

The Morgan Inquiry

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

*Summary of first evidence session - representatives from the voluntary sector
16 January 2008, Committee Room 16, The Palace of Westminster*

Panellists: Baroness (Sally) Morgan of Huyton (Chair)
James Brokenshire MP
Andy Reed MP
Naomi Wilkinson, Scout and Young Leader
Tom Wylie, Former Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency

Apologies: Jo Swinson MP

Oral witnesses: Carly Raby (CR), YoungMinds
William Clark (WC), Prince's Trust
Lizzie Cole (LC), Volunteering England
Pav Dhande (PD), Outward Bound Trust

Apologies: Susie Reilly, British Youth Council
Peter Littlewood, Young People's Trust for the Environment

Opening remarks

- Baroness Morgan welcomed the witnesses and outlined the objectives for the Morgan Inquiry. The Inquiry is looking to produce a very specific report on volunteering amongst 18 to 24 year olds with very practical recommendations for change. This was followed by introductions from the panel members.

Benefits to young adult volunteering

- CR – Stressed that a support structure needed to be in place for individuals who want to get involved. She also spoke of the need to demonstrate the real benefits that volunteering can bring in empowering people, developing self confidence and generating new skill sets.
- WC – Spoke of how the Prince's Trust provides a variety of opportunities for young people who volunteer: helping to develop new skills such as qualifications in health and safety; active work experience; increasing individual's communication skills; and preparing disadvantaged individuals for the workplace.
- LC – Emphasised that volunteering aids employability and provides transferable skills. She said that more emphasis should be put on the voluntary sector and employers to aid this further.
- PD – Stated that volunteering can be a life changing experience, in which young people can interact with people from different communities and generate a greater level of self-confidence.

Barriers to volunteering / potential solutions

- CR - Spoke of how the chaotic nature of daily life can affect individuals who are volunteering, in which simply matters such as travel restrictions and location can act as a barrier for people getting involved. The fact that many individuals are not reimbursed for their travel expenses is a real barrier. This was also echoed by PD who believed that it was important that volunteers' time was used efficiently and effectively and that any expenses, where possible, were covered.
- WC – A greater flexibility amongst benefit agencies is required, as they can restrict people from volunteering or gaining work experience if such activities clash with the actual day in which individuals must "sign-on". This stops people from receiving any financial benefits, as they cannot physically sign-on if they

are involved in voluntary work on that particular day. In WC's case, even with a letter from the Prince's Trust stating that he was involved in voluntary activity, he was denied benefits as this conflicted with the day he was required to sign on. Individuals are therefore being denied the right to gain vital work experience by the inflexibility of benefit agencies.

- LC – At a FE / HE level the need for students to get part-time jobs is often a barrier to volunteering.

Employment and young adult volunteers

- WC – Expressed his frustration that employers are not necessarily recognising some of the qualifications that individuals can achieve through volunteering. Also that some employers are not recognising amongst potential employees some of the other skills, such as communication, which can be developed through volunteering.
- WC – Disappointment that some organisations will not allow people to volunteer with them if they have had drug or alcohol problems, but for many volunteering can help them as they continue to overcome these challenges.
- WC – Prince's Trust runs an aftercare programme to help people build up their CVs, contact local employers and make enquires about potential work experience opportunities.
- All agreed that voluntary work is hugely beneficial in aiding young people in developing skills that can be used in the workplace.

Education and young adult volunteers

- LC / PD – University can often be a stage in young people's lives when they stop volunteering. This can be due to the fact that they have changed their geographical locations and have moved away from the local voluntary organisations they were originally involved with. However, 82% of people involved in volunteering at University do go on to volunteer post HE. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of students are actively involved in volunteering (2-3%).
- LC - Volunteering is particularly important at a HE level, as university towns are often populated by large student populations who have very little interaction with people outside the student community. Volunteering helps facilitate interaction, breaks down barriers and often reduces local resentment towards students.
- LC - Both FE / HE are trying to implement better volunteering strategies, but a lot more needs to be done in highlighting the benefits it brings to the individual. Some universities have volunteering coordinators, but they are often at full capacity and do not have the necessary resources.
- PD – Regional / local volunteering opportunities should be emphasised to young people, particularly when a lot of people move away from home and start university.

Recruitment / Retention

- CR – Better advertising of the opportunities available and highlighting the personal incentives to young people should be undertaken to drive recruitment in the voluntary sector. Volunteering helps to create social interaction amongst individuals and communities, provides a differentiator to individual CVs and helps people develop new skills. However, it also needs to be made to relevant to young people and broken down into why this would benefit them as individuals and their local communities.
- CR – There is also the issue that for more advantaged young people it is easier to get involved, but voluntary work often seems unattainable for young people in deprived communities. Again there needs to be better communication at a local level as to how young people can get involved.
- LC – Argued that there are a number of good access points available to young people who want to get involved in volunteering, but CR felt that more needs to be done in advertising the opportunities available to people who find it difficult to volunteer, i.e. individuals from socially deprived communities.

- CR – Cross-community representation is required in volunteering to ensure that it is perceived as accessible to ALL young people.
- WC – Prince's Trust runs a number of workshops locally across the UK, where they invite young people in the local area to come and meet people involved and find out what opportunities are available to them.
- LC – Need to get the message across to young people that volunteering does not have to be a huge time commitment and that schools should play a more active role in encouraging people into volunteering.
- PD – Outward Bound Trust have been actively using social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook to drive recruitment. However it is important not to underestimate how effective word of mouth can be through positive voluntary experience. This was something echoed by LC.
- CR - A lot of young people need a lot of support and thus more support workers are required to help facilitate increased volunteering.
- ALL stated that the organisations they are involved with would benefit from a greater number of staff to help facilitate the voluntary programmes they run.