ANY VOLUNTEERS FOR THE GOOD SOCIETY?

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Foreword

I believe that building a strong civil society lies at the heart of the Government's social agenda and that encouraging active citizenship, particularly in some of our more deprived communities, will be a key part of achieving some of our most important objectives. Fortunately in the United Kingdom we have a long tradition of civic responsibility and mutual support. There have been challenges to it over the last 30 years and it is not equally strong everywhere. But the ethos on which it is built is still alive and well and is clearly reflected in the huge number of voluntary and community organisations active today and in the very many people who willingly give their time and skills to help others. Active involvement in community and civil life brings many benefits to the people who get involved, to those who benefit from their activities and to community life more generally. It helps to strengthen communities, building trust and confidence as well as promoting equality and cohesion. It is fundamental to a healthy democracy.

But active participation and involvement in community life cannot be taken for granted and a key question for Government is how best to support and encourage it. How can individuals and communities be enabled to play an active part in determining and shaping their own future? How can this be done in a way which encourages mutuality and community cohesion? What are the key investments and supports that Government must provide and the key responsibilities which it must not relinquish? Such questions are central to the relationship between citizens and the state, between the governed and the government and they merit serious consideration. We need a national debate on civil renewal and how it can best be achieved. I therefore welcome this publication as an important contribution to that debate.

Rt Hon David Blunkett
Home Secretary

Executive summary

Five years after Labour's election to government in 1997, the theme of civic renewal continues to sit high on the political agenda. Almost uniquely in the political climate of 'what matters is what works', civic renewal is a policy goal which has the potential to shape the very nature of both political discourse and the society in which we live. This ideal, which has its roots in the rich traditions of civic republicanism from Aristotle through to Rousseau, Mill and De Tocqueville focuses on the relationship between the citizen and the state. Although there are many variants of this theory, the crux has always been the engagement of the citizen in the rule and values of the state. Whereas liberalism has tended to emphasise the limited reach of the state, whereby individuals have clearly demarcated rights to protect their private lives, theories of civic republicanism have emphasised the importance of political duty and participation, moral responsibility and public good: social solidarity rather than individualism.

That the Labour Government has explicitly stated its ambition to achieve civic renewal is therefore remarkable in the extent of social and political change it could require. The very idea of *renewal* forces us to think about what sort of engagement we want citizens to develop, what sort of good society we aim towards. It may require not just democratic engagement (more participation in the decision-making processes that affect us) but also civil and moral engagement which would entail the shaping of our hearts and minds. Most importantly, achieving civic renewal would necessitate a fundamental reappraisal of the relationship between the state and its citizens, requiring the state to support and nurture civil society. Civic renewal is a demanding and laudable policy goal, but it is not yet clear whether the Government's rhetorical commitment to this end will be matched by the introduction of an appropriate and practical policy agenda.

Some evidence for New Labour's concern for the revitalisation of British civil society is apparent in policies to involve ordinary citizens in local regeneration and service delivery, in the rhetoric of rights and responsibilities, in attempts to build strong communities and in the recent interest in 'social capital'. This book focuses on the single policy area which this Government has most consistently and explicitly linked with civic renewal, namely volunteering policy. It seeks to assess the

clarity and efficacy of current policy in this area. Will volunteering, as currently understood and promoted by government, lead to wider civic renewal? Can renewal be achieved directly, or only by building concerns for it into other policy areas? New volunteering initiatives are suggested which would help to promote this goal.

The papers presented in this collection approach the policy issues from a variety of perspectives. The authors disagree on some issues, though the differences of opinion should simply act to stimulate further discussion and debate. Although there are differences there are also a number of important areas of agreement. Two of these concern the need to reconsider the meaning of volunteering. A third concerns the need to reform existing government policy and to develop new strategies which better link volunteering to civic renewal. Before offering an executive summary of each chapter in turn, it is worth briefly highlighting these themes.

The meaning of volunteering

It may sound strange to assert that our understanding of volunteering can itself hinder progressive policy development but this is precisely the argument proposed by several of the contributors. In particular there is a concern that the traditional language of volunteering implies too narrow a range of activities, borne from too limited a set of motivations to really have anything to contribute to the process of civic renewal. In other words, although it is often assumed that volunteering will *automatically* lead to the development of a more civically engaged society, perhaps the connection is rather more complicated than we would like to believe.

Volunteering as a range of activities

The first theme running though the book is the need to broaden the concept of volunteering. Both Matthew Thomson and Susan Stroud (in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively) explicitly note that the term 'volunteering' is usually assumed to refer to formal volunteering through an organisation rather than informal self-motivated activities undertaken by individuals. They see this assumption as unduly limiting. There is a range of activities usually described as 'informal volunteering' which should matter just as much, if not more, if the aim is to further goals of

civic renewal. These activities, described in the National Surveys of Volunteering as 'helping people as an individual', could include care for an elderly relative or neighbour, serving in a public capacity, or working with other local residents to tackle community problems. Matthew Thomson makes a strong argument for recognising and supporting such activity which grows from the principles of self-help and empowerment rather than narrow philanthropy, and as such is more in line with the civil and moral engagement demanded by civic renewal. In this light Susan Stroud recommends using the term 'civic involvement' rather than 'volunteering' precisely to encourage such a development.

On a related note, Elisabeth Hoodless, in Chapter 3, argues that policy development is hindered not just by the tendency to focus on formal volunteering opportunities, but also by cultural and institutional barriers which prevent us from thinking more radically about the involvement of volunteers in mainstream public services. In other words, it is not just that the focus on formal volunteering is misplaced, it is also that there is too much focus on formal volunteering through third sector organisations.

These arguments make a persuasive case for moving away from the traditional understanding of volunteering, perhaps as the Home Office intended when the Voluntary and Community Unit was renamed the Active Community Unit in 1999. However, the important point is that this is not just a matter of language, it's a matter of policy and practice. A move towards a policy agenda which encourages 'active communities', 'civic involvement' or 'giving time' can only be fulfilled by policy practice which proactively joins up and supports the full range of activities falling under these headings. Until local residents sitting on Local Strategic Partnerships or helping to regenerate their area are respected and supported as volunteers, this will not have been achieved. Significantly broadening our understanding of the range of activities that should count as volunteering is a key element in ensuring that volunteering policy is linked up with the wider objective of encouraging civic renewal.

The question of benefit and motivations to volunteer

As well as challenging the common understanding of what sorts of activities 'count', this book raises a debate as to what sorts of motivations we think volunteering should be driven by. The traditional

assumption is that volunteering should be driven by a desire to help someone else. However, many of the contributors discuss the importance of recognising more selfish motivations and the value of individual rewards for volunteers. This raises two important questions: firstly, what form of individual benefits should we provide to reward volunteers? And following on from this, is the introduction of more selfish motivations compatible with civic renewal and the provision of benefits to wider society?

Matthew Thomson offers an important critique of traditional views of volunteering. He argues that there is a tendency to assume that what distinguishes volunteers is that they work selflessly and they work for free. On this view, giving rewards to volunteers would 'cancel out' the selfless motivation required for an activity to count as volunteering. This understanding of volunteering as a 'philanthropic' activity is very limiting though, for as Thomson notes, it presents an image of 'powerful' volunteers doing good to 'powerless' recipients. It suggests that in order to volunteer you have to be not only affluent enough to afford the time, but also more skilled or able than the person you help. If this were our view of volunteering we should not be surprised if it were to prove hard to raise participation levels amongst lower-income, poorly educated or socially excluded groups.

Many of the authors in this book challenge this 'philanthropic' view of volunteering and there is agreement that rewards in some form are appropriate. Thomson suggests that the first step towards being genuinely inclusive would be to offer honoraria to all volunteers, including those participating in more informal volunteering such as local regeneration schemes. Susan Stroud and Will Paxton (Chapter 7) take the idea further, presenting schemes whereby volunteering is rewarded with some form of credit. All agree that the reward for volunteering need not distort or destroy less selfish motivations because there is no direct or immediate payment. Furthermore any financial reward is awarded in such a way that it helps to further the individual's own personal development through education or asset ownership. Wendy Piatt (Chapter 5) and Selina Chen (Chapter 6) challenge still further the notion that volunteers must be unrewarded. Piatt recommends the promotion of Student Teaching Assistants, who will receive a direct financial payment, albeit with the supposition that it contributes to their Higher Education costs. Chen's chapter argues that we must emphasise

the personal benefits to potential volunteers, particularly when focusing on the young. She applies this to her idea of an 'ExperienceYear', where people will be paid for their time volunteering on a gap year between school and university. Both of these schemes suggest that volunteering can legitimately be encouraged by combining an appeal to the noble considerations of doing good with an appeal to considerations of a more self-interested kind.

Even if we abandon the philanthropic model as anachronistic, some concern remains about how far volunteering can incorporate a notion of reward if it is to contribute to civic renewal. As Victoria Nash argues in Chapter 1, the goal of civic renewal assumes the growth of three different types of engagement: civil, moral and democratic. The aspiration to moral engagement means that citizens are expected to become more personally and socially responsible, ensuring that their activities respect important social and political values. Volunteering might be expected to contribute towards this process of moral engagement by helping individuals to develop a broader more empathic understanding of the needs of others and a greater respect for fellow citizens. The concern then is that if individuals undertake voluntary activity just because they want the CV points or the financial reward, then they are no *morally* richer as a result.

It is hard to give a conclusive response to this question of motivations. There is certainly some consensus among contributors that some form of reward is legitimate and even desirable. There is also agreement that to use volunteering fruitfully as a mechanism which contributes to wider civic renewal, a balance between three types of benefit has to be found. These are the *personal benefits* to the volunteer, the benefits to the *recipient community* and the benefits to *wider society or civic renewal*. All three must stand together. A personally rewarding volunteering experience will only be possible if the activity genuinely makes a difference to other people's lives, whilst the broader goals of civic renewal will only be achieved if the experience is personally empowering and changes volunteers' future actions. However, striking the correct balance is difficult. Whilst several chapters in this collection emphasise the importance of attracting new groups into volunteering activity, there is a danger that by placing too much emphasis on individual benefits the positive impact on wider society is reduced. In this light it is important to note that all of the chapters which advocate

the provision of a reward for volunteering do so with a view to institutionalising that activity in some way. The aim is to promote not casual, episodic volunteering which is unlikely to engage hearts and minds, but rather, to involve individuals in longer-term programmes of activity which require some personal commitment and are more likely to facilitate real personal development.

Policy development

All the chapters in this collection make recommendations which could help further the goal of a more engaged civic society. Although this list is broad and varied, there is particular focus on the issues of volunteering in and around Further and Higher Education. Given the different perspectives of the seven authors there is no assumption that all of these policies should or could be introduced together. However, amongst the most important recommendations are:

- Greater secured funding for the volunteering 'infrastructure' and for expansion of locally administered pots of money such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's Community Chest and community foundations rather than big spending on 'dragnet' style recruitment drives.

- Honoraria payments for volunteers helping to turn their area around in local regeneration efforts, like those sitting on Local Strategic Partnerships.

- Introduction of a US-style 'Work-Study' programme whereby access to Higher Education is promoted by financial aid for students prepared to work in important community and voluntary sector positions. One specific option under such a scheme would be for students to receive financial aid in return for working as teaching assistants.

- An ExperienceYear programme offering financial aid for students in Higher and Further Education willing to spend a gap year undertaking community service.

- Financial credits for voluntary activity undertaken to contribute towards assets accumulated through new asset-based welfare policies.

Summary of chapters

The book is divided into two sections. The first – *Underlying Principles and Assumptions* – looks critically at existing assumptions about the nature of volunteering and the role of volunteering policy. It identifies and responds to some of the key challenges faced by any government determined to pursue goals of civic renewal though this medium, and offers critical opinions of existing thinking from within the voluntary sector. The second section – *Developing the Policy Agenda* – outlines specific proposals for developing new volunteering initiatives which could help contribute to wider civic renewal, with particular reference to policy on Higher Education and asset-based welfare.

Section One

Chapter 1: Laying the ground: civic renewal and volunteering policy

In this chapter, Victoria Nash unpacks the rhetoric of civic renewal to identify the policy goals at its heart. It is argued that the Labour Government seeks to promote three types of engagement – civil, moral and democratic – and policy on volunteering is assessed in the light of these goals. It then lays out a clear set of principles which should form the basis of future policy development. In particular, it is suggested that there has been too much focus on the numbers of people volunteering rather than on the quality of the volunteering experience. Policy should build on strengths of current initiatives by seeking to join up the activities that engage citizens across government departments, and by providing more support for civic activities that fall beyond the definition of traditional formal volunteering.

Chapter 2: Renewing volunteering for civic renewal

Matthew Thomson responds to several of the issues raised in the first chapter by assessing not just existing policy but the very concept of volunteering. He argues that many of the current volunteering problems are based on a traditional understanding of volunteering as based on a view of 'powerful' benefactors philanthropically helping 'powerless' beneficiaries. Such an approach ensures that more socially excluded groups feel they have little to offer or gain from the volunteering

experience. Thomson recommends a policy approach which challenges the assumption that volunteering must be unpaid, suggesting that honoraria payments could be awarded to volunteers, especially those who participate in local regeneration programmes such as Local Strategic Partnerships. He also argues that we must broaden the range of activities supported through the volunteering policy framework to offer more support for informal activities. A segment of Lottery Funds could be set aside for involving new groups in volunteering in this broader range of activities.

Chapter 3: Opportunities to act: involving volunteers in delivering public services

Elisabeth Hoodless raises the question of what we expect the growing numbers of people encouraged to volunteer to actually do. She argues that if it is so important that we engage citizens in ever larger numbers than before, then it is essential that these people contribute something which is genuinely useful. In this light, Hoodless suggests that we need to change the way we think about public service delivery such that the involvement of volunteers in this process becomes a mainstream concern. It is suggested that every public sector body should be required to develop a 'volunteering strategy' setting out the ways in which it can improve its service by incorporating volunteers.

Section 2

Chapter 4: Civic involvement and student finances: lessons from the US

Susan Stroud's chapter introduces examples of successful civic engagement programmes from the US. The concept of 'service' is much more developed in the US and, as Stroud makes clear, it is particularly well developed in relation to links with Higher and Further Education funding. In Britain debates on student finance are centred on the appropriate role of grants and loans. However, in the US there is a third element, which is service-based financial assistance. Stroud argues that a British move towards a student finance system based on loans, grants and service-based aid would be a valuable way of linking two key policy goals, namely widening access to Further and Higher Education,

and increasing civic involvement. Stroud describes three types of scheme operating in the US, and specifically recommends the Federal Work Study programme as one which could work well in Britain. This scheme rewards students for civic work undertaken during the academic year, by providing assistance with the costs of Higher Education.

Chapter 5: Student teaching assistants: setting an example

Wendy Piatt proposes a scheme for engaging students in Higher Education which meets many of the principles of the Federal Work Study Programme. Piatt argues for the introduction of a student teaching assistant scheme, whereby students in Higher Education could help out in local schools, in return for a modest financial reward. This scheme, Piatt suggests, goes with the grain of current trends in Higher Education, notably in its recognition that an increasing number of students have to combine work and study. It also helps meet the challenge of increasing access for people from deprived backgrounds. It does this both through providing income for people while at university, but more importantly by providing positive role models for pupils who would not previously have considered going onto Higher Education. Importantly such a policy would also further civic engagement, potentially shaping the perspective and ambitions of both school children and university students. It could lead to more graduates considering teaching at a time when public services face growing recruitment difficulties.

Chapter 6: Transitions to civic maturity: gap year volunteering and opportunities for Higher Education

In this chapter, Selina Chen builds on her idea of an ExperienceYear; a service scheme which would offer students who take a gap year, financial reward in the form of credits towards the cost of their education. She argues that this programme would meet two key policy aims. Firstly, it would widen access to Higher Education by reducing the likely burden of debt for students. Secondly, the scheme would provide significant incentives for young people to volunteer, which might prove one way of reversing the recent trend of decreased participation among the under 25s. Chen argues that the benefits of

volunteering and 'service learning' are increasingly being recognised by employers and are more appropriate for many people than classroom based learning. The ExperienceYear is one way of extending these benefits to a wider group of people.

Chapter 7: Civic involvement and asset-based welfare

Will Paxton argues that the recent development of asset-based welfare policies presents a golden opportunity to introduce a system of credits for civic involvement. This serves two important policy goals. Firstly, the framework of individual savings accounts created by policies such as the Child Trust Fund could potentially allow for the development of a nationwide system of credits for civic involvement, thus helping to incentivise volunteering. Secondly, non-financial contributions to asset-based policies would allow people from low-income households to accumulate a larger asset. This chapter illustrates that the aims of civic renewal will not be achieved by policies entirely focused on volunteering; instead other policy areas need to be adapted to help enhance engagement at the same time as achieving their main aims and objectives.

SECTION I UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS

1. Laying the ground: civic renewal and volunteering

Victoria Nash

A common theme in New Labour's politics and rhetoric has been the importance of civic renewal. Several speeches by Tony Blair, David Blunkett and Gordon Brown have made reference to this theme. Civic renewal is supposed to be an over-arching goal to be achieved through the working of a wide range of policies. It describes more a vision of a certain type of society than a particular measurable outcome. Volunteering is often held to have a unique role to play in supporting processes of civic renewal, by offering citizens the experience of direct engagement in their communities that can lead to broader habits of civic engagement. In order to achieve this goal, it is important to be clear exactly what is meant by civic renewal and how policies such as those on volunteering can contribute to this aim.

This chapter investigates this ambition in the context of current and future policy on volunteering. It will first set out a clearer account of civic renewal and attempt to identify the sorts of changes required to achieve this goal. Current policies on volunteering will then be assessed against this account to determine just how far they respect the underlying aims of civic renewal. A final section proposes some simple principles from which future policy on volunteering could be developed in a way which would help achieve wider civic renewal.

