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## HOW UK UNIVERSITIES ENGAGE WITH THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES: A STUDY OF EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING

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### ABSTRACT

In 2000 the UK Prime Minister pledged that employers should be encouraged to release staff for one day a year to undertake volunteering activity. Many and varied programmes are being set up to assist employees to volunteer, whether during work hours or in their own time. This is called employer supported volunteering (ESV). This paper discusses the increasing use of ESV and aims to provide an understanding of the key concepts of this phenomenon. An email survey was completed of all 122 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. University websites linked to volunteering for staff and students were also examined. Responses were received from 65 institutions (a response rate of 53%). This initial research reveals that university commitment to ESV varies across the sector. Many universities support staff volunteering and informally encourage links with the local community through voluntary activity but only seven institutions had developed a formal policy allowing staff time off work to volunteer. From this initial research, three best practice universities have emerged and their activities are discussed. The next stage in this project is to research the areas identified and to explore the extent of volunteering by university staff and staff attitudes to volunteering with a view to providing a full picture of ESV in the UK university sector

**KEYWORDS** Corporate social responsibility, employee supported volunteering, corporate volunteering, community engagement

### INTRODUCTION

In 2003, 42% of the population (almost 18 million people) in England and Wales volunteered formally at least once, with 22% volunteering formally at least once a month<sup>1</sup>. However, a large proportion of voluntary organisations (41%) believe it will become harder to recruit volunteers. In a survey of volunteering-involving organisations in the UK, among the reasons given for a decline in volunteering were lack of time amongst potential volunteers and declining unemployment in certain areas<sup>2</sup>. As voluntary organisations in the UK are becoming more engaged in a broader range of public service activities<sup>3</sup> they are depending on fewer volunteers doing more work. There is an increasing need to encourage and enable those previously not engaged in volunteering to donate their time.

In order to increase the pool of volunteers some firms are allowing employees to have time off work (either paid or unpaid) to undertake voluntary work in the community. In recent years the UK government has identified and has been active in encouraging business organisations to support the concept of volunteering. In 2000 Tony Blair pledged that employers should be encouraged to release staff for one day a year to undertake volunteering activity. This was reiterated by Gordon Brown in 2006 when he set a challenge to industrialists in

*[International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing \(publication details forthcoming\)](#)*

Britain to work towards a position where “every employer has a volunteering scheme for their employees”<sup>4</sup>. Many and varied programmes are already in place to assist employees to volunteer, whether during work hours or in their own time. Such schemes are described in a number of ways; the most commonly used terms being employer supported volunteering, employee volunteer programmes, corporate volunteerism, corporate community involvement, community engagement. This paper will use the term employer supported volunteering (ESV).

Although much has been written on volunteering and the characteristics of volunteers<sup>5</sup>, there has been relatively little published on ESV. This paper aims to provide an understanding of the key concepts of this phenomenon. It also highlights some of the key factors arising from its operation through an examination of ESV in the UK university sector. The paper contributes to the current dialogue about volunteering by drawing together the available literature to provide an overview of the main issues.

Over the last ten years many Employee Supported Volunteering (ESV) schemes have been introduced in the UK. They can be divided into two categories: ‘released’ (where the business organisation specifically releases staff from their paid employment into the voluntary and community sector) and ‘own-time’ (where staff are encouraged to become involved in volunteering outside of their paid work). Meijs and Van der Voort<sup>6</sup> have presented a typology for ESV around these two dimensions. However, there are variations within these two categories. ESV may include giving staff time off to volunteer, acting as a broker to find volunteering opportunities for staff, organising team volunteering events or seconding a member of staff to a voluntary organisation. Where time off work is given this may be a formal policy or may be operated informally. Staff may be allowed to leave early to volunteer, use flexi-time or be granted a certain number of hours or days per year for volunteering. ESV also varies in terms of level of involvement, ranging from prolonged (e.g. once a month over several years) to an annual activity. The schemes may be open to current employees, retired staff and to others linked to the organisation.

Employee Supported Volunteering (ESV) is becoming one of the fastest-growing areas of voluntary activity in the UK<sup>7</sup>, throughout Western Europe<sup>8</sup> and North America<sup>9</sup>. The growth in ESV is part of a much larger movement to encourage the commercial and public sectors to become more socially aware and accountable. Employers are increasingly realising that they have responsibilities to a number of stakeholders<sup>10</sup>. Business organisations are expected to exhibit ethical behaviour and moral management and to focus on the social impact of their activities.

Integrating these issues with business operations and strategy is known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Hess et al<sup>11</sup> identify three categories of drivers behind CSR. *The competitive advantage factor* – As traditional sources of competitive advantage become more accessible and less significant, better corporate image gained through CSR strategies provides firms with harder to imitate and less tangible sources of competitive advantage. *The moral marketplace factor* – Successful firms respond to changes in the attitudes of consumers and other stakeholders. There is evidence of growing public support for CSR strategies which creates certain obligations for managers. *The comparative advantage factor* – Some corporations have developed a unique combination of knowledge and resources that provide them with a comparative

advantage over other organisations and even governments in being able to respond to particular problems.

