

# MOBILISING UK VOLUNTARY ACTION DURING COVID-19 – INITIAL REFLECTIONS FROM ENGLAND



CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION



# NCV

# PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN ENGLAND

Desk based review  
research on voluntary  
and policy responses

Survey of 127  
organisations  
(infrastructure, voluntary  
orgs, public sector  
bodies, LAs)

Workshop to discuss  
emerging findings



July 2021:  
Mid project  
briefing  
(England)

Key  
themes

- Bringing back volunteers
- Sustaining the involvement of new volunteers
- Volunteer diversity and inclusion
- Collaboration and the importance of local

# MID-POINT BRIEFING: CURRENT ISSUES AND LEARNING FOR RECOVERY

Organisations identified four key areas for future support:

- **Clear, timely and accurate information** with guidance to help navigate the new volunteering environment
- **Collaborative, communicative and flexible ways of working**
- **Recognising and meeting volunteer needs** through support, particularly around mental health and wellbeing and transition to new
- **Future investment in volunteering**, raising its profile and value and investing in its infrastructure. Including **breaking down barriers to bring new and diverse volunteers.**

# POLICY RESPONSE IN ENGLAND - VOLUNTEERING



Mobilising  
UK VOLUNTARY ACTION

CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION  
**NCAO**

# PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN ENGLAND

Desk based review of policy responses, including review of policy documents and wider literature

Interviews with policymakers and wider stakeholders

Workshop to understand impact of policy response with wider group of organisations



Final briefing event and report (England)

This final briefing is **policy-focused** :

- reflecting on the policy response to the pandemic and its impact
- looking ahead to the future and how policymaking can support voluntary action in the future

# ENGLISH POLICY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The policy response in England in relation to volunteering during the pandemic centred on:



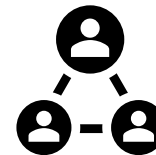
Guidance to support volunteering during the pandemic



Developing the NHS Volunteer Responders Programme



Distributing funding



Coordinating engagement and partnerships with the voluntary sector



Supporting Covid-19 testing and vaccination volunteering



Mobilising  
UK VOLUNTARY ACTION

CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION  
NCO

# REFLECTIONS ON THE POLICY RESPONSE IN ENGLAND - VOLUNTEERING



Mobilising  
UK VOLUNTARY ACTION

CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION  
**NCO**

## OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE

- The Covid-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented threat to and the government responded at pace, with limited evidence and in the face of huge uncertainty.
- The perceptions of this response were gathered later, when the pandemic had progressed significantly.
- Perceptions of the policy response were mixed (though often more negative than positive). This reflects the varied experiences during the pandemic.
- Different geographical perspectives were driven by varied levels of resources and investment, existing partnerships, and experience with emergency response.



## OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE

There were key aspects of the policy response discussed:

### **Communication**

- Participants were generally positive towards the government's 'call to action' to volunteer. It helped to raise the profile by raising the awareness of volunteering into the 'consciousness' of the public
- The communication of public health guidance was perceived less positively. It was viewed as inconsistent, issued at late notice, not always relevant for volunteers.



# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE

## Collaboration and relationships

- Having pre-existing relationships was seen as a key advantage, enabling organisations to act quickly and effectively. Good communication, mutual understanding and trust were important.
- Funding was identified as an enabler to collaboration and organisations were concerned about a lack of funding going forwards.
- Partnerships such as the VCSEP were seen by some to support the communication and coordination between national and local levels.



# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE

## National and local connections

- Many felt the relationship between national and local was a challenge. Key issues raised included a lack of understanding of volunteering and volunteer management at the national level.
- The NHS Volunteer Responders programme was cited as an example of a 'top down' response, though there were mixed perceptions of the programme. It was seen as key in areas with fewer resources and less infrastructure, whereas in other areas it felt disruptive of local arrangements.



# OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE

## Leadership

- Some perceived a lack of leadership and strategic direction in the response to the pandemic, at a policy level as well as within the voluntary sector.
- Participants raised questions about individual roles as well as the relationship between volunteer involving organisations, volunteers, the government and the role of national infrastructure.
- It was argued more clarity is needed about leadership on volunteering issues in the sector and how this relates to government and wider policy making.



# LESSONS LEARNED AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE



Mobilising  
UK VOLUNTARY ACTION

CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION  
**NCAO**

## PLANNING AHEAD AND THINKING LONGER TERM

- The pandemic exposed and amplified what was already there. **Local areas and organisations which were better prepared, through other experiences of emergencies or having pre-existing relationships, responded better to the crisis.**
- These experiences highlight **need to address inequalities and put investment, resources and coordination in place in preparation for emergencies and other challenges.**

## COLLABORATING AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

- We saw the **important role of collaboration and relationships**. There is a **need for better collaborative working at local and national levels**.
- We saw a desire to build on opportunities to **sustain and develop networks and relationships, including VCSEP, collaboration within the sector and partnership between government and the sector**.



## SETTING A STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- There is a desire for **leadership and a strategic direction for volunteering in England**. This includes more discussion about the **role of the state in relation to volunteering**, but also the **role of national infrastructure**.
- **The Vision for Volunteering was mentioned as a good opportunity** to influence government and set a strategic direction for volunteering, as well as the **Shaping the Future through volunteering group** and the **Together Coalition**.



## (RE-?)THINKING THE VOLUNTEERING ECOSYSTEM

- **We have an opportunity to think about the volunteering ‘ecosystem’ and how it can best thrive.**
- **We saw the importance of social infrastructure and the chance to invest in it. The importance of community empowerment, resilience and collaboration was also seen as important for ‘levelling up’.**
- **Volunteering needs to be more accessible and inclusive. Many felt more must be done to understand and support volunteering, and ensuring local volunteering knowledge and expertise was brought into decision making.**