

Working Well: How volunteering to help young people also boosts volunteers' wellbeing

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The Education and Employers Charity has been supporting people from the world of work to volunteer in schools and colleges since 2009. We know that such volunteering has considerable benefits for young people¹ as well as benefits for employers, such as staff skills gain and saved training costs, among many other benefits². There's also evidence that volunteers hugely value their own participation.³

We want to understand better how volunteers feel volunteering contributes to their wellbeing and how that contribution can be enhanced. To explore these topics, we draw on a survey of 1,026 volunteers, collected between November 2018 and March 2019 from our own Inspiring the Future volunteers and via partner networks. To analyse wellbeing at work, we focus on four questions about volunteers' sense of mission at work, levels of motivation and work satisfaction.

Between them, this sample of volunteers describe an average of 3 days volunteering in education activities per year and a further 3 days volunteering in other activities – adding up to almost 50,000 hours between them. They report that (1) education volunteering supports their wellbeing; (2) more volunteering typically results in more benefits; and (3) supportive employers make a difference:

1. **Education volunteering supports wellbeing:** 62% reported improvements to their “sense of mission” at work as a result of their volunteering in education. 88% reported benefits for their motivation in day-to-day life outside work; 77% reported the same for motivation at work. 49% reported that their volunteering has ultimately improved their satisfaction with their employer or line of work.
2. **More is better:** The more hours volunteered, the more likely employee volunteers were to report an impact. For instance, 55% of those volunteering the equivalent of 10+ days a year reported strong or very strong impact on their in-work motivation, compared to 32% of those doing fewer than 4 hours a year. This pattern is often small but statistically significant, remaining present when controlling statistically for key background factors: the volunteer's age, gender, location, seniority at work and number of dependents. More varied types of volunteering also have a small, positive association with greater reported benefits.
3. **Supportive employers matter:** The more personally supported volunteers felt, the greater the benefits they reported in all areas. The same applies when volunteers did more volunteering during paid working hours. When employers actively seek out volunteering opportunities for staff, 62% said that volunteering enhanced their work satisfaction, compared to 40% when their employer was aware of their volunteering activities but only supported them passively. Many volunteers spoke highly of their employers: less than 1% felt actively discouraged and 46% felt very supported.

¹ See, for instance, Kashefpakdel, E., Percy, C., & Rehill, J. (2019). *Motivated to achieve: How encounters with the world of work can change attitudes and improve academic achievement*. London: Education and Employers Charity.

² Corporate Citizenship. (2010). *Volunteering—The business case: The benefits of corporate volunteering programmes in education*. London: City of London.

³ e.g. Karen Smith et al. (2010). Motivations and Benefits of Student Volunteering: Comparing Regular, Occasional, and Non-Volunteers in Five Countries. *ANSERJ, Vol 1 No 1*, 65-81; Marieke Van Willigen. (2000). Differential Benefits of Volunteering Across the Life Course. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B, Volume 55, Issue 5*

1. Volunteering contributes to mission, motivation and work satisfaction

Employee volunteers⁴ reported significant benefits for their wellbeing at work:

- 62% felt that their “sense of mission” had seen some or significant development as a result of their volunteering in education.
- 88% described some benefit, strong benefit or very strong benefit to their motivation in day-to-day life (outside of work)
- 77% felt the same about their in-work motivation.

Ultimately, this sense of mission and motivation likely contributes to volunteers reporting that their volunteering has ultimately improved their satisfaction with their employer or line of work – 49% agreeing (against only 11% disagreeing). A very similar picture emerges across the full sample of respondents - see Charts 1-4 for details.

Chart 1: Extent to which volunteers feel their "sense of mission" has developed due to volunteering

