

Standing for Office: Time-Off Entitlements Communities and Local Government

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

December 2008

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Government should extend time off entitlements to include roles proposed in the consultation document, particularly to Youth Offender Panel members.

Recommendation 2: Government should extend the time of entitlement to include charity trustees.

Recommendation 3: Organisations should adopt youth participation principles to encourage and ensure meaningful engagement of young people on a board of trustees or in other governance roles.

Recommendation 4: Government should apply a consistent approach to rules about young people's involvement as charity trustees and remove age limits to those participating in governance roles in all forms of charitable organisations.

Recommendation 5: Government should support all sectors to introduce volunteering schemes and encourage employers to be flexible so that employees can take up volunteering opportunities.

Recommendation 6: Government should continue to utilise and support infrastructure and network systems to promote volunteering opportunities as charity trustees.

Key comments

4. NCVYS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Standing for Office: Time-Off Entitlements* and the focus it puts on recognising, appreciating and facilitating people to engage with civic roles, in particular as charity trustees.
5. NCVYS supports the personal benefits of undertaking civic roles highlighted in the document, including learning new skills which should be seen as part of ongoing personal development and training. Other personal benefits, especially for young people who volunteer as charity trustees, include developing self-esteem, gaining ownership of services for young people and the opportunity to make contacts and network. Organisations will also benefit from having younger people involved as trustees as they can gain a different perspective on issues, possibly by the very people the organisation is there to serve.
6. The proposals to extend time off entitlements to other roles, in particular Youth Offender Panel members¹, should be taken forward. These are highly important roles and the process of fulfilling the position should be facilitated as much as possible. Youth offender panel meetings are a crucial part of the youth justice process and local community engagement. Supporting volunteers to participate in these meetings is essential to effectively and efficiently steering a young person through the youth justice system.

Recommendation 1: Government should extend time off entitlements to include roles proposed in the consultation document, particularly to Youth Offender Panel members.

¹ Further information on youth offender panels is available via:
<http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/GetInvolved/Volunteering/YouthOffenderPanels/>

7. NCVYS would fully support the extension of time off entitlements to include charity trustees. Although the variety and breadth of organisations within the sector mean that it is harder to draw consistency across similar organisations, as described in the document, charity trustees play an important strategic role for all organisations. Similar to that of a member of a governing body of an educational establishment which is already covered by current legislation.
8. The costs for employers to enable people to volunteer as charity trustees is a real consideration, especially as many trustees also work for third sector organisations. However, this would lead to the argument that government should support organisations to allow their staff to take up positions as charity trustees.

Recommendation 2: Government should extend the time of entitlement to include charity trustees.

9. Problems with engaging young people with trustee boards of charities should continue to be challenged, especially for organisations that work directly with young people. NCVYS is an example of an organisation that has responded to this and has recruited a representative from its young person's group, ENVOY, to sit on the trustee board. Having a young person on the board ensures that young people are fully involved in the strategic planning and decision-making of organisations that are meant to support and work with them.
10. The document considers barriers to participation in trustee or governance roles. These barriers can be the same as those which prevent people from committing to regular volunteering, for example lack of time and access to opportunities. However, lack of knowledge about the role of a trustee and the perceptions of charity trustees, e.g. being generally older people, could put people off this specific role. People might also think that they need specific experience to become a trustee and are worried about being held accountable for high-level strategic decisions.
11. In particular young people might not know much about the role of a charity trustee and might not see the relevance or benefits to them getting involved with such a role. If organisations are to engage young people it is important that they understand and fully implement youth participation principles. Organisations wanting to involve young people should utilise resources, materials and advice provided by experts such as Participation Works².

Recommendation 3: Organisations should adopt youth participation principles to encourage and ensure meaningful engagement of young people on a board of trustees or in other governance roles.

12. There is currently no age limit to be a director of a charitable company, where a director is seen as a trustee. However, the trustees of a trust or of an unincorporated association legally have to be over 18 years of age. The Office of the Third Sector and the Charity Commission are currently considering a new corporate form for charities, the Charitable Incorporated Organisation³.

² Participation Works is a consortium of six leading children and young people's organisations, including NCVYS. Further information on Participation Works is available via:

<http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>

³ At the time of writing the consultation on the Charitable Incorporated Organisations is available via:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Consultations/current_consultations/cio.aspx

13. Enforcing age limits obviously restricts young people's involvement in governance roles. NCVYS supports measures to remove barriers to young people's participation as charity trustees and would encourage Government to introduce a consistent approach to age limits.

Recommendation 4: Government should apply a consistent approach to rules about young people's involvement as charity trustees and remove age limits to participating in governance roles in all forms of charitable organisations.

14. In order to increase knowledge about the role of trustees Government needs to continue to support Volunteer Centres and websites such as do-it.org.uk and the Charity Trustee Network⁴ to raise awareness. Community and voluntary sector infrastructure organisations should be used to disseminate information about trustee opportunities within the sector. Links need to be established with other sectors to promote the role of charity trustee and engage a wide variety of people to fulfil trustee vacancies.
15. Some statutory and private sector organisations already have volunteering schemes in place to encourage and support employees to participate in voluntary activities. This good practice needs to be spread and encouraged. It is also another avenue for promoting voluntary roles such as charity trustees.
16. Although existing volunteer recruitment routes, such as Volunteer Centres and do-it.org.uk, are contributing to the expansion in volunteering, more work needs to be done. As the document states, 93% of charities have between one and five trustee vacancies. As previously mentioned knowledge of what a trustee does, realising the importance of the role and the transferable skills that it offers, all need to be promoted throughout all sectors.
17. The document suggests adding information on third sector governance roles, such as charity trustees, to the employer pack. This would be another way to promote the role but if an organisation does this, it has to ensure that it supports employees to fulfil that role, for example by being flexible with employment times.

Recommendation 5: Government should support all sectors to introduce volunteering schemes and encourage employers to be flexible to enable employees to take up volunteering opportunities.

18. In order to encourage young adults, disabled groups, black and minority ethnic groups and those with lower incomes to participate in trustee or other governance positions, accessible information needs to be made available. Organisations should utilise infrastructure systems and networks that support these groups in order to access and promote volunteering opportunities. Furthermore, employers need to demonstrate that they recognise the benefits of encouraging staff to participate in trustee and governance roles so that people are not worried about conflicts with work priorities. Trustee roles need to be made appealing and exciting, demonstrating that they can offer transferable skills and experience at a strategic decision-making level which an employee might not have in their job.

Recommendation 6: Government should continue to utilise and support infrastructure and network systems to promote volunteering opportunities as charity trustees.

⁴ The Charity Trustee Network has launched a trustee finder application on its website. Further information is available via: <http://www.trusteenet.org.uk/jobs-search>