

Volunteering England Annual Membership Return 2009/10

Key Findings

Institute for Volunteering Research

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Introduction

The Annual Return for Volunteer Centres (ARVC – formerly The Annual Membership Return (AMR)) enables the collection of baseline data from Volunteer Centres (VCs) in England. This report attempts to give a general picture of the network, whilst also exploring the inherent variation within it. Section 1 analyses the findings at the national level. Sections 2-10 break the findings down regionally in data tables.

The ARVC was collected through an online survey, distributed to VCs in England via email with a link to the online survey in September 2010. The data contained in the ARVC 2009/10 relates to the financial year from 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010 and therefore does include the Volunteer Centre network's involvement in the Department for Work and Pension Work Focused Volunteering Programme.

The online survey collects data on the nature of the area served by VCs, funding, participation in partnerships and staffing levels. It also asks VCs to provide statistics on the number of enquiries received by them and the breakdown of these into gender, age and ethnicity.

There were few changes and additions to the survey questions in this year's ARVC. However, the population of the survey changed during this survey year from all VCs in England (approximately 300) to include only category six members of Volunteering England, that is Volunteer Centres who have or are working towards VCQA (261 at the point of survey).

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is currently undertaking a review of the data collection process to determine if it is the best way to collect the strongest data from VCs. There remain considerable issues surrounding the data collection and the categories used. In particular, the interpretation of the number of total "enquiries" varies among VCs. For example, some VCs count one individual as one enquiry (whether they are phoning, emailing, visiting or a combination of all three) whereas other VCs count every point of contact with any individual as an enquiry.

The data collection raised questions around the consistency and reliability of data and on some occasions extreme outliers have been removed. Figures also suggest that some integrated VCs (that is, Volunteer Centres which are part of another agency, commonly a Council for Voluntary Service) find it difficult to separate their discrete data from their host organisations, particularly around funding sources. The degree of variability within regions as to the size, scale, nature and funding streams of VCs also makes regional analysis problematic.

Throughout the report percentages refer to the percentage of respondents who answered the particular question not the overall number of respondents to the survey. In total 203 VCs completed the ARVC out of 261 VCs in England who are members of Volunteering England (78%).

Given these issues the results of this survey should be used cautiously.

General Information

As can be seen from Table 1a approximately one third of VCs in England are independent organisations with the remaining two-thirds integrated with another organisation. The overwhelming majority of these are integrated with their local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). The medium trend of increased integration that was seen between 2004/05 and 2007/08 appears to have slowed considerably and there has been a stabilisation of the number of independent VCs to approximately a third. However, even the trend towards integration was not straightforward as in some cases it was not the VC being subsumed into the CVS but rather the VC expanding its functions to become a broader CVS organisation.

Some VCs had no full-time or part-time staff and were completely reliant on volunteers. However, this was the exception as the vast majority of VCs have at least one paid member of staff. The mean number of full-time staff was two and the mean number of part-time staff was four. Even those with high numbers of full-time staff tended to involve a large number of volunteers, with some involving more than 50 individuals directly in the running of the centre. The mean number of volunteers involved was 12.

Table 1a: General information

	2009/10	2008/09
% of VCs independent or integrated (% integrated with CVS)	33% independent 67% integrated (90% with CVS)	31% independent 66.5% integrated (60% with CVS)
% of integrated VCs with discrete budget from host organisation	69% with discrete budget	N/A
% of integrated VCs with a separate governance structure from the host organisation	1% separate governance structure	
% of integrated VCs with some of the six core functions delivered by host organisation	35% with some of six core functions delivered by host organisation.	
% of VCs achieved VCQA	90	N/A
% of VCs with branches	10	9
% of VCs with outreach points	47	46
Mean number of full-time staff	2	2
Mean number of part-time staff	4	3
Mean number of volunteers involved in helping to run the VC	12	11

NB: 203 VCs completed the AMR

Funding

It is difficult to make a definitive judgement but we know that many of the smallest VCs in England are those who are not members of Volunteering England. As these VCs have been excluded from the ARVC this year it is possible that the mean funding figures will be higher than last year. As such this increase does not necessarily represent an increase in funding but rather, reflects the slightly different characteristics of the survey population for 2009-10.

