



STUDENT VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY:
RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

DCU in the Community Papers No. 3

November 2015

The DCU in the Community Papers series addresses issues of concern to the community where a research perspective can be translated into practical action. It seeks to engage with critical thinking- from wherever it might emerge- and promote empowerment through research. The views expressed here are purely those of the authors.

DCU in the Community Papers No. 1:

The Value of Civic Engagement in Higher Education: An Irish Case Study

Authors: Ronnie Munck, Ursula Kelly, Joanna Ozarowska

DCU in the Community Papers No. 2:

Community Safety in Ballymun-Shangan, Coultry and Whiteacre Crescent

Authors: Laura Martins de Carvalho and Ailbhe Garvey

DCU in the Community Papers No. 3:

Student Volunteering in the Community: Results and Prospects

Authors: Ailbhe Garvey, Rachel Cook, Lisa O'Quinn, Joanna Ozarowska

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INTRODUCTION

In Ireland, as elsewhere, student volunteering takes many different forms but everywhere it is on the increase. We are reaching the stage where a steep change from within universities will be needed to create the capacity to allow this wave of enthusiasm for civic or community engagement to flourish. To ascertain the picture 'on the ground' as it were, we conducted a small scale survey at DCU with follow up qualitative interviews. In this research paper we first lay out certain parameters that we feel influence the choice students make when they decide to volunteer in the community. Then we report on the survey itself and set it in its comparative international context. We also provide a model for expressing the value of volunteering in monetary terms.

Finally, we look to the future and make some recommendations, in particular reporting on a crucial national initiative we are involved in to create an online national student volunteering management system. This is very much a document for discussion and we do not pretend to present a definitive answer to all the problems posed. The methodology of engaged community based research always stresses the need for community validation (in this case the student body in particular, but also our community partners) when research is conducted. Looking beyond this study, we would argue for the need to have a conversation on what is student volunteering in the community? Does it include global overseas volunteering? Should it have certain ethical or political values? Who should organise it or should it just be self-organising? These are questions we will address in the months to come.



THE ISSUES

The impact of volunteering is felt by all those who give of their time and reap the direct personal benefits, but also by the community organisations and causes they engage with. For DCU, the community organisations should not be seen as 'beneficiaries' of volunteering, but as partners in creating a two way conversation between the university and the community.

The act of volunteering forms many valuable impressions and can bring life-changing experiences to those higher education students who fully engage in activities involving children, the elderly or those in need for example (Eccles and Barber, 1999). Most of all, it is a valuable learning tool for higher education students who are the future builders of our civil society. Civic engagement is a key part of students' development in the course of a university education. Through volunteering, they are provided opportunities to work with people whose lives, values and circumstances might be different from their own. Through these experiences, students can reflect upon how their values and actions can shape their future and that of the world in which they live. The university years are also a time when students crystallise their values and form the political identities that predict the positions they will hold on many issues as they approach mid-life. The politics of any generation is shaped within the context of issues their cohort faces (i.e. the great recession, global warming, etc.) and how they will gather the resources to interpret and solve these problems. Thus, the higher education experience is an ideal environment in which to explore one's values at a deeper level. In many instances, volunteers can readily see the implications that their values and actions have upon those they work with, their immediate communities and, ultimately, the global community (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Volunteering also allows students to gain professional experience in a variety of fields and helps determine which vocation suits their career interests, as well as their values. They are placed in an environment to gain experience at a pivotal time in their lives as they prepare to leave the university and enter the real world (Astin & Sax, 1998). Volunteering also can enhance students' self-esteem, thereby encouraging positive change to their identity and self-image (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner & Finkelstein, 1999). There are many reasons which may simultaneously motivate students to volunteer, including both altruistic and self-motivating reasons, such as career enhancement. The literature offers a variety of reasons for volunteering including: a moral obligation; wanting to become involved in projects that reflect one's values; a desire to contribute to the betterment of humanity, learning more about the world and the community; personal growth and enhancement; connecting with others; developing career connections; and learning new skills (McDougle, et. al, 2011). It should also be noted that students' reasons for volunteering may change over time. While they may be motivated by altruistic reasons at the beginning of their tenure, their continued commitment may be more strongly influenced by the social connections they have formed (Winniford, et. al 1995; Snyder & Omoto, 1992; Ryan, et al., 2001; Liarakou et. al., 2011; McDougle, et. al., 2011). Thus, when non-profit institutions are recruiting students to volunteer, they should not only emphasise the value of the cause, but also the opportunity to network and meet people who share a similar value system and the functional benefits and experience students will gain as well.

Students who attend a university where civic engagement is both part of the university mission and embraced through campus activities are far more likely to volunteer in their own communities (Sax, 2004). Just being asked to volunteer carries significant weight in an individual's decision to volunteer, and having the right qualifications to volunteer in a particular role at an organisation is an even stronger predictor for engagement in formal volunteering (Lee & Brudney, 2012). Volunteering can also reinforce civic values and social responsibility, enable students to hone critical learning skills and allow them to identify and address social issues, thereby creating bonds between citizens and contributing to the cohesion of society (Astin & Sax, 1998; Putman, 2000). College graduates who have actively participated in community activities and have been mentored by those who teach these values will be more likely to continue to give of themselves through their intellectual capacity, altruistic values, "citizen-driven solutions" and economic capital (College Board, 2010).

We also find that involvement in volunteering activity assists students in building the graduate attributes sought after by employers. One such model is DCU's own Generation 21 attributes:

DCU Generation 21 graduates demonstrate:	Volunteering offers opportunities to:
Leadership	Take active and key roles in organisations
Creativity	Stretch yourself intellectually
Enterprise	Develop and demonstrate initiative
Commitment	Prove your reliability and sticking power
Effective communication	Improve key communication and social skills
Continuous learning	Share skills and knowledge, learn from others
Problem solving ability	Become solution and action-focused
Engagement	Listen, understand, empathise and contribute
Flexibility	Develop transferable skills and responsiveness
Responsibility	Develop autonomy, personal responsibility
Cultural and ethical awareness	Engage with and learn from diverse groups
Employability	Embrace challenges for personal and professional development

Thus, there are many reasons for choosing to volunteer, all of which benefit the student, the community and the university in both the short and long term.

Adapted from DCU Generation 21 Graduate Attributes: <http://dcu.ie/generation21/graduateattributes.shtml>



Our own survey (reported on below) measured students' motivations for volunteering; average hours devoted to volunteering over the course of a year; and types of volunteering engagements. Many of the students' motivations for volunteering mirrored the findings in the literature including those ranging from altruistic reasons of giving back to the community to gaining experience for their own career advancement (McDougle, et. al, 2011; Astin & Sax, 1998; Putman, 2000). Involvement in altruistic activities that benefit the marginalised of society is reflective of a portion of higher education students who have been influenced by prior participation in youth groups. They seek to combat social injustice through their own efforts (Flanagan & Levin 2010). Similar value systems are also witnessed in students who are environmental activists for their advocacy is reflective of "self and collective efficacy" (McDougle, et. al., 2011).

Of those students who choose to volunteer great care must be taken by community organisations that seek to retain them. Omoto and Snyder (1995) cite three stages of a "volunteer process model" which contribute both to the decision to volunteer and to continue in this capacity: 1) values or experiences which have motivated the person to volunteer; 2) positive experiences while serving in the capacity as a volunteer; and 3) a constant interaction of the first two stages. Given the weight that motivation and interest along with positive daily experiences have upon a volunteer's reason for continuing to give of their time, non-profit coordinators and university partners must together strive to make this experience a positive and rewarding one.

