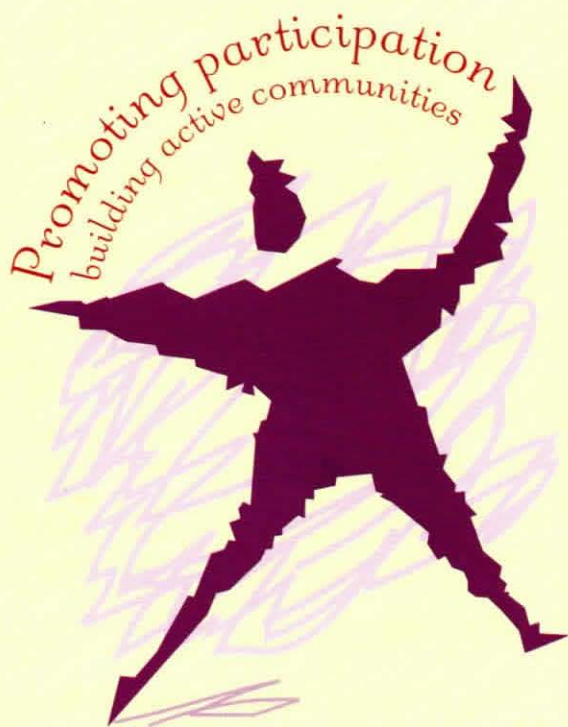


Research on behalf of
Volunteer Development Agency

Attitudes of students at
Queens University Belfast
towards volunteering.



me?
I'm not a volunteer!

Introduction

In the summer of 1999, Ciáran Toner, a student at The Queen's University Belfast, completed a piece of research on behalf of The Volunteer Development Agency examining the attitudes of students at Queen's University towards volunteering. Whilst previous research has recognised the considerable contribution young people make to voluntary activities, the researcher was keen to address why a large proportion of the students in the university did not consider themselves as 'volunteers'. To do this, the researcher needed to examine the perception students held about volunteering, and to question their understanding of 'who is a volunteer?'

The research recognised the breadth of work undertaken previously by the National Centre for Volunteering, as well as local organisations such as the Volunteer Development Agency, Voluntary Service Belfast and Youthnet.

What the researcher set out to examine

The research project set out to explore the following suggested points about young people and volunteering:

- Many young people would not consider themselves as volunteers even though they may make an active contribution to their community without any concern for payment.
- Most young people see volunteering as a charity/fundraising activity, which may deter them from becoming involved in other activities which benefit society in more subtle ways.
- Young people often perceive volunteers as middle class, middle aged, Christians and in Northern Ireland terms, more likely to be Catholic.
- The term 'volunteer' does not appeal to young people, and the image projected is not attractive.
- Students may be more likely to become involved in volunteering than some other young people because of the opportunities they are presented through Queen's University.

The research was conducted through a comprehensive questionnaire using mainly closed questions, taking account of the need to handle personal information sensitively.

Who responded to the questionnaire?

52%	Male	Female	48%
-----	------	--------	-----

82.7%	Under 25	Over 25	17.3%
-------	----------	---------	-------

86.7%	Under Graduates	Post-Graduates	13.4%
-------	-----------------	----------------	-------

Of those who responded

80%	Didn't consider themselves as volunteers	Perceived themselves as Volunteers	20%
-----	--	------------------------------------	-----

54.7%	Do no voluntary work	Do in fact do some form of voluntary work	45.3%
-------	----------------------	---	-------

Of those respondents who consider themselves to be volunteers

61.2%	Have volunteered for less than 3 years	Have volunteered for more than 3 years	38.8%
-------	--	--	-------

What did the researcher uncover?

- Those students who see themselves as volunteers, had a much broader view of what could be considered as voluntary work. This strengthened the suggestion that many young people may in fact be volunteers but are not aware of their status because they consider their activities non-voluntary.
- Contrary to the suggestion that volunteering has a very negative image, only 29% of those who did not perceive themselves as volunteers felt that volunteering had a poor image.
- 70% of those who responded felt that the opportunities available to them as students made no difference to their view of volunteering.

The views of students' regarding 'who usually volunteers' showed some interesting perceptions. Most students believed that volunteers come in all shapes and sizes, and there is no real stereotype.

