



the National Trust
for Scotland
a place for everyone

Volunteering and Happiness

A study with National Trust for Scotland volunteers



March 2015

“I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.”

- Albert Schweitzer

1. Introduction

Volunteering is at the heart of the National Trust for Scotland. Founded as a voluntary organisation in 1931, the Trust has grown to care for over a hundred properties that are central to our national heritage, including historic buildings, gardens, mountains and islands. Volunteers contribute to the conservation work of the Trust, and also to realising our core principles of public access, education and enjoyment.

The Trust currently has more than 3,800 volunteers on our database, who perform a wide variety of roles across all areas of Trust activity, including work with species and habitats, path-building, archaeology, guiding, research and interpretation. We have a pool of Conservation Volunteers who travel around the country to assist on projects, and we also run Thistle Camps, week-long, residential volunteering opportunities at Trust properties.

We have long-recognised the personal benefits people gain from volunteering, and we were interested in better understanding why people volunteer with the Trust and how the volunteering experience can be improved. One source of insight is the developing field of positive psychology, which goes beyond addressing mental distress to understanding how our everyday lives can be enhanced. One of the findings of this research is that purposeful, meaningful activity can have a stronger, more lasting effect on people's wellbeing and happiness than the pursuit of immediate pleasure.

To better explore this, we added an extra module onto our annual volunteer satisfaction survey. This module had a set of questions asking our volunteers why they volunteered, their current wellbeing and life satisfaction, and how their experience could be improved. We received 492 responses from our volunteers, compared to 578 for the main survey. The questions used are set out in the Appendix.

We would like to thank Volunteer Scotland for their assistance in writing this report.

2. Life satisfaction, worthwhile activity and happiness

The questions we used to investigate happiness and wellbeing are the same as those used by the Office of National Statistics in its Measuring National Well-being Programme, and could therefore be used to compare the experience of Trust volunteers with the wider population.

Table 1: Overall, how satisfied are you with life nowadays?

	NTS volunteer sample	UK Average
Very low (0-4)	2%	5%
Low (5-6)	13%	16%
Medium (7-8)	54%	51%
High (9-10)	31%	27%

When NTS volunteers were asked how satisfied they were with their life, we found that they were more satisfied than the UK average. Eighty-five percent of Trust volunteers scored as medium or high, compared with 78% for the UK as a whole.

Table 2: Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?		
	NTS volunteer sample	UK Average
Very low (0-4)	1%	5%
Low (5-6)	11%	15%
Medium (7-8)	52%	49%
High (9-10)	37%	33%

When asked to what extent they felt the things they did in their life were worthwhile, we again found that NTS volunteers were more likely to be confident that they were making a meaningful contribution, with 89% scoring medium or high, compared to 82% of the general population. Only 12% of the Trust sample scored low or very low in their assessment of how worthwhile their activities were compared with 20% in the UK as a whole.

Table 3: Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?		
	NTS volunteer sample	UK Average
Very low (0-4)	4%	10%
Low (5-6)	13%	18%
Medium (7-8)	44%	41%
High (9-10)	39%	32%

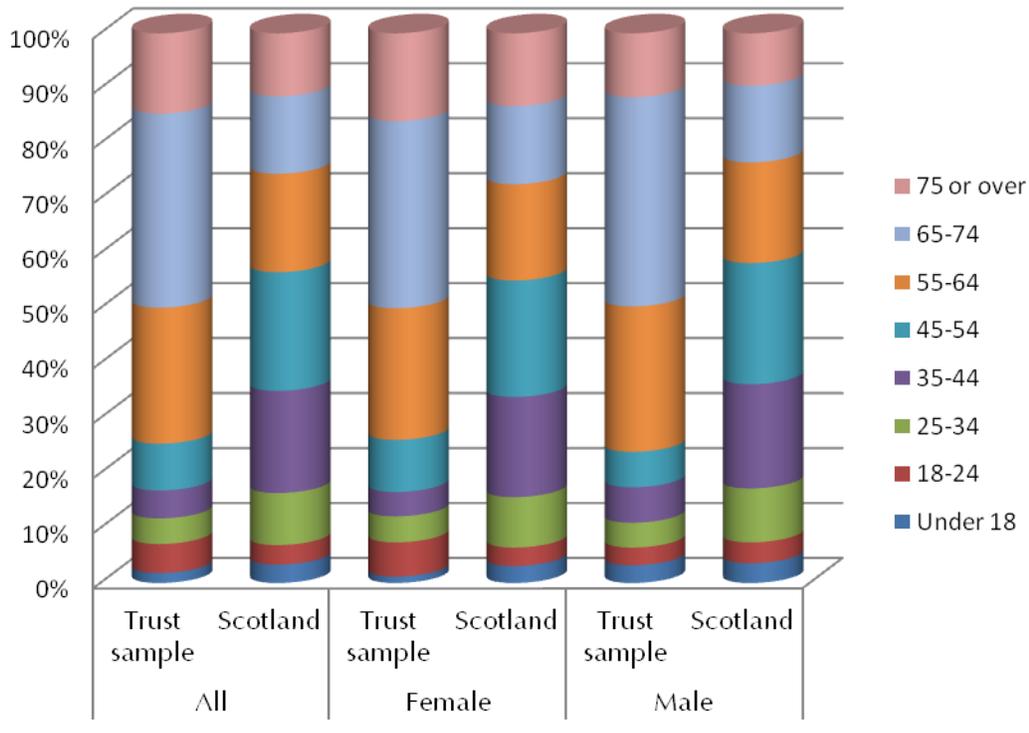
Encouragingly, our volunteers were happier on average, with only 17% scoring low or very low compared with 28% in the UK as a whole, and with 39% scoring high, compared to 32% in the UK.