Civic renewal: the vision

Voluntary activity is the cornerstone of any civilised society. It is the glue that binds people together and fosters a sense of common purpose. It is an essential building block in our work to create a more inclusive society. It contains the principles of commitment and engagement that are the foundations of democracy. (David Blunkett, NCVO conference, 2001)

> I want to outline the case for a new and stronger relationship
> between individual, community and government – for the
> renewal of British civic society – for a great British society
> which not only defends the importance of voluntary
> organisations, but engenders a civic patriotism. (Gordon
> Brown, NCVO conference, 9 February 2000)

> Enabling government strengthens civil society rather than
> weakening it...the state, voluntary sector and individuals
> working together. New Labour's task is to strengthen the
> range and quality of such partnerships. (Tony Blair, Third
> Way pamphlet, 1998)

The concept of civic renewal articulates the aim of achieving civic
engagement. Civic engagement means participation by citizens in the
public realm and focuses attention on the concept of citizenship with all
the rights and duties that that status implies. In classical times and in
later republican writing, such participation meant literally self-
government: citizens working to preserve the security and virtue of the
state. Now, as Matthew Taylor has suggested, it could just mean 'giving
ordinary people a say in the political process' (Taylor 2001). In the
current political context one key issue is the recognition that citizens are
not just consumers of services provided by government, but also rightful
participants in the production of those services.

Civic engagement can be seen as valuable for either of two reasons,
one which appeals to the intrinsic good of participation, and one which
looks to the consequences. The first is based on classical republican
ideas of civic virtue that date back to Aristotle. The good life was simply
a life where the uniquely human characteristics of speech and reason
were expressed and stretched in political participation. Engagement in
the form of direct democratic participation was seen as a way of
exercising citizen 'virtue'. Later civic republicans such as Montesquieu,
De Tocqueville and, arguably, even Mill, adopted a more
consequentialist approach, arguing for civic engagement as a driver of
human progress. Both Mill and De Tocqueville, for example, greatly
feared the stifling effects of democracy which they thought would lead to
conformity and apathy. Their fears of the 'tyranny of the majority' were
to be countered by healthy participation in a wide variety of social

groups, activities and institutions which would promote and protect free speech, free thought and morally responsible 'habits of the heart'. The contemporary consequentialist argument is both less complicated and more familiar, claiming that the quality of public services will improve if citizens are involved in the decision-making process, or that fewer cash transfers and benefits will be required if citizens become more mutually supportive and self-reliant. These are often the arguments appealed to in New Labour evocations of 'rights and responsibilities'.

Additional weight has recently been added to the outcomes-based justifications of civic renewal, in the form of arguments about 'social capital'. In particular, Robert Putnam's work has helped to spread the message that the quality of social relations in society can have an important impact on key policy outcomes such as health, educational achievement and economic growth (Putnam 2000). Social networks are essential in providing support, information or links to other groups, whilst norms such as trust or reciprocity make transactions easier and more predictable. According to this account, participation in the groups and institutions of civil society or 'associational life' as Putnam calls it, is a key component of social capital, helping to build the rich and diverse social networks that are so valuable. As well as being vigorously embraced by David Blunkett, social capital has appeared internationally on the research agenda of the World Bank and domestically on that of the Health Development Agency and the Office for National Statistics.

Although the classical ideal of direct self-government is often seen as anachronistic in the context of modern representative democracy, there are other aspects of civic engagement which do still have resonance today. Whilst the classical duties of citizens were clearly defined and limited to the realm of politics, contemporary calls for civic renewal often seek one or more of three possible forms of engagement:

● The first and simplest is *civil engagement*, the idea stated above that people should be encouraged to participate in the groups, activities and institutions that comprise civil society. This form of engagement could cover activities as diverse as sitting on a school governors' board, singing in a local choir, signing up as a formal volunteer or to use Robert Putnam's example, taking part in a regular bowling league.

● The second possible goal of civic renewal is *moral engagement*, often presented politically as appeals to individual or corporate social responsibility. Such appeals capture the idea that individuals can work together to take more control over their lives, either by showing self-restraint in using services more responsibly, or by actually meeting their own needs through mutual aid. Companies are similarly encouraged to pursue social and environmental objectives above and beyond their business interests. This aspect is a contemporary interpretation of classical republican requirements that citizens display civic virtue.

● The third potential aim of civic renewal is *democratic engagement*, the idea that individuals should be encouraged to make more use of their political rights to vote, lobby or even stand for election. This element of civic renewal has recently been expanded to incorporate the idea that citizens should have the right to be consulted in decisions that affect them, and in particular in the design and delivery of local services.

Together these three strands combine to provide a vision of an active society, of individuals working responsibly and autonomously to support their vision of the good society. Politically, they are perhaps most explicitly linked in David Blunkett's recent publication *Politics and Progress* (Blunkett 2001). Clearly these three strands are overlapping. Some types of activity or behaviour, such as volunteering for an environmental charity could be classified as both a form of civil and moral engagement.

It is important to note that there is likely to be political disagreement both as to what constitutes civic renewal and how it should be achieved. Proponents from different sides of the ideological spectrum place varying emphasis on the three possible aspects of civic engagement, and also set out with contrasting accounts of individual freedom and responsibility. Thus neo-conservatives have in the past seen civic engagement as something that takes place at the point where the state stops. A strong welfare state would on this view potentially crowd out forms of mutual support that would otherwise arise. Civic renewal, understood like this, might require the rolling back of state intervention in individual lives and the institutions of civil society. The operation of

an unfettered free market could on this view be seen as an essential component of civic renewal. This contrasts with the traditional view on the Left that the welfare state and public provision of services are vital to ensure equal opportunities for full participation in the activities and institutions of civil society, and the New Labour claim that involvement in the shaping and delivery of these services is itself a form of empowerment.

The Government's ambitions for civic renewal had their roots in the agenda of the 'Third Way' propounded in the run up to the 1997 election and during Labour's first term. Tony Blair then claimed that a central objective must be the achievement of 'a strong civil society embracing rights and responsibilities where the government is a partner to strong communities' (Blair 1998). Anthony Giddens, an architect of that vision, argued similarly that 'The fostering of an active civil society is a basic part of the politics of the third way' (Giddens 1998). Although much of New Labour's first term focused on the core functions of government, such as improving the quality of public services and the uniformity of their implementation, more focus on 'opportunities and responsibilities' has started to emerge. Blair's emotional speech at the 2001 Labour Party Conference, for example, stated 'Today our idea of society is shaped around mutual responsibility; a deal, an agreement between citizens not a one-way gift, from the well-off to the dependent.'

In Britain, both the Conservatives and New Labour have converged on some common ground in their appeals to civic renewal. Just as New Labour has paid lip-service to ideas of reinvigorating civil society since its election in 1997, so the Tory party established the Renewing One Nation team in 2000, with a heavy focus on civic renewal. In specific relation to volunteering policy, Labour re-launched the Voluntary and Community Unit as the Active Community Unit in 1999, whilst the Conservative Party's Renewing Civil Society report suggests a ministerial-led 'Office for Civil Society' within Whitehall (Conservative Party 2001). Both forms of organisation would be charged with supporting the growth of volunteering and the voluntary and community sectors. It remains to be seen how far-reaching this apparent consensus is. There are certainly still significant differences in the detail of policy, as the Conservative Party's recommendations place a great deal of emphasis on reducing taxation and red tape as a way of stimulating engagement, and the traditional family unit appears to be

allocated a greater role in their vision of the good society. It is also less than clear whether the rhetorical convergence is matched by a move to the Left in underlying Conservative values. At the very least, however, this developing consensus in one policy area makes ideas of civic renewal potentially very powerful in British politics.

As was outlined above, New Labour has introduced a wide range of policies which could be seen as contributing to civic renewal. One policy area in particular, is consistently and explicitly linked with these goals, and as such, should be assessed for the progress it has made. This is volunteering policy. The rest of this chapter will consider the extent to which current volunteering policy succeeds or fails to live up to the goals of civic renewal, and suggests some foundations for a policy agenda more likely to achieve these aims.

Civic renewal and volunteering: current policy

Programmes and funding

In 1999, the Voluntary and Community Unit of the Home Office was re-launched as the Active Community Unit (ACU). This move was presented by the government as a way of awarding volunteering policy a greater profile and role. That launch was accompanied by the launch of New Labour's flagship volunteering initiative, Millennium Volunteers. This initiative, resourced to the tune of £48 million, is directed at 16 to 24-years olds, and is actually operated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), rather than the ACU. The stated aim is to bring 100,000 young people into volunteering, and it is targeted at the age group who showed the sharpest drop in volunteering rates between 1991 and 1997 (Davis-Smith 1997).

The Labour government has recently introduced one further high-profile initiative: the Experience Corps, a £20 million not-for-profit company was launched in January 2002. This campaign seeks to attract the over-50s, a group often seen as having most to offer in terms of skills and time, into voluntary and community work. This scheme has also set a numerical target by which to judge its success, this time hoping to attract 250,000 volunteers by March 2004. The Experience Corps will be run from nine regional centres around Britain, and is technically operated at arms' length from any government department although the money will come from the Home Office. It is too early to

judge whether the initiative has proved successful in engaging the target group.

As well as these volunteering initiatives, the government provides support for the voluntary sector (the range of professional organisations which provide opportunities for volunteering although many of their own permanent staff are paid). The relevant programmes or initiatives supported include:

- Voluntary sector umbrella organisations such as Community Service Volunteers (CSV), National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS). These organisations help to connect volunteers with placements and provide important strategic support for the sector.

- Voluntary sector local volunteering organisations such as the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service and the National Association of Volunteer Bureaux.

- Student Volunteering UK, a national organisation working with a network of Student Community Action Groups around the UK. This is the main volunteering programme for students, and although it is focused primarily on universities, the model is gradually being extended to the Further Education sector.

- Mentor Points (managed by the National Mentoring Network) and the ACU's Mentoring Fund which aim to provide support and encouragement for people at challenging stages in their life.

- TimeBank and Youthnet, both of which are funded to help raise awareness of the possibilities for giving time.

- The Development Fund, which provides funding for voluntary and community organisations to recruit and train a Development Manager to inspire local people to get involved.

- Core funding for the Community Development Foundation (CDF), Community Matters and the National Youth Agency (NYA), which may not strictly speaking support volunteering

activity, but which very definitely support civic engagement more broadly interpreted.

Beyond this, local authorities have a responsibility to help fund the local volunteering infrastructure through volunteer bureaux and voluntary services councils, with other resources coming from the Community Fund, European Social Fund and regeneration programmes such as the Single Regeneration Budget.

It is important to remember that volunteering is not 'free labour', even when it is totally unwaged. The volunteering infrastructure costs money to provide, and individual programmes require significant funding. This point deserves emphasis, especially in an economic climate where many local authorities have cut back funding for voluntary services. If volunteering is as valuable as the government claims, a steady resource base for the infrastructure must be guaranteed, whether the funding is centrally or locally delivered. Given that there are scarce resources this makes it doubly important that existing volunteering schemes, especially large costly ones, are seen to deliver results that justify the investment. It is in this light that the following section examines the remit and design of current volunteering policy.

Assessing current volunteering policy

The Active Community Unit was launched with the explicit remit of strengthening civic engagement:

> The term (Active Community) reflects the positive idea of restoring a sense of community that has been lost in some places and which for some groups of people was never there in the first place. It will be important to bring together the strands of volunteering, community self-help and citizenship in a single strategy…Volunteering and community activities are central to the concept of citizenship and are key to restoring our communities. They can help with social inclusion, life-long learning, healthy living and active ageing. A strong and vibrant democracy requires active citizens participating in their communities. (Home Office 1999)

Despite this stated vision, there is concern that the current initiatives do not fully engage with the key aims of civic renewal as laid out in the previous section. Recent announcements such as the £13.5 million set aside to provide Development Managers, and the roll-out of Mentor Points are very much to be welcomed. The Development Fund will help to strengthen and shore up the existing local volunteering infrastructure, whilst both programmes should help to engage some of the hardest-to-reach groups and individuals. Similarly, the support offered for organisations such as CSV, Timebank, CDF and the NYA, is undoubtedly very valuable in the pursuit of increased civic engagement. All of these actions could contribute a great deal towards engaging people in the groups, institutions and activities of civil society, and also offer opportunities and support for potential moral development of participating individuals. Greater democratic engagement might also result, either directly from the work of organisations such as CDF and the NYA, or more indirectly as a result of the confidence gained through volunteering and mentoring programmes.

Where current policy appears to lack focus is when it comes to the flagship initiatives such as Millennium Volunteers and the Experience Corps. The arguments laid out below suggest that these initiatives, with their emphasis on numerical targets, fail to guarantee the sort of *moral* rather than just *civil* engagement required to deliver civic renewal. If this criticism is fair, then the implication is that government could make better use of its resources by focusing on partnership working and support for the voluntary sector infrastructure, than by launching large-scale initiatives.

Several particular sources of dissatisfaction can be identified. The first bone of contention is the preoccupation with numbers. The government said in 1997 that its target was to get a million more people volunteering, but it is unclear how this figure was arrived at, or indeed why numbers alone should be the priority. From the perspective of civic renewal it is certainly desirable that as many people as possible should be encouraged to take part in community activities. But civic renewal asks for a real character change not simply numeric participation. The accompanying element of moral engagement may be fostered by experience of helping others that is genuinely fulfilling. But it may also be undermined if the volunteering experience is unfulfilling or tokenistic. An important aim of civic renewal is the achievement of a more socially

responsible populace. High levels of volunteering may be either a sign that this is occurring or a cause of its development, but equally, it could just be a reflection of the self-interested pursuit of CV points and new skills.

The second cause for concern is also the preoccupation with numbers, but this time it's the concern that the fascination is insufficiently subtle. The complaint is that if we are to be concerned with numbers at all, we should be concerned with the numbers of people volunteering from traditionally under-represented, excluded or hard-to-reach groups. Recent figures on volunteering do show a slight decrease in the percentage of people volunteering between 1991 and 1997 – from 51 per cent to 48 per cent – but this is not obviously problematic, especially as other polls have revealed a general willingness of people to volunteer if asked (Davis-Smith 1997; CSV 2001). More worrying are the participation rates of certain groups: activity by 18 to 24-year olds appeared to drop dramatically between 1991 and 1997, and formal volunteering remains a predominantly middle-class activity (Davis-Smith 1997). Information is only starting to be gathered as to the representation of ethnic minorities in volunteering. The correct response to these latter concerns is not to set targets, or indeed to set up programmes such as Millennium Volunteers which adopt a 'drag-net' approach to participation. Rather, the policy aim should be to identify and remove the barriers which makes participation harder for these groups and to find ways of reaching out and encouraging them.

Current volunteering policy raises two further concerns. The first is that insufficient attention is devoted to the definition of volunteering and its boundaries with other related activities. The second issue is a related one, and focuses on the failure of current initiatives to consider the sorts of volunteering experiences that are most valuable.

Although it might seem absurd to quibble over semantics, how we choose to define volunteering will have an effect on both volunteering figures and, more importantly, capacity of policy to further goals of civic renewal. Quite simply, seeing volunteering as an unpaid activity undertaken in formal group situations risks missing the point and being class biased. A genuinely socially inclusive approach is only possible if, at least in certain cases, individuals are at least paid for expenses accrued, a principle already recognised by the many voluntary organisations that offer accommodation and expenses on volunteering

placements. Without this, only those who are wealthy enough to work for free will be able to participate.

Similarly it is important to recognise that formal volunteering is just one activity on the spectrum of civic participation, and that many people take part in activities which are just as beneficial but which they wouldn't describe as 'volunteering'. Residents of run-down areas may, for example, be doing a great deal to improve the quality of their local environment. This may not be formal volunteering, but it is definitely a form of community involvement that has at its heart principles of self-motivated activity to provide a community service. With their focus on democratic and even moral engagement, Local Strategic Partnerships could be one of New Labour's most important steps in the drive towards a more engaged society, but only if the process of engaging citizens is undertaken with sensitivity towards the costs and character of the duties required.

The original Working Group on Active Community did, in fact, recognise both these points:

> Such participation may be through 'formal' volunteering, undertaken through an organisation either large or small; 'informal' volunteering; spontaneous giving of time and help to neighbours; or 'self-help' volunteering to improve the quality of life locally, for example tenants' associations. Sometimes participation will take the form of advocacy, lobbying or even opposition to issues, but it is an important part of active community involvement in a democracy. (Home Office 1999)

Unfortunately, this observation has not really been put into practice. There has so far been little attempt to join up thinking on say, regeneration and volunteering, with the result that those who participate in Local Strategic Partnerships or simply get involved in clearing up their street are rarely recognised as valued volunteers and are often taken for granted. It is a common complaint in the regeneration sector that people living in deprived communities are expected to undertake work that those living in affluent neighbourhoods are not. Official recognition of their contributions as civically and morally engaged volunteers, possibly with some compensation for expenses, could help to defuse this complaint.

Whether or not we expand the definition of volunteering to include such efforts or not, it is essential that we move beyond a focus on numbers and pay more attention to the *quality* of volunteering experiences: one million more volunteers may sound very impressive, but it is only desirable from the point of civic renewal if those volunteers are both providing a service that is genuinely useful, and if they themselves find the experience fulfilling. The potential benefits of voluntary activity can be thought of as threefold, accruing to the individual, the recipients of the service and the wider society as public culture becomes more socially responsible. We need to be wary of creating volunteering which is too slanted in favour of any *one* of these objectives. Of course volunteering has to be rewarding and provide personal benefits to the individual, but quality volunteering should also genuinely provide additional benefit to the recipient community and benefit wider society. To benefit wider society volunteering should lead to ongoing civil engagement and the gradual growth of social responsibility. Quality volunteering experiences will lead people to think about the world they live in and what action is needed to achieve change.