Fig 1. Students views of who volunteers by class

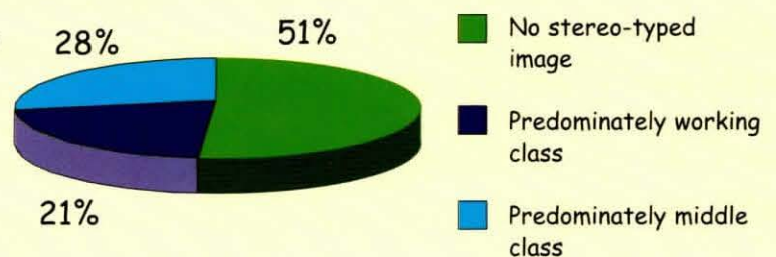


Fig 3. Students' views of who volunteers by Religion

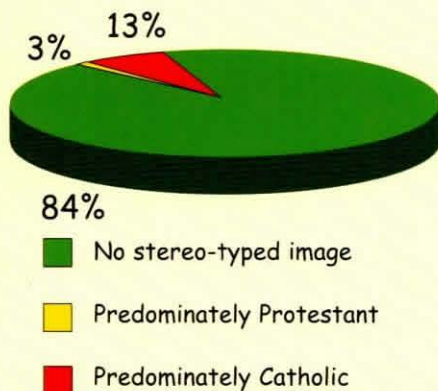
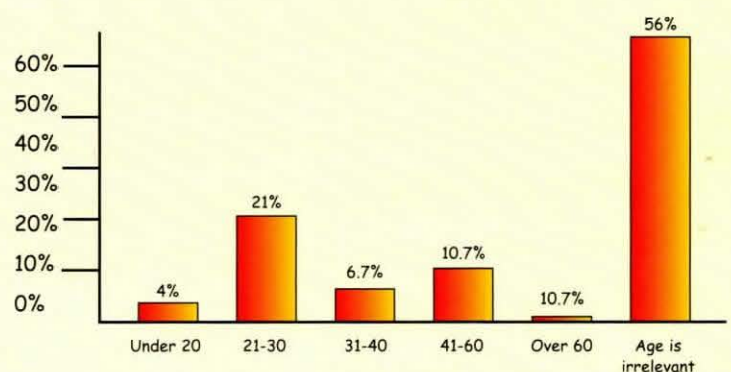


Fig 3. Students' views of who volunteers by Age



- Most of the students' responses indicated that political interest and level of education were irrelevant in terms of motivation to become a volunteer.

Why do students volunteer?

All those who responded felt that at least one of the following benefits would motivate them to volunteer:

- Volunteering is morally rewarding
- Volunteering gives a defining role in society
- Volunteering might be something you just want to do!
- Volunteering enhances employability
- Volunteering provides an interest

81% would be attracted by two or more of these benefits.

Why don't all students seek these benefits?

Almost 88% of respondents stated that they would be put off volunteering by two or more of the following factors:

- Too time consuming
- No financial reward - might be out of pocket
- Apathy
- Undesirable image
- Would affect benefits entitlements
- Disagree with the concept of volunteering

So what else are the students involved in?

The researcher asked the students about their involvement in clubs and societies. A staggering 76% held membership of clubs or societies and almost 50% belonged to more than one. When asked about roles held within these clubs, 60.7% of those holding membership also undertook some position of responsibility for which they received no payment. From this information, the researcher was able to identify that of all those who took part, **25.3% were volunteering yet did not see themselves as 'volunteers'**.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the research:

- Many students are in fact volunteering though they would not consider themselves 'volunteers'.
- Students who are not currently involved in volunteering appear to hold a fairly narrow view of what activities are undertaken by volunteers.
- The student respondents had no real perception of a 'typical volunteer', and the factors explored were generally considered to be irrelevant.
- The image of volunteering is not perceived to be the main barrier to participation.
- Students consider volunteering is no different for them than for any other young person.

The Volunteer Development Agency can relate to many of the findings in this report; in particular the number of people who carry out voluntary activity without the recognition, support or resources they deserve.

If you have any more information about what encourages young people to volunteer, the Volunteer Development Agency would be keen to know more.

Many thanks to Ciáran Toner and the Northern Ireland Science Shop for researching and compiling the information for The Volunteer Development Agency

Volunteer Development Agency
Annsgate House
70 - 74 Ann Street
Belfast BT1 4EH
Tel: (028) 9023 6100
Fax: (028) 9023 7570
www.volunteering-ni.org