



# Rallying Together

Summary of a research study of Raleigh's work with disadvantaged young people

An ippr report for Raleigh International Trust

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**Raleigh**

## Rallying Together: Summary of a research study of Raleigh's work with disadvantaged young people

In 2008, ippr was commissioned by Raleigh to research the long-term impact of Raleigh's work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This research had two key objectives:

1. To provide Raleigh with feedback on its work with disadvantaged young people over the past 25 years
2. To provide a case study of a practical intervention which has broader lessons for policymakers and practitioners concerned with improving young people's lives.

### Raleigh and its 'venturers'

Raleigh is a youth development organisation that runs overseas expeditions for young people to work together on community, environmental and conservation projects around the world. The young people who participate in Raleigh expeditions, known as 'venturers', come through a number of different routes:

- 'Self-funders': young people from the UK who fundraise approximately £3000 to go on the expeditions
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK who fundraise for less money (usually around £500)
- Young people from the host countries, and international venturers.

Since 'Operation Raleigh' was founded in 1984, approximately 1600 of the young people who have accessed expeditions have come from disadvantaged backgrounds: around 10 per cent of all venturers. Many of these young people have come from communities that can be described as 'working class' or 'deprived' and have experienced a range of difficulties including unemployment, homelessness, drug and alcohol problems, mental illness and violence. The access routes for these venturers have undergone many changes over the past 25 years, in terms of the ethos, selection criteria, extent and nature of the support offered. Raleigh has also changed as an organisation: it is increasingly concerned with stimulating personal development through adventure while conducting sustainable community and environmental work internationally.

However, Raleigh continues to define its expeditions in relation to four challenges, stating these on its website (2008) as:

*'The challenge to be selected; the challenge to fundraise; the expedition itself, and the challenge to make a difference locally when you come back'*

**"Raleigh is increasingly concerned with stimulating personal development through adventure while conducting sustainable community and environmental work internationally"**

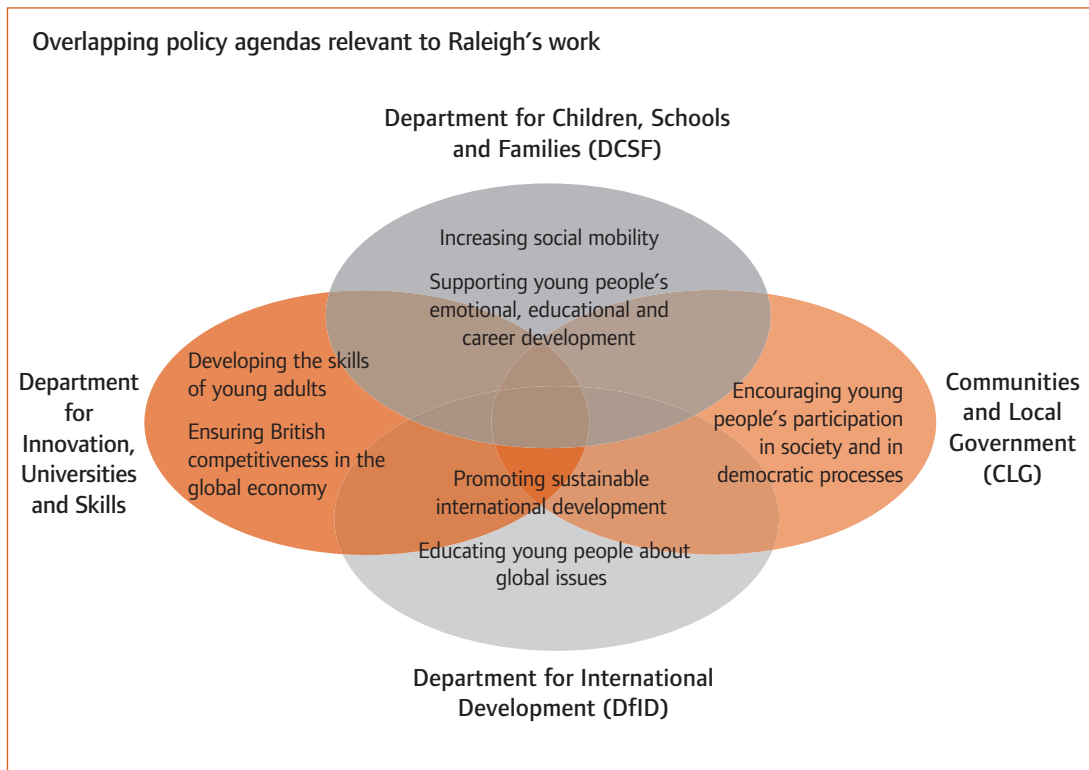
### Raleigh's work and the youth policy context