In the rush to attract the requisite crowds into volunteering activities, web-sites and campaigns have emphasised the skills and CV points to be gained from the volunteering experience. Student Volunteering UK has a page on 'Career Development' for example, which points out: 'Having more than just a degree and having concrete evidence of skills gained from volunteering in the community which can easily be transferred to the world of work will stand graduates in good stead.' Whilst this is clearly true and worth stating, the balance of emphasis should reflect the three types of benefit outlined above to ensure that volunteering opportunities are undertaken with the best of intentions. Volunteering may well benefit the individual volunteer, but the primary benefit is the self-empowerment of *choosing* to make a difference rather than the CV points won. From the point of view of civic renewal it is this moral engagement which is so desirable. Whether or not we need to market volunteering in this way to attract hard-to-reach groups is a more difficult question. At the very least, it is essential that future volunteering initiatives attend to the quality of the opportunities provided. If young people or other hard-to-reach groups can be persuaded to volunteer with the expectation of some personal benefit, only a high-quality, mutually empowering volunteering experience can

ensure that those individuals do develop their sense of social and personal responsibility in the desired manner.

Ultimately, what is needed in existing policy on volunteering and active citizenship is both a set of coherent grounding principles and a clearer remit. A good first step would be to rationalise existing initiatives, but more substantial improvement will only occur if government works to identify and accept some basic principles which can guide future policy thinking in this area.

Principles for future volunteering policy

In order to ensure that future volunteering policy takes the aims of civic renewal seriously we can suggest some key principles which will help to further the goals of enhanced civil, moral and democratic engagement. These principles should be not be seen as limiting the potential of government to deliver grand and high-profile volunteering schemes, but they should provide some basis for determining how those schemes operate, whilst serving as a reminder of broader government aims. Examples are given of the ways in which such principles might be translated into policy.

'Necessary but not sufficient': volunteering as a contributor to civic renewal

Future policy on volunteering must accept that such activities can support civic renewal but will not guarantee it. There is a need to join up (both practically and intellectually) activities across public policy which relate to the wider civic renewal agenda. For example greater cross-cutting thinking needs to be developed on volunteering, citizenship education, civil and political participation and public involvement or consultation. Citizens can be engaged in a variety of different ways at a variety of different levels. We need to ensure that these experiences can be connected.

● *Recommendation:* The Active Community Unit could issue guidelines for relevant organisations (local authorities, schools, voluntary organisations) showing how individuals can be helped to build on their current experience of civic involvement by undertaking other forms of civic activity.

Quality not quantity: volunteering as benefiting the community

Current policy on volunteering sets targets for levels of involvement without consideration of what those volunteers may usefully do. Future initiatives need to ensure that any drive to support volunteering also supports processes and infrastructures which will connect up volunteers with valued and necessary activities and lead to ongoing civic involvement.

- *Recommendation:* No more 'drag-net' style initiatives aimed at mass recruitment and Millennium Volunteers to scale down its ambitions. Funding to be diverted instead to providing solid support for the infrastructure of local & national umbrella organisations and to expanding locally-run community chests for grants to small self-help projects.

Volunteering as a process not just an activity

It is vital that volunteering is seen as a process by which individuals are shaped and socialised as well as an activity which inculcates skills or provides a particular service. Only by appreciating this can we ensure that more attention is directed to the responsibilities of voluntary organisations themselves and the experience of volunteers themselves.

- *Recommendation:* A volunteers' charter to be drawn up which lays out universal guidelines as to how public services or local government can retain and develop volunteers, for example through Local Strategic Partnerships.

Not-for-profit not unpaid: volunteering as an exercise of choice

As well as payment for expenses, alternative forms of recompense such as Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) or time-bank schemes should also be considered more widely. More blue-sky thinking might consider ways of encouraging civic involvement whilst helping individuals to take responsibility for their futures at the same time, perhaps developing a credit system that could feed into policies such as the proposed 'baby-bond', Higher Education costs or even pensions. The Treasury could help to incentivise volunteering or civic involvement by rewarding active citizens or companies with tax or National Insurance breaks.

● *Recommendation:* Universal grants to cover at least the cost of expenses incurred in the process of volunteering within public services or local government. (This option is explored in greater detail in Chapters 4-7.)

Mainstream not an add-on: volunteering and civic involvement as a mainstay of quality public services, healthy communities and successful regeneration

Volunteering is still seen too much as detached from other areas of government policy. Government initiatives to regenerate deprived areas and improve public service delivery would both benefit from mainstreaming volunteering into their thinking. Volunteers can bring important additional benefits to public services and can complement and help those professionals. At the same time, it is also important to recognise the personal costs associated with some of these activities, and to ensure that initiatives such as LSPs which rely on citizen involvement do not impose heavy personal costs on those least able to bear them.

● *Recommendation:* ACU and NRU to run a cross-cutting team overseeing the involvement of local volunteers in current regeneration initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out an account of civic renewal and argues that although New Labour has explicitly linked policy on volunteering with admirable long-term goals of civic renewal, it is not clear that the most high-profile initiatives help to meet these aims. The set of principles set out above go some way towards clarifying how future policy on volunteering and civic involvement could build on current successes to help foster the civil, moral and democratic engagement required to achieve the Left's vision of the good society.

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2. Renewing volunteering for civic renewal
Matthew Thomson

Volunteering has much to contribute to civic renewal. This chapter contends, however, that its full potential will only be unleashed if we succeed in broadening understanding of the concept. In particular, changes in the way that volunteering is perceived and practiced are necessary to involve more diverse social groups in more creative ways in their communities. Some fruitful possibilities for making such changes are identified, and the chapter concludes by arguing that without the initiation of such changes, success in implementing the civic renewal agenda will be at best partial. At worst there is a risk that current modes of volunteering will reinforce the very social divisions that volunteering is expected to bridge.

If volunteering is the answer, what was the question?

Volunteering is widely seen as the donation of time by people who see themselves as better off, to those whom they perceive to be worse off. Such a division instils a gradient of power between ´powerful´ benefactors and ´powerless´ beneficiaries that is often artificial. This is not to argue that there are no differences between the needs and abilities of individuals and social groups. It is just that, in the volunteering equation, volunteers have needs as significant as those of the people they are ´volunteering to´. In the philanthropic model of volunteering though, volunteers' needs are often camouflaged or suppressed. Whether or not the process of volunteering meets the needs of the volunteer is a question that, to a greater or lesser extent, will determine the authenticity of the civic renewal it is supposed to bring about.

Both the need for civic renewal and the role of volunteering in meeting that need, have been romanticised. They depend upon a perceived demise of community which may be largely accurate, but which does constrain our understanding of both the problem and the solution. It is useful to reconsider the key elements of this nostalgic vision in order to see exactly what part volunteering plays in sustaining

and renewing communities and to expose the preconceptions and misconceptions that abound about volunteering.

The received wisdom is that in any geographical community, people used to help each other out more than they nowadays do. Taking the time to check on neighbours, doing shopping for those less mobile than oneself, inviting neighbours or isolated community members round for Sunday lunch: these were all activities that sustained the innocuous but essential bonds that helped British society cohere. It was accepted that, even where some tasks were quite onerous, or could have been done by a professional expert, doing them was just part and parcel of being a member of that community. Such community activity was supposedly a reflex: a natural response of the community to its own needs.

Then, as the economic regulation of time displaced the social, so the small taken-for-granted tasks, the fulfilment of which cemented a community, gradually became displaced. People no longer popped round to collect laundry, change dressings, pick up or drop off post. Children, who had been known by everyone in a community, were now barely overseen by their own families. Women who had done most of these invisible tasks became economically active in new ways, which demanded more time away from their communities.

Communities, so the conventional wisdom has it, became more and more atomised in the sense that fewer connections were made between members. Neighbours became less likely to know each other well, if at all, or even each other's name. In this climate of anonymity, knowledge of individuals' specialisms or skills disappeared with the knowledge of who did what kind of job. Awareness of individual needs disappeared with the prioritisation of desire as the driver of society. This ebbing information has, ironically, peaked with the rise of the 'Information Age'. Individuals often now feel alienated and surrounded by strangers, they shy from interaction and recoil from intervention. As the gratification of desire has become commodified it has become impolite to discuss need, or at least doing so marks those who do with the tint of failure or of weakness. Instead, personal need has come to be contained within the emergent profession of social work, and the professionalisation of social services can be correlated with the disappearance of the last shreds of collective responsibility for community needs.

At a certain juncture concerns about the societal cracks arising stopped being just the tired premonitions of doom by a pessimistic

minority. They gained the status of being the conventional wisdom and their resolution became a political imperative, and the decay of community rushed to the top of the political agenda. When New Labour was elected with an explicit and overwhelming mandate for renewal, a host of compacts between individuals, local authorities, central government, business and charities were drawn up in an attempt to glue 'failing' communities back together.

An apparently cheap and easy answer to some of the questions of civic renewal was to suggest that those 'glueing' tasks needed to be re-appropriated by the community. However, after the changes described above, there was a dearth of ready and willing community members available to start doing these jobs and no direct mechanism to connect local needs with capable local agents. So the nostalgic community-focused solution foundered as the moral engagement required was simply found lacking.

Volunteering and charitable organisations have responded to this failure of communities to pick up the tasks they had undertaken in the past. But as charities crowd in offering different services to alleviate suffering or rescue the vulnerable, a cycle of need and relief of need begins and is perpetuated. The charities hire workers whose salaries depend on the continued neediness of those they serve. Moreover, the charities, and the charities that spring up to serve those charities, become used to drawing their funding from the professional Social Services Departments. The same charities often continue to be run by volunteers, but with a declining understanding of the work of their professional staff. Meanwhile, the staff develop understandable jealousy of volunteers who, sometimes, do jobs that could be done by professionals. The renewal of the community has in this sense been delegated to external agents and, in many areas, is seen as just one of the services that residents can expect from their local authority.

This simplistic view of the demise of community and the essential role of charitable and voluntary organisations in serving local needs skates over the ambiguities around the concept of volunteering. In particular it ignores the structural flaw at the heart of the popular perception of charitable or voluntary activity: that of philanthropy. Where such groups are built around the concept of the strong helping the weak, there is an inherent problem with encouraging more people to take part, especially those from less privileged sections of society. At the

same time, the ideal of community self-help is too hastily abandoned simply because the nostalgic visions of close-knit communities no longer seem to apply.

As the next section makes clear, greater emphasis needs to be placed on values such as reciprocity, mutuality, and even personal benefit, as drivers of volunteering. The supposedly lost ideal of individual and community self-help must be regained. The civic renewal that is sought will only be brought about by people coming together regardless of their capacity, ability or skill to work towards goals that are at once personal and common. Common in the sense that the goals reflect the needs of both the 'giver' and the 'receiver'. That the work is voluntary should be almost by the by. The person offering help has a need equivalent to, if not greater than, those they seek to help, and it is this need that lies at the heart of the call for civic renewal: the need for a sense of belonging, of a higher purpose, of a meaning in their community. Volunteering based on equality, rather than on difference provides a common identity.

The limits of volunteering as it is currently configured

The problem is not just that we have an overly pessimistic view of the demise of community, but that we have also romanticised the idea of volunteering. In fact there are several significant problems with volunteering as it is generally understood which lead to more significant problems as it is actually practised. One of the supposed strengths of volunteerism is that it is, in theory, 'bottom-up'. With over 150,000 separate charities registered in England and Wales, it is fair to assume that the majority of these have grown out of needs identified at the community level. Around a thousand charities can be termed 'mega-charities', those that together absorb over 90 per cent of charitable funding and which, in many contexts discharge quasi-statutory duties. While these large charities are also significant deployers of formal volunteers, the volunteers involved with the overwhelming majority of smaller charities are probably closer to fulfilling the brief of 'civic engagement' described in the previous chapter. Critically they are volunteering to terms defined by their own communities. It is worth noting though, that even these small charities which emerge from the 'bottom up' will rarely represent all community interests. The first

danger then is that we may tend to romanticise the role of voluntary sector organisations such that they are allowed to become self-serving and exclusionary in the long term.

The second concern focuses on the way that third-sector organisations use voluntary labour. Such groups expend a tremendous amount of volunteer effort, often on tasks that might be classed as paid services in other sectors. Many of these groups maintain unnecessarily labour-intensive processes, which they can afford because of their pool of volunteer labour. This must partly explain the finding of the 1997 survey that 64 per cent of volunteers feel they could be better deployed (IVR 1997). Apart from wasting human potential, such activities strip the act of volunteering of its empowering force, since the volunteer is primarily concerned with doing what is expected of them, rather than applying their own initiative. Instead of harnessing the freedom that should be intrinsic to volunteering, many volunteering opportunities can stifle the very creativity the act of volunteering could unleash.

It is important to note though, that it is not only charities that are at fault in this regard. The increasing use of volunteers in local and regional government consultation processes has, in some cases, undermined the reasons for involving citizens in this way. Classically, such involvement takes the form of repetitive participation in meetings and the reading of and response to copious papers about the arcana of local democratic processes. Even such new vehicles as Local Strategic Partnerships have started out down this road. Apart from the frequently incurred risks of the executive ignoring, or being unable to meet, the aspirations of citizens involved in such processes, this form of involvement hardly contributes to renewal in any creative sense.

So, there are several concerns about our uncritical acceptance of formal volunteering and the role of these volunteers in stepping in to fill the needs of local communities. Firstly, formal volunteering may be seen as a style of crowd management, of involvement for involvement's sake, with little thought given to what volunteers could add. Secondly it may be criticised as stripping jobs by replacing paid posts, and in many cases the involvement of volunteers in the administration of professional organisations is simply inappropriate. But perhaps the most fundamental critique of much of mainstream volunteering practice is to do with its philanthropic nature.

Philanthropy is a term that has been used as powerfully ironically as it has according to its dictionary definition. Before and since Robert Tressel's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, the notion of the do-gooder, doing something for the welfare of others has long been suspect (Tressel 1891). 'Busybody' and 'nosey-parker', are terms commonly used to mock those taking an interest in the affairs of those not immediately within their orbit. At the same time, we claim to regret the absence of that same interest when we consider broken down communities, and we attribute such an interest to better, healthier communities. So we mock the very virtues we seek, perhaps because at root, the political ethos of the 1980s has irredeemably contaminated the ideal of selflessness.

Philanthropy implies a gradient of ability to care; philanthropists are benefactors, and the needy are, to greater or lesser extents, deserving beneficiaries. Philanthropic volunteering becomes as much a conscience-salving activity as it is the delivery of a valuable service; an activity, moreover, that is the preserve of those clearly in a position to help others. To this day there is an incumbent requirement on newly registering charities to demonstrate the altruism of their activities: benefits should either be delivered to those in need, or at least be incidental to such delivery.

The institutionalisation of philanthropy brings its own problems. As the larger charities have 'professionalised' by hiring more and more staff, so the paradox of 'professional philanthropy' has taken hold, whereby a philanthropic ethos has to be combined with a professional hierarchy and methods of operation. The paradox is resolved, classically, by the underpaying of charity staff or by placing artificial boundaries around the need that is to be relieved by the delivery of the service, so as to contain the work within professionally manageable parameters. In the vast majority of charitable organisations, which do not have paid staff, the opposite problem occurs. Here, volunteers often end up trapped in a culture where the volunteer must do everything, and who are, as a consequence, often over-stretched to the point of stress or underachievement.

With the ascendance of the idea of the Self as the chief motivator of personal activity permeating society and the media, so the perception of involvement in 'selfless activity' has become irrelevant to many people. Voluntary activity risks becoming ghettoised and stagnant by its denial of benefit to the helper. Philanthropic approaches to volunteering stand to hinder rather than facilitate community renewal by the implicit

exclusion of those apparently less able to give, or by the explicit emphasis on avoidance of personal benefit.

Renewing volunteering for civic renewal

If volunteering is to contribute to civic renewal it must alter its philanthropic image. While many people equate the meaning of the verb volunteer with 'work without payment', this is in fact its tertiary meaning (OED 2001). The primary definition, 'freely offer to do something', and secondary meaning 'say or suggest something without being asked', are usually concealed by the economic perspective.

Volunteering is first and foremost the exercise of free will. This fundamental confusion between 'giving something for nothing' and 'doing what you want to do' has dogged volunteering and probably ensured its irrelevance to many people who stand to benefit most from volunteering. Why should the isolated, the disadvantaged, the marginalised and the excluded person volunteer when they have enough problems already? If volunteering is work without payment then should it not be left to the well-off, who can afford to work for nothing?

In fact, if volunteering is perceived as an unequivocal exercise of free will then it becomes dramatically more attractive and relevant to disadvantaged groups. By volunteering, one becomes an agent of change in one's own right. Empowerment is nowhere more practical than in voluntary activity, and the benefits to the participant are clear, if not always tangible. This places volunteering at the heart of a policy of civic renewal that seeks to build up 'the commitment and skills upon which formal democracy depends' (Blunkett 2001). This policy calls for an expansion of volunteering; an expansion defined in terms of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of marginalised groups to whom volunteering needs to be brought.

But volunteering also needs to expand on two other fronts. On the one hand, (and not universally), volunteering needs to escape the shackle of 'without payment', which culturally and practically inhibits the involvement of the most impoverished people in communities. On the other, volunteering needs to move beyond its connotation of work for organisations; it needs to reclaim the informal mosaic of tasks that we believe were once the invisible glue holding the community together, and which were delivered by individuals to individuals. This is often

styled 'informal voluntary activity', and is still widespread, although it has often been seen as the poor relation of formal volunteering, and is not counted by many as volunteering at all. In subsuming volunteering within the achievement of organisational (usually charitable) objectives, whole sets of social activities have in many cases, been lost to communities as the voluntary energy directed at a community has become formalised and clique-ridden.

Volunteering now needs to move beyond the traditions of philanthropy as described above, into a paradigm where the benefits to the volunteer are not seen as shameful. In the post-philanthropic world volunteers should be encouraged to expect some sort of quid pro quo. If voluntary commitment is to become as central to modern lifestyles as the annual holiday, then volunteering needs to be able to demonstrate more effectively that it is relevant and rewarding.