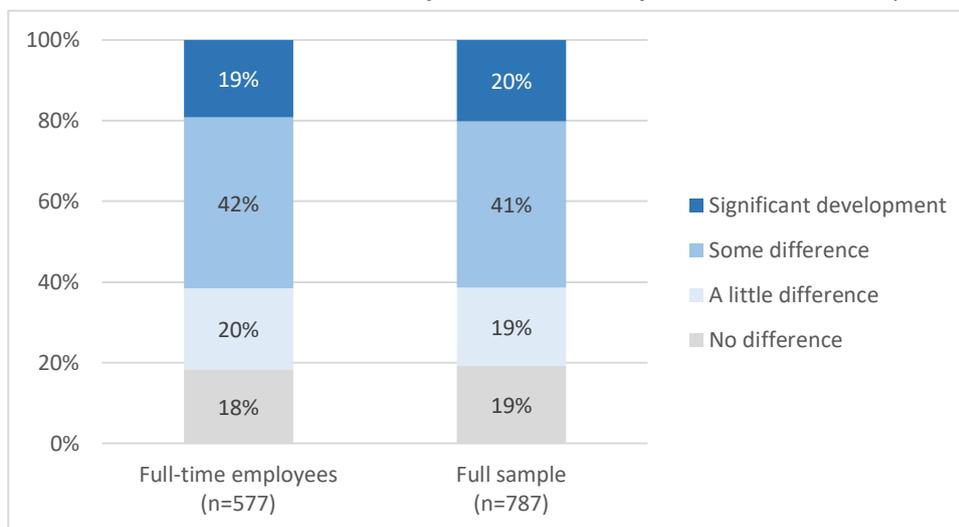
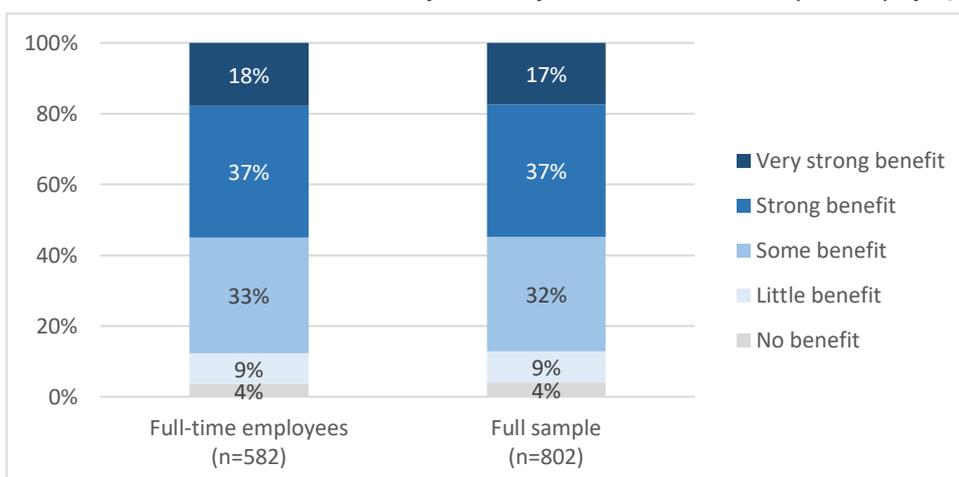


Chart 2: Extent to which volunteers feel benefit in motivation in day-to-day life (outside work)



⁴ “Employee volunteers” refers to the 657 respondents who were working full-time with an employer and were actively involved in a specified type of education volunteering at the time of the survey. Not all respondents answered all questions, so sample sizes for specific questions can be smaller than 657. See the Appendix for survey respondent details.

Chart 3: Extent to which volunteers feel benefit in their motivation at work

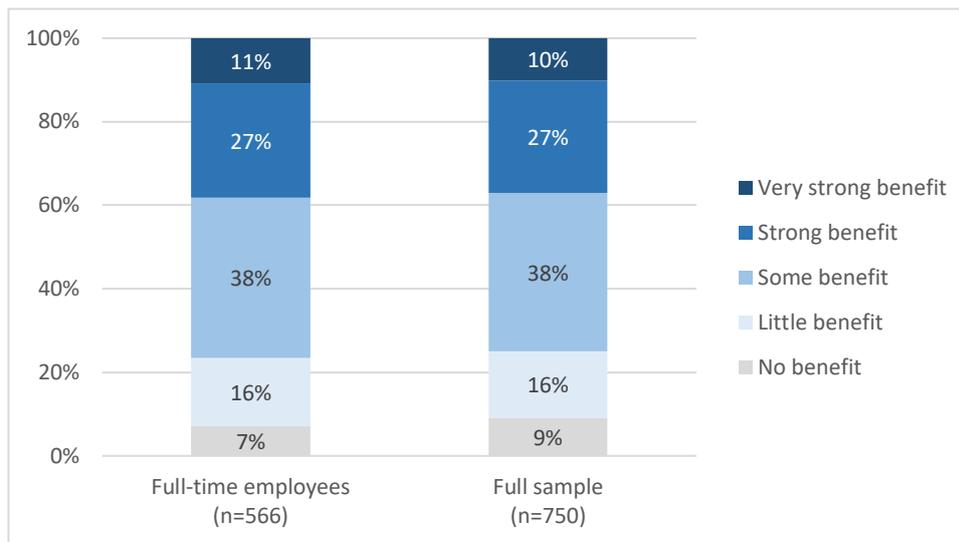
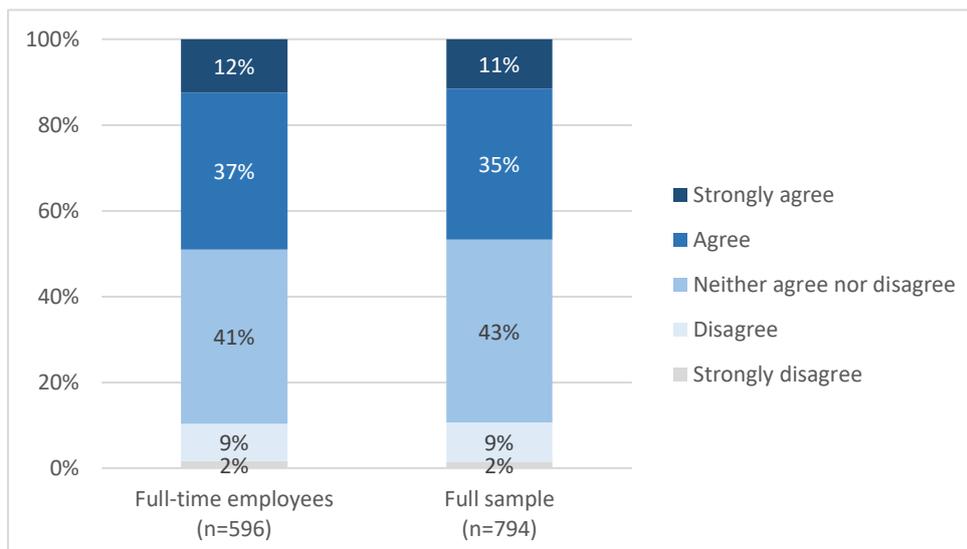


