

# Volunteering and the Recession

## Report 4

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## 1. Introduction

This is the fourth in a series of surveys which have been carried out with Volunteer Now members between 2009- 2011. The focus of the surveys has been to monitor the impact of the economic downturn and public expenditure cuts on volunteer involvement and volunteer management practices.

## 2. Overview of Findings

- The majority of organisations in 2011 reported that volunteer applications have remained the same, however a significant number are still reporting an increase (37%) in applications. On average these organisations experienced a 33% increase in people applying for volunteer opportunities since the same period in 2010.
- There has been just under a 50% increase in organisations who could continue to support volunteer involvement in the long term (from 24% in 2010 to 42% in 2011).
- 40% of organisations are continuing to see an increase in applications from unemployed people similar to the 2010 findings.
- Little change is reported in the impact of public expenditure cuts and the recession compared to the same period in 2010. Almost ½ of the organisations across 2010-2011 have experienced cuts either in general or directly to volunteering.
- There has been a significant reduction in organisations that have given volunteers duties previously carried out by paid members of staff (from 20% to 12%).
- The main reason given in 2010 and 2011 for decrease in applications was because people were not coming forward to volunteer. In 2011 31.2% of organisations indicated that they had stopped recruiting volunteers because they do not have funding to manage volunteers; this was not raised as a reason in the 2010 survey.
- There has been a fall in 2011 of organisations who anticipate an increase in applications; while more organisations responded that they think volunteer applications will remain the same in the next 6 months.

Response rates				
Survey	1	2	3	4
Report Produced	May * 2009	February * 2010	November * 2010	December* 2011
Time Period of Interest	Jan – Mar 2009	Oct – December 2009	Apr-Sept 2010	Apr-Sept 2011
Responses (frequency)	76	68	75	66
Sample Size (frequency)	311	455	461	311
<b>% Response</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>

\* NB throughout the document each survey will be referred to by the date that the report was produced.

### 3. Demographics of Responding Organisations

Like the previous three reports the majority of organisations that responded were from the Voluntary and Community Sector (80.3%). There was a slight increase in responses from Church & Faith based organisations, Sport Clubs & Groups and Social Enterprises compared to the November 2010 survey.

#### 3.1 Remit / Sector Organisations Work Within

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Voluntary / Community	80.3%	53
Church / Faith Based	7.6%	5
Sport Club / Group	3.0%	2
Housing Association	0.0%	0
Grant Making Trust	1.5%	1
Social Enterprise	3.0%	2
Statutory	3.0%	2
Credit Union	1.5%	1
Co-operative	0.0%	0
Mutual	0.0%	0

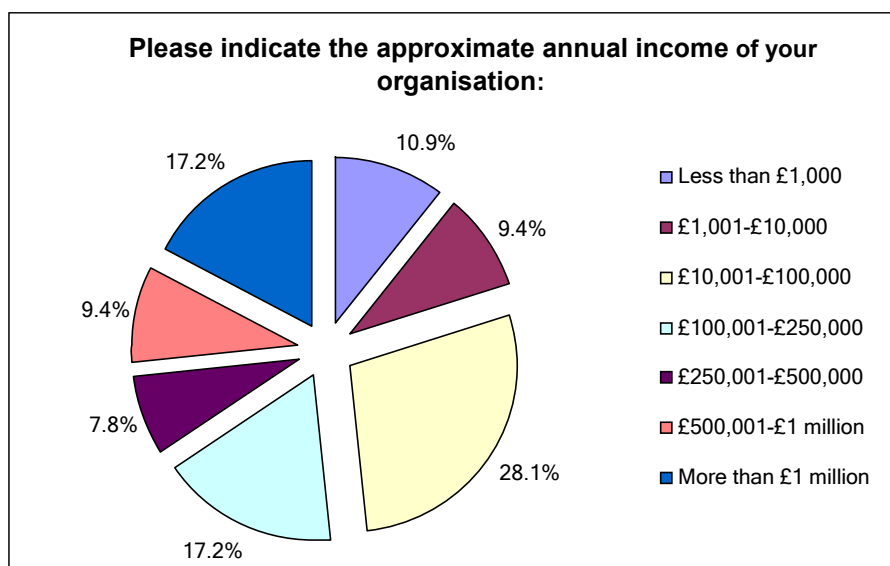
The vast majority of organisations who responded were from the Voluntary and Community sector (n=23).

