



RUSSELL COMMISSION

A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

**Executive Summary to
The Russell Commission**

Ian M Russell

March 2005

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C O M M I S S I O N

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Personal Foreword



How can we achieve a step change in youth volunteering?

What can be done to encourage more young people to volunteer and get involved in their local communities?

How can their contribution be better recognised?

Why do we need a new national framework for youth action and engagement?

Will it really make a difference to young people's volunteering?

These are among the questions the Commission has been asked as we have developed our proposals to transform the ways in which young people become involved in volunteering activity.

The recommendations in this Report provide answers which, like the experiences of so many young volunteers, are both exciting and challenging.

I believe our recommendations can deliver a step change in youth volunteering in the UK – a step change in diversity, quality, and quantity. The measures we propose can have a dramatic impact on young volunteers themselves, who will develop new skills and qualities through their experiences, as well as being of enormous benefit to local communities and wider society.

This will only be achieved by building on the excellent work already underway within the voluntary and community sector, which is a source of tremendous value and vitality in our society. I count it a personal privilege to have been able to get to know better many of those active in volunteering across the UK, and have learned a great deal from their example.

The Commission's challenge has been to design a new national framework which will bring together all youth volunteering activities in a shared sense of purpose. We want to create significantly more opportunities to volunteer, and we want to give individuals a better, more meaningful choice. We want more volunteering opportunities of a higher quality, and we want to see greater emphasis on celebrating young volunteers' achievements, and on recognising the value of their contribution to society.

In this Report, we respond to the clearly expressed desire of young people to find meaningful ways of contributing to their communities. We address current inconsistencies and weaknesses in provision which prevent the full potential of youth volunteering opportunities from being realised. We identify ways to engage more young people from disadvantaged and under-represented communities. We propose measures to significantly improve the range and quality of activities for which young people can choose to volunteer.

The interests and requirements of young people have been central to our thinking as we have developed our recommendations. At each stage of the volunteering journey, we have placed the individual young volunteer at the heart of our proposals. This reflects our belief that each element of the framework should have a youth-led focus, and should remain flexible and responsive to young people's perspectives and aspirations.

In keeping with this, I should like to offer my thanks to the members of the Youth Advisory Board, who have been candid, enthusiastic, imaginative, and consistently impressive in the level of assistance they have given to the Commission. I am equally grateful to members of the Independent Advisory Group for their guidance, and to the Home Office, HM Treasury, the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the members of the Russell Commission Review Team for their support in the production of this Report.



Ian M Russell

A national framework for youth action and engagement

A national framework for youth action and engagement

The Commission's vision is of a society in which young people feel connected to their communities, seek to exercise influence over what is done and the way it is done, and are able to make a difference by having meaningful and exciting opportunities to volunteer.

It should be natural for young people to volunteer and natural for organisations to either offer young people the opportunity to volunteer or support them in doing so.

The Commission's overarching finding is that there is a need for a new national framework for youth action and engagement. Our consultation has shown a need to match the enthusiasm from young people to volunteer and the enormous goodwill from the voluntary and community, government and private sectors to support their involvement.

This framework will deliver benefit for young people, volunteer involving organisations and their communities, and society as a whole. Young people will develop new friendships, gain new skills and have opportunities to give greater expression to their altruism. Volunteer involving organisations will build their capacity and deliver more for their customers. Society as a whole will benefit as young people express themselves as active citizens. It benefits from the connections young people make when they volunteer – across classes, communities, neighbourhoods and generations. As a result society will be more cohesive.

We have a shared interest in encouraging and enabling young people to volunteer. Young people's volunteering permeates almost every aspect of our national life – strengthening its diversity, quality and quantity will benefit us all. There should be a shared purpose in making the framework happen – the voluntary and community sector, business, government and young people themselves all have a valuable part to play. This Summary provides an overview of the measures a new national framework for youth action and engagement should contain in order to achieve this.

