
Briefing: Programme for Government 2024-25

September 2024

Contents

Page 1	About Us
Page 2	Introduction
Page 2	Volunteering in Scotland
Page 3	Volunteering Policy Framework
Page 4	Cross-cutting Themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legitimate and Sustainable Volunteering• Fair and Transparent Funding• Volunteering Infrastructure
Page 4	
Page 4	
Page 5	
Page 5	Programme for Government Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child Poverty• Growing the Economy• Tackling the Climate Emergency• Ensuring High Quality and Sustainable Public Services
Page 5	
Page 7	
Page 9	
Page 11	
Page 14	Further Information and Next Steps

About Us

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland's national centre for volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

This briefing was developed following consultation with the Volunteering Action Plan [Policy Champions Network](#) (PCN).

Should any queries arise from our response, please contact our Senior Policy Officer by emailing sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk.

Introduction

The [2024-25 Programme for Government](#) provides a clear indication of the Government's priorities for the next year, in what the First Minister describes as 'times of unprecedented budgetary constraint'. Volunteers and volunteering already play an important role in delivering against these key priorities. They also provide a considerable return on investment despite the challenging fiscal landscape. With additional policy consideration, the potential for volunteering to support the Programme for Government is significant.

This briefing has been written to support policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the 2024/25 Programme for Government. It explores the contribution of volunteers and volunteering to a range of policy issues and references a number of Volunteer Scotland policy publications.

Volunteering in Scotland

Volunteers make a vital contribution to communities and services across Scotland. In 2022, volunteering was estimated to be worth [£5.3 billion to Scotland's economy](#). Volunteers support activities which encourage community connection, enrich the lives of our children and young people, enable access to vital advice and services, and promote participation in sport and culture.

Participation in volunteering also has significant [personal benefits](#). It increases the confidence and wellbeing of participants, as well as supporting the development of meta skills such as leadership, working as part of a team and using initiative. It also supports greater social connection and promotes civic values.

Despite the clear benefits, the [2022 Scottish Household survey](#) found that the adult (16+) formal volunteer participation rate has fallen to 22%, down from 26% in 2019¹. The time contributed by volunteers has also decreased, with [61 million fewer volunteering hours](#) in 2022 compared with 2018. This is equivalent to a £132 million decrease in the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's economy. The situation is even more concerning for [young volunteers](#) (aged 12-18) where formal volunteering participation dropped by 12 percentage points between 2019 and 2022, from 49% to 37%.

In 2022 we published a [report](#) which found that many volunteers were experiencing 'fatigue and burnout' coming out of the pandemic. This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that volunteers, as individuals, are not immune to the effects

¹ Formal volunteering is the unpaid voluntary giving of time through a group, club or organisation for the benefit of other people, the environment or wider society.

of the cost of living crisis. As reported in our [latest bulletin exploring the impact of the crisis on volunteering](#), 37% of Scottish adults recently reported a detrimental impact on their mental health due to concerns over money matters and 58% of Scottish adults have cut down on leisure activities. This situation is undoubtedly having an impact on individuals' ability and capacity to volunteer.

Volunteer involving organisations are also experiencing significant challenges, also detailed in our most recent bulletin, and this is having an impact on the experiences of volunteers. Organisations have seen an increase in demand for their services and increasing costs, often coupled with stagnating resource. This has led to increased expectations on many volunteers, often with less dedicated resource to support them. In the recent [NCVO Time Well Spent survey](#) on the volunteer experience, 26% of volunteers felt that their volunteering was becoming too much like paid work and 24% felt that their volunteering group or organisation had unreasonable expectations.

Volunteering Policy Framework

Volunteering has a strong policy infrastructure in Scotland. In 2019, the Scottish Government published the ['Volunteering for All: National Framework'](#), which detailed Scotland's Volunteering Outcomes and how these map to the National Outcomes Framework.

In 2020, The Youth Volunteering Innovation Project (Youth VIP) published [13 recommendations](#), co-produced with young people, to increase youth volunteering participation. All 13 recommendations were accepted by the Scottish Government.

