Investigation into the roles of Volunteering in developing employability skills

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Acknowledgements

We would like to show our appreciation to the wider research team for giving us the space to complete this research independently.

Also, we would like to thank Peter Reavey, Project Director for GRAHAM Construction and Jason Lear, Owner/Manager of Lear training for responding to our questions in a timely manner.

Finally we would like to acknowledge George Gillespie from Volunteer Now for taking the time to meet us weekly and for always being available to contact if we had any queries. George gave us a great insight into the project and set clear guidelines on what he wanted from the research. We would also like to thank Volunteer Now for the use of their premises for meetings, supplying us with lunch and for allowing us to use their Survey Monkey account, which meant we could add in more questions with no personal cost to ourselves.

Thanks are also due to the Youth Council for Northern Ireland for supporting the Peer Research Project.
Executive Summary

Volunteer Now is a leading volunteer organisation in the UK. They help to promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. (Volunteer Now, 2013) The aim of this research project is to investigate and analyse the links between volunteering and employability.

The literature review highlights various authors’ views on employability and volunteering. The authors looked at all provided much of the same opinions on the value of volunteering to employability. In one of the studies looked at, it was highlighted that the majority of individuals who volunteered felt that it improved their employability skills and prospects. (Hirst, 2002) This was backed up by Perera (2012) who states that “work experience is always an asset in the competitive job market” (p17). Other author’s findings were also important but all seemed to be in agreement that volunteering provides some level of benefit to the individual’s employability.

Within the methodology section, the justifications of the data collect methods were discussed. The research by Saunders et al. (2012) defines the subjectivist approach of ontology as social phenomena being formed by the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors. It should be noted that within a survey, each individual respondent will have personal factors which influence their choice in answer.

The data collection tool that was used was a carefully constructed survey with questions relating both to volunteering and employability. Alongside our survey of students we conducted email interviews with employers which also proved to be beneficial. Volunteer Now’s main concern was finding out to what degree student’s found volunteering to benefit their employability level and the survey was focused as such. By having students as our target population, it made sense to post the survey online and send the link to students at both Queens’ University and the University of Ulster to gather responses. 63 responses were recorded which is a good number. SPSS was used as a statistical analysis tool to bring the correlation between various questions from the survey to light.
Most of these turned out to have no significant relationships apart from the two questions; “To what extent does your volunteering relate to your degree or current job?” and “To what extent do you agree with the comment; ‘do you think volunteering has helped or will help secure a job.’” These proved to have a very strong correlation.

The key findings of the research project were analysed in graph, table and word format in order to show the depth and variety of responses. It was found through the qualitative research that employees firmly believed that through volunteering they would gain higher level employability skills even though the review of the links through SPSS found only one link to be significant. Furthermore, insights from case study interviews showed that volunteering is perceived to play a moderate part in future employability.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Volunteer Now is an organisation which works to help promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. (Volunteer Now, 2013) They encourage people to volunteer and provide recognition for the contributing of their volunteers through the Millennium Volunteer scheme. This scheme recognises the number of hours that an individual volunteer has dedicated to unpaid work and provides them with a certificate which is recognised by employers throughout the UK.

Volunteer Now provide training, support and guidance to volunteers and organisations on a variety of issues including volunteer management and safeguarding of vulnerable adults. From 2012-2013 Volunteer Now have developed 1,100 new volunteering opportunities and provided 14,494 volunteers with placements because of this. They talk about volunteering at information and promotion events across Northern Ireland and have close links with universities including Queens’ who accredit an Effective Management of volunteers’ course. (Volunteer Now, 2013)

1.2 Objectives

The aim of our research project is to discover whether volunteering has had an impact on the development of employability skills and whether students find it useful in helping them gain employment.

We have decided to focus on a younger population in order to see what our peers feel about volunteering. In order to gauge people’s view on links between volunteering and employability, we are going to create a survey and send it to students from the volunteering sectors of Queens’ University and The University of Ulster. The analysis of these results should help us better determine the relationship between the two.
In addition, we are also going to invite a small portion of the respondents of our survey for in-depth interviewing. The basis of this is to glean detailed and personal views on volunteering developing employability skills. Further to this, an interview will also allow us to pursue any interesting points the participant makes about volunteering affecting employability skills.

It would be unfair to only look at the student’s views however; as employer’s opinions to volunteering would be vastly important as to whether they feel it is beneficial when students are applying for jobs. We will be sending three questions to three major employers in Northern Ireland in order to see their views on the validity of volunteer work. We aim to highlight that possible skills gained from engaging in voluntary work would be transferable to different job categories and for an individual to show willingness to learn new skills in their free time should increase their level of employability.
2. Literature Review

