



Question Time Session.

The following is the minuted highlights of the Question Time session that took place at the Inspiring Volunteers conference. Questions posed were developed by delegates and answered by a panel that included Steven Marwick (Chair of VCE), Bill Howat (Chair of VDS), Harriet Eadie (Director of VCE), Dr Eleanor Logan (LPM Ltd), Colin Beck (Service Manager, Health and Social Care, City of Edinburgh Council), Tim Montgomery (Director of Operations, Royal Edinburgh Hospital).

Please note that not all questions were able to be answered in the time available. Unanswered questions have been included at the end of this document and points raised in them will be taken forward by the iGIVE panel in their work towards completion of the Strategy Action plan and the further development of the Strategy.

Question asked by Penny Radway:

Do the numbers (of how many people volunteer) really matter? We know that hundreds of people in North Edinburgh contribute a tremendous amount e.g. through local sports coaching to their community but aren't included in the numbers of people who volunteer.

EL: Believes quality of volunteering is what is important. Examples of island where everyone volunteers and sees it as being a member of the community. The numbers matter for funding but quality is more important.

BH: Numbers matter at highest level because the higher the numbers we have a more engaged society. Volunteering is about letting people do what they want to do. Administrative aspect of volunteering important. Numbers do matter because outcomes have to be measured.

Response from Penny: Glad that the panel are not overlooking volunteers who do not come into the statistics.

Question asked by John Arthur:

How can the volunteering strategy help sustain and develop the support, training and management of volunteers in Edinburgh, in context of the "procurement" of services from the voluntary sector and the credit crunch?

BH: Something we can bring into our agenda. We do lots of joint training and procurement but we have not yet thought how we can support this. Bringing staff and volunteer managers together.

HE: Challenging. Feel very strongly about collateral damage of procurement. Added value of volunteering is often outside this service. Damage to small groups of volunteers and making sure we can tie in the social added value into the procurement.

BH: I wonder if there is an opportunity eg of the Balgreen model of role models. We need to look at how we increase investment.

Response from John: This is going to have an impact on volunteering. Watch this space.

Response from David Jack, Corporate Services CEC: It would be best to contribute as much energy as possible to the framework of partnership action in Edinburgh. There are ways of contributing to the discussion on procurement.

Question from Emma Crawshaw:

How is the Strategy (iGIVE) addressing barriers to volunteering especially with regard to BME groups?

HE: No specific funded programme in strategy to support minority ethnic groups. Number of enquiries to Volunteer Centre reflect very positively indeed on minority ethnic groups. Example given earlier of Chinese group undertaking IIV. Lots of ad hoc things going on.

Response from Emma. They need support for infrastructure and support for good practice. Activity tends to be in particular pockets in particular communities. Mainstream organisation need to get involved. It can happen if we continue to resource the community based organisation this will produce leaders to develop other organisation.

HE: Consciously trying to make sure different faith communities are brought into the debate which crosses into ethnic groups.

Response from Emma. It is about supporting role models.

Question from Violet Dalton

How do we maintain the voice of volunteering and ensure it isn't subsumed into another role/and or organisation that doesn't have volunteering as its primary focus?

BH: Difficult question. This is about the formality of volunteering. Volunteering is about what people do voluntarily so people will find a way of expressing their voice. If new structures do not adequately represent the volunteers people will walk away. Key thing for this group is that here is the chance to ensure that the voice of volunteering is heard.

Prompted response from Geoff Pearson, Third Sector Team, Scottish Government.: Last week there was a session on volunteering. This government has not yet made a statement on volunteering. The Government has not walked away from promises. Previous policies still largely in place. Mr Swinney has talked about volunteering being built into life of Scotland. Meeting last week is first of work aiming for a definitive statement that the government wants to say about volunteering.

TM: We have a volunteering strategy in Edinburgh so may not need more guidance. We promote volunteering, implement the Strategy.

CB: It is about how we facilitate volunteering, not about how volunteering makes the economy grow.

HE: In Edinburgh the situation is positive. Volunteering is not owned for and with the third sector but by the actual volunteers. Our challenge to make sure it works well in Edinburgh.