In 2022, the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland jointly launched Scotland's [Volunteering Action Plan](#). This comprehensive plan details almost 50 actions for ensuring that everyone in Scotland can volunteer, more often, and throughout their lives.

Finally, in 2023, Volunteer Scotland relaunched the [Volunteer Charter](#). This Charter details 10 principles for the meaningful, inclusive, legitimate and safe engagement of volunteers. Since its relaunch, almost 250 organisations have pledged to uphold the principles of the Volunteer Charter as 'Charter Champions', including two Local Authorities and one NHS Board. This Charter has been endorsed in the Volunteering Action Plan and is the standard for good practice in volunteer involvement.

Cross-cutting Themes

Legitimate and Sustainable Volunteering

In his [foreword to the Programme for Government](#), the First Minister acknowledged that we are living in ‘times of unprecedented budgetary constraint’. Similarly, in a [letter to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee](#), the Finance Minister referenced the need for ‘tough and decisive action through the 2024-25 Scottish Budget to improve the underlying sustainability of our public finances.’

At a time where difficult decisions are undoubtedly required, it is vital that volunteers are not seen as a money-saving solution to budgetary constraints. As stated previously, many volunteers have already experienced heightened expectations in roles that are increasingly reminiscent of paid work. It is likely that this shift in volunteer experience has contributed in part to the recent decline in volunteer participation.

The [Volunteer Charter](#) details 10 principles for ensuring that volunteer engagement is fair, appropriate, and meaningful. These include that ‘effective structures should be put in place to support, train and develop volunteers’ and that ‘volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers, nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services’. **We would encourage government teams to ensure that any proposals for the Programme for Government align with the principles of the Volunteer Charter.**

Fair and Transparent Funding

Again, it is acknowledged that the Scottish Government is facing unprecedented financial challenges at present. However, the current funding situation faced by many third sector organisations is unsustainable. In our [consultation with volunteer involving organisations](#) for the 2024 Social Justice and Social Security Committee Inquiry into third sector funding principles, we have heard from organisations that have faced real-time cuts to their funding of 20-30% due to the lack of inflationary uplifts. We have also heard of instances where paid staff, delivering vital work on a range of government priorities, are at risk of redundancy on an annual basis due to the lack of multi-year funding.

This strain on third sector organisations is having a considerable impact on an already stretched volunteer workforce. Some organisations have reduced their paid resource to support volunteering. Others have increased their expectations of what volunteers will deliver, causing stress and resentment.

With this in mind, it is vital that Fair Funding for the third sector is prioritised.

We are in full agreement with [SCVO's Fair Funding calls](#), which include:

- Longer-term funding of three years or more
- Flexible, unrestricted core funding, which enables organisations to provide security, plan effectively, and fulfil good governance requirements
- Sustainable funding that includes inflation-based uplifts and full costs, including core operating costs
- Funding that accommodates paying staff at least the Real Living Wage

Volunteering Infrastructure

There are over [46,500 voluntary organisations](#) in Scotland's third sector. All third sector organisations are reliant on volunteer trustees or board members for their governance, and many rely on volunteers for the delivery of services. Indeed, [72%](#) of Scottish charities - almost 17,000 organisations - have no paid staff, and a further 20,000 unincorporated community groups are also likely to be volunteer-led.

Supporting such a diverse sector requires significant infrastructure including support and guidance on funding, governance, HR and volunteer management. This is particularly true for smaller organisations that are run by volunteers. This support is provided by a range of local and national infrastructure bodies, including Volunteer Scotland, SCVO and the network of 32 Third Sector Interface (TSI) bodies in each local authority area.

Given the overarching focus on community-based and preventative approaches in the Programme for Government, **it is vital that infrastructure organisations in both the public and third sector are given adequate resource and support.**

Programme for Government Priorities

Child poverty

1. Investment in community-based projects that provide early, preventative interventions to address child poverty

Many of the projects that support children and families in community settings are in the third sector, and a significant number of these will involve volunteers as part of their delivery model. This includes child befriending and mentoring schemes such as [Intandem](#), and intensive child and family support provided by organisations like [Aberlour](#) and the [Home-Start network](#).

