

# Volunteering Service

## Student Survey 2017-18

Between June and September of 2018, the Volunteering Service conducted its annual online survey of subscribers to our newsletter. We received 607 completed responses: 338 had volunteered on one of our projects, 116 had volunteered elsewhere, and 153 who had not volunteered at all.

### Impact of volunteering

In 2016/17 survey, 96% said they had had developed new skills, 76% of volunteers felt that their well-being had improved, 55% of volunteers had gained insights into their academic studies.

This year, we decided to concentrate on skills development, and delve deeper into what skills students feel they have gained through their experiences. In particular, we looked at skills listed by the Institute of Student Employers<sup>1</sup> or by EY Futureskills<sup>2</sup> as being in demand by graduate employers.

**“Because of my volunteering, I have become better at ...” % agreeing or agreeing strongly, Volunteering Service volunteers only, n=338**



It is noticeable that the most cited skills are all interpersonal in nature – understanding others, collaborating, and communicating professionally. Almost all of our volunteer roles involve interactions with other people from beyond academic life, giving students the chance to broaden their experiences of dealing with other people, so this result is understandable.

<sup>1</sup> See “ISE development survey results: what soft skills do successful students need?” <https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/news/blogs/guest-research-blog-what-skills-successful-student-need/>  
<sup>2</sup> See <https://ukcareers.ey.com/students/career-advice/future-skills>

## Experience of Volunteering

We also asked students them to rate their experiences of volunteering against a range of indicators used to measure the quality of volunteer management. We compared responses from those who'd volunteered on our projects, and those who had volunteered elsewhere.

“Looking at your overall experience with the organisations/projects you volunteered with in the last year, how much would you agree with the following statements?” Shows % of volunteers agreeing with “This is TRUE for ALL of my volunteering”, responses for Volunteering Service volunteers (n=338), compared with students who'd volunteered in other ways (n=116).

	VS	Non-VS
I felt welcomed at the project	88%	84%
I was satisfied with the application/registration process	85%	73%
I was satisfied with the response to my initial enquiry about volunteering	83%	70%
I felt supported by the project supervisors/leaders	82%	73%
The project organisers showed their appreciation of my efforts	82%	72%
I knew who to ask if I had a question	82%	75%
The project gave me a suitable induction/initial briefing into my volunteer role	81%	64%
I received the training and/or information I needed to be an effective volunteer	78%	64%
The project organisers were open to my ideas	69%	66%
I was informed about health & safety procedures before I started volunteering	68%	59%
I was told what to do in an emergency	58%	52%

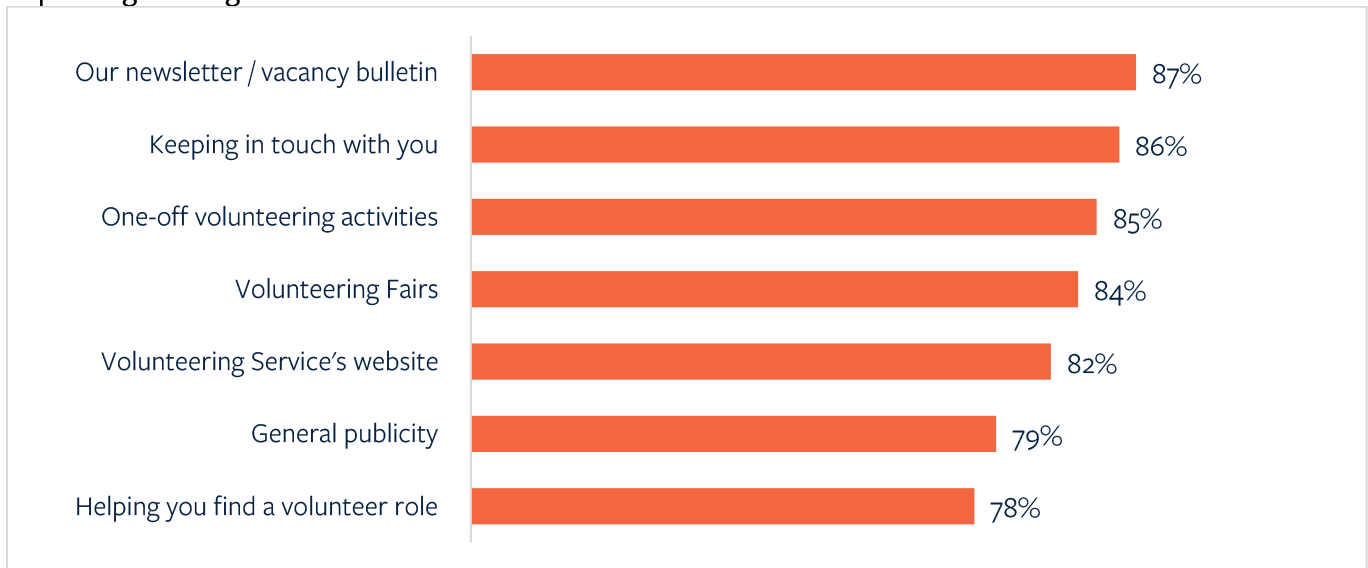
Students who volunteered on projects supported by the Volunteering Service generally reported higher satisfaction than students volunteering elsewhere, which perhaps reflects the work we put into quality assuring placements. Nonetheless, some responses for our own volunteers – e.g. how welcomed they felt, the quality of their induction, etc – are lower than we'd like.

