Enhancing the impact of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) on Employees' Wellbeing: A case study - Network Rail

This is a report from research funded by Network Rail and undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia.

NetworkRail

Jurgen Grotz
Sara Connolly
Kathleen Lane
Ritchie Woodard

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Institute for Volunteering Research — UEA University of East Anglia

Executive Summary

This research was commissioned to investigate what can be done to help Network Rail to achieve its ESV goals. It confirms key findings from the existing evidence base and suggests the following in order to better achieve the benefits associated with ESV and to enhance and measure its impact.

"*Employer-supported volunteering provides employees the opportunity to volunteer with support from their employer, whether this is in the form of time off for individual volunteering or in a programme developed by the employer such as a team challenge event or ongoing arrangement with a community partner.*" (Volunteering England, 2011)[i]

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) is recognised as a mutually beneficial activity, which, if done well, has the potential to create multiple positive benefits for the employer, staff volunteers andfor the community in which the company operates.

Volunteering works - Train to gain

ESV delivers impact for organisations but it isn't a free resource, and it is a specialist undertaking. In order to gain the mutual benefits for company, staff and community, which are comprehensively supported by existing evidence, investment commensurate with ESV's strategic relevance is required. This does not just relate to the allocation of financial resources but also to dedicated long-term strategic planning, with aligned targets, which is informed by available expertise, regular evaluation and a programme of training and engagement, supported by market leaders in volunteering.

Volunteering for all - Design to deliver

The design of an ESV programme needs to connect with staff's lives, for example, with their shift patterns. Similarly, the needs of community organisations might not easily be addressed with available skills or commitments amongst staff. Furthermore, eight in ten volunteers are involved locally. These and many more factors need to inform the design of ESV programmes.

Volunteering for impact – Choices and voices

The answers to the questions of why organisations support ESV, why staff might want to volunteer and why the community might want to engage are essential in order to understand how activities will lead to achieving the varied purposes and how they can be measured effectively. In particular, the purpose for the organisation needs to be fully developed, underpinned by a compelling and consistent approach and communicated effectively. In a complex systems approach, what difference an organisation seeks to make influences the choices it needs to make and the voices it needs to include in the decision-making process.

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1. Introduction

"*Employer-supported volunteering [ESV] provides employees the opportunity to volunteer with support from their employer, whether this is in the form of time off for individual volunteering or in a programme developed by the employer such as a team challenge event or ongoing arrangement with a community partner.*"[ii] ESV is recognised as a mutually beneficial activity which, when done well, has the potential to create multiple positive benefits for both the company and the voluntary organisation, and for the volunteers themselves [iii]. Furthermore, volunteering can have significant health and wellbeing benefits for the volunteer[iv] and ESV can be a part of a company's endeavour to support this.

1.1   Background

"*Previous CIPD [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development] research around the benefits of volunteering has shown that there are a lot of potential advantages to be gained by employers who support volunteering amongst their employees. As well as providing a boost to the organisation's reputation and brand, there are a number of HR advantages, including improved levels of employee engagement and huge scope for employees to develop skills, including communication, teamwork and resilience, through volunteering opportunities.*

> ***However, these advantages will be realised only if employees actually take part and the opportunities that they participate in are of good quality and are having a positive impact on the communities which they are supporting.***

This can be achieved only through constructive and open relationships between employers and the voluntary organisations providing the opportunities." (CIPD, 2015) [Highlight, bold and indent by authors] [v]

"*The attention of the rail industry is starting to focus on mental health and wellbeing where volunteering plays a vital role. The rail industry will build on their partnership with Samaritans and provide volunteering hours to support increasing demand for their services through the Million Hour Challenge. The Challenge was launched by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) in partnership with Network Rail to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of all rail workers, which remains a priority for ORR and across industry. The Million Hour Challenge will be an effective mechanism to help support this.*" (Scope of Services, for current research contract, no date)

1.2 The link between volunteering and volunteers' wellbeing

The international evidence overwhelmingly suggests that volunteering can be good for volunteers' wellbeing, and that volunteering can be particularly positive for the wellbeing of people who may experience lower prior levels of wellbeing, while happier and healthier people are likely to volunteer already. Positive wellbeing effects are particularly associated with

- happiness,
- life satisfaction,
- and reducing feelings of depression and anxiety.

1.2.1 Differentiating

Volunteering does not automatically lead to wellbeing effects and affects individuals differently at different times of their lives. The evidence points to more wellbeing benefits for some groups, in particular:

- people in later years of life,
- people from lower socio-economic groups,
- people living with chronic physical health conditions,
- people with lower levels of wellbeing.

1.2.2 Sustaining

Regular and more frequent volunteering is associated with more wellbeing benefits, whereas fewer wellbeing effects are associated with one-off or very infrequent volunteering. Wellbeing is also associated to volunteering that engenders feelings of:

- self-efficacy - a person's belief in their abilities,
- social connectedness,
- sense of purpose.

1.2.3 Work Performance

Emerging evidence from ongoing research at the University of East Anglia suggests that ESV schemes not only increase the wellbeing of employees, but also improve their performance at work by reducing absenteeism and presenteeism. These productivity gains manifest indirectly through improvements in wellbeing measures including mental and physical health, life satisfaction, and worker engagement. This highlights the importance of recognising and monitoring such wellbeing measures to ensure that ESV has the desired effects on both employee wellbeing and productivity. As well as reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, other academic studies find that ESV can also improve staff retention, morale, commitment, and skill acquisition. These benefits are largest for volunteers, but non-volunteers in organisations which offer ESV are also positively impacted.

1.3   The project

The Institute for Volunteering Research was appointed by Network Rail to undertake research enhancing the impact of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) on employees' Wellbeing and understand the motivators and barriers to volunteering to support the rail industry's Million Hour Challenge, see contract v. 1.16, page 1.

1.3.1 Rationale

Network Rail is looking to fund research, in order to inform ORR and industry's continued priority of improving the mental health of track workers. As part of this, Network Rail is interested in:

- better understand how volunteering is beneficial for staff, especially their mental health and wellbeing;
- better understand how to support both the rail industry's Million Hour Challenge and Network Rail's own desire to see an increase in the number of volunteer days used by Network Rail track staff and Network Rail contractor track staff;
- inform a strategy with practical steps as to what will be most effective in encouraging people to get involved in volunteering, specifically NetworkRail track staff and Network Rail contractor track staff.

1.3.2 Aims

This research was therefore designed to:

- understand motivations to volunteer of Network Rail track staff and of Network Rail contractor track staff;
- understand barriers and enablers for Network Rail track staff using the Network Rail ESV programme and for Network Rail contractor track staff to volunteer if ESV programmes are available to them;
- understand barriers and enablers for uptake of volunteering for Samaritans;
- understand the potential wellbeing benefits from the Network Rail ESV programme on volunteers.

In addition, the research aims to inform the Rail Industry's efforts to support mental health and wellbeing of staff with a focus on frontline workers, in particular track staff. In order to facilitate this, we use the process and findings of this research to make recommendations to improve knowledge of:

- research with groups under-represented in research, in particular track staff;
- survey design and tools for research with groups under-represented in research, in particular track staff;
- efficacy of employer supported volunteering schemes for groups with suspected lower take up, for example, track staff.

After completion of the research, the team will seek to publish description and critical discussion of the methods used in the research and the efficacy of ESV programmes, in particular its effects on the mental health and wellbeing of previously under-researched groups, such as track staff.

1.3.3   Method

The study encompassed four main phases: Set-up and design; Desk research; Data collection and analysis; Synthesis and validation.

Phase 1: Set-up and design

Working collaboratively with Network Rail we designed an approach which proved robust, transparent and realistic. The set-up and design phase of the work included:

- a start-up meeting to finalise agreed milestones and key activities, and to confirm key concepts to ensure the work meets the needs of Network Rail;
- scoping interviews (n=5) with key stakeholders, which will help refine the research questions, inform the research design, and provide the research team with initial evidence to inform the research, including unpublished evidence and datasets.

Phase 2: Desk research

Building on reports available through the Institute for Volunteering Research, we reviewed the current academic literature regarding volunteering and the motivations behind volunteering decisions. We also collected and analysed existing datasets which contain relevant information on volunteering. This secondary research informed the primary data collection and feed into interview and survey questions in Phase 3. Network Rail advised on useful categorisation of job titles, companies and consistency in terminology used in internal surveys. The interview and survey questions were piloted in early January 2021 and finalised before fieldwork and data collection began in late January/early February 2021.

Phase 3: Data collection and analysis

We collected primary data from Network Rail staff in the form of both qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey.

Interviews (n=8) – in collaboration with Network Rail we identified track staff from Network Rail and other rail organisations who volunteer, either through taking up the ESV volunteering offer, Network Rail volunteering activities or outside work. Six participants had extensive, regular and on-going volunteering experience; one participant was volunteering on an occasional basis; one participant who was not currently volunteering had a brief volunteering episode several years previously.

Survey (n=544) – in collaboration with Network Rail we distributed a short survey to all Network Rail staff and to other Rail Industry staff, receiving 137 unique responses from track staff.

Phase 4: Synthesis and validation

Once the data was extracted, we discussed early findings with Network Rail in a deliberative online workshop meeting.

1.4 Limitations

This project was conceived, commissioned, designed and conducted over an extremely short, four-month, period. The compressed timetable limited the possibility for some of the early-stage planning, consultation and communications which the team would typically engage in. Also, in order to report by the end of April 2021, the survey was open for a relatively short window and all interviews needed to be conducted by the end of February. Whilst we met all our targets, achieving a deadline for reporting within three weeks of the completion of data collection necessarily limits the depth of analysis undertaken.

The methodology was chosen to match those conditions. Limitations of this study relate to sample selection and insufficient sample size for extensive statistical measurement.

The sample was recruited in close collaboration with Network Rail. We recognise that this will have led to self-selection and associated bias. While we utilised statistical methods to control for bias, these could not be applied extensively due to the sample size.

The number of survey responses was at the lower end of expectations and did not allow for detailed statistical analysis.

However, these limitations were addressed by extensive triangulation of a variety of data sources, including those provided by Network Rail.

2 Volunteering in the Rail Industry Survey

This section of the report discusses the findings from a survey administered to gain insights relating to volunteering in the rail industry. A copy of the survey is included in the appendix.

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the survey was to identify the motivations and barriers to the volunteering decision of rail workers. There was a particular focus on the uptake of volunteering leave offered by some companies within the industry, and on track staff who are generally less likely to use this type of leave. The survey was created using Qualtrics software, advertised via email and social media, and made accessible to participants via a public and unrestricted link and accompanying QR code. It was targeted at workers throughout the rail industry with participation being optional and anonymous. The survey received 544 responses in total, of which 492 (90%) completed the survey. The survey was advertised to take about 10 minutes to complete. After outliers (> 1 hour) were excluded, the average duration was 8 minutes 17 seconds.

The survey consisted of four main sections, these included questions related to the type of job each member of staff does, their volunteering activities, 'what if' scenarios (or vignettes), and a small number of personal characteristics, respectively. A final question provided participants with an opportunity to make any other comments. These responses were also analysed and are discussed in section 3 of this report.

Section 2.2 briefly describes the demographics and job characteristics of those who completed the survey. These were discussed with Network Rail in the validation meeting where it was confirmed that the sample is broadly representative of the industry. The discussion in the report is descriptive, where it is helpful to do so, we focus upon three breakdowns: Network Rail employees, track staff and those who have volunteered in the last 12 months. Section 2.3 presents analysis of the questions relating to volunteering, while Section 2.4 describes the vignettes and analyses the responses. Section 2.5 provides a summary of the main findings.

