

# Student volunteering research

## Bursting the Bubble & The Student Volunteering Landscape: using this research to develop your volunteering service

This briefing highlights the main similarities and differences between two important pieces of research into student volunteering, and identifies ways that you can use this research.

### Introduction

As part of Student Volunteering Week 2014, NUS launched the findings from a research project called *The Student Volunteering Landscape (SVL)*. Focusing on how many students volunteer, their motivations for doing so, and the barriers stopping others from doing the same.

This report can be examined alongside *Bursting the Bubble (BtB)*, a report released in 2010 by vInspired, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR). Both reports focus on similar topics and offer an interesting insight into the volunteering landscape.

Links to both reports can be found at the end of this briefing.

**“Volunteering plays a vital role in developing students community awareness, allowing them to break out of what many respondents describe as the ‘student bubble’” – Jon Snow**

### Developing your volunteering service

Ideas based on the findings from both research reports:

- Linking volunteering more closely to academic subjects might encourage more students to volunteer
- Motivations for volunteering are ‘a desire to make a difference’ (BtB) and ‘improving things/helping people’ (SVL) – use this to attract new volunteers and to keep existing volunteers motivated.
- Schools and local charities are more popular than national charities – consider this when working with student fundraisers and RAG teams.
- Time is a major barrier to volunteering – is this a real barrier or a perceived barrier? Can you change the format of your volunteering opportunities to fit better into your students existing commitments?
- ‘I’m not sure how to get involved’ is a significant barrier in *Bursting the Bubble* – think about how you promote your volunteering opportunities. Is it easy to take that first step?
- Nearly half of non-volunteers had volunteered before coming to university (BtB) – most stopping because they ‘did not feel part of the community’ or did not have

friends/family involved. How can you ease this transition and encourage people to continue volunteering after starting university?

## Demonstrating impact

Student volunteering has been a fantastic success story in many institutions – yet groups often still feel vulnerable because of short-term funding, running on a shoestring, or feeling peripheral to core activities.

We have shown examples of national research, providing key statistics you can use. It is also important to build in local evaluation of your own programmes, so you have evidence of impact.

You can use this evidence to demonstrate how student volunteering can make a strategic contribution to core objectives of your institution, such as student experience, employability, and public engagement. The NCCPE has developed toolkits which can help you do this – see links below.

- Build a shared sense of purpose amongst key stakeholders of your volunteering programme.
- Provide an efficient and 'joined up' support infrastructure.
- Encourage leadership and advocacy, at all levels including students and senior management.
- Recognise learning and celebrate achievement.
- Communicate a clear and effective offer about your programme.

## Further information

This briefing was created following a Student Opportunities Lunch & Learn webinar that took place on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2014. The slides from this webinar are available on the Student Opportunities pages on NUS Connect.

## Reading

[Bursting the Bubble \(2010\)](#)

[The Student Volunteering Landscape \(2014\)](#)

[Mapping Participation \(2013\)](#) & [briefing \(2014\)](#)

– report by NUS talking about participation in the students' union. Includes data around participation in volunteering, as well as elections and SU services.

Organisations of interest:

- [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#)
- [NCVO](#)
- [Institute for Volunteering Research](#)

The [Children's University](#) provides a structure for extra-curricular opportunities for children aged 7-14, which could be used by student volunteering groups. See also case studies: [Brunel University Societies in Schools](#), [MMU Re-Create](#), [Warwick University Practical Piracy](#).

NCCPE guides on research/impact:

- [Student-led Evaluation of volunteering projects](#)
- [Carrying out surveys of Student Volunteering](#)
- [Peer-led qualitative research](#)
- [Self-assessment tool: Embedding student involvement in public engagement strategies](#)

Other reading on volunteering impact:

- [Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit](#)
- [Measuring economic impact of volunteering](#)
- [nfpSynergy report on Volunteering](#)
- [Rob Jackson blog – Volunteering: measuring what counts](#)