## The Volunteering Service

We rate satisfaction by looking at the percentage of students saying a particular service is 'good' or 'very good'. Student satisfaction is generally on a par with previous surveys – ranging between 78% and 87%, with an average of 83%.

However, in the previous year 92 % of students were satisfied with 'Finding placements for volunteers' last year, and the figure 2015/16 was 88%. This year, only 78% of students were satisfied with 'Helping you find a volunteer role'. The big drop may be due to the changing of wording, or indeed reflect problems with our placement processes.

“How would you rate our following services?” % answering ‘good’ or ‘very good’, n=458 to 623, depending on usage of service



Finally, we asked two open questions about what students liked and disliked about our service.

‘What do you like least about the way the Volunteering Service works?’ Open question, % of answers falling into category, n=327, top 10 categories.

Category of response	% of responses	Number of responses
Nothing!	23%	76
Too many emails	10%	34
Not enough choice of roles	9%	31
The newsletter	7%	22
The process for signing up to volunteer roles	6%	20
Not a personalised service	6%	19
Need to improve publicity	6%	18
The website	5%	17
Volunteering Fairs	4%	14
Need to improve info about roles	4%	13

The most popular response was where a student said they couldn't think of anything they didn't like. Beyond that, volume of emails, lack of choice of roles, and the newsletter were the least favourite things about our service. There were also 20 students with complaints about the process of getting started with volunteering – finding it confusing, bureaucratic or inefficient.

Some typical responses:

“The emails can get a bit too frequent at times, I wish they were less frequent and more focused”

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“The email newsletters are fairly hard to navigate as they are very long to scroll through and I find the hyperlinks rarely work. Would also like to see more green/environmental based volunteering opportunities.”

“The process is somewhat bureaucratic, unfortunately. Achieving a side by side role with the Alzheimer’s society took me almost 6 months which was quite lengthy even considering the necessary background check.”

“I would like if there was a way to filter opportunities better to those suited to me.”

“Having to register interest, rather than being able to apply directly and no clear instructions on how to apply for the role.”

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It is worth noting that when asked what they most liked, the newsletter was by far and away the most popular response, and breadth of opportunities was second most popular! 40 students said the Volunteering Service had been helpful or supportive, and 36 mentioned our ease of use.

“The weekly newsletters always have such a wide range of things to do and makes me consider roles I hadn’t before.”

“The calendar of volunteering opportunities is great, so is the newsletter. I also love that you send us follow up e-mails; shows us that you care :) The people at the office are also always super-friendly. I love that travel expenses for one-offs are provided for, as it doesn’t restrict anyone from volunteering!”

“You can always get support and help if needed. They were very fast answering my queries.”

“The fact that there is a physical office that students can walk into to ask questions, all the projects I’ve been a part of were well organized.”

“I like how it showcases a diversity of opportunities and ways to volunteer. Communication is always clear and helpful.”

“I am quite appreciative of how open the Volunteering Service Team is which makes it easier for students to approach them for help in my experience. The newsletter is also particularly useful since it allowed me to find a summer internship and other potential one-off opportunities that catches my eye every now and then.”

“I really appreciate the personal approach of the Volunteering Service. For example, I received an email asking me about my satisfaction with my volunteering provided by the Volunteering Service.”

“The Volunteering database was very helpful when I was initially searching for a volunteering position.”

**What do you like most about the way the Volunteering Service works? Open question, % of answers falling into category, n=384, top 10 categories**

Category of response	% of responses	Number of responses
Newsletters	41%	157
Range of opportunities	24%	94
Supportive / helpful	10%	40
Ease of use	9%	36
Communication	7%	28
Website / directory	7%	27
One-off volunteering	6%	22
Well organised	3%	10
Volunteering Fairs	2%	9
Good publicity	2%	7

Taken together, the responses to the open questions indicate that most students are generally happy with our service, but that there is a section who we're not properly serving – by not having the right volunteer roles, or by having inefficient systems that get in the way of volunteering, or who are turned off by the volume of information we send out.

## Motivations for volunteering

Separate to the student survey, we also conducted analysis of why students wanted to volunteer, taken from responses given in our online newsletter registration form.

**Why are you interested in volunteering? Based on 589 registration forms (319 Undergrad and 270 Postgrad).**

	Postgrad	Undergrad
To make a difference to others	59%	60%
To develop new skills	51%	61%
To meet new people	46%	38%
To bring about social change	41%	40%
To do something related to my academic studies	37%	33%
To build upon my existing interests	35%	36%
To support a cause that's important to me	34%	45%
To connect with other London communities	33%	24%
To try something new	31%	37%
To improve my chances of getting paid work	22%	24%
To do something fun	21%	26%

## What happens next?

As with all of our surveys, we will use these results to inform our planning for the future shape of the Volunteering Service. In particular:

- In September 2018, we made substantial changes to our newsletters – changing from twice weekly to weekly, and reducing the content. We'll conduct a thorough evaluation of how well this has worked – both in terms of how students feel about the newsletter, and how effective it is at getting students involved.
- Students Union UCL's web development team will be overhauling our online directory, making it easier to find volunteer roles and to make sure the breadth of opportunities is more clearly communicated. This survey gives us a benchmark to measure these improvements.
- The findings on student skills will help inform the development of the directory – we are hoping that students can look for roles that will help them develop particular skills. These results will also be fed into the Students Union UCL's new student skills project.
- We will look again at how we can ensure that students are receiving the best possible experience on their volunteering placements and – in particular – that they're receiving proper inductions and health & safety briefings.

Students' Union UCL Volunteering Service

November 2018