When exploring the links between volunteering and employability skills, it is important to consider the research that has already been carried out on the subject and what the findings of these were. Perera (2012) discusses how volunteering can and in many cases, should be used as a tool for “self-branding” (p17) and states that “work experience is always an asset in the competitive job market” (p17). A case study by Koonce (1996) supports this as he describes how one individual separated themselves from others by volunteering to ensure they were employable and even if they lost their job tomorrow they would have the necessary skills to get another job easily. Hirst (2002) carried out a study into the role of volunteering in improving ability to get employment. It is highlighted in this case that the majority of individuals who volunteer “believe that volunteering improves their employability” (p45). Before this study, a gap in the research existed in that there was “no robust quantitative evidence demonstrating that volunteering does lead to improved employment prospects” (p45) and so this piece attempted to fill it. However, they found “no overwhelming evidence that volunteering leads directly to entry into employment” (p46). Although, it was highlighted that this does not mean that there is no link but instead, it is likely to be affected by many other factors. It is also added that, although no clear link was discovered, volunteering does help develop employability skills. The findings from a study by Rothwell (2012) supports the link between volunteering and employability skills but in contrast, he found that the majority of people engaging in volunteering activities were not doing so with career motives in mind. Instead, it was found that they had more philanthropic motives. However, this study was related to volunteering on an international basis so it is likely that the motives for engaging in these activities were more than to develop employability skills.
As this research is based on the view that students have on the link between volunteering and employability skills, it is also useful to look at what the literature says about this. “Student volunteering generally refers to activities taking place outside the core curriculum” is the definition given by Darwen and Rannard (2011, p117). It does, however, add that although the activities are outside the curriculum this does not mean that it does not link to their studies as in many cases the voluntary activity is in the form of a placement or internship. It is also highlighted in this study that there “has been little research into the impact of student volunteering” (p180) which suggests there is potential for further research on the topic.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of our chosen research and to explain the reasoning behind our approach.

In order to collect the information needed to determine the link between volunteering and the development of employability skills a survey was composed to be distributed online to students for completion. The tool used to design this survey was Survey Monkey. This design was used due to the time constraints imposed on the piece of research and as it allowed all the information required from students to be collected and then collated effectively in order to analyse. It also allowed for distribution on a large scale which would be important to gain enough results to draw conclusions from. The questions for this survey were designed using both the findings of previous research, as found in the literature, and the brief that was given by the client. This aimed to ensure that the findings would be what was required by the client but also that it was not repeating already established facts.

In addition to the surveys, three large employers in Northern Ireland were interviewed. This enabled their view on the importance of having volunteering experience when they interview candidates for employment within their organisation to be analysed. Unfortunately, only two of the three employers responded. However, some extremely useful information from both employers was gained.
After both these measures were undertaken, people who had completed the survey were invited by email to take part in case study interviews. These interviews were designed to explore in more detail what students thought of volunteering and employability. To achieve this, many of the questions asked in the interviews were lifted from the survey, albeit tweaked to uncover the meaning behind student’s views. 5 students responded to these emails, creating 5 case study interviews.

Using the combination of an online survey for students, interviews with employers and interviews with students, we collected both qualitative and quantitative data which enabled the information required to be collected in an effective way. The quantitative data can be used to test for correlations between the variables and therefore links between volunteering and the development of employability skills can be identified. The qualitative data will give a deeper understanding of how both students and employers feel volunteering has an impact on employability skills.

3.1.1 Chosen Method

Defined as ‘a subset of a population’ (deVaus, 1996, p393) it is important to use the right approach to ensure that the responses received are free from bias and representative of the population. The method of sampling used was self-selection as individuals chose themselves whether to take part in the research or not. The advantage of this is that the responses received come from people who have meaningful opinions on the subject. However, it does bring about the issue that the research needs to be well publicised in order to get respondents.

The established target population for the research was students and in order to make this population aware of the study we contacted the two universities, Queens University and University of Ulster; both of whom agreed to send out information about the online survey. However, due to the factors such as timing and placement of the information being sent to students which were out of our control, this method did not bring much success. On closing the survey a total of 63 responses were collected.
The choice of employers came from contacts within the organisation which the piece of research was being carried out for. This was effective in that, it was known that good responses would be received. However, as the employers were not chosen randomly there is an aspect of bias which should not be ignored. If time constraints had not been a factor, it would have been possible to source additional employers to gain their view and reduce the element of bias.

3.1.2 Case Studies

Additionally, for this piece of research case studies were carried-out on a small segment of the students who responded to the survey. Following an email invitation to the 63 survey respondents, 5 students replied back, reporting that they would be happy to be interviewed. A member of the research team carried out these interviews in and around the Queen’s University of Belfast campus. The questions asked were mostly taken from the questions asked in the survey. However, to try to show the meaning and personal points of view that students have on volunteering and employability, the interview questions were amended so that personal meaning could be expressed as much as possible. Furthermore, as the case studies were all asked the same questions in the same order, their responses were standardised, thereby allowing comparison of responses. The results of these interviews gave good examples about how student’s volunteering experience helped them with employability skills and how, in one case study, volunteering directly lead to employability.
4. Results

4.1 Key Findings from Survey

The key findings from the survey are discussed below with all results available in the appendix (Figure 2)

The chart above shows the responses to the question; “Why did you decide to volunteer”.

As expected, the majority (70.5%) said that the reasons for their volunteering activity was for work experience purposes, followed by 59% stating that it was to improve employability skills. This shows that, even though the literature states that there is no proven link between the two, students believe that volunteering improves their chances of employment. However, it should also be noted that the other options have quite high percentages as well, showing that even though employment is the main concern for most, they are also engaging in volunteering activities for the right reason. As well at these responses, there was a chance for the respondent to write their own reasons, these included “To give something back” and “To help breast cancer patients”, again highlighted that work experience and employability skills are not the priority for everyone.
This chart shows the responses to the question; “During your volunteering experiences what activities have you engaged in?”

Almost all of the respondents (93.4%) stated that their volunteering activity involved working with people, with 68.9% stating that theirs involved working in teams; a vital skill in employment. Again with this question there was the opportunity to provide their own answer, an interesting one which came up was “problem solving and brainstorming”. These are skills which are important in the workplace so it is likely that this respondent was targeting their volunteering activity to their career goals.
The above pie chart shows the responses to the question; “On average, how many hours do you volunteer?”