Response from Violet. I often see volunteering tagged on to someone else's responsibility. If volunteering is everyone's responsibility it will fall off. There has to be a voice for volunteering. If it becomes everyone's responsibility then it is no-one's.

Question from Liz Ferguson

How do you propose to ensure that there is grassroots influence and involvement in local decision making?

TM: Difference between the rhetoric and the reality. Example of staff being trained for suicide awareness. From a council perspective is about neighbourhood partnerships etc.

Prompted response from Jenny Dawe, Leader of CEC: Local Neighbourhood Partnerships obvious way of ensuring grassroots influence. Fairer Scotland fund - there was involvement of volunteers in deciding what the criteria for use of funding would be. Through the Edinburgh index we have an objective and fair way of assessing where the need is. If people don't get involved the criteria will not develop in a desirable way.

HE: Endorses Liz's concerns. There is a threat to grassroots volunteering projects whether neighbourhood based or projects like Clanski. We must make sure our structures and systems have in place support for small groups which are challenged by funding.

Response from Liz: Important that communities are listened to and don't get lost in new structures. Neighbourhood Partnership is fine but some Neighbourhood Partnerships have struggled with criteria which has been imposed on them.

Question from Carol-Anne Alcorn

Does our current attitude to risk inhibit us from involving volunteers. In view of the more challenging areas of our work including working with people from socially excluded backgrounds and possibly with higher support needs. Carol-Anne Alcorn.

TM: Does not believe this is the case. We want to encourage volunteering opportunities so it should not be a barrier.

Prompted response from Marion Findlay, Health and Well Being Manager, VCE: Shares Carol-Ann's concerns. We have a strategy of being inclusive. This is a challenge to all involved in volunteering. There are people who with the right support and structures who can volunteer. Sometimes it is about making a fresh start and that sometimes involves a risk and we must take that on.

TM: We need to be allowed to manage risk. This does not mean eliminating risk. It is about being answerable for the decisions we make.

Response from Carol-Ann: If we are a socially inclusive Scotland it is about helping people being moved from being the helped to the helpers. Risk needs to be managed well and not exclude people.

Time did not permit the following questions to be debated, as detailed above these will be taken forward via iGIVE.

Herriot Watt is aiming for 50% of students to be volunteering. If this happened across Edinburgh would organisations have the capacity to cope?

Ian Boardman

Will Disclosure checks of volunteers really become transferable next year? (multiple disclosures really do put volunteers off!) e.g. RSVP school vols in Edinburgh are currently disclosed twice.

Terry Blair

We need a volunteering champion for Scotland/Edinburgh. How do we ensure that the right person is appointed?

Diane Lockhart

liV is somewhat exclusive for smaller orgs especially those that are volunteer led. It's a good thing – but could it be amplified into a set of minimum standards free to all to access?

Gail Vencker

How can we ensure sustainability if volunteering? Given that we all have to apply/chase funding for vol opportunities . Also given that there is likely to be an increase in demand for volunteering as a result of the economic downturn and a rise in employment.

Deborah Wilson

How do you get a system of commissioning that results in services that communities actually need (not just employability) recognising that people are more likely to volunteer if they can see the difference it makes to their community.

Jim Slaven

Achieving outcomes is the main focus for volunteering what's the best way of developing systems that demonstrate outcomes directly

Tom Lee

Given that there are differing levels of volunteering amongst the different community planning partnerships (CPP) how will the different CPP's ensure that volunteering is addressed and encouraged?

Graham Checkley

You can't beat a good volunteer manager! How do we inspire organisations to prioritise this role rather than have volunteer management as an add-on to other responsibilities

Colin Mackay

If Edinburgh model is to be rolled out across Scotland what needs to be put in place which is currently missing from the volunteer strategy?

Andrew Jackson

How would the panel help us to escape from the often sterile debates about funding and more on to "how do we solve problems together?"

David White

Given a developing system of community planning, how do we ensure that volunteering is not squeezed off?

Brid Cullen

With the current economic climate how do we ensure that volunteering doesn't become (or isn't perceived as) a cheap alternative to service provision and that volunteering itself put at risk

Ian Whyte