3. Demographic profile of NTS volunteers

In interpreting these results, it is important to keep in mind the personal characteristics of our volunteers, which will also have a bearing on their life satisfaction and happiness.

The graph below shows how the profile of our respondents differs from the Scottish population as a whole, noticeably with a higher proportion of older people. In addition there is a higher proportion of female respondents. The pattern among survey respondents of volunteers tending to be older and female is repeated in our volunteer population as a whole.

Chart 1: Demographics of volunteer respondents



The Scottish Government carried out research ¹ into volunteering in 2007 and noted the following:

- Disabled people were less likely to volunteer than those without a disability.
- Unemployed people were less likely to volunteer than those who were self employed, employed part-time or retired.
- Young people aged between 16 and 24 were significantly less likely to volunteer than those aged between 35 and 74.
- People living in the 15% most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland were less likely to volunteer than those living in more affluent neighbourhoods.
- People without formal qualifications were less likely to volunteer than those with qualifications.
- Generally, volunteers were more likely to volunteer with organisations which focused on children, young people or sports and physical recreation.
- Females were significantly more likely than males to volunteer with organisations that focus on children or older people, while males were significantly more likely than females to volunteer with organisations that focus on sports and physical recreation, the natural environment or on crime/community safety/anti-social behaviour.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/209828/0055479.pdf>

Looking to the most recent volunteer data in the Scottish Household Survey (SHS data 2013²) we can see that more females volunteer than men, particularly in the 35-44 age group, but that this gap closes at age 60.

Volunteer Development Scotland³ has found that volunteering is constrained by health, but that there is also a constraint related to income. Volunteering is also significantly lower in an urban setting than in a rural one.

Table 4: Adult volunteering in Scotland by employment status

	Self-employed	Full-time employment	Part-time employment	Looking after family/home	Permanently retired from work	Unemployed and seeking work	Higher/further education	Permanently sick or disabled	All
Yes	36	26	35	27	26	21	33	14	28
No	64	74	65	73	74	79	67	86	72
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	600	3,250	990	540	3,130	480	290	460	9,920

Source: Volunteer Development Scotland, 2011

Further research by Volunteer Scotland⁴ and the University of Stirling has looked at the difference between urban and rural volunteering. Whilst the volunteering commitment in terms of hours is similar, rural volunteering runs across more organisations and services compared to a “deeper” volunteering commitment in urban roles. There was also an “all hands on deck” hypothesis that rural volunteers were more likely to take on a general role or do whatever was needed. Further research would be needed to test this hypothesis against NTS volunteer preferences. The research would also need to take into account that the Conservation Volunteers and Thistle Camp volunteers may not be local to the community they are working in.

Our volunteer sample has very good health and very little in the way of disability. In Scotland, 33% of 60-69 years olds report long-standing limiting illness, health problems or disability and 51% of over 70s. Indeed 19% of the entire Scottish population falls within this category of ill-health. However, of the 76% who disclosed health issues, fewer than 15% of the Trust sample considered themselves to have a disability.

