate level within the three colleges.
- The full effects of the Learning by Volunteering project will not be wholly realised until sometime after the completion of the project, perhaps months or even years afterwards. For this reason it would have been ideal to carry out a **longitudinal study** tracking changes in behaviour as a result of the Learning by Volunteering project over the longer term. However, resources were not available for this activity over the required timescale.
- A widely used **definition of volunteering** is “Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.” This definition refers only to the benefits that volunteering brings to *recipients* of volunteering services and does not acknowledge the variety of benefits that often accrue to the *providers* of voluntary services - a concept central to the objectives of the Learning by Volunteering project.
- Many projects report the *results* that are achieved through their endeavours but do not say much about the project *process*. The Learning by Volunteering project is founded on improving the learning process and so it is appropriate that the **lessons learned** during the course of the project - both positive and negative - were recorded and are shared in this report in the ‘Key Learning Points’ at the end of each section.

7) FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Learning by Volunteering project was completed almost within budget as shown in the summary table below. A total of £250,000 was received from the Scottish Funding Council and matched funding from the project partners exceeded the budgeted amount of £40,000 by £8,162 (20.4%). Financial management of the Learning by Volunteering project was provided by Angus College whose Finance Manager attended Steering Group meetings to provide quarterly updates on project spend.

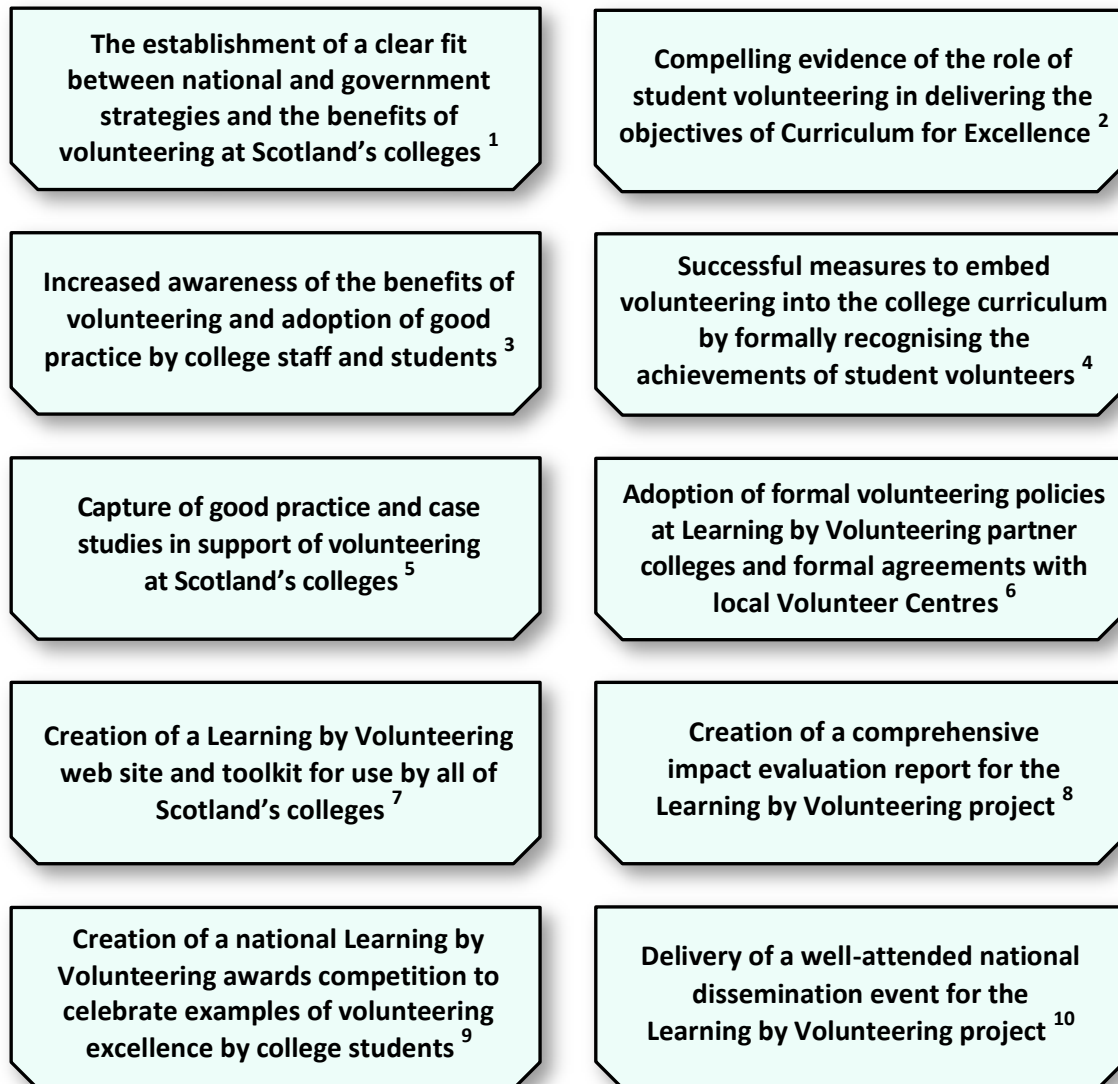
Learning by Volunteering project financial summary	Total Budget		Matched Funding	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
Volunteer development posts	£170,000	£170,189	-	£189
Project management	£35,000	£48,296	£15,000	£28,296
Volunteer Centre costs	£15,000	£15,000	-	-
Administrative support	£25,000	£23,657	£15,000	£8,657
Project evaluation	£20,000	£20,000	-	£5,000
Dissemination	£25,000	£21,019	£10,000	£6,019
Total	£290,000	£298,162	£40,000	£48,162