As the survey was sent to students, it was expected that the majority would fall within the 0-10 range. It is also not surprising that 14.3% have no regular pattern of volunteering. It is important to highlight that the ability to commit to any number of hours whilst also studying, and in some cases having a job (61.9% of respondents were in either full-time or part-time employment, shown as figure 2 in the appendix) shows an ability to manage time effectively; another skill required by many employers.

On receiving the results, it was recognised that it would have been useful to find out why 12.7% respondents no longer volunteer.
This chart shows the responses to the question; “What employability skills do you think volunteering has helped you to develop”.

The majority stated that their activity allowed them to develop their communication skills. The other options all had a similar responses rate, varying slightly. This highlights that even if the motivation to volunteer is not to gain employability skills the skills are still developed. Once again, this question allowed the respondents to add skills they have developed which were not on the list. The response “Knowledge of the working environment” was an interesting one as this relates directly to the research question as this respondent clearly felt that their volunteering activity would be of use in employment.

Another response which was quite interesting was “20+ years’ work experience”. Although this was not explained in any detail, it can be assumed that this means this respondent used their volunteering experience to gain employment and has been working for over 20 years. If this is the case, it highlights that even 20 years ago, volunteering was an important factor in gaining employment.
The above shows the response to the question; “During previous job interviews has your volunteering activity been of interest to employers?”

There was almost an even split, however it was expected that more would have responded yes to this question. This may be because some of the respondents have not had an interview since volunteering. In hindsight, it was realised that this should have been an option. However, this question did provide some good examples of how volunteering experience has been of interest to employers, some of which are:

- “During any job interview I have had, I have spent most of the time being asked questions about my volunteering experiences and how it has strengthened my communication skills, my ability to work under pressure, and how to work in a team”
- “It has enabled me to explain to employers the skills that I’ve acquired from volunteering and the fact that I was volunteering showed a lot of hard working qualities”
- “Employers specifically ask about activities outside your studies and look to see how skills gained can be applied to the job you’re applying for”
- “Employers always care more about my voluntary work than my curricular work”
Allowing respondents to give their views on the question was useful as the responses highlight that there is an opportunity to discuss volunteering activities in interviews and that it can be used as a way to stand out from the other candidates.

The final question asked on the survey allowed the collection of qualitative data. The question, “What impact do you think volunteering has had on the development of employability skills” was used to draw out responses from respondents about how volunteering has affected their personal development of skills. Of the 63 respondents, 52 answered these questions, providing a wide range of opinions on this subject. These responses are shown in Figure 2 in the appendix. It is important to highlight that many of the respondents had similar opinions on the impact volunteering has had, for example many of them mentioned that their communication and team working skills greatly improved. Interestingly, quite a few mentioned that their volunteering experience allowed them to gain experience in a work environment and how roles within organisations interact. There was also an emphasis on the benefit of matching volunteering to degree pathways as it develops an edge over the people competing for the same jobs.
4.1.2 Quantitative Analysis

In order to effectively analyse the findings, SPSS; a statistical analysis tool, was used. This allowed the identification of any significant correlations between two variables. Those which are most relevant to our research question are discussed below.

**Hypothesis: There will be differences between the level of study and the relevance of the degree pathway.**

The two questions that were looked at to support the hypothesis were; “What are you currently studying? Please include year/level of study” and “To what extent does your volunteering activity relate to your chosen degree path or current job?”

**Test Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To what extent does your volunteering activity relate to your chosen degree path or current job?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square df Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>3.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 .356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable:

Level_of_Study

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no significant difference between the different levels of study. This means that there was a null hypothesis. This was quite surprising as it could be assumed that higher level students would choose volunteering activity to relate to their current job or degree.
Hypothesis: There would be a significant difference between the level of study and the number of hours volunteered.

The two questions that were looked at for this were “What are you currently studying? Please include year/level of study” and “On average, how many hours per month do you volunteer?”

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent Volunteering_those that know the amount they volunteer</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.7826</td>
<td>.89226</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level_of_Study</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.1774</td>
<td>.87823</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘no longer volunteering’ and ‘no regular pattern’ options were removed to allow for an analysis of the remaining fixed working hours patterns (0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31+ hours per month). Subsequently, a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that there was no statistical difference between these two variables. This means that there was a null hypothesis as it was thought that the higher the level, the fewer hours the respondent would be able to commit and that 1st years would be able do more.
Hypothesis: There will be a correlation between the extent volunteering relates to your degree or current job and their view on how volunteering has helped or will help secure a job.

A Spearman's Rank Order correlation was run to determine the relationship between respondents opinions on the comment “having volunteering experience has helped you secure a job or will help you secure a job” and employers interest in respondents volunteering activity during interviews.

There was a strong, positive correlation, which was statistically significant, meaning that those that rate their volunteering as very relevant to their degree also rate volunteering as helping them to secure a job.
### Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman's rho</th>
<th>To what extent does your volunteering activity relate to your chosen degree path or current job?</th>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the comment; &quot;having volunteering experience has helped you secure a job or will help you secure a job.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient 1.000 .445**</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) .000 .000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63 63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you agree with the comment; &quot;having volunteering experience has helped you secure a job or will help you secure a job.&quot;</td>
<td>.445** 1.000</td>
<td>.000 .000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63 63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
4.2 Key Findings from Qualitative Research

4.2.1 Background of Employers

GRAHAM is a privately owned company operating in the construction, asset management and project investment markets whose primary focus is constructing and maintaining the infrastructure we all rely on in everyday life. The company is ranked among the larger construction and services businesses in the UK and Ireland (GRAHAM, 2013).