Volunteering in practice is already, in many areas, moving away from doing things to or for poor or needy groups. There is greater emphasis on the processes of potential self-help, empowerment and the building of mutually beneficial partnerships, but this is matched neither by the public perception of volunteering, nor by the strategies (where they exist) of the charitable sector itself. The UK Volunteering Forum has been working to lead volunteer involving organisations towards the strategic management and deployment of volunteers. Such initiatives are hampered by the lack of secure funding at the level of individual charities and at the level of the agencies and umbrella bodies that help these groups develop. Where funding is secure, it is quite often sourced from Social Services budgets, reinforcing the traditional 'needy client' approach to volunteering.

Strategic funding of volunteer-involving organisations and an improved public profile of volunteering would undoubtedly give valuable impetus to the changes already afoot in the volunteering world. However such changes are unlikely to achieve the paradigm shift required by the civic renewal agenda. While volunteering is still seen as the preserve of middle-class liberals, it is unlikely to ring the changes that constitute civic renewal. To facilitate the involvement of, for instance, younger people on lower incomes within the volunteering movement, the quasi-religious fixation on not paying volunteers may need to be dropped.

At stake is the concept of volunteer-reward. Over 90 per cent of charities now pay at least some of the expenses incurred by volunteers

in order for them to volunteer. The same proportion provides training to volunteers on the job, and many people move from working as volunteers to working in a paid capacity, demonstrating the value of the training and of the volunteering experience. A host of other benefits to the volunteer are well documented elsewhere, but despite this the appeal of volunteering is still too narrow. The payment of an honorarium to a person who is freely giving their time and enthusiasm to help fulfil an organisation's goal and who is not on the formal payroll does not, on the face of it, appear terribly radical. However, the notion of paying volunteers for their time is heresy in most volunteer-involving organisations.

Honoraria are, by definition, not pro-rata payments. They are given as freely as the volunteer offers their time. In a post-philanthropic model of volunteering, with an emphasis on the recognition of mutual benefit, it should not be so hard to trial the payment of honoraria to volunteers. A good place to start would be with the volunteering taking place as part of the various Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives. The payment of expenses is usually in arrears, and covers only the tangible costs associated with service-based volunteering. To a single mother in a council flat, surviving on benefits and whose only communication tool is a pay-as-you-go mobile phone, the payment of retrospective expenses is academic. If she is the type of person who should be leading a process of neighbourhood renewal, then the only way she can make her calls, send her emails and pay her childminder is if she is given some basic funding to enable her to do so. This goes beyond the proposals to link community service to vehicles such as the baby-bond; it is about giving cash to those who are unable to participate in community initiatives because they lack the resources to do so.

This is not an argument to make volunteering into another tier of modern apprenticeship, or to pay every single volunteer a standard honorarium. It is an appeal to charities to consider paying volunteers, in advance, sums of money that are not connected to specific receipts but which relate to the commitment and service they volunteer to further the organisation's own objectives. Implementation would not be easy, and funders' perceptions of volunteers and beneficiaries will need an overhaul before it can be adopted on any great scale. One way of making progress without relying on such a change in perceptions would

be to award a segment of lottery funds simply for the involvement of new groups in volunteering. The biggest shake-up, though, would have to take place within the system of benefits and income support to enable recipients to be paid moderate honoraria without compromising their livelihoods.

Mutualism is the force that drives informal volunteering. Informal volunteering is largely between individuals, which most volunteer involving organisations refuse to accept as a form of volunteering. However, if a wider public needs to embrace volunteering, wouldn't it be much easier to foster such willingness if they could be shown that actually volunteering is something they do in their own lives already? Around half the population claim participation in some sort of informal voluntary activity already (Davis-Smith 1997). Such activity is most likely within extended families or similarly tight-knit networks but this should not invalidate it as a form of volunteering. In fact Cahn's theory of co-production, which has shaped the growth of time bank networks, could offer volunteering the redefinition it needs (Cahn 1999). It dispenses with the division between the volunteer and the beneficiary, and identifies both parties as volunteers co-producing a shared output.

By incorporating person-to-person volunteering as a form of citizenship, and promoting it as something of value integral to civic renewal, volunteering can be made to appeal to far more people than is currently the case. Local time banks are already demonstrating success in this regard. Through the creation of 'mutual volunteering' networks within tight communities, within which community members offer, unconditionally, hours of their own time to each other, a new model of volunteering is being created. It is one which is involving more marginalised individuals than the majority of traditional approaches. This kind of mutual volunteering enables people who would otherwise be imprisoned in the category of 'beneficiary' to give and contribute as easily as has the traditional philanthropic volunteer. It enables more collaboration between individuals, outside of formal charitable organisation, and is now involving all sorts of cash or in-kind benefits to make volunteer time a valuable currency in local micro-economies. This is the sort of volunteering which policy needs to promote.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that traditional forms of volunteering have less and less relevance to the very communities most in need of the benefits of civic renewal. It has challenged two of the central tenets of volunteering as it is widely perceived, namely that volunteers must be unpaid and that volunteering can take place only within organisations.

Volunteers should be encouraged to own and be honest about their own needs, rather than forced (either consciously or unconsciously) into the straitjacket of altruistic philanthropy where only their 'beneficiaries' have needs. The needs of the volunteer should be met through the volunteering process as much as those that are designated as recipients of volunteer services. Where this entails payment to offset the intangible costs of participation, these should be budgeted for as a matter of course. Once the notion of volunteer reward has been made explicit, it should be a small step to embrace reciprocal volunteering between individuals. The prime attributes of volunteering become commitment and choice, and these are genuinely available to all. Harnessing this informal activity within the volunteering yoke will make volunteering directly relevant to many more people, and go a long way to reversing the philanthropic bias that has dominated volunteering since the Victorian era.

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3. Opportunities to act: involving volunteers in delivering public services
Elisabeth Hoodless CBE

Despite the often talked about growth in citizen alienation over the last half century, the number of volunteers has risen steadily. A 1997 survey showed that half the nation volunteered, investing service valued at over £12 billion (Davis Smith 1997). The ESRC's recent 'Citizen Audit' of 24,000 adults in England, Scotland and Wales revealed very high willingness to participate in activities including jury service, giving blood and assisting with meals on wheels (ESRC 1999).

The latent potential of volunteering is a major pathway to civic engagement and renewal. Much anecdotal evidence illustrates the well-beaten path from involvement in pre-school playgroups to service on the PTA board to engagement in community activism. However, one of the greatest challenges faced by policy makers, if they are to increase volunteering, is how to provide appropriate *opportunities* for those volunteers to do something genuinely useful and fulfilling. This chapter examines the role that public services can play in giving citizens more opportunities to volunteer. Given Labour's acute desire to improve the quality of public services, the added value that volunteers could offer in some areas of public services fits well with other government priorities. Yet, there are blockages to be overcome. Too often those who hold power are reluctant to share it with volunteers. This chapter attempts to answer two questions: where might volunteers contribute to the improvement of public service delivery, and how might existing barriers to this involvement be overcome?

Opening opportunities to citizens

Already volunteers are at the heart of many of our public services. For example in the courts, 30,000 lay magistrates deal with 90 per cent of English criminal prosecutions and in policing, 12,700 uniformed special constables help the professional police keep the peace. Volunteers give more hours to the NHS than the combined total of ambulance

personnel (NHS 1996) and organisations such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and St. Johns Ambulance are almost entirely staffed by volunteers. Moreover there appears to be considerable potential for further volunteers to be recruited. Eleven million people told researchers they would also volunteer if only they were asked: a potential value of £6 billion (Davis Smith 1997).

The current focus of the Government's flagship volunteering initiatives is on recruiting new volunteers, particularly from age groups currently under-represented in this activity. In this light public services could open up even further to volunteers. The DfES has invested £66 million to involve young people through the Millennium Volunteers programme. A further £27 million has been allocated to English universities through the Higher Education Funding Council to involve students in their communities. On top of this the Home Office has recently invested £19 million in the Experience Corps for volunteers between the ages of 40 and 65. Whilst the wish to see more volunteers is an admirable one, the focus on recruitment seems somewhat strange. If there really are 11 million people waiting to be asked to volunteer then perhaps the problem is not recruitment, but engagement. Unless we can provide enough opportunities to volunteer which are genuinely empowering and challenging, then those eleven million have little reason to get involved. In this light, there needs to be a policy shift away from recruitment and towards creating more opportunities for citizens to become involved as volunteers.

If we are to focus on providing more opportunities to volunteer, then it is important that attention is paid to the quality of those opportunities. Baby boomer volunteers are not attracted by envelope stuffing. Contemporary volunteers are not standing by to do the filing or weeding paid staff prefer to avoid (Freedman 1999). Rather they are leading a crusade for safer pavements through the Liveable Streets campaign, or like Nottingham Medical School retirees, giving six months full time service to a hospital in Uganda. Citizens are taking direct action to achieve their aims because they want to make a difference. This determination to make a difference needs to be reflected by creating more opportunities for people to volunteer in the public services.

The engagement of citizens as volunteers in public services could also be seen as an extension of the Labour government's principle that

citizens should be involved in the decisions that shape delivery of their services. Democracy is, after all, about power to the will of the people, not to the will of professionals of various kinds. What is needed is a new sense of mutual respect. Those who hold the keys to citizen involvement and who lead civic agencies, such as chief officers of police, chief executives of health authorities or chief librarians, need to engage more with citizens to discover how they would like to contribute to civic renewal, where help is needed and then to realise that engagement. There are many ways in which volunteers could add value through their contribution to public services, either by bringing in new skills and experience without expecting a salary, or by helping to extend the provision of a service where current funding makes it limited. This engagement could be incorporated within the existing framework of local government. For example, West Sussex is planning to include a target related to volunteering as part of its social inclusion strategy in its Public Service Agreement (West Sussex Local Authority 2002)

Inviting citizens to participate in civic renewal

All publicly funded provision offers opportunities for involving citizens which should be further explored. We need to take steps to ensure that more opportunities are created. Accordingly the key recommendation of this chapter is that *every agency funded by taxpayers should be required to produce, publish and implement a volunteering strategy*. Areas where there is potential to involve citizens include the following:

● *Local Government*

  The experience of Plano in Texas (see www.planotx.org) is instructive. Here all citizens are invited to participate in providing services to residents from day care to youth courts. Professional personnel are only employed to work where volunteers are unable to contribute.

● *Libraries*

  Campaigners are quick to spring into action when library hours are threatened. Why not invite them to commit two hours a week to help enable professionals' work to be rescheduled so that hours could be extended?

- *Social Services*

  In New York social workers involve citizens from the local neighbourhood to visit children at risk. Parents and social workers alike welcome the support. This reflects a need for social services to engage with citizens to improve services.

- *Regeneration Initiatives*

  As the Bishop of Liverpool pointed out these programmes have been a bonanza for highly paid consultants (Jones 2001). Residents are increasingly reluctant to attend their meetings as they despair of ever seeing actual results. Why not engage citizens in their own right? They are the experts on their areas and as such have special skills to offer. They could be invited to allocate the fees saved directly for their community's benefit.

- *The Police*

  There is enormous potential to extend the use of volunteers to help the police. In cities such as Tempe (Arizona) and Redding (California) in the US, volunteers provide ten per cent of the person power, a target set by the city council. Similar targets could be set here.

- *The Environment Agency*

  The Environment Agency recently announced a list of one hundred areas the agency could not protect from floods. Greater manpower would be helpful both to prevent floods in the first place and to help victims cope in the aftermath. The Environment Agency could invite citizen volunteers to help with both preventative and ameliorative measures.

- *Health Services*

  The citizens of Wyre Valley cared about their hospital so much they worked together to return a member of parliament who shared their views. Repeated surveys, however, show dwindling support for the NHS, especially amongst the young. If hospitals recruited ten per cent of their person power from volunteers, they could improve the service and act as positive ambassadors for the

NHS. In general practice, research shows that volunteer involvement reduces prescribing by 30 per cent, hospital appointments by 35 per cent and substantially improves the quality of life of the doctors. (Pietroni 1991)

● *Inland Revenue*

For many citizens completing the 63-page tax return diminishes their commitment to the community that their contributions support. In the US thousands of retired revenue personnel volunteer to assist citizens. In the UK only two small groups of volunteer accountants offer similar support.

● *Immigration and Refugee Services*

In Canada, volunteer 'buddies' welcome and support new arrivals, providing friends and exploding many myths. The Home Secretary has already promised to consider a similar approach and should be kept to his word.

Involving citizens in education

The role of volunteers in education is now well accepted. In chapters 4 and 5 Susan Stroud and Wendy Piatt discuss, in different ways, the role that citizens can play in education. Indeed, the biggest growth in citizen involvement in the last 10 years has been in education. When CSV floated its 1992 'Learning Together' initiative, it was warned that to involve volunteers in classrooms would provoke nationwide strikes. The scheme started with only eight volunteers in one school in Islington, supporting teachers by offering one to one tuition to slow or gifted pupils. It is now unusual to find a school without volunteers. Students, employees and retired people tutor individual pupils, help with reading, GCSE projects or share their IT skills. The reading age of a child tutored by a volunteer for one hour per week can rise by one year in one term (Moseley 2000).

It is not only a question of adults going into schools. As well as the adult-involving schemes outlined in other chapters of this book here are at least three other ways in which education can be the focus point of civic renewal.

● The first concerns allowing pupils to volunteer *informally* in their schools. A unique and rapidly growing innovation is the development of peer tutoring and mentoring. Five-year-olds can welcome four-year-olds, hosting their first day, escorting them to lunch and to the toilets, setting a tone of mutual respect. Older children can help those new to reading and all ages can organise anti-bullying programmes to protect the vulnerable. Secondary school pupils can tutor younger pupils and help with projects. Also pupils themselves provide lunch-time clubs for refugees and asylum seekers. The earlier young people engage in helping others, the more likely they are to continue.

● The second sense is the *formal* opportunities created by the addition of citizenship to the national curriculum, which comes into effect in September 2002. Plans are afoot to introduce teacher support teams to build links to community agencies, organise reflection and escort pupils to projects. We should build on the use of employee volunteer groups who can run Saturday schools on social housing estates. They can develop exciting themes from their direct experience, for example if they had been travelling abroad.

● Third some *civil* servants from the DfES have given a lunch hour each week to tutor pupils at nearby primary schools. This builds links between the department and the people that they aim to serve, allowing civil servants to learn first hand about the service they endeavour to support. This is a principle which could valuably be extended to other Whitehall departments.

Why are 11 million people waiting to be asked?

In short there is great scope for citizen volunteers to be used across the public services, but currently these opportunities have not been opened up. Of course, there are those who counsel caution, and who try to identify 'unsuitable' roles or tasks which should always be carried out by paid employees. For example, some claim not to want volunteer brain surgeons, although some of the world's finest volunteer through Medecins sans Frontieres. This is not to suggest that unskilled people should be allowed to volunteer for certain jobs but if they have the

knowledge and relevant training then they should be involved if they are available.

It has also been suggested that accountability cannot be discharged without a pay cheque, but 30,000 volunteer judges keep the courts service operational. Like paid staff, they can be dismissed but few challenge their efficacy. In roles such as this it helps that there are clear expectations and responsibilities that volunteers are expected to fulfil. Some also fear the higher quality of management needed for volunteers. Where there is no pay cheque, people are unwilling to see their time wasted by poor organisation. Furthermore, in some circumstances, reliability or turnover among volunteers can actually be better among volunteers than among paid staff. Indeed in many agencies, hospitals, schools and courts the volunteers are frequently the longest serving personnel, albeit comprising a relatively small proportion of the workforce.

Trade unionists and professionals also fear that their jobs could be taken over by volunteers. Recent research by Professor Goerl of California State University (Goerl 1999) indicates that professionals create the biggest constraint on extending the use of volunteers. According to that research, public servants may be reluctant to allow citizens into public services because they perceive them as a threat and they fear wider public understanding of their activities. These attitudes need to be changed. Already, as we have seen above, teachers have realised the value of skilled and dedicated volunteers. Ways must be found to help communicate this message to doctors, librarians, health service administrators, civil servants and others.

There are a number of ways in which these concerns and barriers could be addressed. If, as was suggested above, all agencies were to produce, publish and implement a volunteer strategy, this could go some way towards addressing concerns such as those about accountability. It could begin by offering an audit of the gaps where more person-power could enable a service to be expanded, or where special skills and experience could be contributed by qualified volunteers. It is important to note that on many occasions where trust or local knowledge is required in front-line services, the appropriate qualification could just be 'being an approachable local resident'. Perhaps more importantly, such a strategy could set out guidelines which detail responsibilities for volunteers to sign up to, and which also

ensure that the public agency is aware of its management responsibilities. Such strategies should be produced with the involvement of the professionals themselves in such a way as might allay some of their fears.

Conclusion

Not only is volunteering in itself a powerful direct pathway to civic renewal, but the indirect benefits it can bring, such as increased self confidence, social capital, networking skills and community organisation capacity, also contribute to civic renewal.

However, careful design and planning is needed if volunteering is to contribute meaningfully to civic renewal. In the US, where a number of states, led by Maryland, have made community service a pre-requisite for the school leaving certificate, research shows that volunteers need to be introduced to the context of their work and the relationship between their tasks and the end goal. It is essential to engage their thinking as well as their muscles. Volunteer involvement in the context of good leadership and reflective interpretation leads to support for compassionate social policies. For example, helping people with AIDS develops commitment to paying for governmental research through taxation. It makes participants more connected to society, more aware and empowers them to be more active citizens. As a general principle, this rationale for engaging more volunteers in public service delivery has a lot to offer in the context of the political drive towards civic renewal.