Raleigh's work with disadvantaged youth feeds into a number of overlapping youth policy agendas concerning different government departments (summarised in the diagram overleaf). These include:

- **Personal development:** Concern about wellbeing as well as attainment has grown to dominate youth agendas, as reflected in the Government's *Youth Matters Green Paper* (2005), *The Children's Plan* (2007) and the *Youth Taskforce Action Plan* (2008). The policy paper *Aiming High* (HM Treasury 2007) specifically promised extra funding for purposeful activities that are perceived to improve 'soft skills' and contribute to psychological development. The Department for Children, Schools and Families' growing emphasis on learning outside the classroom clearly relates to Raleigh's own emphasis on experiential learning.
- **Global citizenship and cross-cultural awareness:** Encouraging tolerance and respect for diversity is an increasing political priority (Agegbo 2007). The *Leitch Review of*

*Skills* directed policymakers to the need to equip young people with the skills they need in the global age (Leitch 2006), while policy support for education relating to international development is also growing (Young and Shah 2008). Through sending young people to developing countries, Raleigh explicitly aims to encourage young people to develop a sense of global citizenship and understanding of other cultures.

- **Civic participation:** Promoting volunteering and active citizenship among young people is a political priority for politicians across the political spectrum. The case for youth volunteering was made most explicitly by the Russell Commission on Youth Action and Engagement (Russell 2005). David Cameron’s Conservatives have proposed a National Citizen Service for all 16-year-olds. Most recently, the Youth Citizenship Commission is ongoing and due to report in 2009. This ties in to Raleigh’s ‘fourth challenge’, which encourages young people to ‘make a difference back home’ after they return from their expedition. Raleigh aims to encourage these young people to make a difference in whatever community they end up in, but recognising that their experiences may lead them to look beyond that community.



**What this research project set out to achieve**

While there is a growing body of research exploring gap years and overseas expeditions, this has tended to focus on the experiences of young people from middle class socio-economic backgrounds. These fit the general stereotype of typical ‘gap year students’; they tend to be on clear educational and career trajectories and are relatively affluent. Our research asked how the experience of overseas expeditions differed for young people from less affluent backgrounds, many of whom were not in education or employment at the time that they became involved with Raleigh.

Existing research into volunteering has tended to ask people to evaluate their experiences soon after they volunteered. By returning to people who went on expeditions many years ago, our research was uniquely placed to understand the long-term role and significance of volunteering in people’s lives, too.

Our research set out to answer the following questions:

- What long-term influence has Raleigh had on the lives of people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have taken part in its expeditions over the past 25 years?

- In particular, what is the relationship between participating in Raleigh and:
  - a) Personal development
  - b) Global citizenship
  - c) Civic participation

Our research consisted of three main phases:

- 1) A review of existing research and an audit of the policy context
- 2) An online and postal self-completion survey of 105 past Raleigh participants from disadvantaged backgrounds who had gone on expeditions
- 3) Fifteen life history interviews with past Raleigh participants from disadvantaged backgrounds. These interviewees ranged in age from 22 to 40 and had gone on expeditions between 1989 and 2006.

In this summary we give an overview of the findings of phases two and three of our research under the headings ‘personal development’, ‘global citizenship and cross-cultural awareness’ and ‘civic participation’. We have structured our findings in this way in order to make them relevant both to Raleigh’s objectives and to the current policy and research context. We then draw out the implications of our research for Raleigh and for policymakers working across these different agendas.

We have used direct quotes from participants. These have been identified by interviewee/survey respondent code, gender and the year that they went on expedition.