THE PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the national framework is to deliver a step change in the diversity, quality, and quantity of young people's volunteering. It will respond to the demand from young people to volunteer in their communities, and to the good will that exists in the private and voluntary and community sectors to support volunteering. It will broaden access to volunteering opportunities, enhance the benefits that young people can get from volunteering, and raise the value that society places upon their contribution. It will transform the number of young people who engage in volunteering, enabling them to participate in volunteering activities that they find personally rewarding, and that are of measurable benefit to local communities. This will help to embed a culture of volunteering among the young which will continue to pay dividends, for them and their communities, in later life.

The framework offers a step change in young people’s civic engagement, overseeing the expansion of all types of youth volunteering activities to the point that volunteering becomes a common feature in their lives.

By building on the strengths of the voluntary and community sector, and by demonstrating a renewed dedication by government departments, the national framework can deliver:

- a step change in the profile of young volunteers, to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, have an equal opportunity to volunteer;
- a step change in choice and quality for young volunteers, with improved access to advice, better opportunities to enhance their skills, and greater support for their commitment of time; and
- a step change in the number of young volunteers, with half of all young people aged between 16 and 25 years old – some 3.5 million people – actively engaged in a form of volunteering.

Young people have made it clear that they want their volunteering to have a tangible impact upon the communities in which they live. Young people can – and do – make a difference to community life, and the new framework should provide a real opportunity to expand upon their contribution, helping to build social capital and to ensure that society appreciates the value of young people’s civic engagement.

Young people are interested in a wide variety of volunteering activities, examples of which include:

- **good health** – tackling obesity through sport, promoting good sexual health advice;
- **community safety and city pride** – self-defence groups, raising awareness about drugs, anti-bullying projects;
- **education and literacy** – theatre groups, classroom assistants, extended schools, homework clubs, teaching IT skills;
- **community involvement** – helping the elderly, working in a hospital, organising cultural events, running a local campaign, fundraising for charity; and
- **greener environments** – cleaning up public parks and play areas, recycling programmes.

To deliver this step change in activity, the framework will work with new and existing partners to strengthen the role of organisations which provide volunteering services to young people, by helping them to build capacity, raise standards, and extend their reach to groups of young people which are currently under-represented in volunteering activity.

The Commission's terms of reference direct us to propose a framework that could be applicable across the UK, whilst taking into account the devolved nature of volunteering programmes. We fully recognise that the decisions on the recommendations will be for each administration to take having made its own assessment of the fit with their circumstances.

The national framework will provide a focus for the organisation and delivery of youth volunteering. We hope it will also serve to highlight the positive contribution made by young volunteers to their local communities, in fields as diverse as the arts, education, health and caring, sport, conservation, and many other areas. The enthusiasm and commitment of young volunteers deserves to be more widely celebrated, and the store of as yet unrealised potential needs to be tapped more effectively.

KEY THEME

The key theme for the Commission is the importance of involving young people themselves in the design and implementation of volunteering activity. Half of all young volunteers become involved in activities on the advice or recommendation of friends, some of the most successful and inspirational volunteering experiences are those that are led by young people, and young people are uniquely placed to support and mentor their peers on a number of important social issues.

Wherever possible, we recommend that the national framework embraces this youth-led approach. As we have seen in the response to our national consultation, young people are enthusiastic about becoming more involved in volunteering activities, particularly if they feel they are empowered to exercise meaningful choice and have a clear role to play.

A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Key features of the national framework

The national framework for youth action and engagement would deliver a step change in the diversity, quality, and quantity of young people's volunteering.

The case for change is compelling. Through the framework, young people would be able to enjoy a more widely available range of volunteering choices – from local environmental campaigns to international volunteering, from enhanced participation in sports and community activities to making the most of extended school opportunities, such as IT classes, out of hours clubs, or peer mentoring.

The framework would tackle community needs and offer real development opportunities for young people, with a particular focus on providing currently under-represented and disadvantaged groups with a new route to skills and qualifications.