But we need to remember that simply stuffing envelopes will not achieve civic renewal. Episodic one-off tasks such as pond clearance in themselves have little lasting impact. The value of such short term volunteering is that they provide a 'taster', which can attract new volunteers. What is really needed to drive forward the goals of civic engagement through the design and implementation of policy on volunteering is a new focus on opening up genuinely empowering opportunities to help. If eleven million people want to make a difference we should see what we can do to make that real.

The public services have an important role to play in providing citizens with the opportunities to volunteer in a substantive form. Volunteering and citizen involvement, of all kinds has a major part to

play in civic renewal. It builds neighbourliness, social capital and improves political literacy, social and moral responsibility. Almost every form of public service delivery could benefit from systematic voluntary involvement. However, whilst progress has been achieved *systematic volunteer involvement*, and the huge benefits it can bring, requires resolute government action.

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SECTION II
DEVELOPING
THE POLICY AGENDA

4. Civic involvement and student finances: lessons from the US

Susan Stroud

> The aim (of Higher Education) is not only to prepare young people for productive careers, but to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not merely to increase participation at the polls, but to help shape a citizenry that can weigh decisions wisely and more effectively promote the social good. (Boyer and Hechinger 1981)

This chapter examines the possible links between two important policy areas: Higher and Further Education funding and attempts to increase levels of civic involvement[1] among young adults. Policy challenges in both these areas could be met, in part, through linking the two.

Both the United Kingdom and the United States share a concern that forms of civic involvement, especially participation in the political process, have declined. In both countries the young vote at significantly lower rates than older citizens do. Among high school seniors in the US, interest in current affairs has fallen dramatically. In 2001 one survey found that only 28.1 per cent of first year college students reported an interest in 'keeping up to date with political affairs.' This was the lowest level recorded since the survey was established in 1966, when the figure was 60.3 per cent (Kellogg 2001).

One significant difference, however between the UK and the US is in volunteering rates of young people. In the UK students are less engaged in formal volunteering than in the past (IVR 1998). In contrast, in the US volunteering among young people has increased significantly in the last ten years (UCLA 2001). Research indicates that young people prefer volunteering to other forms of civic participation because of the sense of efficacy they derive from having an immediate and direct impact (Halstead 2001). Although volunteering is one form of civic engagement, it is not yet clear that

it translates into increased interest or participation in the political process.

One challenge facing UK and US policy makers is to create opportunities for this politically disenchanted generation to become civically engaged. They also need to develop policies which will translate into greater levels of participation in conventional politics and political processes. One possibility is to consider how Higher and Further Education (HE and FE) funding policy might be linked to these goals. The possibility that civic involvement or 'service', might act as a new rationale for government assistance with the cost of HE and FE has not received significant attention to date in the UK. Financial assistance based on civic involvement would address multiple policy objectives. It could:

- expand options for financial assistance;

- increase access to Higher and Further Education;

- encourage civic involvement and strengthen civil society;

- positively influence students' career and academic decisions.

Policy paradigm in the US: a three-legged stool

While over-simplifying a very complicated system, it is accurate to say that the current US funding paradigm has evolved since 1965 to resemble a metaphorical (and unevenly balanced) three-legged stool made up of grants, loans and service-based aid. The balance between the three has been debated and modified over time.

Access to HE in the US has expanded significantly in the past 50 years, primarily as a result of financial aid policies adopted by the federal government in two important periods. During the immediate post-war era, the 1944 GI Bill was introduced to provide educational benefits to veterans. In 1965, needs-based financial aid resources for individuals from low-income families were introduced as part of the Johnson administration's 'War on Poverty.'

The Higher Education Act of 1965 introduced several new financial aid vehicles for students from low-income families: needs-based grants (known as Pell Grants) for the lowest income students, Guaranteed Student Loans (GSL), and several financial aid programmes that

provided aid in exchange for students' participation in activities that directly benefited communities. Each programme had different eligibility criteria, but all were designed to increase access for children from low-income families. The Higher Education Act of 1965 has been amended repeatedly over the years, but the basic principles of the bill have remained in place.

The majority of American students receive federal financial aid in order to attend institutions of HE. Depending on the level of financial need, a student's aid package typically includes resources from all three government sources: grants, loans, and service-based aid. In the UK funding for students in HE has moved from grants towards loans. Many have voiced concerns about the possible effects on matriculation and completion rates, and as a result government has instigated a review of financial support. Critics of the current system argue that the emphasis on loans and the consequent debt, or the reluctance of families to incur debt, negatively affects enrolment and completion rates and results in high loan default rates. Others argue that limited government resources should be directed to the neediest students and wealthier families should be expected to pay partially or fully the cost of their children's education. Whatever the criticism of the current system, the debate is still largely about 'grants versus loans.'

In the next section, examples of US financial aid programmes based on service are briefly described. They may provide models which could be applied in the UK. This would expand the UK debate about HE funding to cover not only students' financial needs, but also opportunities for increased student civic involvement through service.[2]

A typology of programmes that link service and Higher and Further Education funding

The examples of financial aid programmes based on service can be classified into three categories. Firstly, those in which students perform the service that qualifies them for financial assistance *before* receiving the aid. Secondly, there are programmes in which students earn the financial assistance in direct return for service performed *during* their undergraduate years, and thirdly, there are programmes in which the students serve *after* they have studied.

Programmes in which the service is completed before financial aid is available

AmeriCorps

The AmeriCorps programme provides education awards to the value of $4,725 a year for full-time volunteers who complete a year of service. The award can be used within seven years of completing the service and can be spent on current or future educational expenses or to repay federal student loans. AmeriCorps members can serve a maximum of two terms and can earn up to $9,450. These education awards are deposited in a government trust and are paid directly to accredited education and training institutions. Between 1994 and 2002, approximately 350,000 individuals have served in AmeriCorps.

Loan forgiveness

Loan forgiveness programmes can be an efficient means of directing scarce skills towards pressing social problems. The programme is flexible and can be re-directed over time, as needs change. One example, the Perkins Loan programme, provides for up to 100 per cent forgiveness of undergraduate loans in return for full time work in non-profit or public organisations. The placement might be in a range of settings from work with high-risk children and their families in low-income communities through to teaching special education in schools.

   In 2001 $1 million was appropriated for a demonstration programme of this type to address a US shortage in child-care providers. The programme, to be administered by the Department of Education, will forgive loans obtained for graduates working as childcare providers in facilities that serve children from low-income families. Eligible borrowers include individuals who complete a degree in early childhood education, have two years of full-time experience prior to application in a facility serving a low-income community, and who are ineligible for similar benefits under the AmeriCorps programme.

Programmes in which aid is available in direct return for the service provided

Federal Work-Study

The Federal Work-Study programme (FWS) provides financial assistance to qualifying students for work done during the academic year and/or summer term (Campus Compact 2001). Compensation for the work is provided by a combination of funds from the federal government and matching funds from HE institutions and organisations in which the students work.

The purpose of the FWS programme is twofold. Firstly, it is to encourage the entry of students from low-income families into HE, and secondly, to promote student involvement in the community (IHEP 1995). Specifically, the 1965 Higher Education Act created the programme to strengthen college and university community service programmes by providing funding for students to work with community organisations (especially those that address issues of poverty) or for work related to the students' career and academic interests.

The legislation for the FWS programme required re-authorisation in 1992. A study by the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, reported that the work-study programme was not meeting the second of its original goals. It was increasing access to HE but almost none (0.2 per cent in 1992) of the aid was being received by people while working in community service jobs. HE institutions were using the funds to hire students in campus jobs that rarely had a relationship to students' academic and career goals or to addressing the needs of communities.

In response to this finding Congress amended the Higher Education Act to ensure that higher levels of work-study funds be used to support students in service positions. Congress also amended the statement of purpose. FWS now aims explicitly; 'to encourage students receiving Federal student financial assistance to participate in community service activities that will benefit the Nation and engender in the students a sense of social responsibility and commitment to the community'. The legislation also expanded the definition of community service to programmes designed to 'improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs.'

This service could be in the medical field or in education, childcare or social services, in addition to other social service fields originally identified in 1964.

Funding for the programme has expanded from $55.7 million in 1965 to $1 billion in 2001. Participation has grown dramatically. In the first year of the awards, 1965-66, 115,000 students received FWS as part of their financial aid package. It was estimated that one million students would participate in FWS in 2000-2001 (US Department of Education 2000). The current legislation ensures that HE institutions use seven per cent of FWS funds for community service positions but current estimates are that actual support for such positions is between 11 and 12 per cent.

FWS has been integral to the design of several federal government educational initiatives since 1996. This reflects its flexibility and the ability to adapt the model to meet new policy priorities, such as childhood literacy. For instance, a report in 1994 indicated that 40 per cent of American fourth graders were reading below grade level. Additional studies linked poor reading to poor behaviour and disengagement from the classroom. In 1996, the America Reads Challenge was launched to use volunteers, including work-study students, to raise national reading achievement levels by assisting all children to read well and independently by the end of grade three. To support this initiative, universities were released from their responsibility of matching 25 per cent of a student's earnings for FWS positions. As of January 2000, 1,300 HE institutions and 22,000 FWS students were participating in the programme (US Department of Education 2000).

An evaluation of a similar initiative, DC Reads, which uses 340 tutors, a majority of which were FWS students, found that children in the programme had significant gains on five of eight tests of reading performance. The lowest performers progressed at the fastest rate and tutored students gained nearly twice as much as the untutored (Macro International and CNS).

Changes to FWS policy continue to be made and suggested. President Bush's 2002 budget request to Congress calls for an increase in total funding and a provision that HE institutions be required to use half of their FWS funds to support students in community service jobs.

Programmes in which the service is performed after financial aid is provided

National Health Service Corps

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) programme has a 25 year history. It provides financial aid to future doctors in exchange for their promise to serve in under-served rural and urban communities upon completion of their medical education. For every year they receive financial assistance they should work for a year in under-served communities. The NHSC covers all educational costs for medical school students: tuition, fees, books, supplies, equipment, and a monthly stipend ($1,028 per month in 2001). Since its inception in 1978, 21,000 health professionals have served, and 2,200 professionals are currently serving.

In 1987 the programme's benefits were extended to include loan forgiveness as an incentive for doctors and health service professionals to work in areas with a shortage of medical personnel. A 1999 study showed that medical students owed an average of $90,745 in educational debt and 13.9 per cent of indebted students owed $150,000 or more (Proctor 2000). For clinicians in the loan forgiveness programme, the average medical debt can be repaid in two to four years. One former executive of the NHSC has described the policy as 'a powerful lure and a flexible recruitment tool.' Over 3,000 clinicians have participated in this part of the NHSC programme, which is described as being a more cost-effective means of targeting community health needs than the scholarship programme (NHSC Scholarship and Loan Repayment Programmes 1998).

Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)

The ROTC, a programme run by the US military, is a hybrid of 'before' and 'during' models. Most of the service is performed after graduation while the financial assistance is provided during university. The ROTC programme recruits students in the first and second years of university. It provides financial assistance in return for a commitment to serve in the army upon graduation, participation in certain academic courses, and periodic weekend and summer training. The programme offers a more cost-effective way of training future military officers.

While this particular programme serves the military, it can serve as a model for other sectors. The programme's advantages include its ability to attract talented people to high-need fields and public service for a minimum of two or three years before beginning the rest of their careers. For example, if the programme were altered to attract students to teaching careers, students would have during-university obligations such as special weekend training sessions or work in summer schools for students with low reading or mathematics skills, and post-university obligations to serve as a teacher for a few years in an under-served community (Newman 1985).

Policy options for the UK[3]

In an era of scarce resources, policy makers are forced to prioritise options carefully to produce the greatest 'bang for the buck.' The US experience indicates that there is much to be gained by linking the twin objectives of increasing access to HE and civic involvement. However what approach should be prioritised? Of the models described, the Federal Work Study Programme where people receive the rewards during their university education, has the most potential. There are several reasons to suggest this model:

● *It has a relatively low per student cost*

In the US, one million students are supported at a total cost to the federal government of $1 billion. Obviously the programme costs would have to be adjusted to the scale of the UK HE and FE population and to relative per student cost. In addition, the US model includes a cost-sharing provision with the students' employers which shares costs and builds programme buy-in.

● *It increases financial aid options for students and their families*

If given a choice, 92 per cent of students reported that they would prefer to earn money for college through the FWS programme than borrowing money through student loan programmes (US Department of Education 2000).

● *It acknowledges the reality that students are already working*

The programme directs student efforts towards socially useful work. This is likely to develop habits of civic involvement,

especially if the job placement provides opportunities to reflect on social conditions and political questions.

● *It is tied to students' academic and career interests*

Studies of the US FWS programme show that the consequences of this are increased job satisfaction with FWS positions and increased likelihood of future civic engagement (US Department of Education 2000).

● *It has positive community impacts*

The community effects of this aid programme should be measurable. The programme can be designed to link students' efforts to the achievement of national policy goals. An evaluation of the America Reads programme concluded that FWS/AmeriCorps tutoring had a positive effect on raising children's reading scores. In Britain, the programme could also focus on improving childhood literacy, a national education priority for the UK government.

● *It has a persistent impact over time*

The FWS programme is designed to provide students with aid for work on a weekly basis throughout four years of HE. The consistency and persistence of a students' involvement with a community service position (typically 11 hours a week in the US) makes it more likely that there will be a greater impact on their social awareness and civic involvement than would be developed through casual and episodic volunteering. More than 80 per cent of students working in community service positions indicated that their FWS experiences would stimulate their future participation in community service (US Department of Education 2000).

● *It is politically popular*

In the US, the FWS programme has enjoyed bipartisan support over many decades. There is a strong appeal to policy makers and the public in providing financial aid in return for work, especially for work that is directly related to community needs and students' academic and career interests.

● *It could act as a catalyst for institutional change*

The potential impact on HE institutions of having a significant percentage of students working in community service positions could be profound. The impact is likely to be greatest if students' work is recognised as having strong educational value. For students the community service, in addition to providing income, might provide opportunities to design academic internships, research projects, and thesis material. For faculty and administrators, increasing the institutions' connections with community organisations might provide opportunities for research, course development and re-design, improved teaching based on community realities, and an enhanced profile of the institution as a civic partner in the community.

The FWS is not without its critics. It has been argued that requiring low-income students to participate in community service is punitive, when those from higher income backgrounds do not have to participate. However, this argument can be turned on its head. FWS levels the playing field by allowing low-income students who would otherwise have to work at non-service jobs to engage in service. This is a privilege that their fellow wealthier students can already do because they have greater time and financial support.

If a policy modelled on the FWS programme is applied in the UK, the opportunity should be taken to improve on the American model. It should be designed specifically with civic outcomes in mind. These would include aiming to increase the civic involvement of students, improving the civic mission of universities and positively influencing students' academic and career choices. Cumulatively this would help contribute to strengthening civil society.

In the US, challenges to the successful achievement of the FWS goals of improved access to HE and increased civic involvement have included the following:

● *Institutional abuse of the intent of the legislation*

HE institutions have used funds for FWS as budget relief to employ students on campus in jobs unrelated to community service or students' academic and career interests.

● *There is a lack of focus on community and student impacts*

  Except for involving FWS students as tutors in the America Reads Challenge, the FWS programme has lacked focus on important national policy issues; a more targeted approach would ensure more measurable results.

● *There have not been enough FWS hours to meet student financial need*

  The number of hours a student can work at a FWS position are limited by the amount of aid they are qualified to receive and by the maximum number of hours that it is acceptable to work as a full-time student. In reality, however, students are working more hours and a quarter of FWS students have another job to meet their financial needs.

A scheme similar to the FWS in the UK would need to be careful to avoid these problems. However, if it did then it would represent a significant contribution both to widening participation in HE and FE while also encouraging greater civic engagement.

Conclusion

The UK and US governments share a key objective: promoting civic involvement. At the same time, in both countries there is growing concern about expanding access to HE and FE and families' ability to pay the cost of attendance. There is an opportunity to link both these priorities. Financial aid programmes should be developed that provide opportunities to work in positions that provide tangible benefits to communities and engage students in socially responsible work. A variety of policy options exist in the US. In addition to creating new options for financial assistance, the introduction of a service-based financial aid programme in the UK would shift the paradigm from a loans versus grants axis to a debate about three options: grants, loans and service.

   Of the many challenges and demands on HE and FE – workforce preparation, development of new technologies, support for research – none is more critical than the need to prepare students for lives as engaged and committed citizens. Institutions of higher learning must

be committed to developing not only intellectual and professional skills in students, but also to developing the skills necessary to engage actively in the civic and political life of their community, nation and the world.

Endnotes

1   The term civic involvement is used to encompass a wide range of socially useful activity which benefits local communities including both formal and informal volunteering but also other activities which could contribute to strengthening civic society. The term 'service' (more commonly used parlance in the US) is used in this paper to be interchangeable with civic involvement. Volunteering is a more tightly defined part of civic involvement.

2   In addition to programmes in the US, other countries have linked HE to community service. Mexico and Nigeria both tie graduation to participation in community service. In Mexico, university students pay virtually no tuition. However, undergraduates must complete 320 hours of community service in the last third of their degree. The *Servicio Social* was established by law in the 1930s and requires students to work in projects related to their academic focus and in community projects that are designed to reduce poverty. In Nigeria, all university and polytechnic graduates must spend one year in non-military national service.

3   Little comparative research exists on the different types of service-based financial aid: what in this paper are referred to as *before*, *during*, and *after* models. It would be useful to have better data on various impacts in order to develop more informed policy. For example, is any model more likely to have a positive effect on students' academic and career choices? Are students likely to graduate with less debt if they receive aid as a result of participation in one programme versus another? In the absence of good research, policy recommendations are still possible, but with the appropriate caveats.

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5. Student teaching assistants: setting an example
Wendy Piatt

The current situation: challenges and drivers

In the previous chapter Susan Stroud argued that student finance could be linked to civic involvement. This chapter, after outlining the current student finance policy context, will discuss how a scheme linking civic involvement with Higher and Further Education could work in the UK.