NB Figures rounded to nearest pound

8) ACHIEVEMENTS

8.1 SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The ten key achievements of the Learning by Volunteering project are set out below together with sources of evidence in support of each achievement.



Evidence:

- 1 Section 2 - Strategic Background - of this report (page 2)
Impact Evaluation Report Nov 2010 (Appendix 3)
- 2 'Volunteering and Curriculum for Excellence' paper Dec 2010 (Appendix 4)
- 3, 8 Impact Evaluation Report Aug 2011 (Appendix 3)
- 4 Pilot SCQF volunteering award at Angus College and new national SQA volunteering award (see Appendix 2 - Item A4)
- 5, 7 Learning by Volunteering web site and toolkit: www.learningbyvolunteering.org
- 6 Example policies provided in 'Project Documents' section of Learning by Volunteering toolkit - www.learningbyvolunteering.org
- 9 Learning by Volunteering national awards – details and case studies (Appendix 6)
- 10 Learning by Volunteering dissemination event - brochure and programme (Appendix 5)

8.2 DETAILS OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

(1) *The establishment of a clear fit between national and government strategies and the benefits of volunteering at Scotland's colleges*

A literary review was carried out at the commencement of the Learning by Volunteering project. The review examined education policy in general and college sector policy in particular in order to ensure that the Learning by Volunteering project actions were informed and driven by national and government strategies. Seven of the most relevant strategic documents are discussed in Section 2 of this report. The literary review is included in Appendix 3 – Impact Evaluation Report.

(2) *Compelling evidence of the role of student volunteering in delivering the objectives of Curriculum for Excellence*

The potential contribution that volunteering at Scotland's colleges can make in delivering the objectives of Curriculum for Excellence is discussed in detail in a paper called 'Volunteering and Curriculum for Excellence' which was written for the Learning by Volunteering project and is provided in Appendix 4. The key findings of the paper are:

- Volunteering by college students contributes towards the achievement of almost every aspect of Curriculum for Excellence
- Volunteering has the potential to enhance students' vocational skills and people skills - including confidence, motivation, team-working, creativity, self-awareness and employability - and offers the opportunity of utilising these skills in a variety of real-life contexts
- The value of student volunteering derives from the powerful combination of personal achievement, service to others and practical experience of working in a real-life context
- The benefits of volunteering in support of Curriculum for Excellence are available to students of all ages, abilities and circumstances

(3) *Increased awareness of the benefits of volunteering and adoption of good practice by college staff and students*

The Impact Evaluation report (Appendix 3) for the Learning by Volunteering project identifies changes in awareness by staff and students at the three partner colleges of the benefits of volunteering between the beginning and end of the project. The quantitative survey data was verified through interviews with selected staff and students.