The step change in young people's volunteering would be achieved through a **dedicated implementation body**, youth-led and independent of government. The body would be responsible for raising **awareness** among young people of the value of volunteering, improving the quality and usefulness of their volunteering experiences, and for **building volunteering capacity**. It would provide an **accessible 'portal', or point of contact** – via web, phone, and face-to-face local interfaces – for individuals seeking information and advice on volunteering. This portal would also maintain a **nationwide database of opportunities**, and work closely with local volunteering bodies to deliver opportunities, advice, and guidance.

Opportunities would be of consistently better quality, with a **kitemark guarantee** of standards; and there would be more of them. Young volunteers would be able to choose between **short-term volunteering** (such as 'taster' sessions and local 'task force' activities), **part-time volunteering** (from a few hours to one or two days per week), and **full-time programmes**.

The number of placements would increase greatly, with funding for significant increases in short-term opportunities and part-time roles, and for a high profile **national programme of full-time youth volunteering**, as part of which young people would receive a weekly allowance to pursue long-term commitments. With the aspiration of attracting **1 million more young volunteers** across all forms of volunteering activity, **more than half of all those in the 16 to 25 age group** would participate. Opportunities to volunteer would not be limited to the voluntary and community sector. There would be new **opportunities for young people to volunteer in the public sector**.

An emphasis on recognising the achievements of young volunteers, including through **accreditation and linkages to vocational qualifications**, would amplify the importance of volunteering activity to personal and skills development. The framework would aim to increase appreciation of the value of volunteering, particularly in educational institutions and among employers.

By engaging with young volunteers and responding to their needs and aims, the national framework can transform youth volunteering. It aims to make volunteering a common, fun, and popular pursuit for young people, and to help to establish a **pattern of lifelong engagement** which would be to the benefit of the individual, the local community, and the UK as a whole.

The journey of a young volunteer through a new national framework for youth action and engagement

