IVR POLICY PAPER

'~~not~~ under the direction of any authority wielding the power of the State'
a critical assessment of top-down attempts to foster volunteering in the UK

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1 Executive Summary

Acknowledging the unresolved question of defining 'volunteering' in the English language, this paper identifies the Latin core 'voluntas' of the English word, 'voluntary', to focus attention on volunteering as about an individual's will, intent, determination. It conceptualises volunteering as an individual's choice, about what to volunteer to do, what difference they want it to make, and how this shapes the community an individual wants to live in. In this context choice overlaps extensively with the three core components in common definitions of volunteering, as being an activity that is: unpaid, uncoerced and of benefit, or more recently, of making a difference.

For the purpose of this paper 'top-down attempts to foster volunteering' is to mean: initiatives to increase citizen involvement in volunteering programmes. In the UK, since 1948, government attempts to foster volunteering, could be observed in four distinct policy environments: 'the Mixed Economy', 'the Third Way', 'The Big Society' and 'Post-Devolution and Austerity'. These attempts were enacted through dozens of government programmes, marked by an apparent, persistent lack of learning from results and by being ineffective in changing levels of involvement over time. However, another interpretation of this data, presents government attempts as also not diminishing volunteering, given that people have simply continued to volunteer in ways and for what they want. For example, most recently many volunteers responded to the local emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in mutual aid associations, delivering food and medicine, and in other community groups, for example, producing personal protective equipment for the health services.

This paper therefore offers the following assertion for discussion.
The failure of government attempts to increase levels of volunteering is not only a consequence of failure to learn relevant lessons, but also of a fallacious conceptualisation of volunteering as unpaid work, which follows from obligations and privilege, and which can and should be directed by the State, as illustrated in the policy environments and programmes identified in this paper.

In order to discuss features that enable volunteering, this paper offers an alternative conceptualisation of volunteering, as expressing individual choice to take part in civil society, which is explicitly not under the direction of the State.

These positions are not presented as necessarily mutually exclusive.

2 About the Author

Dr Jurgen Grotz is the Director of the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) at the University of East Anglia and a Research Fellow in the NIHR - ARC East of England Inclusive Involvement in Research for Practice Led Health and Social Care. Born in 1963 in Germany, he studied in West Berlin, Beijing, Marburg and London and received his PhD from the University of London, in 1996, for his research about Chinese Braille. With over two decades of experience in applied research in the UK, Germany and China, his largely interdisciplinary work has a strong focus on participative approaches and inclusive involvement, working across the academic, public and voluntary and community sectors. He is Chair of the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector in the UK. He has co-edited the prestigious The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations | David Horton Smith | Palgrave Macmillan, which currently has over 90,000 chapter downloads, and he co-authored Patient and Public Involvement in Health and Social Care Research - An Introduction to Theory and Practice | Jurgen Grotz | Palgrave Macmillan. He has recently led research on volunteer wellbeing, mutual aid associations and on employer supported volunteering. He is currently collaborating in a wide range of research including an ESRC funded project about mobilising voluntary action in all four nations of the UK, on hyper local volunteering activities in Norwich and on the United Nations Volunteers' State of the World's Volunteerism Report.

He has been collaborating with partners in China for more than three decades and IVR's work has recently been described in 'China Third Sector Research' 2020.Vol 2. (中国第三部门研究 第 20 卷,第 183-191 页) and is reproduced with the kind permission of the authors, see link below.

https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/96135/2802691/英国志愿行动研究中心的运作与启示_曹宇赵挺.pdf/94d68d77-83d2-6a75-91eb-f82bd3b77c6a?t=1618327162519

3 Background

This paper was commissioned by the Manchester China Institute, for an online workshop on Volunteering in the UK and China, 25th June 2021. The paper is to deliver 'a critical assessment of top-down attempts to foster volunteering in the UK', aiming to address two questions:

- What can we learn from earlier attempts to encourage volunteering?
- What key features appear to enable volunteering?

The paper will first, as part of the background, clarify its 'Scope', briefly address the question of cultural encoding of the concept of 'What is Volunteering' and also the specification of the brief 'top-down attempts to foster volunteering in the UK'. It will then describe 'Findings' 'and subsequently, briefly, discuss the two questions to be addressed in the section 'Discussion'.