Table 1b breaks down the income received by VCs through different funding streams. The mean total income for VCs in 2009/10 was £122,246 but this figure is skewed by some very large VCs with the largest among them having an income approaching £1 million. The median total income (which gives a better representation of the average VC income) was £55,000. Throughout this report the median income will be given with the mean income included in brackets. The median income has remained relatively stable over the last 5 years of data although the data suggests there has been a decrease in real terms. In 2005/6 AMR shows a median income of £59,000.

The funding for the network comes from a variety of sources. Local government was the most common source of funding with 88 per cent of VCs receiving some funding through this channel. Ten per cent were wholly dependent on this stream for their income. It accounted for 45 per cent of total funding within the network. Of those who received funding from local government the median amount was £32,000 (the mean was £59,000) but it ranged dramatically from a few thousand pounds to hundreds of thousand of pounds. These figures are considerably larger than the median of £28,000 in 2008/09 (mean of £42,000) although this is more likely to suggest that VE members receive larger amounts of funding from local government than non-VE members.

The other major source of local funding was through LSPs/LAAs. The majority of this funding is usually provided by the local authority but the local PCT, police and fire service may also contribute some of the funding. This accounted for 5 per cent of total income in the network. When we combine the funding directly from local authorities and that from the LSP/LAA we can see that half of the funding of VCs came from local government sources in 2009/10.

Grant-making bodies were the second most common source of income for VCs in 2009/10 with 57 per cent receiving funding through this channel. This represents a fall from 2005/06 when 65 per cent of VCs received funding from this source. In 2009/10 grant-making bodies accounted for 24 per cent of total funding within the network. Of those who received funding the median amount was £29,000 (mean of £49,000). The amount received ranged from below £1,000 to £200,000.

Twenty-two per cent of VCs received funding from central government, which accounted for 11 per cent of total funding within the network. Of those that received funding the median was £35,000 (mean of £58,000).

One significant trend in the funding is the continued increase in the amount brought in through fees for services. In 2007/08 this was 3 per cent but has risen to 8 per cent in 2009/10.

Only 12 per cent of VCs reported receiving funding from regional government and this only accounted for 3 per cent of total funding in the network.

Table 1b: Income 2009/10 (figures in brackets are for 2008/09)

Income stream	% of total income	% of VCs that received funding from this source
Total income	Median £55,000 (£50,000)	Mean £122,246 (£89,000)
Central Government	11 (7)	22 (14)
Regional Government	3 (2)	12 (10)
Local Government	45 (39)	88 (84)
LSP or LAA	5 (9)	24 (30)
Euro	1 (2)	7 (4)
Grant-making body	24 (27)	57 (56)
Individual donations	1 (2)	25 (27)
Fees and services	8 (6)	37 (32)
Other	3 (7)	29 (35)

NB: 177 VCs gave information on income

It should be noted that it has not been possible to identify where funding is for core expenditure or for specifically funded projects. Further, although we specified in the question that respondents from integrated Volunteer Centres should separate out VC funding from that of a host agency we believe that it has not always been possible for respondents to do this entirely accurately. It should also be noted that VCs gave their data to different degrees of accuracy. Thus, this report can only give a broad indication of some different characteristics of funding within the network.

Core functions:

Brokerage

As Table 1c shows the mean number of volunteer enquiries by each VC in 2009/10 was 1,574 (with the median level at 979), 26 per cent higher than in 2008/09 (which represented a 31 per cent increase from 2007/08). However, as the average income of the VCs surveyed in 2009/10 is considerably higher than in 2008/09 it is not possible to compare the level of enquiries in 2009/10 with figures from 2008/09 directly (as the VCs surveyed in 2009/10 are larger and so we would expect them to receive more enquiries). The 2009/10 data also includes the involvement in the Department for Work and Pension Work Focused Volunteering Programme. Involvement in this programme has increased the number of enquires and placements seen by VCs.

