

“An army of employer-supported volunteers can help bring social action to a new generation...”

SCOUTING FOR SKILLS

Jonathan Birdwell
Ian Wybron

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Jonathan Birdwell
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Executive summary

Youth unemployment remains a public concern. Changes in the UK labour market – including the sharp decline of middle skilled jobs – have impacted negatively on many young people’s job prospects. The decline of skilled, craft-based manufacturing and the rise of the service sector means that twenty-first-century employers place a stronger emphasis on ‘character’ or ‘employability skills’, such as communication, self-direction and ability to work in a team.

Because of these changes, building ‘character’ in young people is moving up the political agenda, with politicians of all persuasions backing calls for schools and youth programmes to instil important character traits in young people such as emotional resilience, responsibility and self-control. Recent speeches by Education Secretary Michael Gove and Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt called for character to be taught in schools, while the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility appealed for a ‘national conversation’ on how an emphasis on building character in young people could help narrow the attainment gap.¹

Yet research suggests that the ability of schools to instil ‘character’ is constrained and employers frequently complain that young jobseekers lack these ‘employability’ skills. The current school performance measures all mount pressure on schools to perform well across traditional academic subjects, making it difficult for schools to place greater emphasis on character and employability skills. Attention has therefore tended to focus instead on non-formal avenues of learning, for example through extracurricular activities, as a means of fostering ‘character’ as well as the right attitudes and skills for the workplace. A focus on ‘character’ is also at the heart of the Step Up To Serve campaign. The Step Up To Serve campaign,

launched in November 2013 by Prince Charles and all three political party leaders, aims to increase the number of young people taking part in 'social action' (practical action in the service of others) to 50 per cent by 2020.

This report seeks to add to the emerging evidence base on the importance of building character in young people, and what it means for their employability. We use a broad definition of character, avoiding disputes about which traits are the most important. As research for the Education Endowment Foundation has noted, there is no single character trait that promises success in later life, and a number of important non-cognitive skills need to be developed by young people in combination.²

Since their establishment in 1907, the Scouts have been one of the most recognisable programmes for extracurricular activities and youth development. We present research into the contribution that Scouting can make to skills acquisition and employability for young people and adult volunteers. Our findings are based on six semi-structured focus groups with the Scouts at the Explorer age level (14–18-year-olds) and adult volunteers. We also conducted structured one-to-one interviews with Scouts and ex-Scouts between the ages of 18 and 25, adult volunteers and employers. We spoke to over 85 people. Our findings suggest that Scouting provides young people with the skills and attitudes that employers are increasingly looking out for.

Our research shows that the employability of adult Scout leaders as well as young Scouts improves as a result of their involvement with the Scout Movement and they are able to bring the skills they learn through the Scouts into their workplaces.

This is important because many organisations in the third sector that work with young people need volunteers to help them to expand their programmes to as many young people as possible. For example, there are currently 40,000 young people on the waiting list to join The Scout Association but they are being held back because of a lack of adult volunteers. One way to address this would be to place greater emphasis across the UK on the importance of establishing employer supported volunteering schemes, which allow employees to take time

off of work to volunteer. This would have an impact on not only the Scouts, but also other voluntary organisations facing capacity issues.

Many employers already have such schemes but our research suggests that there is significant scope for doing more. Employers should consider encouraging employee volunteering schemes as a form of continuing personal development, which can make employees not only good citizens, but more effective in their jobs. Becoming skilled in leadership, team-working and communication skills promises returns to individuals seeking to get ahead in a competitive labour market and organisations willing to support their paid employees to volunteer.

Research findings

Scouts: teamwork, resilience and problem-solving

The ethos and activities of the Scouts – particularly at the Explorer age of between 14 and 18 years old – underpin the acquisition of a broad range of soft skills. Our research suggests that the Scouts can assist the development of team-working, leadership, resilience and problem-solving, as well as demonstrate commitment and resolve. They can also provide access to networks and social opportunities that are valuable for future employability.

Make the link, but keep the fun

Scouts and adult volunteers whom we spoke to think that the Scouts could do more to make clearer the link between Scouting and employability. However, this should not jeopardise the ‘fun’ activities that attract young people to Scouting, nor the Scouts’ underlying ethos of ‘non-formal’ education and learning by doing.

In discussion, some Explorer Scouts were able to describe the skills they learned as a result of being in the Scouts, but they often admitted to not previously giving it much thought, as they tend to be the unstated by-product of fun Scout activities. Older Scouts and adult volunteers, with more experience of the

working world, more immediately recognised the skills learned in the Scouts and their usefulness for employability.

Twenty-first-century Scouts

It was commonly felt that society's perception of the Scouts was outdated and failed to reflect the value of Scouting accurately. While there have been some benefits to the recent rebranding of the Scouts – including rising numbers – efforts are still needed to combat the image of the Scouts as not relevant to today's working world.

Engaging local businesses, but no CV workshops

There was a consensus that The Scout Association should seek to engage more proactively with local businesses and employers to facilitate work experience and hold employer fairs for young people. Scouts were less keen on the idea of CV workshops, career advice and mock interviews, which are more traditional and direct employment forms of help.

Articulating what Scouts means for skills in the workplace

Employers recognised the value of the Scouts to employment – demonstrating commitment, resilience, good social skills and the ability to work in a team – but required job applicants to be able to describe these skills and how they are relevant. Putting 'Scouts' on a CV was not sufficient. However, evidence shows that many employers are prioritising applicants with experience of volunteering over those without, which should benefit adult volunteers.

Adult volunteers gain crucial employability skills as well

Our research with adult volunteers for the Scouts identified teamwork, emotional intelligence, resilience and communication as key skills they had developed through volunteering. Many adult volunteers also noted the training scheme that was

provided to leaders, and the possibility of gaining the Wood Badge award, which signifies the leadership and management training that adult volunteers receive and gives them associate membership to the Institute for Leadership and Management.

A culture shift towards employer supported volunteering is key to helping achieve Step Up To Serve's youth social action campaign

The Step Up To Serve campaign aims to encourage over half of young people to take part in 'social action'. To achieve this aim will require a significant increase in adult volunteers providing support to youth development programmes like the Scouts. According to the 2012–13 *Community Life Survey*,³ the most commonly cited barrier to volunteering is 'work commitments'. This suggests that more employees would volunteer if the opportunity were provided directly by their employer.

Benefits to employers and employees of employer supported volunteering include job satisfaction and skills development

The most widely cited benefits of employee volunteering include general satisfaction and sense of wellbeing, exposure to new people and types of work, and a feeling of giving back. Barclays found that the more times an employee had volunteered, the more likely they were to report an increase in job satisfaction.⁴ While increasing job satisfaction and a feeling of giving back appear to be the primary motivators for volunteering, there is also potential for skills development and assisting career progression. Several surveys have shown that employees and employers see leadership, team-working and communication skills as among the most important skills to be gained from volunteering, echoing our research.⁵

Getting the right 'fit'

At its best, employer supported volunteering (ESV) should result in benefits at multiple levels – for the individual employee, the employer, the receiving voluntary organisation and the wider

community. However, it is important that organisations' ethos, expectations and skills 'fit' well between each other. Some voluntary organisations benefit most from 'skills-based volunteering', which uses the specialist expertise of volunteers – for instance in finance. The concept of 'impact volunteering', developed in the US and promoted by organisations in the UK like NESTA, addresses the importance of measuring the impact that volunteers are actually having, rather than assuming that all volunteering is beneficial. Brokering agencies can be very useful in ESV for ensuring that partnerships are based on a good 'fit' between sending and receiving organisations.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on our research and focus on two broad themes. The first looks at ways to expand and improve ESV schemes in the UK. The second theme presents our recommendations for how to make the link between Scouts and employability more explicit.

Expanding Scouts' potential: employer support volunteering

Our research shows that The Scout Association already provides employability skills to young people taking part, as well as adult volunteers. However, there is currently a lack of adult volunteers so tens of thousands of young people are being denied the opportunity to take part. Our research suggests that radically increasing 'employer supported volunteering' could be the answer to addressing this shortage.

These are our recommendations:

- *Employers in the public and private sector should develop ambitious employee volunteering schemes and link them to continuing personal development strategies.* There is a strong business case for encouraging employees to volunteer with organisations like the Scouts because the skills they acquire can make them more effective in the workplace, as well as increasing loyalty and retention. The evidence suggests that formal programmes

involving partnerships with voluntary organisations, which are open to a large number of volunteers, can have the most positive impact on all involved. The evidence also suggests that businesses and public sector organisations must ensure that programmes remain flexible to the needs of the volunteer, and that employees can exercise sufficient choice in how they volunteer – two factors that contribute to a larger uptake of ESV programmes.

- *Business consortia, youth organisations and human resources (HR) professionals should work together with the Step Up To Serve campaign to develop a strong rationale and frameworks for ESV.* The Step Up To Serve campaign relies on partnerships and pledges across third sector and private sector businesses, and provides an excellent opportunity to galvanise employers to support ESV. Specifically, within the context of the Step Up To Serve campaign, business consortia – such as Business in the Community (BITC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) – youth organisations – such as those that are part of the networks Generation Change and Youth United – and HR professionals should work together in the context provided by the Step Up To Serve campaign in order to:
 - calculate the return on investment to businesses and the third sector of participating in well-structured ESV, and give business the tools to prove and increase return on investment
 - enumerate guidelines and principles to ensure voluntary organisations offer a good ‘fit’ and ‘purpose’ to volunteers
 - ensure that employers have realistic expectations about what employee volunteers will be able to do with voluntary organisations
- *Employers should use a range of incentives to encourage a take-up of volunteering opportunities among employees.* While a number of employees are self-motivated to volunteer, employers should consider putting in place further incentives to increase the rate of volunteering among staff. These could include publishing employee volunteering league tables, establishing volunteering

targets in personal development plans, or explicitly linking volunteering to promotion and reviews.

