All Party Parliamentary Group on Civil Society and Volunteering.

Building on sound foundations: scaling up Employer Supported Volunteering.

14th July 2015, 4pm

Committee Room 9, House of Commons

Chairs:

- Nick Hurd MP
- Baroness Pitkeathley

Speakers

- Katerina Rudiger, Head of Skills and Policy Campaigns at CIPD.
- Kate Van Der Plank, Head of UK Community Investment at the National Grid. Kate has started to take on a new role at Step Up To Serve as well this month, as their Business Engagement Director.
- Anne Heal MD Strategy & BT Volunteering.
- Linz Darlington, CEO, Benefacto.

Welcome from the Chair, Nick Hurd MP

- It is important that organisations make effective use of the time being allocated for this. The government’s policy is a ‘game changer.’

Katerina Rudiger (CIPD)

- Human Resources (HR) is in a position to lead change in this area.
- HR can provide volunteering solutions. For example, mentoring young jobseekers and ex-offenders.
- HR can also help solve current challenges to ESV. For example only a third of organisations integrate volunteering into their HR policies.
- This is despite the benefits to companies of embracing ESV:
  - Skills development, particularly soft skills gained through volunteering.
  - Increasingly young people care about the culture of the company they work for, not just about its primary business aim. Employees want to know what an organisation does in its communities.
- CIPD is keen to help companies bridge this gap and integrate volunteering.
- CIPD provides practical support and guidance on how to integrate volunteering into recruitment practices.
- CIPD works with partners like NCVO to foster relationships between business and charities.
- A problem is that charities feel unable to talk to employers about the kind of capacity they need. A lot can be done in this area.
- CIPD also works closely with Team London.
- Please do get in touch with CIPD if there is anything else we can do to help the implementation of ESV.
**Nick Hurd MP:** Are you planning to commission any research to try and evidence a link between ESV and productivity?

**Katerina Rudiger:** We have really only looked at skills development so far.

**Kate Van Der Plank (National Grid/Step Up To Serve)**

- CIPD have been a driving force in this area and a source of expertise.
- The National Grid connects people which puts us at the heart of communities. Through ESV we share the skill and expertise of our colleagues and receive a good return on this investment.

**Benefits**

- High quality volunteering opportunities help employees to develop the skills relevant to our business. For example, together with Volunteering Matters we have developed a programme called Good Leaders. This sets our employees a commercial challenge with a charity partner and puts them on boards with charity trustees.
- Young people who have been involved in volunteering make better recruits because they have had the opportunity to develop soft skills. Volunteering is part of the recruitment campaign and the new graduates’ induction. It is a great way of making everyone feel involved.

**Challenges**

- To create high quality volunteering opportunities so that there is a value in it to a business. By this we mean sharing business skills.
- ESV requires a lot of management which is not such a problem for bigger organisations but trickier for SMEs.
- The government policy on ESV is to allow three days paid volunteering leave. This will considerably increase the supply of volunteers but many charities are not really volunteer ready yet.
- Businesses must think flexibly about allowing people a few hours every week. They must also see how they can facilitate more skills based volunteering.

**Anne Heal (BT)**

- BT regards volunteering as being at the heart of its purpose.
- BT supports communities through people skills and technology. Volunteering fits in with this.
- BT’s goal is to have 66 percent of its employees volunteering by 2020.
- Volunteering must voluntary and not mandated. If employees feel passionately about a particular cause then BT will support that, although the company also has a suggested volunteering activities programme.
- At BT staff are already allowed three days volunteering leave per year.
- ESV improves employer brand and means staff are more engaged and committed.
- For charities there is a concrete and practical benefit.
- Through BT’s volunteering programme there are 3500 groups supported in the community, a programme for trustees and school governors and many magistrates. It is a varied programme that includes sports coaching and team volunteering too.

- It is sometimes difficult to get people to admit that they volunteer. So BT runs a Chairman’s award for volunteering and the winner receives a donation to their chosen charity.
Matching charities and volunteers can be a challenge, particularly with reference to finding high quality volunteering placements.

BT encourages a culture of participation. They want people to have a go at volunteering.

The company is especially proud of its micro volunteering package. This is an immensely powerful way of unlocking people’s interest and getting them to try volunteering.

Nick Hurd MP: Do you think that the 3 days paid leave [specified in government policy] will challenging to implement?