Student finance rose to the top of the political agenda in the summer of 2001. The government, apparently prompted by concerns that the present regime was deterring poorer students from entering Higher Education (HE) , acknowledged that the issue required reassessment and announced a review of HE funding. Some claim that the state-subsidized loan is too meagre and students are compelled to undertake commercial debt and that some students are working long hours, often in low-paid jobs to service their loans (Callender and Kemp 2000).

Background

There have been radical changes to the student support system for full-time students over the past decade. The most important are:

- The replacement of maintenance grants with student loans (1988 Teaching and Higher Education Act)
- The introduction of student loans (1990 Education Act)
- The introduction of means-tested tuition fees (1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act)

The system has subsequently been subject to slight modifications such as the introduction of bursaries for targeted groups and the increase in the income threshold for exemption from fees.

The Government has been considering alternative means of securing a contribution from the individual which avoids the negative associations and characteristics of fees and loans. Among other options a graduate tax was mooted as a solution: it was thought to be

psychologically more attractive to pay a tax rather than incur a debt. Yet a radical overhaul of the system could be over-hasty. A substantially new system was introduced only four years ago and there is inadequate evidence on which to base new proposals. Britain is undergoing a transitional period and it may take several decades before the idea of investing in education is as acceptable as taking out a mortgage. More students are borrowing more money, from more diverse sources of credit than ever before.

Perceived risk and the need for role models

Much of the debate has centred on the contentious issue of debt aversion amongst the poor. Two-thirds of the respondents to a recent DfES survey claimed that a member of their peer group had decided against HE due to worries about debt (Callender and Kemp 2000). This was most strongly asserted by those from socio-economic groups IV and V. However, perceived risk, rather than debt aversion *per se* may be the key factor. Further or Higher Education appears to be a much riskier option for the disadvantaged than the middle-class student. Although research clearly shows that most graduates are guaranteed a high wage premium this can carry little weight in the absence of successful graduate role models. Uncertainty about standards expected at college and a profound lack of self-confidence compound the risk factor for many people from low incomes. The social and financial capital of the middle class provides a safety net and a second chance in case something does go wrong.

Students and paid work

One undeniable trend is the increasing number of students who work during term-time. A recent survey found that nearly two-thirds of full-time HE students worked during the academic year for an average of eleven hours a week (Callender and Kemp 2000). The rise has been greatest among low-income and older students who also tend to work longer hours (Connor and Dewson 2001; Barke *et al* 2000). Not all work is detrimental to study as it may complement academic pursuits directly or indirectly. However, 45 per cent claim that work has adversely affected their academic performance (Callender and Kemp

2000). The Barke survey showed that the mean percentage grade for employed students was 1.7 percentage points below that of non-working students. The effect was stronger for male students (2.7 per cent). The struggle to balance work and study commitments proves too demanding for many and is often cited as one of the prime reasons for dropping out. Two-thirds of respondents to the Unite/Mori survey found that the timetable rigidity made combining work and study very difficult (Unite/Mori 2002).

There is no firm evidence that the increase in the number of students working is linked to the introduction of fees and loans. The main cause for the increase may be cultural. Working and earning is playing an increasingly central role in the lives of young people. A survey found that 75-80 per cent of 16-19 year olds in full-time education had a part-time job (Hodgson and Spours 2000). The increasing importance of citing work experience on the CV also provides strong motivation to work while studying.

However, the value of work experience varies considerably. Although the merits of apparently mundane work particularly in the service industry are increasing recognised by employers, other more challenging placements in respected companies carry more weight. An internship at Goldman Sachs is a substantially more valuable asset than a job at McDonalds. Ironically, one of the consequences of expansion of the higher proportion of graduates holding an upper second is the increased importance attached to work experience by employers as a means of differentiating between candidates. There is a real danger that access to quality work experience will be restricted to the privileged few, and will become a prevalent source of inequality. Currently, most students work as sales assistants or checkout operators (34 per cent) and in catering (31 per cent) (Unite/Mori, 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests that prestigious companies are more likely to advertise their work experience in the elite Russell Group universities.

Worthwhile work?

Above we have identified two important trends. One is a *challenge* which must be overcome: the perceived risk that people from low income backgrounds associate with university and their need for positive role models. The second is a *driver* which could be harnessed: the

increased number of students who are working while studying. Students want and need to work for financial, social and 'employability' reasons. Yet there are concerns that their work may be compromising their study and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. The Government could harness this driver and mitigate the attendant problems by employing students in the public services. Specifically, through employing students in schools, it is possible to meet the demand for term-time work and to meet the challenge of overcoming the fears of individuals from low incomes about investing in HE.

This fits well with the government's key objective of promoting civic involvement. The Government has made efforts to promote a culture of volunteering at an early age. One of the primary vehicles for instilling a sense of social responsibility is citizenship education. Community involvement is a key component of the citizenship curriculum. According to the DfES, it focuses on 'Pupils learning about becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their neighbourhood and communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community' (DfES 2002). This represents a significant development and could provide a powerful tool to encourage civic involvement. More broadly a number of ministers have stressed the importance of civic and community involvement.

Encouraging students to work in the public services could be an important policy tool to engineer civic renewal. From the perspective of civic renewal, the idea has one particular advantage. It potentially involves and motivates people at a crucial decision-making stage in their life. One important facet of civic or community involvement, if it is to lead to wider civic renewal, is that it must have a lasting effect on decisions and behaviour of individuals. Introducing high quality under- and post-graduates to the possibility of working in the public services could have a significant impact on their eventual choice of job. This chapter goes on to outline one possible scheme: student teaching assistants.

Mentors and student teaching assistants

The Government is encouraging students to act as mentors to secondary school pupils who are underachieving or at risk of school exclusion. The primary objective of the National Mentoring Pilot Project (NMPP)

is to raise the aspirations of pupils from the lower socio-economic groups and encourage them to consider entering HE. Currently, seventeen universities are supplying 900 students as mentors, primarily in HE 'cold spots', that is, those areas where few pupils go to university. Each student is assigned four young people – pupils[1]. From September 2002, the Project will be expanded into the areas covered by Excellence in Cities as part of the Excellence Challenge strategy. As the scheme expands, the Government expects to have 1,250 trained mentors nationally supporting around 5,000 pupils a year (DfEE 2001). A variety of different schemes have emerged around the country. For example, Birmingham Mentoring Consortium (BMC) gives Millennium Awards worth £2,000 each to students who spend one day a week helping disadvantaged pupils. Lewisham College has initiated several innovative schemes working on the same principle.

However, most students who work in schools do so on a voluntary basis as part of schemes run by their university or through organisations such as Community Service Volunteers (CSV). Some of these volunteers are indirectly recompensed for their work. For example, many universities offer a small wage to students to help at open days and those who have volunteered in schools are given priority in allotting this paid work.

Imperial College's innovative teaching assistant scheme (to be launched in June 2002) aims to encourage science and engineering post-doctoral students who are employed as research assistants to teach part-time (Haines and Hallgarten 2002). Imperial has secured funding from commercial sources and, as an incentive, proposes to clear student loans for participants on the scheme.

Reservations have been expressed about introducing financial inducements. Many, for example, argue that paid volunteering is not true volunteering and some schemes forbid any remuneration. This attitude is misguided. An allowance can be an appropriate and important element in volunteering, mainly to ensure that those from low-income backgrounds are not deterred from participating. Many students simply cannot afford to sacrifice time which could be used to earn money. Care must therefore be taken in determining the level of payment to facilitate equal access to these opportunities. Financial reward for community work in the form of debt forgiveness or wage should be offered by the Government. Students could also be rewarded 'academically' in the form of course credits towards their qualifications.

The principle underpinning the mentoring scheme could be extended to other paid roles in schools such as teaching assistants. The Government advocated the idea in the 1999 Green Paper *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change*. They have recently reiterated the importance of increasing the number of support staff, particularly teaching assistants to relieve teachers of some of their workload and to allow them to concentrate on teaching (Morris 2001). Student teaching assistants could make a substantial contribution to increasing the number of teaching assistants to 20,000 over the next four years as pledged in Labour's manifesto.

Currently teaching assistants play an important role in schools on tasks such as literacy support and helping pupils with special educational needs. In ten years time, the Secretary of State envisages that teaching assistants will be:

● supervising classes that are undertaking work set by a teacher, or

● working with small groups of pupils on reading practice,

● supervising lunchtime activities and invigilating tests,

● giving pastoral and other individual support to pupils, and

● covering for teacher absence (Morris 2001).

Both undergraduates and postgraduates could undertake some of these duties, ideally under the supervision of a more experienced and qualified teaching assistant. It may be argued that students taking subjects with 'heavy' timetables such as science, medicine and engineering would be effectively excluded from the scheme. However, Imperial College which has been in the forefront of schemes to encourage students into schools specialises in science and engineering and has experienced few difficulties in attracting students to participate. Many universities are providing more flexible, credit-based courses and are responding more effectively to students' needs; others have been less responsive. A widespread student teaching assistant scheme would add impetus to this trend.

Another objection may arise regarding the effect of temporary student teaching assistants on the local labour market. Many teaching assistants come from the local community and have served in the school for longer than any other member of staff. They are a source of

continuity and stability in school and it would certainly not be desirable if they were displaced by students. However, the planned increase in the number of teaching assistants should ensure that students would not be in competition with these 'traditional' teaching assistants. Moreover, as suggested above, the more experienced teaching assistants should supervise and train student assistants.

Why student teaching assistants: the advantages for pupils

Role models

As stated above, the perceived risk which deters many low-income pupils from considering HE poses a significant challenge for policy makers. Student teaching assistants have great potential as positive role models who raise pupils' expectations. First generation potential undergraduates need substantially more reassurance and encouragement than their counterparts who come from backgrounds with a tradition of attending university. A 2001 study commissioned by the DfES provides substantial evidence of the impact of role models on the decision-making process. For example, one pupil had always said that she would not go into HE because it would be too expensive. However, she changed her mind after seeing the positive effect having a degree had on one of her brothers compared to another brother who had no degree (Connor and Dewson 2001). Student teaching assistants will provide positive role models for a number of reasons:

● Most will be in their 20s or early 30s and their relative youth means they are more approachable. Student teaching assistants may be able to bring fresh perspectives and greater variety of experience to the learning environment from which both pupils and teachers can benefit.

● While the rise in the number of female secondary teachers is a welcome development, they are over represented in arts subjects and under represented in sciences. There are still too few teachers from ethnic minorities (Hutchings, 2002). The proportion of men entering primary teacher training courses is below the 15 per cent target set for the teacher-training agency. Student teaching assistants would increase the likelihood of attaining a greater gender and racial balance across the subject spectrum. The

Licensed Teacher schemes, which permit schools to recruit people without a teaching qualification, have been useful in increasing the number of black and Asian teachers. The NASUWT, who have reservations about teaching assistants, did acknowledge their potential to promote diversity amongst school staff:

> One very positive aspect of these developments has been the involvement of teaching assistants, working under the supervision of the teacher, in English as an additional language activity. Here the employment of ethnic minority teaching assistants has often boosted the diversity of the school's staff. (O'Kane, 2002)

Undergraduates and graduates have great potential to contribute to this diversity as both men and women from ethnic minorities are substantially over-represented in HE (NAO 2002).

- Lastly, a substantial proportion of students are non-British and, due to high fees and cost of living, often seek part-time work. Increasing the number of these students in schools would be an ideal way of promoting 'internationalism' – a greater understanding of other cultures – as well as tackling xenophobia.

Advice

Student teaching assistants would be an additional source of advice and guidance on career choices, course choices and financial costs of HE. Equal access to comprehensive and accurate information is crucial to widening participation. Yet there is significant variation in the level of awareness (Connor and Dewson 2001). In this survey the majority who decided not to enter HE also did not receive any advice while at school. This lack of information was most keenly felt by pupils from lower socio-economic groups and mature students. Only 20 per cent of pupils from the lower social groups had enough information and only 40 per cent found that information easy to understand.

This report concluded that the most important factor in information distribution is not the volume available but the means of communication. The value of information was increased dramatically if it was

communicated verbally, ideally in a one-to-one interview and was tailored to individual circumstances. It was also more effective coming from someone with knowledge of the individual concerned and/or someone with expertise and experience of the particular field of study or career.

This reliance on personal advice has important implications for pupils from low income groups. As we have seen these pupils do not generally have access to role models and networks to provide a source of accessible, first hand experience. Overall, one of the conclusions that can be drawn is that pupils from lower socio-economic groups benefit greatly from having a mentor or 'champion' at pre-entry stage. Student teaching assistants could be ideal candidates for this role.

The supply of accurate and comprehensive information is crucial during a period of transition. High levels of ignorance about the substantial changes to student support since 1998 remain (Connor and Dewson 2001). The Government is clearly aware of the importance of access to good advice and has launched the Connexions service to answer this need. The service has many strengths but it is important to emphasise the scale of the challenges that Connexions faces (Piatt and Robinson 2001). There is clearly a role for the student teaching assistant in dispensing advice, particularly as they can offer a perspective based on recent experience. Most potential student teaching assistants will still be coping with a financial situation largely determined by the current student support system. Again they could be part of the answer to an important challenge being faced by the Government.

Links between schools, colleges and universities

The government is encouraging closer ties between schools, colleges and universities to facilitate progression into FE and HE. Student teaching assistants could contribute to strengthening these links. This is particularly important for disadvantaged pupils for whom university is an alien environment.

New ways of inspiring pupils to learn

Many students, particularly doctoral students, are motivated by a passion for their subject and may be able to inspire pupils. They could also give instruction on basic research techniques. Research repeatedly

demonstrates that many pupils from working class backgrounds lack the means and knowledge to access information (for example Connor and Dewson 2001). Schools could employ the postgraduate as an 'academic in residence' who would be encouraged to study on the premises in order to work alongside the pupils as far as is practical. As part of the overriding strategy to widen participation in HE, the Government is offering Excellence Fellowship Awards to teachers from schools in deprived areas. They will have the opportunity to spend a term away from their school or college to work on projects that will encourage their own pupils to go on to university. A reciprocal scheme to facilitate the employment of students by schools could consolidate co-operation between schools, colleges and universities to achieve greater representation of disadvantaged students in FE and HE.

Why teaching assistants: contributing to civic renewal

According to a recent study, the most frequently cited reason (57 per cent) among secondary school teachers for leaving the profession was workload (Smithers and Robinson 2002). Increasing the number of teaching assistants to 20,000 over the next four years as pledged in Labour's manifesto, could be instrumental in raising teaching standards and reducing the number of teachers leaving the profession.

Indeed, not least among the advantages of the student teaching assistant scheme would be its contribution to tackling the deep-seated problem of teacher shortages (Johnson 2002). Estelle Morris has estimated that there will be a deficit of 40,000 by 2006 (Morris 2001). Many students who would not otherwise have contemplated teaching as a career may be encouraged to become a teacher as a result of their experience as a teaching assistant. It could give them a 'preview' of teaching to determine whether the career is suitable so reducing drop-out rate during and after a PGCE. Four out of ten students recruited to teacher training either drop out before they have completed the course or pass and do not enter the profession. The cost of initial teacher training, including training salaries, is currently £245 million a year. The loss to the public purse will therefore be about £100 million (Smithers and Robinson 2002).

There is evidence to suggest that giving people a taste of teaching will increase the likelihood that they will enter the profession full time. Increasing numbers of teaching assistants are now training to become

teachers. One teaching agency, Select Education, which specialises in finding work for classroom helpers, says that it has noticed the beginnings of a trend, with people opting for PGCE courses at the end of a year as a teaching assistant (*The Independent* 2002). Universities are meeting the demand for progression from assistant to qualified teacher and two-year foundation degrees are now being piloted by three universities. Central and local government are encouraging this trend by promoting professional development for teaching assistants.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the phenomenon of temporary teachers deciding to pursue a teaching career is fairly common in the private sector. Many students, particularly postgraduates work in independent schools and tutorial colleges as they do not require a teaching qualification. They then continue to teach within the private sector. The public sector should be able to benefit from this too.

Even if student teaching assistants choose not to become a teacher, the experience could still have affected their thinking and actions. If they were working in a deprived school and had experienced some of the difficulties that people from low income households experience, this could have a broader impact on choices they make in the future. An evaluation of the mentors' experience of mentoring, for example, found that the vast majority felt a sense of achievement and gained an improved understanding of younger people. Improved communication skills and self-confidence were also cited by mentors as benefits of their experience (Lines 2000). They could be inspired to continue to be involved in local communities in some form, which would be an important contribution to wider civic renewal.

Implementation and cost

Working with teachers

One of the main barriers to extending the use of teaching assistants will be the reaction of the teaching profession. Particular controversy was sparked by Estelle Morris' announcement that their role would be extended to include possible teaching duties. This elicited the notorious remark from the General Secretary of NASUWT implicitly comparing teaching assistants to 'pig-ignorant peasants'. Nigel de Gruchy subsequently denied he was denigrating teaching assistants. However, the comment does highlight the importance of clarifying the

responsibilities of potential student teaching assistants and ensuring they are welcomed by the teaching profession. The fact that the assistants will have gained or be working towards a degree should dispense with accusations of ignorance. It should be made clear that the graduate assistant would be working under the direction and supervision of fully qualified teachers and in no way should be perceived as potential substitutes. Indeed, it is possible that increased use of teaching assistants could have a positive impact for teachers, complementing their work and freeing them up to teach.

Recruitment

Most universities already have a student employment service of some kind that advertises student friendly jobs and vets employers. These so-called 'job-shops' could be the agent in liasing with local and central government to arrange placements as teaching assistants. This arrangement may be of particular mutual benefit in areas of high unemployment where students would have greater difficulties finding decent part-time work. These are the very areas which often have a low HE participation rate and where pupils are in most need of role models. The Unite/Mori survey found that many students (24 per cent) would like to work for their university but cannot find a vacancy. This proportion is almost certainly higher in areas of relatively high unemployment, 'providing a large pool of willing potential employees' (Unite/Mori 2002).