The mean number of volunteers that were placed from these enquiries was 315 (an increase of 4 per cent on 2008/09 figures). This represents a conversion rate of 24 per cent of all enquiries although due to the differences in accounting methods for enquiries and placements it is difficult to accurately capture the true conversion rate.

Table 1c: Brokerage

	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Mean number of volunteer enquiries	1,574 (+26%)	1,253	958
Median number of enquiries	979	640	524
Mean percentage male/ female	36% male 64% female	33% male 67% female	32% male 68% female
Mean number of enquiries from disabled people	84	71	55
Mean number of volunteers placed	315	302	232
Conversion rate (enquiries to placements)	20%	24%	24%

NB: 163 VCs gave information on brokerage

Table 1c, 1d, 1e and 1f show the breakdown of volunteer enquiries by gender, age, employment status, ethnicity and disability. The ARVC continues to provide very strong evidence that VCs are disproportionately successful at engaging with those groups who generally have lower rates of volunteering than the general population.

Table 1d shows that of all enquiries, 29 per cent came from 19-25 year olds and 63 per cent of enquiries came from 15-34 year olds. This contrasts sharply with general levels of volunteering registered in the Citizenship Survey 2009/10¹, which shows that 16-34 year olds are less likely to regularly formally volunteer than any other adult age group.

Table 1d: Total volunteer enquiries by age:

Age of enquirer	% of total enquiries 2009/10	% of total enquiries 2008/09
Total under 15	1	1
Total 15-18	11	13
Total 19-25	29	28
Total 26-29	12	13
Total 30-34	10	11
Total 35-39	9	9
Total 40-44	8	7
Total 45-49	6	6
Total 50-54	5	4
Total 55-59	4	3
Total 60-64	3	3
Total 65 and over	3	2

NB: 15% of enquirers did not record their age. These have been omitted.

¹ Citizenship Survey: 2009/10 (April 2009 – March 2010), England, Department for Communities and Local Government

The make up of enquirers to VCs in terms of employment status (see Table 1e) also varied significantly from the general population. Those who were in some form of employment represented only 26 per cent of the total, whereas those who were either unemployed and seeking work, non-employed and not seeking work or unable to work represented 50 per cent of the total. The remaining 23 per cent were students. These figures show that VCs are especially effective at engaging with those who are unemployed or non-employed as the UK employment rate was approximately 70 per cent of adults in 2009/10². Crucially, this high engagement with those not in employment was also apparent before the recession.

Table 1e: Total volunteer enquiries by employment status

Employment status	% of total enquiries 2009/10	% of total enquiries 2008/09
Employed	23	27
Non-employed and not seeking work (including house persons)	17	15
Self-employed	3	3
Student	23	26
Unable to work (legal status)	3	5
Unemployed and seeking work	30	24

NB: 21% of enquirers did not record their employment status. These have been omitted.

The ethnic breakdown of VC volunteer enquiries (when those who did not specify their ethnicity are excluded) shows that 72 per cent are from people who consider themselves White, 11 per cent Black, 10 per cent Asian, 4 per cent Mixed, 1 per cent Chinese and 2 per cent from those who considered themselves to be of any other background (see Table 1f). When these figures are compared to the 2001 census of England and Wales³ we can see that VCs are effective at engaging with potential volunteers from minority ethnic groups.

Table 1f: Total volunteer enquiries by ethnicity

Ethnicity	% of total enquiries 2009/10	% of total enquiries 2008/09	% in 2001 Census of England & Wales
White	72	71	91
Asian	10	10	4
Black	11	11	2
Chinese	1	2	0.4
Mixed	4	3	1
Any other background	2	4	0.4

NB: 23% of enquirers did not record their ethnicity. These have been omitted.