2.2 Demographics and Job Characteristics of Respondents

Amongst working adults, the scope or capacity to volunteer may vary with life stage, gender, marital status and family commitments or with cultural norms. The survey was designed to capture some of these, and Table 1 summarises the responses to these questions. The average age of the sample was just over 44 years old, while 38% were female and 86% were white. The ease with which people can integrate volunteering into a working life may depend upon their out of work commitment: 43% of the sample have dependents: 31% have dependent children, 10% have older dependents, and 10% have other dependents. Note that some respondents have more than one type of dependent, hence why the sum of each type of dependent is larger than those reporting any type of dependent. The presence of another earner in the household might reduce financial pressures which may facilitate volunteering activities: 79% reported to be the sole or main earner in their household. Finally, being part of a faith community may provide more volunteering opportunities or offer role models: 17% of respondents considered themselves to be religious.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Age	44.07	11.14	18	65+
Female	0.38	0.48	0	1
White	0.86	0.34	0	1
Religious	0.17	0.38	0	1
Main Earner	0.79	0.41	0	1
Child Dependents	0.31	0.46	0	1
Older Dependents	0.10	0.29	0	1
Other Dependents	0.10	0.30	0	1
Mental Health	6.90	1.96	1	10
Physical Health	6.89	1.84	1	10

Capacity for outside work activities may reflect physical and mental health, on scales of 1-10, respondents report a score of 6.90 for mental health and 6.89 for physical health - Table 1. While these averages are remarkably similar, there are some notable differences in their distributions as displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mental and Physical Health Distributions

(a) Mental Health   (b) Physical Health
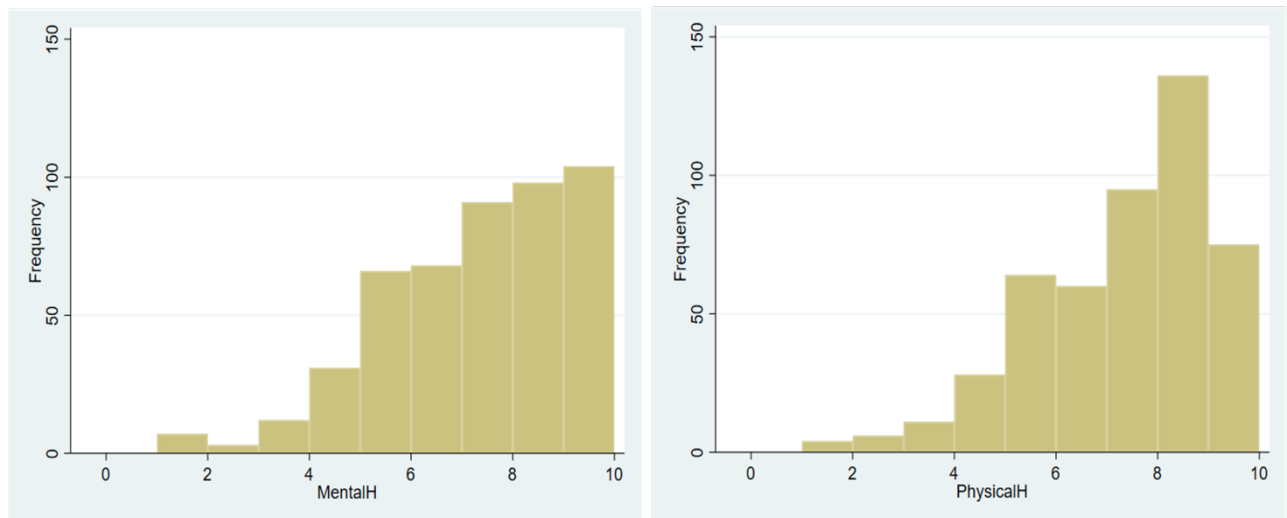
For mental health, in panel (a) of Figure 1, the modal response is 10 with high frequencies for 9 and 8, but also only a small drop off for 7 and 6. For physical health, in panel (b) of Figure 1, the modal response is 9 with a large drop off for 10 on one side and 8 on the other. The drop off down to 7 and 6 is also larger for physical health.

Respondents were also asked which region they lived in, with the results presented in Figure 2. The survey reached across all regions of Great Britain, including all three nations, and even a small number from overseas. Frequencies varied between regions, with the largest group being based in South East England.

Figure 2: Regions where Respondents live
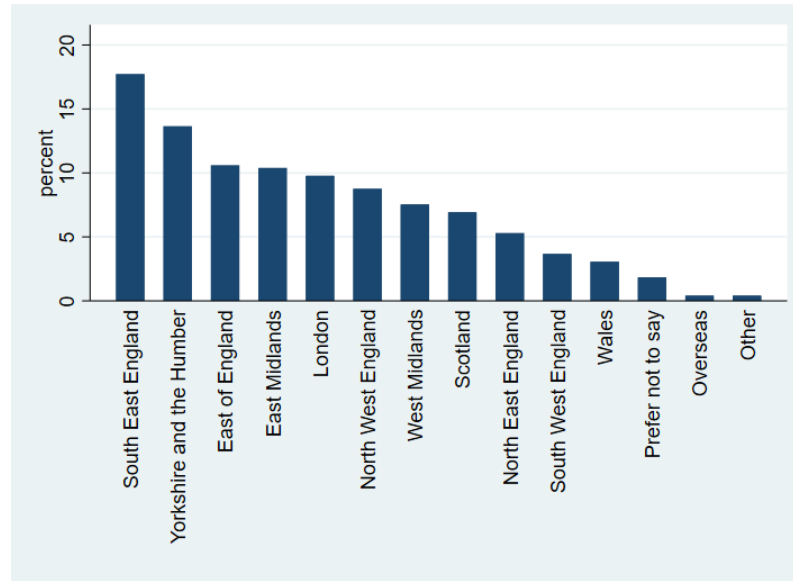
In addition to demographic information, respondents were also asked about aspects of their jobs within the rail industry. Respondents were from 35 different companies within the rail industry (excluding those responding "Other" and "Prefer Not to Say"). Figure 3 displays a percentage frequency bar chart of these companies. Companies with an absolute frequency less than five were reclassified into Other (24%). Unsurprisingly, the most frequent response was Network Rail with 138 (26.5%), followed by Ganymede Solutions(15%).

Figure 3: Companies that Respondents work for
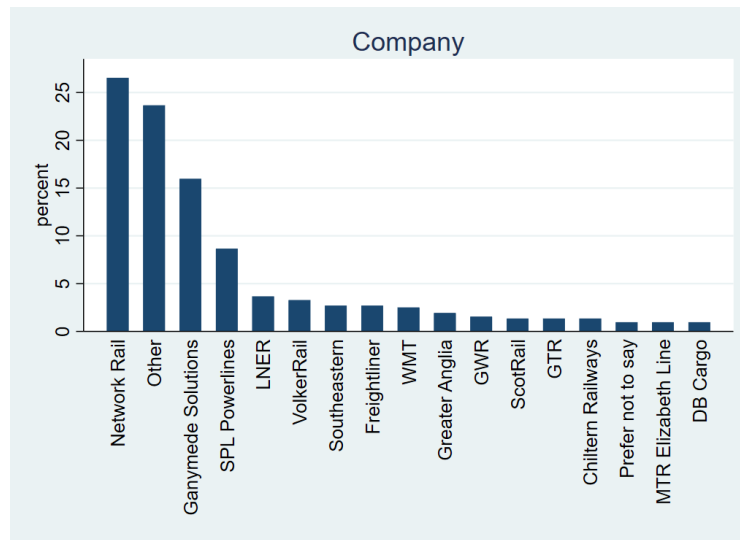
In terms of job roles, respondents were first asked to classify themselves as either office or frontline workers. Around 60% of the sample were office workers, while around 38% were frontline workers, as displayed in panel (a) of Figure 4. Focusing on the frontline workers, the areas that they work in within this job role are shown in panel (b) of Figure 4. By classifying track staff as those working in the areas of infrastructure, engineering and operations, we find that 66.83% of the frontline workers are track staff, which is 25.6% of the entire sample - 137 respondents.

Figure 4: Job Roles

(a) Office v Frontline
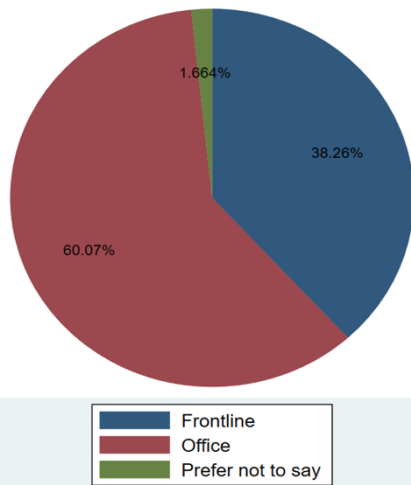
(b) Frontline workers by area
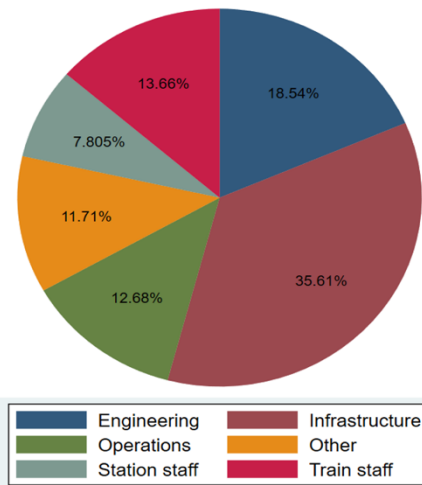
We use classification for track staff in the discussion that follows. The number of hours worked per week by respondents is reported in Figure 5, for non-track staff in panel (a) and for track staff in panel (b). Most non-track staff (54%) work 31-40 hours per week, while a significant portion (39%) work longer hours, only a small proportion work very low numbers of hours a week. While just under 31% of track staff also work 31-40 hours per week, the modal response was 41-50 hours per week, while a much bigger proportion work 50+ hours when compared to non-track staff (25% vs 9%). While still a relatively small proportion, more track workers also work shorter working weeks. The working weeks of track staff are therefore not only longer on average, but also more varied.

Figure 5: Hours worked per week

(a) Non-track staff
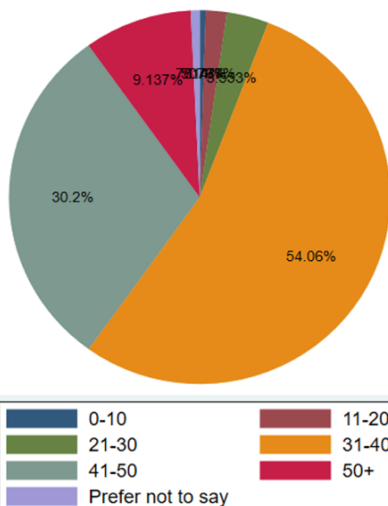
(b) track staff
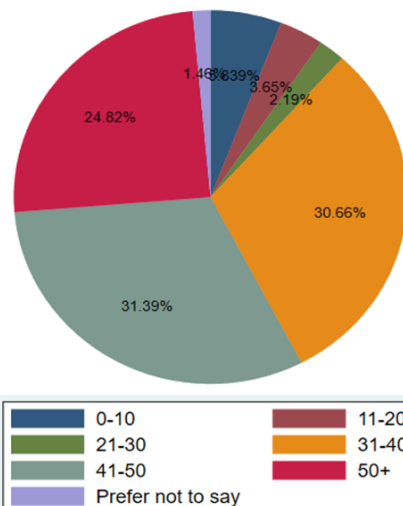
Figure 6 shows how often shift patterns change for non-track workers in panel (a) and track workers in panel (b).