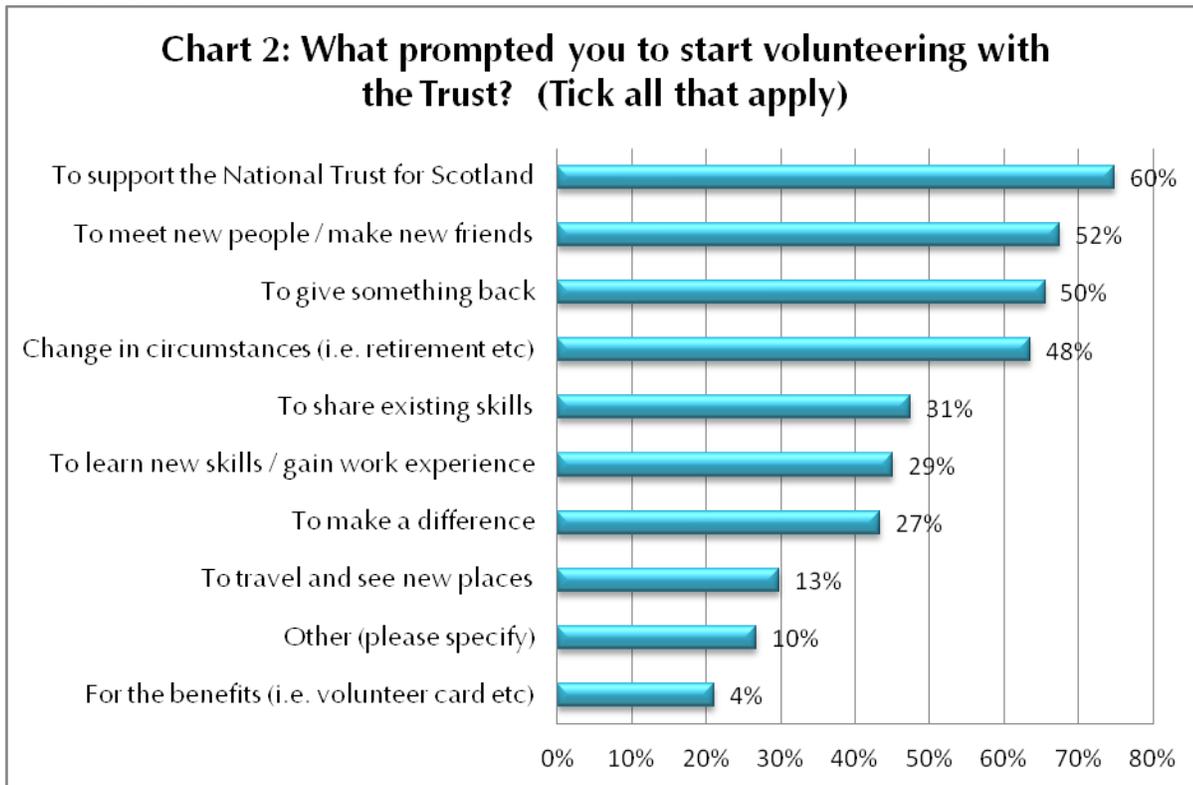
² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/08/7973/downloads#res457571>

³ http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/197345/volunteering_data_tabulations.pdf p85 shows the recruitment method

⁴ http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/393450/research_doylerutherfordmcdonnell_volunteeringparticipationinScotland.pdf

4. Reasons for volunteering

We were interested to know more about why people had chosen to volunteer with the National Trust for Scotland.



The leading motivation identified was to volunteer with the National Trust for Scotland which, allowing for the self-selecting nature of the sample, shows the appeal that the Trust's conservation work has. Other significant reasons included:

- Meeting new people and making new friends (52%)
- Giving something back (50%) and to make a difference (27%)
- To share skills (31%) or to gain new skills (29%)
- To travel and see new places (13%)

We were interested to discover whether there were differences by role, specifically between those volunteers working inside properties ("indoor"), and those working on outside projects – whether archaeology, gardens or countryside and natural heritage. Volunteers in "outdoor" roles tended to be younger than those in "indoor" roles, 73% of outdoor volunteer respondents were aged under 65, compared to 36% of indoor volunteers. When responses were broken down by "outdoor" and "indoor" volunteer roles the findings included:

- Outdoor volunteers were more likely to want to learn new skills/gain work experience (40% compared with 22%).
- One hypothesis in volunteering research is that younger volunteers are more likely to be motivated by extrinsic factors, such as gaining skills and experience, than older

volunteers where intrinsic motivation, supporting a good cause, may predominate. As outdoor volunteers were more likely to be younger, their greater interest in gaining skills and experience, would seem to support this hypothesis. However, we should note that the Trust also has many volunteers in indoor roles, and where we know that professional development is a factor in their volunteering with the Trust.