As more organisations acknowledge philanthropic responsibility and integrate this approach into their business strategy, the business case for ESV is becoming more widely recognised and the trend is likely to continue<sup>12</sup>. Cause related marketing is used by many companies, demonstrating the mutually beneficial nature of working alongside and being closely linked with not-for-profit / voluntary organisations<sup>13</sup>. Although it is often difficult to quantify its impact, there is evidence to suggest that ESV benefits the business organisation, employees, the voluntary organisation and society in general. As a result ESV has been described by several commentators as a 'win-win' situation<sup>14</sup>.

Organisations involved in ESV profit in a number of ways. ESV demonstrates a real commitment to the local community and has an impact on the perceptions of customers and other stakeholders, such as employees and suppliers. Establishing contacts with non-profit organisations not only creates a positive local profile<sup>15</sup> but can have an affirmative effect on corporate image and reputation<sup>16</sup>. Through increasing profitability and brand reputation a company's competitive edge increases<sup>17</sup>. Consumers might be more eager to do business with those organisations they believe are ethical and have a social conscience<sup>18</sup>. ESV makes sound business sense in other ways. It provides employees who volunteer with a perspective external to the organisation, exposing them to different environments and challenges<sup>19</sup> and enables them to make useful contacts outside the organisation<sup>20</sup>. This external influence enhances the ability of volunteers to identify more innovative approaches in responding to difficulties in the workplace<sup>21</sup>.

Involvement in community schemes has a positive impact on employees' perception of the work organisation<sup>22</sup>. Those involved in ESV are more committed to the organisation<sup>23</sup>. Being part of an organisation involved in ESV has a positive impact even on those who do not participate<sup>24</sup>. Being associated with a worthwhile cause builds greater loyalty amongst staff<sup>25</sup>. This commitment to the organisation may be a factor in employee retention. Several commentators report that ESV cuts employee turnover, allowing organisations to retain high quality employees<sup>26</sup>, fosters job satisfaction<sup>27</sup> and raises staff morale<sup>28</sup>. Employers benefit as not only does ESV boost morale but also productivity<sup>29</sup>.

ESV is also an important human resource tool. It aids in recruitment, enabling organisations to attract better employees<sup>30</sup>, and facilitates employee development in that it helps employees develop job related skills such as team working<sup>31</sup>, leadership, greater social awareness<sup>32</sup> and interpersonal skills<sup>33</sup>. Acquiring relevant work related skills through volunteering can be a low cost answer to corporate training needs as organisations have less necessity to rely on expensive training programmes or professional staff development seminars<sup>34</sup>.

Not only does the employer benefit from ESV but so do the employees involved. Employees themselves see the benefits of volunteering in enhancing skills related to work through taking on new roles as a volunteer and bringing newly acquired skills back into the workplace. The most frequently cited are transferable skills such as communication<sup>35</sup>, time management<sup>36</sup> and leadership<sup>37</sup>. Developing new skills and building on existing ones increases self esteem and confidence<sup>38</sup>. Taking time out from work to volunteer reduces the pressures of the workplace, energising them so that they can better take on the

challenges of the job when they return<sup>39</sup>. For the career minded volunteering may enhance the CV and open up new career possibilities. For those coming to the end of their careers it can help the transition from work to retirement.

The receiving voluntary organisation also benefits from ESV through gaining extra volunteers but, in addition, often acquires a volunteer with a fresh perspective on activities and projects<sup>40</sup> and differing skills from those who would normally come to that organisation as ESV attracts people different from the traditional volunteer<sup>41</sup>. ESV encourages more general volunteering, adding to the pool of volunteers. Those employees volunteering through ESV also tend to participate in volunteering outside work time<sup>42</sup> and people who work with colleagues who volunteer are more likely to volunteer themselves<sup>43</sup>.

Finally, there are benefits to the wider community. Those who participate in ESV have an opportunity to mix with people they might not normally have contact with. This external focus make them more aware of the problems facing people in the community and get to know their local district better<sup>44</sup> as well as an increased understanding of social issues<sup>45</sup>. ESV adds sustainable value to the local community. The co-learning which arises between the local region and businesses involved in ESV can increase prosperity in a community<sup>46</sup>.

This paper reports on the first stage of a research project funded by the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) to investigate ESV in UK universities. HEACF is supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Its role is to enhance the key role played by higher education institutions in their local community and is part of the Government's wider Active Community initiative, one of a package of measures designed to encourage greater involvement of students and staff in voluntary and community activities.