² Office for National Statistics, *Labour Force Survey 2010*

³ Office for National Statistics, *Census 2001*

Other core functions:

Marketing volunteering

Sixty-three per cent of VCs participated in some kind of national publicity event during the 2009-10 financial year and a similar proportion (76%) participated in their own marketing/publicity campaigns for volunteering (see Table 1g). These figures are relatively stable compared to other years.

Good practice development

Eighty-eight per cent of VCs provided training for volunteer-involving organisations in 2009/10 with a mean of 40 organisations attending the training (13% of the total number of volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) registered with the network). Sixty-six per cent of VCs provided training for volunteers over the same time period with a mean of 75 volunteers attending (see Table 1g).

Develop volunteering opportunities

The mean number of VIOs registered with each VC was 298. The collection of data on opportunities changed in 2009/10 in an attempt to capture different accounting methods across the network. Opportunities (volunteers) is calculated by counting the total number of volunteers that would be required to fill all of the opportunities registered e.g. if ten volunteers were required to work at a festival in the same role it would be counted as ten. The mean for opportunities (volunteers) was 1029 (only 36 VCs gave this information). Opportunities (roles) is calculated by counting the number of different roles available to potential volunteers. The mean number of opportunities (roles) was 445 (145 VCs gave this information).

Policy response and campaigning

Seventy-two per cent of VCs responded to consultations on volunteering in the last year, whilst 58 per cent had facilitated a consultation with local volunteer-involving organisations or volunteers (see Table 1g).

Table 1g: Core functions

	09/10	08/09
% participated in any national publicity campaigns for volunteers	63	69
% launched any of their own marketing/publicity campaigns for volunteering	76	67
Mean number of volunteer-involving organisations registered with the VC	298	251
% that provided training for volunteer-involving organisations	88	84
Mean number of VIOs that attended the training	40	36
% that provided any training for volunteers in the last financial year	66	65
Mean number of volunteers that attended the training	75	46
Mean number of opportunities currently registered as active		319
Opps (vols) was 1029 (only 36 gave this). Opps (roles) was 445 (145 gave this)		
% that have responded to consultations on volunteering	72	66
% that have facilitated any consultation with local volunteer-involving organisations or volunteers, related to policy issues	58	47
% able to meet current demand for their services generally	61	61

Strategic development of volunteering

The survey question relating to the strategic development of volunteering became more sophisticated in 2009-10. The development of this question now allows us to distinguish between representation by a VC member of staff, representation by a staff member from the organisation who hosts the VC and representation by a partner organisation. However, this increased sophistication makes comparison with previous years more difficult.

We can see from table 1h that almost three quarters (74%) of VCs are represented by a VC member of staff on a sub-regional VDA Network and 59% on a regional VDA network. A considerably lower percentage are represented by a VC member of staff on the other strategic partnerships such as Change Up Consortia (28%), LSP/ LAA (25%), County Sports Partnership (23%), Regional EVDC (32%) and Regional VCS Network (28%). Of those VCs who are integrated with another organisation, the majority are represented by their host organisation on Change Up Consortia and the LSP/ LAA.

Table 1h: Percentage of VCs participating in partnerships 2009/10

	Change Up Consortia	LSP/ LAA	County Sports Partnership	Regional VDA Network	Sub-Regional VDA Network	Regional EVDC	Regional VCS Network
Yes, by a VC member of staff	28	25	23	59	74	32	28
Yes, by a member of the org we are integrated with	39	56	12	9	8	7	23
Yes, we are directly represented by a partner organisation	16	14	28	26	11	44	27
No, we are not represented	10	5	35	6	6	14	14
Don't know	7	1	3	1	1	4	8

VCs were also asked to rate their engagement with the local funding and political agenda and their effectiveness at shaping the local volunteering agenda. Three-quarters (74%) of VCs felt that they were either engaged or very engaged with the local funding agenda even though most also felt that they are facing resource constraints. This is a significant increase from 67% in 2008/09. Sixty per cent felt that they were either engaged or very engaged with the local political agenda (see Table 1i).