- Outdoor volunteers placed a lower priority on supporting the Trust than indoor volunteers (49% compared to 61%).
- Outdoor volunteers want to make a difference – perhaps physically, given the roles that gardeners, Conservation Volunteers and Thistle Camp volunteers take on (34% compared with 22%).
- There was no significant difference between outdoor and indoor in the desire to meet new people, give something back or share existing skills.
- Indoor volunteers were far more likely to have been motivated by a change in circumstance, such as retirement (55% compared to 36%). However, indoor volunteers in the sample were also more likely to be older, 64% were aged over 65 compared with only 27% of outdoor volunteers.
- Perhaps indicative of the more local and frequent nature of indoor volunteer roles, only 4% were motivated by the chance to travel compared with 31% of outdoor volunteers.

Our respondents were also highly engaged individuals, with 64% regularly volunteering with other organisations. It was interesting to note the range of organisations that they work across. We would consider the types of role and their popularity to be consistent with the age profile and gender balance of the Trust volunteers.

Volunteering activity	Percentage of respondents
No other regular volunteer roles(s)	36%
Voluntary organisation/charity/community group	30%
Church, religious or faith-based group	18%
Arts or cultural group	16%
Professional society or organisation	7%
Caring organisation	7%
Other	7%
Sports club	6%
Public service (e.g. school, hospital, police etc.)	6%
Youth group (e.g. Scouts, Guides, youth clubs)	4%
Community Council, Social Inclusion Partnership, Community Planning Partnership	4%
Housing/residents' association	2%
Social club	2%
Children's group (e.g. playgroup, toddler group)	2%
School board or Parent Teachers Association	1%

5. Experience of volunteering

We also asked volunteers a set of questions to assess their experience of volunteering with the Trust.

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
My role gives me a sense of purpose	88%	10%	2%
I always have someone to support me when I have a question or problem in my work	84%	11%	5%
I get stressed when I volunteer with the Trust	5%	8%	86%
I look forward to volunteering with the Trust	92%	7%	1%
I feel part of a wider team	81%	14%	5%
I feel like I am helping to protect Scotland's historic and natural environment	90%	9%	1%
My role is very demanding	14%	25%	60%
I get to meet and work with people that I would not meet otherwise	93%	5%	2%
I always feel appreciated	78%	15%	7%
I am using my key skills	64%	26%	10%
I am frustrated in the role I have	8%	11%	81%
I have learnt new skills	61%	26%	13%
Volunteering with the Trust connects me to my local community	51%	33%	16%

The leading reason given was to support the conservation work undertaken by the Trust, with 90% of respondents agreed with the statement "I feel like I am helping to protect Scotland's historic and natural environment." Eighty-eight percent of respondents also agreed with the statement that their volunteering role "gives me a sense of purpose."

Ninety-two percent of respondents agreed with the statement "I get to meet and work with people that I would not meet otherwise", and 61% with the statement "I have learnt new skills" as a result of volunteering with the Trust.

Results for support, appreciation, and teamwork were all positive. Only a small minority of volunteers found their role stressful or frustrating.

6. Accessing volunteering opportunities

The majority of our volunteers had travelled to the place where they were volunteering by car (53%), with 26% travelling by public transport, 10% by foot and 1% by bicycle. Eight percent of our volunteers had travelled using transport laid on by the Trust.

Travel time was relatively short, with 56% of our volunteers travelling 30 minutes or less, 25% between 30 and 60 minutes, and only 7% for more than an hour.

For the respondents, therefore, volunteering was centred on those properties relatively close to where they lived, the exception being Thistle Camps. Travelling for volunteering did not affect volunteers' enjoyment of their role.

7. Enablers/Constraints on volunteering

We asked an open-ended question about how the individuals' volunteering roles could be enhanced. Recurring answers included:

- More time would help as they could volunteer more.
- Better communication and more involvement.
- Direct public transport.
- A more varied role and greater opportunities.
- More frequent newsletters.
- Greater appreciation by staff.
- A chance to learn more about the property.

8. Conclusions

Our research shows that volunteering to conserve Scotland's heritage is not only compatible with a healthy, productive life but can actually contribute to raising wellbeing.