The academic calendar can limit the training period of students and their availability to engage in meaningful work over a consistent period of time. This, coupled with students' other commitments, such as class schedules and often part-time work, can sometimes interfere with their interest in volunteering over long periods of time. Together, other commitments coupled with the limitation of the academic calendar usually lead to a high turnover rate of students who serve as volunteers. To solve this dilemma, the non-profit coordinators and higher education partners must identify projects and objectives that can be achieved during the scope of a term or an academic year (Bowman, 1998). Community organisations must work with students to set realistic goals and objectives for their experience: many of their efforts may not yield immediate tangible benefits, for much of the work in fields such as environmentalism can take years to demonstrate signs of progress (Liarakou et. al, 2011).

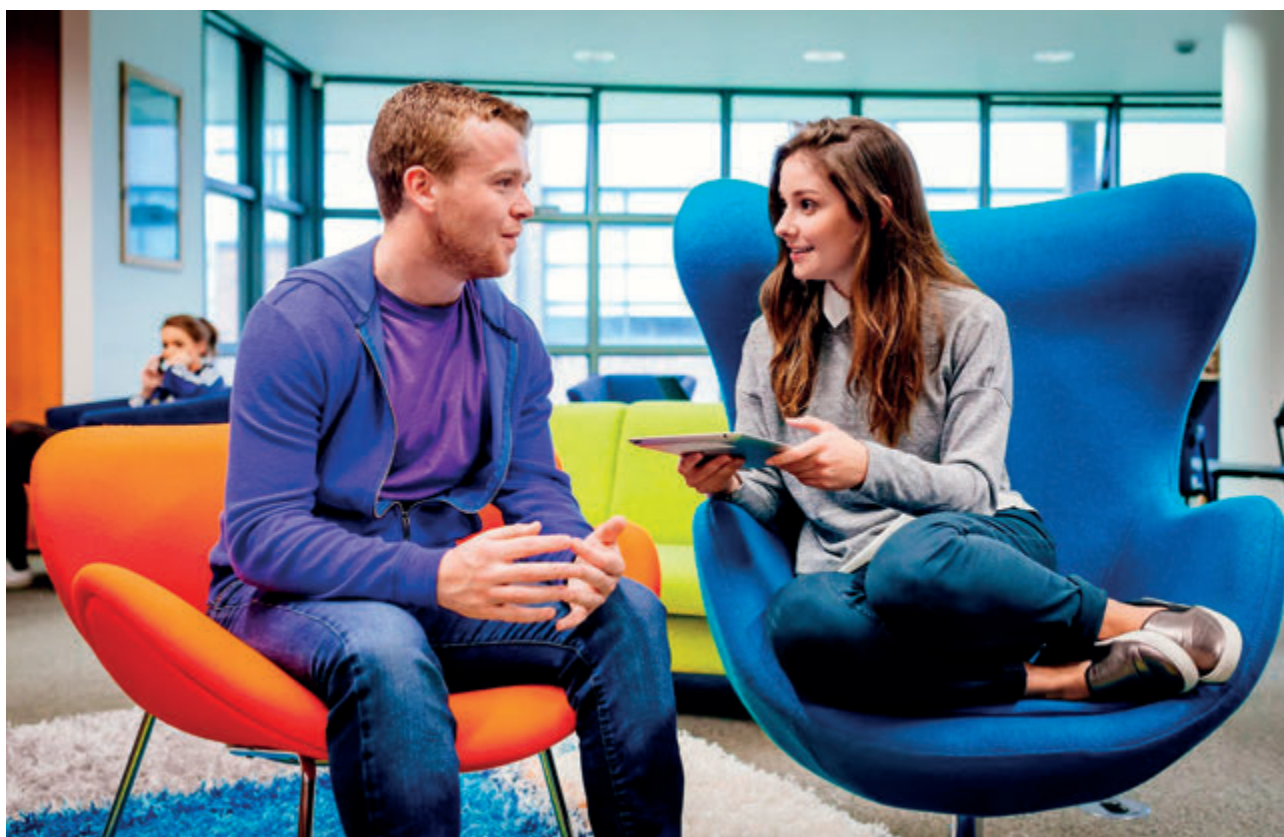


THE SURVEY

This research was conducted using a small scale survey at DCU with follow up qualitative interviews.

- 536 students were surveyed;
- the questionnaire consisted of 26 questions;
- there were 2 sections under the headings: non-current volunteers and volunteers;
- we gathered personal and academic details for both volunteers and non-current volunteers.

This allowed the researchers to not only develop a clear picture of the students who volunteer, but also to understand the reasons why some students choose not to volunteer and how the university can support them if they wish to become involved in volunteering. This section of the report will examine student volunteers. It will describe the characteristics of the respondents, the volunteering experience and students' motivations to volunteer. A discussion of barriers to volunteering will follow.



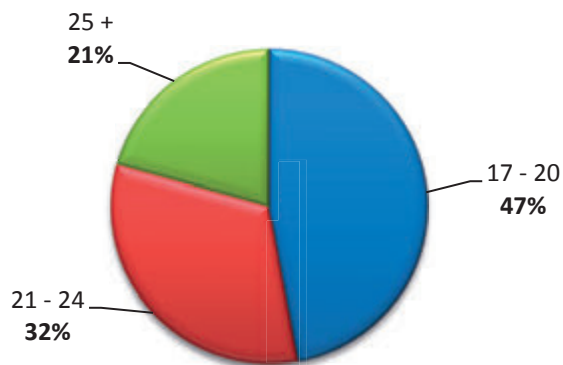
Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of the student volunteers surveyed is summarised in the bullet points below:

- 58% of the student volunteers who responded were female;
- the majority of student volunteers were aged between 17 and 20, with each successive age bracket showing a decline in the numbers volunteering;
- 83% were enrolled in undergraduate studies;
- 65% were in either their first or second year of study.

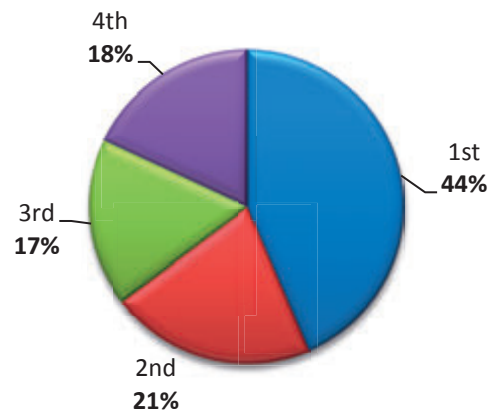
Pie Chart 1:

To which age bracket do you belong?



Pie Chart 2:

What is your academic year (if undergraduate)?