Rewards and costs

Students would be financially rewarded for their work as teaching assistants. This reflects the argument made in the previous chapter where 'service' was seen as part of a three-legged stool sitting alongside grants and loans as sources of finance for students. It would be possible, as in some of the US schemes, to directly relate the rewards for student classroom assistants to relief on loans or fees. Perhaps most simple though would be a straightforward remuneration. If this were the case then £1500 pa may be an acceptable figure. This works out to be approximately £5 per hour for eight hours a week during term time. It compares well with the average earnings of full-time students, who if

they are under 25 earned on average £675 in an academic year and, if over 25 earn approximately £917 (Callender and Kemp 2000). These figures vary according to social class. While the average income for social classes I and II was £647, for IV and V it was £950. This reflects the fact that students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to work during term-time and work longer hours. Evidence suggests that the trend is towards those from low income groups working more and middle class students working less. It is important, therefore to ensure that the payment received as a student teaching assistant is sufficient to attract students from social classes IV and V.

£1500 is not generous, but it exceeds students' average annual income. At any rate students should be attracted to the better working conditions, the CV value and the greater social skills developed as a teaching assistants compared to many jobs in the retail and catering sectors.

The cost to the Government of this scheme would, of course, vary according to the number of teaching assistant positions allotted. For example, 50,000 posts at a cost of £1500 *per annum* would cost £75 million. A portion of this cost could be deducted from the budget set for increasing the number of classroom assistants.

Conclusion

The Government should allocate more funds to LEAs in 'HE cold spots' to employ students as mentors and teaching assistants. Student teaching assistants offer the opportunity to build on existing drivers, such as the increasing numbers of students who work, to achieve a number of positive outcomes. It will increase the number of positive role models available for pupils from disadvantaged households. At the same time encouraging people to work in education can help the government to move towards its broader ambitions for the renewal of civic society, changing the way people think and behave. Indeed the fact that the student teaching assistants recommendation links up these different areas is one of its main strengths. John Potter from the CSV has warned that the Government's policy on civic involvement lacks coherence and is characterized by piecemeal initiatives:

> There is a danger that we shall sink under a confusion of relatively small, uncoordinated initiatives through failing to

create an overarching purpose and framework for linking learning with purposeful social involvement (Potter 2002).

The student teaching assistant scheme would provide coherence and address multiple policy objectives: it would expand options for student support, increase access to HE, provide role-models for the disadvantaged, encourage civic involvement, strengthen civil society and affect students' career decisions positively.

Endnotes

1   Throughout this chapter 'student' is taken to mean the young adult in Higher or Further Education who is a potential student classroom assistant and 'pupil' refers to young people in schools.

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6. Transitions to civic maturity: gap year volunteering and opportunities for higher education

Selina Chen

The need to rebuild a strong civil society is emphasised by many across the political spectrum and lies in the recognition that strong social organisations are more important than ever before in the global economic age. However, young people in society appear to be particularly disinclined to sign up to the cause of civic renewal.

This chapter argues that reaching out to young people requires an innovative and less traditional approach. It explores some ways by which civic renewal initiatives can be harnessed to the desires and needs of young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Community service carefully designed can be a flexible and innovative vehicle by which the skills for and access to Higher Education can be promoted.

The civic renewal agenda

Whether one sees the aim of renewing civil society as complementing or supplanting the institutions of market and state, there is a cross party political consensus that a 'missing middle' exists in the relationship between the private sphere and the political sphere. As Robert Putnam argued so influentially, a civil society, which fosters the habit of social co-operation, is needed to solve problems at local and global levels, to build the foundations for continuing growth, to counteract the damaging effects of economic and social inequality that global markets have on societies, families and individuals, to renew the democratic legitimacy of our political institutions and not least, to foster a sense of social well-being.

The rise up the political agenda of civic renewal in recent times reflects the rejection of the 1980s ideology of economic individualism. The 'no such thing as society' decade recognised individual economic

success as the main form of achievement in society, often at the expense of social engagement. In this context, it is no surprise that civic renewal has been hailed as the big idea of the second term of the New Labour government. The agenda of civic renewal is dear to the heart of the Prime Minister and key members of his Cabinet such as Gordon Brown and David Blunkett. The push to promote volunteering and civic renewal is, according to Gordon Brown a 'new more balanced approach that…envisions a strong and effective civic society…as the middle ground.'

The Labour Government's commitment to rebuilding a sense of civic community has been expressed in generous funding for a profusion of initiatives to promote volunteering and in targets for regular volunteering across all age groups. With regard to young people, the Government has set up a flagship volunteering scheme, Millennium Volunteers and there are suggestions that community service may become a mandatory part of the school curriculum. The Prime Minister announced early in 2001 that he intended 'to give more young people the chance of voluntary community service at home and abroad between school and university'. Gordon Brown recently announced in his 2002 budget speech that he would be working with the Home Office to look at further ways of promoting community service among young people.

Youth volunteering: a distinct challenge

The task of resuscitating volunteering at a time when it shows a downward trend across most age groups is not an easy one. While promoting volunteering needs to take into account the needs and perceptions of different social groups, the challenge of promoting civic renewal among young people is particularly daunting. Young people are the most alienated from a sense of community and are least likely to vote or volunteer of all age groups in society.

The 1997 survey of volunteering by the Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) showed a sharp drop in volunteering in the 18-24 age group, with 43 per cent volunteering compared to 55 per cent in 1991 (IVF 1998). A survey of volunteering for the Sports Council, a body which one would have thought would have little difficulty attracting young people, showed that its volunteers aged 24 and under made up

only 3 per cent of all its volunteers while 76 per cent came from 25-59 year olds. The Active Community Unit (ACU) also found that significantly fewer young people between 18-24 volunteered in 1997 (2.1 million) than in the next age group up (4.8 million among 25-34 year olds) (ACU 2000).

These statistics make sobering reading, particularly when one considers the fact that young people have more free time than most other age groups. But not only were they fewer in number, the numbers that did volunteer also spent the least amount of time doing so: an average of 0.7 hours per volunteer as opposed to an average of 4.4 hours a week for all other age groups.

The IVR survey uncovered more negative views of volunteering among the younger generation than among older age groups and a resistance to initiatives that would enforce volunteering. For them, volunteering conjured up visions of 'worthy philanthropy' that did not fit in with their outlook and lifestyle choices. They do not appear to respond well to the language of civic duty and service in which most volunteering initiatives are couched. Community Service Volunteers, the largest volunteering charity, deliberately avoids using the word 'voluntary' in their appeal to young people because it's not viewed as 'cool' (BBC 1998).

The Thatcher generation of young people making the transition to adulthood today exhibit the greatest social disaffection from public institutions. We should not find this altogether surprising. As EJ Dionne remarks,

> the idea of strong citizenship flies in the face of most of the messages young people – and everyone else – receive day after day. The predominant ideas (in advertising but also in the news and in the culture) treat people as consumers, workers, entrepreneurs, investors – in effect as isolated, if often heroic, individuals. The message of citizenship is different: it emphasizes common bonds and common obligations, the possibility of common action, an attitude of 'we're all in this together.' (Dionne 2000)

This is not, however, to say that young people today are unquestioningly in thrall to the materialist values so celebrated in the

eighties. They exhibit many 'post-materialist' values in their aspirations and ideals and have a broader conception of well-being beyond the narrowly economic and a concern about wider social and global issues. What is significant about this age group is a greater distrust of mainstream political institutions and a lack of identification with conventional forms of collective action. It is clear that there is a lack of mainstream vehicles that can harness the desires and preferences of this age-group and channel them in ways that can produce engaged and active citizens.

The IVR study showed, however, that this age group responded positively to the instrumental value of volunteering; the chance to gain experiences that were interesting and valuable to their personal as well as to their career development was particularly appealing. In thinking about strategies for promoting youth volunteering, it would be worth exploring ways in which civic participation could be made to appeal to the motivations and perceptions of this generation.

Youth volunteering and service learning

Volunteering is not merely an altruistic activity but yields substantial benefits to the individual. Volunteers not only make a substantial contribution to their organisation and become more valuable citizens, they also frequently gain a sense of empowerment from helping others that can affect the way they face major life decisions. Many of them gain both valuable skills that make them more employable and access to social networks through which valuable information is transmitted.

In the case of young people, the potential for alternative forms of education through civic volunteering has been explored in various countries through the concept of 'service learning.' Exposure to the wider environment outside the family and school, and the use of non-classroom based methods of instruction can not only improve confidence, motivation and cognitive performance but also impart valuable communication and 'life skills' not easily gained in a classroom environment. These skills are increasingly prized in a service-centred economy. The concept of 'service learning' and the many positive evaluations it has attracted provide strong reasons for making well structured community service options a study option for students and for training teachers (Eyler, Giles *et al* 2001). Service learning is likely to

especially benefit young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not respond as well to traditional classroom based provision. The potential for community service to overcome the social barriers of disadvantage is as yet untapped in the UK. It is an area of policy that would greatly repay more exploration.

Gap year volunteering

Integrating civic participation into the education system is being seriously explored with the addition of citizenship to the curriculum. However, there should also be strong incentives to encourage young people to volunteer outside school. If civic participation is to be seen as a personal decision and encouraged as a lifelong duty, initiatives to encourage young people to participate as individuals rather than students are key. Extra-curricular forms of civic service can have benefits that are particularly important to young people negotiating the transition between dependence and adulthood, and between the very different worlds of school and university. Further, young people at 18 have an opportunity to give their time in ways that they may never be able to do again. Many young people now come out of college heavily indebted and not surprisingly, they prioritise private endeavours that can help repay that debt.

In Britain, the practice of taking a gap year between school and university has caught on in recent years and the benefits to overall personal and social development are undisputed. Taking a year off between 'A' levels and university appeals to many young people who are at a key transitional stage in their lives. Recent figures showed a significant increase in the numbers of students taking a gap year before going to university. An estimated 23,000 students deferred their entry in 2000 compared to 14,530 in 1994 and this trend is predicted to continue (UCAS 2001).

Gap years appeal to young people because it creates a space for them to reflect on their life-plans and priorities, to 'find themselves' and also simply to have fun. While gap years often conjure up the image of young backpackers abroad, in fact they can be spent in a variety of ways doing domestic community service, preparation courses, work placements or in employment. Gap years, while being clearly linked to civic participation, should also be seen as flexible vehicles which can be

tailored to different personal needs and circumstances. The many gap years taken between school and university span an important period in a young person's life. The transition to adulthood is a complex and confusing one for many young people, who are often unprepared for the independence and the responsibilities that they take on at university. While time spent at university does not resemble working life, it is nevertheless, for many young people, a significant step away from the institutional cocoons of family and school. A gap year offers an opportunity to get accustomed to independence from institutions, to think through how they will approach big life decisions and to prepare themselves to meet the responsibilities that come with the freedom of adulthood.

Typically, a well-structured gap year will expose participants to people of different backgrounds, ages, cultures, and perspectives and yield new and challenging experiences. It will also ideally involve team working and develop personal and social organisational skills. A gap year constructively spent, results in more well rounded young individuals who have a wider and more informed outlook on life, a more mature approach to making major life decisions, and who have more self-confidence and self-esteem in their dealings with people. However, these benefits are not open to all regardless of background and income. Gap years are still viewed as the preserve of the better off, with many young people believing that money is the main barrier to taking a gap year. As Tony Higgins, Chief Executive of UCAS has observed, awareness of gap year opportunities is far higher among students in independent schools than in state schools (*Independent* 22 October, 2000). Further, although more young people are taking gap years, many of them are doing so in order to earn money to meet the costs of their degree rather than to engage in new experiences (*Independent* 1 June 2001).

The ExperienceYear proposal appealing to financial and skills related incentives

The remainder of this chapter will argue that a nationally co-ordinated scheme should provide incentives for young people, particularly for those from low-income backgrounds, to undertake a gap year. This would help make community service appealing to young people

alienated from conventional ways of joining in. The incentives would be based on a promise of financial reward, personal and social growth and an appeal to public spirit. The appeal of an interesting gap year spent in a variety of ways and not simply in 'worthwhile philanthropy' can do much to promote civic participation among young people.

A promising and successful precedent for such a scheme is the popular AmeriCorps scheme in the US. This offers substantial financial awards for Americans over 18 who engage in full-time voluntary service for up to two years. The money contributes to the costs of Higher Education (HE). A similar scheme entitled ExperienceYear, has been proposed for the United Kingdom (Bell and Chen 2001).

Modelled on AmeriCorps, the ExperienceYear scheme would offer financial rewards in the form of education credits or awards, which could be used to defray the costs of HE for those who have completed a certain length of full-time volunteering work in an accredited organisation. Of available places to be allocated annually, between two-thirds and three-quarters would be earmarked for young people from low-income backgrounds. Participants would be able to choose between a nine-month option and a full year one. They would be paid a non-taxable living allowance equivalent to the minimum wage for their age group during their volunteer experience. This would amount to roughly £4000 for the nine-month option and £6000 for the full-year one. They would be able to choose from a variety of different volunteering work experiences, either based in their local community, in another part of the country and even overseas. They may also choose to incorporate a shorter period of work experience within their Experience Year. Upon completion of their volunteer experience, they would be entitled to an educational credit award worth £3000 for those on the nine-month scheme and £4000 for those on the full-year option. These credit awards could be cashed in the form of tuition fee waivers, or bursary top-ups to the same value as received by those who already qualify for help with the costs of Higher Education. Participating organisations taking on ExperienceYear volunteers would need to satisfy certain criteria governing the quality of the experience that volunteers can expect to receive and would be eligible for funding to cover training and administrative costs.

The ExperienceYear could boost levels of volunteering among the key age group of 18 to 25 year olds in two ways. Firstly, it would make

volunteering more affordable for young people. Secondly, it provides an ideal opportunity for challenging people's perceptions of volunteering, helping to make it more palatable to the young through appealing to personal benefits of experience, personal development and skill acquisition.

The idea of a funded ExperienceYear will have the immediate attraction of offering diverse and different experiences for many young people. However, being paid a living allowance will not be enough for many others, for whom the opportunity cost of delaying a year's full earnings may deter take-up. For this reason, the extra financial incentive of an education award that can help with Higher Education costs, and ensuring that the programme will yield concrete benefits in terms of the acquisition of important skills that can help employment prospects, is particularly significant. A strong message that volunteering does not detract from, but in fact enhances one's career progression would be particularly attractive to those from lower income backgrounds.

Widening access to Higher Education

While the lack of high aspirations is one barrier to students from disadvantaged backgrounds applying to university, the fear of debt plays a major part in deterring students from poorer backgrounds. Recent studies in this area have confirmed the significance of this problem (KPMG 2001; National Foundation for Educational Research 2001). As one would expect, students from poorer backgrounds incur greater debt and are more concerned about repayments (Callender and Kemp 2000).

Tony Blair has said that by 2010 he wants to achieve a university participation rate of over 50 per cent among the under–30s, an objective that can be met only if there is greater take-up of HE by children in lower socio-economic groups (Morris 2001). The gap between socio-economic groups in terms of university participation remains wide and has not narrowed in recent years. Fewer than one in five young people from the lower social class groups (IIIm, IV and V) participate in HE; this remains well below the 45 per cent who participate from the higher social class groups (IIIn, II and I).

Giving young people from lower income families a chance to build up a financial lump sum to pay for a large proportion of their HE costs

would give them a substantial boost in confronting the difficult financial decisions about going on to HE. The AmeriCorps scheme in the US does just this, enabling many to access educational opportunities previously beyond their reach. One survey showed that seven in ten participants said their education award was necessary to achieve their educational goals. It also found that AmeriCorps had significant effects on encouraging further and HE participation through its efforts in spreading greater awareness and information about opportunities (Aguire International 1999). Most programmes try to make members aware of the career and academic options available, many of them offering help in writing CVs, searching for job opportunities and organising field trips to colleges and universities.

An ExperienceYear scheme in the UK could widen horizons for those from families or areas where there has not been a tradition of HE participation by giving people a chance to overcome the financial barriers faced by many people. It would make debt repayment more manageable and shorten the repayment period. Although such a scheme might be said to appeal only to those already thinking of going on to university, the spectre of debt cannot be understated as a source of low aspirations. The knowledge that a university education could be affordable can provide strong incentives for students who may have previously dismissed the idea of going on to HE to reconsider their options.

Volunteering, life skills and the habit of lifelong learning

The traditional answer given to the question of why some people achieve better jobs and higher earnings than others has focussed on the level of educational qualification and performance. While these remain an important factor, the increasingly significant differences among graduates indicate the importance of other factors. The sociologist John Goldthorpe has written of how in a 'knowledge economy' increasingly dominated by the service sector, 'soft' skills such as communication and 'people' skills are increasingly important. Indeed they may be as important in determining life-prospects as levels of educational qualification. In addition, 'network capital', the 'values, behaviours and networks of contacts that affect access to opportunities', is also attracting attention as a factor that explains why children from higher socio-economic

backgrounds fare better economically (Aldridge 2001; 6 2001). The effects of such networks may help explain differential employment rates and remuneration experienced by similar graduates of differing social class backgrounds. As the authors of the 1999 'What do graduates do' survey conclude, 'who you know (and who knows you) is at least as important as what you know' (Fairweather and Rothwell 1999).

The diffuse and informal nature of these barriers to greater social mobility makes addressing them directly through public policy extremely difficult. However, an ExperienceYear programme would have a positive impact by creating more opportunities for young people to acquire informal and interpersonal skills and to gain access to information networks. It could do this in three ways: first, through imparting social, organisational and vocational skills through the tasks and responsibilities that participants are assigned. Secondly, through facilitating social mixing, it can help to break down barriers to accessing information networks. This would spread informational advantage more widely. Lastly, through involving employers in the programme, ExperienceYear could create more access to information about internship and employment opportunities.

