

# The Whole Picture - Understanding the scope, scale and impact of volunteering in museums and galleries in Scotland

Summary Report  
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**Museums  
Galleries  
Scotland**

Supporting Scotland's Museums

The WholePicture: understanding the scope, scale and impact of volunteering  
in museums and galleries in Scotland: executive summary

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## **1.1 Introduction**

Volunteers and the roles they perform play a vital part in the arts and cultural sector in Scotland. They are fundamental to the operation and sustainability of many museums and galleries across Scotland, often ensuring the viability of places and at the very least enhancing the offer that is provided to visitors.

Volunteering also has a role to play in contributing to the delivery of national outcomes, including those specifically related to the sector but also to the achievement of wider government agendas.

This report is the executive summary of a research project, commissioned by Museums Galleries Scotland, which provides an in-depth understanding of the scale, scope and impact of volunteering in the museums and galleries sector in Scotland. For a full copy of the report, please contact Museums Galleries Scotland.

## **1.2 A major contribution to the arts and culture sector in Scotland**

With over 400 museums and galleries across Scotland, there is enormous breadth and diversity in the sector.

Around a third of museums and galleries who participated in the research were solely reliant on volunteers. Volunteers were fundamental to the viability and sustainability of many of the museums and galleries involved in the research and, without their support, it is evident that many venues would be unable to survive. Volunteers take on a wide variety of roles, covering all aspects of museum and gallery operations.

Without the support of volunteers in many of these venues, the overall cultural offer that would be available in Scotland would be affected in a detrimental way.

Where museums and galleries do have a complement of paid staff, volunteers provide additional services and take on additional roles that would not be feasible without them. This all adds to the depth and quality of the experience that visitors, volunteers and staff get from their involvement and interaction with the venue, and ultimately strengthens the cultural offer across the whole sector.

#### SUMMARY

- 94% of responding organisations used volunteers
- 31% of responding organisations were staffed exclusively by volunteers
- 17 out of 46 organisations said their museum/gallery would not function without volunteers

### 1.3 Volunteer numbers are increasing

The research has indicated that there are thousands of people volunteering in museums and galleries across Scotland and these numbers are increasing.

Encouragingly, there was no clear relationship between the change in volunteer numbers and associated declines in staff numbers. It was evident that numbers of paid staff have remained relatively constant and with increasing volunteer numbers, this represents an increase in the available workforce for museums and galleries. Some organisations highlighted how the growth and development of their volunteer programme had enabled them to grow their staff, for example in one case with the employment of a Volunteer Manager.

The profile of volunteers has remained similar to that seen in 2009, predominantly female, aged 65 and over, retired and highly educated. This was based on the respondents to the volunteer survey, yet it was also evident from the other surveys and case study sessions that a considerable number of young people and students also volunteer, albeit with different motivations.

#### SUMMARY

- Reported total of over 2,600 volunteers in 68 organisations

### 1.4 Volunteers have strong altruistic motivations

Motivations for volunteering are very clearly personal to the individual, but there are some clear differences when you consider the types of people that are volunteering. Similarly what they get out of their experience differs according to their profile.

For the older, retired volunteer, motivations are largely altruistic, with a strong desire to want to give something back and to specifically help the

museum or gallery. Social motivations, as well as outcomes, also featured very strongly, with people enjoying meeting new people and feeling part of a team.

For younger volunteers, motivations were largely intellectual and economic, gaining work experience, skills and knowledge to help them secure relevant employment. Social outcomes also featured, with enjoyment and meeting new people mentioned.

#### SUMMARY

- 99% of volunteer respondents rated their experience as very good or good
- 82% of all volunteer respondents were motivated by helping the museum/gallery; 73% by a personal interest in the subject; 58% to meet new people
- In terms of economic motivations, 20% of volunteer respondents were motivated by learning new skills to get a job; 14% for career development

### 1.5 Social outcomes were important to volunteers

Nearly all volunteers felt that volunteering in a museum or gallery had been an enjoyable experience. A strong theme from the research was the importance of the social and 'people' elements of the volunteering experience. This included meeting and working with others and interacting with the public.

For those who were retired, volunteering provided a replacement workplace, in particular the elements of camaraderie and team spirit which many missed.

#### SUMMARY

- 99% of volunteers agreed (64% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had been an enjoyable experience
- 49% of volunteers agreed (13% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had improved their social life
- 72% of volunteers agreed (29% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had made them feel more part of the community they lived in

## 1.6 The transformational effect of volunteering

Volunteers regularly illustrated how the volunteering experience had had a transformational effect on their lives. Impacts on health and self-confidence were very positive. Nearly half of volunteer respondents stated that their self-confidence had improved and a third said that their mental health had improved.

Often staff were able to articulate impacts on volunteers that they may not have necessarily identified themselves. For example at one of the museums, staff discussed that fact that volunteers often came to them after a specific period of illness or bereavement, stating that volunteering 'filled the gap' and gave them the motivation to get out of the house.