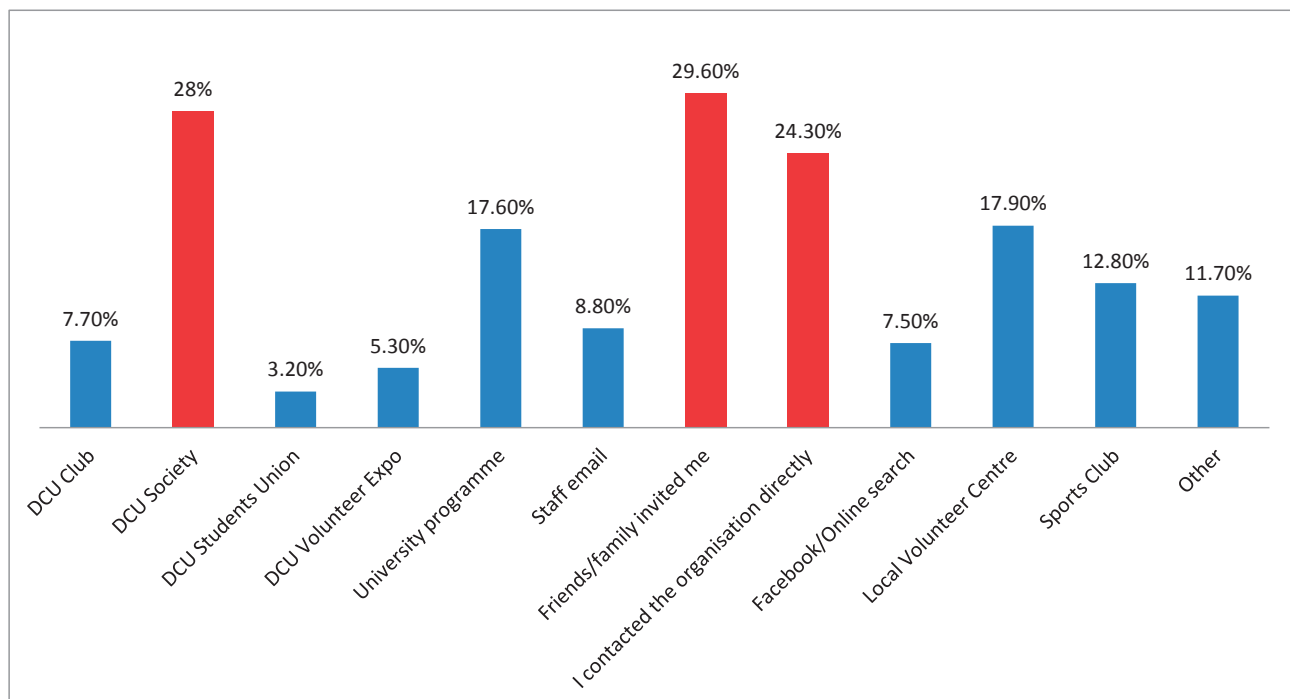
Volunteering Experience

In the section of the survey focusing on student volunteers, the participants were asked a number of questions regarding their volunteering habits and experiences. These questions explored how students became involved in volunteering, the types of volunteering they frequently participated in and the amount of time that they spent volunteering.

The main findings are summarised below:

- friends and family, the university and the student's own initiative were important factors in taking the initial step to volunteer;
- 30% of respondents said that friends and family invited them to volunteer;
- 28% got involved in volunteering as a result of joining a campus society;
- 24% of student volunteers contacted an organisation directly.

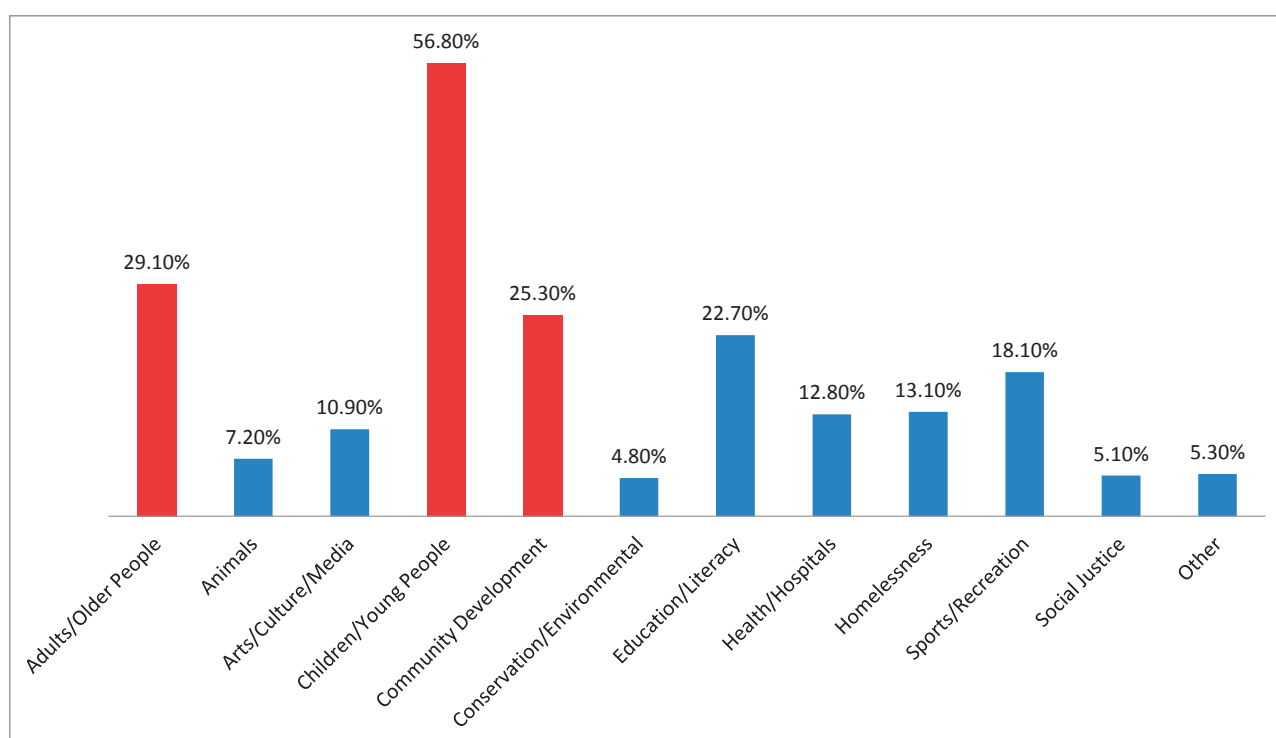
Chart 1: How did you initially get involved in volunteering?



The results show that the top three groups and/or causes that students volunteer with are:

- children and young people;
- adults and older people;
- community development.

Chart 2: What cause/group do you volunteer with?