Chart 4: Levels of agreement that they feel more satisfied with their employer or line of work as a result of volunteering



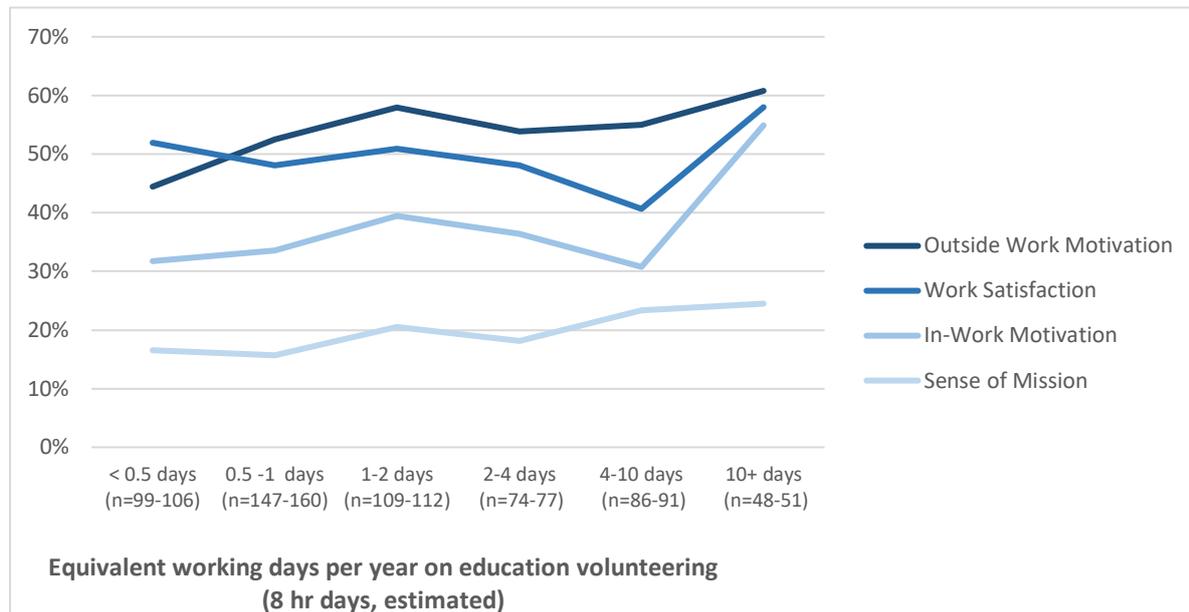
2. More volunteering translates into a greater sense of benefit

The more hours volunteered on specific education based volunteering activities, the more likely employee volunteers were to report a sense of benefit. For instance, 55% of those volunteering the equivalent of 10+ days a year reported strong or very strong benefits for their in-work motivation, compared to 32% of those doing fewer than 4 hours a year. Similarly, the proportion seeing significant benefits for out-of-work motivation increases by 16 percentage points; for sense of mission it increases 8 percentage points and for work satisfaction 6 percentage points.

