

Accreditation of Volunteering

Summary

This Information Sheet is aimed at volunteer co-ordinators who are interested in formally accrediting the work of the volunteers in their organisation.

Topics covered:

- What is accreditation?
- Why get involved with accreditation?
- Key issues to consider
- Options for internal and external accreditation
- Contact details for accreditation schemes or sources of further information
- Alternatives to accreditation

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is the formal recognition of the achievements of an individual, linked up to some internal or external standard. In other words, it is a process of confirming that someone's performance conforms to standards that are agreed or approved. By making this assessment, a person's previous experience and learning can be taken into account, as well as what they currently do as a volunteer. This is called the accreditation of prior learning. An assessor is the person who actually decides whether an individual's performance is up to the required standard.

Why get involved in accreditation?

The possible benefits to volunteers and the organisation are:

For volunteers

- Motivation
- Increased skills
- Increased likelihood of gaining paid work after their experience of volunteering
- Personal development
- Recognition of their contribution to the organisation.

For the organisation

- Volunteers who are more effective and skilled in their tasks
- Improved retention of volunteers
- Easier recruitment of volunteers
- Improved service/ results of volunteering.

Key issues

Accreditation clearly has a lot to offer volunteers and the organisations that they work with. If you are considering introducing accreditation into your organisation, you should first of all think through clearly what you hope to gain from it. This will make it much easier to select the most appropriate method for your organisation.

There are some key issues to consider before you decide to go ahead:

- Offering accreditation of volunteering can result in attracting volunteers who may be better educated and/or who are doing volunteering as a step towards paid work. You need to make it very clear that accreditation is for anyone, and not equate it with formal or written examinations. It needs to be properly presented and explained to avoid deterring people who may have had previous bad experiences in education or who are not very confident of their own abilities. If it is handled properly, accreditation can make a positive contribution to equal opportunities by enabling people who may have no or few qualifications to gain in confidence and skills.
- Accreditation can bring assessment and possible success or failure into volunteering. Some people volunteer to escape these pressures.
- For accreditation to succeed, the volunteer must be performing specific tasks which demonstrate particular skills. This demands a clear role description for the volunteer and may reduce flexibility. You will also need to keep proper records of all activities to provide evidence for accreditation.
- You must be prepared for some costs in time and money.
 - Initial costs may be incurred in the meetings and working groups involved. There may be the costs of engaging a consultant to assist in the preparatory stages or of a trainer to run seminars or prepare tutors.
 - Continuing costs may include materials and tutors' fees.
 - Grants may also be available from Learning and Skills Councils, or they can give advice on alternative sources of funding (see 'Useful Organisations' at the end of this Information Sheet).
- Some funding bodies, such as v which allocates funding for the National Youth Volunteer Programme, actively encourage organisations to offer accreditation to volunteers and build the costs into funding bids.
- All training provided for volunteers, whether accredited or not, must be relevant to the volunteer's role. If not, this could be seen as offering a gift or perk in return for the volunteer's work. This can have significant implications for the legal relationship between a person and an organisation. In certain circumstances, a form of 'employment contract' could be created, meaning that the person might be entitled to employment rights such as the National Minimum Wage. (For further

information, please refer to Volunteering England's Information Sheet *The National Minimum Wage Act and Volunteers.*)

What are your options for offering accreditation?

There are two options open to you if you decide to go ahead with offering accreditation to your volunteers.

1. Internal accreditation

This involves offering your own award in recognition of the skills, ability and experience of the volunteer. You will need to set standards to judge against and work out the evidence you will require from volunteers to demonstrate that they have achieved these standards. Volunteers can then be given a certificate outlining their specific achievements.

Internal accreditation can achieve many of the possible aims outlined earlier. It is also cheaper than external accreditation. The main drawback of internal accreditation is that it may lack external credibility, which can make it less suited to volunteers who are volunteering as part of their career development.

See 'Suggested Reading' at the end of this Information Sheet for free publications which give advice on arranging internal accreditation.

2. External accreditation

This involves using external criteria to assess your volunteers. Rather than drawing up your own list of necessary skills and competencies, you can use ones produced by an external recognised awarding body. This guarantees that standards have been defined and that the assessment of skills and competence is rigorous. External accreditation has more status for the volunteer. It is also more likely to be impressive to potential employers than an internal accreditation scheme.