Figure 6: Shift Pattern Changes

(a) Non-track staff   (b) track staff
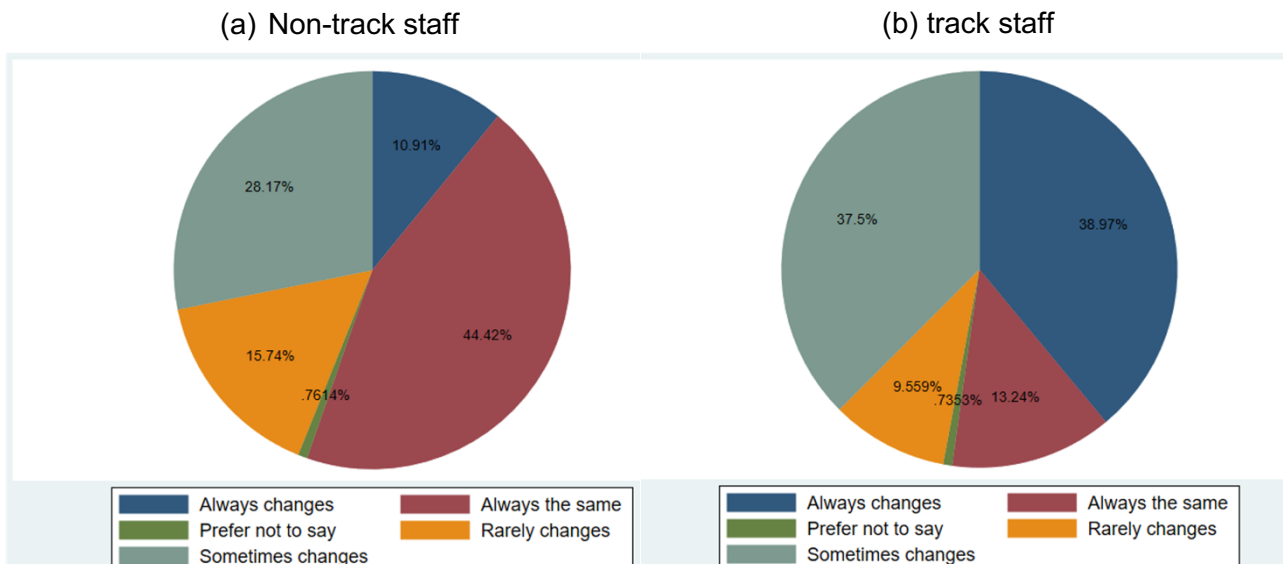
It is noticeable that a majority (60%) of non-track respondents answer that their shift patterns are always the same (44%) or rarely change (16%). However, the opposite is true of track staff with a majority (76%) reporting that their shifts always change (39%) or sometimes change (37%). With longer working weeks on average and changing shift patterns, it is reasonable to expect that track staff will find it more difficult to volunteer, both through company volunteer leave schemes and outside of them.

Respondents are also asked to score their satisfaction with their life, work, and work/life balance in turn on scales from 1-10. Figure 7 shows the responses of non-track and track workers overlayed for each. While Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations for each satisfaction for non-track and track workers.

Figure 7: Satisfactions of Non-Track vs Track Workers

(a) Satisfaction with Life   (b) Satisfaction with Work
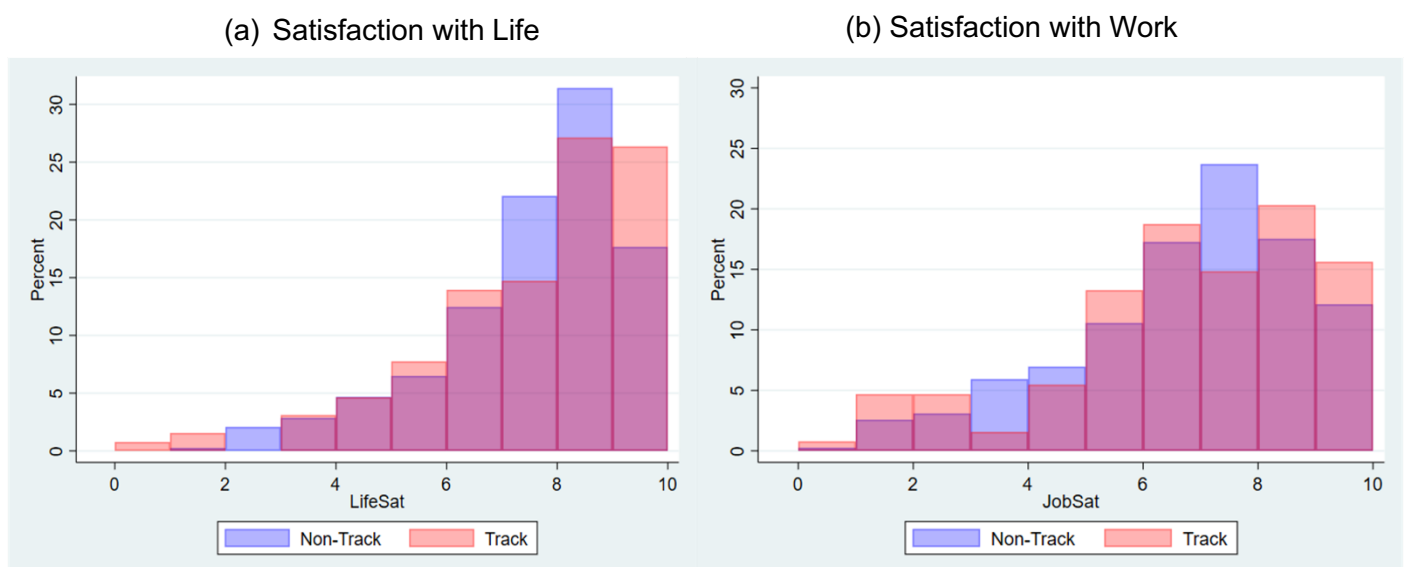
(c) Satisfaction with Work/Life Balance
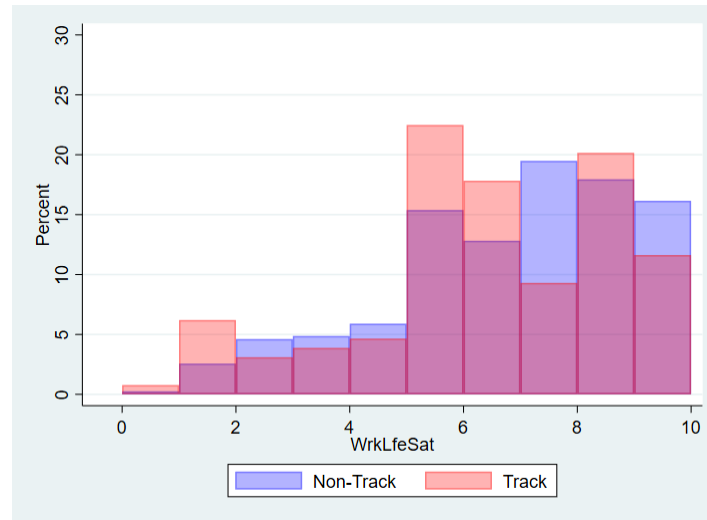
Table 2: Satisfactions of Non-Track vs Track Workers

	Mean		Std Dev	
	Non-Track	Track	Non-Track	Track
Satisfaction with life	7.09	7.18	1.78	2.01
Satisfaction with work	6.29	6.34	2.08	2.34
Satisfaction with work/life balance	6.36	5.99	2.25	2.35

In panels (a) and (b) of Figure 7, for satisfactions with life and work individually, there are relatively more track workers giving the top, middle, and bottom scores, with non-track workers giving higher relatively frequencies in the spaces in between. This is somewhat similar for satisfaction with work/life balance; however, a higher relative frequency of non-track workers gave the highest score of 10 on this question. Table X2 shows that, despite working longer hours and changing shift patterns, track workers report higher satisfaction with both life and work, but also a lower satisfaction with their work-life balance. However, these differences are small.

2.3   Volunteering in the Rail Industry

In the full sample, 64% of respondents report to have volunteered in the last 12 months. However, this figure is higher for non-track staff (71%) than for track staff (43%) as shown in Figure 8. This is a large difference which may reflect the barriers to volunteering that track staff face.

Figure 8: Self-reported volunteering in last 12 months

(b) Non-track staff   (b) track staff
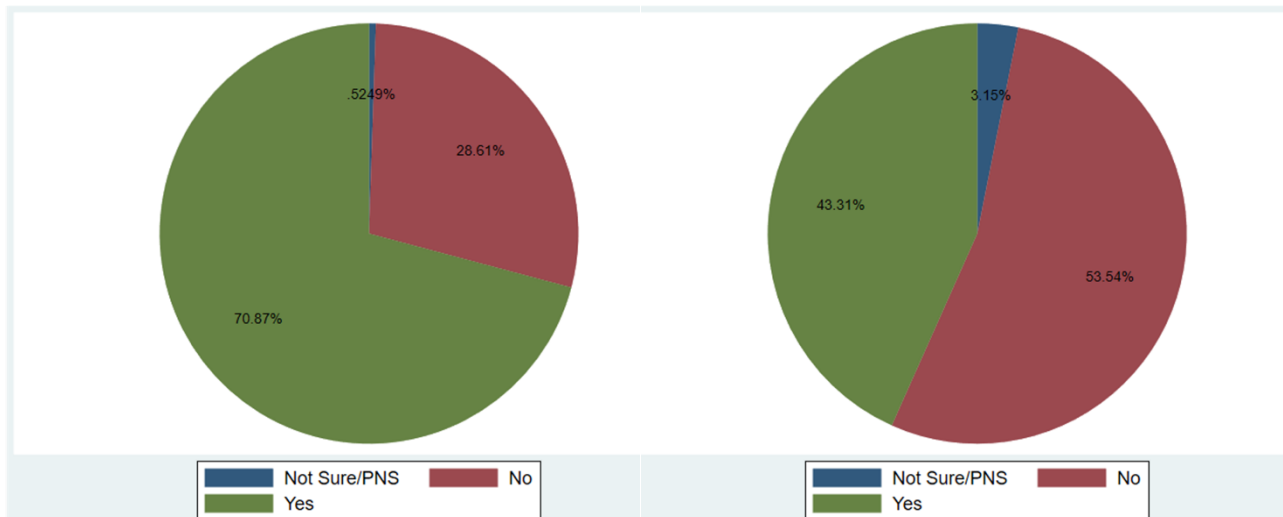
Of the full sample of volunteers, although many reported to have volunteered infrequently in the last 12 months (panel (a) of Figure 9), many also report that the COVID pandemic has caused them to volunteer less often than usual (panel (b) of Figure 9).