- *Employers should develop partnerships with broker organisations to ensure the best possible fit between employees' skills and the needs of voluntary organisations, and help employers understand the skills that employees will be developing from different activities.* The best ESV programmes entail partnerships between employers and a brokering organisation, such as the online hub of volunteering opportunities provided by the National Grid in partnership with their broker Community Service Volunteers. These relationships help to ensure that employees have a range of volunteering options to choose from, and that there is a good fit between employees' skills and the needs of voluntary organisations. Broker organisations can work with employers to understand what skills are being developed through different volunteering activities. This can help employers to align their budgets for skills and training with their ESV programme. The savings made by businesses on training course costs could be used to pay the broker organisation.
- *Voluntary organisations should develop recognised accreditation schemes that formally recognise the skills obtained by volunteers.* In order to boost the numbers of employers offering ESV schemes, there needs to be an increased public recognition of its value, which could be achieved through various accreditation schemes. The Wood Badge, developed by the Scouts for adult volunteers, is one example of such an award that could help employers understand and quantify the skills that their employees are receiving as part of their volunteering experiences.

Making the link explicit: Scouting and employability

While the majority of people we interviewed believed that Scouting activities already taught employability skills, many thought the link with employability could be more explicit and that some additional activities should be considered.

These are our recommendations:

- *Older Scouts should take part in discussions and activities directly tied to employability.* Adult volunteers should be encouraged and supported to offer group discussions with Explorer Scouts about employability, skills learned in Scouting and future transitions (whether to university, work-based training or employment).
- *'Guided reflection' should be a core element of Scouting activities.* Scout leaders should be encouraged to provide guided reflection to Scouts on the skills learned through Scouting activities, and their applicability to the 'real world' or the 'world of work'.
- *Scout leaders should work with local businesses to run employability activities.* Senior volunteers should be supported to undertake an audit of local businesses whose personnel could potentially take part in employability activities such as information sessions or possibly offers of work experience for older Explorer Scouts.
- *Develop and promote employability-relevant Scouting awards.* The Scout Association offers a number of awards that are specifically relevant to skills that young people can benefit from later in employment and higher or further education. The Scout Association should take this further and look at how certain badges and awards could be moulded to fit the demands of vocational accreditation. This could be particularly useful to Scouts who plan to take an apprenticeship or go straight into employment rather than attend university. The Scout Association should increase its efforts to communicate to employers the value and relevance of its top awards.
- *Increase the breadth of activities, for example through further youth social action projects.* The Scout Association's objective of making a positive impact in local communities through social action campaigns such as Scout Community Week is welcome, and should be expanded. Other initiatives with a political focus, such as the Scouts' Question Time, media training, the public

relations activity badge and other activities involving parliament were popular with the Scouts we spoke to. These activities could help break down the traditional perception that The Scout Association is solely involved in outdoor activities.

- *Lead a campaign highlighting the successful employment routes of ex-Scouts.* The Scout Association should survey former members to gain an insight into what Scouts go on to do professionally. They should also identify high profile business leaders to lead campaigns explicitly highlighting the skills and employability benefits of being a member of the Scouts.

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1907, Scouting has aimed ‘to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities’.⁶ More than 100 years later, this aim is more relevant than ever.

Scouting is a major influence on the lives of many of the young people and adult volunteers who take part in its activities.⁷ In addition to forging lifetime friendships and teaching useful practical skills, it leaves an indelible mark on the character, personality and sense of responsibility of many of them. In this report we consider another important outcome of Scouting: employability.⁸

Exacerbated by the 2008 recession, youth unemployment has reached the highest levels since 1992, with just over 900,000 16–24-year-olds currently looking for work, according to the latest figures.⁹ Young people inevitably face a disadvantage in the labour market due to lack of work experience. For example, labour market data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the youth unemployment rate has consistently been twice as high as the rest of the working age population – even in the best economic times.¹⁰

The proportion of youth unemployment compared with the rest of the working age has been steadily on the rise since 2004.¹¹ In 2001, the number of unemployed youth was approximately 500,000. In October 2011 the figure was an all-time high of over 1 million.¹² According to the most recent figures, as of January 2014, 912,000 16–24-year-olds were unemployed, constituting almost a fifth of that age cohort.¹³

While the 2008 recession has hit young people hardest in the short term, changes to the UK economy over the past 15

years have not favoured young people. Two key trends include the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the service sector and the so-called knowledge economy.

The decline of the manufacturing industry has led to the disappearance of mid-level, semi-skilled jobs that provide decent, liveable wages. In 1980, approximately 6.5 million people (or around 1 in 4 British workers) were employed in manufacturing compared with 2.5 million (or 1 in 10 British workers) in 2013.¹⁴ As Professor Alison Wolf argues, the UK economy now is now in the shape of an hourglass with growth and/or stability in low- and high-skilled jobs, with huge declines in jobs requiring mid-level skills.¹⁵ These changes disadvantage many young people who would have forgone university in favour of semi-skilled and craft-based careers and apprenticeships.

On the other hand, the UK service sector has expanded rapidly. In 2013, more than 4 in 5 jobs in the UK were in the service sector, a third more than in 1980.¹⁶ The growth of the service sector has implications for young people, as employers in the service economy value employees who have a broad range of communication and soft skills, such as ability to self-manage, work in a team, lead others and deliver projects to a deadline.

These changes have significantly increased the importance of a broad range of 'soft skills' or 'employability skills' (such as leadership, ability to work in a team, perseverance, self-confidence, problem-solving and communication skills). Yet despite this increased demand for soft skills, reflecting changes in the structure of the labour market, employers are ever more likely to say that young people lack these skills. The most recent CBI survey (published in 2013) showed that 54 per cent of employers thought school leavers have poor self-management skills, while 61 per cent thought they had inadequate business and customer awareness.¹⁷ University graduates fared better, but a fifth of employers still considered that graduates displayed weaknesses working in a team and problem-solving. A university degree is no longer sufficient: 88 per cent of employers are looking foremost for the attitudes and skills that will enable graduates to be effective in the workplace.

This report

In this report we present research into whether Scouting provides key ‘soft skills’ or ‘employability skills’ that employers require. We focus in particular on young people and the skills they need to succeed in the labour market, but also consider the development of employability skills among adult volunteers, and the gains to be made by employers in supporting volunteering among their staff. We argue that participating in the Scouts can teach young people a range of skills that should make them more competitive when they enter the labour market. But at the moment, approximately 40,000 young people are on the waiting list for the Scouts as there is a lack of adult volunteers. We argue that a comprehensive and UK-wide emphasis on ESV would be the best way to unlock the full potential of Scouts, as well as other voluntary organisations currently unable to meet local demand. Part of bringing about this step change is the realisation that employee volunteering – particularly as an adult volunteer with the Scouts – can be a significant asset for UK employers.

1 Young people, 'character skills' and employability

When employers speak about employability skills the most common characteristics mentioned are the ability to work in a team, commit oneself to a task and see it through to completion, manage multiple tasks, communicate well to others, display self-confidence, and be a 'self-starter'. In Demos research, we often refer to these as character skills or capabilities.¹⁸ They are the essential basis on which other skills, successes and positive life outcomes are built and depend.

Character skills include:

- *application*: concentration and motivation to pursue and complete a task
- *self-regulation*: emotional resilience and control
- *self-direction*: ability to recognise and shape what is in one's control and plan for the future
- *self-understanding*: a positive and accurate sense of self
- *social skills*: ability to communicate and work with others
- *empathy*: ability to see the world from others' perspectives

Research by Jo Blanden and colleagues has shown that possessing these skills has an impact on success in the labour market (measured by wage levels). After controlling for a range of potentially influential factors, better 'application skills' at age 10 were associated with approximately 9 per cent higher earnings at the age of 30, while a stronger sense of 'self-direction' – or 'locus of control', a commonly used phrase in psychology to describe the extent to which people feel they can control events – was associated with 6 per cent higher wage earnings.¹⁹

This effect appears to be even stronger for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Better application skills among the average disadvantaged child were associated with 14 per cent

higher earnings at the age of 30.²⁰ They were also more important for those with fewer qualifications, being four times as important as academic ability in determining wages among low-skilled men.²¹

Research from the Institute for Public Policy Research suggests that these skills have become more relevant in recent years. Its analysis of longitudinal data sets suggests that personal and social skills were 33 times more influential to life outcomes for those born in 1970 than for those born in 1958.²² The reason for this seems to be that the growth in service sector jobs and the increasing flexibility of the labour market places a premium on communication, empathy, self-confidence and teamwork.²³

The development and exercise of these skills is a lifetime endeavour, and is influenced by a number of factors. Demos research in *Building Character* demonstrated how parenting style, particularly in the early years of a child's life, possibly has the most significant impact on the development of these skills.²⁴ However, these skills can be taught and developed in other ways and through other activities. In *The Forgotten Half*, Demos explored whether schools provided students – particularly those who do not progress into university – with these character or soft skills.²⁵

Are employability skills being taught in school?

Many academics and experts have argued that the UK school system privileges academic knowledge over practical knowledge and ability. Indeed, previous research conducted by Demos and others found that, with notable exceptions, schools are constrained in their ability to inculcate these character skills among their pupils. In a report for the Young Foundation Yvonne Roberts wrote,

*The emphasis on a set of core academic skills, and a culture of intensive testing, has too often squeezed out another set of skills – how to think creatively, how to collaborate, how to empathise – at the very time when they are needed more than ever.*²⁶

A number of schools are trying to incorporate pedagogies and activities that aim to build practical skills and soft skills outlined above. With the Government's academies policy encouraging a greater diversity of specialist schools, a number have been established that aim to readdress this balance, for example through a project-based learning curriculum and greater focus on communication skills. Nevertheless, following the introduction of the academically rigorous English Baccalaureate as a school performance indicator, and the pressure of league tables, schools often have very little time to focus on employability or character skills.