Volunteering schemes in UK universities may be available to employed staff, students and alumni. As well as the benefits of ESV outlined above university staff involvement in volunteering is considered to be particularly important as their participation exemplifies the university's commitment to reaching out to all sections of the community. Staff volunteers also act as ambassadors for university outreach programmes. Some staff are proactive in developing and leading projects with student teams (often, but not always, subject-related). Additional benefits to the university include developing contacts outside work-related networks, raising the profile of the department, boosting kudos through faculty-based programmes and building links with organisations that may help build the university as a business<sup>47</sup>.

This research project aims to examine volunteering as an integral part of university culture by examining university policies, identifying the extent of volunteering by university staff and exploring staff attitudes to volunteering. The first stage of the project investigates policies across the higher education sector regarding institutions' support for volunteering by staff to identify examples of best practice with a view to assisting those currently developing and managing such schemes. This paper reports on the initial findings of this first phase of the study. Later stages will examine, through a questionnaire and qualitative research, staff attitudes to volunteering.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This part of the study was an exploratory investigation as there has been little previous research into ESV and there appears to be an absence of work

examining ESV in the UK higher education sector. One objective of the study was to “*discover significant variables in the field situation, to discover relations among variables and to lay a groundwork for later, more systematic and rigorous testing of hypotheses*”<sup>48</sup>.

In order to obtain an overview of ESV in UK Higher Education Institutions an email survey was completed of all 122 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Given the exploratory nature of the study the survey adopted an open approach. An email survey was used as ESV schemes may be managed by a variety of departments<sup>49</sup> and as the role of the contact person for the survey was likely to differ between organisations distribution by email allowed the survey to be forwarded within the university to the most appropriate person. Consequently, the survey was completed by whoever had responsibility for ESV in the university. This became a variable to be identified.

Each respondent was asked to provide details of the university’s policy regarding ESV, its development and operation. This included questions about the stage the university was at in developing its ESV policy (for example, its intention to introduce a policy or if it was working towards one, the adoption of an informal policy or a detailed and written formal policy, policy content). University websites linked to volunteering for staff and students were also examined for their content and degree of emphasis on staff involvement. Telephone / email follow-up was undertaken for further information and/or clarification as required. There was also an attempt to increase the response rate through follow-up emails. During this stage of the research several universities contacted the researchers to collect information about ESV for information to enable them to progress with developing their ESV policy.

From the survey and analysis of the websites three universities emerged as examples of best practice (these institutions had also been frequently cited by other universities as leaders in this field). These three organisations were selected for a collective case study. Cases were chosen “*to provide insight into an issue ...because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorising, about a still larger selection of cases*”<sup>60</sup>. They were chosen as examples of best practice by the researchers using judgemental sampling. The criteria for their selection included the degree of commitment by the university to ESV, the policies adopted, the number of staff involved in volunteering and the variety of voluntary projects undertaken.

In addition to data collected in the survey, further data were collected from each of the three cases through documents and material provided by the university. Key informant in-depth interviews were held with the contact responsible for employee volunteering. Each interview followed an interview schedule to gather data on the organisation’s ESV policy, its development, management, operation and future plans. Benefits of the scheme to the institution, staff, voluntary organisations and other stakeholders were included as well as problems and disadvantages. After transcription, the interview data was analysed using data reduction techniques<sup>51</sup>. Using data collected on each case within case analysis was undertaken. To enable comparisons to be made while preserving the uniqueness of each case a cross-case analysis was then carried out<sup>52</sup>.

## FINDINGS

Within universities there is evidence of a great deal of voluntary activity being undertaken. Most of the work supported through HEACF concentrates on encouraging the involvement of students in voluntary work. This support has been extended by a number of universities to staff employed by the Student Union. This can be classed as ESV but, as the benefits to the employing organisation as outlined above would differ, this research concentrates on all staff directly employed by the university and not just the Student Union.

Responses were received from 52 universities. Follow-up telephone calls and emails increased this to 65 (a response rate of 53%). The follow-up process indicated that non-respondents tended to be those which did not have a policy and had no plans to introduce one in the near future. It could be inferred that those universities which were committed to ESV were more likely to have responded.

The key findings can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. This initial research reveals that university commitment to ESV varies across the sector. Of those who responded, 36 stated that they did not have an ESV policy. However, many universities do support staff volunteering and informally encourage links with the local community through voluntary activity. Only 10 institutions had developed a formal policy allowing staff time off work to volunteer but 33 universities did have a policy on Public Service volunteering (allowing time off work for activities such as jury service, magistrates' or school governor duties, reserve forces commitments) and 16 establishments were working on an ESV policy. It should be noted that this data underestimates the full extent of voluntary activity being supported by universities as many more universities are releasing staff from their paid employment into the voluntary and community sector. However, this is difficult to measure as it may not be arranged centrally but is agreed locally with the employee's line manager. In addition, through HEACF funded activities, staff are encouraged by the university to become involved in volunteering in their own time.