There is increasing interest in the heritage sector in engaging volunteers in caring for our natural and cultural heritage. This is motivated both by a desire for individual and community benefit, and to help pass our heritage on to future generations. In engaging with volunteers, heritage organisations need to recognise that volunteers are individuals and will have their own motivations for, and expectations of, volunteering.

Our experience shows that in offering volunteering opportunities, policy makers should consider that:

- Volunteers are attracted by a strong organisational message – specifically supporting the conservation work of the NTS was the leading reason respondents gave for doing so, ahead of giving something back, or making a difference;
- The social aspect of volunteering is very important, and managers of volunteers need to consider how to foster and sustain this;
- For some volunteers, the opportunity to share skills or to learn new skills is also a significant motivator.

For indoor vs outdoor volunteering roles, where indoor volunteers tended to be older, there were significant differences in motivation. Outdoor volunteers put a higher importance on learning new skills than indoor, while indoor volunteers put a higher value on supporting the Trust, specifically. If this finding does reflect a significant split in motivations in younger/older heritage volunteers, then satisfying this extrinsic motivation may need to be part of designing volunteering opportunities for younger people.

In encouraging volunteering, policy makers will also need to consider how volunteering opportunities are accessed. The majority of our volunteers used their own transport, with only 26% using public transport. Better public transport was also one of the main requests for improving the volunteer experience.

The relatively short travel time of volunteers (56% under 30 minutes) suggests that the pool of volunteers available may be limited to those who are already quite close to a property, with implications for how remote, rural sites are cared for.

Finally, recognising that our sample of volunteer respondents had better than average health and means, the proposition that purposeful activity such as volunteering is correlated with life satisfaction and happiness appears to be borne out by the results. Volunteering can contribute to experiencing a happier, more meaningful life.

Appendix: Volunteering and Happiness research method

Overview

The Volunteering and Happiness survey was run as an additional, optional module of the National Trust for Scotland's annual volunteer survey.

The survey was open from mid-August to early October 2014. In total, 2209 volunteers were contacted by email and 482 paper copies were circulated to properties for volunteers without Internet access. The total volunteer population surveyed was therefore 2,691.

For the main survey, 578 responses were received, a 21.5% response rate.

For the Volunteering and Happiness module, 492 responses were received, an 18.2% response rate.

For both elements of the survey, respondents may only have provided answers to some of the questions.

Survey questions

The Volunteering and Happiness module posed seven questions to volunteers:

H1. How do you usually travel to your volunteering role? (Please mark all that apply)

H2. How long does it take for you to get to the place you volunteer?

H3. Do you agree with the following statements in relation to your role at the Trust?

- My role gives me a sense of purpose
- I always have someone to support me when I have a question or problem in my work
- I get stressed when I volunteer with the Trust
- I look forward to volunteering with the Trust
- I feel part of a wider team
- I feel like I am helping to protect Scotland's historic and natural environment
- My role is very demanding
- I get to meet and work with people that I would not meet otherwise
- I always feel appreciated
- I am using my key skills
- I am frustrated in the role I have
- I have learnt new skills
- Volunteering with the Trust connects me to my local community

H4. What prompted you to start volunteering with the Trust? (Please tick all that apply)

- To support the National Trust for Scotland

- To make a difference
- To meet new people / make new friends
- To give something back
- To learn new skills / gain work experience
- To share existing skills
- Change in circumstances (i.e. retirement etc)
- To travel and see new places
- For the benefits (i.e. volunteer card etc)
- Other (please specify)

H5. What would make your volunteer experience better? (For example, having more spare time to volunteer more often, a different role, more frequent newsletters, a direct bus route...?)

H6. Do you regularly volunteer with other organisations? (Please mark all that apply)

H7. Finally... to see if our volunteers are happier than the average Scottish resident, we'd like to ask you four questions from the Office of National Statistics about your mental health and wellbeing. (Remember – all of your answers to the Volunteer Survey questions are anonymous) On a scale of 0-10, where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = completely...

- Overall, how satisfied are you with life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Volunteer characteristics

The National Trust for Scotland Volunteering team reports that there are many more female than male volunteers, particularly in the indoor volunteering roles. The NTS volunteers are on average older than the Scottish population and the Trust is proud of the number of volunteers aged over 75.

The experience of the Volunteering Department leads them to believe that fewer long-term volunteers have responded to the volunteer survey this year and that the response rate has been higher among newer volunteers.