Twenty-six per cent of VCs felt that they were very effective at shaping the local volunteering agenda, with a further 42 per cent thinking they were effective (see

Table 1j). The remaining 33 per cent felt that they were not effective at shaping the local volunteering agenda.

Table 1i Engagement with local agendas 2009/10 (figures in brackets are for 2008/09)

Level of engagement	Funding (%)	Political (%)
Very engaged	40 (35)	26 (24)
Engaged	34 (32)	34 (27)
Neither engaged nor disengaged	19 (24)	25 (26)
Not very engaged	7 (5)	12 (13)
Not at all engaged	1 (4)	4 (10)

Table 1j Effectiveness in shaping the local volunteering agenda 2009/10 (figures in brackets are for 2008/09)

Level of effectiveness	%
Very effective	26 (16)
Effective	42 (42)
Neither effective nor ineffective	26 (34)
Ineffective	6 (6)
Not at all effective	1 (2)

Level of demand and capacity to deliver core functions:

Overall, 61 per cent of VCs surveyed felt that they could satisfy the demand for their services. When the analysis is broken down by each of the six core functions the data suggests VCs are struggling to satisfy their demand. VCs were asked to state the level of demand for their services and their current capacity to deliver these services. Table 1k compares the demand and capacity to deliver where it was high. Brokerage was the most demanded core function with 88 per cent of VCs rating this as high. Only 52 per cent felt their capacity to satisfy this demand was high, a shortfall of 36 per cent. The next most demanded core functions were marketing and developing volunteering opportunities (both rated as high by 57% of VCs). The percentage of VCs who rated their capacity to satisfy this demand as high was 30 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.

The figures from 2008/09 also showed that demand outstripped capacity for all of the six core functions. The gap has decreased slightly over 2009/10.

Table 1k: The level of demand for services relative to the capacity (%) 2009/10 (figures in brackets are for 2008/09)

Function	Demand for services			Capacity to deliver services			Discrepancy between % high demand and % high capacity
	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	
Brokerage	88 (92)	11 (8)	1 (0)	52 (44)	44 (45)	5 (11)	-36 (-48)
Marketing	57 (52)	40 (41)	3 (8)	30 (23)	59 (57)	11 (20)	-27 (-29)
Good practice development	46 (43)	47 (47)	7 (8)	37 (29)	53 (52)	10 (19)	-9 (-14)
Developing volunteering opportunities	57 (55)	35 (41)	9 (5)	35 (26)	50 (56)	15 (18)	-22 (-29)
Policy response and campaigning	26 (15)	40 (43)	34 (42)	17 (10)	54 (49)	29 (41)	-9 (-5)
Strategic development of volunteering	36 (31)	44 (52)	20 (17)	25 (18)	50 (52)	25 (30)	-11 (-13)

Conclusions

Before drawing conclusions from the data it is worth restating that the findings should be treated cautiously due to differing accounting methods across the network, a less than 100 per cent response rate and the difficulty for integrated VCs in separating out data from their host organisation. Despite these limitations it is possible to draw conclusions from the data.

The number of enquiries has increased dramatically since 2006/07

The number of volunteer enquiries has increased from 834 in 2006/07 to 1,574 in 2009/10. This almost doubling (an increase of 89%) of enquiries over three years represents a dramatic increase in demand for brokerage services although the increase between 2008/09 and 2009/10 is partly explained by involvement in the Department for Work and Pension Work Focused Volunteering Programme. No research has been carried out to explain the longer term increase and although it is likely that the recession has increased demand (most likely from those out of work) the trend began before the onset of the economic downturn. In one sense this increase in enquiries is a boon for the network as it demonstrates the demand for their services and the fact that the number of placements has largely matched this increase in enquiries demonstrates that VCs are largely answering this demand. However, VCs have not, on the whole, received additional funding over this period (with the exception of the DWP scheme) and therefore it has placed extra demands upon their other core functions.