Of the 122 universities contacted, 59 are 'Old' universities. Within the UK University sector 'Old' universities are those regarded as having the status of a university before the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 came into force. They are, therefore, the longer established universities. In 1994 19 of these formed the Russell Group. These universities are considered the major research-intensive universities of the United Kingdom. Of those working on ESV policies, there is no significant difference between university status. However, universities with a formal policy are more likely to be 'Old' rather than 'New' universities.

Across the sector the organisation of ESV programmes within universities varies greatly. In some institutions responsibility lies with senior management, in others with a more junior employee. For those universities actively working on an ESV policy or with a policy in place the majority locate the responsibility for ESV within Human Resources (see Tables 1 and 2). However, some universities prefer their volunteering activities to be housed closer to the community and so position the responsibility for ESV in those centres dealing with community engagement or specifically volunteering. There are instances of ESV being part of Corporate Social Responsibility with the ESV policy role being at the centre of the university in Marketing or the University Executive.

**Table 1. Universities with ESV policies**

<b>University</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Public Service Policy</b>	<b>Staff policy</b>	<b>University Type</b>
University Of The Arts London	Voluntary projects manager		Arrangements with line manager	New
University of Cambridge	Community Relations Coordinator		Arrangements with line manager	Old <i>Russell Group</i>
East Anglia	Volunteer Coordinator (Careers Dept)	✓	✓	Old
Imperial College London	Volunteer Centre manager		✓	Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Kent	Personnel		✓	Old
Leeds	External Partnerships manager	✓	✓	Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Leeds Metropolitan	Training Officer		✓	New
London School of Economics and Political Science	Volunteer Centre manager		✓	Old <i>Russell Group</i>
London South Bank	Human Resource Officer	✓	✓	New
Nottingham Trent	Events manager & Administrator/ Volunteer Projects Coordinator		✓	New



**Table 2. Universities working on ESV policies**

University	Respondent	Working on Policy	Public Service Policy	University Type
Queens Belfast	Equal Opportunities Officer	✓		Old
Birmingham	Community Liaison manager	Piloting activities		Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Bristol	Community Engagement manager	✓	✓	Old <i>Russell Group</i>
East London	OD manager in HR	✓		New
Gloucestershire	Community Development Officer	✓	✓	New
Huddersfield	Community Projects Coordinator	✓	✓ Reserve forces	New
Hull	Active Community Co-ordinator	✓		Old
Lancaster	Management Development Adviser (Staff Development)	✓		Old
Liverpool	Careers	✓		Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Northampton	UCN Project Coordinator, (Community Volunteers Dept.)	✓		New
Nottingham	Head of HR Policy & Projects	✓		Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Portsmouth	Marketing Campaigns Officer	✓		New
University of Salford	Personnel	✓	✓	Old
Surrey	Equal Opportunities & Diversity Adviser	✓	✓	Old
Warwick	Project Manager, Warwick Volunteers	✓		Old <i>Russell Group</i>
Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama	University Executive	✓		Old

It is not surprising that ESV policy development is being addressed by Human Resources Departments in consultation with other units as this central department often has overall responsibility for those policies dealing with staff. Community engagement units are the ones who have direct access to the receiving voluntary organisations and so will be required to implement the policies. How the policies are implemented are outlined in the three case studies below.

## CASE STUDIES

The three institutions selected, the London School of Economics (LSE), Imperial College London (ICL) and the University of Cambridge, are all 'Old' universities and members of the prestigious Russell group. Two are colleges of London University. The London School of Economics and Political Sciences was founded in 1895 and employs over 1600 full time equivalent staff. Imperial College was established in 1907 and is an independent constituent part of London University. It is a member of Employees in The Community Network and employs 5764 academic and support staff. The University of Cambridge's earliest record is 1209 with Peterhouse College. Founded in 1284, it is a confederation of Colleges, Faculties and other institutions.

The adoption of ESV by these universities was driven by many factors. For LSE a champion emerged to support the initiative and was supported by a growing demand from staff and observed benefits accruing to other institutions. For the LSE and Imperial College the development of ESV can also be linked to the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) initiatives. LSE has adopted a formal written policy through its Employer Supported Volunteer Scheme, Volunteering for All (V4All), launched in May 2005. In 2002 ICL stated its remit is to *"map, co-ordinate, and develop opportunities for both staff and students to interact with the wider community through volunteering"*<sup>53</sup>. Although staff volunteering was encouraged from this time with the launch of the Imperial Volunteering Centre in 2003, a formal staff volunteering policy was not introduced until 2005. Unlike LSE and ICL who have formal written ESV volunteering policies, although fully committed to ESV, the structure of the University of Cambridge (147 independent autonomous units) led to a decision by the University not to introduce one overarching university-wide ESV policy.