Extracurricular activities

With schools focused on academic skills and knowledge, attention has turned to the building of these skills and relevant experience through extracurricular activities, including informal programmes of education, 'service learning' and volunteering. Extracurricular activities can range from sports, youth clubs, local volunteering, the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and the Scouts. A range of other programmes have attempted to provide young people with 'service learning' opportunities – the ability to learn, build skills and gain experience through structured volunteering opportunities. Examples include the organisation City Year, V's Talent Year and the Government's National Citizen Service.

Youth social action and national service

In recent years, politicians from both main parties have spoken about the need for young people to get involved in youth social action projects in local communities, and to take up other positive extracurricular activities that build skills and a sense of responsibility. Evidence shows that youth social action projects in particular are a highly effective means of developing character skills such as team-working and resilience in young people.

The national campaign Step Up To Serve, launched in late 2013 by the Prince of Wales and with backing from the three main political parties, has given new momentum to youth social action in the UK. It aims to make youth social action the norm for the majority of young people, tying in with other government-backed programmes such as National Citizen Service launched in 2010. The Step Up To Serve campaign has set the target of getting more than 50 per cent of 10–20-year-olds to volunteer for youth social action projects by 2020. This will require encouraging a further 1.7 million young people to take part.

A large body of evidence shows that the types of skills developed through youth social action offers a range of benefits to young people, in improving educational outcomes and access to jobs, and increasing civic participation. An evaluation of the UK Government's National Citizen Service found that 77 per cent of its participants said they were more likely to help out locally, while 85 per cent agreed that the National Citizen Service made them feel more positively towards people from different backgrounds.²⁷ Moreover, international research from the USA has shown that young people with experience of volunteering in the community have a 27 per cent higher likelihood of finding work after a spell of unemployment compared with those without that experience.²⁸

A previous Demos report, *Service Generation*, mapped out the current provision of youth social action projects in the UK, and found that there is a growing number. The report found that there are over 750 organisations, schools and companies that provide volunteering or social action opportunities for young people.²⁹ There is also growing demand, with volunteering among young people on the rise. For instance, in 2012–13, 58 per cent of 16–19-year-olds reported that they had volunteered at least once in the past year, compared with 42 per cent in 2010–11.

However, *Service Generation* also argued there is likely to be a considerable amount of untapped desire among young people for further youth social action opportunities in the UK. In a 2010 Ipsos MORI poll of 11–16-year-olds, 91 per cent said they would like to get involved in at least one type of volunteering

activity that was presented to them.³⁰ Research by The Scout Association with Fast.MAP showed that 39 per cent of 18–25-year-olds would consider joining Scouting and also that Scouting is valued most and has its biggest impact in the most deprived parts of the country.³¹

Therefore far more needs to be done if the ambitious aims of Step Up To Serve are to be met. As we argue below, unlocking the benefits of youth social action depends on recruiting not only more young people, but also the adult volunteers who help to support it.

The Scouts: building character

While the merits and impact of ‘capability building’ programmes may vary considerably, overall such activities appear to be important and highly useful in building skills and demonstrating employability and the right attitude to employers. In the Demos report *Experience Required* we analysed the impact of V’s talent year programme on the development of ‘character capabilities’. We argued that ‘apart from gaining qualifications and specific skills, young people today often require two kinds of experience before they can embark on fruitful careers’. The first is work experience, which as we saw above is becoming more difficult to come by. The second is experience developed through non-formal activities:

The other kind of experience is more informal and harder to pin down, but it consists of working with other people to achieve common goals – perhaps organising an event as part of a team, running a sports session or facilitating a meeting. This is the kind of positive structured activity of which high quality volunteering opportunities often consist.³²

Perhaps the oldest example of this kind of programme is the Scouts. From its beginnings in 1907, Scouting has sought to achieve the development of persons with strong character, good practical skills and a keen interest in nature and the community, and these continue to be core aims of Scouts today. Working with children and young people between the ages of 6 and 25,³³

Scouting seeks to provide a broad education that contributes to the 'full development of an autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed person'.³⁴

To much of the general public, Scouting most likely conjures up images of young boys camping, learning how to tie knots and working towards acquiring badges that adorn their uniforms. However, Scouting involves significantly more than this nostalgic image. In recent years especially, The Scout Association has rebranded and reformed its programme of activities to attract more teenagers and adult volunteers to Scouting and to update it for the twenty-first century. This has reversed a previous decline in the numbers of Scouts, to a year-on-year increase since 2001.

Scouts, particularly between the ages of 10 and 18, can earn new awards (or badges) in areas from IT to public relations to advanced aviation skills, alongside the time-honoured pioneering and trekking awards. Older Scouts can also achieve badges on 'community impact', involving volunteering in the community, aviation and nautical skills, as well as public relations and media training. The result is a unique offer to young people in the UK: the ability to experience outdoor and adventure activities, acquire awards and skills relevant to higher and further education and employment, all the while with an explicit emphasis on building character, leadership, a sense of responsibility, and having fun.

Although the perception of the Scouts as a boys-only organisation persists in the minds of many, The Scout Association admitted girls into the older age group Venture Scouts (now divided into Explorer and Network Scouts) 37 years ago. While all Scout age groups had the option of admitting girls since 1991, since 2007 there has no longer been a choice and female membership continues to grow. In 2014, the number of new female recruits outgrew new male recruits at 6.6 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively; girls make up approximately 19 per cent of all young Scouts in the UK.³⁵

The Scout Association has enjoyed a recent boom in popularity, with membership growing for the past eight consecutive years. Its membership in 2014 stands at

approximately 445,784 youth members. The number of older Scouts between the ages of 14 and 18 (Explorer Scouts) has grown 110 per cent in the past decade, from 18,429 in 2002 to 42,939 in 2014.³⁶

The impact of Scouting

As the emphasis on measuring impact becomes further embedded in the third sector, The Scout Association has undertaken studies to determine the impact that Scouting has on young Scouts and adult volunteers as well as the wider community. Based on surveys of over 2,500 people, including Scout adult volunteers, young Scouts, former Scouts and a range of external organisations, a report by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) provides insights into Scouting's impact.

The surveys found that 91 per cent of adult volunteers and 88 per cent of youth members stated that Scouting had helped them develop key skills and over a third of Scouts agreed that it was unlikely or impossible that they would have had the opportunity to gain these benefits in the absence of Scouting. The research found that the most common activities undertaken by Scouts and volunteers involved team building and problem-solving, and that half of all young Scouts and volunteers take part in these activities at least ten times a year.³⁷

The research also found that membership of Scouts encouraged young Scouts and adult volunteers to take part in volunteering activities in the community: 47 per cent of adult volunteers reported volunteering outside the Scouts, while 82 per cent of youth members reported volunteering.³⁸

As we'll see in the next chapter, a substantial portion of Scouts' volunteering is likely completed through the Young Leaders' Programme (where Explorer Scouts act as leaders for younger age groups) and other Scouting activities. However, the research also suggests that Scouting instils a motivation and desire to volunteer after leaving Scouts: 36 per cent of former youth members reported volunteering regularly at least two hours per week, compared with only 26 per cent of the general

population, after leaving the Scouts. Moreover, two-thirds of those who do volunteer reported that their membership of the Scouts had a positive influence on their decision to volunteer.³⁹

In addition, Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) surveyed 800 external organisations, including employers in the public and private sector, providing a good indication of other organisations' perceptions of the Scouts, including the skills it helps develop and its broader impact to the community. The surveys found that around 6 out of 10 employers thought that Scouts:

- had strong team-working skills
- showed respect for others, which was important when working with peers, customers and clients
- appeared to build character and personal development
- showed confidence and leadership ability⁴⁰

Overall, 41 per cent of employers reported that job applicants' Scouting involvement – as young Scouts and as adult volunteers – would be a positive influence on their decision to hire new employees.⁴¹

Indeed, the benefit to adult volunteers in increasing skills development and employability is often overlooked when considering the impact of Scouts. In an article for the Social Market Foundation, the UK Chief Commissioner for The Scout Association Wayne Bulpitt makes a compelling argument for businesses to recognise how the skills that adult volunteers acquire can be beneficial in the workplace and do more to encourage their employees to volunteer as Scout leaders.⁴²

Currently more than 100,000 people volunteer, making the Scouts the largest mixed volunteer-led youth development organisation in the UK.⁴³ However, because of the shortage of adult volunteers there are currently approximately 40,000 young people on the waiting list to join Scouts. Wayne Bulpitt argues that UK employers do not yet adequately value employee volunteering as a form of continuing personal development, although adult volunteers overwhelmingly consider that their experience with Scouts had a positive impact on their

employability. According to the survey conducted by PACEC, over 90 per cent reported developing key skills, as discussed above, and over two-thirds of adult volunteers with Scouting experience thought there had been a positive correlation between that experience and their employment prospects and/or career development.⁴⁴

In the next chapter we present the findings of the qualitative research conducted for this report. The findings complement those of PACEC's surveys conducted in 2010–11, which were quantitative in nature and based on a much larger sample size. Our approach aimed to go into more depth regarding questions of skills and employability.

2 Scouting for skills

This chapter presents our research with young people, adult volunteers and employers. We conducted four focus groups with Explorer Scouts and two focus groups with adult volunteers. We held focus groups in Swindon, Cardiff, Liverpool and Carlisle in which 46 Explorer Scouts took part, and 25 adult volunteers took part in focus groups in Birmingham and Gilwell Park in Chingford. We also conducted one-to-one interviews with five Scouts between the ages of 16 and 24, five adult volunteers and five representatives of companies in order to get an employer perspective. In total we spoke to over 85 people involved with the Scouts.