Figure 9: COVID effect on volunteering frequency
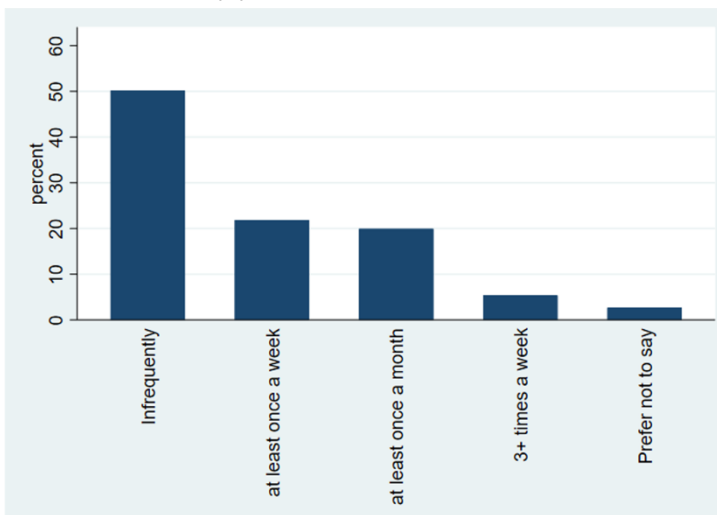
(a) Volunteering Frequency   (b) COVID effect
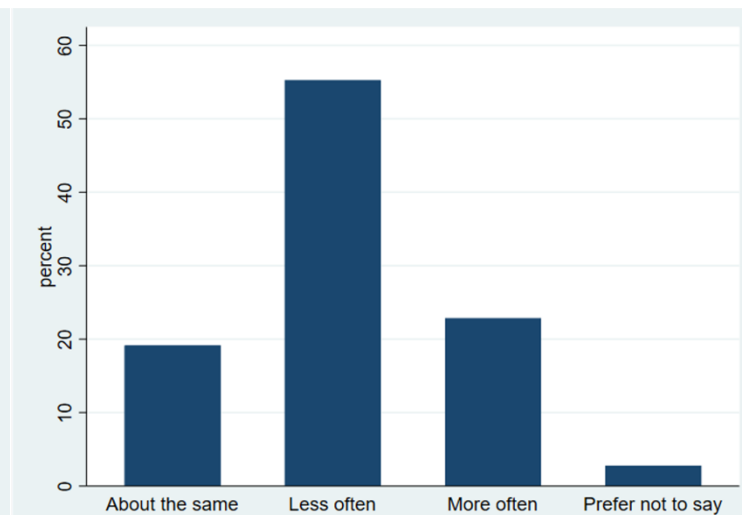
For the next part of the analysis (Figures 11-14), the data is broken down by whether or not the respondents report to have volunteered. This highlights differences between these groups in what they understand by volunteering, and what they perceive the purposes of and barriers to volunteering are. The split between volunteers and non-volunteers for the whole sample is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Self-reported volunteering in last 12 months (Full Sample)
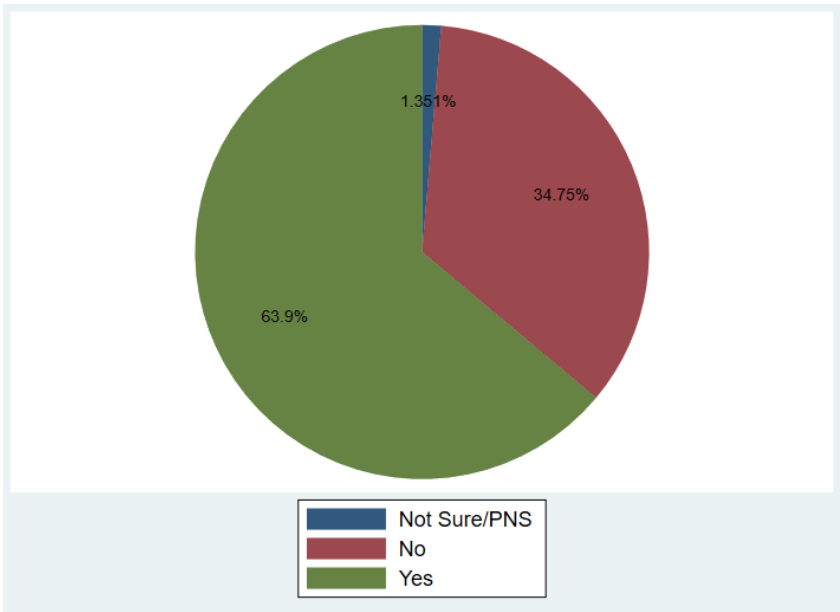
In terms of where volunteering activity may be concentrated, we listed a broad range of possible groups that staff may be involved with. Interestingly, staff report involvement with these groups, whether or not they had volunteered in the last 12 months. Whilst levels are higher amongst those who self-identify as volunteers, around 30% of non-volunteers report recent involvement across a range of activities. Popular groups include sport, hobbies, school, youth, health and social care and trade unions.

Figure 11: Involvement in Groups in last 12 months (Volunteers vs non-volunteers)
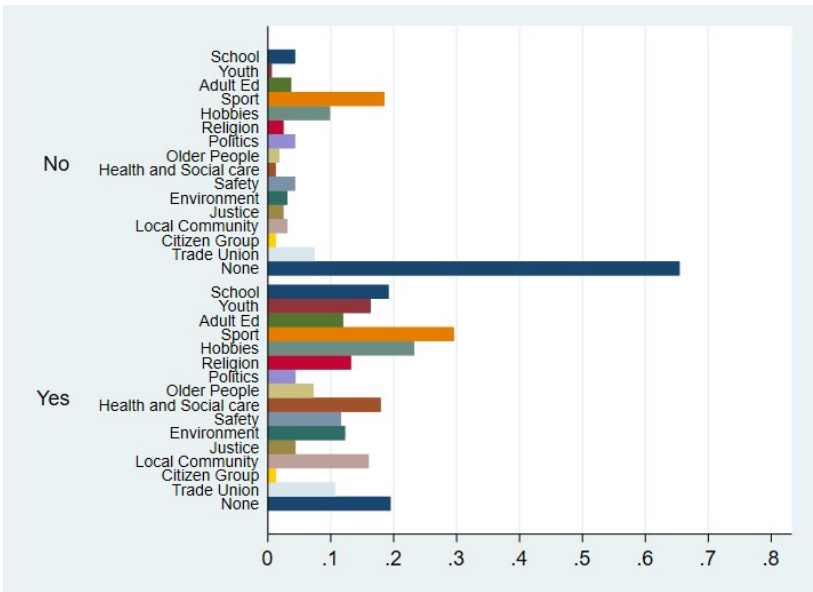
We then asked a more precise question, whether staff offered any unpaid help, in terms of advising, promoting, visiting, mentoring, and handling money. Figure 12 shows that, despite not self-reporting as a volunteer, non-volunteers do offer some unpaid help to different groups. These results suggest that a clear message about the broad scope of volunteering activity aimed at a common understanding of volunteering may encourage staff to use their volunteer leave and to volunteer more.

Figure 12: Unpaid Help given to Groups in last 12 months (Volunteers vs non-volunteers)
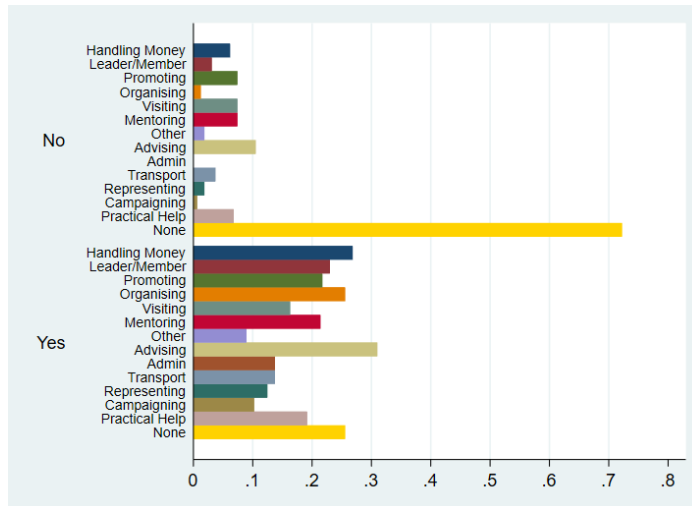
Figure 13 shows that both groups have similar views on the purpose of volunteering. Around 80% think that volunteering is about making a difference and helping others. Only around 10% of each group think the purpose should be to improve one's CV. It is perhaps notable that a higher proportion of volunteers, compared to non-volunteers, report enjoyment as a purpose of volunteering. Also, that a relatively small proportion of both groups view improving their CV as a purpose, therefore, stressing professional development may not be a productive route to stimulate interest in volunteering.

Figure 13: Purpose of volunteering (Volunteers vs non-volunteers)
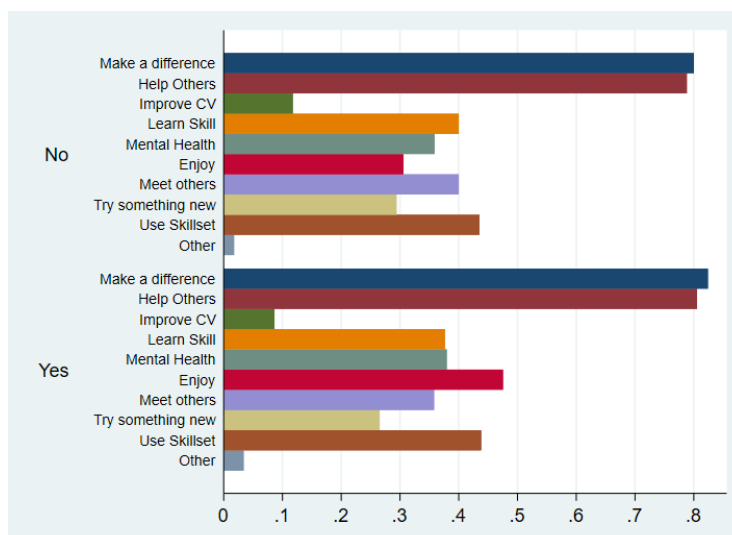
Regardless of experience with volunteering, being busy is a barrier to volunteering activity, either being busy at work (70%) or at home (45%). Not knowing where to start (35%) and not being asked (25%) are also seen as barriers. Interestingly, a lack of support and a lack of skills are more frequently reported by volunteers than non-volunteers. Although these are barriers that volunteers have overcome, it is striking that finding information and work and home commitments are the main perceived obstacles that an EVS needs to help staff address.

Figure 14: Barriers to volunteering (Volunteers vs non-volunteers)
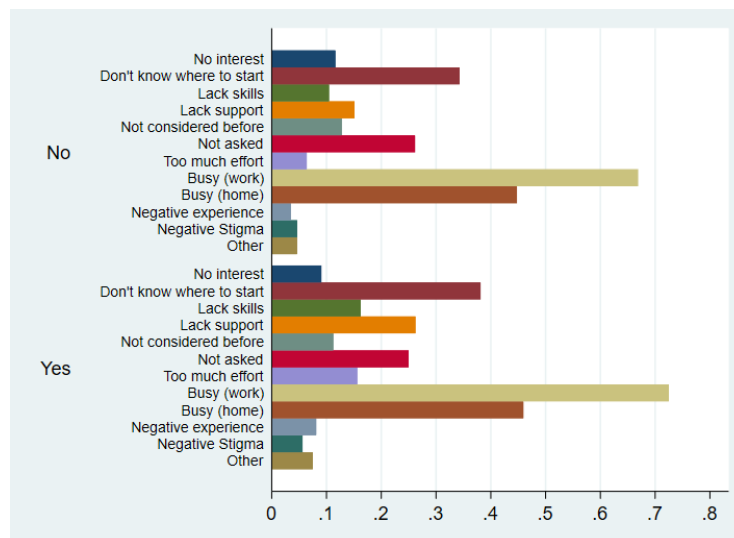
Panel (a) of Figure 15 shows that a sizeable group of respondents (44%) were aware of volunteer leave being offered by their employer. Of those who are aware of volunteer leave being offered, 47% have used it, as shown in panel (b) of Figure 15. For clarity, respondents were only asked if they had used volunteering leave if they report to be aware of it, so this equates to 20.7% (44% x 47%) of the entire sample who report to have used volunteering leave.