The survey results indicate the following changes:

- An increase from 58% to 67% in the number of college staff who felt that volunteering is "very important" for enhancing the learning experience of students
- An increase from 89% to 92% of college staff who felt that their college viewed volunteering as "moderately important", "important" or "very important" for enhancing the learning experience of students
- An increase from 34% to 42% in the number of college staff who confirmed that the promotion of volunteering is included in departmental strategic plans
- An increase from 55% to 66% in the number of college staff who confirmed that college departments support their students into volunteering
- An increase from 63% to 69% in the number of college students who believe that volunteering can enhance their employability
- An increase from 66% to 71% of college students who believe that volunteering is either "important" or "very important" in relation to their course (*Angus College and Langside College only – Adam Smith College not asked this question*)
- An increase from 20% to 37% of college students taking part in volunteering that links to the subject that they are studying

(continued)

- An increase from 32% to 39% of college students taking part in volunteering outwith college (not directly linked to their college course)
- An increase from 31% to 57% of college students who have been encouraged to take part in volunteering
- An increase from 8% to 22% of college students who stated that volunteering featured in their course (*Adam Smith College only – Angus and Langside not asked this question*)

(4) Successful measures to embed volunteering into the college curriculum by formally recognising the achievements of student volunteers

In addition to a range of activities designed to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering, the Project Coordinators took part in the development of two complementary volunteering-related accreditations designed to encourage the integration of volunteering into the curriculum:

- Led by the Angus College Coordinator, a pilot Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework volunteering unit was approved following scrutiny in November 2010 and successful trials then took place with selected teams at Angus College (NB the unit was approved by Individual Learning Account Scotland and so qualifies for means-tested funding support)
- Two of the Learning by Volunteering Project Coordinators participated in the successful development of a new national Scottish Qualifications Agency volunteering accreditation that was validated in June 2011

(5) Capture of good practice and case studies in support of volunteering at Scotland's colleges

The whole of the Learning by Volunteering partnership team maintained a continuous interest in the identification and recording of good practice. Specific examples include:

- The Learning by Volunteering project literary review completed in November 2010 (see Appendix 3) contains a section on good practice that addresses ways in which students can overcome real and perceived barriers to participation in volunteering
- Examples of good practice were recorded as part of the quarterly monitoring reports (see section 6.2) including the matching of students to suitable volunteering places, finding time for volunteering within the timetable, the value of reflective practice, defining culture change and liaison with schools and universities
- 16 case studies were written using examples of good practice from entrants to the inaugural Learning by Volunteering awards and are included in the online volunteering toolkit (case studies for the six award winners are provided in Appendix 6)
- A further 7 case studies were completed as part of the Impact Evaluation Report (Appendix 3)

(6) Adoption of formal volunteering policies at the Learning by Volunteering partner colleges and formal agreements with each local Volunteer Centre

The Project Coordinators led the process of securing formal volunteer policies at their own colleges plus formal agreements with their local Volunteer Centres to support student placements. Achievement dates were:

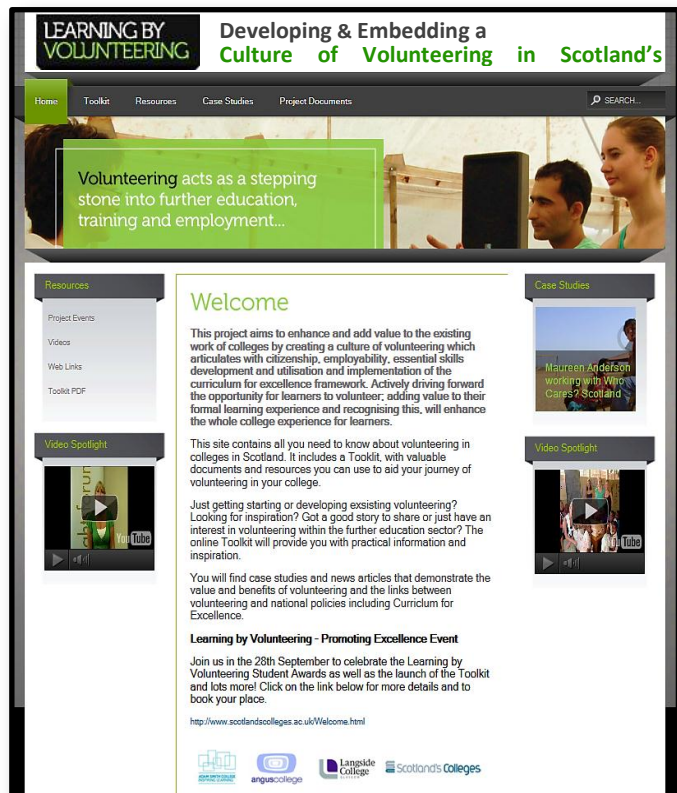
- Angus College - volunteering policy adopted by college in April 2011
- Langside College - volunteering policy adopted by college in June 2010
- Adam Smith College - volunteering policy adopted by college in May 2011
- Volunteer Centre Angus - formal agreement signed September 2010
- Volunteer Centre Glasgow - formal agreement signed November 2010
- Volunteer Centre Fife – an effective informal agreement was already in place prior to the Learning by Volunteering project