## Key findings from the research

### Personal development

*‘In brief it changed my life, it gave me the opportunity to explore who I was and where I wanted to be in life’ (Survey respondent no. 80, female, 2003)*

- **Participants said that participating in Raleigh had transformed their lives.** 83 per cent of survey respondents said that Raleigh had a long-term impact on their personal development. This was particularly through enhancing their sense of wellbeing and their ability to cope with difficult things that happened to them. 79 per cent of respondents said that their sense of having control over their lives increased as a result of Raleigh.
- **The experience of being in an unfamiliar and extremely challenging environment was an important contributor to personal development.** 81 per cent of survey respondents said that being in a remote environment where it was necessary to be self-sufficient was a very important part of their overall experience. The challenging nature of the environment helped people to break away from destructive influences and patterns of behaviour in their home environments, broadened their horizons and enhanced their sense of achievement.
- **Mixing with UK venturers from different social backgrounds was an important part of the expedition.** Participants had both positive and negative experiences of this. 76 per cent of survey respondents said that being with people from backgrounds different from their own was an important part of the Raleigh experience. Some participants said that mixing with people from different social backgrounds challenged their preconceptions and raised their aspirations and self esteem. However, others found these relationships more difficult, with some of them feeling stigmatised for coming to Raleigh through a route for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **The ways in which Raleigh impacted on participants’ personal development depended on the levels of social support and the opportunities they could draw on at home.** 81 per cent of survey respondents said that Raleigh had increased the number of friendships they had with people from different backgrounds. However,

**“For one group, participating in Raleigh was an opportunity to explore and question their identity and social status in a way that raised their aspirations and self esteem”**

“Some participants felt they had an affinity with people from the host communities because they shared experiences of coping with difficulties and disadvantage”

some participants also said they experienced some difficulties in relating to people from their home communities after they returned from expedition.

- **Participants said that their confidence and interpersonal skills were greatly increased as a result of their experience with Raleigh.** 94 per cent of survey respondents said that their confidence in their own abilities increased as a result of participating. 89 per cent reported an increased ability to lead or encourage others and 87 per cent an increased ability to work as part of a team. There was therefore clear evidence that Raleigh helped participants improve both their team working and leadership skills.
- **A very high proportion of survey respondents (83 per cent) said that Raleigh had increased their career ambitions.** 83 per cent of participants reported increased interest in working in countries outside the UK and 75 per cent reported increased interest in working in youth or community work. The extent to which people translated this into specific employment outcomes varied according to their personal circumstances.
- **The opportunity to mix with people who had been to university encouraged some participants to believe that they could succeed in higher education.** Some participants reported becoming more aware of the benefits of further and higher education as a result of their Raleigh experience.
- **The role that Raleigh played for people with drug and alcohol issues was highly dependent on individuals’ circumstances.** A number of participants had previously experienced drug or alcohol dependency. Some of them said that Raleigh played an important role in helping them overcome these problems. Others among them felt that they needed more support before and during their expeditions in order to cope with the issues that this raised.
- **Participants had mixed views on the level of adventure and risk to which they felt they should be exposed while on expedition.** This was in part a reflection of the different backgrounds and experiences of the research participants. It also highlights the difficult balancing act that Raleigh must facilitate, in providing challenging opportunities while guaranteeing safety.

#### Global citizenship and cross-cultural awareness

*‘Raleigh opened my eyes and mind to the world around me and I can’t thank them enough’ (Survey respondent no. 103, male, 1994)*

- **Participants reported that Raleigh had greatly increased their awareness of the world and had broadened their horizons.** 94 per cent of survey respondents said that their understanding of other people’s cultures and backgrounds had increased as a result of participating in Raleigh.
- **85 per cent of survey respondents said that participating in Raleigh had increased their awareness of inequality in the world.** This particularly affected people’s attitudes towards consumerism, although in varying ways. Some participants said that they developed new appreciation of the material comforts available to them at home. Others said that their experience of visiting poor but happy communities made them more critical of materialistic culture in the UK.
- **Participants described the host communities in complex ways.** At times these conformed to known stereotypes of communities as ‘poor but happy’ or ‘needy and grateful’ but some accounts were more questioning and reflective. In cases where people were reflective about their relationships with the host communities, this appeared to be linked to the strong personal relationship that they developed with host country participants and international venturers. More than eight in ten (83 per cent) of survey respondents said that spending time with people from the host community was a very important aspect of their expedition.