Figure 15: Volunteer Leave

(a) Aware of Volunteer Leave being offered

(b) Use Volunteer Leave
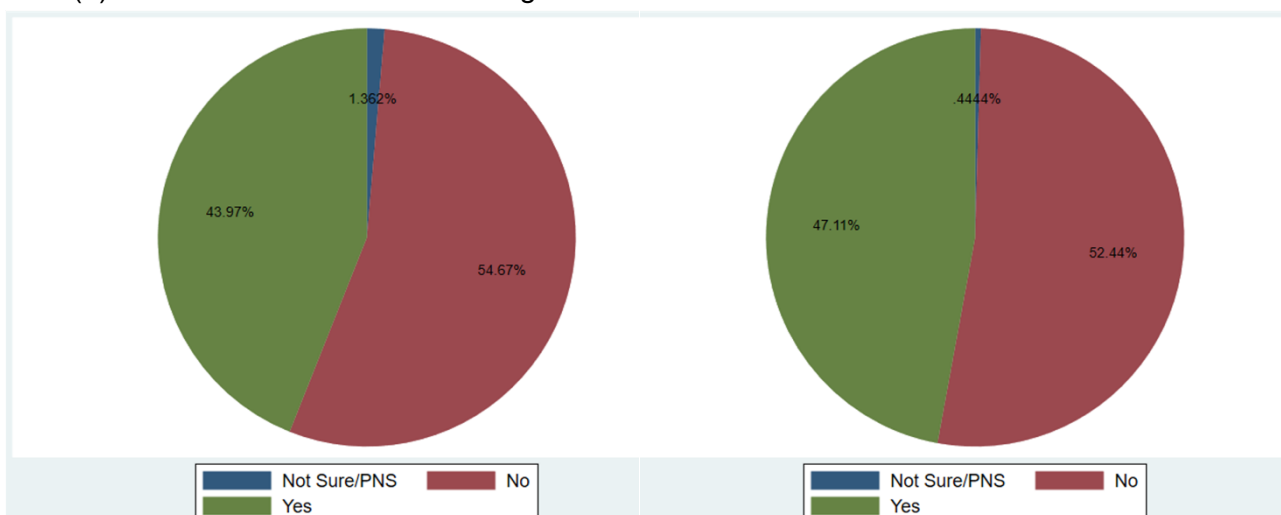
We provided a list of organisations that Network Rail reports suggest staff had volunteered with in previous years. Figure 16 shows that 67% of respondents used their volunteer leave with an organisation not included in this list. It is notable how small the Samaritans' segment is, with only 5% of respondents reporting to have used their volunteer leave at Samaritans.

Figure 16: Organisations volunteered for
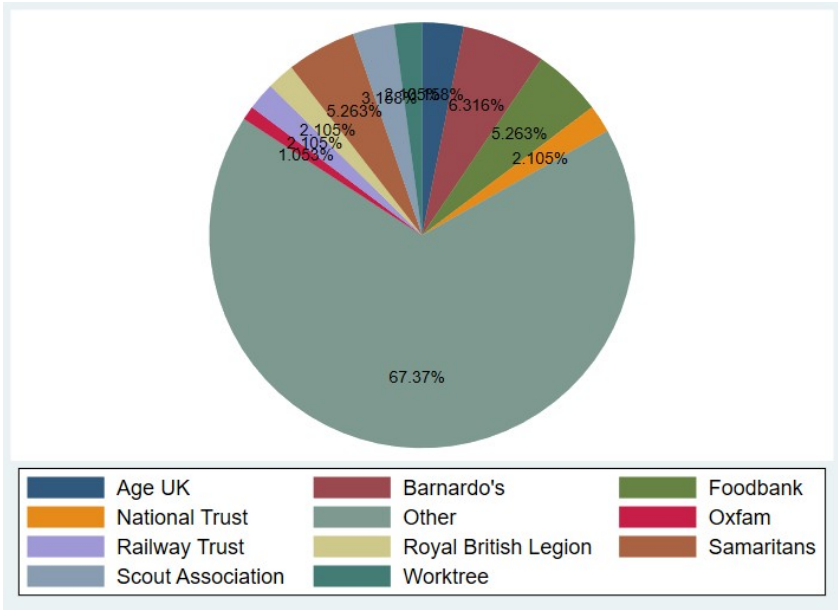
Many of the volunteers reported that they enjoyed their volunteer activity which may in part reflect that they many volunteered in a team with friends or co-workers, however a significant number also volunteered individually, as shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Volunteered individually or as part of a team
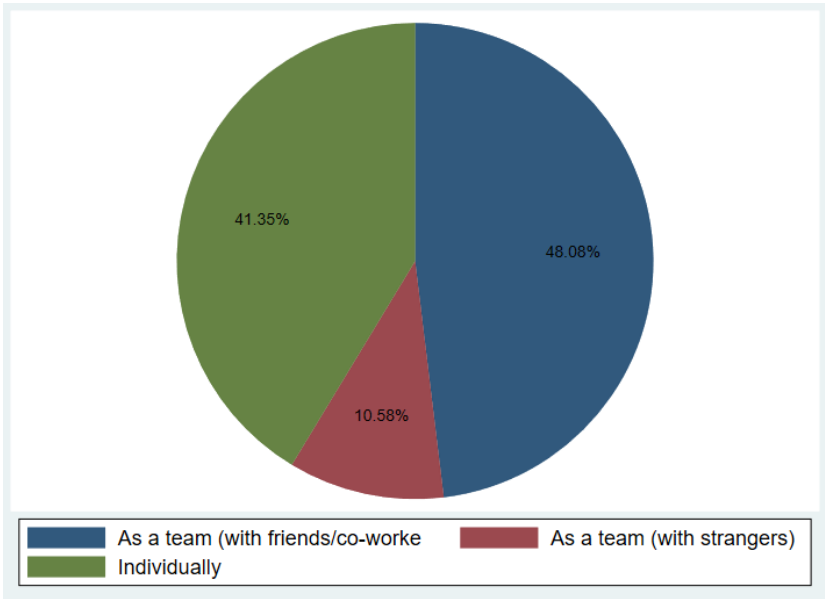
One of the main motivations for volunteering was to make a difference or to help others, the experience of volunteering does seem to help staff achieve these goals. Figure 18 shows that 91% of respondents reported that they felt their volunteering had made a difference. A lower but still significant proportion, 64% reported that volunteering had improved their mental health.

Figure 18: Impact of volunteering

(a) Did volunteering make a difference?   (b) Did volunteering improve mental health?
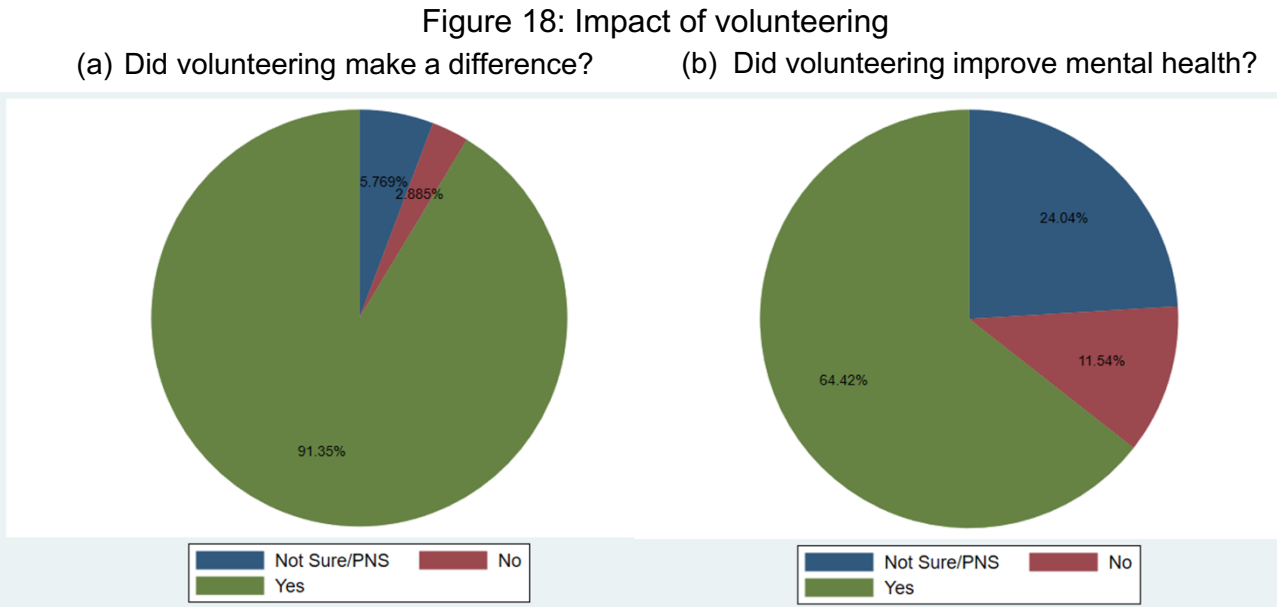
We also asked staff to reflect on any barriers that they had experienced in using the volunteer leave system. Panel (a) of Figure 19 shows the responses of those who have used the system, while panel (b) shows the responses of those who have not used the system. Both groups mention that they have to catch up on missed work, though the proportion is notable bigger for non-volunteers (over 40% compared with 27% of those who have used ESV). This is a significant issue as the system is not really functioning as volunteer leave if staff feel obliged to catch up on missed work. This finding suggests potential for improved messaging to staff and briefing line managers on how to work with staff and the system to support volunteering.

Figure 19: Barriers to volunteer leave programme

(a) Criticism of volunteer leave   (b) Reasons respondents do not use volunteer leave
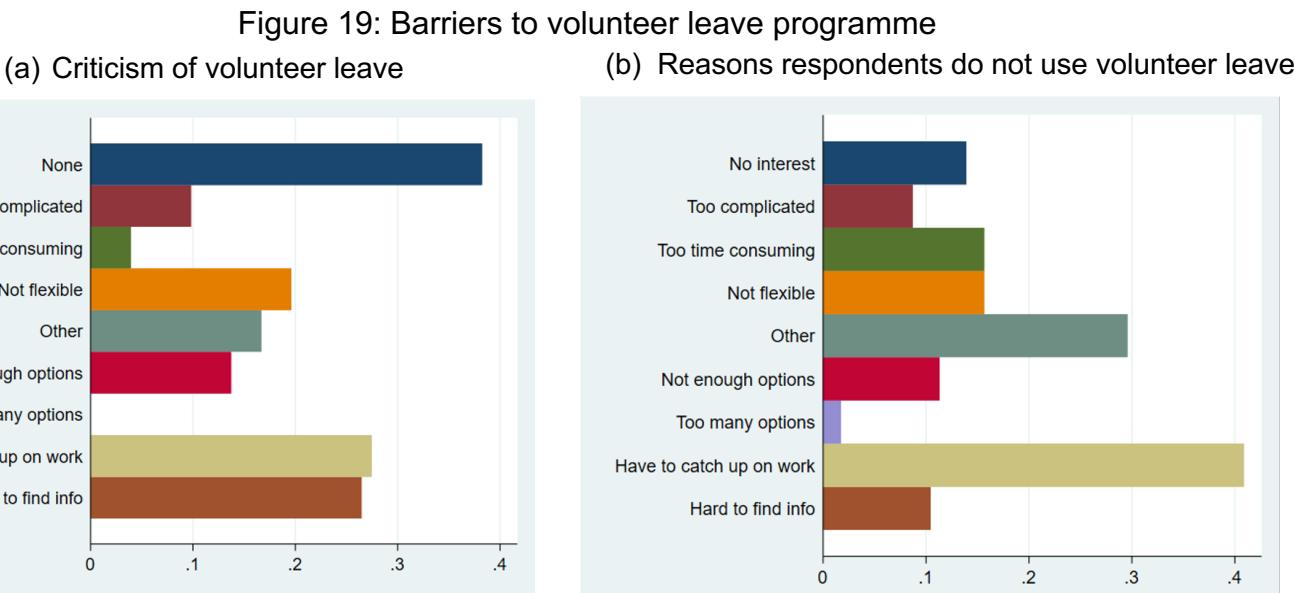
2.4   Vignettes

The vignettes presented survey respondents with three 'what-if' scenarios. The intention is to provide a distance between the individual's own experience and perhaps provide a more reflective response to the issues surrounding workplace volunteering. We explored questions on how employees might go about finding a suitable charity, how often they might volunteer and how their decisions might be affected by a mismatch between the design of the volunteer leave and the volunteer opportunities.

The scenario that each respondent received varied by gender, work role and hours, family status, type of charity and the work colleague from whom they seek advice:

- John/Sally;
- part/full-time;
- office/frontline;
- single/married;
- 0/2 children
- local/national charity
- peer/supervisor/senior manager

Vignette 1 was designed to explore routes to finding a suitable charity to volunteer with.