(7) Creation of a Learning by Volunteering web site and toolkit for use by all of Scotland's colleges

The Learning by Volunteering web site at <http://learningbyvolunteering.org> went live in March 2010 and the on-line volunteering toolkit was developed incrementally by the Project Coordinators, with support from the rest of the project team, throughout the remainder of the project period.

The on-line toolkit contains the following information and resources:

- Introduction
- Understanding volunteering
 - Definition
 - Why volunteer?
 - Government strategies
- Make volunteering work
 - Who's who
 - Your college
 - Partnership
 - Promotion and marketing
 - Curriculum for Excellence
 - Volunteer management
 - Policies and procedures
- Capturing learning
 - Awards
 - Recognition
 - Accreditation
- Project findings
- Resources
- 20 case studies
- Project documents



During the process of developing the web site, helpful feedback was obtained from the college sector group 'Developing volunteering in Scotland's colleges' regarding proposed content.

(8) Creation of comprehensive impact evaluation report for the Learning by Volunteering project

A baseline report was completed in November 2010 containing:

- The policy context for the Learning by Volunteering project
- Benefits and barriers associated with student volunteering (from literary review)
- Results of staff and student baseline surveys at Angus, Langside and Adam Smith colleges
- Good practice in relation to overcoming barriers to volunteering at colleges
- Summary of key findings and conclusions

An impact evaluation report was completed in September 2011 containing:

- An explanation of the methodology adopted for the project research
- Evaluation findings from staff and student surveys and interviews at the three partner colleges, including staff and student case studies highlighting good practice
- Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

The results of the detailed survey work are summarised in section 8.2(3) and the key findings of the evaluation as a whole are provided in section 6.3.

(9) *Creation of a national Learning by Volunteering awards competition to celebrate examples of volunteering excellence by college students*

A volunteering-related awards competition was proposed and agreed by the Learning by Volunteering steering group in December 2010 and development of the project was led by Scotland's Colleges with support from the partnership team. Competition criteria, entry forms and publicity were prepared and issues such as the judging process, timescales, prizes and administrative support were agreed. The closing date for entries was 20 May 2011. The competition attracted 35 high quality entries (from 19 different colleges) which were judged by an independent panel. Three individual and three team awards were announced in June 2011 and the winning individuals and teams collected and spoke about their awards at the national Learning by Volunteering dissemination event in September 2011.

The entries to the competition provided a rich source of information from which a total of sixteen case studies were written up and included in the Learning by Volunteering toolkit. As well as being inspiring examples of student volunteering, these case studies were selected for the wide variety of volunteering activity that they demonstrate. Case studies for each of the six award winners are included in Appendix 6.

(10) *Delivery of a well-attended national dissemination event for the Learning by Volunteering project*

The national Learning by Volunteering dissemination event was held on 28 September 2011 at Stirling Management Centre. 145 people attended the event including 42 staff members from 20 colleges plus 23 college students. Other attendees included 29 representatives from voluntary and voluntary sector interface organisations, the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council, Learning & Teaching Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Agency, Scotland's Colleges, local authorities (including two Provosts), NHS/health organisations, sports organisations and youth organisations.