Reported benefits for sense of mission and outside work motivation tend to increase fairly consistently with increased hours, whereas for in-work motivation and work satisfaction, there is a

slight dip among those reporting 1-2 weeks a year of volunteering, before picking up sharply among those reporting over 2 weeks a year of volunteering. See Chart 5 for details.

Chart 5: Proportion of employee volunteers who strongly feel their volunteering has contributed to the specified outcome



* Chart is based on the proportion who report a significant development in their sense of mission, a strong or very strong benefit for their motivation, and agree or strongly agree that it has supported work satisfaction; equivalent days per year estimated from answer options (e.g. those reporting “1-3 hours a term” estimated as 6 hours a year on average); categories grouped to ensure a minimum of approximately 50 in each grouped category.

These positive relationships are also present, albeit often modest in scale, when controlling statistically for key background factors: the volunteer’s age, gender, location, seniority at work and number of dependents.⁵ Once these factors are controlled for, the most consistent relationships are for sense of mission and in-work motivation.

The statistical analysis with control variables indicates that someone volunteering the equivalent of ten days a year would, on average, be 22% likely to report a “significant development” in their sense of mission (the strongest statement available) as opposed to 17% for those doing a single hour a year. For in-work motivation, 43% of those volunteering ten days equivalent would, on average, be expected to report a strong or very strong impact, compared to 34% for those volunteering a single hour.⁶

The pattern is small but statistically significant, and the positive findings allay concerns that volunteering a large number of days might have a detrimental effect on volunteers’ sense of wellbeing at work.

⁵ Detailed results: The odds that someone reports a significant development in their sense of mission are increased by 3% for each extra working day equivalent someone volunteers (p-value 0.07; n=476). The odds that someone reports a strong or very strong benefit for outside work motivation increase by 2% (p-value 0.26; n=492), or 4% for in-work motivation (p-value 0.01; n=490). The odds that someone agrees that volunteering has improved their work satisfaction increase by 2% for each extra working day equivalent of volunteering (p-value 0.25, n=488). Robust standard errors are used in all reported models. Location is controlled with respect to the ten regions of Great Britain and how urban the area is where the person lives.

⁶ Using the linear relationship estimated through the logistic regression model as the basis for the estimate.

Volunteers were asked about their activity across ten different types of education volunteering (Table 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of specified education volunteering activities across the sample

Type of education volunteering	Number of active, full time employee volunteers reporting participation (n=657)	Number reporting participation across full sample (n=946)
Careers talks/ fairs	85%	83%
CV workshop/ mock interviews	49%	48%
Mentoring	32%	32%
Hosting work experience	32%	28%
Hosting job shadowing/ workplace visits	25%	21%
School governor	17%	17%
Enterprise workshops/ skills competitions	13%	14%
Admin/managing other volunteers	12%	12%
Support/coaching for school staff	8%	8%
Reading/language/number partner	5%	6%

A common pattern across the four wellbeing outcomes analysed in this paper is for some variety of education volunteering to increase (or at least maintain) the proportion of respondents who describe an impact on that aspect of wellbeing – followed by a sharp increase among the small proportion (~5%) of volunteers reporting 7 or more different types of volunteering activity. For instance, if we consider motivation at work, Table 2 describes a gradual increase in the proportion who report such impacts as the number of types of volunteering increases from 1 to 6 from 32% to 38%, before shooting up to 74% at 7-10.

Table 2: Employee volunteers views on work motivation benefits vs volunteering diversity

Number of types of education volunteering	% reporting a strong or very strong impact of their volunteering on their work motivation	Sample size
1	32%	134
2	34%	165
3	33%	113
4	39%	68
5	36%	35
6	38%	20
7-10 types	74%	31

The modelled relationships reinforce the findings in the table.⁷ To some extent, those doing more different types of volunteering are also likely to be doing more hours overall – and we saw earlier that more hours is also linked to increased impact. However, variety of volunteering appears to be more important than implied simply by its influence on volume of hours – even when we control for how many hours they are volunteering there remains a positive association with the number of types.

⁷ Using the same logistic regression model with robust standard errors as elsewhere, coefficients are typically statistically significant at the 5% level or better, both with and without control factors. It is likely that this is being driven in large part by the volunteers engaged in 7 or more different types of education volunteering.

3. Supportive employers help volunteers secure wellbeing benefits

Volunteers described how personally supported they felt by their employer to volunteer, which we arrange on a 0 to 4 scale, where 0 is “actively discouraged” and 4 is “very supported”. In our sample of employee volunteers only one out of 657 felt actively discouraged and 46% felt very supported. The average level of support emerges as 3.3 out of 4, with a standard deviation of 0.9.