#### 3.2 Nature of Organisations Work

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Advice/Information	10.6%	7
Arts/Culture/Heritage	1.5%	1
Children/Young People	24.2%	16
Church / Faith	1.5%	1
Community Development	16.7%	11
Disability	9.1%	6
Education/Training	3.0%	2
Environment/Conservation	1.5%	1
Health/Wellbeing	10.6%	7
Housing/Homelessness	0.0%	0
Older People	12.1%	8
Sports	3.0%	2
Volunteer Development	3.0%	2
Women	3.0%	2

The most common type of work carried out by the organisations surveyed in 2011 was working with Children / Young People (n=16), followed by Community Development (n=11). This is similar to the makeup of responses from previous recession reports.

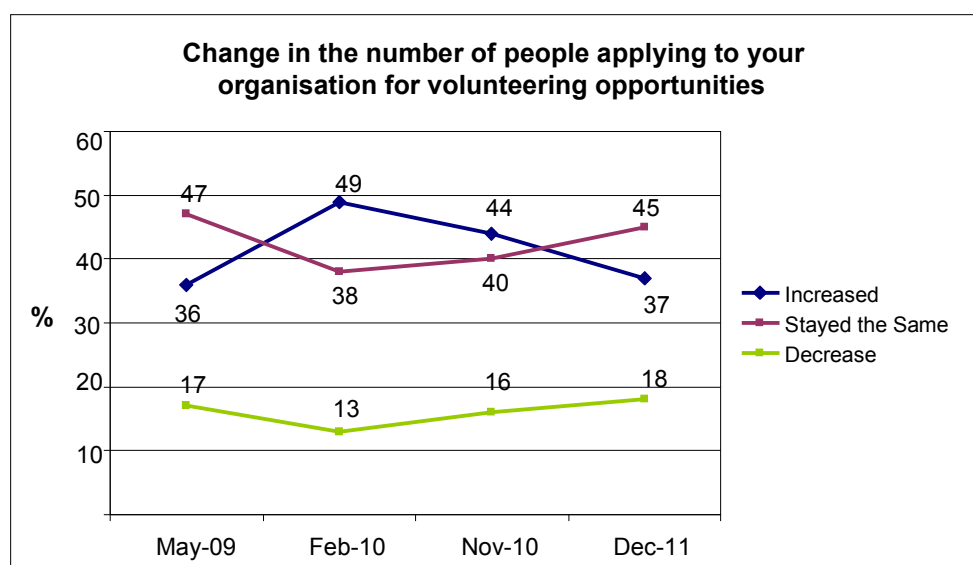
### 3.3 Annual Income



There was a slight change in annual income of organisations responding, when comparing November 2010 to December 2011. In 2010 the majority of organisations had an income of £100,001- £250,000 (38.4%), while in 2011 the most common income band of organisations (28.1%) was £10,001-£100,000. However there was an increase in the number of organisations who had an annual income of more than 1 million from 9.6% in 2010 to 17.2% in the 2011 survey.

## 4. Change in Number of Volunteers Involved in the Organisations Surveyed

All four recession surveys asked organisations to indicate the change in the number of people applying for volunteer opportunities during a specific time period. As illustrated in the graph below organisations experienced an increase in application between February 2010 and November 2010, while in the December 2011 survey the majority of organisations (45%) reported that volunteer applications had remained the same. With 37% of organisations in the most recent survey reporting an increase in people applying.



### 4.1 Increase in Volunteer Applications in 2011

Twenty four organisations indicated that they had experienced an increase in volunteer applications; on average they reported a 33% increase (ranging from 5%-100%). There was a strong indication in previous surveys that this was as a result of people applying for volunteer opportunities to gain new skills in order to increase employability.

### 4.2 Reasons for Observed Decrease in Volunteer Applications in 2011

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
We have stopped recruiting because we do not have funding to manage the volunteers	31.2%	5
People aren't coming forward to volunteer	37.5%	6
We are not actively recruiting volunteers	6.3%	1
Funding has been re-distributed from volunteer management to other areas of organisational work	12.5%	2
Welfare Reform proposals are creating barriers to those on Benefits	12.5%	2