However, there are some organisational issues that need to be overcome before it can be successfully implemented. To achieve the relevant criteria of external qualifications, volunteers may well have to complete tasks which are not in their role description and perhaps not readily available in your organisation. A possible solution to this is to liaise with other volunteer-involving organisations in your area to pool volunteer tasks. Your local Learning and Skills Council or Council for Voluntary Service should be able to give you information about other organisations offering accreditation. Most organisations offering external accreditation will be getting involved in National Vocational Qualifications, so it is important to have a basic understanding of their role.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

These arose from a governmental review of Vocational Qualifications in 1986. They are designed to accredit the knowledge and skills that people can demonstrate through work experience. They are composed of 'elements of

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competence' which describe the skills, knowledge and understanding required to meet a defined standard. These elements are grouped into units, which in turn are grouped into NVQs, each of which has a title and a level. They are designed to be extremely flexible – for instance, it is possible to do just one unit from an NVQ. There is not a specific NVQ for volunteers, but many of the tasks that volunteers undertake would enable them to gain all or parts of an NVQ in different subjects, such as Advice and Counselling or Management.

Assessment involves producing evidence to enable the assessor to judge whether the candidate is competent. This will involve demonstration (observation of work-based activity), completed work, supplementary evidence, such as oral questions, and the accreditation of prior learning.

Assessment is carried out by centres approved by an awarding or examining body: for example, education centres or Social Services Departments. Voluntary organisations can also become assessment centres, either in their own right or as part of a consortium.

Any organisations offering NVQs must set aside resources to:

- Allow candidates the time and work space to collect evidence, undertake training and have contact with advisors and assessors
- Enable qualified and/or experienced staff to become advisors and assessors
- Develop policies and practices which allow candidates to generate evidence to meet the required standards.

Please note that this information on National Vocational Qualifications applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Much of it is also relevant to Scotland: an address for more information on accreditation in Scotland is given in the 'Useful Addresses' section at the end of this Information Sheet.

Welfare benefits and NVQs

Unemployed volunteers who are working towards an NVQ through their volunteering should still be eligible for Job Seeker's Allowance, if they fulfil the necessary conditions of being available for work and actively seeking work. NVQs are deemed as 'unadvanced education' by the Department of Social Security and as such should not affect benefit entitlement. If volunteers come across any problems with their benefits, they can contact the Information Service at Volunteering England for advice (freephone/textphone 0800 028 3304 or email information@volunteeringengland.org).

The Open College Network

The Open College Network (OCN) offers accredited training designed to overcome the anxiety some people have about the more formal aspects of training. The emphasis is on high-quality, accessible, learner-centred training rather than on the qualification. The learning programmes are designed for the specific working role or interests of learners and are locally accountable. OCN also offers units covering generalist volunteering roles. You can find details of

your local branch of the OCN by contacting its main office (see 'Useful Organisations' at the end of this Information Sheet).

Learners receive a certificate showing the learning outcomes they have achieved at nationally recognised levels of study. In contrast with NVQs, OCN certificates recognise learning achievement rather than competence in a work task. OCN certificates are currently not as widely recognised by employers or colleges.

Accredited courses aimed at volunteers

Some courses specifically aimed at volunteers have recently been introduced and cover general volunteer roles. For full information please contact the organisations below:

Certificate in Interpersonal Skills for Volunteers

This distance learning course is run by the University of Wales Lampeter, and lasts for an average of 30 weeks. All assessment is by correspondence course work; there are no exams. The course is free to most new students and fully accredited at university level one. It can be taken as part of a wider BA Degree in Voluntary Sector Studies.