In the focus groups and interviews we explored the skills that Scouts learn, their relevance to employment and higher education, ways to improve the link between Scouts and employability, and perceptions about the labour market.

What skills does Scouting teach?

Explorer Scouts identified a wide range of skills they learn through Scouting. In addition to practical skills traditionally associated with Scouting, including first aid, map reading and geography, other skills they mentioned frequently included 'teamwork', 'problem-solving', 'leadership', 'self-confidence', 'social skills', 'independence', 'responsibility' and 'showing commitment'.

The majority of Explorers felt these skills were not explicitly aimed for but were rather the useful by-products of taking part in fun and interesting activities. One Explorer from Swindon reflected the common view:

You need team-working skills to [participate in Scouting activities], but... it's not like you're actively training team skills... You just get put in a team with a task to do, so it's sort of, you passively learn it but it's not taught.

The ability to work in a team and developing self-confidence were the most frequently cited positive outcomes of being in Scouts. A Cardiff focus group member said:

Yes, it definitely boosts your confidence. Personally I wasn't a very confident person before I joined Scouting but now I'm far more confident because of doing Scouting things.

Explorers thought this was achieved through the way in which Scouts brings different types of people together – who often did not know each other very well – in the context of group or team activities that are goal-oriented. As one Explorer put it, making a direct link to a work environment:

I think it's better working in groups, and at Scouts you don't necessarily know everyone as well as you would at school, so it's working with people that you wouldn't normally be working with, which I guess in a working environment is more realistic.

The skills learned through Scouting mapped neatly to those general skills that Explorers felt employers were looking for. These included, 'getting on well with colleagues', 'punctuality', 'showing initiative', 'being able to make decisions', 'commitment and motivation', 'people skills', 'good attendance' and 'trustworthiness'. Approximately one-third of those in the focus groups were able to draw on their own experience in part-time or summer employment with jobs that included being a lifeguard, carpenter's assistant and sales assistant, and paper rounds.

Older Scouts (18–25-year-olds who were at university or employed) who had already made the transition to employment were more likely to appreciate and reflect on the skills that Scouting provides and their relevance to the workplace.

David Z, who is 23 years old and employed as a paramedic, said he believed the skills you learn in Scouts ‘are super relevant to the workplace. I think no matter what workplace they’re in, be it academic or practical, as far as communication and leadership go’. David also thought that the practical and problem-solving skills he learned as a Scout help him directly in his job:

The more practical skills [learned in Scouts] I use on a daily basis at work. Sometimes the equipment we carry doesn’t always work and, basically, I’ve got to improvise quite a lot. That’s definitely a skill that I picked up from being in Scouts.

Explorers did not feel that these employability skills were taught or learned in school to the same extent they were in the Scouts. There were two commonly given reasons for this: schools did not include group activities and the need to work with other people to the same extent as Scouts, and other students were disruptive to learning. Those who attended Scouts were keen to be there and participate, and were thus more engaged. One Explorer from Swindon expressed a common sentiment:

The majority of people in your team when you are doing something actually want to be there, rather than at school where they have to go, so [those in Scouts] are more committed and don’t mess around so much.

Explorers’ enthusiasm and general desire to take part in Scouting activities appear to make Scouts a unique learning environment. Indeed, it may be that schools can benefit from working in closer partnership with the Scouts, as is happening in the case of schools in Bradford and Toxteth. For instance, in University Academy Liverpool in Toxteth, Scouting activities are run during the school day, guided by staff, sixth form students and parents. While there is not yet evidence of its effect on pupil attainment or behaviour, it could be an interesting model to help address the inability of schools to teach character skills effectively.

Some Explorers we interviewed also spoke about the opportunities that Scouting provides for volunteering, which

helped to build relevant employability skills. They had volunteered in the local community (eg with the rotary club and the Scout Post), but the main avenue for volunteering is the Young Leaders' scheme, discussed further below.

At the very least, Scouting was seen as something additional to what everyone else does, and thus inevitably provides additional skills. One Explorer told us: 'Everybody has the set of skills you get from school but if you've been in Scouts, it's on top of what you're doing in schools', and another said:

It's something different that no one else does. I've got something different that the other guy next to me who is applying to uni hasn't got. It looks different to every other CV that some employer might go through.

Case study: Richard, Scout Network, 23 years old

Richard has been involved in Scouting since he was 6. He is a university graduate and runs his own business. According to Richard, the Scouts provided him with 'interpersonal skills, teamwork and the ability to deal with problems, challenges and adversity'. This learning came about through encountering 'good problems' during Scouting that require adaptability, teamwork and problem-solving:

At the time you think [getting lost hiking] is not very good but it's actually incredibly good for you because you think of a way to deal with these problems, especially with the people around you. Later on in life, they turn into a practical ability to tackle problems in employment and in personal life... When you run a business, the key to it is networking and the other side is problem-solving and having the ability to think and be creative.

He thought Scouting was helpful in all of these aspects:

Networking is hugely important and I've met large numbers of people; Scouting touches the lives of almost everyone and we get a lot of people in from diverse social-economic backgrounds and

some are high up in big business, which forms good contacts and knowledge bases.

Richard did think that the Scouts could be doing more to improve the Scouts' employability but this did not necessarily include changing its fundamental approach:

I don't think we need to rush out tomorrow and tell all our leaders to do interview training on a Wednesday night. There are career services at job centres and very intelligent people working within schools who already provide that service. Let's not reinvent the wheel.

However:

Teasing out what it is about Scouting that makes you employable and gaining the confidence to know that you are more employable as a Scout [would be helpful]; some young people may not realise it, they may go into an interview and not mention it. They'll talk about GCSEs and A levels and what jobs they've had before, but let's help them realise that the fact that they've been a Scout, and some of the things they do as a Scout, could actually really impress [interviewers or potential employers]. Employers put their pens down, look at you and say 'really?' and then you're on to something.

Young Leaders

Explorers clearly appreciated the valuable employability skills the Young Leaders' scheme gave them. Approximately three-quarters of the Explorers who took part in the focus groups were Young Leaders. The scheme allows Explorer Scouts between the ages of 14 and 18 to serve as Scout leaders for the younger age groups, including Beavers, Cubs and Scouts. Explorers felt that the Young Leaders' Programme helped to improve their problem-solving abilities, management skills, leadership qualities and attitude towards taking responsibility. Young Leader participants receive training on management and first aid as

adult volunteers, but many felt that the most valuable lessons were learned on the job.

One Explorer from Swindon told us that the Young Leaders' Programme 'teaches you to get on with stuff, it sort of makes you more prepared for random events'. Another in the Swindon focus group suggested that the skills you develop as a Young Leader were not necessarily immediately obvious but can be seen on reflection:

If you had just asked me, 'did you learn anything from Young Leaders' I would have said yes a little bit, but now you have sort of properly focused it I actually think that you do learn quite a bit of people management, because you have to be able to control [big groups of young children].

The Scouts thought the Young Leaders' Programme was valuable because it forced them to assume greater responsibility 'on the job' without the supervision and guidance of an older adult volunteer – it forced teenage Scouts to assume the role and responsibilities of an adult. Interestingly, the Scouts have accredited the Young Leaders' Programme through the Institute of Leadership and Management, which will help to ensure that its value and status is captured in a way that is recognisable by potential employers.

How important are awards to employability?

Most people associate the achievement of different awards or 'badges' as an integral part of Scouting. But according to one Explorer, expressing a commonly held sentiment,

Most of the badges just happen because we are enthusiastic and keen and we don't aim for a badge. We just do the stuff and then it turns out we can have a badge for it.

The majority of Scouts we consulted did not see badges or awards as a very useful by-product for their employability and future transitions – with the exception of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which was the most popular award among

the Explorers we spoke to. According to one Explorer from Cardiff, the presentation and public speaking aspect of the Duke of Edinburgh Award makes it valuable in improving employability skills:

What actually makes the D of E award so special is the presentation. I speak to my friends at school and they never have to do a presentation or have an opportunity to develop the skills they need to talk in front of people. So I see people in assembly and they just shiver because they cannot speak in front of people.

The Queen Scout Award – which is the highest award that can be achieved in the Scouts – was seen as more difficult, and thus more of an achievement for those who attained it, but very few of the Explorers we spoke to were planning to work towards it. Many thought the Queen Scout Award did not have as much recognition in society as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Some of the adult volunteers we interviewed agreed with these views, saying that more employers recognised the Duke of Edinburgh Award. To gain more recognition for the Queen Scout Award young Scouts needed to ‘stand up and shout about it’. A participant in the Chingford focus group observed:

The fact is your employer may not have much information but they have a mental picture of what D of E [the Duke of Edinburgh Award] involves, but they have very little idea of what [the] Queen Scout Award involves.

One possible way of ensuring that Scouts and employers know about the validity of the Scouts would be to introduce formal qualifications, which could be recognised by employers and universities alike. One participant suggested that the UCAS points used in the university application process could be designated to Scout activity. However, most of the adult volunteers we spoke to were hesitant about introducing qualifications. For example, those in the Birmingham focus group considered that any attempts to increase the number of certificates and qualifications related to employability would turn into a tick box exercise. But we believe The Scout Association should

play more of a role in promoting the relevance of awards such as the Queen Scout Award to employers.