To ensure such services can continue to provide vital public services which help to tackle child poverty, all third sector organisations in this space should be afforded fair funding. This will help to ensure that they can engage volunteers in roles which align with the Volunteer Charter.

2. Parental Unemployment

As detailed in our [response](#) to the 2023 consultation exploring parental unemployment, volunteering can be an important stepping stone for many parents seeking to get back into employment. More recently, our [briefing exploring the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's education and skills landscape](#) identified a number of recommendations for maximising the employability benefits of volunteering. These include:

- **Ensure that the next iteration of the Adult Learning Strategy better reflects volunteering as a progression route and learning opportunity for community-based adult learners.**
- **Ensure that the My World of Work portal includes a tool which allows individuals to reflect on the learning achieved through activities such as volunteering, including a clear link to meta skills as well as opportunities to record vocational skill development.**

3. Community-based youth work

The Programme for government commits to investment in community-based youth work, 'reaching young people outside the classroom and supporting access to education, training and employment'. [Youthlink Scotland](#) estimate that over 45,000 volunteers currently support youth work in Scotland. In recognition of the vital contribution of volunteers to youth work, our recent [briefing exploring the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's education and skills landscape](#) recommends that:

- **Volunteers are clearly identified as a vital yet distinct cohort of the Community Learning and Development (CLD) workforce in any resulting plans, and that future involvement of volunteers in CLD activity aligns with the Volunteer Charter.**
- **Sufficient investment in CLD provision (Adult Learning, Youth Work and Community Development) is provided to ensure that volunteers are engaged in meaningful and legitimate roles which are well supported and are not a replacement for paid workers.**

Growing the Economy

1. Removing Barriers to Employment

Volunteers have a key role in providing services which help to address barriers to employment, particularly through community learning and development (CLD). CLD supports the most vulnerable individuals and communities to learn, grow and develop through a range of educational engagement activities. [CLD Standards Council](#), the professional body for people who work or volunteer in CLD across Scotland, state that:

‘Volunteers across Scotland are helping adult learners get back into work, supporting newcomers to our country to learn English, building the confidence of community members to make a difference in their neighbourhoods’

In addition, the wellbeing and employability benefits of participating in volunteering are often more acute for people from marginalised groups. In [Scottish analysis of NCVO’s Time Well Spent survey](#) of the volunteer experience in 2022, it was found that 79% of Scottish adult volunteers reported that volunteering gave them new skills and experience. [Evidence](#) also suggests that the benefits of volunteering are greater for those with long term health conditions, poor mental wellbeing including social isolation, or those who are unemployed.

As stated previously, our [briefing exploring the contribution of volunteering to Scotland’s education and skills landscape](#) identified a number of recommendations for maximising the employability benefits of volunteering. These include:

- **That the next iteration of the Adult Learning Strategy better reflects volunteering as a progression route and learning opportunity for community-based adult learners.**
- **That the My World of Work portal includes a tool which allows individuals to reflect on the learning achieved through activities such as volunteering, including a clear link to meta skills as well as opportunities to record vocational skill development.**
- **That volunteers are clearly identified as a vital yet distinct cohort of the CLD workforce in any resulting plans, and that future involvement of volunteers in CLD activity aligns with the Volunteer Charter.**
- **That sufficient investment in CLD provision (Adult Learning, Youth Work and Community Development) is provided to ensure that volunteers are engaged in meaningful and legitimate roles which are well supported and are not a replacement for paid workers.**

2. Community Wealth Building and Land Reform

In our [2023 response to the government consultation on Community Wealth Building](#) (CWB), we identified the important role of volunteers creating thriving, resilient and sustainable communities. Volunteers have a vital role in the governance of community organisations, as well as the operational delivery of a range of community-based services. In particular, ambitions related to community empowerment and land reform are often reliant on volunteers in communities taking on governance responsibilities as trustees.