"John/Sally works as an office/frontline worker part/full-time in the transport industry, is single/married and has 0/2 children. John/Sally wants to volunteer but doesn't know where to start. A peer/supervisor/senior manager with lots of volunteering experience advises John/Sally to find a local/national charity that John/Sally is either passionate about and sign up for whatever help they need, or one where John/Sally skills will be useful. John/Sally struggles to find a suitable charity. What should John/Sally do?

- Give up
- Keep looking
- Choose a random charity
- Ask for more advice"

There is very little variation in response to this question, the vast majority (81%) suggest that John/Sally should ask for further advice. The responses here provide confirmation that information about volunteering in general and volunteer opportunities in particular are likely to be important factors in encouraging volunteer activity.

Figure 20: John/Sally struggles to find a suitable charity. What should John/Sally do?

Struggling to find a charity ....

- Give up
- Keep Looking
- Choose a random charity
- Ask for more advice
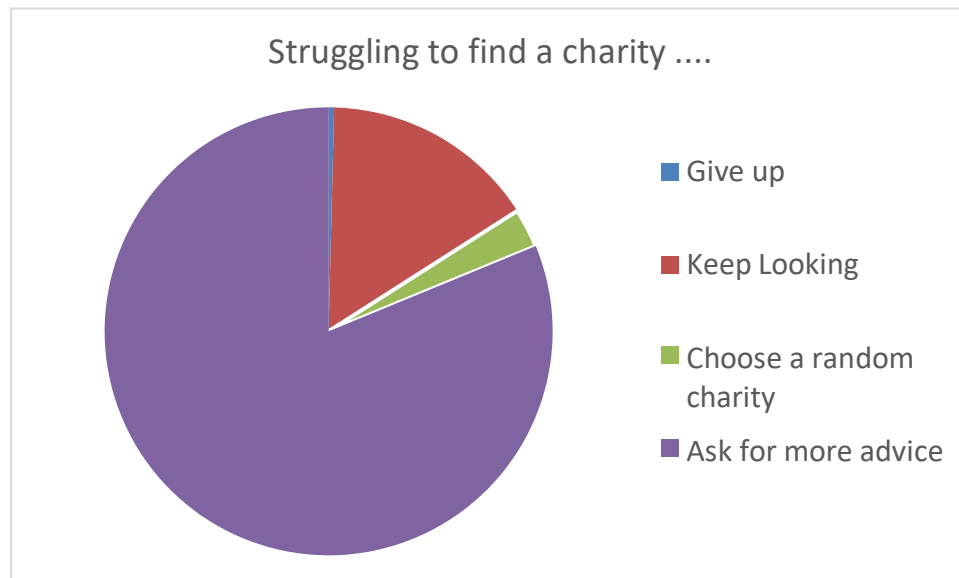
Vignette 2 was designed to explore views on desirable frequency of volunteering

"John/Sally finds out that their company offers volunteer leave and provides a list of suggested charities. From this list, John/Sally finds some charity work that interests them. How often do you think John/Sally should volunteer?

- Never
- Infrequently
- Once a month
- Once a week
- or more times a week"

Figure 21: How often do you think John/Sally should volunteer?

- Three or more times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Infrequently
- Never
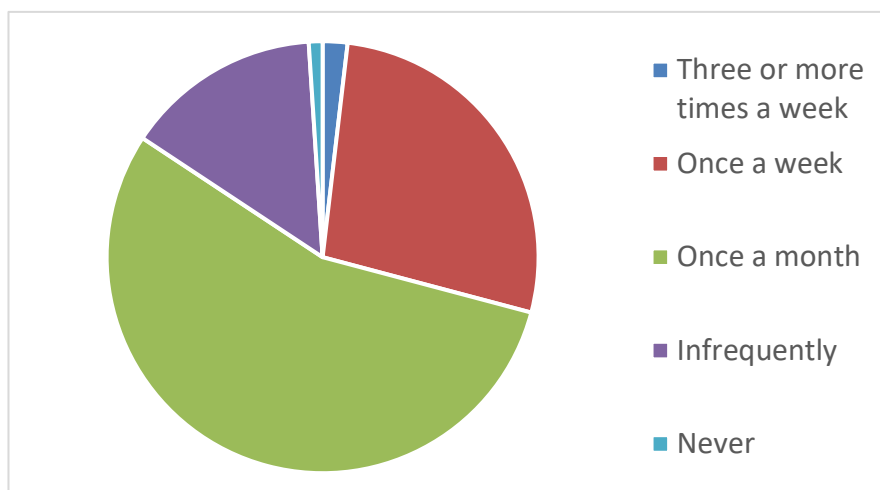
More than half of the respondents (55%) suggest that John/Sally should volunteer once a month. We find some evidence that responses do vary with gender and marital status presented in the scenario. Where the scenario asks about John, respondents were significantly more likely to suggest that he should volunteer 3 or more times a week. If the scenario indicated that the person seeking advice was single, rather than married, then the advice was for more frequent volunteering – a difference which is statistically significant.

Figure 22: How often do you think John/Sally should volunteer?
By gender and marital status
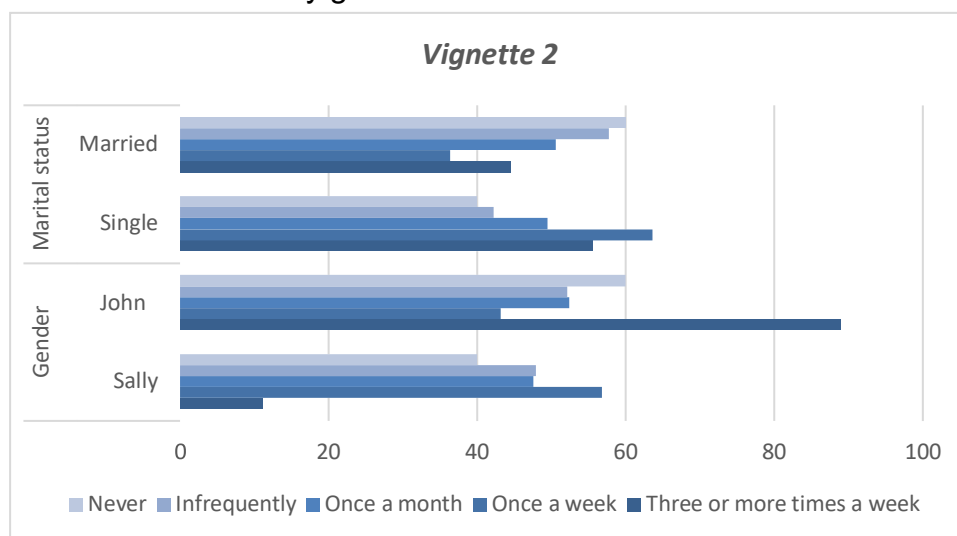
The concentration of responses around once a month suggest that facilitating ways in which volunteer leave might be distributed into smaller chunks rather than blocks of days is likely to be valuable in encouraging greater volunteer activity.

Vignette 3 was designed to explore how views of staff might be influenced by a mismatch between the needs of their preferred charity and the design of the volunteer leave system.

"John/Sally is allowed 5 days of volunteer leave from work per year. However, the charity says they only need volunteers on weekends and the company says the volunteer leave cannot therefore be used. What do you think should happen?

- John/Sally should choose a new charity which needs help on weekdays
- The company should allow John/Sally to volunteer on the weekend and take a weekday off work instead
- Other
- John/Sally should volunteer on the weekend and not use the volunteer leave
- John/Sally should volunteer on the weekend, as well as finding a new charity to use the volunteer leave"

The largest single group indicated that the member of railway staff should be given a day in lieu (45%), followed by suggesting that they continue to volunteer at the weekend but without using the volunteer leave (21%) and suggesting seeking some other solution not specified by the vignette (19%).

Figure 23: Mismatch between charity needs and design of volunteer leave scheme

Charity only needs volunteers at the week-end when volunteer leave cannot be used ...
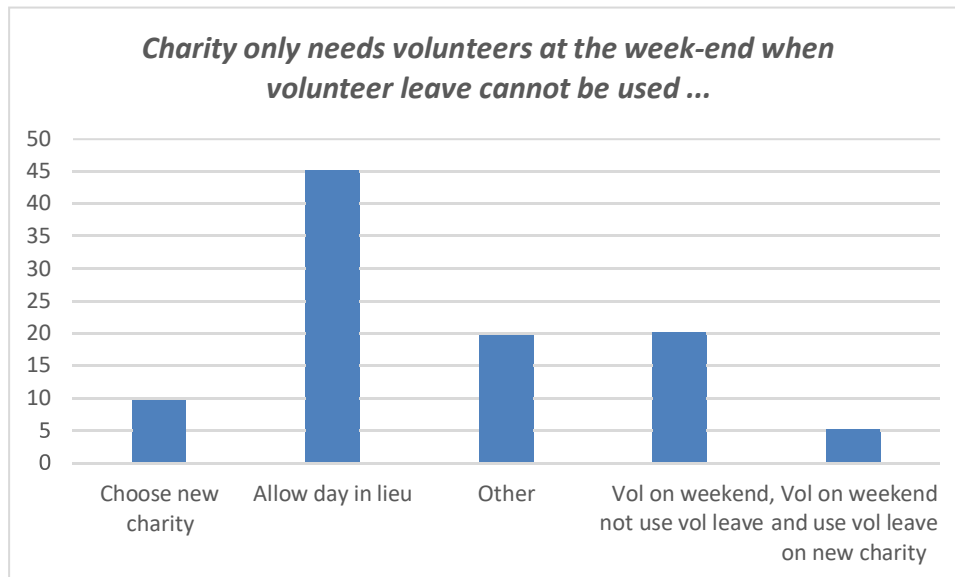
We again find that the responses given vary with the characteristics suggested in the scenario. Where the member of railway staff has 2 children (rather than 0), then the mismatch between the charity needs and the volunteer leave policy is more likely to prompt the suggestion of finding a new charity, whereas volunteering at the weekend regardless of the volunteer leave is more likely when the scenario suggests that the railway worker does not have children. There is also some statistical difference when the colleague that the railway worker approaches is a supervisor rather than a peer or a senior manager – here the response is more likely to be to suggest volunteering at the weekend without using the volunteer leave.