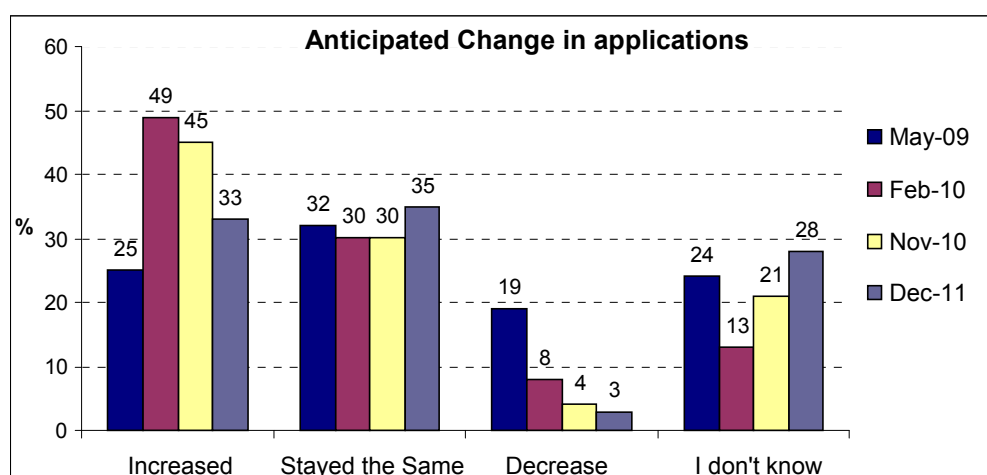
Of the 12 organisations who indicated that they had seen a decrease in volunteer application, ½ (n=6) attributed this to people not coming forward to volunteer and 5 had stopped recruiting because they do not have the funding to manage volunteers. Other suggestions were that there had been a downturn in volunteering due to an increase in family commitments and need to provide caring support.

*“Those who would have volunteered are now seeking employment and/or looking after family members to allow others to go to work e.g. looking after grand-children”.*

*“Volunteers cannot afford to volunteer”*

*“As a voluntary organisation, we have found that some of our volunteers are unable to complete all of the hours that they would like to do, mainly due to other work or jobs that they are carrying out to supplement their income i.e. People getting extra shifts or second jobs.”*

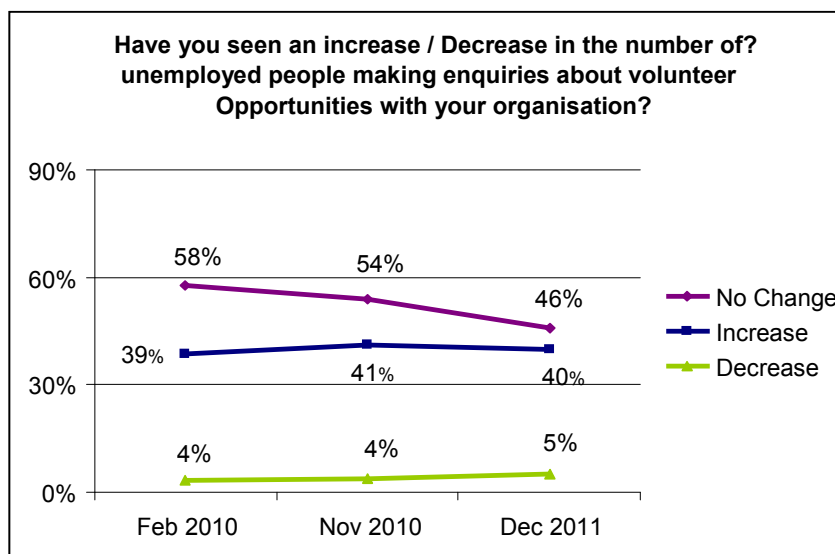
## 5. Anticipated Change in Applications



Over the four reporting periods respondents have been asked to indicate how they anticipate volunteering applications changing in the following 6 months. The graph above illustrates that in December 2011 there has been a fall in the number of organisations anticipating an increase in applications; while more organisations responded that they think volunteer applications would remain the same. There has been a continued drop over the four periods in organisations anticipating a decrease in applications.

## 6. Unemployed People Applying to Volunteer

The graph below provides a picture of how applications from unemployed people have changed over the 3 year period. It illustrates very little change across reporting periods, on average 40% of organisations have experienced an increase in applications at each survey point. There has been a consistently low numbers of organisations reporting a decrease in applications from unemployed people each year; not rising above 5%.



### 6.1 How Unemployed People Found out About Volunteer Opportunities

The most recent survey asked organisations where unemployed people had heard about their volunteer opportunities. Responses demonstrated it is was mainly through word of mouth (34.1%) and as a result of their own promotional activities (28%), with only a small number coming from the Jobs and Benefits Office (4.8%).

Other successful recruitment methods were via local churches, through their own organisations website, Universities and press coverage including through the Belfast Telegraph.

<i>What is the profile of the unemployed people that are coming forward to volunteer:</i>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Highly skilled	10.7%	6
High support needs	7.1%	4
A mix of people with greater support needs and those who are more highly skilled	39.3%	22
No different to other people interested in volunteering	42.9%	24

The response table would suggest that unemployed people coming forward to volunteer are often no different than any other person looking for a volunteer role. However a significant number (39.3%) also acknowledged a mixture of people, some with support needs and others more highly skilled.

## 7. Dealing with Social Security Agency or the Jobs and Benefits Offices with Regards to Volunteers Receiving Benefits

Previous surveys have indicated a larger number of unemployed people are applying for volunteer opportunities. As a result, a series of new questions were added into the December 2011 survey, looking specifically at how organisations and volunteers found dealing with the Social Security Agency/ Jobs and Benefits Offices.