Lear Training was founded in 2009 and their overall mission is to combine sports with education. They are passionate about blending the best of the sports world with the best of the business world. Whether it’s a career or voluntary position in the business sector or sports sector they can provide a qualification, professional development learning program or consultancy service to fit with the needs of their consumers (Lear Training, 2013).

4.2.2 Overview of Employer responses

By conducting an interview with Peter Reavey, Project Director of GRAHAM Construction and Jason Lear, Owner/Manager of Lear Training, the links between volunteering and employability skills from an employer’s perspective could be analysed.

Q1. Do you believe volunteering experience is an important quality to have to gain employment?

In response to this question Peter Reavey noted that “those people with volunteering experience will help potential employers to obtain a better understanding of the candidate seeking employment”. However, Jason Lear argues the dangers in the current economic climate of assuming “volunteering is a route to employment”. He continues to highlight “When deciding to volunteer I think the question should always be ‘what can I give?’ and not ‘What can I get out of this?’”
Literature by Rothwell (2012) found that the majority of people engaging in volunteering activities were not doing so with career motives in mind. Instead, it was found that they had more philanthropic motives. This would support Jason Lear’s view that there has to be a “self-motivated passion in what you are doing” in order to then “enhance transferable employment skills.”

Q2. Which of the following are you looking for in volunteers at an interview? *see appendices, figure 3

Peter Reavey indicated that all the attributes listed were important but he said “it is not evident with the individuals being interviewed”. Jason Lear pointed out that “those who volunteer for the right reasons bring a recognisable professional attitude, passion and work ethic to the application and interviews”. Based on his past experiences with interviewees, he also found that volunteering can improve their “ability to network and collaborate with various internal and external stakeholders”. From this it is evident that employers see the benefits of having volunteer experience. However, it is vital that the interviewee has the ability to communicate the skills they have developed from volunteering and how they can be used within the company in which they are applying to.

Q3. Do you prefer the volunteer to have experience that relates to the job/subject skill or a life-skill – or does it matter?

In response to this question, Peter Reavey highlights that it is preferable that the volunteer has “job specific skills” but that this “should always be accompanied with life skills”. On the other hand, Jason Lear believes that “the fact someone has given up their time to benefit others shows an attitude and commitment that is transferable into any working environment”. Therefore, it is evident that not all employers will focus on the same thing. Some companies may view job specific skills as more important while others such as Lear Training will see like skills as more preferable and job specific skills as “an additional bonus”.
Q4. Are there any other comments you wish to make about the links between employability and volunteering?

Peter Reavey comments on the increased difficulty for young people to obtain either paid employment or paid work experience. Therefore, he argues that volunteering can give candidates the chance to provide “evidence of their work ethic potential”. Unfortunately, Jason Lear had no additional comments to make on this issue. However, the comments by Peter Reavey give a great insight into the links between employability and volunteering by revealing that volunteering can give candidates an advantage by showing that they have a strong work ethic.

4.3 Results from case study interviews

The five case studies consisted of 4 current undergraduate students and 1 person who had graduated from both an undergraduate and a masters degree (Case study #4).

Case study #1:

1) **Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have?**
   I’m in neither, but currently looking for part time employment.

2) **What are you studying, and what year are you?** I’m studying a single Hons bachelor’s degree in Geography [and I’m currently on level 2].

3) **Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do?** I volunteer regularly for St John Ambulance (Volunteer First Aider)

4) **Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this?** Not directly, but it does supply some skills which could be useful in terms of field work safety and the supervision of other workers in physical environments. This is relevant as I’m thinking of doing a career in geographical fieldwork.
5) **What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering?** I chose to volunteer for St John Ambulance as I’ve always liked to help people, and always had a keen interest in first aid work, and the skills it has to offer.

6) **What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important?** The three most important activities I’d do whilst volunteering with SJA would be: the supervision and care of the public (You’re the one responsible to aid them when they’ve sustained an injury); responsibility to carry out first aid professionally and confidently (Making sure you’re protecting yourself as well as others); and making sure I’m equipped with the adequate knowledge to carry out first aid procedures correctly to organisation standards by attending weekly classes (You never know when you need to know how to treat a deep wound or heart attack situation – you have to be prompt and make quick decisions).

7) **Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why?** N/A

8) **What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job?** The fact I know first aid and every work environment needs a first aider; as well as making quick decisions, leadership skills and teamwork. Yes, as they offer skills which are transferable to a geographical context, be it in the field or in the lab or classroom – you have to know what you’re doing, look after yourself as well as help others, and know how to confidently approach a situation.

9) **During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees?** Yes

10) **Did you feel your volunteering activity helped you in the interview, and in what way (e.g. it showed employers you were reliable)?** In previous interviews, the fact I was a first aider was a bonus to employers and brought me to closer to the mark to get employed, in some cases I got the job shortly after the interview such as that when I applied for a job recently at a city centre pub, or office.
11) Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this? Possibly, due to the transferable skills I obtained through volunteering which can be applied to a broad spectrum of jobs, I do feel that volunteering has boosted my chances of getting employed as well as opened more doors to employers I may not have had a chance with in the past.

Case Study #2:

1) Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have? Not at the moment. I ran out of my student loan, so I’m going to look for work in a couple of weeks.

2) What are you studying, and what year are you? Psychology, 2\textsuperscript{nd} year

3) Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do? I volunteer at an adult mental health centre. It’s a stepping stone for getting people who have mental health issues back into the community.

4) Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this? I’m interested in pursuing a career in clinical psychology. This does relate to my degree path. The stuff you learn in class is applicable to the people I meet. I’m also acquiring real first-hand experience, instead of merely reading about people with mental health issues.

5) What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering? The realisation that a degree is not enough to secure me post-grad work or a masters/phd. But from a personal point of view, I like to give back to society and help people with mental illness.
6) What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important? Walk around and talk to people. This is important as I’m being friendly and speaking to them. I’m trying to make them feel included. Secondly, for quieter people I try to make them feel comfortable, as they may feel stigmatised for being in the place. I try to integrate them.

7) Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why? No, I wouldn’t. Even though I volunteer 5 hours a week at it, I’m very busy at the moment with degree and looking for employment.

8) What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job? Having direct contact with mental health people, which many of my course peers won’t have. Also, I can get an insight into clinical work. I’m shadowing what clinical people are doing.

9) During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees? No.

10) How did you feel about your commitment to volunteering in the light of perspective employers not showing interest in it? It didn’t affect me as previous employers were a means to an end. After my degree, I hope they acknowledge my volunteering. My previous interviews were for jobs in shops, restaurants etc.

11) Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this? I don’t think it alone will secure a job, but it will help. It shows I’ve taken the initiative. I realise other people are volunteering. But, what I’m doing is better than nothing. It’s not just about a job, I’ve also acquired insightful experience about people with mental illness.
Case study 3:

1) Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have? No

2) What are you studying, and what year are you? Psychology Bsc 2nd year

3) Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do? I work with children to establish a transition with them back into education (Youth Tutor). I work in a school with a nurturing environment where we’re not judging the children there.

4) Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this? Yes. I’m thinking of doing a career in education psychology, where you have to prove that you’ve done work with children. This is directly related to it.

5) What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering? To try to find out whether you can work with kids and not be terrified. From the volunteering, I’ve found that it’s not as difficult as it seems.

6) What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important? I try to couch kids when they’re writing their CVs. I need them to understand that they’re actually better than they think they are. I also try to motivate them. They need to realise that the path they take may not be the ‘scenic route’ (doing A-Levels, university, then get a job), but they will get there (a job) eventually.

7) Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why? I’m happy with it at the moment. I volunteer there all day Friday, 9-4.
8) **What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job?** They do tie into my degree path. Teaching them beyond the requirements of a teaching role. Actually talking to them, making breakfast. Biggest thing is emphasising and caring with the children. I try to make them understand that they can do stuff in the real world. Another important skill is trying to diffuse tense situations. We have children here who come from a violent, chaotic background, these kids could have substance abuse, and if they’re going off the rails, I try to talk them down. It’s actually good for kids in crisis. It’s face to face talk.

9) **During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees?** It doesn’t apply as I haven’t applied to any jobs yet.

10) N/A

11) **Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this?** I think it will help me secure a job. If I don’t go on to do postgrad educational psychology, I will a PCGE (post graduate school education), where I would try to work in schools like the one I’m volunteering in now. I find it immensely rewarding. It’s brilliant. They’re brilliant kids. I think the volunteering I’ve down will help me, because just having a degree of psychology would be difficult getting onto a PCGE, but the references I get from my volunteering should help me.
Case study 4:

1) **Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have?**

   Yes, I’m in full-time employment. I am a mental health support worker who works night. My job is to be there if anyone needs assistance. I have to take patients to on-site psych consultation. If on days, I would go to appointments with them, helping them with daily activities. This is for people who have been in Mater Hospital and Knockbraken, whom we try to get back into the community.

2) **What are you studying, and what year are you?**

   I got a First-class Honours in Psychology at QUB and a distinction in my masters in Foundations of Clinical Psychology at the University of Wales.

3) **Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do?**

   For three years, I was a child councillor at Child Line. I also spent 6 months over two summers working with NIAMH (Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health), where I worked in their research department. I also volunteered with NIACRO’s (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) youth wing.

4) **Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this?**

   Yes. My Child Line training gave me a caring nature to work with mental health people. They also gave me ASSIST (a suicide prevention program) training which is helpful. In my current job, I’ve actually talked people out of taking their lives. With NIAMH, it gave me awareness of practices in mental health, which contributed to me getting my current job.

5) **What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering?**

   It’s a toss-up between doing good in the world and getting a job. They complement each other, but mostly for getting a job.

6) **What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important?**

   N/A
7) Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why? A lot of these people are not aware of looking after themselves in the real world. I pushed an intuitive for people to cook. The people I looked after were eating rubbish, getting unhealthy. I also try to help them when they suffer from their mental health problems. Letting them know that they do not have to go through this along.

8) What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job? From Child Line I developed counselling skills. This is used in my job and is, I believe, the number one skill I learned from Child Line. Another important skill was the awareness of inter-agency work. I need to constantly work with other people. Some people I work with do not know how to communicate, which is masslessly important when patient’s welfare are concerned.

9) During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees? (For interview of current job) Yes

10) Did you feel your volunteering activity helped you in the interview, and in what way (e.g. it showed employers you were reliable)? Yes. It gave me the confidence that I could do this job. I didn’t have specific past experience, but I had relevant experience from Child Line. The transferable skills I got from Child Line were brought to my current post.

11) Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this? Most definitely. Without the volunteering work, I just would have had a degree. And today, an undergraduate degree counts for nothing. Everyone has got one. If you want to get into caring profession, you need experience. I didn’t need my degree for this job. It asked for GCSEs.
Case study 5):

1) **Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have?**
   Yes. I’m a Sales Assistant at Asda.