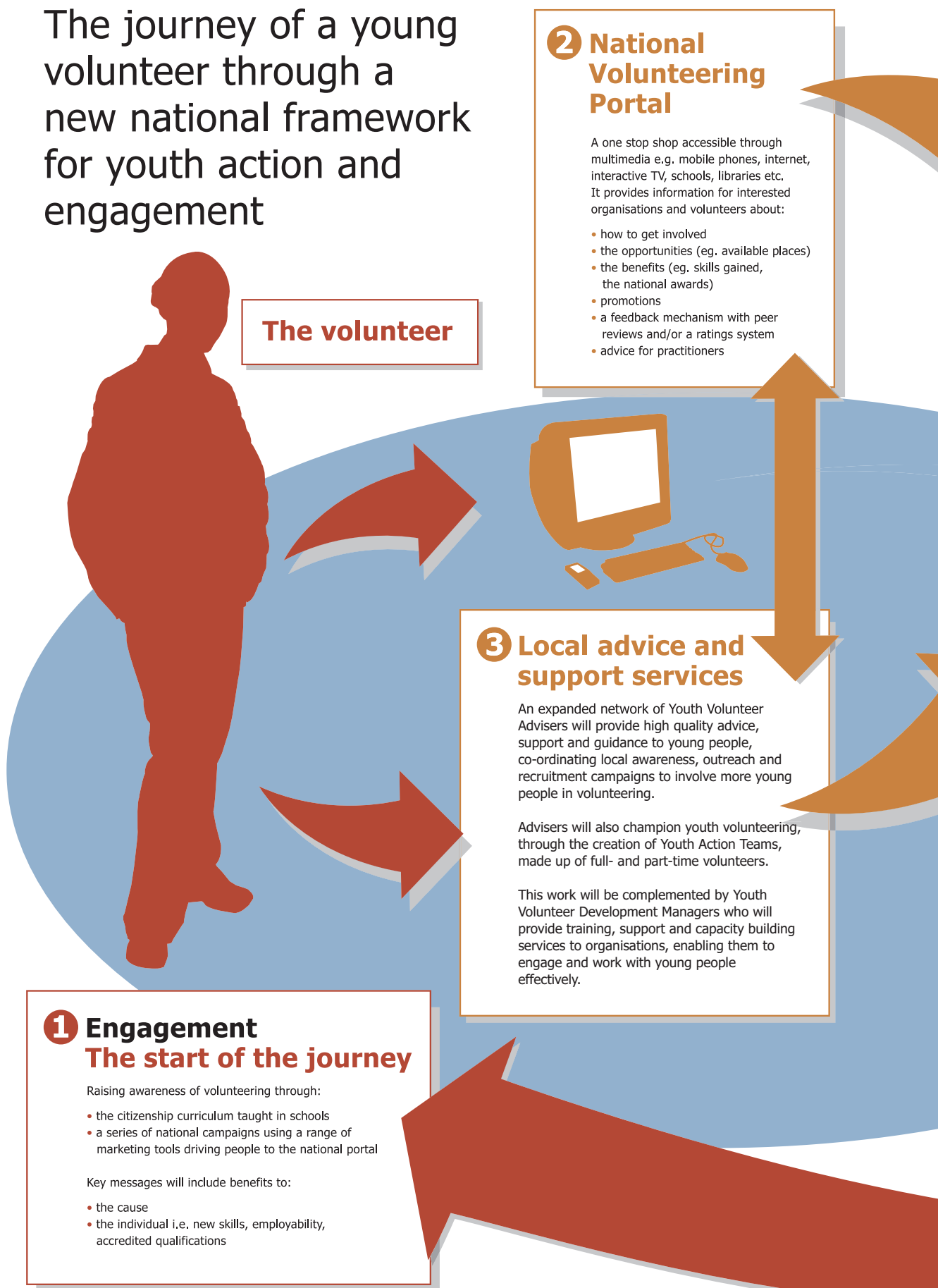


Figure 1. The 'volunteering journey'.

4 Activity Menu of Opportunity

Young people can get involved in whatever they are passionate about – Sport, Environment, Animals, Politics, and even set up their own projects

A flexible menu of:

- full-time domestic and international opportunities in 3 month modules,
- new part-time opportunities on Millennium Volunteers and better matching of volunteers to opportunities
- taster days and short-term ops
- a new emphasis on team volunteering and task forces
- quality assurance through Investing in Volunteers
- funding for voluntary organisations to offer more opportunities
- a living allowance for full-time volunteers

5 Results

Volunteering is about give and take. By giving a little time young people...

- meet people and make new friends
- feel good about themselves by helping others
- learn new skills
- help themselves get better jobs
- go to new places
- make better communities

The new framework could...

- break down financial and social barriers which stop people getting involved such as sorting out the benefits problem
- recognise success stories
- strengthen the links between volunteering and accreditation, where young people want this, in particular through linking placements with NVQs and ASDAN awards such as the Youth Achievement Award

Quality assurance and measuring success

There will be a strong focus on quality assurance, ensuring that young volunteers have a positive volunteering experience. Young people will play an active role in assessing and reviewing the quality of their volunteering, in order to drive up standards and meet the needs and interests of young volunteers.

The implementation body will also commission ongoing research and evaluation to measure the participation of young people in volunteering, and also to assess the community benefits of youth action and engagement.

Summary of Recommendations

The Commission's overarching recommendation is the creation of a new national framework for youth action and engagement to enhance the diversity, quality and quantity of volunteering opportunities for young people.

A dedicated implementation body will need to take the lead in delivering the framework, bringing together young people, business, the voluntary and community sector, business and government as partners to make volunteering a valued part of the lives of most young people.

RECOMMENDATION 1

A series of campaigns should promote awareness of volunteering, in order to establish volunteering nationally as a powerful force for change and an activity that all young people should aim to pursue.