2.1 Scope

The timeframe for review is 1948 to present, albeit drawing on a scene-setting example as far back as 1917. For initiatives up to 1997 the review will refer to UK as relating to all four nations combined. After 1997, because of devolution, the paper will specify which country initiatives apply to.

2.2 What is Volunteering

The most common official conceptualisation of volunteering, in English in the UK, has remained largely unchallenged over two decades, referring to three components of activities that are: unpaid, uncoerced and of benefit. These have also been widely used to define volunteering in academic literature since the end of the last millennium. (Cnaan 1996[i], Wilson 2000[ii], Hustinx 2010[iii], Smith et al 2016[iv]). The UK Home Office, with powers on immigration which are not devolved, in May 2021 advised staff, for example, as follows:

> "*Volunteers are those who give their time for free to charitable or public sector organisations without any contractual obligation or entitlement. They are not employees or workers as defined by various statutory provisions.*" (p:18)[v]

This standpoint is not so dissimilar to the 'Volunteering Code of Good Practice' (2007) widely adopted, as for example, locally in Salford, which drew on the UK Volunteering Forum's 1998 definition (quoted by Kerney, 2001[vi]).

> "*Volunteering is an activity that involves the "'commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain*." (p:4) [vii]

However, these definitions do not accurately reflect the multiple and varying characteristics and culturally encoded concepts associated with volunteering captured in the UK, where over 200 languages are spoken, and where ideologies and individual backgrounds also affect understandings of the concept. In English, the concepts associated with the term 'to volunteer' are further complicated by its connotation of 'offering to do something', even if not associated with the definitions of volunteering emphasised here, but instead with paid work, military service or used even with choice altogether or mostly absent, as when accepting 'voluntary' redundancy.

Given the nature of this workshop, it might be helpful to reach for a Chinese language comparison, because the characteristics often associated with volunteering in the UK are also captured by Chinese terms in particular 'helping each other' (互相帮助), 'doing good deeds' (做好事) and 'serving the people' (为人民服务). [viii] These compare well with Beveridge's (1948) Mutual Aid and Philanthropic motive[ix], and with what Rochester et al (2010)[x] call the current dominant paradigm in the UK of volunteering as 'service'. However, despite those similarities in terms, we cannot simply assume conceptual or ideological similarities, for example with Kropotkin's (1902)[xi] or Borkman's (1999)[xii] understandings of Mutual Aid, or indeed the way this term it was used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, acknowledging the unresolved question of defining 'volunteering' in the English language, this paper identifies the Latin core 'voluntas' of the English word, 'voluntary', to focus attention on volunteering as about an individual's will, intent, determination and conceptualises volunteering as an individual's choice, about what to volunteer to do, what difference they want it to make, and how this shapes the community an individual wants to live in. In this context choice overlaps extensively with the three core components in common definitions of volunteering, as being an activity that is: unpaid, uncoerced and of benefit, or more recently, of making a difference.

2.3 'top-down attempts to foster volunteering in the UK'

For the purpose of this paper 'top-down attempts to foster volunteering' is to mean: initiatives to increase citizen involvement in volunteering programmes. In the UK, since 1948, government attempts to foster volunteering, could be observed in four distinct policy environments: 'the Mixed Economy', 'the Third Way', 'The Big Society' and 'Post-Devolution and Austerity'. These attempts were enacted through dozens of government programmes. The purposes of such programmes ranged from promoting volunteering as an activity with multiple benefits and seemingly more frequently as a means to an end, to achieve particular policy objectives.

4 Findings

British government attempts to direct volunteering or voluntary service have been described for well over a century. For example, in 1917 the newly established British political and cultural magazine the New Statesman wrote the following about the scheme for National Service Volunteers, which was not getting off to a good start.