2) **What are you studying, and what year are you?** Psychology, 2\textsuperscript{nd} year.

3) **Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do?** I coach rugby for younger kids at an Antrim rugby club.

4) **Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this?** Post-degree, I want to do either clinical psychology or perception research. My volunteering loosely ties into perception research due to large amounts of movement being involved in playing rugby.

5) **What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering?** When I was a child I played at this club. I then wanted to give back to the club that lead me to be interested in rugby.

6) **What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important?** I organise charity events to raise money for youth division. This is important as it’s not free to run a rugby club. We want them to have the best experience possible. Also, planning their activities, this is important for them as they can be better players and play with ours.

7) **Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why?** At the minute no, because of my studies. I can only commit 3 hours on a Saturday at the moment.

8) **What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job?** There’s a degree of leadership from coaching. The younger kids look up to you as a leader, as a source of knowledge. They’ll engage in activities as you’ve made them interesting. As well, I try to bring enthusiasm to it. It’s a transferrable skill as I’m using my enthusiasm to get kids from the wider community into the club.
9) **During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees?** No.

10) **How did you feel about your commitment to volunteering in the light of perspective employers not showing interest in it?** In my case, my employment started before my volunteering.

11) **Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this?** I think it will help as it shows your motivations toward your career aren’t solely based on money. Stuff you are interested in should be what motivates you. I think it’s more important that you enjoy your work, even if the money isn’t there.

### 4.4 Discussion of overall results

From looking at the survey and interviews with employers it was clear that there is a link between volunteering and employability. However it was highlighted that students took part in volunteering activities in order to gain work experience. Young people want to gain work experience to aid employability, with most feeling that they need to engage in some sort of volunteering activity instead of wanting to do it for philanthropic reasons. This links with what employers believe as they stated that volunteering should be completed for the right reasons. Jason Lear stated; “I don’t think volunteering will give you or enhance transferable employment skills unless there is a self-motivated passion in what you are doing.” As well as this, the survey highlighted that students engaging in volunteering activities developed many skills with communication and team work having the highest response rate. However, Graham Construction discusses that even if employability skills have been developed through volunteering, the ability of the individual to effectively communicate this is vital. The importance of the development of life skills was apparent in the responses from both the employers and students, which one student stating “employers always care more about my voluntary work than my curricular work”.
5. Conclusion

Overall, it appears that a link exists between volunteering and employability skills. Students and employers both value volunteering in promoting self-development. However, it should be noted that employers want candidates at interview to be able to demonstrate how volunteering has helped them and emphasis that volunteering should not be used solely as a means of gaining employment.
6. Limitations

The main limitation that was faced was the limit on the amount of respondents to both the survey and interviews that could be received in the time given. As well as this, when the results were collected, it was found that there could have been additional questions asked in order to give a better insight into the views of the respondents. Limitations also exist surrounding our research methods for example; there is no way to prove that the responses to the online survey were accurate.

7. Recommendations

The main recommendation that comes from this study is that further research should be done to fill in the gaps about why students feel there is a need to volunteer. Although, a link was discovered, in order to make this more valid the sample size should be increased for both the survey and interview. As an element of bias exists within the employers data it would be useful to ask the same questions to additional employers that had no links to Volunteer Now.

From this research, it is clear that many students engage in volunteering activities with the view that it will improve their chances in employment, it would be useful to know where this message is coming from as voluntary organisations want their volunteers to be committed for the right reasons.
Appendix

Figure 1: Survey Questions

Question 1: Are you in either full-time or part-time employment?
Responses: Yes or No

Question 2: What are you currently studying? Please include year/level of study

Question 3: To what extent does your volunteering activity relate to your chosen degree path or current job?
Response: Scale from 1-9 with not 1 being not relevant and 9 being very relevant

Question 4: Why did you decide to volunteer?
Response:
- Meet new people
- Help the community
- Work experience
- Improve employability skills
- Personal reasons
- Other ____________

Question 5: During your volunteering experience what activities have you engaged in?
Response:
- Working with people
- Working in teams
- Administration
- Sales
- Other ____________
Question 6: On average, how many hours per month do you volunteer?

Response:

- 0-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31+
- No regular pattern
- No longer volunteer

Question 7: During previous job interviews has your volunteering activity been of interest to employers?

Response:

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please explain

Question 8: To what extent do you agree with the comment; “having volunteering experience has helped or will help you secure a job”

Response: Rate from strongly agree to strongly disagree (not applicable option given)

Question 9: What impact do you think volunteering has had on the development of employability skills?

Response: Comment box

Demographic Information

**Gender**: Male or Female

**Age**: comment box
Do you give permission for this research team to contact you in the future over further research? If yes, then please leave your email address below


Figure 2: Results from Survey

Question 1

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<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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answered question 63
skipped question 0

Question 2

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<th>Business Management – 3rd Year</th>
<th>Mechanical Engineering – Final Year</th>
<th>Marine Science – 2nd Year</th>
<th>Law – 3rd Year</th>
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<td>BIT – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Business Management – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Chemistry – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
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<td>Business Management – 2nd Year</td>
<td>Business Management – 3rd Year</td>
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<td>Biomedical Engineering – 1st Year</td>
<td>Archaeology – 4th Year</td>
<td>Biomedical Engineering – Final Year</td>
<td>Sports Technology – Final Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pharmacy – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Drama with English – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Events Management - Foundation</td>
<td>French and Spanish – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Chemistry – 3rd Year</td>
<td>French and Spanish – 3rd Year</td>
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<td>Business Management – 3rd Year</td>
<td>Business Management - 2nd Year</td>
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<td>English – 2nd Year</td>
<td>Irish and Celtic Studies, 3rd Year</td>
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Question 3

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Question 4

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<tr>
<td>Help the community</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve employability skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td></td>
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It looked fun!
Lots of spare time
Travel opportunity
To give something back
I don't volunteer. I have a job
Duke of Ed commitments
Question 5

During your volunteering experience what activities have you engaged in?