Youth social action, campaigning and the Scouts' Question Time

One way to increase the employability skills of Scouts is to promote youth social action and campaigning – activities that encapsulate the ‘modern’ approach of Scouting. The Scout Association is increasingly encouraging their members to become involved in youth social action projects, in line with the Step Up To Serve campaign outlined in the previous chapter. As of 2014, young Scouts and adult volunteers have the opportunity to become ‘community leaders’, planning and executing local campaigns that matter to them. This focus on local issues is reflected in Scout Community Week, a week of fundraising activities in local areas being run in partnership with B&Q during where Scouts are recognised for their commitment to social action through community impact awards.

Some Explorers we spoke to talked about programmes run by the Scouts involving politics and public affairs. The Talk This Way project developed in partnership with parliament’s Education Service aims to help young Scouts learn more about parliament and influencing policy. The project includes workshops on debating and campaigning skills, as well as media training. Explorers we spoke to were very favourable about these activities; they found them interesting and fun, and valued the teaching skills they gained from them.

The opportunity to meet MPs and take part in Scouts’ Question Time was also mentioned by some Explorers. A number of other Explorers and older Scouts we interviewed cited the media and public speaking training that they received as part of Scouts. Explorers in the Cardiff focus group spoke about participating in local events and ceremonies such as ‘Lord Mayor Scouts’ in Cardiff. One Explorer commented:

I think the civic duty [of participating at a Holocaust ceremony with the Lord Mayor Scouts], I don't know how employers would see that, but I

think it's just good personally to be able to say that I've done that, it's really cool.

Scout Community Week and the new awards for youth social action have the potential to provide Scouts with further and richer opportunities to develop these sorts of skills through social action and campaigning in the local community.

Can the Scouts do more to improve employability?

Scouts clearly feel that their Scouting experience provides them with employability and character skills already, and those we spoke to often expressed concern that an increased focus on employability would sap the fun out of Scouting. For example, one Explorer from Carlisle observed, 'You have to be careful... if you bring the employability into it too much and squeeze out some of the fun, less people will do it.' An Explorer from the Liverpool group commented:

You just kind of do it [the Scouts] because it's fun, not because you want to get into university. You shouldn't do it because it'd look good on a CV, you should do it because you enjoy it. That's why I do it.

Becky, a member of Scout Network, felt the same way. Asked if she thought the Scouts should be doing more to focus on employability she said:

I'm inclined to say no because I don't think Scouts should be just about preparing people for the work place. If more of an emphasis is placed on getting people into the workplace, it will detract from what Scouting is actually about, such as meeting people and new experiences.

There was a significant amount of resistance to the idea posed in the focus groups of introducing CV workshops, interview training or career guidance. Many considered that Scouting should continue much as it is now. According to one Explorer from Liverpool:

Most of the things that we do with Scouts, you get most of those skills that [employers] are mentioning. You get it as a by-product of doing other stuff. Instead of doing more stuff specifically for these [skills], just keep getting on with it.

However, other Scouts considered that offering more to enhance employability skills could be beneficial – at least for those towards the older end of the Explorer age group. They thought such activities should be optional to ensure that the Scouts maintains its fun quality. A participant in the Liverpool focus group observed:

Because the ages between groups, like the Explorers with ages 13 to 18, there's a big maturity difference so some people would hate it and want to just mess around with your friends. So it's hard to make those kinds of decisions.

When discussing employment and job fairs David Z, 23 years old, former Explorer, agreed that focusing on improving employability skills

would be a good idea, but again I don't think it should take away from any more Scout values and activities. Scouts want to have fun and don't want to be bored out of their brains.

Some Scouts had stories of work experience facilitated by Scout leaders, but this was ad hoc and informal. Emily, a 17-year-old Explorer Scout, observed:

I think it would be good to talk to 14–18-year-olds about work experience. I do a lot of work experience, both in and out of college; however, some of my friends don't know how to go about getting work experience. This could be something that Scouting could help with, as a kind of one-off session.

However, one Explorer from Swindon drew attention to the potential lack of training and knowledge of Scout leaders to deliver these kinds of activities: 'It's not like our Scout leader is a careers adviser.'

The most popular suggestion was that there should be more involvement from local employers, including offers of work experience, information sessions or informal job fairs. Many suggested this could be mutually beneficial.

Like young Scouts, adult leaders were divided over whether more should be done to encourage and promote employability for young Scouts. Many thought that The Scout Association was already doing enough to develop skills and attitudes valued by employers.

There was less resistance among adult volunteers than among young Scouts to the idea of interview training, career guidance and discussion of CVs and interview techniques. Adult leaders were more likely to think that this could work successfully if provided in an appropriate way.

Someone in the Birmingham focus group suggested that interviews and assessment centres should be simulated:

Because the main thing about these assessment centres, you're so nervous and terrified on the day it all just goes out the window. With the Scouts you could perhaps aim to cope with change and that might do a little better inherently if you have these opportunities where you put these assessment centres together to try these different things.

An adult volunteer we interviewed named Amy, who has been involved with the Scouts for 12 years, suggested that job fairs would be 'a great place to start'. Ray, who is an assistant Scout leader, wanted to expand the Question Time workshops that had been offered in the past:

They have Scouts Question Time workshops; there could be at district or county level more focus on employability, such as mock interviews, help writing a CV, explaining how [Scouts] fits into your CV.

Some adult leaders we spoke to were already offering more activities focused on employability. Many of the leaders claimed that they spoke to Scouts about their future career aspirations or provided some form of support. One said, 'If I had a pound for

every time I had asked to be a reference I probably wouldn't be here.' However, activities around employability were limited to the odd Scouts section here and there. A member of the Birmingham focus group told us that one district:

did a big Explorer evening with employers coming in and offering CV help and discussing opportunities, and we are doing that in Coventry as well. Now I know that's not a national level thing... But that could be the basis for something... We need a role, we definitely need something nationally that gives us the support to engage. I think most adult volunteers would be prepared to go that extra mile, bearing in mind we are all volunteers and are already giving up an amount of time.

There was some discussion about whether to offer activities like those used in *Dragons' Den* and *The Apprentice* as a way of introducing employability and getting local businesses involved, and most favoured this kind of activity.

Echoing the views of young Scouts, the strongest levels of support by adult leaders were for businesses to come into Scout and Explorer meetings. A participant in the Birmingham focus group suggested, 'We ought to have far better links with employers.' Bijal, an adult volunteer we interviewed who has been involved in Scouting for 16 years, agreed:

At unit level, Scout leaders could invite local business people to meetings to explain what they do and why Explorers might be interested in working in a similar industry or company. It would also give the Scouts an opportunity to tell employers about Scouts and what skills they can offer.

Many thought that the Scouts' current outreach to businesses was more to do with sponsoring badges than anything else, but it required minimal effort on the part of businesses, and greater involvement in other areas such as running workshops or offering work experience would be more beneficial to the Scouts and the employers themselves.

Other leaders considered the main priority was to make young Scouts more aware of the relevance of the skills they were learning in the Scouts and to help them to sell themselves better.

A member of the Chingford focus group spoke about his experience in helping his son, who was a Scout, write his CV:

I don't think they realise quite how many skills [they gain], and how important or relevant it is when it comes to their CV. When my son was applying for jobs a few months ago I was helping him fill in his CV. When it came to the question of what skills and interests [he had] I told him to put Scouts down and he said, 'Why, they will laugh at me', and I said, 'No they won't, it is nothing to be embarrassed about, it gives you a lot of skills.' I don't think it's emphasised quite widely enough how important it is.

Another volunteer suggested that while an emphasis on employability may be a good idea at Explorer level it was important that Scouts leaders did not become 'careers advisers': 'Scouting can contribute [to employability], but it's important to make sure it preserves its essence and doesn't become another formal school type institution.'

Most of those whom we spoke to recognised that there was a drop-off rate in numbers at the Explorer stage of being a Scout, due to 'school pressures' or young people simply finding something else to do. There were mixed views about whether a greater focus on employability would lead more people to remain in the Scouts throughout the Explorer level.

Like young Scouts, adult volunteers worried about taking away the fun appeal that draws people in to the Scouts. A member of the Chingford focus group commented: 'I think you have got to be very careful when you are running Scouts and Explorers. The reason that they go is to have fun.' On the other hand, some thought that having a greater focus on employability was actually in keeping with the values of the Scouts: 'Scouts has always been about providing opportunities for young people.'

Adult leaders were concerned about those young Scouts who would not go on to progress into the Explorer group. They knew that only a minority would go on to achieve awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and that it was possibly more important for the majority who do not achieve them still to be able to capture the value of the Scouts and the skills they

learned, and communicate them to employers. A member of the Birmingham focus group told us:

We should be aiming for all young people that have been involved in Scouting to have something they can put on their CV for it. The skills attributed to [being a Scout] should be something that employers recognise without having to give it a badge or a label or a certificate.

The views of employers

In addition to interviews with Scouts and adult volunteers, we conducted interviews with five employers in order to get some insight into their views about Scouts and its relevance to the world of work. We recruited a random selection of employers and conducted semi-structured interviews with those in HR departments responsible for recruitment. The employers came from a range of different organisations and companies: a healthcare provider, an outdoor activity provider, a web-hosting company, an insurance company and a building society. They all wished to remain anonymous.

The employers we interviewed were all responsible for hiring new recruits. They claimed that they frequently recruited young people between the ages of 18 and 25, primarily university graduates. All had some personal experience of Scouting: four had been in either the Scouts or the Guides as children or had children in the Scouts or the Guides, and one had served as a Brownie leader for the Girl Guides.

The majority (4 out of 5 employers) believed that young people lacked employability skills, though most stressed that this opinion was anecdotal. They suggested that young people had an 'inability to commit', could not 'turn up on time' and did not 'have the right attitude'. Three thought they lacked general workplace etiquette. The recruiter for the building society felt that young people were often unable to communicate effectively. Many had excellent academic credentials but they struggled in a formal working environment. However, one employer suggested that the general view that young people lacked employability

skills was 'ageist' and that they can bring a mixture of good skills to the workplace.