Elements of these campaigns could include:

- promoting the benefits of volunteering and encouraging young people to register on the national portal;
- targeting specific groups of young people, particularly those who are currently under-represented in volunteering, and/or promote specific types of volunteering opportunities;
- challenging the media to help create new public attitudes to young people's volunteering by celebrating and recognising their achievements;
- maximising exposure to volunteering messages within the education system, at pre-16 level as well as in secondary schools, sixth forms, Further Education and Higher Education to ensure that all students have the opportunity to volunteer;
- running targeted campaigns to recruit volunteers for voluntary and community sector organisations at a national and local level;
- ensuring young people are involved in the development and delivery of any campaign.

RECOMMENDATION 2

A national volunteering portal will ensure that young people have ready access to information on volunteering opportunities through:

- a new website linked to mobile messaging facilities and available via interactive digital TV platforms;
- an 'online community' where young people can promote their interests or skills to both volunteering providers and young people looking to set up community projects;
- a new volunteering hotline to refer young people to volunteering opportunities;
- a youth focused database of volunteering opportunities that brings together existing data sources including do-it, and WorldWide Volunteering and possibly similar services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland;
- advice, guidance and training resources for volunteering practitioners and youth workers, including resources to involve young people from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- involving young people at all levels of delivery of the national portal. A concerted effort should be made to employ young people with relevant experience for key positions and a range of voluntary roles should be devised for young people to engage in online or face to face on a part-time and/or full-time basis.

RECOMMENDATION 3

To ensure that young people receive high quality advice and guidance on volunteering, the implementation body should contract to put in place 200 Youth Volunteer Advisers.

These Advisers will:

- provide advice, guidance and placement for young people liaising with local statutory services so that volunteering becomes a more natural choice for disadvantaged young people;
- ensure access to advice and information on volunteering options via established youth service networks and advisory services;
- champion youth-led volunteering through the creation and management of Youth Action Teams, enabling young volunteers to engage and support their peers in voluntary activity.

To build the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations to engage and support young volunteers, the implementation body should contract to put in place a further 200 Youth Volunteer Development Managers.

Development Managers will be responsible for:

- providing training, support and capacity building services to youth brokers and volunteer involving organisations to increase the quality and availability of opportunities for young people;
- plugging into local and regional networks to promote youth volunteering, develop positive partnerships and identify available resources.

RECOMMENDATION 4

It should be commonplace for young people to volunteer whilst they are at school, college or in higher education. All education institutions should have a volunteering ethos. This will require:

- better information on volunteering opportunities through access to the “portal” and targeted awareness campaigns;
- a stronger emphasis on volunteering within the citizenship curriculum and training for citizenship teachers;
- making the most of the opportunities for volunteers within extended schools, community schools, and their equivalents, providing leadership on new volunteering roles for the schools sector as a whole;
- a new role for young volunteers working with local advisors to link schools, sixth-forms, further education colleges and higher education institutions with volunteer centres and local opportunity providers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To celebrate the achievements of young volunteers, the implementation body should facilitate an annual youth volunteering award ceremony, to recognise and reward young people for their contributions to UK society. The national award ceremony should:

- be designed, organised and judged by young people, with support from the implementation body;
- recognise volunteering in all its diversity, and reward both distance-travelled and achievements;
- have a strong regional component, enabling local and regional recognition of young volunteers;
- regional events should also provide opportunities for young people to nominate their peers for national awards;
- attract corporate sponsorship, celebrity support and high profile media coverage;
- utilise internet, mobile and digital platforms to facilitate interactive voting.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Young people should have access to a 'menu of opportunity', with details of the full range of volunteering activities, including:

- the range of choice available matching young people's desire to make a contribution with community needs;
- peer ratings of opportunities and organisations that provide them;
- the pathways between different volunteering experiences – from one type of opportunity to another by activity, organisation or time committed;
- the links between volunteering opportunities and different qualifications and recognition schemes;
- peer e-mentors providing advice and information to young people around developing their own ideas for action and taking them forward within their communities.