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<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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<td>Working in teams</td>
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<td>Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

answered question 61
skipped question 2

- Working with young children
- Working with animals
- Technical engineering
- Problem solving, brainstorming
- Fundraising
- Working with animals
- Working with animals
- Giving first aid help to those who need it
- I don't volunteer, I have a job
- Talking with patients

Question 6

On average, how many hours per month do you volunteer?

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<td>No regular pattern</td>
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<td>No longer volunteer</td>
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answered question 63
skipped question 0
Question 7

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<td>Team work</td>
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<td>Organising and planning</td>
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<td>Problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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answered question: 61
skipped question: 2

Knowledge of the working environment
Public speaking
20+ years work experience
I don’t volunteer. I have a job.
University interviews
Team work in relation to carrying out patient transfers, volunteering with the St Johns Ambulance.
Advised during interview of recent charity events I have organised and how successful they were when it comes to team & project management,
They were keen to see how comfortable I am when interacting with people I do not know.
During any job interview I have had, I have spent most of the time being asked questions about my volunteering experiences and how it has strengthened my communication skills, by ability to work under pressure, and how to work in a team.
And also what I have gained from volunteering, and what skills I contribute to it.
I was asked a lot of questions about how I felt it could help me in the job
It has enabled me to explain to employers the skills that I've acquired from volunteering and the fact that I was volunteering
Showed a lot of hard working qualities about me which they liked.
They were interested in hearing about my experiences as a volunteer and what I learned from it
They are interested in how outside skills can help within there company and it shows a level of responsibility
Employers specifically ask about activities outside your studies and look to how skills gained can be applied to the job your applying for
Employers were interested in specific times I had to demonstrate certain skills with my voluntary activity
No interviews since volunteering experience
They believe the skills mentioned above are core competencies. They like the examples from it.
Good asset, shows that you are a kind and sympathetic person who is willing to go the extra mile for someone else
Employers always care more about my voluntary work than my curricular work
Having volunteering experience allowed me to talk about different examples of when I had completed various tasks
Communication and team work seem to be a major thing employers are looking for, regardless of the field
Having first aid experience (especially to a higher level of training) can be of great use in any work environment
To have an employee who possesses such training is a valuable asset to any employer or business.
A great skill to have on your CV
It helped me beat other people for the job as I had experience
They were very keen to find out my story of why I wanted to help cancer victims
Working with children, Sports related
What skills I gained from volunteering
Question 9

- Developing social and communication skills, preparing people for the reality of a full-time job.
- It helps with team building and trains you to work within a team.
- A little effect.
- A good impact as it has developed my team work and communication skills, which is what employer's desire.
- It also shows that you have a work ethic because you are willing to give up your spare time to work without getting paid.
- Good experience.
- A very positive impact as it provides confidence in various areas.
- Increased confidence.
- Better communication skills and confidence with new people.
- Through volunteering you learn key skills which are needed in every job you could possibly be employed in.
- You learn the importance of considering other's points of view, working in a team, working independently,
- And being able to use your own initiative and cope under pressure. You also develop communication skills. These are all important in a job.
- Provided a practical application to current skills.
- A big impact.
- Greatly improved my ability to work in a workplace, understand how different roles interact with each other, improved ability to talk to other people and confidence.
- Positive impact- shows that you are willing to go the extra mile.
- I think it helps you strengthen your skills and shows your commitment to something.
- A large impact, learning how to conduct you in a certain work environment and picking up on essential skills that are required in certain fields will help a lot.
- I think people can learn a lot of skills from volunteering and can maybe even get them in touch with people who can help them to find paid employment.
- Raises employability, more experience.
- It's helped improve some skills and cement others and also provides evidence of those skills.
- If you volunteer in the same field as the career you wish to pursue then it shows your enthusiasm and interest in it.
- Volunteering can prepare you for employment and can show good character.
- It's given me a better insight into how the working environment is structured. It gave me an idea of how to better apply by knowledge from university to a job role.
- Positive.
- I think it helps improve your confidence in working with other people.
- It shows the willingness to work without the incentive of earning money and therefore a person's desire to improve.
- Their skills in a certain field i.e. improving leadership and project management skills.