It is particularly important to recognise this contribution given the significant challenges and barriers many trustees are currently experiencing. In [research carried out by OSCR](#) in November 2020, it was found that many trustees were experiencing fatigue, particularly given that their voluntary trustee responsibilities were often additional to their paid work. This is reflected in the most recent [OSCR survey results for 2022](#), which found that the recruitment of trustees is a considerable issue. In fact, charities reporting recruitment of trustees as an issue increased from 17% in 2016 to 25% in 2022 – a 47% increase.

As such, we recommend the following:

- **That volunteers should be recognised as a key part of the CWB workforce within CWB legislation and subsequent guidance.**
- **That CWB legislation and the Land Reform Bill acknowledge the vital role of volunteers, and the barriers they face, in the governance of community assets.**

3. Culture and Tourism

The contribution of volunteers to Scotland’s culture and tourism industry is considerable. Volunteers support visitors to our larger culture and sporting events, as demonstrated in last year’s [Cycling World Championships](#). Indeed, the importance of volunteers to Scotland’s events was acknowledged in [Scotland’s National Events Strategy 2024-2035](#), launched earlier this year, which states that:

‘Scotland’s event volunteers are recognised as one of the key assets making Scotland the Perfect Stage. It is important to ensure that volunteers have meaningful experiences, and that the distinction between paid employment and volunteering is understood and respected, as set out in the Volunteer Charter.’

Volunteers also support access to cultural activities in local communities, often bringing visitors and income to the area. As detailed in our [response to the Culture in Communities inquiry](#) in April 2023, [4,973 voluntary organisations](#)

in Scotland supporting culture and the arts, 2,050 of whom are community groups. This includes events like the Pittenweem Arts Festival - the longest running and largest community-based visual arts festival in Scotland.

When inviting Scotland's culture sector to work together on Scotland's festivals, it is vital that community volunteers involved in the provision of cultural festivals are meaningfully included. It is also important, in the provision of funding for culture and arts, to ensure that third sector providers are funded fairly and sustainably in line with SCVO's calls for Fair Funding.

Tackling the Climate Emergency

1. National Adaptation Plan

As detailed in our responses to consultations on the [Circular Economy Bill](#), [Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity](#) and the [Flood Resilience Strategy](#), volunteers have a considerable role in responding to the dual nature and climate emergencies. Volunteers support our understanding of the impact of climate change through citizen science projects. Local volunteer groups also lead work to inform communities about the impact of climate change, and influence behaviour change.

When implementing the National Adaptation Plan, including the proposed development of climate-resilient local development plans, it is vital that the needs of community volunteers at the frontline of this work are identified and addressed. It is also important to ensure that the engagement of volunteers in activity to address the impact of climate change is developed in line with the Volunteer Charter.

2. Natural Environment Bill

As stated in our response to the consultation on [Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity](#), volunteers have a clear role in restoring and protecting nature. Volunteers are often involved in activity to plant trees, facilitate beach cleans or remove invasive species. They also support biodiversity and nature restoration through citizen science projects, including monitoring endangered species. Finally, many volunteers are custodians of community owned land. According to the [Scottish Land Commission](#), 211,998 hectares of land (2.6% of the total land area of Scotland) is under community ownership.

The Natural Environment Bill and subsequent policy documents must recognise the variety of ways that volunteers support the protection and

restoration of Scotland's natural environment, and identify actions for promoting nature-based volunteering in line with Action 33 of the Volunteering Action Plan.

Ensuring High Quality and Sustainable Public Services

1. Increasing capacity and access to Primary Care

When taking steps to shift the balance of care to preventative and community based support, it is important to acknowledge the role of volunteers in delivering community-based health interventions. In the [2022 Scottish Household Survey](#), it was revealed that 15% of Scotland's adult volunteers in formal roles support organisations or groups focused on health, disability and wellbeing. This equates to almost 150,000 people.