<i>Do you understand the Social Security Agency/ Jobs and Benefits Offices processes that volunteer involving organisations must go through when a volunteer is a benefits claimant?</i>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes, definitely	20%	11
Understand a little	52.7%	29
No, definitely not	27.3%	15

The response table above illustrates that 80% of responding organisations have some gaps/ major gaps in their understanding of the processes that volunteer involving organisations must go through when a volunteer is a benefits claimant. 27% do not understand the procedures with only 20% definitely understanding the process.

<i>How easy or difficult do you find it to deal with the Social Security Agency or the Jobs and Benefits Offices with regards to volunteers receiving benefits?</i>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Very easy	3.8%	2
Easy	11.3%	6
Neither easy or difficult	64.2%	34
Difficult	15.1%	8
Very difficult	5.7%	3

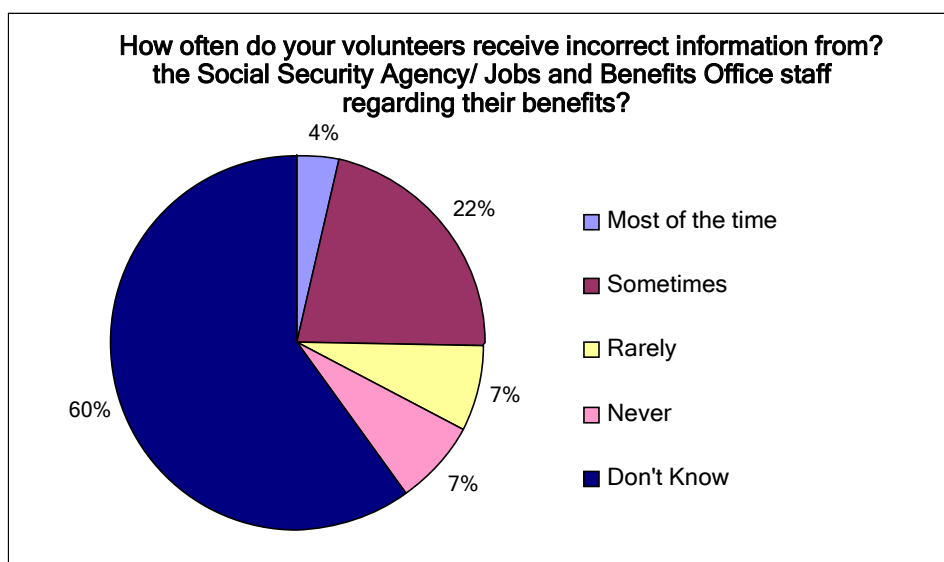
As the table above illustrates the majority of organisations who responded to this question found it neither easy nor difficult to deal with the Social Security Agency/ Jobs and Benefits Offices, with a total of 15% answering that they found them easy or very easy to

deal with. However 21% of the organisations surveyed found it difficult or very difficult; when asked what they found most difficult responses included:

*“Getting clear information-the words yes and no seem to have been replaced with perhaps and maybe, this is a barrier to benefit claimants taking on volunteering against a backdrop of migration and changes to social welfare generally”.*

*“Volunteers are often called into the Social Security Office as think they (the volunteers) are in a paid capacity, this frightens the volunteer. It would be better if they could check this with the organisation concerned”.*

*“The attitude - don't care and don't appreciate the effect on volunteers of losing benefits just because they are volunteering- have to wait until they prove they don't get paid”.*

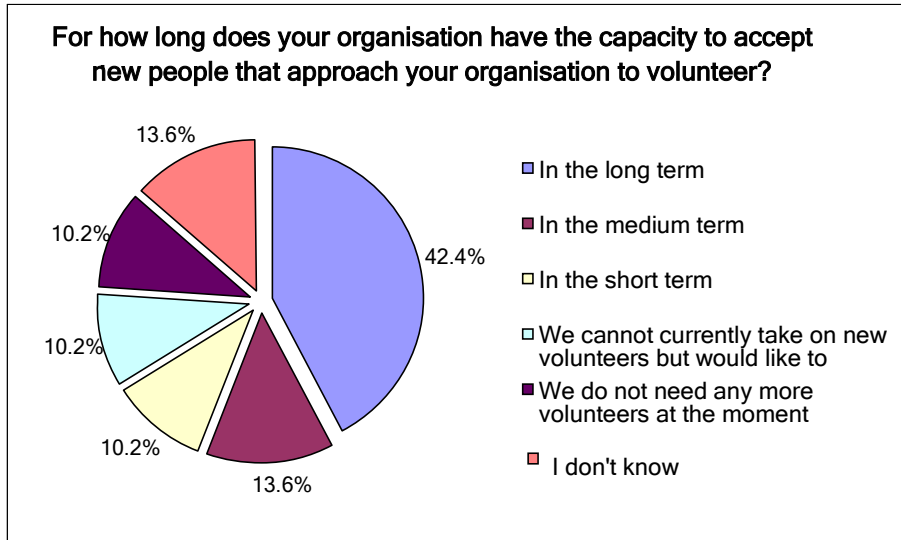


While the graph demonstrated that the majority of organisations did not know if volunteers were receiving incorrect information (60%), in total 33% of organisations reported volunteers receiving incorrect information to varying degrees (most of the time, sometimes or rarely).