All the employers we interviewed said they were looking for something that made a young person stand out from the other job applicants, for example evidence that they had taken part in activities and commitments outside formal education and workplace experience. However, they considered that while participation in the Scouts would count as an unusual and valuable experience, they would not give extra consideration to a candidate simply because the Scouts was on their CV.

All the employers we interviewed considered that being a Scout did convey certain benefits that were worthy of consideration to employers – for example, 'showing commitment' and 'being comfortable in social situations', but emphasised that it was essential that job applicants were effective at highlighting these benefits and selling themselves. One told us, 'Doing Scouts means that you can meet a challenge and that you do not simply pack up and go home', but he suggested that young Scouts were not selling themselves well enough: 'I have not heard young people talk about Scouting values with a lot of confidence.' Another commented: 'It's making the link. Great you're in Scouts – but what does that mean?'

In addition, only one of the employers we spoke to was aware that the Scouts now offered opportunities and skills beyond the traditional 'campfires and bob-a-job' activities associated with the Scouts, suggesting more needs to be done to communicate these changes to employers. The others still thought of the Scouts nostalgically as mainly concerned with outdoor activities. Two argued that The Scout Association should do more to advertise the link between the Scouts and employability in order to change perceptions among employers, for example have national level campaigns, build links with employers' organisations like the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and CBI, and engage with local employers. One said: 'It's about making connections with corporates as colleges are increasingly doing – to support them with employability courses.'

Conclusion

The research presented above suggests that Scouting gives young people the opportunity to develop important skills and character traits that are valued by employers, and more needs to be done to ensure that employers and young people themselves are made aware of this. In light of this research there is also a compelling argument for addressing the significant waiting list of young people wanting to take part in Scouts, which at the moment stands at approximately 40,000. This waiting list is the result of a lack of adult volunteers, and is a particular problem in areas of the country where Scouts could be most beneficial for young people.

In the next chapter we look at the role of employer supported volunteering (ESV) to plug this gap of adult volunteers, and unlock Scouts' potential for tens of thousands more British young people. While many British employers have schemes that allow and encourage their employees to volunteer, a huge amount more could be done. Our research suggests that involvement in Scouting can be just as successful and significant in skills training and employability skills for adult volunteers as well. This is important because dramatically expanding employer supported volunteering in the UK will depend on employers recognising the potential skills and training value of volunteering, and considering these schemes from the standpoint of HR, not just corporate social responsibility.

3 Adult volunteers and employer supported volunteering

The 2012/13 *Community Life Survey*⁴⁵ found that the most commonly cited barrier to volunteering is ‘work commitments’, suggesting that more employees would volunteer if the opportunity were provided directly by their employer. This implies that the solution to The Scout Association’s shortage of volunteers could lie in dramatically expanding ‘employer support volunteering’ (ESV) among British employers. Encouraging employers – whether in the private or public sector – to support their staff to volunteer would provide a vital lifeline not only to The Scout Association but also to other voluntary organisations.

Many employers currently see the key benefit of supporting their employees to volunteer as demonstrating corporate social responsibility, but our research suggests that employers have just as much to gain in improved personal development, motivation and loyalty of their employees.

For this chapter we conducted an extensive desk-based review of ESV programmes and evidence of effectiveness. We interviewed five employers with ESV programmes, a European expert on volunteering, and representatives from two further voluntary organisations. We also conducted two focus groups of adult Scout volunteers in Chingford and Birmingham. In total, 25 adult volunteers took part in focus groups and we interviewed a further five adult volunteers individually.

The state of ESV in the UK

There is limited up-to-date information about the extent to which employers in the UK are providing ESV opportunities for their employees, and the data available suggest that in the private sector it is much more common for larger companies to offer ESV than small and medium businesses. From the most

recent estimates, around 70 per cent of FTSE 100 companies have some kind of ESV programme, compared with 20 per cent of medium-sized businesses, and 14 per cent of small businesses.⁴⁶ There are also ESV programmes in the public sector, including the Civil Service, the NHS and smaller institutions such as Durham University.

It is also difficult to know how many employees are taking up ESV opportunities in the UK. Volunteering rates in general appear to be increasing. The numbers of people involved in all types of volunteering had been on the decline since 2005, but has risen in the last few years. According to the *Community Life Survey*, regular, formal volunteering – defined as giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations at least once a month – increased from 39 per cent of people in 2010/11 to 44 per cent in 2012/13.⁴⁷ Among employees, there was an increase from 42 per cent in 2010/11 to 48 per cent in 2012/13. We do not know what proportion of this was supported by employers, but a rise in ESV might explain this trend.

One international expert in volunteering reported to us that ESV is currently more ingrained in the culture of US employers than among employers in the UK or other EU countries. This may be because in the US there tends to be a higher expectation among employers that staff will have volunteering experience. In 2013, 47 per cent of US companies had a community volunteering programme.⁴⁸ It is not clear, though, that the take-up of these opportunities is any more substantial than in the UK, with 27.7 per cent of employed people in the US taking part in some kind of voluntary work in 2013.⁴⁹

While there are multiple benefits to ESV, and some very good programmes, there is significant scope to extend the quantity and quality of ESV in the UK. A vInspired survey found that less than 4 in 10 (39 per cent) managers rated their organisation as good or very good at supporting staff to volunteer.⁵⁰ This is concerning, given that this survey also showed that at least 58 per cent of employees are likely to volunteer if they receive support from their employer, with less than 1 in 5 (17 per cent) unlikely to volunteer.⁵¹

What is employer supported volunteering?

Employers support their employees to volunteer in a number of ways. Some employees volunteer on their own initiative and are supported individually by the employer, through paid time off, flexible time arrangements or the use of company resources.

More substantial ESV programmes involve formal partnerships between employers and charities, or other organisations in the community. Some companies such as the National Grid are able to offer a variety of volunteering options to their employees, for example working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or partner schools, and support paid volunteering placements during work time.

Other forms of ESV include ‘Team Challenge’ events – usually a one-off group activity – and ‘virtual volunteering’ such as online mentoring.⁵² Multinational companies such as Levi Strauss run annual community days during which employees around the world take a day off to volunteer with local NGOs.

The type of work undertaken by volunteers varies, though there are two main types. ‘Skills-based volunteering’ tends to make use of or develop the volunteer’s existing professional skill-set, such as an accountant working on the books within a charity. The other type of ESV is not directly related to the employee’s existing skill-set, and involves developing other skills – for example, the same accountant reading to children in a primary school, or being involved in a practical task such as gardening.

What employees gain from ESV

There are many potential benefits to employees of participating in an ESV programme. Many employees appear to take up volunteering opportunities because it gives them general satisfaction and a sense of wellbeing. This benefit was cited by two-thirds of employees in the survey *Helping Out* carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research.⁵³ There is also evidence to suggest that the gain in job satisfaction from volunteering is related to the number of times an employee has volunteered. Barclays found that the more times an employee had volunteered, the more likely they were to report an increase in job satisfaction.⁵⁴

A representative we spoke to from Rolls Royce talked about the specific benefits of volunteering to highly specialised workers who may spend their whole career in one firm or industry:

We do have quite a lot of people who are very specialist and may spend their whole careers with us. So that opportunity to link people up with other organisations that work very differently is actually a very rich opportunity.

In this case, doing something completely different from the everyday has a positive impact on the motivation and wellbeing of staff.

An expert on volunteering commented on corporate volunteers: ‘Especially if they’re in for-profit jobs where they feel that they’re always taking from people, it just gives them back a bit more of a work-life balance.’ While a sense of wellbeing and a feeling of giving back appear to be the primary motivators for volunteering, there is also a great potential for skills development and assisting career progression. Just under 4 in 10 respondents to a survey by CIPD in 2012 said they took part in a mentoring scheme for the purposes of furthering their career.⁵⁵

Volunteering as a form of continuing personal development

Several surveys have shown that employees and employers see leadership, team-working and communication skills as among the most important skills to be gained from volunteering. A 2010 survey found that communication skills were perceived as the most important skill type that could be gained from volunteering.⁵⁶ Employers agree: a separate survey of 500 employers found that they rated the three most important skills and attributes that can be gained from volunteering to be communication skills, team-working and confidence.⁵⁷

Some employees may be in an organisation where there are few opportunities to work in a team or progress in a leadership role, and volunteering gives them the chance to do so. One employer we interviewed told us: ‘Those sorts of organisational

skills, communication skills, leadership skills, are something that can be used to enhance somebody's career path.'

Our research with adult volunteers from the Scouts confirms the huge potential that volunteering can have for skills development.

Selling the skills that Scout leaders develop

When speaking about the skills they had developed, adult volunteers used various tags to describe what could broadly be termed as soft skills. Oft used phrases included, 'emotional intelligence', 'coming out of the shell', 'forming personality' and learning 'life skills'. Like the younger Scouts, these adult volunteers rated teamwork the most important skill they had learned: 'Teamwork – everything you do boils down to team-working, having confidence in your abilities.' Those we spoke to noted that teamwork and resilience in Scouts often developed from being put in difficult situations, which required working together with people with whom you are not well acquainted:

It's because people have got that confidence, they are used to mixing with a whole range of different people in different situations... which means they have to be calm, step back and look at different situations and think 'what are we going to do?'

Adult volunteers believed they had gained a broad range of skills, which were useful in the job market, and a number of those we spoke to had drawn on their experience as leaders when applying for jobs. One had been through spells of unemployment and felt that being involved with the Scouts 'helped me stand out against the rest' when applying for jobs. A volunteer from the Chingford group told us:

I proudly cited my work with the Scouts. I was applying for a role as a director so... I was able to give examples from my Scouting experiences and apply them to the questions and answers given throughout the interview.