Diversity of the network

The ARVC consistently demonstrates the marked variation across the network of VCs. This variation can be in terms of size, the nature of activities, organisational structure and funding sources. This variation is caused by both positive and negative factors. Partly the variation is driven by the different local needs within the areas which volunteer centres serve and can therefore be seen as a positive, however, the variation can also be seen as a negative as the inconsistent provision is also due to wide variation in financial support from local government. This variation is also driven by the Volunteer Centres themselves as some have been much more successful than others at attracting more diverse funding sources such as grant making bodies and charging fees for services. The diversity also makes researching the network difficult.

VCs work disproportionately with “hard to reach” groups

One of the strongest pieces of evidence for the value of VCs that is consistently demonstrated by the ARVC is their ability to more than proportionately engage with groups who are less likely to volunteer. Every year the survey data shows that the network of VCs are extremely successful at supporting ‘hard to reach groups’ The ARVC consistently shows that VCs engage with those groups who are less likely to formally volunteer (Citizenship Survey) such as those who identify themselves as BME, disabled, not in employment and young people. There are often additional costs to engaging with these groups as they can have

additional support needs and wider evidence suggests that they can value the face-to-face, person centred approach of VCs⁴.

Those VCs who have diverse funding sources are more likely to offer a wide range of services across their six core functions

As mentioned above, some VCs have been more successful than others at attracting more funding from more diverse sources. The ARVC shows a strong correlation between the range and extent of activities carried out by VCs and the range and extent of funding received. What isn't clear from the data is which comes first – the diverse funding or the diverse activities? Wider research (Rochester et al 2008, Rochester, 2009, Hill, 2010) suggests that it probably is a bit of both. Some VCs have proactively diversified their activities into the core functions other than brokerage and have been more expansive in their approach to brokerage (e.g. engaging in employer supported volunteering schemes). In many cases this has helped attract more diverse funding streams. However, the evidence also suggests that where VCs are adequately funded to carry out all six of their core functions they are able to take a broader more strategic role around volunteering.

Brokerage remains the primary focus of many VCs

The results from this year's ARVC continue to demonstrate that brokerage remains by far the primary function of VCs in England. In 2009/10 88 per cent of Volunteer Centres saw their demand for brokerage as high. In part this is driven by the continued increase in the number of volunteer enquiries since 2007/08. Servicing this demand restricts the resources that can be devoted to the other core functions. However, the continued focus upon brokerage is also largely because this is essentially what VCs are funded to deliver.

As discussed above there is a need for the VCs to diversify their activities in order to attract more diverse funding, however, this presents a difficult problem for those organisations who remain almost exclusively focused upon brokerage. To some extent they are "trapped" in a paradox where they need to diversify their activities in order to attract more diverse funding sources but at the same time they need to attract more diverse funding in order to invest in the expansion of their services.

Varying levels of representation on strategic bodies

A relatively low number of VCs are directly represented by a VC member of staff. Where the VC is integrated with another organisation very few VC members of staff represent the VC on strategic bodies such as the Change Up Consortia, LSP/ LAA, County Sports Partnership, the Regional EVDC and the Regional VCS network. In itself this is not an issue as long as the interests of the VC are robustly represented by the organisation they are integrated with. Wider research suggests that this is happening in many cases but not in all (Hill, 2010). There is also a relatively high number of VCs who are either not represented on strategic bodies or only represented by a partner organisation. This is the case for more

⁴ Rochester, C (2009) A Gateway to Work: The role of Volunteer Centres in supporting the link between volunteering and employability IVR

than half of VCs on County Sports Partnerships and for 41% for Regional VCS networks.

The Annual Return for Volunteer Centres has its limitations, however, it continues to offer us the most detailed information we have on the activities and funding of Volunteer Centres in England. The data provides invaluable information to inform Volunteering England campaigns and development work on behalf of VCs. The report also helps to direct the future research agenda around the network. In particular, the ARVC points to the need for more systematic evidence on the impact that these activities have upon volunteering in England.