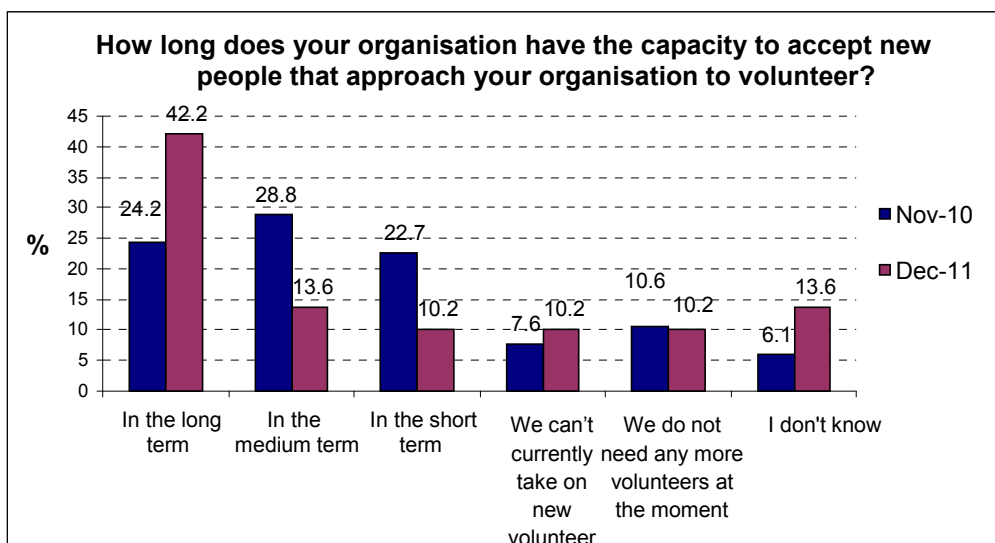
*“ So far, all volunteers who have approached me have advised the SS Office and there has been no problems.”*

## 8. Capacity to Involve New Volunteers

The graph below illustrates that the majority (42.4%) of organisations in the most recent survey (December 2011) could continue to support volunteer involvement in the long term, with an equal split across the remaining organisations (10.2%) suggesting that they could only accept new volunteers in the short and medium terms or could not take on any new volunteers.



When comparing the data to the same question in the 2010 survey there has been an 18% increase from 24% in 2010 to 42% in 2011 of organisations that have the capacity to accept new volunteers in the long term. There is also a decrease in organisations that had the capacity to accept new volunteers in the medium (from 28% to 13%) and short term (22% to 10%). Organisations that didn't require any more volunteers remained consistent at around 10%.