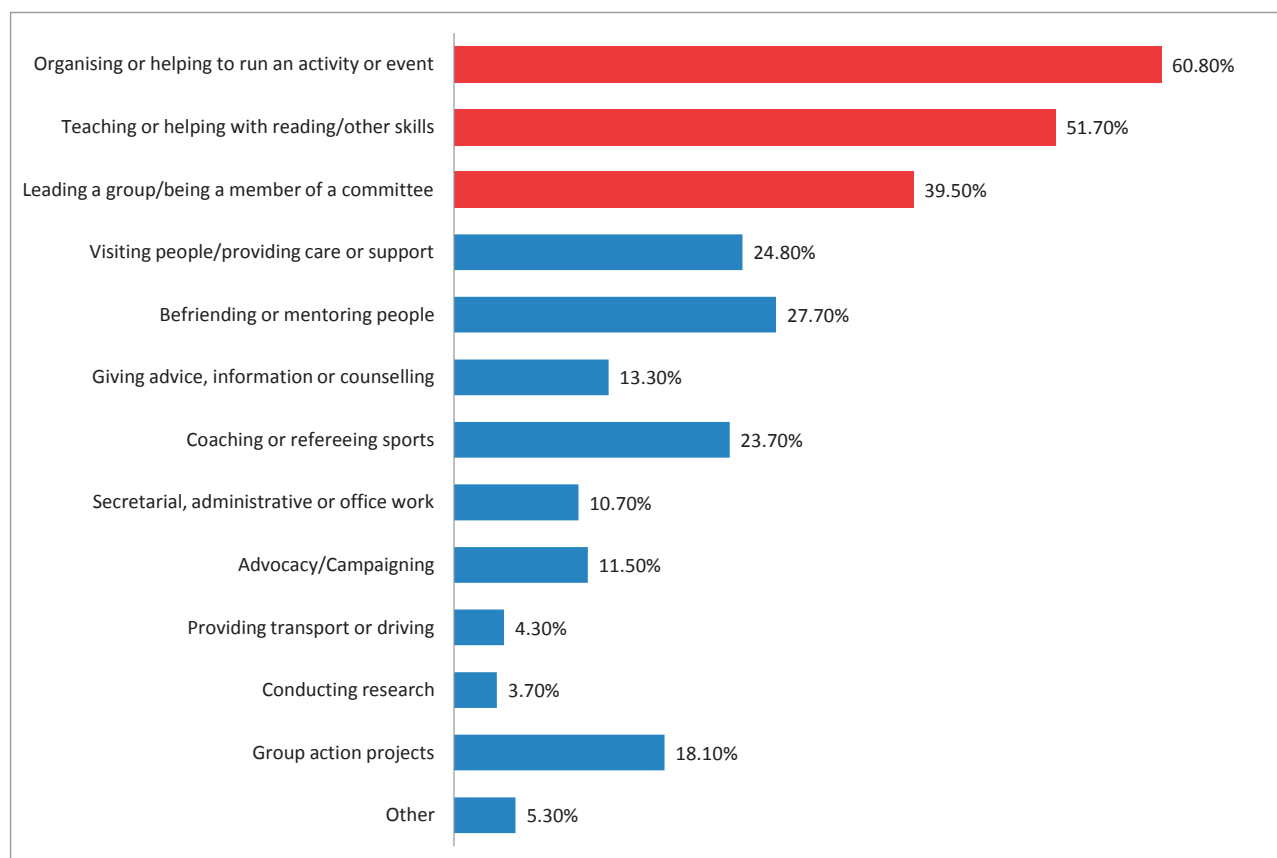


Students reported that “voluntary work with children was really interesting and educational. It [was] a great experience and everyone should try it.” The experience of volunteering while a student in the university’s local community will likely impact on the volunteering choices made by students in their own communities, which was highlighted in one student’s comment on their volunteering experience: “I had my first experience of volunteering this year as part of the DCU Suas Literacy Support Programme. It made me want to go on and volunteer for a project in my own community.”

The types of activities that students are involved with while volunteering are varied, but most frequently involve:

- organizing or helping to run an activity or event;
- teaching or helping with skills such as literacy;
- leading a group or being a member of a committee.

Chart 3: Which of the volunteering activities below have you ever participated in?



The amount of time spent volunteering also varied, however results indicate that students are not likely to spend more than 6 hours volunteering per month. Student volunteers were very enthusiastic about the activities they engaged in and the importance of giving their time. A student acting as a committee member of the DCU society encouraged “everyone [to try and] give at least an hour a week [to] volunteering.”

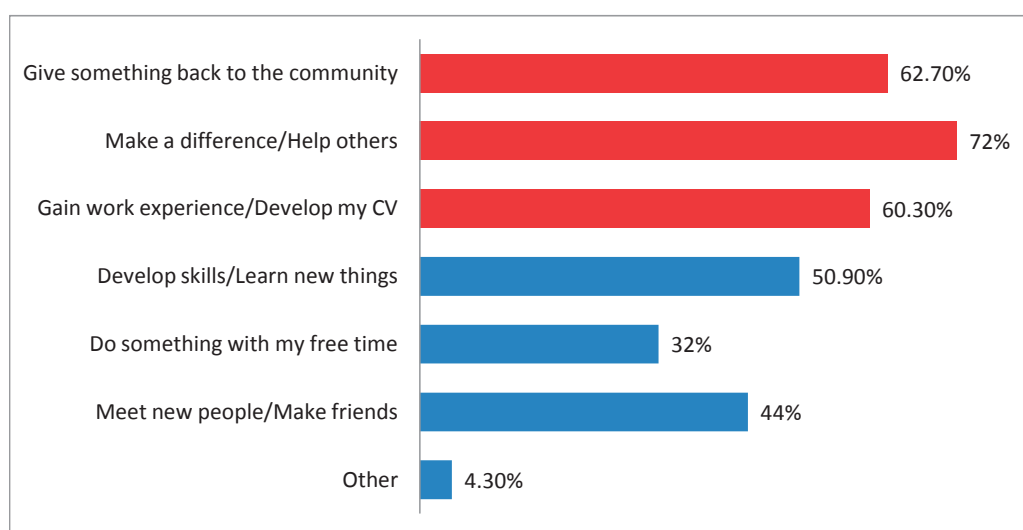


Motivation to Volunteer

The reasons why students volunteer and the perceived benefits of volunteering are of particular importance to illustrating what drives students to volunteer and why they continue to volunteer. There are numerous reasons for volunteering, although most students indicate either altruistic or self-motivating objectives. The top three motivations given for volunteering in this survey were:

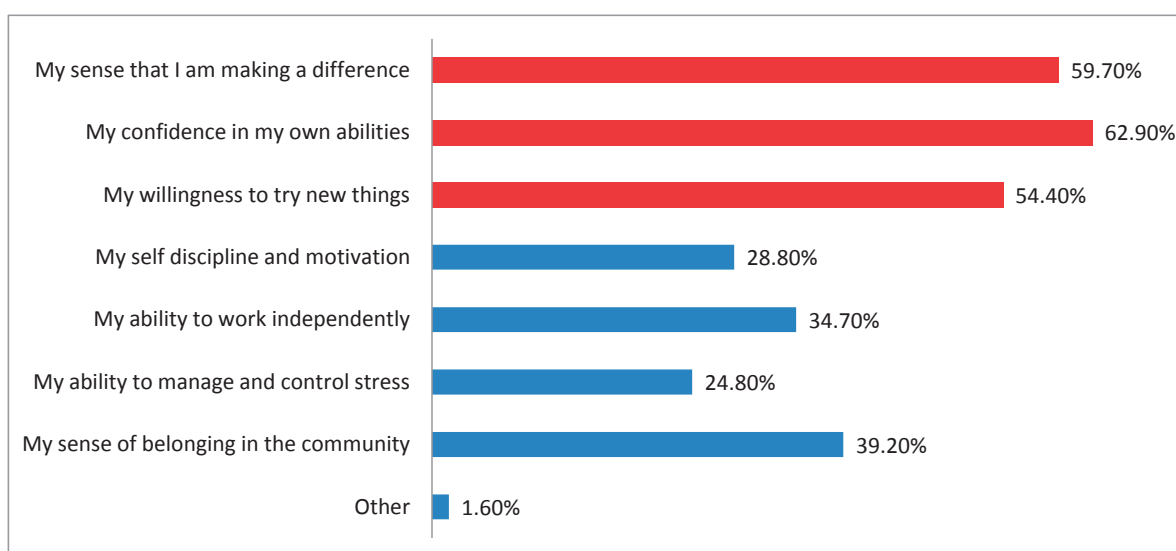
- a desire to make a difference and help others;
- to give something back to the community;
- to gain work experience and CV development.

Chart 4: What motivates you to volunteer?



The benefits of volunteering revolve around supporting the emotional development of the volunteer as they feel they are making a difference, increasing their confidence, and becoming more willing to try new activities.

Chart 5: Which areas of your life has volunteering improved?



The responses that students gave when asked to comment on the reasons they volunteer highlight their personal motivations:

- "What you give to [the] voluntary sector, you get back ten-fold. Very enjoyable and rewarding to know that you are helping someone without seeking anything in return."
- "Great experience and one which allows us to appreciate what we have and don't have."
- "I found it was a great way to make new friends, gain personal skills and make a difference in the lives of the Ghanaians we worked with."