- **Many participants adopted notions of ‘difference’ that were rooted in social class rather than culture.** For example, some participants felt they had an affinity with people from the host communities because they shared experiences of coping with difficulties and disadvantage, while feeling very different from the ‘posh’ UK self-funders.
- **Participants’ understandings of the host communities were based on their personal, subjective experiences.** For example, people identified commonalities between problems they found in the host communities and problems they had encountered in their own local communities.
- **Participants were interested in the overall organisation and sustainability of their projects.** Some said they would have liked to know more about the countries before they went there. A number said they would have liked more information about what happened to the projects and host communities in the long-term.
- **Most participants (86 per cent of survey respondents) said that Raleigh had impacted in the long term on their sense of identity and values.** However, participants tended not to use political or economic frameworks in explaining the problems they encountered.
- **Participants saw themselves as both volunteers and explorers.** At times, these two self-conceptions sat uncomfortably together. This may be a reflection of broader tensions between models of ‘personal development’ and the values of ‘international development’.

### Civic participation

*‘On return and at home it has opened my eyes. All I want to do is travel the world. My experience around the UK and other countries would be great for my local area but I want to travel further, gaining more knowledge and then pass it down to others who wish to follow or want to help others in remote countries’ (Survey respondent no. 88, male, 2002)*

- **Participating in Raleigh had a very strong impact on participants’ attitudes towards others and their involvement in further volunteering.** Three quarters (73 per cent) reported their increased participation in volunteering activities as a result of their involvement with Raleigh. Participants also developed more philanthropic and altruistic attitudes towards other people who are less fortunate.
- **While many participants became involved in further volunteering, this was often not in their local community but further afield.** One explanation for this is that some people felt more distant from their local communities after returning from their expedition. But while some found this distancing difficult, others thought it was a positive development that demonstrated they were moving up in the world and broadening their horizons.
- **Participating in Raleigh had less of an impact on people’s interest in politics or their involvement in political activities than on other aspects of their lives.** The terms ‘citizenship’ and ‘community responsibility’ did not hold resonance for participants, even though many were engaged in voluntary activities.
- **Those people who had been supported by Raleigh to get involved in further volunteering felt that this was extremely helpful.** The types of activities that participants valued included involvement in subsequent Raleigh fundraising and selection weekends and volunteering activities run by other organisations that were suggested by Raleigh.

### Conclusions and implications for Raleigh

These findings lead us to a number of conclusions and recommendations, both for Raleigh as it looks to build on its good work in the future, and more broadly for

policymakers concerned with improving the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Our findings provide very positive feedback for Raleigh from the young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have taken part in its expeditions over the past 25 years:**

- Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the role that Raleigh had played in improving all aspects of their lives.
- They reported that Raleigh had helped them develop, on a personal level in relation to their education and career, and in terms of their global awareness.
- Participants expressed a great deal of good feeling towards Raleigh and asked us to pass on their thanks to Raleigh staff.

Below we highlight some key implications for Raleigh as the organisation looks to the future.

**Raleigh should continue to encourage constructive relationships between young people from different social backgrounds. In order to facilitate this:**

- Raleigh should continue to be open and transparent with young people about the routes that people have taken to get on an expedition.
- If funding allows it could try to increase the proportion of venturers who are from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- If funding allows it could try to increase the number of volunteer staff who had originally got involved with Raleigh through its routes for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Raleigh should continue to negotiate the difficult balance between providing opportunities to young people who may have experienced complex difficulties and ensuring safety 'on the ground':**

- Raleigh's role in providing these opportunities to young people who would not normally have them is really valuable and important.
- Raleigh should continue to ensure that potential venturers are assessed by a relevant professional.
- Young people who have recently experienced drug, alcohol or mental health issues may require specialist support, before, during and after their expedition.

**Providing ongoing support to participants after they return from expedition:**

- The extent to which participants were able to build on their experiences from the expeditions depended on the support and opportunities available to them after they returned home.
- Participants who had received post-expedition support from Raleigh were positive about this.
- Ongoing support with the difficult post-expedition transition process was one of the few areas in which some participants said that they would have liked Raleigh to do more.

**Opportunities for further learning:**

- Some participants would have appreciated an educational programme, both before and after the expedition, that could help them build on the insights they developed while on expedition.
- Participants would also have liked more opportunities to stay in touch with people from the host communities and learn about what happened to their projects in the long term.

**The role of partner organisations:**

- Our findings suggest there is an important role for partner organisations currently involved in Raleigh's Youth Agency Partnership Programme (YAPP). The more



understanding and insight that these organisations have of the Raleigh experience, the better placed they will be to support the young people who take part and help them build on their experience.