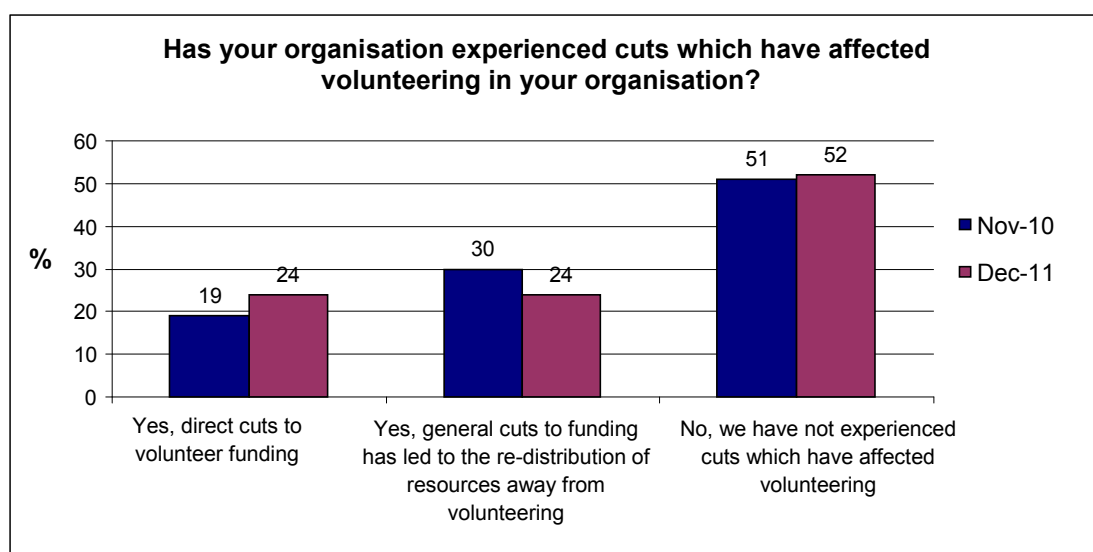


## 9. Experience of Funding Cuts

Responses to the December 2011 survey (see response table below) suggest that approximately ½ of organisations (52%) have not experienced cuts which have affected volunteering, with an equal number (n=14) of organisations reporting direct cuts to volunteer funding or general cuts to funding which have resulted in resources being taken away from volunteering.

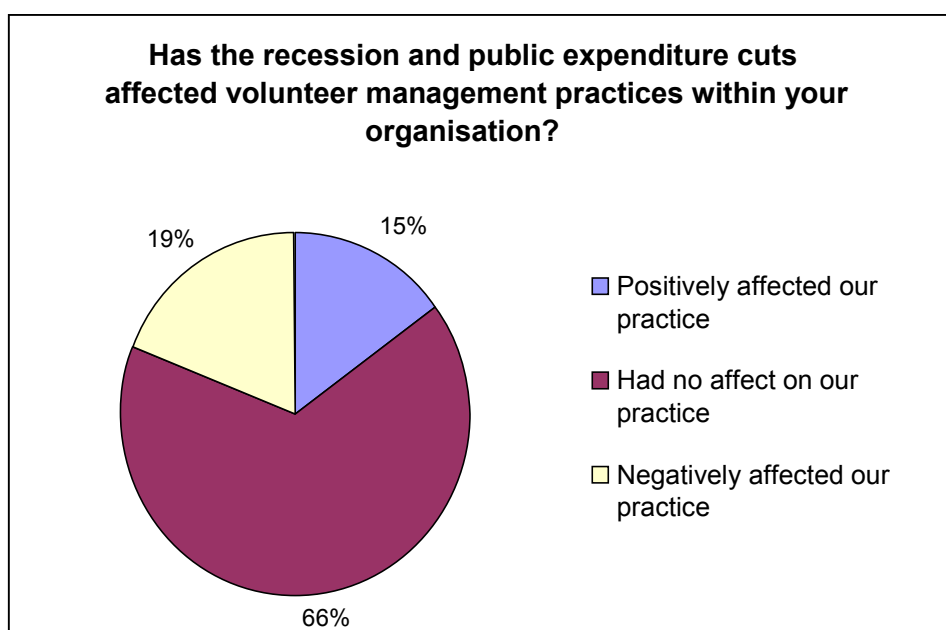
<i>Has your organisation experienced funding cuts which have affected volunteering in your organisation? (tick all that apply)</i>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percentage</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes, direct cuts to volunteer funding	24%	14
Yes, general cuts to funding has led to the re-distribution of resources away from volunteering	24%	14
No, we have not experienced cuts which have affected volunteering	52%	30

### 9.1 Comparison to November 2010



When comparing the November 2010 and December 2011 surveys, it is clear that there is little difference in organisations experiencing funding cuts (a few percentage points). However there is a slight rise in those experiencing direct cuts 5% (from 19% to 24%) and a slight fall of 6% (from 30% to 24%) of those experiencing cuts that had led to the re-distribution of resources.

## 10. The Impact of Funding Cuts on Volunteer Management Practices



The vast majority (66%) of organisations (n=39) responded that the recession and public expenditure cuts had not affected their volunteer management practice. 15 of the 39 organisations did not rely on funding to cover volunteer costs, 13 had not experienced cuts to volunteer funding while 10 organisations had put measures in place to mitigate against damage to practice.

### 10.1 Positive Impact

15.3% of organisations answered that the recession and public expenditure cuts had positively affected volunteer management practice (n=9), 7 reported becoming more efficient by making changes and 4 had formed better partnership working with others. One organisation highlighted that a positive impact for them was appointing a Volunteer Coordinator and designated Volunteer Supervisors.

### 10.2 Negative Impact

18.6% of organisations stated that there had been a negative impact on their volunteer management practice (n=11) with 6 identifying that they have stopped or reduced payment of out of pocket expenses and training for volunteers as well as reducing staff support for volunteers.