Figure 24: Mismatch between charity needs and ESV design, by parental status

Vignette 3
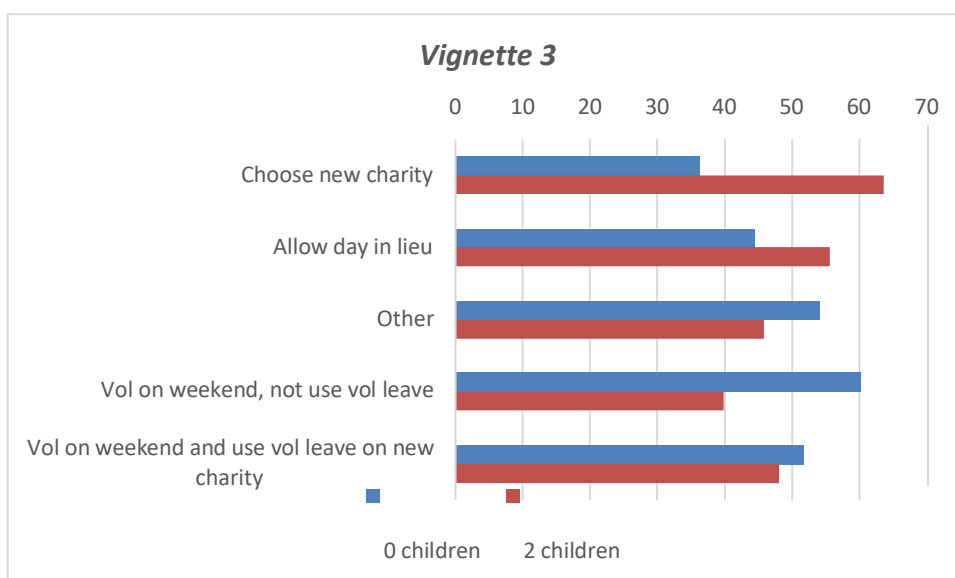
Figure 25: Mismatch between charity needs and ESV design, by colleague
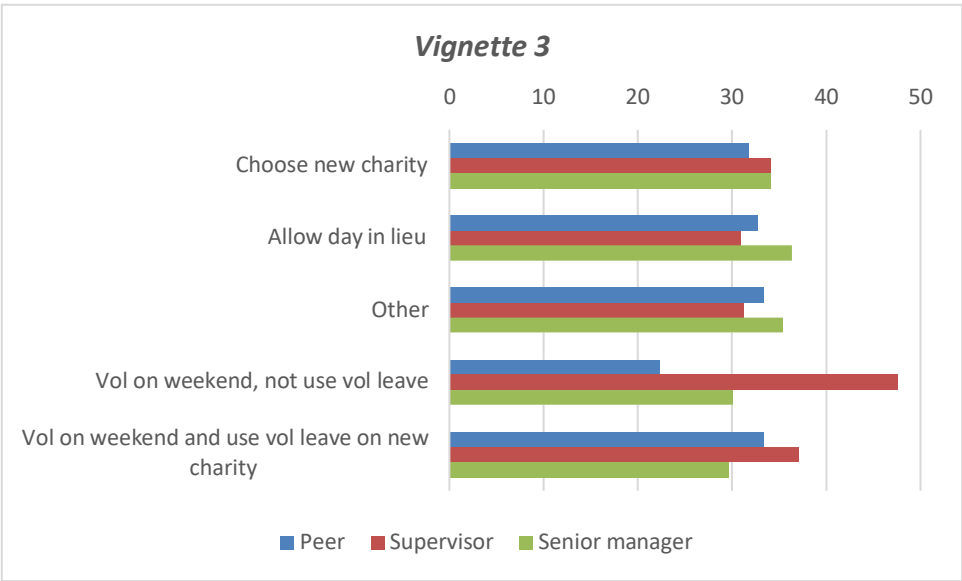
2.5   Summary

Responses to the survey suggested high levels of experience of volunteering and familiarity with the ESV leave scheme – though this is likely to reflect some self-selection that those who were interested in volunteering were more likely to complete a survey on the topic. Consistent with Network Rail's own internal surveys, rates of volunteering were higher amongst office compared with track staff. Staff reported more altruistic motives and benefits associated with volunteering – helping others, making a difference. The main barriers to volunteering arose from time constraints – either at work or at home – or lack of information. When answering the 'what if' scenarios, it seems clear that personal circumstances were considered as limiting the time available for volunteering.

3 Qualitative Interviews and unprompted responses

In the following we talk about the findings from interviews and 'unprompted responses' from the survey. For anonymised and participant-verified interview summaries and anonymised ''unprompted responses' see the appendix.

3.1 Interviews
3.1.1 Introduction

We sought to interview 8-10 individuals from the rail industry who would provide us with their experiences of and perspectives on volunteering. This included examples of their own volunteering, the benefits they obtained from it, what motivated them to volunteer and their views of ESV.

Two routes were used to recruit interviewees:

(1) Network Rail facilitated access to potential interviewees by making an Invitation Notice of the interview to Network Rail employees to raise awareness of the study; the notice was also circulated by Network Rail to contacts in several other rail operating companies, with the request the information be cascaded to their employee networks
(2) Information, including a link to the Participant Information Sheet, was posted on the IVR website

To maximise confidentiality and reduce the potential of a participant being identified we do not disclose how they expressed their interest in talking to us and all participants are referred to as "he/him" in the analysis and discussion below. We undertook eight interviews. Our sample reflected a variety in gender, approximate age, employer, employment role and experience of volunteering.

Gender: 5 male, 3 female

Age: participants were not asked their age; however, based on the accounts given by interviewees, about four participants were between a relatively early to mid-stage of their careers while the other four had been working for more than 25-30 years in the rail industry

Employer: one participant works for Network Rail; the other 7 came from six different rail operating companies

Role: these were varied and reflected driver, customer assistant, partnership officer, office staff and different types of engineering staff

Experience: 6 participants had extensive, regular and on-going volunteering experience; one participant was volunteering on an occasional basis; one participant who was not currently volunteering had a brief volunteering episode several years previously

The sample seems comparable to the general volunteering population showing similar responses: for example, all eight interviewees reported that volunteering was a source of enjoyment and most described it in terms akin to enriching and enhancing their quality of life. The participant who had minimal previous, and no current, volunteering experience stated that it had been an "eye-opening" and learning experience, to which he was open in future.

3.1.2   Network Rail Offer

Network Rail's offer of up to 5 days a year to volunteer was already known to four interviews, although one of these had learned of it only when reading the website notice of the study.The other four had not heard of Network Rail's offer prior to the interview. Views on the offer were positive across the interview cohort: "*a really good idea*"; "*I wish my organisation did this*"; "*if my company started this, I'd be keen to particip*ate"; and two interviewees each said it would "*encourage lots of people to volunteer*".

Several interviewees, unprompted, offered further comments. One interviewee who approved of the idea added that, owing to procedures within his organisation which assigned Annual Leave, he was left with only 7 days a year when he could be completely flexible with his own leave: "*Network Rail's scheme would allow me to do more volunteering*".

3.1.3   Benefits of volunteering

The benefits of volunteering were often described in similar ways by interviewees, the most frequent of which were that volunteering gave a chance to contribute and make a difference to the local community; enjoyment was gained from being involved with others for a common purpose; and volunteering helped to make positive changes. Other benefits included: gaining a sense of achievement, giving a sense of purpose, having something to look forward to outside day-to-day life, feeling valued, learning new skills and meeting others with whom you share a common focus. These benefits on wellbeing, including key influencing factors, mechanisms of change and intermediate outcomes of volunteering, echo recent research on volunteering (What Works Briefing, October 2020; Time Well Spent, 2019).

Distinct benefits cited by three participants are also noted: volunteering helps to give a "*less introverted view of life*"; volunteering means the participant is "*genuinely needed*" and volunteering has led to "*challenging some biases*" of which the participant had been unaware, such as preconceptions of who would use a food-bank. Lastly, perspectives given by two interviewees are in a slightly different category of benefit. One of these two individuals envisaged his volunteering as a "*go-between between management and staff on the ground*" in order to help "*solve issues*". The second person remarked that volunteering helps "*to provide a more human face in the railway industry*". These last two comments suggest a degree of conflation between formal employment and volunteering itself.

3.1.4 Motivations to volunteer

The motivation to volunteer garnered many similar as well as several distinct perspectives. Many motivations overlapped with the benefits interviewees had cited, as participants themselves acknowledged. Chief among these were the enjoyment of volunteering and enjoying its social aspects. The motivation to "*give something back*" was mentioned frequently and usually associated with the context of the local community; another interviewee cited giving back specifically to the NHS, while another, reflecting on his own youth, described his motivation to pass on to young people something of what he himself had gained. Two interviewees reported related motivations: for one person, the motivation sprang from always enjoying being active and busy; the other person described a "*compulsion*" to stay involved in his areas of interest. Two other interviewees described motivations that implied a higher purpose: for one, the motivation was "*doing something good*" while for the other, it was doing "*the right thing*". One interviewee reported that part of his motivation came from the desire to connect with people he "*would not normally have the chance to*". Finally, one example of motivation was specific to the work context: the potential that volunteering "*could help with career progression*".

3.1.5 Barriers

Respondents identified barriers or potential restrictions on taking up an ESV offer. One interviewee identified a block for railway staff who want to volunteer but who cannot commit to regular hours, while another argued that the scheme "*might not be helpful for Network Rail staff who want flexibility around their volunteering*". Another interviewee felt that whenever a rail company introduced re-organisations, schemes such as this offer would likely have to change. Commenting on his own experience, another interviewee reported that local section managers need to be "*better informed and trained*" about such schemes. He elaborated: "*managers do not have sufficient knowledge or awareness of the scheme, which leads them to block someone's intention to take up volunteering, partly because they do not understand what to do*". The lack of knowledge exhibited by some line-managers meant they were likely to deter staff from taking up the 5-day scheme. A different interviewee reflected that "*Network Rail likes discrete projects*" in which a group of people comes in, carries out a specific task and then can say, "*such-and-such has been achieved*". By contrast, he added, volunteering should be seen as something "on-going". Another interviewee thought that Network Rail's scheme was a good idea "*because it gives people an opportunity where they don't have to come out of work to do this; it removes the hassle*". As in an example above, this perspective suggests a conflation between paid employment and volunteering.

Suggestions from interviewees on what might Network Rail do to increase the take-up of volunteering among its track staff typically picked up on the challenges that many interviewees felt Network Rail's scheme faced. Chief among these was the lack of flexibility available to track staff, given their changing work-shifts and non-regular hours, which prevented track staff from committing to volunteering on a fixed basis. For one interviewee, "*shifts are terrible, they literally change at 24 hours' notice*". These and related comments in this research indicate that, as expressed in the Time Well Spent report (2019) [vi], rail staff "*want to give time on their own terms*".

Although many interviewees acknowledged the barriers presented by track staff's work patterns, they also offered constructive suggestions to help address the challenge which in contrast still illustrate the existing barriers. Some interviewees recommended that Network Rail "think local": "find local projects that need people", "liaise with those with local knowledge" and "make the most of the social side of volunteering and what can be given to the local community". This strongly resonates with national findings, for example, that 80% of volunteering happens locally.[vii] In addition, interviewees pointed out that track staff need clarity, so suggested that Network Rail explain or clarify what volunteering means and provide track staff with a list of options which included:

- volunteering that requires a regular commitment
- volunteering that is highly flexible and allows staff to work around their shift
- volunteering related to railways, for example, talking to school children about safety on the rails or about railway careers, because most track staff are proud of their work and enjoy talking about it

The highly individual nature of volunteering was emphasised by some interviewees, who felt that Network Rail also needed to emphasise this. One remarked that volunteering has "*got to be sold as a benefit to the person*", which he acknowledged was a challenge but worth trying to address, while another said that Network Rail needs to understand what individual staff "*want to achieve*", so "*give them space to understand they can get something*" from volunteering. Yet another suggested that volunteering be talked about in terms of "*improving one's life and own skills*".

Some interviewees underlined that Network Rail should not assume what track staff might choose to do; Network Rail has a role in trying to "*find a match with each person's interests and skills*" in volunteering. In a similar vein, it was suggested that Network Rail give staff "*options on what they might want to do, rather than having it presented almost like a prescription: 'here is a charity, go and talk to it'*." Another suggestion was that Network Rail hold workshops for track staff "*so that they understand what they might be able to do*".

Different types of obstacles were raised by interviewees: for example, "*some track staff might be concerned about being reprimanded or seen as awkward if they requested a volunteering day*" and therefore would avoid what they perceived would be a "*hassle*".

Another interviewee highlighted that a "*proper lads*" culture among track staff could be a barrier for them engaging in volunteering because "*it might trigger a 'what are you doing that for?' reaction*". To help address this factor, he suggested that a "*volunteering champion*" among track staff might help to give a sense of "*it's your mate that you can speak to*". Having a peer speak up about their own volunteering experience might help some track staff "*feel more comfortable about getting involved*" in volunteering. More than one interviewee felt that messages about volunteering should come from peers, not above line-manager level. One person raised the challenge of making "*credible connections*" with Track staff who tend to walk past posters without reading them and most do not read information online. In a related vein, another interviewee said separately that messages on volunteering should also come through "*non-formal channels*" not related to work (e.g., WhatsApp; Facebook).