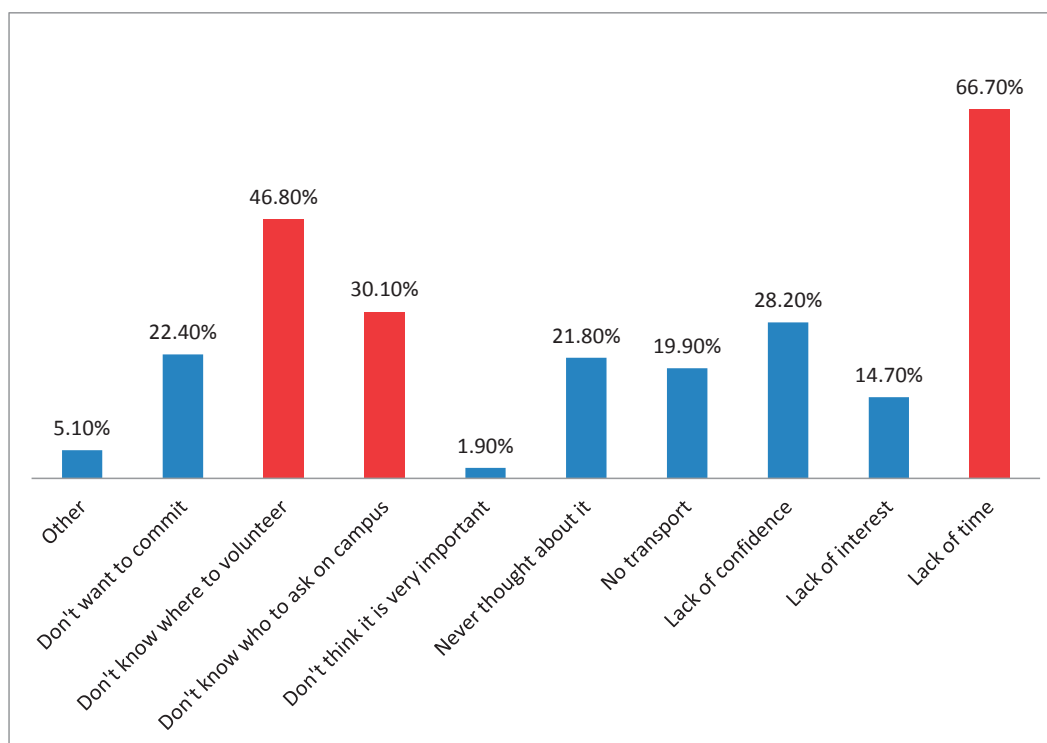
Barriers to Volunteering

A key concept related to successful volunteering is the removal of barriers that exist for participants. Often potential student volunteers run into barriers which can relate to their perception of volunteering to be time consuming, or not being able to access information about volunteering. The survey asked non-volunteers if any of ten potential barriers prevented them from volunteering.

- more than two thirds of students highlighted that they lacked the time to engage;
- the most commonly cited reason related to lack of information, with almost half stating that they did not know where to volunteer;
- just under one third said that they did not know who to ask on campus.

Other barriers were lack of confidence, not wanting to make a commitment and no transport. Notably, only a small number of students said they had a lack of interest or did not think it was very important.

Chart 6: Please give your reasons for not volunteering



The responses students gave in relation to the key constraints included:

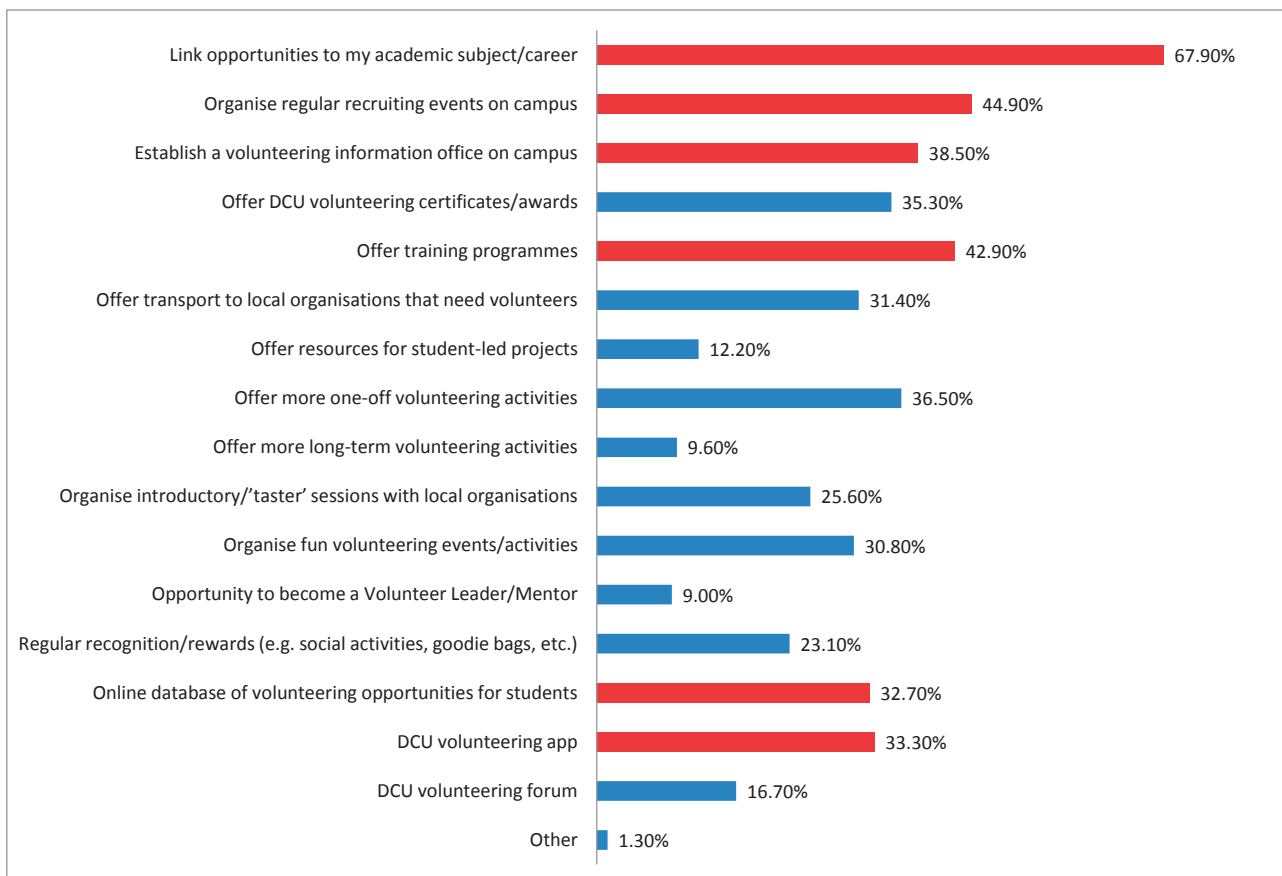
- "I have volunteered before with the homeless, but I commute every day from Laois to Dublin, so that curtails my time and energy."
- "I think information is the key thing about volunteering. The volunteering app is a good start if there isn't already one because technology is everything for info."
- "I found it REALLY difficult [to] find volunteer work in DCU! There is no society or office with volunteer information [for] us (especially us Foreign students)... For me, I really want to do volunteer work in Ireland with the aim of enriching my experience and having fun with people from different country. But it is hard for me to find such an opportunity!"

Creating volunteering services and opportunities that appeal to students is imperative, especially given that students are under such time constraints, due to their busy schedules throughout the academic year. This is evident when respondents were asked what DCU can do to encourage more volunteering. Students were given a list of seventeen opportunities to choose.

The three key areas that students cited as most important were:

- linking opportunities to their academic subject/career
- organising regular events and training programmes
- disseminating information via an information office on campus, a DCU volunteering app, and an online database of volunteering opportunities for students

Chart 7: What can DCU do to encourage more to volunteering?



Linking volunteer opportunities to students' academic courses is an effective way of encouraging students to volunteer. When students were asked if there was anything else they would like to add, the feedback given in relation to time constraints was evident.

"I enjoy volunteering, but find it difficult to have time outside to volunteer as I have children. If there were 2-3 [hours] scheduled into [our] timetable a week to volunteer, I would happily do so."

