

Value Case Study – UK 2010

Over the past few years the University of Liverpool, UK has started to work more closely with The National Trust in the North West of England to provide some university lifelong learning (ULLL) opportunities for volunteers and staff managing volunteers.

The National Trust, UK

The National Trust (NT) is a charity completely independent of the UK Government with over 3.5 million members and 55,000 volunteers who gave 3.1 million hours of their time in 2008/09. It protects and opens to the public over 350 historic houses, gardens, industrial monuments and mills and also looks after large areas of the natural landscape.

The NT website is: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

The National Trust and Volunteers

As noted above, there are currently 55,000 volunteers, who undertake multiple roles at the large number of properties across the country. In addition to the social benefits of this role for its volunteers, the NT sees volunteering as a means of offering a number of opportunities to:

- acquire new or develop current skills. As the National Trust website notes:

“Some roles are highly specialised and ideally suited for professional people who want to develop their skills and experiences by supporting specific projects, such as conserving, maintaining and improving our buildings. Other roles do not require professional or specialist knowledge, but still allow volunteers to learn new skills from using their wide-ranging experiences.”

- embark on a new career. Again the website states:

“Volunteering for the National Trust can help you get a foot on the career ladder and give you hands-on experience of environmental, conservation, heritage work as well as leisure and tourism management.”

- Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) is for business and public sector employers wishing to make a difference to the environment, while fulfilling staff training and development objectives. Companies that participated last year include Nokia, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, e:on UK, Orange, Barclays, Nationwide, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Environment Agency, IBM, Microsoft, the Home Office and Ernst & Young, to name but a few.

UK Universities ULLL for Volunteer organisations

There are a number of universities across the UK offering short courses and full academic awards particularly aimed at the volunteering sector both for volunteers and those who manage these organisations. Some offer modules that particularly focus on the ‘business’ of running a volunteer organisation, for example on fundraising or human resources issues concerned with managing volunteers. Other modules encourage the volunteer to reflect on their own learning or to review the context of the voluntary sector as a whole.

University of Liverpool and ULLL for NT volunteers

The University of Liverpool in working with the local NT property (Speke Hall) has provided a number of ULLL opportunities for volunteers. It should be noted that some of the staff managing volunteers have also attended these sessions, and also staff from other properties across the North West. Currently these are early small steps to encourage engagement with the university for those volunteers who wish to do so:

- in the winter season, when the property is closed to the public, a tutor from the university has delivered a lecture to the volunteers about a particular historical aspect of relevance to the period of the House

on another occasion a lecturer talked to the volunteers about a historical figure involved in the initial organisation of the NT

both of these events allowed the volunteers to update and expand their knowledge both regarding the historical context to the property and also of their organisation. Evaluation has shown that the volunteers have felt this contributes to their effectiveness in their roles as room stewards e.g. in answering questions from the public.

- following on from these short sessions the University has delivered a number of short courses that are available to the public and volunteers alike. Volunteers are able to access these courses at a preferential fee. These have addressed in greater depth particular historical aspects of the property but also the wider link with art, literature, furniture, land management and architecture both of the relevant historical periods and beyond. Again volunteers have commented on how this has enhanced their knowledge and also exposed them to a wider perspective on how e.g. art and literature contribute to the rich history of the property. Some volunteers have not learned about these disciplines before and again they commented on how this has enhanced their effectiveness as a volunteer. They recognise that some members of the public are not just interested in the history of the House but want to engage in discussion of the wider context, and they consider these courses have facilitated a deeper interaction with the public.
- the University has a small accredited award (Personal & Professional Development Certificate) that is available for those in work or volunteering. This award includes opportunities for reflection on the learning experience throughout the award and also a shell module designed to allow the learner to capture their learning in the 'workplace'. The flexibility of this award allows for the unique role and experience of a volunteer to be captured and recognised for its innate learning as well as experience.

This award is similar to one offered by the University of Sunderland that works with the North East regional area of the NT in offering learning opportunities to its volunteers.

For other organisations in the North West the University has offered sessions for volunteers to review their learning from their volunteering experience and to explore whether they wish to engage in more formalised learning or wish to gain academic recognition for their learning in the 'workplace'.

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UK partner in VALUE project. August 2010