Furthermore, most volunteers said that the experience had increased their knowledge of history and culture, clearly demonstrating the impact of volunteering on the individual's knowledge and learning. Three quarters also agreed that volunteering had provided them with new skills, and around a third said that they had acquired new skills that would be useful in future employment. As the majority of volunteers surveyed were retired, this finding is unsurprising as it is unlikely they would be looking for further employment, but this is a significant benefit for students and younger people.

### SUMMARY

- 93% of volunteers agreed (52% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had increased their knowledge of history and culture
- 73% of volunteers agreed (31% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had provided them with new skills
- 32% of volunteers agreed (15% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had provided them with skills that would be useful in the future
- 14% of volunteers agreed (4% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had improved their physical health
- 44% of volunteers agreed (12% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had increased their self confidence
- 33% of volunteers agreed (7% strongly) that volunteering at the museum/gallery had improved their mental health
- 62% of volunteers agreed (15% strongly) that volunteering in general promotes wellbeing

## **1.7 Museums play a key role in local communities**

The important role that museums and galleries played in the local community was highlighted throughout the research. They often provided additional facilities that would not otherwise have been available for local people, such as a café or shop. This was particularly relevant in smaller towns and villages where museums were more reliant on volunteers to survive and therefore these were the communities where closure would be more strongly felt.

The role of volunteers was important in this as they provided the link to the local community, encouraging people to come through the doors and engaging with them when they visit, whatever their reason for visiting. This ambassador role also operated in wider day-to-day life, with volunteers often encouraging visits from friends, family or acquaintances.

As well as the offer for local people, the museums acted as an attractor to tourists in some locations. Again, in areas where there were few other attractions, the museum or gallery may be the sole reason for a visit. This can bring a boost to the local economy as people may spend in the shops or eat in a café or restaurant, for example.

## **1.8 The economic contribution of volunteering is significant**

Volunteering makes a significant economic contribution. Whilst it is difficult to accurately put a total figure on this for the whole sector, we have produced an estimate based on the responses received to the survey and applied them more widely. Full responses to the questions that enable this calculation to be produced were received from 19 organisations and an average was produced which was applied to the whole sector. This figure from the survey indicated a value of around £5.3 million, based on the average number of hours volunteered and using an average museum wage (£9 an hour).

This figure represents the economic contribution of volunteer time and does not take account of the added economic impacts that are evident. On an individual basis, volunteers have gained skills and experience, which will enable them to get a job in the sector, with some examples of this cited throughout the research. At a wider level, the impacts of attracting visitors to the area will produce economic benefits, in terms of spend in shops and restaurants, as mentioned in the previous section.

#### SUMMARY

- For the 19 organisations that provided data on the number of volunteer hours, there was an estimated economic value of around £250,000 (based on an average wage of £9 an hour for a collections or visitor services assistant). Given that the range of volunteer roles is varied, it can be assumed that this figure is a minimum and could be far higher than this.
- If you take an average figure for economic value and apply it across the sector to the 404 museums and galleries, there is an estimated economic value of £5.3 million.

### 1.9 Key success factors that support a sustainable volunteer programme

The research has identified a number of key factors relating to the infrastructure required to support and develop a successful volunteer programme.

A clear volunteering framework for the organisation was seen as important for the delivery of a volunteer programme. It ensured clarity and consistency for both the organisation and volunteers, by articulating the role of volunteers, expectations from the organisation and processes for recruitment and management. The extent to which this framework was formalised is largely dependent on the size of the volunteer programme. For smaller places, the need for a rigorous structure is less vital than for larger organisations who have to coordinate hundreds of volunteers.

For some organisations, it may be advisable to develop further detailed processes that feed into the framework, for example for recruitment, induction or training. Even in smaller organisations, the value of recording processes and procedures was recognised to ensure consistency over time.

The role of a volunteer coordinator was recognised as important in the smooth operation of a volunteer programme. For larger organisations this tended to be a paid member of staff. For smaller organisations, having one person as a point of contact and someone to communicate and coordinate volunteers, was seen as crucial. The role was highly valued where it did exist, among volunteers and paid staff alike.

More generally, the success of the role was down to the individual concerned, with the need for someone who is approachable and able to spend time with

the volunteers. They often have to act as a negotiator and provide the link between volunteers and the rest of the paid staff.

#### SUMMARY

- 71% of organisations had a volunteering policy
- 20% of organisations employed a member of staff to manage volunteer recruitment and processes
- 39 out of 46 organisations provided training for volunteers, however only one had any form of accreditation associated with the training
- 21% of volunteer respondents found out about their current opportunity via word of mouth; 18% in the local press; and 15% directly by a member of museum/gallery staff
- 86% of volunteer respondents rated recruitment practices as good or very good

### **1.10 Museums make a considerable contribution to national agendas**

The research as a whole has illustrated how volunteering contributes to the achievement of many objectives, both for the arts and culture sector and for the Scottish Government.