Those who do not respond well to traditional classroom-based teaching often flourish when they are exposed to a service-learning environment where the learning process is far more interactive, practical and empowering. The thought that students may flourish in learning environments outside the traditional classroom is reflected in a scheme now extensively provided in schools in Ireland known as 'Transition Year' which students can take after they complete their Junior Certificate at the age of 15 which 'provides a bridge to help young people make the transition from a highly structured environment to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision-making'. (Transition Year Programme's Guidelines, Department of Education, Republic of Ireland). For attitudes towards lifelong learning to change, attitudes towards learning itself must also be altered. More recognition of and investment in different learning processes would help foster such attitudinal changes.

The 'life skills' development of participants in AmeriCorps has been assessed. Ninety percent of members in one survey reported gains in life skills such as communication, interpersonal skills, analytical problem solving, understanding of organisational systems, and

technological skills. While the composite score of members in all five areas of life skills on entering the program was 3.60, their mean post-program composite score was 4.00 – a mean gain of 0.40. These gains were particularly significant for those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds. The authors concluded that 'involvement in service learning appears to have contributed to the skill area of "learning to learn" that has become so important in a society which increasingly demands and values lifelong learning' (Aguire International 1999).

In a service intensive economy, employers increasingly value these social and interpersonal attributes. A survey of 200 British businesses found that three quarters preferred to employ someone with volunteering experience and that over half felt that volunteering experience could be more valuable than that gained through paid work (TimeBank 2001). Access to networks of information about career opportunities can be widened by involving employers in the ExperienceYear programme. Many existing gap year providers do this already and have direct links to major graduate recruiters who provide paid internships or support. These schemes also provide their members with support, via help with CVs and interview techniques, arranging mentoring and open days and information about work experience placements. In some gap year placement schemes run by industry associations or employers, students who have worked on industrial projects are offered sponsorship during their studies and jobs thereafter. More generally, the contacts made during this time can indirectly open doors to future employment.

The last way by which an ExperienceYear can overcome social disadvantage is by getting young people from different social classes working together. This can help overcome social divisions and spread network contacts more widely. Often young people of different social classes have such different experiences prior to entering HE that they remain confined to narrow social circles even at university. Research from the US showed that AmeriCorps has a positive effect in enhancing social mixing among young people from diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds. An ExperienceYear programme that encourages working in teams for protracted periods of time could help overcome the class-based and sometimes, race-based divisions that still subtly but obstinately continue to colour British society.

Conclusion

While such an approach could be usefully adopted for more than one age group, there is reason to think that those at the threshold ages of 18 to 21 would benefit most. An ExperienceYear scheme, as suggested here, would give many young people, who may not otherwise have had the wherewithal, unprecedented opportunities for self-development, volunteering and HE. At the same time they would strengthen communities through their contribution. The proven success of AmeriCorps has led to the expansion of its reach and silenced its critics. The ExperienceYear scheme could match this success. In time it could become even more ambitious and come to apply to a wider pool of applicants who could use their awards for activities other than university, such as alternative training or business start-up.

The potential returns to a strategy which links together the civic renewal agenda with the education, skills and social justice agenda are great. Furthermore, it is precisely the instrumentally valuable nature of such approaches that is likely to appeal to young people today.

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7. Civic involvement and asset-based welfare
Will Paxton

Achieving a sea change in British society is not something which can be done *to* people *by* central government. Instead a confident social democratic state must be prepared to *share* responsibility for the civic and social renewal of Britain with individuals, their families and civil society. Importantly, however, this is not simply a matter of unthinking government retreat, as the Right would have us believe. Instead the State, possibly as a precondition to stepping back and allowing civil society to flourish, needs to develop policies that support, encourage and reward people when they become involved in their local communities and civil society. Few governments however, have a good record in this area. Achieving wider civic renewal and reinvigorating the relationship between citizens and state will require a plethora of policies and some fundamental changes of mind-set.

This chapter proposes just one strategy which could be used by the government to build community capacity and help to renew civil society. It explores the possibility of using recently developed asset-based welfare policies such as the Child Trust Fund (or 'baby-bond') and the Saving Gateway (HMT 2001a; HMT 2001b) to promote civic involvement. Credits for civic involvement could be awarded and paid into these asset-based policies.

'Asset advantages' to linking asset-based welfare and civic involvement

In the past year there has been increased interest in government and the policy world in the role of assets (such as savings and investments) in welfare policy: what has been called asset-based welfare. Traditionally social policy has been delivered in two ways: either through income-based measures, such as social security or through the provision of services such as the NHS. It has been suggested that asset-based welfare could form a third pillar of the welfare state (Paxton 2001). Justifications for adopting an asset-based approach include the current

unequal distribution of wealth; the growing importance of buffers to help people cope with transitional stages in increasingly risky lives; the feeling of empowerment and independence which asset-holding can bring; and emerging evidence that asset ownership can have positive effects on welfare outcomes such as health (Kelly and Lissauer 2000; Regan 2001; Bynner 2001). Perhaps the strongest argument for an asset-based approach is that ensuring a more equal distribution of productive assets will ensure greater opportunity for all.

In its fullest sense, asset-based welfare is a new approach to welfare policy and has implications across many areas of social policy. In the UK, though it has become associated with two specific policy developments: the Child Trust Fund and the Saving Gateway. Below we use these two policies to illustrate how, using credits for volunteering, asset-based welfare could be used to encourage civic involvement.

Child Trust Fund

The Child Trust Fund (CTF) is designed to build the assets of *all* children so that when they reach 18 they will have a pot of money to invest in their futures (HMT 2001a; HMT 2001b). Its core aim is to increase young adults' opportunities, particularly for those from low-income backgrounds.

Box 7.1 The main features of the Child Trust Fund

- A *universal account* for all new-born children.
- An *initial state endowment* when the child is born.
- *Additional state top-up* payments at the ages of 5, 11 and 16.
- The initial endowment and top-ups will be bigger for low-income households.
- Account holder and their families can make *voluntary contributions*.
- *No access* to the funds before the child turns 18.
- *No restrictions* on how the funds can be spent.

Because the core aim of the policy is to increase opportunity for all young adults it is important that the funds accrued, particularly by those from low income households, are sufficient to genuinely affect life chances. This is partly a question of the level at which the initial endowment and the additional top-ups are set, but it is also about children's (and their families') ability and willingness to make additional contributions themselves. If only financial contributions are allowed

then one concern is that people on higher incomes will take advantage of the account and save into it, while those from less privileged backgrounds will not. Low income households will face two main barriers: firstly, they will have less income to save; secondly, the lack of access to the fund before the child turns eighteen will be a disincentive for the poor. People on low incomes value easy access to any savings.

There are therefore good reasons to consider non-monetary methods of contributing to a CTF. A policy which rewards civic involvement with credits paid to top up the fund should be considered. It would, if well targeted, provide account holders who have limited resources with a way to boost the fund and the eventual asset accumulated. This will help the policy achieve its objective of allowing all people to accumulate an asset significant enough to have a positive impact on life chances.

Saving Gateway

The Saving Gateway is designed to build the assets of low-income adults. It too will be an individual account in which an asset will accumulate, though where the CTF uses an endowment to support asset accumulation, the Saving Gateway provides matched saving. Every pound that is deposited by the account holder will be matched by the state.

Box 7.2 The Saving Gateway

- Targeted at low-income adults.
- Accounts will run for *five years*.
- The government – probably at a rate of 1:1 – will match individual contributions up to certain limits.
- Before the maturity of the account, savers will have *access* to their own funds but not to the matched deposits.
- *No restrictions* on the use of funds.
- Important role for financial education.

The Saving Gateway, as proposed, also raises questions about the possible role and importance of non-financial deposits. Having credits which people could pay in as a result of some civic involvement would mean that low-income adults would not necessarily be forced to find the money to save from their limited weekly income. Indeed, the wisdom of

giving people on low-income strong incentives to save has been questioned. Although there is evidence to suggest that saving is a universal aspiration and it is only a small minority of individuals who never save at all (Kempson and Whyley 2000), it continues to be argued that either people simply will not be able to save, because of their low incomes, or that they will save but only at the expense of short term needs. Because it helps temper the power of this argument, providing a non-financial method of saving would be valuable.

If these exciting new asset-based welfare policies are to be successful they must meet stiff challenges, some of which have been identified above. When an asset-based policy depends, as the CTF and the Saving Gateway do to varying degrees, on the financial savings of individuals and/or their families, questions are raised about how appropriate and fair this is. Allowing non-financial deposits, related to civic involvement, could play an important role in making asset-based welfare a success.

Asset-based welfare as 'Left Thatcherism'

The above arguments for being able to pay credits into an asset-based policy could be described as *instrumental* reason, that is, they are based on the desire to ensure particular policies achieve their stated aims. There are, however more *principled* reasons for using asset-based welfare policies to encourage civic involvement.

Many on the Left believe that asset-based policies will be powerful policy tools, which will enhance the life chances of all children. Yet unease about some aspects of the new approach remains. One concern regards their seemingly individualistic nature. People are being asked to save as *individuals* into *individual* accounts. At worst such individualistic asset-based policies could even be seen as undermining a healthy civil society by encouraging people to think only as individuals. This worry has been characterised as a fear of a 'Left Thatcherism', a form of progressive individualism (White 2001).

Although we should not exaggerate these concerns, they require a response. One option is to devise more collective and community focused asset-based welfare policies. This could involve communities owning their local assets. Another option is the one being discussed in this chapter. The CTF and the Saving Gateway, while they are based on individual accounts, also present us with opportunities to strengthen

civil society. Indeed, as other asset-based policies are developed, they too need to be considered in relation to broader social concerns such as civic responsibility or community service. The aim should be to create more of a civic asset-based approach.

Summary: 'asset advantages' to linking civic involvement and asset-based welfare.

- *Instrumentally* it will help asset-based policies achieve their aim of allowing all, particularly the worst off, to accumulate an asset.
- *In principle* it will neutralise the individualism of asset-based welfare.

'Civic renewal' advantages to linking asset-based welfare and civic involvement

It is a central premise of this chapter that government needs to develop new tools for facilitating greater levels of civic involvement. As Selina Chen points out in Chapter 6 one worrying trend is the drop in the level of formal volunteering among young people (Davis Smith 1997). More broadly, as the introduction points out, encouraging people to become more involved in their communities and civil society, as well as recognising those who already do so, is a necessary part of achieving civic renewal. Government needs to find better ways of relating to citizens and shaping their actions and behaviour. But why should asset-based welfare be used as a vehicle to achieve these aims vis-à-vis other forms of government intervention and policy approaches?

Mainstreaming civic renewal into other policy areas

One argument for using asset-based welfare to promote civic renewal reflects the previous section. It is possible to kill two birds with one stone by helping to achieve the government's asset goals as well as providing incentives for civic and community involvement. This reflects the principle, as outlined by Victoria Nash in Chapter 1, that strategies to encourage civic renewal should not be seen as separate from existing policies, but instead should be mainstreamed into existing provision.

Using the structures provided by asset-based policies

The structure of individual accounts and administrative systems created by asset-based welfare policies are ripe for exploitation. Significantly the accounts have a *savings* element, which provides the facility to save or bank credits for civic or community involvement. Take, for example the CTF, which is intended to be universal. *All* new-born children and, when the policy matures, all young adults will have a government sponsored savings account and be contactable through the administrative structure created.[1]

There are a number of schemes, such as TimeBank which already use credits for civic and community involvement. However, these remain largely small scale and have not yet been placed within a national framework. At its most ambitious asset-based welfare could provide the basis for a citizen's account into which citizenship credits could be paid for a range of activities. This could emphasise the common citizenship element of volunteering and be presented as recognising the contribution that every citizen should make (McCormick 1994; NCV 1999).

The use of such credits need not be universal. Indeed for both practical and principled reasons it might be desirable to develop policies targeted at groups with specific needs. Practically, establishing a nationwide network of citizenship credits could involve significant cost and major policy change. In principle, it is possible that universal citizenship aims would conflict with targeted welfare aims. Policy makers need to be aware of middle class capture, whereby the credits are taken advantage of by the well-informed and savvy middle classes, but exclude the very groups who, from an asset-perspective, we want to benefit most. The structures provided by asset-based welfare policies could still be used for a targeted approach. The Saving Gateway offers one vehicle for a targeted policy or alternatively a specific group of CTF-holders could be focused on.

The role of credits: the distance between reward and payment

There is an increasing acceptance that credits are a useful way of recognising the value of volunteers' contributions to society. There has been an increase in the number of Local Exchange Trading Schemes

(LETS) and 'Time Dollar' schemes such as those organised by TimeBank. Both of these schemes primarily seek to make visible any civic involvement or volunteering. They reward people who are already involved, but could also be seen as ways of encouraging new civic and community involvement. However, direct rewards for volunteering have not been uncontroversial.

There are significant practical difficulties with credits, but perhaps the most controversial question is one of principle. It concerns the impact credits will have on volunteers' motivations and hence the very nature of civic involvement. The appropriate balance between selfish motivations (increased CV points and direct financial benefits) and more altruistic motivations (the benefit of the recipient community or environment) has attracted particular attention. Encouraging people to become involved requires attention to a range of issues, which include the supply of opportunities, access to advice and the provision of information. However, it seems clear that, particularly for young people, more material benefits must be part of the equation.

Providing credits, which can be paid into an asset-based welfare policy, does represent a financial reward. The credits could be 'cashed' if paid into an asset account and then become available when the account matures. This would not satisfy a purist and is incompatible with the often used definition of volunteering: 'action undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for personal gain.' It is true that there are dangers of policy becoming too reliant on material rewards (and other selfish motivations). Firstly, the *quality* of the civic involvement and the level of commitment displayed by individuals may be affected. Secondly, the experience of community or civic involvement, when financially enticed, could have less of an ongoing effect on the behaviour and thinking of individuals. This would dilute the eventual contribution to wider civic renewal.

These are genuine concerns. There certainly appears to be a difficult trade-off between needing to encourage civic involvement or recognise people who already give their time and an equally important need for quality civic involvement to build on our more altruistic natures and to link into wider civic renewal.

However, this trade-off could be less stark when credits are used through the framework provided by asset-based welfare policies. Although there is a reward gained it is not immediate. There is an

action-reward gap. People will not see the tangible benefit of the credit until the account matures, which may be some time after doing the activity that was rewarded. This distance between the *action* and the receipt of *reward* provides a compromise between the need for direct financial rewards and the need to ensure the quality of civic involvement. What is more, the on-going dynamic nature of a savings process could be reflected in an ongoing commitment to civic involvement. The regular savings habit, which economists talk about, could be translated into a regular civic involvement habit.

The asset-effect

A final civic renewal advantage to linking these two policy areas, is that it could help create a virtuous circle. Thus far we have been talking mainly about the role that civic involvement can play in helping people to build up an asset. However, recent research has shown that holding assets can be linked to increased civic involvement. Research suggests that holding assets in early adulthood is positively related to both 'political interest' and trust in the political system (Bynner 2001) and that people who own assets are more likely to be involved in their local communities (CfED 2001). This, it has been suggested is because an asset gives people a greater stake in society and their local community. Linking asset-based welfare policies and civic renewal could therefore be seen as helping to create a virtuous circle. Civic involvement will lead to asset-accumulation which would then in turn lead to greater civic involvement.

Summary: Civic renewal advantages to linking civic renewal and asset-based welfare

- It *mainstreams civic renewal* into another policy area and kills two birds with one stone.
- Asset-based welfare provides a structure of savings accounts into which credits can be paid.
- There is an *action-reward-gap*, which helps ensure balance between needing to encourage involvement and ensuring the quality of the activity undertaken.
- There is evidence that holding an asset will result in a more involved and vibrant civil society.

Policy options

This paper has been primarily been concerned with establishing the argument behind linking asset-based welfare policies and policy on civic involvement. It does not explore in detail any specific policy recommendations. However, some principles around which policy development could be based can be identified.

A universal scheme of citizenship credits is attractive. Yet for the reasons identified above it should probably be considered the ultimate ambition, but unrealistic in the shorter term. Because of the numerous practical and principled difficulties with the use of credits perhaps the most fruitful approach would be to start small. An incremental approach could then build up the breadth and scope of the link between asset-based welfare and civic involvement, as the evidence base and experience allowed.

It would also be useful to think about how existing credits schemes can be built upon and used. Already we have mentioned TimeBank and the use of time dollars: these could be linked into the framework created by asset-based welfare policies. It might also be possible to use credits which people gain on the new Connexions cards, which are issued to young people between 16 and 19 as part of the new Connexions service. Young people can gain points for, among other things, formal voluntary activity. These can then be claimed by 'paying' for a number of items or entering raffles for more glamorous prizes. One favoured option could be for people to pay their credits into a CTF.

While building on existing schemes might be useful, it is also possible that small-scale new policies should be explored. These could take a range of forms, from small schemes run by community based organisations, through to schemes organised through schools. One of the advantages of using such organisations would be that decisions would be made locally, thus avoiding some of the pitfalls of centrally administered schemes.

Conclusion

The civic renewal of Britain should be a core objective of the Left. To achieve it new tools are needed in the policy maker's toolbox. Clearly there is no single solution and a range of policy responses is necessary.

However, linking incentives to become more active citizens with asset-based welfare policies has enormous potential. There are *asset advantages* as well as *civic renewal advantages* to linking the two policy areas. As asset-based welfare policies are introduced their links with civic renewal should be considered a core element of the policy development process. This opportunity should not be missed.

Endnote

1   It should be remembered that while the vast majority of people will be covered by the structure created by asset-based welfare policies, there are groups who will not be able to benefit. For example marginalised groups such as the disabled, runaways and children in care.

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