## Conclusions and implications for policymakers and other relevant organisations

The Raleigh expedition is a 'positive activity' of the kind identified by policymakers as promoting personal development:

- Its positive attributes include the fact it is focused, goal orientated, takes place in a group setting and is supervised. Previous research has identified these as critical factors of activities that are beneficial for personal development.
- The Raleigh experience helps to build aspects of self-esteem that the educational establishment is coming to recognise as crucial to success.
- Our findings highlight the value of experiential learning through expeditions. As such they support the current focus of education and youth policy on the importance of learning outside of the classroom.

The importance of international experiences for personal development:

- The unfamiliar and challenging nature of the expedition locations was an extremely important aspect of participants' experience: being somewhere which is culturally unfamiliar and is physically and mentally challenging enhanced their development and learning, and being far away from their home environment broadened participants' perspectives and helped them leave behind any destructive influences back home.
- Participants viewed their Raleigh experience as an opportunity to volunteer, explore and learn rather than as a holiday.
- There can be tension between the role of developing communities as sites for learning and the needs of those communities.

One-off interventions need to be linked to longer-term support:

- Policymakers need to consider the ways in which shorter-term interventions and longer-term youth services can complement each other.
- Policymakers should seek to develop policy that is responsive to the differing, long-term trajectories of young people. More cross-department working is necessary to support this. This includes considering how best to fund longer-term and shorter-term interventions in sustainable ways.
- Policymakers and practitioners should ensure that shorter-term interventions are closely linked with careers services, youth services, employment services and employers.
- Organisations running shorter-term interventions should support young people to maintain new relationships that they develop as a result. This might be through encouraging peer support networks or organising follow-up events.
- As Raleigh has demonstrated, organisations running shorter-term interventions that are highly valued and trusted by young people may be uniquely placed to help those young people access other services and sources of support.

Learning about poverty, social inequality and sustainable development:

Our findings have particular implications for organisations concerned with education about international development and social justice issues. In particular:

- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can draw on their personal experience to learn about issues facing communities around the world.
- In order to link their experiences overseas with broader global issues, young people can benefit from an educational approach that helps them to learn about historical, political and economic contexts and about development issues.

**“The unfamiliar and challenging nature of the expedition locations was an extremely important aspect of participants' experience”**



#### The relationship between international volunteering and local community participation:

- Our research provided evidence of one way in which policy agendas promoting social mobility and those promoting strong local communities can pull young people in two different directions.
- Policymakers and providers who want to use overseas volunteering in order to stimulate interest in local community participation need to involve local community groups in their schemes.

#### Altruism and philanthropy, not politics or 'citizenship':

- Our findings have highlighted that policymakers' language about citizenship and volunteering does not resonate with some members of the public (although it is important to note that many of our participants went to school prior to the introduction of the citizenship curriculum).
- They also provide an example of a broader trend whereby volunteering is seen as a philanthropic – not a political – activity.

#### The relationship between 'international development' and 'personal development':

- There is a difficult balance to strike between the needs of the young venturers and those of the host communities. Policymakers working across these areas need to communicate how best to balance their different objectives.
- Policymakers and providers need to ensure that projects and activities in host communities are wanted by people in those communities as well as being sustainable and genuinely contributing to productive outcomes.
- There is scope for further analysis of the ways that models of 'international development', 'community development' and 'personal development' relate to each other.

#### Implications for assessing youth interventions:

- It is important that 'outcomes' of youth interventions are measured in ways that reflect the ongoing nature of the people's educational and personal development.
- While Raleigh's work is clearly relevant to a range of policy agendas, it is also important to highlight the intrinsically valuable nature of the experience for the young people who take part:

*'That kind of memory, the memory of the freedom, great – it's nice, it's something I can always hold [on to] and it's something that no one else can ever understand 'cause it's mine'*  
(Interviewee A, male, 2002)

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## Acknowledgements

ippr would like to thank the many individuals who willingly gave up their time to participate in this research. The research for this project was conducted by Ruth Sheldon, Naomi Jones, Lucia Durante and Reg Platt at ippr. The online survey was coordinated by Cognisant Research. Ruth Sheldon wrote the report, with contributions from Naomi Jones, Julia Margo and Duncan Purvis. Additional inputs came from Lucia Durante, Jill Rutter, Kayte Lawton, Carey Oppenheim, Stacey Adams and Isabel Burton.

The report represents the views of the author and not necessarily the views of ippr's directors or trustees.

This report was first published in January 2009. © ippr 2009