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<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</table>
- A positive impact as it has helped developed employability skills further.
- Volunteering already requires the same skills as most jobs and thus increases your employability because you are able to show your capacity with these skills.
- Not much impact
- Increased employability as shows initiative
- it has helped develop many of the skills that will be required when applying for jobs in the future
- improves essential skills required for meeting people and meeting targets
- I have not had much experience yet due to this being a new venture, but expect a positive impact.
- A large impact as the skills, in my case, is directly transferable.
- It has added to my CV, to have a part time job and volunteer as well shows good time management skill and other desirable traits that an employer looks for.
- By volunteering you can develop experience in a particular sector you may not have worked in before.
- If the volunteering experience is a positive one, I will drive you to develop and progress.
- Helps improve your work ethic and build good team relationships.
- Has helped provide contacts in my chosen field of study, which may become useful further done the road.
- Also has given me a vast array of opportunities and access would not have other wise had.
- Volunteering has helped developed skills such as team-work, public speaking and event planning which I may otherwise not got the chance to develop
- Volunteering give the opportunity to gain experience before applying to work.
- I think that as it has allowed me to enhance my team work and good communication skills it has increased my attractiveness to employers
- Working as a team and being given responsibility.
- It has fostered employability skills.
- A good one, because people are motivated more to find a job. It is disheartening
- When you go through all of the volunteering and effort and get a rejection call/letter. However, when you get one, it is worthwhile.
- help you learn how to talk to people gets you used to employment environments
- Good Impact because jobs are more competitive so it may give someone the edge
- A huge impact.
- It makes you look like a nice person
- it helps you understand how the workplace works
- A positive impact for the person and employer
- It helps. If only a little.
- Excellent skills, social, interaction, empathy for others.
- Massive impact. In certain job areas it's the only way to get relevant experience to get on the career ladder.
Question 10

Research survey into the links between employability and volunteering.

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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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Answer Question: 63
Skipped Question: 0

Question 11

Age Summary

18-22 = 49
23-26 = 11
45-48 = 2

Question 12

Research survey into the links between employability and volunteering.

Do you give permission for this research team to contact you in the future over further research? If yes, then please leave your email address below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
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<td>Skipped Question</td>
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Figure 3: Responses from Employers

Responses from GRAHAM construction (Peter Reavey)

Q1. Do you believe volunteering experience is an important quality to have to gain employment?

Any form of experience is very important to gain employment, whether paid or voluntary. I believe that for those people with volunteering experience will help potential employers to obtain a better understanding of the candidate seeking employment

Q2. Which of the following are you looking for in volunteers at an interview?

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Organising and planning
- Time Management
- Decision making
- Leadership
- Problem solving
- Project Management
- Other?

All of the above attributes are looked for in all candidates applying for work opportunities, but are not always evident with the individuals being interviewed. It is important for those volunteers who have some or all of the above skills highlight these in any job application or interview.

Q3. Do you prefer the volunteer to have experience that relates to the job/subject skill or a life-skill – or does it matter?

It is preferable that the volunteer will have job specific skills, although this should always be accompanied with life skills as for most job roles common sense is always vital for anyone to succeed.
Q4. Are there any other comments you wish to make about the links between employability and volunteering?

Due to the increased difficulty for young people to obtain either paid employment or paid work experience it is extremely important for candidates to maximise their chances of being interviewed by providing evidence of their work ethic potential, which can be demonstrated by relevant volunteering.
Responses from Lear Training (Jason Lear)

Q1. Do you believe volunteering experience is an important quality to have to gain employment?

I think it depends on the employer and their perception of volunteering. Personally I am a firm believer that people have choices in life and those that choose to give up their time freely shows passion and work ethic which is a foundation to build a career on. Having said that I find the current economic environment has dangers in suggesting volunteering is a route to employment. When deciding to volunteer I think the question should always be ‘what can I give?’ and not ‘what can I get out of this?’ I don’t think volunteering will give you or enhance transferable employment skills unless there is a self-motivated passion in what you are doing.

Q2. Which of the following are you looking for in volunteers at an interview?

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Organising and planning
- Time Management
- Decision making
- Leadership
- Problem solving
- Project Management
- Other?

I think all the qualities you have listed are important but what I look for is professionalism and examples of a strong work ethic. I find those that have volunteered for the right reasons bring a recognisable professional attitude, passion and work ethic to their application and interviews. I also look for adaptability in my staff, in an ever changing world of business how will they cope with change? Dependant on the type of volunteering other skills that volunteers may bring with them is the ability to network and collaborate with various internal and external stakeholders that again can be very beneficial to employer.
Q3. Do you prefer the volunteer to have experience that relates to the job/subject skill or a life-skill – or does it matter?

I think the fact that someone has given up their time to benefit others shows an attitude and commitment that is transferable into any working environment, obviously if this is job specific it will be an additional bonus.

Q4. Are there any other comments you wish to make about the links between employability and volunteering?

No comment
**Figure 4; Case Study Interview Template**

Question 1) Are you in full time or part time employment? If you are, what job do you have?

Question 2) What are you studying, and what year are you?

Question 3) Do you volunteer? If so, what voluntary activity do you do? If the answer is yes, continue the case study. If the answer is no, end the case study.

Question 4) Do you feel your volunteering relates to your chosen degree path or current job, and why do you feel this?

Question 5) What was the single most important factor that lead to you volunteering?

Question 6) What two or three most important activities do you participate in during volunteering? Why do you feel those activities were important?

Question 7) Would you like to change the hours you volunteer per month? If so, why?

Question 8) What two or three most important employability skills has volunteering developed? If so, do you feel they tie into your chosen degree path or current job?

Question 9) During job interviews, has your volunteering been of interest to perspective employees? If the answer is yes, go to Question 10). If the answer is no, go to Question 11).

Question 10) Did you feel your volunteering activity helped you in the interview, and in what way (e.g. it showed employers you were reliable)?

Question 11) How did you feel about your commitment to volunteering in the light of perspective employers not showing interest in it?

Question 12) Do you feel volunteering has helped you, or will help you secure a job? If so, why do you think this?
Thank you for taking the time out of your day to participate in our case study. I wish you the best of luck in your chosen degree path/or current job.
References