For further information, please contact:

Department of Voluntary Sector Studies

University of Wales Lampeter
Lampeter
SA48 7ED

Tel: 01570 424785

Email: vss@lamp.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.volstudy.ac.uk>

ASDAN Certificate in Community Volunteering

This consists of 5 units:

- Preparing to volunteer
- Skills for self management
- Dealing with meetings
- Working to good practice standards
- Understanding needs, issues and responses

ASDAN Community Involvement and Volunteering Award (aimed at 13-19 year olds)

This consists of six units:

- Starting Out
- Planning and Preparation
- Taking Part
- Meetings
- Issues and Needs

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- Personal Development

For further information about ASDAN's awards, please contact:

ASDAN

Wainbrook House

Hudds Vale Road

St. George

Bristol

BS5 7HY

Tel: 0117 941 1126

Email: info@asdan.org.uk

Website: <http://www.asdan.org.uk>

Edexcel Level 2 BTEC Award in Event Support

This qualification is designed to enhance and develop the skills of event organisers and their volunteers in the 'stewarding and marshalling' of mass participation events. It is particularly relevant for the entertainment, sport and community sectors and is directly aimed at volunteers.

For further information, please contact:

EdExcel

Edexcel Customer Service

One90 High Holborn

London

WC1V 7BH

Tel: 0844 576 0026

Email/Website: <http://www.edexcel.org.uk/about/contact/>

A leaflet about the Event Support qualification is available at:

<http://www.edexcel.org.uk/VirtualContent/103283/BTECAwardinEventSupportPDFFINAL.PDF>

Distance Learning Certificate in Community Volunteering

It is now possible for volunteers to complete a Certificate in Community Volunteering (CCV) course through distance learning and online wherever they may be in England.

A CCV website has been developed, which enables students to access information, resources and materials to help them to build a paperless portfolio via the Internet. Volunteers can get lots of help and support through regular email contact with an experienced CCV tutor. It is available via City of Bristol College from where the CCV has been successfully piloted as a distance-learning course with some members of AYME (Association of Young People with ME). They said they found that the course structure allowed them the flexibility of working at home and the ability to work at times that fitted around their illness. It may be possible to arrange some face-to-face contact with tutors and other volunteers (for instance, through planned workshops and

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summer schools) if this is what students would like. Organisations may find it easier to offer the CCV to their volunteers by providing links to the course from their own websites. This gives more volunteers the opportunity to get their voluntary experience recognised and accredited.

For further information about the Distance Learning CCV, please visit: <http://www.asdan.org.uk/ccv.php?cont=distance> or contact tom.drywood@cityofbristol.ac.uk

Youth Achievement Awards (UK Youth and ASDAN)

The Awards are designed to encourage young people to get more involved in selecting, planning and leading activities within their peer group or the local community. They were initially developed for use in the youth work sector, but are now awarded through schools, colleges, national charities, youth offender institutions, Connexions partnerships and training providers. The Awards were recommended as a tool for recognising personal development through volunteering in the Russell Commission report on youth action and engagement (the government's report of 2004 which led to the founding of the national youth volunteering charity v.)

For further information about YAA, please contact:

UK Youth

Avon Tyrrell

Bransgore

Hampshire

BH23 8EE

Tel: 01425 672347

Email: yaa@ukyouth.org

Website: <http://www.ukyouth.org/whatwedo/Programmes/YAA/>,

Train to Gain (this is now open to volunteers)

The Train to Gain scheme helps people to undertake training through their workplace and is run by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The scheme was opened to volunteers in November 2007, after originally being focused on employees and their employers. An employer/volunteer-involving organisation can meet with a skills broker to assess the needs of their employees and volunteers, and then arrange a tailored training package and identify funding. For further information about Train to Gain:

Tel: 0800 015 55 45 to make an appointment with a Skills Broker

Email: traintogain@lsc.gov.uk

Train to Gain Website: <http://www.traintogain.gov.uk/>

Read the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) guidance on accessing Train to Gain for volunteers.

“Train To Gain and the Third Sector: Opportunities for the Third Sector to Access Support for Training and Developing Paid Staff and Volunteers”

<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-traintogainandthethirdsector-jun08.pdf>

Personal Best

(formerly known as the **Olympic and Paralympic Pre-Volunteer Programme**)

The Personal Best programme is designed to offer training in literacy, numeracy, health and safety, first-aid awareness, customer relations and an appreciation of the Olympic Spirit, and leads to a Level 1 qualification. It was trialled in 11 London boroughs in 2007 and will be rolled out within London and nationally during 2008. It aims to encourage unemployed people or those at risk of social exclusion to gain work-related skills and experience and uses the idea of volunteering at the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics as a central theme.