Many adult volunteers noted the training scheme that was provided to leaders, and the possibility of gaining the Wood Badge award. The Wood Badge, which signifies the leadership and management training that adult volunteers receive, gives them associate membership to the Institute for Leadership and Management, one of the leading bodies for awarding qualifications on leadership and management. After a further three years as a Scout leader, volunteers can then apply to become full members of the Institute of Leadership and Management, which gives them access to a wide range of benefits including professional recognition of their Scouting role.

Case study: Alison McCaffrey, District Commissioner, Scouts

Alison McCaffrey is in her 40s and is a District Commissioner for the Scouts in Bognor Regis. She has been involved on and off with the Scouts since she was 20 years old. She was also in the Girl Guides when she was younger (her mother was a Guide leader). Alison is currently working for the Ministry of Defence as an estate manager for the Thorney Island estate.

As a Scout leader and District Commissioner, Alison felt that she was now more employable, and the new focus on employability within the Scouts was positive, especially as the Scouts now offered formal training, which she had benefitted from:

The Scouts now do a host of training and management modules. I think they are great. I have got an NVQ 4 in management from my job with the MOD. I was able to relate a lot of my work and training in the Scouts to this. The training that you get provides you with tools that you can relate to different things.

Alison told us that her experience with the Scouts was extremely important to her: 'I wouldn't swap the Scouts for anything. There are things I have done I wouldn't have been able to do in a million years, and I've visited so many places.'

What businesses have to gain from ESV programmes

You're giving people confidence, a pride in the place they work... it helps you to retain your employees, it gives them a sense of achievement, which all make them better at their job.

Research suggests that many of the gains to individuals through volunteering have positive knock-on effects to the individual's business itself through improved motivation, job satisfaction and skills development.

Research shows that people with experience of volunteering develop skills that are highly demanded by employers. In a 2010 YouGov survey, 57 per cent of managers felt that skills gained from volunteering can fill gaps in the workplace.⁵⁸ At an individual level this can turn into a competitive advantage in the labour market, as three-quarters of Britain's biggest employers prefer a candidate with volunteering experience over one without.⁵⁹ Furthermore, a survey by Reed Executive found that more than 70 per cent of employers agreed that employees with experience volunteering were more likely to get promoted and earn higher salaries.⁶⁰

One widely cited benefit to employers of supporting their employees to volunteer is the increase in the motivation and loyalty of their employees, which is related to staff retention. An expert we interviewed reflected:

You don't get so many sick days, you get a much higher contribution from the staff... It all means higher productivity of staff and higher retention of staff. It's about loyalty to the brand – staff are not going to walk away so easily if they're engaged personally with the company, with the community.

A number of surveys capture the effect of volunteering on staff loyalty and motivation. Barclays found that its volunteers were more likely than non-volunteers to recommend Barclays as an employer (67 per cent compared with 58 per cent).⁶¹ A 2009 vInspired survey found that nearly half of employers (48 per cent) said that job candidates with volunteering experience are more motivated than people without it.⁶² Other surveys have found a positive relationship between staff loyalty and corporate

social responsibility strategies more broadly – employers engaged in their communities tend to be more popular with their staff.⁶³

ESV is not necessarily cheap, but employers should recognise ESV as a long-term financial investment. The research suggests that short-term sacrifices – supporting staff with paid time off or providing match-funding for charitable causes – are likely to lead to longer term gains in productivity and staff loyalty, and a boost to the employer’s public image. A representative from B&Q, a corporate partner of the Scouts, suggested:

The money that’s being spent on [the employee’s] wages is being spent on the community, not in-store, so there’s going to have to be cover and all that sort of thing... But if you’re talking about social responsibility, brand reputation and a marketing point of view, there most definitely is a financial benefit to us to send our guys out to do volunteering.

In general, there is not a lot of hard evidence about the costs and benefits of ESV for an employer’s bottom line, but one employer was clear about the business case for being engaged in the community:

At the end of the day it’s not just about staff, it’s also about our customers and making sure that our customers think that we’re supporting what’s important to them in their communities... That gives them a positive perception of [us]... that ultimately will mean that hopefully they’ll think about us in the future or stay with us longer.

The global consultancy Corporate Citizenship has modelled how the costs involved in developing skills through volunteering compare with the costs involved in developing the same skills through traditional training and development routes. It found that it is marginally cheaper for organisations to develop skills through volunteering (£381 per volunteer per year) than through traditional training (£400 per volunteer per year). The analysis uses a conservative estimate of training costs (one of the companies in the research had training costs of around

£1,500 per person per year), showing that in many cases it is considerably more cost-effective for an organisation to support volunteering than to provide training for the same skills.⁶⁴ A European expert commented: ‘Nobody bats an eyelid about investing in some fancy training course. Any employee volunteering is done at a fraction of the cost.’

Case study: National Grid

The National Grid, also a corporate partner with The Scout Association, provides an extensive volunteering offer to employees, including community action days, placements with charitable partners for 6 to 12 months, and working with local schools.

A representative from the National Grid told us that ESV has become integral to their HR strategy: ‘Volunteering is a cost-effective way for us to build capability for the organisation.’ In addition to the formal partnerships, there is also support for employees volunteering for their own causes, including paying for expenses and providing match-funding. In total, 1,477 staff members volunteered in 2012–13, out of a total of around 10,000.

The National Grid is currently developing ‘Community Action and Skills Hub’, an online interactive tool offering a menu of volunteering options to their employees with information about the different skills they can gain. The HR strategy is based on the idea that people retain and build more knowledge volunteering (which is ‘experiential’) than on a traditional training course.

In 2013 45 volunteers from the National Grid supported the Special Olympics GB Summer Games. An internal evaluation found that 85 per cent of volunteers felt more positive about the National Grid following their volunteering experience, and 100 per cent felt they made a positive impact on the community.⁶⁵

Making sure that voluntary organisations benefit from ESV

Voluntary organisations can benefit from ESV through having additional people working with them, and in the skills and expertise that volunteers bring. Some voluntary organisations such as the Scouts do not currently have enough adult volunteers to meet the huge demand, and therefore ESV can help to fill those gaps. Furthermore, skills-based volunteering can be useful for improving the productivity of receiving organisations; for example the organisations can benefit from the business acumen and financial know-how of some corporate volunteers.

However, it is clearly important to get the ‘fit’ right between individual volunteer and receiving voluntary organisation in order to maximise the benefits. One expert said:

If you don't get the fit right it can be detrimental to the work of the organisation... It's about the planning and about the communication, and all parties understanding that they don't have to go through with it... A lot of voluntary organisations aren't confident enough with big companies to say no or to ask them to cover their costs.

The needs of voluntary organisations must be adequately factored in when establishing volunteering partnerships. Corporate partners certainly need to consider any costs incurred by the voluntary organisation in hosting volunteers. A report by the Corporate Volunteering Network in 2012 suggested that some businesses have unrealistic expectations of charities, which they often have to strain to meet.⁶⁶ A representative from a voluntary organisation said:

Some people from professional backgrounds sometimes have a very clear view of how to run things, and may find the organisation's way of running things not in line with their views.

Ensuring that the ‘fit’ is right is also about making sure that volunteers are involved in tasks that are adding the most value to receiving organisations. An employer commented that there was no point in volunteers painting a Scout hut that does not need painting. Another told us:

Our key goal is firstly to ensure that it's a piece of work that genuinely needs doing, that can genuinely add value to our partner because it can get something done that they don't have the resources to do themselves.

Barclays found that some partner organisations involved in its ESV programme believed it would be more effective if the volunteers used their expertise in marketing and business instead of taking on practical tasks such as painting and decorating.

Brokering agencies can be an effective means of avoiding some of these pitfalls, by making sure that the agendas of both parties complement one another before any partnership is entered into. Employers that we interviewed described the best partnerships as those based on trust and openness. One observed:

It is about there being a good relationship between the two organisations, about them being open and honest with each other [about] what the aims and objectives are for a potential partnership.

Encouraging more ESV

There are a number of potential barriers in the way of a radical expansion of ESV. Barriers for employees may include the time commitment, work pressures, or a lack of information about the programmes from their employer.⁶⁷ The Institute for Volunteering Research found that paid time off was the most important factor in encouraging employees to take up ESV opportunities (reported by 4 out of 5 employees), followed by exercising choice and gaining skills.

Employers often have financial concerns about their employees volunteering. While ESV may have top-level support in a large organisation, the first line managers with financial targets to meet might find it more difficult to implement. One employer remarked:

You might have a really engaged manager, but if something else comes up, the nice-to-do things are the things that go first... If you can't run your shop then you haven't got anything to promote.

A survey by vInspired found that over half of managers (53 per cent) were concerned about the financial and time costs of allowing their employees to volunteer.⁶⁸ However, the authors report that there was less concern among managers who had previously supported employees to volunteer, suggesting that either the costs are being overestimated, or the benefits underestimated. As stated above, it is important that ESV is seen as a long-term investment, and it must be acknowledged that it might incur some short-term costs. One employer suggested it is also important that first line managers are valued by senior managers for encouraging volunteering among employees.

There are some financial incentives in place to encourage employers to develop ESV programmes. In the private sector, HMRC offers tax relief to businesses supporting staff to volunteer during work time. One example from the public sector is that the UK Government piloted a scheme to cover pension costs for public sector staff volunteering overseas with Voluntary Service Overseas, committing £13 million between 2008 and 2011.⁶⁹

But it is unclear to what extent these financial incentives encourage employers to support employee volunteering. None of the employers we interviewed cited tax breaks as a key motivation for ESV. One commented:

It's not on the radar... There are other things that generate more value – making you employer of choice, improving engagement which helps productivity, attracting new starters – those things are more valuable than doing it for the tax breaks.