The coordination and operation of ESV within these three universities differs although it appears to be a partnership within existing departments. LSE employs a consultant based in Staff Development within its Personnel Department. At ICL it is a jointly managed venture between its Staff Development unit and the volunteer centre. In the University of Cambridge it was initially part of the Corporate Liaison Department but was moved to External Affairs.

In all three cases, for employees to have access to volunteering opportunities (with or without a formal policy) formal processes have been developed to manage the activities. At LSE an application form is to be signed and supported by a line manager. This application form includes details such as how the time will be spent and learning objectives to be achieved. During the volunteer activity a record / diary of the volunteering hours is kept. All applications are considered by the V4All committee *"to protect its brand and reputation"*.

At ICL any proposed voluntary activity has to reflect development and learning outcomes identified in the university's staff appraisal process. A detailed form outlines the specific aims and objectives. Consideration is also given to the impact on the volunteer's workload and role at the university and thus applications must be supported by the line manager. Selection of an activity should be mutually agreed between the volunteer and the voluntary organisation to ensure compatibility. Progress is evaluated after 8 weeks. The volunteer activity has a maximum time allowed of 6 months during which time a diary is kept. On completion of the volunteer activity an exit interview takes place.

Allowances available to carry out the voluntary activity vary. At LSE up to five paid working days per year can be approved for employees to take part in agreed activities. ICL staff members who have been employed for a minimum of one year are given up to four hours a fortnight of paid time conditional on this being matched by an equal number of voluntary hours (pro-rata for part time staff). Voluntary hours are taken in the employee's own time (on an evening, at weekends or out of regular leave entitlement). In 2004, 750 individuals at ICL volunteered with 10% of these being staff members<sup>54</sup>. The University of Cambridge encourages volunteering by both academic and support staff, with most volunteering taking place in the Science areas. In 2004 at the University of Cambridge 1,252 staff were involved in voluntary work organised through the university with an additional 1,135 staff working on community activities as part of their paid employment<sup>55</sup>. In 2003/4 one in four members of staff volunteered for one of the university's projects<sup>56</sup>.

The role of the University of Cambridge's External Office is to act as a sign posting service only. It has over 200 organisations listed offering possible volunteering opportunities. The LSE Volunteer Centre and ICL IVC provide informal primary information and advice to staff interested in undertaking volunteering. This can include help in locating specific volunteering opportunities.

Volunteer activities can be related to the academic or professional experience of the volunteer. Drawing on the core competencies of the institutions, as expected education is identified by all three universities. Areas of activity include school governorships, teaching basic skills and, for ICL and the University of Cambridge, significant outreach work in the sciences (an example is the University of Cambridge's initiative 'Physics At Work'). However, extensive databases are available to help the choice process beyond core competencies. For example, LSE have identified 28 categories and ICL 40 categories of projects which cover a wide range of activities such as the environment, including conservation work, supporting local charities, inputting data and working on a helpline for 4 hours per week. ICL cite working with local community arts groups on carnivals as an example<sup>57</sup>. Volunteering is not always a regular commitment. One off events are on offer. For example, in 2005 over 1000 of the University of Cambridge employees took part in the annual Science festival.

Benefits of ESV are clear to all the Universities involved. ESV is seen as a vital part of community engagement. At a strategic level, encouraging community engagement helps maintain a competitive advantage over other universities and leads to new opportunities for learning and research and demonstrates commitment to building healthy communities and underlines the university commitment to community links.

All three cases saw ESV as having an important role in marketing the universities. At an operational level it is used for branding and general promotional activities. Participation in the wider community is seen strategically as a means of raising the profile of the institution and as a highly visible sign that demonstrates corporate social responsibility. The 'Old', Russell group of universities tend to recruit students throughout the UK (not just from the local area) and from overseas and, therefore, may be considered to be detached from the local community. This may be why such universities are more active in ESV than the 'New' institutions.

ESV had a role for all the case study institutions in communicating their work to a wider audience. The external activity of the participants promote both to the local community and the wider environs the purpose and benefit of the work these Universities undertake and helps to develop an understanding and appreciation. It challenges negative perceptions about such institutions being elite. At the University of Cambridge individual departments, colleges, museums, etc. see community engagement as encouraging access, particularly from those poorly represented student groups.