For further information about Personal Best, you can visit:

The London Development Agency website:

<http://www.lda.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.1954>

or the **Learning and Skills Council** website:

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/London/News/LatestNews/2012+skills+programme+improves+prospects+for+20+000+Londoners.htm>

Passports – a tool to record skills, qualifications, accreditation and learning

There are number of schemes which help an individual to record and demonstrate their learning. These are sometimes known as a 'passport'.

One example is the Skills Active Passport which is aimed at the active leisure and learning sector. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.skillsactive.com/resources/skills-passport/>

One further example is the vpassport, which is the working title for a new recognition scheme due to be launched by v, the youth volunteering charity.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.wearev.com/>

Making a start

Whatever type of accreditation you choose, it is important to consult within your organisation the reasons and implications for getting involved in accreditation. Remember to involve volunteers in this process. Your local Learning and Skills Council will be a good place to get advice on how to start an accreditation programme, and the organisations and publications given below will also be able to provide further guidance and information.

Alternatives to accreditation

Award schemes are a popular method for recognising the achievements and commitment of volunteers. There are award schemes which specifically focus on voluntary groups, such as the **Queen's Award for Voluntary Service**, and others which recognise individual volunteers. Other award schemes, such as the **Public Service Awards**, offer a category for volunteers or community champions within a broader award scheme. Some examples of national award schemes can be found at:

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/awards> or <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/links>

Some charities or companies decide to set up their own award scheme to focus on individual volunteers, volunteer teams or employer-supported volunteers. Many award schemes are organised locally and regionally, so the local press or Volunteer Centre can be a good source of information. National newspapers also sometimes sponsor or organise award schemes.

If you decide to nominate an individual or group of volunteers for an award, remember to check in advance whether that person is happy to be nominated and wouldn't object to any media attention as a winner or runner-up. Also, do bear in mind that other volunteers may feel left out, so don't forget to find other ways to thank or praise your volunteers. For some ideas, please read Volunteering England's Information Sheet "Saying 'Thank You' To Volunteers".

Useful Addresses

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

83 Piccadilly

London

W1J 8QA

Tel: 020 7509 5556

Email: info@qca.org.uk

Website: <http://www.qca.org.uk/>

Scottish Qualification Authority

Hanover House

24 Douglas Street

Glasgow

G2 7NQ

Tel: 0141 248 7900

Email: customer@sqa.org.uk

Website: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/>

National Open College Network

The Quadrant

Parkway Business Park

Sheffield

S9 4WG

Email: nocn@nocn.org.uk

Website: <http://www.nocn.org.uk/>

Learning and Skills Council

Cheylesmore House

Quinton Road

Coventry CV1 2WT

Helpline: 0870 900 6800

Email: info@lsc.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.lsc.gov.uk>

Learning and Skills Councils were introduced in April 2001 to combine the functions of Training and Enterprise Councils and the Further Education Funding Council. They are responsible for all post-16 education and training (other than universities) and operate through a network of 47 local Learning and Skills Councils. They can provide lots of information on initiatives in post-16 provision, and the main website has a large selection of useful links.

UK Workforce Hub

Regent's Wharf

8 All Saints Street

London

N1 9RL

Helpline: 0800 652 5737

Email: help@ukworkforcehub.org.uk

Website: <http://www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/>

The UK Workforce Hub works to help voluntary and third sector organisations to develop their volunteers, trustees and staff through workforce development. The Hub can direct you to a wide range of sources of information, and the website hosts factsheets, case studies and statistics.

Suggested reading

Opening Doors

An accreditation guide for the voluntary sector

Lindsay McCulloch

RSA Project 2001, in partnership with NACVS

Would you credit it?

A guide to S/NVQs for the voluntary sector

VSNTO 2001

Credit for Learning

A report on the use of S/NVQs in the voluntary sector

VSNTO 2000

All of the above can be downloaded, free, from the 'useful publications' section of the Workforce Hub's website (look in 'Resources' and then 'Publications'): <http://www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/>

Volunteering England Information Sheets

Saying 'Thank You' to Volunteers

Training and Accreditation for Volunteer Managers

National Minimum Wage Act and volunteers

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/information>

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For more information on managing volunteers, please visit
The Good Practice Bank at www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice

A full list of Volunteering England's Information Sheets is available at:
www.volunteering.org.uk/information sheets