Another reflected: 'If you're doing it because you're going to be incentivised to do it then probably it's not going to work... people see through that.'

However, a Populus report for The Scout Association found that 4 in 10 employers who did not support ESV would do so if there was funding available, suggesting that further financial incentives could be effective at least among some employers.⁷⁰

Employers we spoke to said that creating a positive culture around volunteering and good lines of communication within an

organisation were important for successful ESV. Challenges reported to us include the perceived barriers around the legal requirements of some placements – for instance, employees not taking on a role as a trustee because of concerns about personal liability – and safeguarding when working with young people or vulnerable adults. Better communication and advice on these issues may go some way to alleviating these concerns.

The Scout Association reports that there is little evidence of organisations putting in place formal policies to make sure that the workplace gains from employees volunteering – for instance, through related appraisals and objective setting – so some of the benefits may be lost.

As mentioned above, brokers can have an important role in making ESV programmes successful. According to vInspired, 80 per cent of large companies and 50 per cent of small businesses find it useful to use brokers to help with supporting employee volunteering.⁷¹ More public recognition of the value of these programmes is also important if their number is to be increased.

Recommendations

It is clear that the Scouting has a positive impact on the character skills and employability of young members and adult leaders. Through its values of self-improvement, teamwork and skills acquisition, Scouting enhances the lives and prospects of those who join up, especially those who partake in Scouting in the teenage years.

However, more can be done to ensure that Scouting boosts employability while retaining its practical and straightforward reputation for fun. Policy makers and employers must give greater recognition to the benefits of the Scouts not only to youth development but also to improving the employability skills of adult volunteers.

In addition, through supporting more of their own employees to volunteer, employers should recognise that they have much to gain in increasing the personal development and loyalty of their staff, while at the same time offering an important lifeline to organisations such as the Scouts which are facing an acute shortage of adult volunteers.

A greater focus on employability is consistent with the core aim of the Scouts since its inception:

contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities.⁷²

We have a number of recommendations for employers, government and The Scout Association, which focus on two broad themes: expanding and improving ESV schemes in the UK, and making the link between Scouts and employability more obvious.

Expanding Scouts' potential: employer support volunteering

Tens of thousands of young people are missing out on the significant development opportunities that are provided by the Scouts because of the shortage of adult volunteers. Our research suggests that this could be solved by a radical expansion of ESV.

These are our recommendations:

- *Employers in the public and private sector should develop ambitious employee volunteering schemes and link them to continuing personal development strategies.* Our research presents a strong business case for encouraging employees to volunteer with organisations like the Scouts because the skills they acquire can make them more effective in the workplace, and increase loyalty and retention, all of which can have an impact on the employer's 'bottom line'. The evidence suggests that formal programmes involving partnerships with voluntary organisations, and which are open to a large number of volunteers, can have the most positive impact on all involved. However, businesses and public sector organisations must ensure that programmes remain flexible to the needs of the volunteer, and that employees can exercise sufficient choice in how they volunteer – two factors that contribute to a larger uptake of ESV programmes. Measures to support staff should include paid time off, flexible working arrangements, and time-in-lieu wherever possible.
- *Business consortia, youth organisations and HR professionals should work together in the context of the Step Up To Serve campaign to develop a strong rationale and specific frameworks for ESV.* The Step Up To Serve campaign was launched in November 2013 by Prince Charles and all three major political party leaders. It aims to increase the number of young people taking part in 'social action' (practical action in the service of others) to 50 per cent by 2020. This ambitious and unprecedented campaign relies on partnerships and pledges across third sector and private sector businesses, and provides an excellent opportunity to galvanise employers to support ESV. Achieving the campaign's goal will not be accomplished without radically expanding the number of adult volunteers available to support the increased number of

young people taking part in social action. Specifically, within the context of the Step Up To Serve campaign, business consortia (such as BITC and CBI), young organisations (such as those organisations that are apart of the networks Generation Change and Youth United) and HR professionals should work together to:

- calculate the return on investment to businesses and the third sector of participating in well-structured ESV, and give business the tools to prove and increase return on investment
- enumerate guidelines and principles to ensure voluntary organisations offer good ‘fit’ and ‘purpose’ to volunteers
- ensure that employers have realistic expectations about what employee volunteers will be able to do with voluntary organisations.

The Step Up To Serve campaign can serve as the primary vehicle for answering some of the key questions around ESV and providing the frameworks for extending successful schemes across the UK.

- *Employers should use a range of incentives to encourage a greater take-up of volunteering opportunities among employees.* While a number of employees will be motivated by the skills they gain from voluntary placements and a sense of satisfaction from giving to the community, employers should consider putting in place further social incentives to increase the rate of volunteering among staff. These could include publishing employee volunteering league tables, establishing volunteering targets in personal development plans, or explicitly linking volunteering to promotion and reviews.
- *Employers should develop partnerships with broker organisations to ensure the best possible fit between employees’ skills and the needs of voluntary organisations, and help employers understand the skills that employees will be developing from different activities.* The best ESV programmes entail partnerships between employers and a brokering organisation, such as the online hub of volunteering

opportunities provided by the National Grid in partnership with their broker Community Service Volunteers. These relationships help to ensure that employees have a range of volunteering options to choose from, and that there is a good fit between employees' skills and the needs of voluntary organisations. Moreover, a broker organisation can work with employers to understand what skills are being developed through different volunteering activities. This can help employers to align their budgets for skills and training with their ESV programme. The savings made by businesses on training course costs could be used to pay the broker organisation.

- *Voluntary organisations should develop recognised accreditation schemes that formally recognise the skills obtained by volunteers.* In order to boost the numbers of employers supporting their employees to volunteer, there needs to be an increased public recognition of its value, which could be achieved through various accreditation schemes. The Wood Badge, developed by the Scouts for adult volunteers, is one example of such an award that could help employers understand and quantify the skills that their employees are receiving as part of their volunteering experiences.

Making the employability link more explicit: Scouting and employability

While the majority of people we interviewed believed that Scouts' activities already taught employability skills, many thought the link with employability could be more explicit and that some additional activities should be considered.

These are our recommendations:

- *Older Scouts should take part in discussions and activities directly tied to employability.* The Scout Association should strongly encourage Explorer leaders to offer group discussions with Explorer Scouts – particularly older Explorers – about employability, skills learned in Scouting and future transitions

(whether to university, work-based training or employment). These discussions should be optional, and could take place once a school term. Explorer leaders could draw on a range of individuals and organisations, including local businesses, to facilitate or contribute to these discussions.

- *Continuous ‘guided reflection’ must become a core element of Scouting activities.* Recognition of the benefits of Scouting depends primarily on young people’s ability to draw on their Scouting experience in job interviews. Scout leaders and The Scout Association must help Scouts to recognise and articulate the skills that they have gained in a way that employers understand. To do this, The Scout Association should encourage Scout leaders to provide guided reflection to the Scouts on the applicability of skills learned through Scouting activities to the workplace.
- *Scout leaders should encourage local businesses to run employability activities.* The Scout Association should support senior volunteers to audit local businesses and strongly encourage local businesses to become more involved in employability activities. Activities could include on-site visits, information sessions and workshops or offers of work experience for older Explorer Scouts. In addition to highlighting the skills acquired, The Scout Association should strongly emphasise the power of its networks and the opportunities it can provide to young Scouts.
- *Develop and promote employability-relevant Scouting awards.* The Scouts now offers a number of activities and awards that are directly relevant to skills that are useful in employment and higher education. The Scout Association should take this further and look at how certain awards can be moulded to fit the demands of vocational accreditation without damaging the recreational – fun – aspects of Scouting. The Scouts should also do more to highlight employment-related activities and awards on its website. The Scout Association should make efforts to communicate to employers the value and relevance of its top awards.

Recommendations

- *Increase the breadth of activities, for example through further youth social action projects.* The Scouts' objective of making a positive impact in local communities through social action campaigns such as Scout Community Week is welcome, and should be expanded. Other initiatives with a political focus, such as Scout Question Time, media training, the public relations activity badge and other activities involving parliament were popular with the Scouts we spoke to. These activities could help to break down the traditional perception that The Scout Association is solely involved in outdoor activities.
- *Lead a campaign highlighting the successful employment routes of ex-Scouts.* The Scout Association should consider running a large-scale survey of former members to gain an insight into what Scouts go on to do professionally and how their Scouting experience helped them. This information should then be fed into Explorer Scout groups and presented publicly in national media if possible. The Scout Association should also identify high profile business leaders to lead awareness raising campaigns explicitly highlighting both the fun and the skills and employability benefits of being a member of the Scouts.

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Despite the recent economic upturn, youth unemployment remains stubbornly high. Employers often attribute this to young people lacking the skills that they are looking for: structural changes to the UK labour market – the rise of the service sector and the decline of skilled manufacturing – have led to a stronger emphasis on ‘character’ skills that young people can often lack. How to build these character skills, such as communication, self-direction and ability to work in a team, is a question that has also been steadily moving up the political agenda.

Yet the current ability of schools to instil ‘character’ through the curriculum is constrained, which has focused attention instead on non-formal avenues of learning. This report seeks to add to the emerging evidence base on the importance of building character in young people through extra-curricular activity, taking the Scouts as its key subject matter, which, since their establishment in 1907, have been one of the most recognisable programmes for extracurricular activities and youth development.

Our findings suggest that Scouting provides young people with the skills and attitudes that employers are increasingly looking out for. Crucially, it also shows that the employability of adult Scout leaders improves, as they are able to bring the skills they learn into their workplaces. Therefore the report recommends widespread adoption of employer-supported volunteering, both to make employees more effective at their jobs through continuing professional development, but also to set off a chain reaction of social action across the UK.

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