Dr Alasdair Allan - Minister for Learning and Skills - gave the keynote speech at the event and presented the prizes to the individual award winners. Jim Leishman MBE - former player, coach, manager and now Director of Dunfermline Football Club - spoke at the event about his personal involvement in volunteering and presented the prizes to the team award winners. The individual and team award winners all spoke about or demonstrated their volunteering experiences.

The Learning by Volunteering toolkit and the new Scottish Qualifications Agency volunteering skills accreditation were officially launched at the event and all attendees were provided with a digital copy of the toolkit. An overview of the ten key achievements of the Learning by Volunteering project was provided and two discussion sessions took place – firstly, on the ways in which volunteering supports college learning and teaching strategies and, secondly, what attendees can do themselves to embed a culture of volunteering in their own colleges.

An evaluation of the event was carried out with selected attendees and it yielded strongly favourable results - for example, 97% of respondents agreed that the overall aim of the event was achieved. The promotional brochure and programme for the event are provided in Appendix 5 together with a summary of key points from the discussion sessions.

8.3 KEY LEARNING POINTS

- The students' **induction process** was identified by the Project Coordinators as an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of volunteering as it allows students to build volunteering into their thinking at an early stage in their time at college. Another key learning point identified by the Coordinators was to recognise that the extent to which college staff will support volunteering will vary considerably and it is therefore important to concentrate effort on those staff members who are willing to become '**volunteering champions**'. It was also observed that student volunteering fits well with Freire's theory that a liberating education consists of acts of cognition rather than transferrals of information.

- A valuable element of the Learning by Volunteering project was the identification of key **barriers** to volunteering (e.g. time constraints, lack of knowledge and practical barriers such as funding, transport and equipment) together with key **enablers** (e.g. effective local partnerships, college support systems, accessible information and incorporation of volunteering into the curriculum).
- The identification and preparation of **case studies** celebrating examples of volunteering excellence by college students was found to be a particularly effective method of demonstrating the benefits of volunteering in Scotland's colleges. Case studies complement theoretical analysis by telling powerful, real-life stories about college students providing a service to others and developing a variety of valuable skills and behaviours in the process.
- **Partner organisations** such as Volunteer Centres play a vital role in providing volunteering opportunities and the formal agreements signed with Volunteer Centres were felt to provide a good basis for effective partnership working.
- Useful lessons were learned during the development of the **Learning by Volunteering toolkit**. With the benefit of hindsight, it is felt that the detailed development of the toolkit should have taken place off-line, thus avoiding the use of the live web site as the vehicle for development. This would have improved the toolkit development process in two key respects:
 - The toolkit could have been developed and assembled 'behind the scenes' and launched on the web site at the appropriate time as a finished article
 - Communication and coordination within the partnership team could have been improved by using a familiar document medium (e.g. Microsoft Word) rather than an unfamiliar web-based system
- Useful lessons were also learned in connection with the **Learning by Volunteering web site**. Perhaps as a result of the 'incomplete' look of the toolkit during development, the forums and blog facilities within the web site were underused for discussion and feedback, thus losing potentially valuable feedback from users of the web site, including other volunteering organisations. The web site was also difficult to update throughout the project, suggesting that an alternative method of developing and managing the website could have been considered.
- The national **Learning by Volunteering awards competition** was felt to be a very successful initiative in terms of participation by students, raising awareness of the benefits of volunteering and demonstrating the many forms in which volunteering can be undertaken. Although it was not in the original project proposal and required substantial staff resources, the initiative was enthusiastically welcomed by the project partnership and professionally managed by Scotland's Colleges as lead partner. It is hoped, indeed expected, that the awards will become a regular annual event in the volunteering calendar.
- The task of developing and embedding a **culture of volunteering** is implicit in all aspects of the project. However, culture change cannot be accomplished by single or simple actions – it requires an integrated and resolute approach over time and across a range of actions. Hence the approach by the Learning by Volunteering project comprises a broad range of activities including:
 - Articulating a good fit with government strategies
 - Raising awareness of the benefits of volunteering among decision-makers and colleges
 - Achieving supportive organisational and educational structures (e.g. policies, accreditations)
 - Building a repository of good practice (theoretical and practical)
 - Addressing resource issues (human and financial)
 - Understanding both opportunities and barriers
 - Capturing learning from the project itself

It is clear that fully embedding a culture of volunteering in colleges will require more time than was available within the Learning by Volunteering project. However, the project partners are happy to present this report as evidence that a robust start has been made towards the task of developing a culture of volunteering within colleges.