To the university community ESV is considered a human resources tool, part of the rewards and benefits package, and a motivational tool which also aids in team development and to gain job-related experience and development. IVC Links 2004 states *“Employers are increasingly finding employee volunteering is delivering real human resource benefits. It can reduce employee turnover; recruitment & training costs and increase motivation and productivity.”*<sup>58</sup>

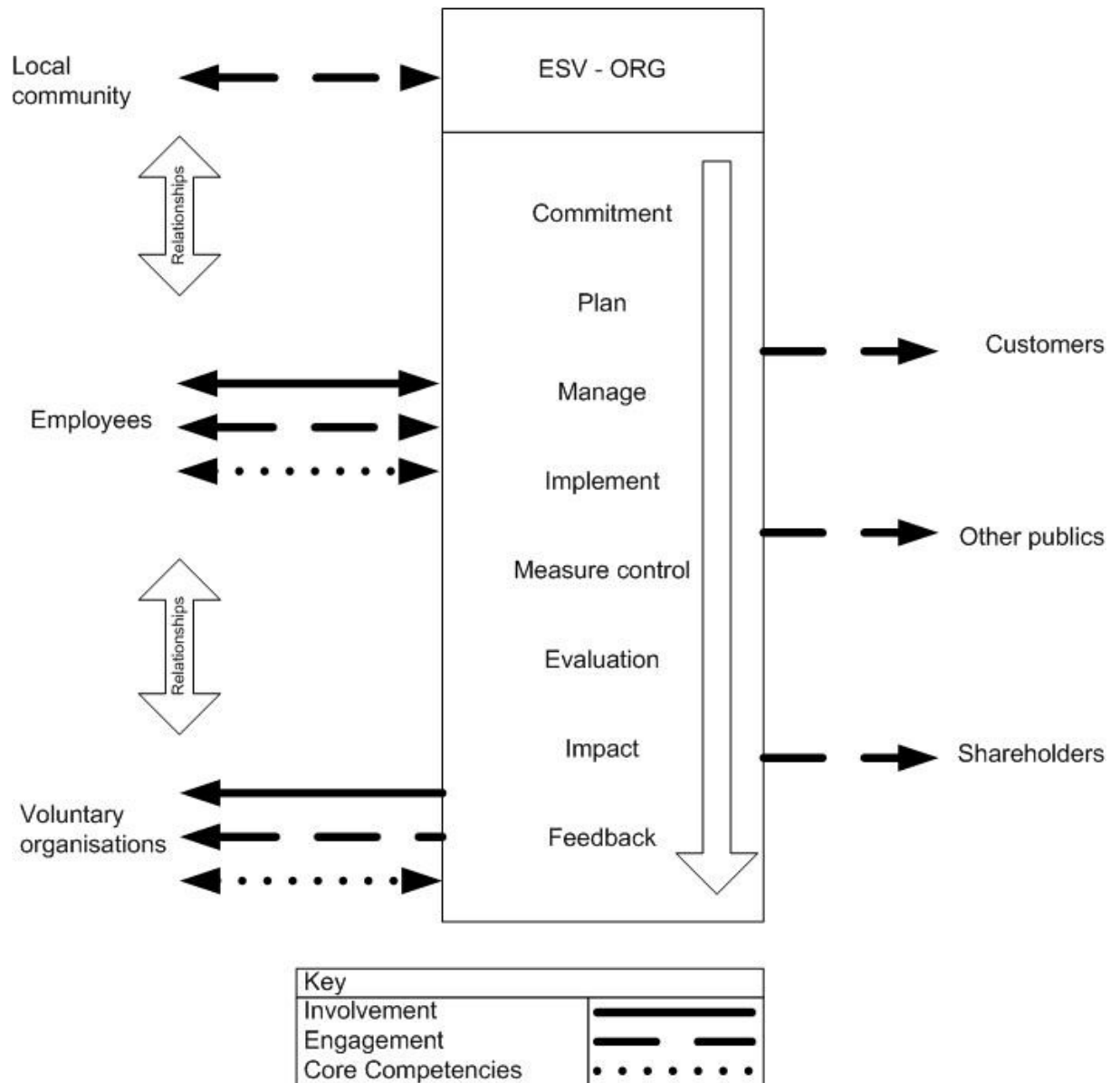
At an individual level all three institutions agree that participation in volunteering can have a significant contribution to the development and enhancement of personal and professional skills. At the same time as developing work related skills, the University of Cambridge focuses on the enhancement of communication skills, dealing with the media, language skills, financial planning, teamwork and management skills. LSE points out that volunteering is fun. ICL stresses the role of volunteering in making friends and in offering a welcome break from the daily work routine<sup>59</sup>. Being a volunteer is seen as enhancing self esteem, giving access to new cultures and ideas and offering the satisfaction of 'giving back' to society or making a difference. Steve Rathburn, Imperial College Staff Development Advisor, sums up the benefits that staff experience from participating in volunteering as *“a superb environment within which to stretch ones capabilities, find new dimensions to one’s talents and develop ones confidence.”*

The community activities outlined above have focused on benefits to the university and staff. For the local community, participation by the university in ESV increases the supply of volunteers offering valuable new skills and energies, offering University facilities, supporting under resourced schools and extending cultural outreach. Meeting university staff can raise aspirations within the local community. ESV can build important partnerships between business and the public sector and ESV can help to break down the barriers between different sections of society.