In regards to out of pocket expenses 1 organisation described *“our older people have been less positive and less enthusiastic as the recession progresses”*. While another found that *“more people are claiming out of pocket expenses where they wouldn’t have in the past.”*

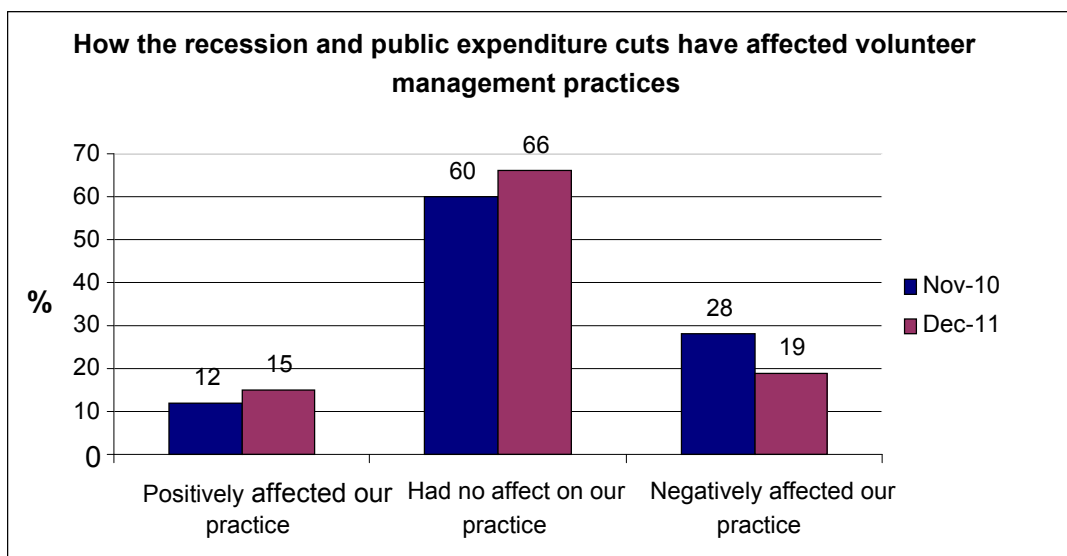
### 10.3 Had No Affect on Our Practice

There is a slight increase in the number of organisations reporting no affect on their volunteer management practice increasing from 60% to 66%. Some additional comments in this section explain reasons for this change:

A Health Care Trust “ *the Trust is committed to involving volunteers across its services and therefore finds funding to enable the service to continue.*”

“*We have increased our fundraising, cut back where we can and have increased the number of volunteers.*”

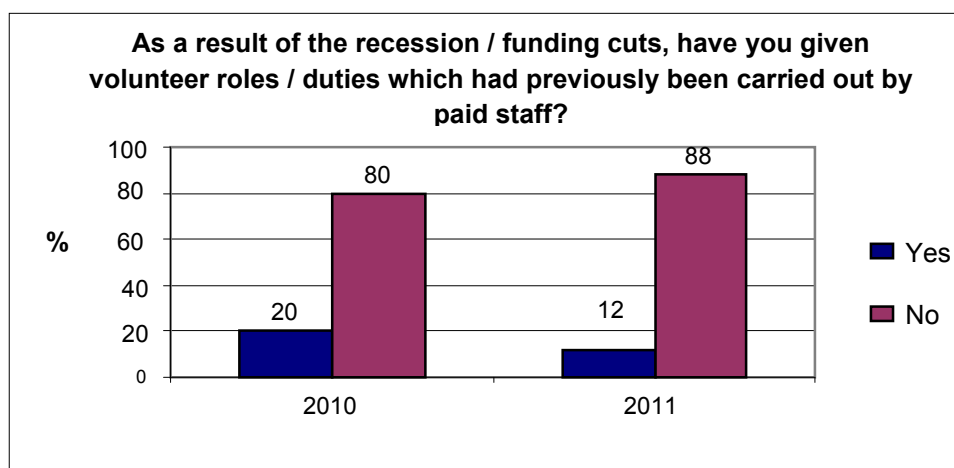
### 10.4 Comparison of Impact of Funding Cuts on Volunteer Management Practices between November 2010 and December 2011



Overall the majority of respondents continue to indicate that the recession and public expenditure cuts had no effect on volunteer management practice from 2010 to 2011. There has been a slight increase in organisations that felt there had been a positive impact on their practice (3%) and a decrease in organisations reporting a negative impact. It is important to note that a significant percentage (19%) reported a negative affect on practice.

## 11. Change in Prevalence of Job Substitution

Similarly to the November 2010 survey the majority of organisations in 2011 are not giving volunteers roles or duties which had previously been carried out by paid staff, as a result of the challenging economic climate. In fact the prevalence of job substitution has almost halved from 20% to 12% between 2010 and 2011.



## 12. Conclusions and Practical Implications

While the series of surveys are not intended to be representative of all Volunteer Now members or of all volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland, they have provided a useful insight into the impact of the recession and public expenditure cuts on some organisations.