> *"In late 1916, Neville Chamberlain, then a successful businessman and Lord mayor of Birmingham, was asked by the Prime Minister David Lloyd George to take up the position of director-general of National Service. One of his duties in the role was to ensure that vital war industries, from shipbuilding to farming, had the workers they needed. He set up a scheme for National Service Volunteers to serve in the roles vacated by the men fighting in France and quickly amassed some 200,000 volunteers. What to do with them though? The writer of this editorial thought that Chamberlain had gone about things the wrong way round, recruiting volunteers before knowing how and where they should be used. He should have asked the farmers and shipbuilders what they wanted first. Chamberlain had ignored the rules of supply and demand with the result that too few volunteers were set to useful work and the scheme was a "fiasco". Later in 1917, Chamberlain resigned."*[xiii]

In the late 1940s, the establishment of the Welfare State in the UK pointed to a separation between State and voluntary service and voluntary action. Beveridge (1948), while recognising the special role of voluntary action in British society describes this separation in terms that leave little uncertainty.

> *"The term 'Voluntary Action', as used here, means private action, that is to say action not under the direction of any authority wielding the power of the State" ….. "The independence of Voluntary Action does not mean lack of co-operation between it and public action. Co-operation between public and voluntary agencies, as is noted below, is one of the special features of British public life" (p:8)*[xiv]

However, Beveridge's seeming clarity and vision articulated here, did not lead to a consistent public policy over the following decades. Zimmeck (2010) describes the history of UK government approaches to volunteering since 1960 as non-linear, as "*twists and turns, fits and starts, ups and downs, two steps forward and one step back*". (p:84)[xv] And since 2010, many powers relating to government relations with voluntary action, have been devolved to the four nations of the UK, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Woolvin et al, 2015)[xvi].

The ‘twisting and turning’ government attempts at fostering volunteering since Beveridge might be considered in four time periods linked to four overall government policy environments, ‘the Mixed Economy’, ‘the Third Way’, ‘the Big Society’ and ‘Post Devolution and Austerity’. These attempts were supported by dozens of government programmes, marked by their stop start nature, and based on reviews of IVR evaluations, seemingly a lack of learning from results.

The Mixed Economy of Welfare

After Beveridge’s seminal work, the next two reports to consider the relationship between public and voluntary action in the UK were about ‘The Voluntary Worker in the Social Services’ (Aves, 1969)[xvii] and about the ‘Future of Voluntary Organisations’ (The Wolfenden Committee, 1978)[xviii]. They brought about a view that voluntary action is a resource that can be deployed by the State to meet social needs, delivered by a voluntary sector. Maybe somewhat surprisingly, in 1979 the incoming administration under the political leader credited with saying ‘there is no such thing as society’, Margaret Thatcher, began to drive a policy to shift responsibilities, which at that time were still directly within the authority of the State, to voluntary bodies, through contracting and public involvement, for example, in Community Health Councils (Grotz et al, 2020)[xix] This policy persisted through the 80s and 90s and is outlined, for example, in documents by the Home Office (1990)[xx]. Rochester (2013)[xxi] describes the resulting changes in voluntary organisations from mutual aid, community activities and campaigning to delivering services previously provided by public agencies, and the resulting changes to the structure and operations of the voluntary organisations and the way they involve volunteers. Wolch (1990) refers to this changing relationship between government and voluntary action as an emerging “*Shadow State*”[xxii].

The Third Way

In 1997 the newly elected Blair administration arrived with the fanfare ‘Things can only get better’. They had prepared their policy towards voluntary action through consultation, for example, with a Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector in 1996, commonly named as after its Chair Nicholas Deakin.[xxiii] In 2008 the next Commission on the Future of Volunteering, led by Julia Neuberger, hyperbolically exclaimed that in their view things had indeed never been better.

> *“We realise that in some ways volunteering has never had it so good. Volunteering is higher on the public policy agenda than ever before and governments of all political persuasions are courting it as a solution to some of the major economic and social problems of our time. The International Year of Volunteers in 2001 was celebrated in over 130 countries worldwide and volunteering has been identified by the United Nations as essential to the achievement of its Millennium Development Goals. IYVPlus10 in 2011, the proposed European Year of Volunteering and the London 2012 Olympic and*

Paralympic Games, will provide other opportunities to showcase volunteering on the global stage." (p:3)[xxiv]

This change in public policy brought substantial investment in voluntary action in the UK, for example, outlined national policy (2006)[xxv] and in spending reviews (2007)[xxvi] and was accompanied with a determination to regulate the relationship between volunteering and the State, notably in the Compact (Grotz, 2008)[xxvii]. Observers like Plowden (2003)[xxviii] predicted the difficulties of implementing such a concept while Deakin (2005)[xxix] discussed its potential for informing civil renewal.