## **MANAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

Figure 1 below identifies the main elements to be considered by an organisation supporting employee volunteering and the key stakeholders affected. For such schemes to succeed Hess<sup>60</sup> believes that ESV should be initiated and guided by top management and incorporated into strategic planning. It is vital that there is commitment to the process throughout the organisation. The support of the Government through its Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) has been an important driver in the cases selected. However, this fund is accessible by all HEIs. The difference in the three selected cases is that there is commitment to the concept of ESV at the highest level and dedication by staff to make the scheme work. Not only has there been direction from the top of the organisation (in two cases through a formal policy document) but also a desire from the bottom up to become involved.

**Figure 1: Management and Engagement**



Although two of the universities studied have a written policy on ESV, it does not appear to be an essential element to a successful programme. For example, the lack of such a policy at the University of Cambridge does not deter a high proportion of their staff from volunteering. However, the collegiate nature of that university and the autonomy of the colleges may be the reason that a formal policy has not been introduced. The existence of a formal policy can have an impact on the effectiveness of the programme. Rostami and Hall<sup>61</sup> found that companies with a formal ESV policy had better managed programmes, were more likely to be proactive in supporting ESV, to increase their level of support for employee volunteering and to enhance their support for ESV through other community investment activities. It is, therefore, advisable for other organisations wishing to establish ESV within their institution to follow LSE and ICL in developing a formal policy.

Even though only two out of the three cases have a written policy on ESV all have established formal processes to manage its ESV activities. There has been recognition that the systems require central control. In all three cases this is done through partnership arrangements between units but the department with overall responsibility again differs between the University of Cambridge (based in External Affairs) and the LSE and ICL (where it is housed in Staff Development and subsequently volunteering has become part of the staff development process). All three operate through volunteer centres which deal with staff and students. A wide variety of volunteering opportunities are made available to staff over different time scales and at a range of times to accommodate commitments university employees may have in their lives. This enables increased participation and engagement by staff.

The benefits of ESV have been outlined above and all three universities studied acknowledge that ESV is 'a good thing'. However, less effort is put into promoting and operating the volunteering programmes than into evaluating their impact on employees, the voluntary organisations or the local communities. This is not unusual in this area. In a study of ESV schemes in Chicago, Benjamin<sup>62</sup> found companies allocated larger funds to internal marketing of their ESV programmes than to external publicity about the schemes (73% versus 45%). The University of Cambridge has produced a report for its stakeholders on all its community engagement activities, including employee volunteering<sup>63</sup>. LSE and ICL provide feedback through newsletters and their websites but, as also demonstrated in Benjamin's study<sup>64</sup>, feedback tends to be from employees with little input from the voluntary organisation. Skok<sup>65</sup> stresses the importance of community feedback as well as from employees. Only in this way can organisations learn what is important to voluntary organisations and how they feel the organisation can best assist them.

Benefits to the various stakeholders have been described above as well as the benefits to the organisation. In addition to highlighting the prerequisites for an organisation embarking on ESV, Figure 1 shows the relationships developed as a result of ESV. ESV enables the case study universities to engage more closely with their local communities. This is an important function of ESV. All three institutions tend to draw their staff and students from communities distant from the local environs. However, the relationship is two way as both parties gain. Not only does a closer link result between the university and its local community but also between employees of the institution and local people. The breaking down of barriers also assists these universities in working towards the Government's Widening Participation agenda.

The relationship between the organisation and its employees is also very much a two-way affair with both parties benefiting. A relationship also inevitably arises between university employees and the organisations in which they are volunteering. The voluntary organisations obtain a great deal from these links with the universities and their employees in terms of extra personnel and variety of new skills acquired. New skills and competences also flow back into the universities from contact with these organisations. This is very much what Austin<sup>66</sup> sees as a transactional relationship. Both parties pursue their own goals and objectives. Such a relationship is built upon exchange rather than collaboration.

The benefits of employer supported volunteering apply to all organisations and have been recognised by many. As a result of this the two case study universities based in the centre of London faced competition from other large

organisations operating in the City for employer supported volunteering opportunities. Some voluntary organisations were in the enviable position of having a number of employers seeking volunteering opportunities for their staff within their organisation or being willing to manage a specific project on behalf of the voluntary organisation. The universities were often at a disadvantage when competing with high profile, affluent multi-national corporations.

Links with external organisations through engagement and involvement in the local community and with voluntary organisations has an impact on other stakeholders of the universities (such as customers, current and potential students, parents, organisations and firms doing business with the universities). Such links are used in promoting the universities and raising awareness of their involvement community engagement activities. Through such measures the reputation of the universities is certainly enhanced. In addition, service quality may be improved as a result of a more motivated and satisfied workforce.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper provides an outline of the current situation regarding the adoption and development of ESV in the UK university sector. Three cases have been presented as examples of best practice. The findings of this exploratory research have implications for universities and those bodies which fund voluntary activity in Higher Education.