The reports have shown that the economic downturn and public expenditure cuts have had varying impacts. Nearly ½ of the organisations in 2011 have experience some sort of cuts to funding either in general or direct to volunteering. While some organisations have reported negative impacts such as having to stop recruiting volunteers as they do not have the resources to manage, reducing or stopping payment of out of pocket expenses or having to stop/reduce the training offered to volunteers. Other organisations have been able to mitigate against the impact by becoming more efficient. There is no doubt however that reducing budgets for voluntary based services that are seeing increased demand will remain a continuing challenge.

Positives findings of the report included that the majority of respondents continue to indicate the recession and public expenditure cuts had no effect on volunteer management practice, in the December 2011 survey there was a significant decrease of almost 50% in job substitution (giving volunteers roles previously carried out by paid members of staff). Overall organisations are anticipating little change in volunteer interest in the next 6 months, but a significant number (40%) are continuing to see an increase in unemployed people coming forward to volunteer.

Organisations in the 2011 survey reinforced the findings from previous recession reports that volunteers have had to reduce their commitment or can no longer give their time due to increasing demands such as caring and family responsibilities or having to take on extra shifts/ work in their paid jobs. The cost of volunteering, especially when out of pocket expenses are not covered has also been identified as a barrier. Although these difficulties have been reported in terms of some people's ability to volunteer, a significant percentage of organisations in 2011 (37%) identified an increase in the number of applications for volunteer opportunities compared to the same period in 2010.

- **Meeting the Expectations of Unemployed People Wishing to Volunteer**

It is evident from the series of surveys conducted that a significant number of organisations are reporting an increase in the number of unemployed people interested in volunteering, in response to the increase in unemployment rates. An important consideration for the sector is how equipped organisations are to cope with the wide diversity of unemployed people who are approaching them.

The 2011 survey showed the varying level of support needs, some unemployed people may have greater requirements, whilst others will have specialist skills to offer. For both types of groups, it is important that organisations have the resources and skills to meet their needs and/or expectations of the individuals whilst also meeting their own organisational objectives.

- **Clear Information and Support Needed for Volunteers Receiving Benefits**

The survey found that word of mouth was the most likely way of unemployed people finding out about volunteer opportunities. Volunteer Now have been piloting a promotional campaign with the Jobs and Benefits across Antrim and Ballymena offices to promote volunteering to people who are unemployed and in receipt of benefits. 18 out of 59 organisations in the December 2011 survey were aware of the promotional campaign. When asked how useful they found the materials responses included: *“excellent”*, *“very useful”*, *“informative and interesting”*, *“ Very good promotional material and effective back up by the Volunteer Now team.”* These positive commentaries highlight the important role that the jobs and benefits office can play in promoting volunteer opportunities.

A ¼ of organisations who involved unemployed volunteers responded that they had received incorrect information from the Social Security Agency/ Jobs and Benefits Office staff regarding their benefits. A new *“Volunteering while on Benefits”* Booklet is currently being finalised by the Department for Social Development. When published this booklet will help to clarify conditions around which people on different benefits can volunteer. In

the interim Volunteer Now have produced an information sheet entitled [Volunteers and Social Security Benefits](#) which provides useful guidelines if having discussions with Jobs and Benefits office staff.

- **Maintaining Volunteer Management Best Practice**

The changing environmental conditions created by the recession, may create opportunities for volunteering to be harnessed, as a way of complementing the work of organisations in new and creative ways. Unfortunately, organisations can be restricted in the amount they can extend volunteer involvement because they do not have the funds to effectively manage or support increasing numbers of volunteers. Over 18% of organisations in the 2011 survey indicated that cuts had a negative impact on their volunteer management practice such as having to reduce: staff support for volunteers, payment of out of pocket expenses and stopping training for volunteers.

Reducing these essential aspects of volunteer management may reduce the attractiveness of these organisations to potential volunteers, especially unemployed people, and may affect the quality of the volunteer's experience. In a broader sense, poorer practices in volunteer involvement may negatively impact on the strategic vision set out with the Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland: that everyone is given the opportunity to have a meaningful volunteering experience.

Overall the series of survey reports have provides a snap shot into the changing circumstances under which organisations involve volunteers. Volunteer involving organisations are still working in an environment of significant change and uncertainty. Although the budgets have been set by Departments the pending Programme for Government and associated Department development plans will continue to affect many organisations work. Although this is the final in the series of recession reports, Volunteer Now will continue to monitor the impact of the recession and provide support to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in challenging economic times.

**Volunteer Now delivers services across Northern Ireland.  
We have offices in Belfast, Broughshane, Enniskillen and Newry.**

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