The majority of respondents to all three surveys (around 90%) agreed that volunteering in museums and galleries had an important role to play in the following sector related objectives:

- increasing cultural participation, by maximising the number and range of people able to see collections, visit and enjoy museums
- providing a wide range of cultural experiences for enjoyment, development and learning
- deepening connections between museums and communities
- sharing knowledge and understanding between museums and communities

Increasing cultural participation received the most positive response from both museum directors and staff and volunteers, with around half of respondents strongly agreeing that volunteering contributes to this outcome. Overall, there was little difference between the views of volunteers and those of paid staff or directors. The majority of respondents also agreed that volunteering led to the promotion of wellbeing, (62% of volunteer respondents and 70% of museum

staff or directors). Furthermore, 86% of volunteers agree that volunteering contributes to stronger communities and 87% that it increases the quality of the cultural experience across Scotland.

*Going Further* also sets out the following aims for the museums and galleries sector in Scotland:

- Empower a diverse workforce to increase their potential for the benefit of the sector and beyond.
- Forge a sustainable future for sector organisations and encourage a culture of enterprise.

Volunteers identified the positive outcomes of volunteering to the sector overall, with 86% of volunteers agreeing that volunteering helped to ensure the institutional sustainability of museums and galleries and 69% of paid staff or directors. 71% of volunteers and 54% of paid staff or directors agreed that volunteering contributed to a high profile sector and nearly 90% of volunteers and 74% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering improved cultural experiences in Scotland and led to developing stronger communities.

60% of both types of respondents agreed that volunteering in museums and galleries contributed to a diverse workforce.

In terms of the national objectives, there was clear evidence of the contribution of volunteering to:

- Better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research innovation (National Outcome 3), via the considerable number of students and young people who choose to volunteer to get work experience and develop new skills to help them secure work in the museums sector.
- Strong, resilient and supportive communities, where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others (National Outcome 11)
- Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs (National Outcome 16), with volunteering and volunteers playing a vital role in the delivery of public services. The scope and breadth of the work that they undertake is extensive and diverse, all of which contributes to the overall cultural experience for visitors.

## SUMMARY

- 90% of volunteers and 88% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to increasing cultural participation by maximising the number and range of people able to see collections, visit and enjoy museums
- 91% of volunteers and 88% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to providing a wide range of cultural experiences for enjoyment, development and learning
- 91% of volunteers and 84% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to deepening the connections between museums and communities
- 62% of volunteers and 70% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to promoting wellbeing
- 87% of volunteers and 74% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to increasing the quality of the cultural experience across Scotland
- 86% of volunteers and 74% of paid staff and directors agreed that volunteering contributed to developing stronger communities, by providing opportunities for people to socialise and support their local community

### 1.11 Concluding comments

Acknowledging the vital role that volunteers play in the sustainability and viability of museums and galleries is an important part of maintaining the current cultural offer for Scotland and achieving success in the pursuit of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes and the aims of the *Going Further: National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*.

The contribution of volunteers in many museums and galleries ensures their existence and adds to the great mix and diversity in Scotland's cultural offer, helping to increase cultural participation, by maximising the number and range of people able to see collections and visit and enjoy museums.

Whilst the research has not provided evidence that increasing volunteer numbers has led to displacement of staff, it is necessary to acknowledge the time and resource that is required to support volunteers. They require time and support at all stages of involvement, including recruitment, induction and ongoing day-to-day work. The role of volunteer managers or coordinators was

highlighted as an important element of this, so any support that can be provided for organisations without this type of role is likely to be welcomed.

The impact of volunteering on individuals has emerged in many different ways throughout the research. As well as the social benefits that volunteers highlighted, a considerable number said that their health, wellbeing and self-confidence had improved as a result of their volunteering experience. Intellectual gains were also apparent, with many learning new skills and expanding their knowledge of history. For younger people in particular, this was particularly important in supporting their aspirations to work in the sector.

For some museums and galleries, resources to support the volunteer programme were limited. The inability to pay volunteer expenses was identified as one example of this, which in turn meant volunteers were unable to attend training, even if it were free. Any resource that can be provided to support such organisations with the provision of expenses to attend training or a fund to support exchange of experience visits are likely to be welcomed.

The profile of museum and gallery volunteers remains similar to 2009, namely older, retired people who volunteer to help the museum and give something back to the community. To be able to sustain the volunteer base, it will be important to consider how to recruit more young people into volunteering. Part of encouraging young people into the role may also involve ensuring that the job opportunities exist so that when they gain relevant experience they are able to utilise it in a relevant job and therefore retain the skills and experience gained within the sector.

Overall the research project has painted a positive picture of volunteering in museums and galleries across Scotland. Volunteers are highly motivated and enthusiastic individuals with a passion for helping their local museum and community. They enjoy what they do and gain real pleasure from meeting and interacting with fellow volunteers, staff and members of the public. For the future, it will be important to build on this strong volunteer base to ensure the sustainability of museums and galleries and contribute to the continued development of a rich and diverse cultural offer for Scotland.