However, volunteering in this space has faced considerable decline in recent years, having dropped by four percentage points since 2019. This equates to a drop in the number of volunteers supporting health and disability organisations of approximately 65,000 and reflects the aforementioned challenges facing volunteers and volunteer involving organisations at present. **To ensure the sustainability of volunteer-led services funded to support the shift to preventative and community-based support, it is vital that fair funding principles, and the principles of the Volunteer Charter, are adopted.**

In addition, it is important to consider the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering as a preventative, community-based solution which can be 'prescribed'. Voluntary Health Scotland facilitate a network for Community Link Workers (CLWs) based in primary care settings across the country. Whilst the design and implementation of CLW programmes differs according to local need and infrastructure, the [Essential Connections report](#), published by Voluntary Health Scotland in 2023 states that all CLWs take a person-centred approach to support patients dealing with complex non-medical issues within their local community, often as a form of social prescribing.

Voluntary Health Scotland asked Community Link Workers in the network about volunteering as a referral pathway. It is clear from feedback (unpublished) that many CLWs regularly refer people to volunteering opportunities, with some referring 10-15 people per month. It was also reported that some CLWs see volunteering as a 'really good way to aid people's recovery' and that it can be a 'soft start to getting them into some sort of routine'.

With this in mind, we would reinforce the important role of social prescribing in the ambition to shift the balance of care to preventative and

community based support and would recommend the ongoing sustainable investment of the Community Link Worker network.

2. Reducing delayed discharge

We recognise the importance of ensuring that people can leave hospital and return home as soon as possible, both for the improved recovery of the patient and the sustainability of the NHS. Volunteers already have an important role in supporting people to return home from hospital more quickly through a range of community-based support services. These include services such as [community transport](#), [food delivery](#) and dedicated support such as the [Royal Voluntary Service Home from Hospital service](#). The potential contribution of volunteers was also recognised in the [2023-24 Winter Preparedness Plan](#), which committed to *'continue to explore how volunteers can provide support in discharge and consider appropriate use of established local and national volunteer partnerships.'*

With this in mind, **it is important to ensure that any new volunteer roles designed to address delayed discharge are appropriate and align with the principles of the [Volunteer Charter](#), particularly given the current financial climate.** The Volunteer Charter states that *'Volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers, nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services.'*

3. Curriculum and Qualifications Reform

In our recent [Volunteering, Education and Skills briefing](#), we explore the benefits of volunteering as an educational activity, particularly in the development of meta skills. For young people, the benefits are clear. In our analysis of the [Young People in Scotland Survey](#) from 2022, 35% of young volunteers reported that participation increased their confidence and 46% reported that they learned new skills. There is also evidence that volunteering increases civic values and ongoing civic engagement, including an increased likelihood of certain young adults voting in elections, and increased 'pro-environment behaviour' following nature-based volunteering.

To ensure that all young people can benefit from volunteering, we recommend the following curriculum changes as part of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle detailed in the Programme for Government:

- **The benefits of volunteering for individuals and communities should be explicitly referenced within the Health and Wellbeing curriculum area, emphasising the links to Curriculum for Excellence four capacities and SHANARRI indicators.**

- **The contribution of volunteers to community resilience, collective wellbeing and local democracy in Scotland should be explicitly referenced in the Social Studies experiences and outcomes, principles and practice, and benchmarks.**

In the briefing, we also explore some of the existing qualifications and course units that allow learners to reflect on the skills and personal development gained through participation in volunteering. These include the Volunteering Skills qualification, the Adult Achievement Award and the Personal Achievement Award. In addition, some further education establishments offer units or credits connected to volunteering as part of a wider course, such as the [Preparing to Volunteer Unit](#) and the [Managing Volunteers in Sport and Recreation Unit](#).

When progressing qualifications reform and diversifying assessment approaches, the greater representation of courses and units like the above (which are predominantly assessed through reflective written coursework) would be an appropriate consideration for assessing more practical or vocational learning experiences.

4. National Care Service

Volunteer Scotland have had an active voice in promoting the role of volunteers to the provision of social care since plans for a National Care Service were first progressed. We [responded](#) to the consultation on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill in September 2022, exploring the contribution of volunteers in both community and residential care or respite settings.