Big Society, Post Devolution and Austerity

In 2010 the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's policy towards voluntary action, like much of its social policy, was overwhelmingly guided by 'austerity' following the global financial crisis of 2008. This exacerbated the emerging divergence between the policies of the nations of the UK. For example, in England we can note 'Big Society' (Cabinet Office, 2010)[xxx] and Building a Stronger Civil Society (2010)[xxxi], while we find 'A Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland' (2012)[xxxii], in Wales 'Volunteering Policy: Supporting Communities, Changing Lives' (2015)[xxxiii], and in Scotland 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework' (2019)[xxxiv] In England post COVID-19 policy makers have received a report from an MP, who has been directly involved in framing the debate for more than a decade (Kruger 2020)[xxxv] and it appears they might be strongly influenced by the 2020 'levelling up' agenda, which seems unrelated to similar initiatives over the last four decades, and which observers like the House of Lords Committee on Public Services note that this still appears somewhat underdeveloped.

"*Not only does 'levelling up' lack clear goals and a plan to achieve them; the strategy's criteria for distributing 'levelling up' resources are too opaque and its management at central Government level too unclear…*"[xxxvi]

Dozens of programmes and initiatives to promote and instrumentalise volunteering for a wide range of purposes were launched under these policy frameworks. Objectives of such programmes included recruiting and training volunteers for tasks envisaged by government for example, in health and social care or in criminal justice; whereas youth volunteering was to keep young people active, reducing anti-social behaviours and unemployed people were to be helped to rejoin the labour market, by gaining skills and experiences; while volunteering by older people was intended to improve their mental and physical health. Several national initiatives were also about promoting volunteering more generally and growing volunteer numbers overall.

Some of those initiatives were evaluated, and showed successes while funding was available to support them, for example, the 'Formative Evaluation of v The National Young Volunteers' Service' which reported impacts such as increased human and

social capital, with bridging capital playing a key role in linking young people to new opportunities, support networks and aspirations (National Centre for Social Research et al, 2011)[xxxvii].

However, despite attempts by IVR and others to drive such learning (Hill and Stevens, 2010)[xxxviii], it does not appear that evaluations have led to any coherent further development, either with subsequent programmes and initiatives or in subsequent policy environments.

As a full assessment is outside the scope of this paper, below are some examples and what was said about them, illustrating only one of many repeated failures, this one first described in 1917: "*recruiting volunteers before knowing how and where they should be used",* with the purpose of programmes set without involving the future volunteers. [xxxix]

The UK newspaper 'The Guardian' reported about the Experience Corps, an initiative to recruit older volunteers in 2003/2004.

> "*The Experience Corps was set a target of recruiting 250,000 volunteers in this age group by March 2004. But its latest figures show that, so far, it has only managed to attract 130,000 and just 75,000 of those have actually been placed in volunteering work. As a result, the Home Office has concluded that it has little chance of meeting its target. But, even more worrying, it also has reservations about the figures which the Experience Corps has presented. The Corps has been criticised by established organisations in the voluntary sector and by volunteers in the field for focusing too much on headline grabbing marketing which, rather than appealing to their target market, turns them off."*[xl]

The National Audit Office (2017) also made the following observations about a major initiative to encourage young people to volunteer.

> *"The Cabinet Office established National Citizen Service (NCS) programme in 2011 as part of its 'Big Society' agenda to bring together local communities. …. The then Prime Minister's stated ambition was for NCS to become universal and a 'rite of passage' for young people and lead to a more responsible, cohesive and engaged society."* (p:6)
> "*Although NCS participation has grown, this has not been as quickly as desired and the extent of potential future growth is unclear*" (p:7) [xli]

