

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Volunteers make a substantial contribution to life in Scotland through engaging with voluntary, community and public sector organisations, and by being active in their own communities of interest and place. This contribution has an important role to play in helping to shape Scotland as an active, successful, and socially just society.

The adult population (16 years and over) of Scotland is around 4,000,000. Therefore, approximately 1,520,000 adults in Scotland have undertaken formal and informal volunteering in the past year. This is a strong foundation on which to build, and requires a robust volunteering infrastructure to support.

For the first time a survey into volunteering has shown that younger adults, aged 18 –24, are just as likely to volunteer as those adults in the mid-life years.

It appears that the omission of the 'V' word from survey questions, and the use of a gentle prompt regarding the range of voluntary activities enables people to identify themselves as undertaking activities in an unpaid capacity to help others.



National Centre of Excellence

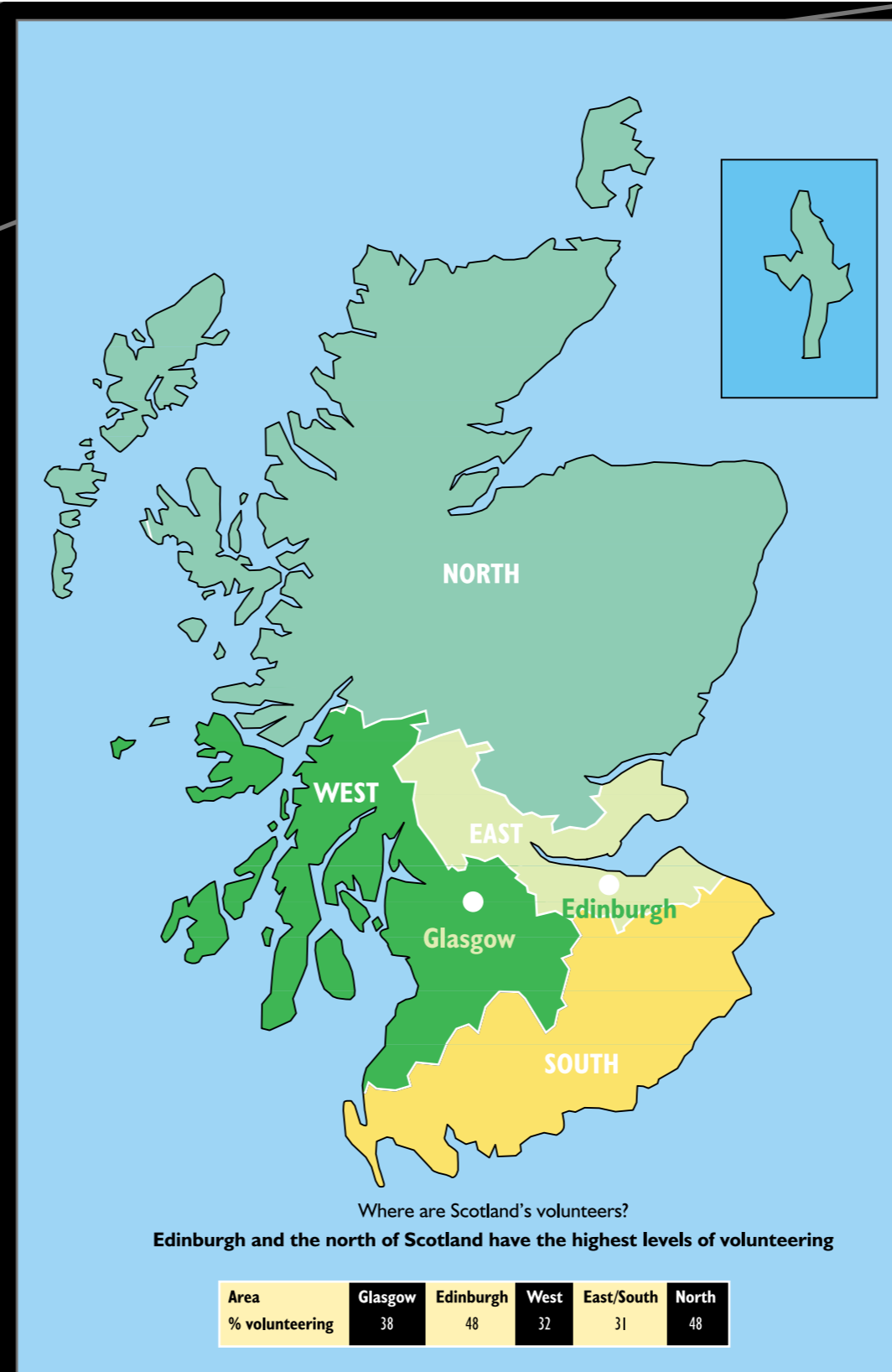
THE SCOTTISH CENTRE FOR VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH

The strategic review of Volunteer Development Scotland, the national centre of excellence in volunteer development, confirmed the need for more research into volunteering in Scotland. With the support of the Lloyds TSB Foundation, VDS appointed a Research Co-ordinator, Laura Baird (formerly VDS Policy Officer), in late 2002 whose role is to establish the Scottish Centre for Volunteering Research.

The aims of the Scottish Centre for Volunteering Research are to promote research into volunteering in Scotland, and to develop knowledge and understanding of volunteering which is relevant to practitioners and policy makers. A research strategy has been produced committing the Centre to undertake and commission research into volunteering in Scotland which:

- is relevant to VDS members, networks, and others with an interest in volunteering
- complements existing research into volunteering in Scotland
- explores aspects of volunteering in Scotland which are currently under-researched
- provides qualitative research, as well as meaningful statistics, on volunteering in Scotland to inform the development of social policy

The Centre will disseminate research findings in such a way as to maximise the impact on policy and practice.



Where are Scotland's volunteers?
Edinburgh and the north of Scotland have the highest levels of volunteering

As with the other surveys there are geographical differences in the levels of volunteering. Whilst other surveys have identified the north of Scotland as having the highest levels of volunteering, this survey found that adults in the city of Edinburgh were as likely to say that they volunteer as people in the north of the country. It is impossible to say why this is. More investigation is needed into why levels of volunteering vary so much around the country.

Due to a successful bid by VDS and the University of Dundee Department of Geography to the Economic & Social Research Council for a collaborative (CASE) studentship a PhD student will later this year undertake a research project entitled 'Space, place and volunteers: the nature, meaning and impact of volunteering in Scotland'. The findings from this research project will assist VDS to better understand the volunteer landscape of Scotland.



Join Us!

All details are provided in our web site www.vds.org.uk
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Volunteer Development Scotland is a partner with YoungScot and provides the volunteer information for young people on the Volunteering Channel of Young Scot. We are partners in the Workwithus.org initiative. The new database of volunteering opportunities will be accessed from the People Channel of the Work with Us portal

RESEARCH ON VOLUNTEERING IN SCOTLAND

RESEARCH FINDINGS SCOTLAND NO 2

This Research Findings Scotland is the second in a series of bulletins on research into volunteering in Scotland to be published by Volunteer Development Scotland. The findings are taken from an omnibus survey on volunteering, carried out for Volunteer Development Scotland by NFO System Three Scottish Opinion Survey in August 2002.

A sample of 990 adults aged 16 and over was interviewed 'in-home' in 43 UK Parliamentary constituencies throughout Scotland over the period 22-29 August 2002.

BACKGROUND TO THE VDS NFO SYSTEM THREE SURVEY - AUGUST 2002

Recent surveys designed to capture quantitative data on volunteering in Scotland show wide variations in the number of people involved as volunteers. For example, the Institute of Volunteering Research **1997 UK Survey of Volunteering** found that 50% of adults in Scotland were engaged in formal volunteering. Data from the **Scottish Household Survey 2001** commissioned by the Scottish Executive found that 25% of adults in Scotland had volunteered through a group, club, or organisation in the previous year, and an **NFO System Three Scottish Opinion Survey** commissioned by VDS in February 2002 (unpublished) found that 20% of the adult population in Scotland volunteered in the past year.

Due to the different methodologies used in these surveys, it is not possible to make a direct comparison of the results. Interestingly, the results show consistency with regard to the popularity of the different types of voluntary activity, and variables such as the age, gender, and socio-economic status of volunteers.

So, why does the percentage figure for the adult population in Scotland engaged in volunteering vary from 20% to 50%? VDS studied the methodologies used in these surveys, and took a particular interest in the wording of the survey questions.

1. THE 1997 UK SURVEY OF VOLUNTEERING

This survey, conducted by the Institute of Volunteering Research, adopted the standard definition of volunteering, namely 'any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups), other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment'. Sample size for this study was 3,275 adults.