The menu would also function as a framework for assessing the provision of opportunities at a local and national level. It would be available via the national portal, from local advisors and accessible in educational institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 7

There should be a step change in the number of young people volunteering and the diversity of young volunteers. This will require a significant expansion in the number of available opportunities – short-term, part-time and full-time – with effective targeting to ensure that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to volunteer.

Careful piloting and evaluation will be necessary to determine the appropriate mix of opportunities – by activity, organisation and the time committed (short-term, part-time and full-time). An assessment would need to take account of the costs, benefits and demand for different types of opportunity. After this assessment the balance of opportunities would be determined. Subject to that assessment, the Commission's view is that there should be a significant expansion of:

- **up to 300,000 short-term, group-based volunteering opportunities per annum within the first five years of the national framework.**
 - the establishment of local 'task forces' of young volunteers that come together on an ad hoc basis to address community challenges.
- **up to 80,000 part-time volunteering opportunities per annum, achieved through:**
 - the reform, re-branding and expansion of Millennium Volunteers;**additional opportunities** will be created:

- by enabling the many volunteer involving organisations with existing part-time opportunities to affiliate to the framework and benefit from the promotion of opportunities, accreditation and quality frameworks, and access to funding to assist with travel and subsistence costs;
 - through a new 'virtual volunteering' scheme in which young people can provide support and help via the internet and their PC;
 - with a specific focus on the creation of young people led opportunities, and new volunteer roles would help ensure that young people are able to contribute fully to the development of opportunities in their local areas.
- **up to 12,000 full-time volunteering opportunities per annum delivered within the first five years of the framework.**

The full-time programme should feature:

- a weekly living allowance of around £60 to cover travel and subsistence costs;
- contribution towards accommodation costs for all volunteers living away from home;
- an education partner for those full-time volunteers who wish to link their activity to a qualification, or towards a Youth Achievement Award;
- young volunteers who lead, develop and deliver and recruit for projects involving part-time and short-term volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 8

A national framework should recognise the popularity and worth of international volunteering, by offering up to 1,000 overseas volunteering opportunities. These opportunities offered should be structured programmes, which:

- have a clear link to UK volunteering, involving training or volunteering in preparation for going overseas;
- respond directly to real community needs, taking into account the particular sensitivities in developing countries;
- encourage greater diversity in participants by ensuring opportunities are made accessible to all young people regardless of financial background;
- take full advantage of private sector funding, levered in as part of wider corporate social responsibility strategies or as sponsorship.

RECOMMENDATION 9

There is untapped potential for young volunteers to give additional help within the public sector, for example in hospitals, schools, parks and sports, leisure and arts centres, to gain valuable experience and deliver tangible community benefit. There are particular opportunities to involve young people in shaping local services and as active citizens in local democracy.

- Government should develop and implement strategies to encourage greater levels of volunteering within public services taking account of the need for additionality and quality opportunities that are attractive to young people;
- Government should involve young people at the highest level to help establish the types of roles that would appeal to them;
- Government should consider the possibility of establishing a series of pilot projects in 2006-07 to examine the most appropriate ways to involve young volunteers, and set targets for their involvement.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The quality of volunteering opportunities would benefit from greater assurance on a set of clearly stated criteria. Volunteering organisations should be encouraged to meet minimum standards governing the access, involvement, development and reward of young volunteers. The dedicated implementation body for youth volunteering should:

- use the new Investing in Volunteers (IIV) as its quality assurance framework;
- develop the framework to include a youth specific module;
- consult with volunteer involving organisations on the timeframe for implementing IIV and a 'passport' system for accrediting existing quality assurance frameworks to IIV to minimise additional bureaucracy or disproportionate burdens for small organisations;
- involve young people in the IIV assessment process as paid assessors;
- ultimately provide access to funding from the framework to organisations holding the Investing in Volunteers kitemark;
- consider how best to help smaller voluntary and community sector organisations achieve the standard, including the possibility of grants.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The opportunity to improve skills and employability is a powerful incentive for young people to volunteer. It is important to mark the contribution made by young volunteers, and to recognise the skills they learn in the course of their activity.