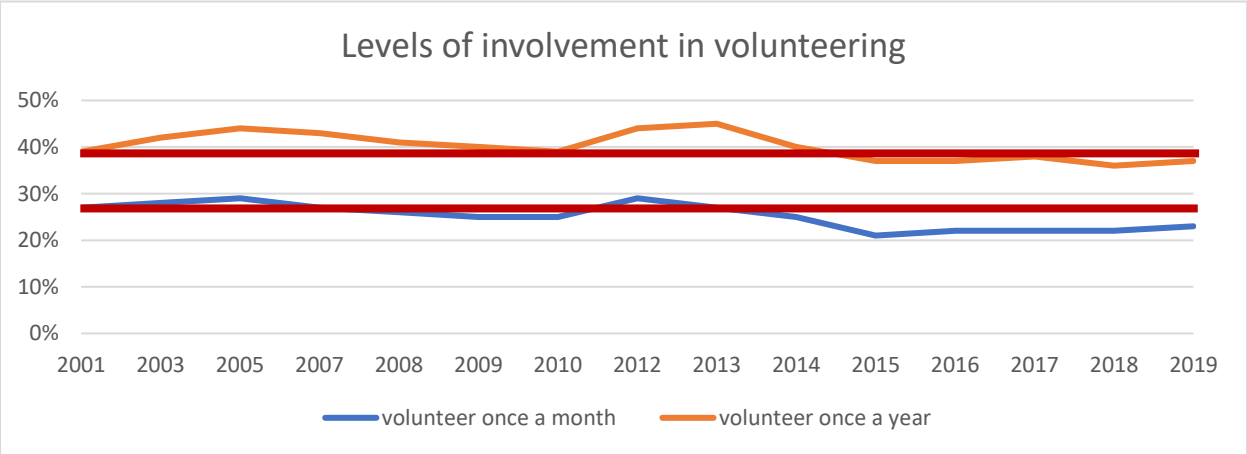
The latest example is the NHS Volunteer Responder scheme of which the British newspaper 'The Guardian' reports:

"NHS Volunteer Responders hoped to attract a quarter of a million helpers to provide app-based community support for vulnerable people self-isolating against coronavirus, but numbers spiralled as the scheme caught the public imagination. After a frantic vetting process, 150,000 of the 750,000 initial applications were rejected, leaving 600,000 ready to be deployed. Huge numbers are still waiting to be allocated a task after weeks on standby." [xlii]

"With many care operators working with 10% to 20% of their staff self-isolating and therefore stretched, ADASS said it was "shameful" that the creation of the National NHS volunteer scheme had not been done in collaboration with councils and it had "diverted 750,000 volunteers away from supporting local communities and left them with nothing to do for the first three weeks of the epidemic". [xliii]

In sharp contrast to the NHS Volunteer Responder scheme, which appeared less effective in the first months of the pandemic, considerable undirected spontaneous volunteering in response to the emergency, was observed, often referred to as mutual aid. Surprisingly, instead of being volunteering being hailed as positive and heroic, such undirected mutual aid activities, in places, were initially hampered by local government hesitancy and obstruction. [xliv], [xlv]

Clearly, some initiatives have achieved speedy and substantial recruitment of volunteers for programmes delivering specific objectives, for example for the London Olympics. However, amazingly, despite the slings and arrows of changing public policy, and the litany of government programmes and initiatives, the aggregate levels of involvement of volunteering have remained stubbornly similar since this information was started to be collected in the UK, initially through the Citizenship Survey and later the Community Life Survey.



5 Discussion

This paper is intended to address two questions

- What can we learn from earlier attempts by national governments to encourage volunteering?
- What key features appear to enable volunteering?

The most eye-catching finding to answer the first question is that national government attempts to direct volunteering have been ineffective in changing levels of involvement over time and often did not even achieve the specific objectives they set for programmes themselves and did not include systematic learning from these attempts. Programmes that reported successes during time of funding were bespoke and often delivered locally working with specialist volunteering agencies.

To answer the second question, it appears therefore that we need to turn away from seeking answers from the government attempts we described, because they neither increased nor diminished involvement over time. Beveridge (1948) speaks of voluntary action as '*not under the directions of any authority wielding the power of the State*' (p:8) [xlvi]. Indeed, when clearly needed, as in the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers emerged and helped where they were needed without any government direction but in some cases they faced obstruction. It would seem possible, that to understand the features that enable volunteering, we need to turn our attention to those spaces where voluntary action is within the power of the people and emerges without government attempts to direct it.

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