Feeling personally supported was positively correlated with how much volunteers felt their volunteering impacted all four aspects of wellbeing considered in this report, both with and without control factors. An increase of one point on the 0-4 scale, e.g. from 2 to 3, is associated with increased odds in reporting an impact on:

- Sense of mission - 9% increased odds (p-value 0.49; 12% with controls, p-value 0.46)
- Work motivation - 66% increased odds (p-value 0.00; 65% with controls, p-value 0.00)
- Non-work motivation - 29% increased odds (p-value 0.01; 26% with controls, p-value 0.05)
- Work satisfaction - 99% increased odds (p-value 0.00, 105% with controls, p-value 0.00).

This means that employees who feel more supported to volunteer report that their volunteering drives a greater sense of mission, greater motivation at work and outside, and better work satisfaction, noting that the positive link to sense of mission is weak and inconsistent (not statistically significant) compared to the others.

For employees feeling that their volunteering has enhanced their work satisfaction, being supported by their employer is key. Using the logistic regression model to control for key factors, such as seniority at work, going from feeling “not really supported” to “slightly supported” increases the proportion of volunteers typically describing such benefits from 29% to 45%. 61% of those that feel “very supported” describe such benefits.

When more volunteering is described as taking place during paid working hours, volunteers are far more likely to say their volunteering has improved their motivation at work and enhanced their work satisfaction (with no such increase in benefits reported for motivation outside work). This suggests that one simple way of making volunteers feel supported and ensuring that volunteering translates into benefits for workplace wellbeing is to enable more volunteering to take place during working hours, rather than during holiday or at non-working times. The attitude of the employer towards volunteering in general also drives how much volunteers report their volunteering enhancing their satisfaction at work (see Table 3).

Table 3: Employee volunteers views on work satisfaction benefits vs employer’s approach⁸

“What is your employer’s approach to volunteering in schools or education?”	% agreeing their volunteering improves their work satisfaction	Sample size
My employer actively seeks out volunteering opportunities for staff	62%	219
My employer does not actively seek opportunities but encourages us to volunteer	48%	174
My employer is aware of volunteering activities and supports them passively	40%	159
My employer is mostly unaware or disinterested in volunteering activities	17%	36
All responses	49%	593

⁸ Excluding the response “My employer would prefer that the staff did less volunteering than they do”, as only 5 respondents selected this.

Appendix: Survey sample description

The full sample is 1,026. The core sample for most analyses is “employee volunteers”, with a maximum possible sample size of 657 if all necessary questions were answered. Employee volunteers refers to respondents working full-time with an employer who were actively involved in a specified type of education volunteering at the time of the survey. The survey questions are available from the Education and Employers website.

Gender	Core Sample	Full Sample
Female	69%	70%
Male	31%	30%
Answer not given / not applicable	0%	0%

Age	Core Sample	Full Sample
Age 20-30	9%	8%
Age 30-40	26%	23%
Age 40-50	34%	30%
Age 50-60	25%	25%
Age 60+	4%	12%
Answer not given / not applicable	1%	2%

Current employment status	Core Sample	Full Sample
Full-time work with an employer	100%	71%
Part-time work with an employer	0%	12%
Retired	0%	6%
Self-employed / Entrepreneur	0%	5%
Freelancer/contractor	0%	2%
Unemployed	0%	1%
Other	0%	1%
Student	0%	0%
Answer not given / not applicable	0%	1%

Job grade / level	Core Sample	Full Sample
Admin	3%	3%
Early career / training scheme	4%	3%
Supervisor	8%	7%
Line manager	21%	18%
Senior manager	43%	40%
Managing Director / Partner	6%	10%
Other	15%	18%
Answer not given / not applicable	1%	2%

Region	Core Sample	Full Sample
East Midlands	5%	5%
East of England	8%	7%
London	29%	28%
North East	5%	5%
North West	12%	11%
Scotland	2%	1%
South East	18%	18%
South West	7%	8%
Wales	1%	1%
West Midlands	6%	6%
Yorkshire and Humber	7%	7%
Other	1%	1%
Answer not given / not applicable	0%	0%

Rurality of area around home	Core Sample	Full Sample
Major city	32%	33%
Large town	26%	25%
Small town	23%	23%
Village	16%	16%
Rural	4%	4%
Answer not given / not applicable	0%	0%

Dependents, e.g. live-in children or elderly/unwell relatives you care for	Core Sample	Full Sample
0	47%	48%
1	20%	21%
2	26%	24%
3	5%	5%
4	1%	1%
5	1%	1%
Answer not given / not applicable	1%	1%