Some DCU Schools, including the School of Business and the School of Nursing and Human Sciences have incorporated volunteering into some of their modules. The Uaneen module also allows student to gain academic credits for their voluntary work, however this is not available to everyone. Opening the Uaneen module to all students was cited by many students as a way of encouraging more volunteering on campus.

"Opening up the Uaneen module to all students would encourage everyone to share their time with others, as it stands I've volunteered every year throughout my time in DCU and because of my course I cannot apply for this module."

Other areas that students cited in their feedback as being important to increase student participation in volunteering activities related to the need for more advertising and promotion. Suggestions included a 'database of opportunities', 'an active social media campaign using technology that engages with the audience', 'an app', 'email', 'make people more aware and have adjustable hours', as well as 'creat[ing] a section on the DCU website listing every type of volunteering students can become involved and a link detailing each volunteer role and how to get involved.' The importance of access to information via technology was also highlighted by one student who stated:

"Just a note on the above, I think that a DCU volunteering app with a database of volunteering opportunities for students would be hugely beneficial in getting as many students as possible to volunteer. A lot of students and young people in general are moving away from using laptops or computers in favour of using their phones to do everything so I think an app would increase volunteer opportunity awareness and participation."

This feedback is greatly beneficial to us as it shows the views of potential student volunteers on how volunteering can best be incorporated into university strategy and what students believe to be the most effective tools to widen their participation with the wider community.

ECONOMIC VALUE OF STUDENT VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY



Student Volunteering

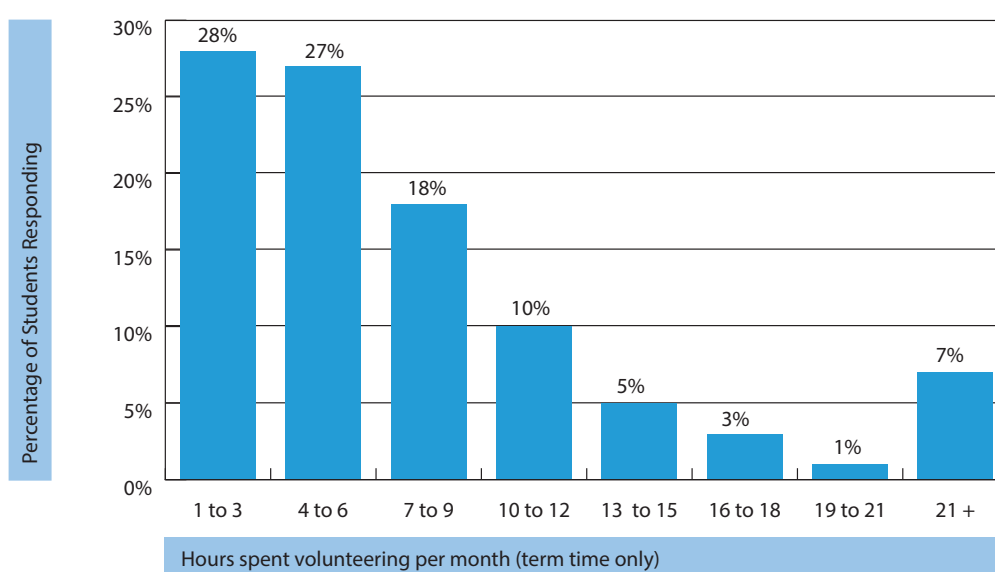
An online survey was conducted of DCU students, which sought information on student attitudes towards, and experience of, volunteering activity. The survey also asked for information on whether students were actively volunteering during the academic year (i.e. during term-time) and if so, the types of volunteering they undertook and the average hours per month they spent on volunteering.

The survey was publicised to students via the Students' Union social networks and students were invited to respond. The survey took place in May 2015 and achieved 536 responses from an ultimate target student population (full time and part-time) of 11,479 students.

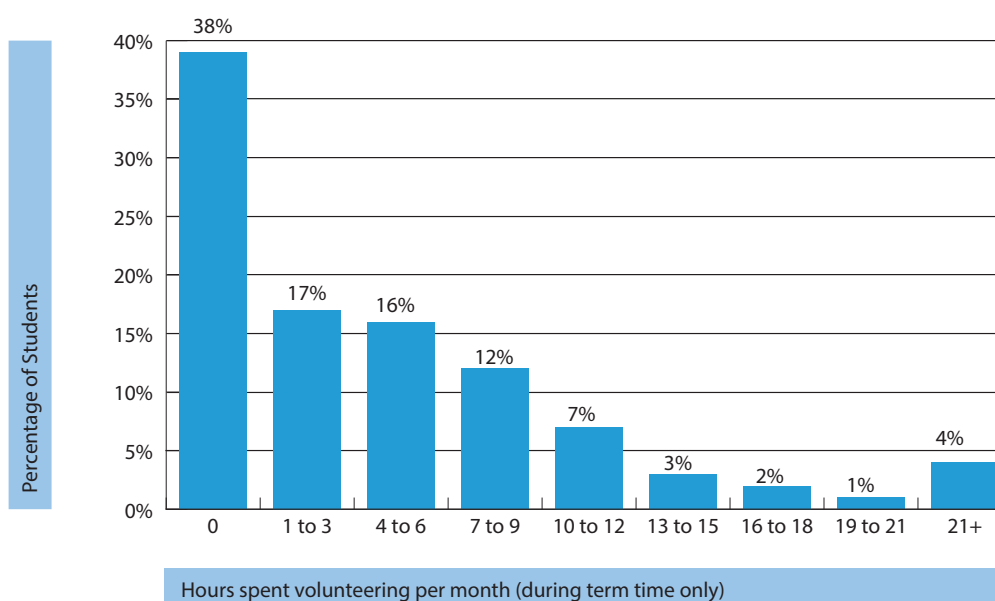
Of the 536 overall responses there were 375 responses giving specific data on estimated hours spent volunteering. 161 respondents gave no indication of time spent volunteering and so it was assumed that they were not currently active volunteers. 49 respondents explicitly stated they spent zero hours volunteering. Therefore of the total number respondents, 61% or 326 positively indicated they had been actively volunteering during term time in the academic year 2014/15.

The Table 1 below shows the overall pattern of volunteers.

Pattern of reported Students Volunteering (active volunteers)



Pattern of reported Students Volunteering: Hours per month (all survey respondents)



The majority of volunteers (28%) spent between 1-3 hours per month, but nearly the same proportion (27%) spent 4 - 6 hours per month, with 18% spending 7-9 hours and the remaining 26% spending more than 10 hours per month. A small but notable number (7% of active volunteers - 23 of the respondents) reported spending more than 21 hours per month in volunteer activity.

An estimate of the total hours spent was made taking the midpoint of each category (e.g. for those saying they had spent between 1-3 hours volunteering, 2 hours were allocated. For those saying 4-6 hours, 5 hours were allocated, and so on. For those indicating 21 hours +, 21 hours was assumed.