This definition was not quoted in the questionnaire. The approach employed was to avoid presenting respondents with a standard definition of volunteering and asking them if they had taken part in any activities which accorded with this definition; rather it was to lead gently into the subject, reminding respondents of a range of contexts in which they might have been engaged in voluntary activity. Throughout the sections of the questionnaire which established the respondent's involvement in volunteering, the wording deliberately avoided the terms 'voluntary work' and 'volunteering' in order to reduce the risk of respondents answering only within their own perceptions of what constitutes volunteering. The questions referred instead to unpaid work or help.

1. THE SCOTTISH HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2001

The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is a major, continuous, cross-sectional survey, commissioned by the Scottish Executive in 1998 to provide reliable and up-to-date information on the composition, characteristics and behaviour of Scottish households, both nationally and at a sub-national level. Sample size is 14,500 adults.

Included in the Scottish Household Survey are questions on formal volunteering designed to measure levels of participation; types of volunteer-involving organisation with which the respondent engaged; types of voluntary activity undertaken; and the time given to volunteering activity. The lead question on volunteering in the SHS is, 'Over the last 12 months have you given up any time to help any clubs, charities, campaigns, or organisations, in an unpaid capacity?'

2. VDS NFO SYSTEM THREE SCOTTISH OPINION SURVEY FEBRUARY 2002 (UNPUBLISHED)

VDS commissioned NFO System Three to include questions about volunteering in their February 2002 Scottish Opinion Survey. The wording used in the lead question was 'Have you taken part in your community in an unpaid, voluntary capacity in the last twelve months?' The word 'community' was used in the question in an attempt to capture both formal and informal voluntary activity. The finding that only 20% of those interviewed in the survey had answered positively to the question was disappointing, as the hope had been that capturing data on both formal and informal volunteering would result in a figure close to that found in the 1997 UK Survey of Volunteering. The sample size was 1052 adults.

THE 'V' WORD

The three surveys suggest that higher levels of voluntary activity are recorded when the words 'volunteer', 'volunteering', and 'voluntary' are not used in the survey questionnaire. Not everyone who undertakes a voluntary activity, formal or informal, necessarily regards himself or herself as a volunteer. The construct of volunteering with its stereotypical images can marginalise the diverse range of voluntary activities that are being undertaken. This fits with the views held by some in the volunteering community that while people have created their own constructs of volunteering, which are inevitably culturally and socially specific, the dominant representation is of volunteering as the domain of the white, middle class, middle-aged female, who volunteers out of altruistic concerns in social care settings or charity shops (Lyon et al, 1998).

THE VDS NFO SYSTEM THREE SCOTTISH OPINION SURVEY AUGUST 2002

Based on the above, and in an effort to test the theory that the omission of the words 'volunteer', 'voluntary' and 'volunteering' from survey questions designed to measure levels of voluntary activity results in the recording of higher levels, VDS commissioned a set of questions for inclusion in the August 2002 NFO System 3 Scottish Opinion Survey. The lead question used in the survey was 'In the past year have you done any of these activities, unpaid, to help others?', and a show card with descriptors covering a broad range of formal and informal voluntary activities was used as a prompt. Those responding positively to the lead question were then asked a second question regarding which of the activities they had undertaken, and the frequency of their involvement.

THE FINDINGS

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND VOLUNTEER?

38% of the adult population say that they have undertaken one or more of the activities, unpaid, to help others in the past year.

This figure is nearly twice that recorded in the VDS NFO System 3 survey of February 2002 (20%), and is half as much again as the SHS 2001 figure of 25%, although it must be acknowledged that the SHS records only formal volunteering. The finding also suggests that the omission of the 'V' word in survey questions, and the use of a gentle prompt regarding the range of voluntary activities enables people to identify themselves as undertaking activities in an unpaid capacity to help others.

WHO ARE SCOTLAND'S VOLUNTEERS?

Gender

Women are slightly more likely to volunteer than men.

Women	Men
39%	37%

REFERENCES/LINKS

Davies-Smith, J. (1997). 'The UK Volunteering Survey 1997'. Institute for Volunteering Research.

www.vr.org.uk

Scottish Executive (2001). 'The Scottish Household Survey 2001'. www.scotland.gov.uk

Lyons, M., Wijkstrom, P., and Clary, G (1998). 'Comparative studies of volunteering: what is being studied?', *Voluntary Action*, 1 (1), pages 45-54.

NFO System Three (2002).

'Volunteering in Scotland'

(unpublished). Volunteer

Development Scotland, Stirling.