Given the explicit recognition of volunteers as part of the Care workforce in guidance accompanying the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019, published earlier this year, we continue to advocate for this to be mirrored in plans for the National Care Service workforce. This would help to ensure that volunteers supporting the National Care Service are engaged in appropriate and sustainable roles which align with the Volunteer Charter.

5. Reform of the Children's Hearing System

Volunteer Scotland has maintained an active interest in ongoing discussions regarding reform of the Children's Hearing System, particularly given the central role of volunteers in the current model. In November 2023, we shared a [briefing](#) with the Education, Children and Young People Committee providing some reflections and points of clarity. In the briefing, we stated that we were in support of the review of volunteer roles in the Children's Hearing System recommended in the Hearings for Children report given the changing nature of the panel member experience. Indeed, it is vital to continuously review any volunteer role in

public service delivery to ensure that it still aligns with the principles of the Volunteer Charter and has not changed to the point that it is now more appropriate for a paid employee.

We recognise that the government has committed to maintaining a ‘volunteer element’ in the Children’s Hearing Service model in their response to their response to the Hearings for Children Report. **We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the ongoing role of volunteers in the Children’s Hearing Service with the Government as discussions about reform progress.**

6. Local Governance and Democracy Matters

In our [response to the Democracy Matters consultation](#) in February this year, we explore the central role of volunteers in local decision-making and community empowerment. Community Councils, – referred to in a [SPICe publication](#) as the ‘forgotten frontline of democracy’ – are led by volunteers, not to mention development trusts and committees taking on the responsibility for community assets such as buildings or green spaces.

In consultations with our networks on local democracy, we have experienced a growing cynicism from many community volunteers that efforts to devolve decision-making to communities is a response to the current financial challenges experienced by local and national governments. Indeed, one volunteer in the Volunteering Action Plan Policy Champions Network referred to community asset transfer as ‘community liability transfer’, whilst another stated that many services previously provided by the local council have been ‘offloaded’ onto the local community with no additional resource to support.

To ensure that ambitions to further progress the findings of the Democracy Matters national engagement are sustainable, and to counter the growing cynicism that we are hearing from community-based volunteers, it is vital that appropriate resource is identified at the earliest possible stage. We have recommend the following:

- **That proposed powers which enable communities to take on services or assets previously managed by public bodies also ensure that the public resource allocated to those services or assets is re-routed to communities.**
- **That all the proposed powers for strengthening local decision-making are aligned with the principles of the Volunteer Charter.**

- **A clear commitment from both central and local government in Scotland to the principles of Fair Funding around all community empowerment activity.**

7. New Scots Delivery Plan

Many organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers involve volunteers to provide person-centred community-led services. This can include delivering English language classes or supporting individuals to integrate into their community. We have seen this most recently with the outpouring of community support for refugees from Ukraine.

In addition, the benefits of participating in volunteering are considerable for asylum seekers and refugees. Indeed, the [evaluation of the Scottish Government's 2018-22 Refugee Integration Strategy](#) found that the majority of refugees and asylum seekers interviewed for the evaluation had been involved in volunteering, and that this helped them to counter boredom, to socialise, to give something back and to build their confidence speaking English. It was also reported that volunteering 'helped their mental health and reduced the isolating effects of not being able to have paid employment.' However, the report also found that 'volunteering was not always possible [for refugees and asylum seekers] due to the cost of transport, caring responsibilities or ill health'.

Given the clear benefits of volunteering for asylum seekers and refugees, we recommend that the implementation of the New Scots Delivery Plan includes resource to identify and address barriers to volunteering for New Scots.

Further Information and Next Steps

Volunteer Scotland have produced a range of consultation responses, briefings and blogs exploring the topics raised in this briefing in more detail. These can be found on the [Policy Publications page](#) of our website.

If you would like to explore the strategic contribution of volunteering to a particular government priority, please contact our Senior Policy Officer, Sarah Latto, on sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk.



Volunteer Scotland
Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ
T: 01786 479593 E: hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk
W: volunteerscotland.net



[@volscotland](https://twitter.com/volscotland)



[@volscotland](https://www.facebook.com/volscotland)



[@volunteerscotland](https://www.instagram.com/volunteerscotland)