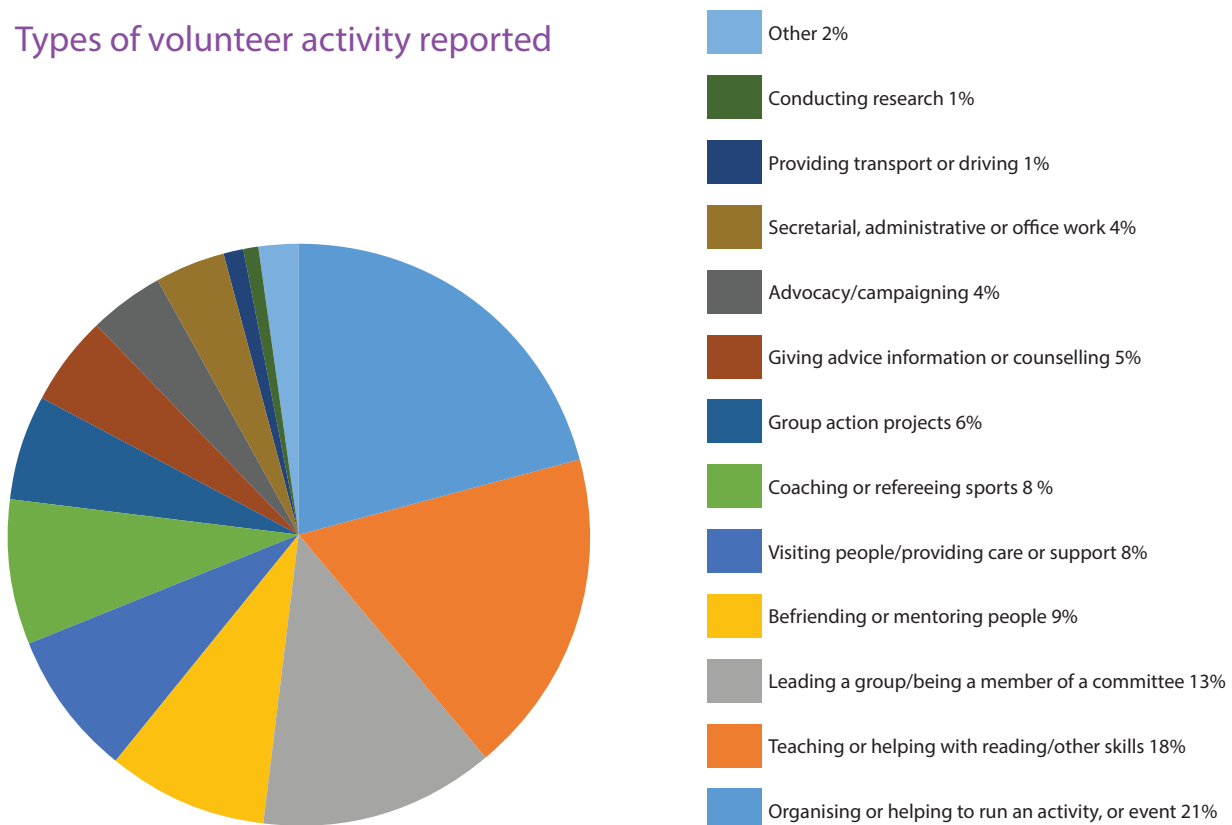
This gave an overall estimate of 2,427 volunteer hours per month delivered by the 326 active volunteers within the survey. This was equivalent to an average of nearly 7.4 hours labour donated per active volunteer per month. Assuming a 9 month academic year, this came to 21,843 hours donated during term time in a single year.



Types of Volunteering Activity

A broad range of activity was reported by the active volunteers in the survey, with many volunteers indicating they engaged in more than one type of volunteering. 21% of volunteer activity was to provide organisational support in helping to run events or activities. 18% of volunteer activity was in tutoring and providing learning support to others. Committee work made up a further 13% of volunteer effort, together with office and administration work (4%). Mentoring support and Counselling or advisory work took up 14% of volunteer time, 8% on providing personal care and 8% of time was focussed on sports activities and coaching. A further 11% of volunteer effort was devoted to Group Action Projects, Advocacy and Campaigning and other research.

Types of volunteer activity reported



Assessing the Value of Volunteer Time

Student volunteering is an unpaid activity and there are no financial flows associated with it. However, while it has no explicit financial value, volunteering has a clear economic value as it involves the use of resources (student time) to deliver services of one kind or another. Students undertake a variety of volunteering involving both skilled and unskilled labour. There are a number of ways currently in use for assessing the value of volunteer time. These include:

- a) Opportunity Cost - which recognises that the volunteer is giving up his/her time which they could have spent in paid work elsewhere or in enjoying their own leisure time.
- b) Wellbeing valuation - using a subjective wellbeing approach to assess the value or satisfaction that the volunteer receives from undertaking the volunteering
- c) Replacement cost or market rates - i.e. what the recipients of the volunteer service would have had to pay to receive the service if it had been done by a volunteer.

The first two approaches are more concerned with using the value or cost to the volunteer of their engagement in voluntary work to impute the economic value. The latter (market rate of the outputs) is focused on the value to the recipients of the services delivered.

'Replacement cost' or 'Market rates' are generally preferred as a way to impute economic value as they are more focussed on the benefit to the recipients of the services and are a closer approximation of what recipients would need to pay to receive the service. In assessing the value of the Volunteering delivered by DCU students we considered (and, where necessary, combined) two different approaches:

- Replacement cost at Market rates and
- Opportunity Cost of Student Time.

These two approaches are presented below.

Shadow-Pricing of Volunteer Time by using Market Rates ('Replacement Cost')

We assessed the economic value of the reported volunteering activity by identifying a 'market wage rate' for the value of the services delivered. Where the level of skill involved was not clear, and hence it was more difficult to determine a market rate, we applied the recognised 'minimum wage' rate as students could have commanded at least this amount for work delivered.

See Forster (2013) for an overview: Household Satellite Accounts - Valuing Voluntary Activity in the UK (ONS 2013)

In order to identify appropriate shadow prices for different types of volunteer services, we allocated the types of volunteer activity reported to five broad categories of activity:

- Administrative/Office Work or Organisational Assistance (38% of activity)
 - o Organising or helping to run an activity
 - o Leading a Group/Being Member of a Committee
 - o Secretarial, Administrative or Office Work
- Sports Coaching/Refereeing or Training assistance (8% of activity)
 - o Coaching or refereeing Sports
 - o Teaching/Advising/Counselling (23% of activity)
 - o Teaching or helping with reading/other skills
- Giving Information or Counselling
 - o General Care Support or Physical Assistance (17% of activity)
 - o Befriending or mentoring people
 - o Visiting people/providing care or support
- Other (14% of activity)
 - o Providing Transport or driving
 - o Advocacy/Campaigning
 - o Conducting research
 - o Group Action Projects
 - o Other

€8.65 is the minimum wage for an adult with some basic work experience

A shadow price was then derived for the volunteering activity based on an equivalent 'market rate' per hour for similar types of work for the four broadly identified categories of work. Rates were based on observed wage rates recorded in Mywage.org/Ireland (<http://www.mywage.org/ireland/home/salary>) For the remaining 'other' category, the Irish minimum wage of €8.65 per hour ²was used as the work undertaken was more difficult to categorise, but the minimum wage could be considered as the 'opportunity cost value' as it is the minimum value that the volunteer's time could command in paid work.

Shadow Price Wage Rates Using Imputed Market Rate *						
Category of work undertaken	Admin/Office or Organisational Assistance	Sports Coaching/ Refereeing/ Assisting Training	Teaching/ Advising/ Counselling	General Care Support or Physical Assistance	Other	Total
Assumed 'Market-rate'	€15.9/hour (Median wage rate for Filing Clerk)	€16.3/hour (Median wage rate for Fitness Instructor)	€20.5/hour (Average of median rate for Teaching Assistants and Other Training Professionals)	€14.5/hour (Median wage rate for Personal Care Workers)	€8.65/hour (2015 minimum rate of €8.65 for an adult with some experience)	Average rate €15.67/ hour (average across all activities)
Estimated Hours Delivered	8,300 hours (38% of activity)	1,747 hours (8% of activity)	4,805 hours (23% of activity)	3,932 hours (17% of activity)	3,058 hours (14% of activity)	21,843 hours (term-time)
Economic Value	€131,975	€28,483	€98,512	€57,010	€26,452	€342,433

*Totals are rounded

² €8.65 is the minimum wage for an adult with some basic work experience

Shadow Pricing of Volunteer Time using Minimum Wage Rates ('Opportunity Cost of Time')

In this approach we applied the 2015 adult minimum wage rate across the board, irrespective of the type of volunteering activity or possible skill levels involved. As students, individual volunteers may not be as fully qualified to the level that the previous 'market wage rate' would imply or require. Using a minimum wage recognises that the student is giving up his or her own leisure time and they could have spent that time earning at least a minimum wage elsewhere.