While it is generally agreed that ESV is a 'good thing' for all involved there are generally few examples of systematic evaluation. Less than one-third of companies involved in ESV keep records on employee volunteering programmes<sup>67</sup>. Figures in Benjamin's study<sup>68</sup> were a little higher with 53% of respondents making a formal report. This was the situation in the best practice cases of this study. As most evidence is based on surveys done by those involved in ESV, more objective evidence is required on the relationship between volunteering and the development of job-related skills. This may be quite difficult to gauge as not all community involvement activities are easily quantifiable<sup>69</sup>. For example, it is easier to quantify the number of volunteers and the total of volunteer hours than the impact of ESV.

With little formal feedback gathered from the voluntary organisations there has been no major assessment of the impact of ESV on the voluntary organisation. Tschirhart and St Clair<sup>70</sup> suggest that such schemes may have a negative impact on the organisation. Reich<sup>71</sup> argues that such schemes take on responsibilities which were previously undertaken by government. For example, LSE staff volunteering to read with children in local schools could be viewed as performing the role of teaching assistants who would normally be employed by that school.

There is also the ethical issue of the benefits gained by the employing organisation. Would these organisations be as active in ESV if they were not gaining from the transaction? The choice of volunteering activity tends to be driven by the needs of the employing organisation rather than the receiving organisation. It could be said that the employing organisation gains more than the voluntary organisation through staff development and its improved status in the community. With increasing costs of advertising and greater competitiveness in the market place, such activities are a relatively cheap method of gaining positive promotion of an organisation. However, although altruism exists it is perhaps unreasonable to suggest that organisations should not obtain any benefits from the relationship. Individuals rarely volunteer due to purely selfless

motives<sup>72</sup> so can we expect business oriented organisations to be totally philanthropic?

A further issue to be debated is whether, in fact, ESV is volunteering. Smith states that volunteering usually “*involves contributions of time without coercion or remuneration*”<sup>73</sup>. However, if a line manager asks an employee to join an ESV scheme the employee may feel obligated to volunteer. It could be seen as implicit coercion. Also if the employee is being paid by the work organisation whilst volunteering, can this strictly be considered to be unpaid work? The volunteer is not accepting payment from the receiving organisation but is receiving some remuneration.

The research found that although a number of institutions are working towards a policy, not all universities have a formal policy regarding ESV. The link between a formal policy and the effectiveness of the programme has been highlighted above. A formal policy also evidences the organisation’s commitment to ESV to all its stakeholders as part of its corporate social responsibility through engagement with the local community. This is particularly important where universities are acting as agents of HEACF in providing an example to students in encouraging them to volunteer.

The cyclical nature of HEACF funding has implications for policy development and adoption. Universities may be reluctant to introduce a permanent policy and commit resources to ESV if funding is available for only two or three years. Much current activity regarding support for volunteering has been driven by HEACF Round 2 which ended 2006, although there is provision for a further round of funding through to 2009. This short-termism is symptomatic of the operation of the UK voluntary sector and should be addressed in future government initiatives.

Research into the management of ESV schemes indicates that the extent and breadth of employee involvement differs significantly according to the adopted management structure<sup>74</sup>. This research shows that the location of responsibility for ESV policy within the organisation varies across the university sector. While there is some discussion in this paper of the relationship between employee engagement and management structure this area requires further investigation.

For the receiving organisation to obtain maximum benefit from ESV a link with the core competences of the institution is important. The expertise of the university should be used within the scheme. Employees may obtain new work related skills through volunteering. In return they can use their existing work skills in the voluntary organisation. An extra pair of hands within a voluntary organisation is always useful but it makes more sense to share professional skills. Matching of skills should be a factor in selecting schemes and in recruiting and placing volunteers. Unlike some examples of ESV<sup>75</sup>, our best practice organisations were frequently involved in volunteering activities linked to education.

Some employees may find it easier to volunteer than others<sup>76</sup>. For example, managers often control their own diaries and so they may be able to balance work and volunteering commitments more readily than those lower down the organisation involved in more routine work. Part-time staff may have fewer occasions to volunteer. Students, with pre-determined timetables and free time for personal development activities, can arrange to have time to volunteer. Academic staff have some flexibility in the working year which enables them to



volunteer on a regular basis, for one-off activities and during vacation periods. This flexibility may not be available to support staff.

The next stage in this project is to research the areas identified above and to explore the extent of volunteering by university staff and staff attitudes to volunteering with a view to providing a full picture of ESV in the UK university sector. In the longer term a study of the costs and benefits to the receiving organisations will be undertaken.

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