Anne Heal: Mandating volunteering is problematic and it would also be harder for SMEs to implement.

Linz Darlington (Benefacto)

- David Cameron bringing in ESV is an excellent idea.
- The experience is really helpful to charities and volunteers.
- However, ESV in its current form is broken. Staff participation is low. The proportion of volunteers taking up opportunities stands at 20 percent. There needs to be a widespread mechanism for enlisting volunteers and corporate organisations need support. We also need to make it really easy for volunteers to get involved, particularly when many of them lead busy lives.
- Purely increasing paid volunteering leave will not help.

Q & A

Baroness Pitkeathley: What makes a charity volunteer ready?

Kate Van Der Plank: Being volunteer ready means having the capacity to manage volunteers.

Discussion with the floor

Implementation

Karl Wilding from NCVO asked if there was a danger that in legislating for volunteering, the government would have the opposite effect to the one desired. Would ESV legislation be perceived as regulation by the business sector? Anne Heal emphasized that volunteering must be voluntary and she had assumed that it would not be made mandatory for employees by legislation but that they would have a right to ESV if they chose to undertake it. Katerina Rudiger said that the biggest risk is that employees do not make the most of this opportunity. Managers must be supported by being shown the benefits of skills development and helped to manage ESV on a daily basis. It was commented that we should focus on a connectivity between supply and demand so that projects tackle real problems facing the community.

Helen Lamb from Marsh raised the difficulty of implementing ESV in global companies which prefer their staff to be treated equally across the organisation. The panel agreed that this was an issue and that consistency for companies was important

Tensions between volunteering and brand identity

A question from the floor focused on this issue and Anne Heal explained that BT do have some rules about who an employee can volunteer with. These rules are in line with BT’s policies on political and religious neutrality and employees may not choose an organisation which would bring BT’s brand into disrepute. Employees seem to find it easy to keep within those rules. Linz Darlington reiterated that corporate firms do have to think about their branding.

Emily Stewart from Cancer Research UK raised the issue of whether ESV being a branding opportunity for commercial companies reinforced a negative perception of charities as in need. Katerina Rudiger said it emphasised only that charities were resource poor and that this type of
need did not make them subordinate. Instead, charities were strong in skills. Anne Heal said she saw ESV as charities extending their reach. Linz Darlington and Kate Van Der Plank emphasised that the relationship was mutually advantageous.

**Volunteering**

Rebecca Veitch from Home-Start asked whether volunteers would use this opportunity to expand on their volunteering journey. Anne Heal noted that it was sometimes difficult for companies to facilitate regular volunteering. The floor also discussed whether there was a tension between providing employees with choice and also encouraging them to find high quality volunteering placements. Katerina Rudiger pointed to Team London as an example of achieving both these goals and also keeping volunteering flexible. Nick Hurd MP said that even using existing skills in a new setting is challenging.

Lizzie Adams from the Small Charities Coalition asked how staff could be encouraged to admit they are volunteering. Anne Heal suggested making volunteering systems as easy and user friendly as possible. At BT they have Chairman’s awards for volunteering and emphasise that it is a part of the company’s culture.

Chloe Stables from NCVO asked if there are groups of staff which can be identified as keener on volunteering than others. Anne Heal said it is not that senior managers are resistant to volunteering but it can be tricky for call centre workers and engineers who do not work ordinary hours. However, they can undertake micro volunteering instead. Kate Van Der Plank said that field workers cannot really be taken off the job and it can be hard for middle managers who are balancing delivery targets to find the time to volunteer.

**Brokerage and placing volunteers**

It was asked whether there was an appetite for volunteer brokerage. Linz Darlington said that one of the issues for volunteering is that it is always a challenge to unite the demands of the volunteers, charities and businesses. Kate Van Der Plank stressed that brokers were useful because they have all the information in one place. There was a comment made by the Shaw Trust that working with brokers can be onerous in terms of overheads and that it would be really helpful if this could be borne in mind.

The useful role of mentors for charities was also discussed and the example of the BITC connectors was given. HR could also play a role in this. Team London shared how workshops with charities had been really useful and their strategies for placing keen employees. There was also a question from Rebecca Veitch at Home-Start (which has 250 local groups) on whether it was best to contact a large company at a local or national level. Both Anne Heal and Kate Van Der Plank suggested that it was best to start at the national level and work down.