Shadow Price Wage Rates Using Minimum Wage Rate *						
Category of work undertaken	Admin/Office or Organisational Assistance	Sports Coaching/ Refereeing/ assisting Training	Teaching/ Advising/ Counselling	General Care Support or Physical Assistance	Other (14% of activity)	All types of volunteering
Minimum Wage rate	€8.65/ hour (2015 minimum rate of €8.65 for an adult with some basic experience)					
Estimated Hours Delivered	8,300 hours (38% of activity)	1,747 hours (8% of activity)	4,805 hours (23% of activity)	3,932 hours (17% of activity)	3,058 hours (14% of activity)	21,843 hours per month
Economic Value	€71,798	€15,115	€41,567	€34,010	€26,452	€188,942

*Totals are rounded

Overall Estimated Economic Value of Reported Volunteering Delivered in 2014/15

61% of the survey respondents reported regular volunteering activity during term time, with the average time spent by active student volunteers being 7.4 hours per month during term time, or over 60 hours per year. This equates to each active volunteer delivering on average unpaid labour with an economic value of between €64 and €116 per month or between €576 and €1044 per 9 month academic year.

The minimum economic value of the reported volunteering delivered by the surveyed students equated to €188,942, using the 2015 adult minimum wage rate of €8.65 to reflect the opportunity cost of the student time involved. However, if a market rate for the services delivered were to be applied, the value of the volunteering delivered could be as much as €342,433.



THE FUTURE

One clear lesson for the future we wish to take from this review of the issues and of our survey of DCU students is that if we are serious about developing this activity in the future there will really need to be better central coordination and university investment in this coordination. Some universities outside of Ireland are already embarking on this path. There is also a need to 'mainstream' student volunteering in the sense of integrating it with the learning and research agendas. For instance, by way of example, there is the University of Kent Certificate in Student Volunteering, whereby students obtain different levels of certification according to the hours allocated to volunteering activity. Hence, hours are recorded and there is an incentive for students to record them. There is also a top level award offered which counts towards a degree credit.

A number of HEIs in Ireland have also started to establish structures to enable, promote, or accredit student volunteering, e.g. NUI Galway ALIVE Programme, University of Limerick President Volunteer Awards, IT Tralee Civic Spirit Awards, IT Tallaght Certificate in Volunteering to name but a few. Some HEIs have built volunteering infrastructures and pioneered "online brokerage" bespoke management systems. However, it is also noted that it is "the embryonic stage" of capturing third level students' volunteering activity and its contribution to student personal, academic, and social development, as well as its internal (campus) and external (wider society) impact (Hanrahan 2014). This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Students who participate in volunteering activities would also benefit greatly from a more structured experience where they were able to define their goals and objectives; receive periodic feedback on their performance and be given opportunities to engage in reflective exercises in the form of journaling or other projects (Hibbert et. al, 2003; Hoppes, 2014;). Such exercises also allow students to engage in reflective practice which further assists them in examining their place in the world, the implication that their participation has upon others and how their career choices impact their personal values (Cox & McAdams, 2012; Erickson, 1968; Finlay et. al., 2010). Students would also benefit from supportive relationships with mentors and supervisors; opportunities to develop new skills; and settings where they can practice and develop leadership skills (Lerner & Overton, 2008; Sherrod, 2007). Non-profits would also benefit from conducting yearly surveys of volunteers that assess their motivations and expectations they have of their experience. If non-profits could identify factors that draw volunteers to their organisations and create realistically satisfying experiences, they could retain volunteers and perhaps engender generations of volunteers (Marta, 2006).

Responses gathered in the survey of DCU student volunteering suggest ways in which higher level institutions can work to remove the most common barriers to student voluntary engagements to promote this activity. The importance of enabled and easier access to information was emphasised. Information that students seek covers three dimensions: the "who", which includes campus and community contact points; the "what" - volunteering opportunities, especially once-off or short-term (considering the lack of time being cited as one of the main obstacles to student volunteering); and the "how" - information on how volunteering links with academic programmes, the ways it benefits personal, professional and educational development, and volunteer training events. Additionally, the role that technology can play in addressing the above to promote student volunteering was emphasised by a large number of respondents. At the same time, it is necessary to note that facilitating, administering and managing all the activity above requires human resources allocated specifically to the role of promoting volunteering among students. The following chapter discusses a way in which the introduction of an online student volunteering management system can address and minimise the above mentioned issues and obstacles.

In terms of the future policy and practice of student volunteering, Campus Engage, the national network of higher education institutions in Ireland tasked with promoting the civic engagement agenda across the sector, has recognised volunteering and student-led engagement as one of the core areas of work and has put in place a Working Group representing a number of universities and institutes of technology to lead the related initiatives.

As mentioned previously, a number of Irish universities and institutes of technology have started to establish structures to enable and certify student volunteering activity, which also includes the introduction of online administrative systems. However, there exists duplication of effort and cost across the sector relating to building volunteering infrastructures for individual HEIs, and there is lack of cohesive data at national level on the outputs and outcomes of student volunteering. Finally, the administration of student volunteering involves a substantial range of activities starting with building and maintaining relationships with communities, through creation and publicising of volunteering opportunities, connecting community and voluntary organisations with students and providing both groups with ongoing support, to capturing and reporting on all this activity and its impacts.

As a way of addressing the issues above, as well as to further increase and promote student volunteering nationally, Campus Engage, in collaboration with seven Irish HEIs (DCU, UL, NUIG, TCD, UCC, IT Tallaght, IT Tralee) have developed and built StudentVolunteer.ie - a national student volunteer management system, and an easy to use one-stop shop connecting higher education students with civil society organisations' volunteering opportunities.

In brief, StudentVolunteer.ie allows community organisations to register, create and advertise local, national and international volunteering opportunities; connect with and recruit student volunteers across Ireland; and manage all related activity online. Students in the participating HEIs are able to browse and apply for opportunities they are interested in; connect with local, national and international organisations; log and track their volunteering hours; and apply for awards and certificates at their HEI.

StudentVolunteer.ie serves a number of purposes for a variety of stakeholders: students, volunteer administrators and managers, community and voluntary organisations, and higher education institutions. Firstly, it is a cost-effective online infrastructure that minimises the duplication of effort and cost in managing student volunteering activity across third level sector. Its introduction reduces the administrative burden related to the management of this student activity. The significance of being able to use the system particularly for HEIs where currently there is no or limited administrative infrastructure for volunteering activities is immense. Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, StudentVolunteer.ie addresses some common obstacles and barriers to student volunteering through provision of an online hub and meeting point, an enabling framework, information and ease of access, especially crucial in the increasingly informaticised society.

Secondly, the management system is a vehicle to enable HEIs to engage with local, national and international community and voluntary organisations in a more efficient manner and expand campus/community networks thus enabling increased collaboration.

Thirdly, the development of StudentVolunteer.ie and its subsequent roll-out and ongoing administration facilitates a dialogue and mutual learning among practitioners at universities and institutes of technology across Ireland, and with community practitioners, hence promoting the development of good practice in student volunteering across the sector nationally.

Finally, the national student volunteering management system will provide valuable reports and insights into higher education student volunteering and its contribution to communities, producing a measurable base of evidence for further development, investment and research into further volunteering initiatives.

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