The aspirations of young people will be met best through a progression of awards and accreditation that recognises the commitment they show and the skills they gain in the course of their volunteering:

- a personal appraisal system to ensure that young people have clear objectives, support and a record of achievement;
- wider use of the Youth Achievement Award to recognise young people's personal development through volunteering;
- (S)NVQ modules for those volunteering opportunities – part and full-time – where more formal vocational accreditation is appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Young people on benefits, and their families, should not suffer a financial barrier when they volunteer. To make it easier for young people on benefits to volunteer:

- a rulebook should be published by the Department of Work and Pensions to communicate existing rules more effectively to staff in Jobcentre Plus, and for interested parties such as volunteer involving organisations and local authorities, with a short summary guide to be widely distributed for volunteer involving organisations and young volunteers;
- the implementation body should make available a discretionary fund that providers of full-time opportunities in the framework could access for individual cases of hardship due to housing costs, loss of family benefits or childcare costs;
- government should consider looking at the general Housing Benefit interactions for volunteers within its current review of Housing Benefit as a whole;
- within its wider Review of Financial Support for 16-19 year olds, government should extend the same entitlements received by those in education or training to those who engage in full-time volunteering opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 13

In order to build the capacity of organisations to engage groups which historically have found it difficult to access volunteering, specifically disabled volunteers, the Commission recommends that government explore the case for the establishment of a cross-departmental initiative to facilitate:

- disability audits, to identify barriers to volunteering and enable organisations to develop appropriate action plans;
- disability awareness and equality training for staff and volunteers; and
- structural renovations to make buildings more accessible.

RECOMMENDATION 14

A dedicated implementation body should commission, through a series of contracts, the delivery of the framework. The body should:

- be a partnership between young people, the voluntary and community sector, business and government. It should give young people a strong voice in its decision-making processes and a significant advisory role in its governance;
- be set up by government working with other partners including the private sector in 2005-06, to operate at arm's length from government;
- be small, drawing on secondees from partner organisations and young volunteers to bear down on running costs;
- follow best practice in minimising the administrative burdens it places on voluntary and community organisations consistent with delivering high quality outcomes and high standards of accountability and propriety.

RECOMMENDATION 15

On funding:

- public funding for young people's volunteering should be ring-fenced and routed through the implementation body including the funding for Millennium Volunteers. Government should review the potential for administrative and efficiency savings in Government and streamlining for the voluntary and community sector in a merged funding stream for young people's volunteering as part of the 2006 Spending Review. A merged funding stream will allow government to assess the relative value for money of the different interventions, and provide for a more joined-up strategic approach to funding youth volunteering;
- a significant element of the funding should reflect the number of volunteers recruited with greater funding available to those organisations which attract more volunteers and a greater proportion from disadvantaged and harder to reach groups of young people;

- the private sector should be fully involved as a partner in the development of the framework to maximise the potential for its support. The Government should aim to secure a significant proportion of the funding from the private sector;
- a good understanding of effective involvement of young people in project development and delivery should be a key feature of any decisions made around funding;
- young people involved in the governance of the implementation body should be trained and supported to be involved in the funding processes for the framework, contributing to key decisions regarding the allocation of funding and contracts;
- the implementation body should establish a new youth fund, under the direction of young people, to facilitate youth-led volunteering projects. The fund could be delivered in partnership with existing youth-led funding such as the Big Lottery Fund, YouthBank UK and The Prince's Trust;
- the framework should be implemented on a sustainable basis with a gradual build-up in funding.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The implementation body will need to measure the impact of the framework and ensure that there is constant learning and evaluation, using tools like the Institute for Volunteering Research's Volunteer Impact Assessment Framework.

Measurement and evaluation should form an integral part of the implementation, to develop a firm evidence base for decision-making comprising:

- longitudinal studies;
- the impact on the community;
- data on the diversity of young volunteers;
- cost-effectiveness measures.