9) RECOMMENDATIONS

The Learning by Volunteering project has, over twenty-two months, built considerable momentum in raising awareness of the benefits of volunteering in Scotland's colleges and in increasing participation in volunteering by college students. In view of the many compelling reasons set out in this report for encouraging and supporting student volunteering, the following recommendations have been developed with the aim of consolidating and building upon the momentum of the Learning by Volunteering project.

❖ **'Volunteering recognised as a national strategic priority'**

Whilst the benefits of volunteering are recognised in many national and government education strategies, college budget reductions threaten activities that might not be deemed 'essential', perhaps including volunteering. It is therefore recommended that the Scottish Government and other key organisations such as the Scottish Funding Council are made aware of the findings of the Learning by Volunteering project and encouraged to actively support continued efforts to promote volunteering in Scotland's colleges.

❖ **'Volunteering established as a key component of Curriculum for Excellence'**

This report provides compelling evidence of the role of volunteering in achieving the objectives of Curriculum for Excellence. It is therefore recommended that key organisations and individuals involved in implementing Curriculum for Excellence should be encouraged to include specific reference to volunteering in future policy documents and to ensure the appropriate use of volunteering in the ongoing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

❖ **'Volunteering actively promoted at every Scottish college'**

It is recommended that all colleges should be made aware of the results of the Learning by Volunteering project and encouraged to actively promote volunteering within their own college. In particular it is recommended that:

- a member of the senior management team at each college should be appointed as an official advocate for volunteering within their college
- a member of staff at each college (e.g. student services) should, as part of their wider role, provide practical support for volunteering, including provision of information to staff and students plus liaison with external partners such as Volunteer Centres

Consideration should also be given to the following supporting measures:

- appointment of a student representative, perhaps on an annual basis, to provide an accessible link for volunteering enquiries and promotion
- provision of volunteering information as part of student inductions, Freshers' Fairs, etc. and at other regular opportunities during term time, e.g. lunch-time stall
- colleges should ensure that students are aware of the valuable opportunity to enhance their CV, UCAS application, etc. through volunteering

The adoption of the above measures would send out an important message regarding the potentially influential role of volunteering within individual colleges.

❖ **'Local volunteering partnerships well-established across Scotland'**

Colleges often rely on partner organisations such as Volunteer Centres to identify volunteering opportunities for their students and so the establishment of effective partnerships at local level is vital. Colleges should consider establishing a local volunteering steering group, including key partners such as Volunteer Centres, to coordinate college volunteering activities. The private sector should also be encouraged to take part in such partnerships. Community planning partnerships provide the overarching framework for local partnership working in Scotland and so have a role to play in supporting volunteering.

❖ **‘Volunteering effectively coordinated at national level’**

It is recommended that a national volunteering coordination group for colleges should be established in order to consolidate and build upon the momentum of the Learning by Volunteering project. All colleges should be invited to take part and the key national organisations such as Scotland’s Colleges, Volunteer Development Scotland and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations should adopt a carefully coordinated leadership role in support of college volunteering.

❖ **‘Formal recognition of volunteering commonplace in colleges’**

Through the Learning by Volunteering project, two complementary methods have been developed for the formal recognition of volunteering achievements by college students:

- The new national Scottish Qualifications Agency volunteering accreditation together with locally developed college accreditations
- The new national Learning by Volunteering awards competition plus a number of local counterparts

It is recommended that the college sector should be encouraged to take advantage of these new processes which, together, provide a strong platform for increased participation by college students in volunteering.

More specifically, it is important that the cost of accreditations remains affordable and that the status of different volunteering accreditations should be clear to all colleges.

It is also recommended that the national college volunteering awards should become an annual event, perhaps as part of a wider national college awards process covering a wider variety of student achievements.

❖ **‘A culture of volunteering embedded in every college’**

It is felt that the achievement of the aspirations set out in this section, together with adoption of the good practice described throughout this report, will help to achieve the ultimate aim of embedding a culture of volunteering in every college.