The small difference in volunteering levels between the sexes is consistent with other surveys on volunteering such as the SHS 2001 (27% female and 23% male) although the National Survey of Volunteering 1997 found that men and women were equally likely to volunteer (48% of respondents in each case).

Adults in age ranges 18–24, 35–44, and 45–54 years are the most likely to undertake voluntary activities.

The finding that middle-aged people are most likely to volunteer is consistent with the other surveys. However, because the VDS NFO System Three August 2002 survey asked a question about intention to vote at the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary elections, the data was calculated for an extra age category of 18–24 years. Interestingly, the percentage of this age group involved as volunteers is 44%, and is equal to that for adults aged 35–44 and 45–54. The methodology used in this survey may well account for the capturing of such high levels of volunteering among 18–24 year olds since evidence suggests that young people are not comfortable with, or may not recognise, the term 'volunteering'. Those aged 16–24 are one and a half times more likely to be involved as volunteers than those aged 65 and over. This differs significantly from other surveys which found that young people, and those aged 65 and over, were the least likely to volunteer.

Socio-economic class

Levels of volunteering increase with socio-economic class

This finding is consistent with other surveys into volunteering. People from the highest socio-economic group (professional, managerial) are more likely to volunteer than those from the lowest group, (unskilled manual workers).

The Scottish Executive's Community Regeneration Statement has a strand within it regarding the need to build social capital in disadvantaged communities. Volunteering provides a way of encouraging people to take part in their communities, it contributes to increased social capital, and can be a stepping-stone into paid employment through offering learning opportunities and skills development.

Employment

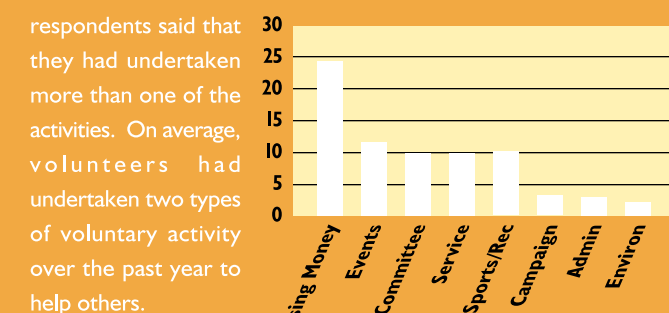
Working status	Full time	Part time	Not working
% volunteering	40	49	33

Adults employed in full or part-time work are most likely to volunteer

the findings from other research, for example the SHS 2001 found that only 17% of unemployed adults in Scotland volunteered compared to 26% of those in full-time employment, and 37% of those who were self-employed. Surveys have also found that levels of volunteering decline amongst those of retirement age and above.

What do Scotland's volunteers do?

Helping to raise money is the most popular activity among the 38% of adults in Scotland who volunteer The percentages total more than 38% because some



respondents said that they had undertaken more than one of the activities. On average, volunteers had undertaken two types of voluntary activity over the past year to help others.

People give most time to some of the least popular voluntary activities

Activity By Popularity	Every Week %	2-3 times a month %	Once a month %	Less than once a month %	Don't know how often %
Helping to raise money (24%)	8	7	14	71	-
Organising, helping to run an event (12%)	6	6	11	76	1
Serving on a committee (10%)	18	12	38	30	2
Providing a service or offering support (10%)	38	13	17	32	-
Helping with sports or recreational activities (10%)	36	17	15	31	1
Campaigning or advocacy (3%)	20	4	28	48	-
Helping with administration or office activities (3%)	38	18	17	27	-
Working in the environment (2%)	21	4	20	55	-

The frequency of volunteer involvement appears to fit with the nature of the voluntary activities. For example, committee meetings tend to be held on a monthly or less frequent basis, whereas support services are required on a regular basis. The findings may also say something about the amount of time that people are able to give as a volunteer.

Recommendations

- Future quantitative surveys on volunteering would benefit from a standard classification of voluntary activities, which would allow comparative analysis to be undertaken. The Scottish Centre for Volunteering Research plans to undertake work on the standard classification of voluntary activities.
- A baseline study into the extent and nature of formal and informal volunteering in Scotland is required.
- Further research is needed to understand people's perceptions of volunteering, and to consider ways to alter the stereotyped 'image' of volunteering. (Objective 1 of the Active Communities Strategy)
- Research is needed into the reasons for the varying levels of volunteering around Scotland. (A collaborative research project between VDS and the University of Dundee Department of Geography into the volunteer landscape of Scotland will commence in October 2003).