3.1.6 Diversity and life-course

The interviews revealed that that no one-size-fits-all approach to and experience of volunteering exists or is possible to identify. On the contrary, participants revealed broad range of individual interests and needs, as well as what they found preferable and convenient to them. Furthermore, aspects of their volunteering changed over their own life reflecting how individual circumstances and interests can alter and develop. This speaks not only to the individual nature of volunteering but also to its wider, life-course characteristics, as outlined in the seminal report Pathways Through Participation[viii]. Accounts from our cohort resonate with a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes volunteering, how to work with it and how to involve people: different things for different people. While benefit and motivation of volunteering overlapped for most interviewees, they varied in their specifics: the principal example of this was the desire to contribute or "give back" to the local community, though socialising with like-minded others while working for a common cause motivated many interviewees. By contrast, one distinct example was the potential for one interviewee of volunteering to have a positive impact on career progression, while another was explicit that volunteering helped him to shed some of these preconceptions about who would access food-banks.

3.1.7 Message

How volunteering is understood also surfaced in the interview findings. This could be at the individual level, akin to a "what is in it for me?" Interviewees were already persuaded of volunteering's positive aspects, so were already receptive to messages about volunteering. At a wider level, however, their comments revealed that the rail industry was not always successful in conveying the message of volunteering and its benefits and the message being received by staff, especially track staff. A few participants felt that messages disseminated from high management had much more limited success in drawing track staff to volunteering than messages from their peers or those at line-manager level, to which they gave greater credence.
According to our interview cohort, it was not sufficient that messages promoting volunteering come only from peers. How volunteering was explained was equally significant, especially in terms of making the message clear and providing examples of the scope of volunteering activities. In addition, messages needed to illustrate how volunteering could be tailored to each person's own preferences. One interviewee cautioned that many line-managers did not understand the volunteering policy and often exhibited "*negative*" or "*closing down*" attitudes when approached about the volunteering scheme. As a result, he recommended strongly that line-managers themselves be trained and updated on Network Rail's scheme. A few interviewees were familiar with the concept of champions, for example Equality and Diversity; Health and Safety, so they felt the idea of a volunteering champion was worth exploring, as long as the person was credible to track staff peers.

3.1.8 Impact
Interviewees offered examples of the positive impact of what rail staff do when they volunteer. For example, a few interviewees spoke of their volunteering in activities directly associated with the rail industry, although the majority referred to a diversity of volunteering in completely different fields, such as health, culture and community activities. All interviewees described their volunteering in highly positive terms; this included expressions such as "*sheer enjoyment*" and "*gaining satisfaction*" from their voluntary activities. These interviewees seem to describe a virtuous circle in which enjoyment leads to wanting to maintain, if not increase, activity, as well as seeing

changes that result from volunteering. Such a virtuous circle is particularly associated with wellbeing[ix]. The "virtue" of seeing a change from voluntary input was mentioned explicitly by one participant. One interviewee underlined the distinct context in which this study took place: he increased his volunteering after the UK's first lockdown was introduced in spring 2020 because he had more hours to contribute, owing to being furloughed.

3.2 Unprompted responses

3.2.1 Introduction

In the survey we added a question to gather unprompted responses to analyse alongside the views gathered from the interviews. We received 98 responses which covered the key areas of barriers, enablers, motivations and perceptions.

The question in the survey was:

> **If you have any additional comments on volunteering in the rail industry please give them here.**

Overall, the responses appeared reflective of generally recognised evidence from volunteering research and compared well with the other evidence from this research, for example, the desire of volunteers to make a difference rather than gain a personal benefit:

> *"Volunteering for me is not about getting time off work but my belief that what I do makes a difference."*

3.2.2 Motivations

Unprompted, respondents identified a range of well recognised motivations to volunteer. As one Network Rail member of staff put it:

> *"Volunteering is a great idea both for the community/those you are helping and also yourself in terms of self worth/developing new skills etc."*

3.2.3 Examples

Respondents offered a range of unprompted examples of their own volunteering both within and outside ESV and of what they did within Network Rail to promote volunteering.

> *"I use around 3 days a year at a Foodbank and at a children's centre for teaching them the importance of safety."*

> *"I am a regular volunteer and have been presenting to other teams on what I do and how to get involved with charities as well as the benefits"*

3.2.4 Network Rail positive observations

Network Rail received some very positive mentions about its ESV and companies with ESV were rated by some respondents as better that those without.

> *"I already volunteered for 3 organisations before i [sic] started working for NR, it was alovely surprise to realise i [sic] could use 5 work days to do more volunteering."*

> *"I have been inspired to start volunteering through the encouragement and enthusiasm of the Senior Management at a DIFFERENT freight company! The former Directors …. set up a volunteering initiative and they themselves shared their own volunteering projects. It was very inspiring. Unfortunately my own company doesn't offer volunteering days and this is a definite drawback."*

3.2.5 Concerns

However, one in four respondents raised concerns about how ESV is handled. As one Network Rail member of staff put it:

> *"Line Manager encouragement and buy-in can sometimes be lacking."*

Whereas a respondent from a company with some ESV arrangements stated:

> *"It is never mentioned, nor is it encouraged."*

3.2.6 Barriers

Four in ten of all the unprompted responses identified practical barriers ranging from lack of time to lack of opportunities to volunteer. The first quote is from a member of Network Rail staff, the second from another company.

> *"I believe people struggle to find opportunities and don't know where to look…"*

> *"Many families (like mine) have more than one railway worker, with parents having to work around shifts to provide appropriate childcare."*

Of those who identified barriers several linked these directly to Network Rail practices even when recognising Network Rail's overall positive approach.

> *"Network Rail always encourage volunteering but so many of us are stretched to the limit and struggle to take annual leave and so it is really difficult to do so at times"*

> *"Extremely unforgiving rosters and unwillingness to change … makes continuing to volunteer impossible."*

3.2.7   Criticisms

Fewer than one in twenty raised fundamental criticism about volunteering or ESV in general. The first quote is from a member of Network Rail staff, the second from another company.

> *"Volunteering is just that and should be something you want to do for the right reason not because your co0mpany/industry [sic] is pushing. I support the companyproviding time but it should not be a company target, this pushes the wrong behaviours."*

> *"Life is too short, when I'm not at work ill [sic] be at home with my family volunteering doesn't put the food on my table"*

And only one respondent criticised the survey, but this is likely to reflect the fact that those more critical of the survey, volunteering or ESV will not have completed the survey.

> *"only network are putting a survey like this out in the middle of a COVID pandemicshows how in touch you are with the real world"*

3.2.8   Suggestions

Respondents provided a range of suggestions relating to ESV in general or their personal interests or circumstances. The first quote is from a member of Network Rail staff, the second from another company.

> *"I would volunteer more if there was a programme organised for me to join as i dont [sic] have the time to research and approach organisations myself."*

> *"I would like it to be sports related and be around like minded individuals."*

3.3   Summary

Many of these findings are reflective of Network Rail's own volunteering survey and confirm that ESV activities are already supporting the company's 'social performance themes'. We have heard from members of staff with real enthusiasm for volunteering in general and also sympathy for Network Rail's support for ESV. However, respondents provide some important messages in terms of developing a common understanding of what is volunteering and the importance of line managers in supporting staff use of ESV to enable staff's volunteer activities and they helped illustrate some of the reasons why uptake remains below target and is indeed falling. Collectively they point to a disconnect in strategic planning, as the social performance themes do not seem to take into account the potential benefits for the volunteers and the current programme design does not appear to take into sufficient account the individual circumstances of staff.

4 Discussion

In this section we talk about what are the main findings and what do they mean.

4.1 The value of existing evidence, knowledge and expertise

Network Rail already collects information about its staff's volunteering, for example, in a staff survey and has detailed information from over 1000 members of staff, which we reviewed. Our survey reached over 500 people including staff from other operators and we reviewed a substantial body of existing evidence about volunteering in general and ESV in particular. We are confident that the findings of our survey are broadly consistent with Network Rail's existing data and reflective of the national picture. That means, taking into account limitations we have spelled out in section 1.3, we can confidently rely on the existing evidence.

General Public	Network Rail
70% have volunteered sometime in their lives	64% of respondents report to have volunteered *in the last 12 months*
10% give their time via ESV	10% give their time via ESV
90% of volunteers feel they make a difference	91% of volunteers feel they make a difference

The Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) has begun to look specifically at staff's health and wellbeing with a detailed questionnaire. We also know that other operators in the industry have ESV programmes, for example, Ganymede with two volunteer days per annum or ScotRail with 10 hrs in a 12 months period. We believe that they too are collecting evidence. We have not reviewed any of that evidence.

Existing evidence does not seem widely available or accessible, which may, for example, lead to some direct line management appearing unsupportive or notfully aware of their staff's volunteering (see also section 3.3.5).

> *"some Track Staff might be concerned about being reprimanded or seen as awkward if they requested a volunteering day"*

This means there is scope to better collect data, use available evidence to train people and include processes to ensure managers understand the ESV scheme. This means there is scope to clarify the strategic objectives using best evidence such as work by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development[x], the National Council for Voluntary Organisations [xi] and the Institute for Volunteering Research. Especially if Network Rail seeks to link volunteering general and though ESV and staff's health and wellbeing the collection of data should be better standardised so that judgments can be made on reliable measurements. If possible, this might be shared and developed with industry partners to achieve shared goals.

Network Rail is already using a wide range of approaches to disseminate information about its ESV to staff, for example, via Charity Ambassadors, newsletters, posters and social media. However, the feedback from our research suggest that this is not yet fully effective especially in engendering middle management support and onboarding new staff. Evidence from the Institute for Volunteering Research, for

example, through work in the NHS [xii], suggests that dedicated plans are required to address such obstacles.

4.2   A diverse bunch

Network Rail's approximately 40,000 staff come in all shapes and sizes and work in a great range of circumstances. 4363 of them, just over 10%, took up the ESV offer in 2019/2020. They are Senior Executives, Project Leaders, HR Managers, Shift Supervisors, Conductors, Administrators, Train Drivers, Signallers, and those are just a few examples. They volunteer in a wide range sectors from Education, Health, Conservation, Youth, Age, Social Care and cultural in organisations such as schools, hospices, the Canal and RiverTrust, the Scouts, Age Concern, Foodbanks and of course Heritage Railways

The headline figure of 10%, in a national comparison that is neither particularly good nor bad. However, while this research could not establish exact patterns, it confirms that behind the headline figure we see great variation, most likely reflective of the variation of staff circumstances and job roles. For example, the ease with which people can integrate volunteering into a working life may depend upon their out of work commitment. Among the people who responded to our survey almost half (43%) have dependents: 31% have dependent children, 10% have older dependents, and 10% have other dependents. This also applies to job roles, for example, to shift patterns. In our survey a majority of non- track respondents (60%) answer that their shift patterns are always the same or rarely change whereas the opposite is true of track staff with a majority (76%) reporting that their shifts always change or sometimes change. A seminal Big Lottery funded research report in 2011, 'Pathways through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship' captures the great diversity of volunteering over people's life-course andoutlines the implications of this.

> *"Participation is primarily about individual choice and personal preferences, and a person's capacity to take action."[xiii]*

Respondents in our research confirmed a broad range of individual interests and needs, as well as what they found preferable and convenient to them. In reverse they identified the barriers which emerged when ESV was neither convenient nor what they wanted to do. Furthermore, aspects of their volunteering changed over their own life reflecting how individual circumstances and interests can alter and develop. For example, one interviewee spoke about always enjoying being active and busy; another spoke about volunteering potentially adding to career progression.

Our survey supports the view that Network Rail's staff, with regards to volunteering, are broadly comparable with the UK population. Therefore, addressing diversity amongst the workforce and its implications on volunteering might benefit from comparison to the national picture, for example, the recent compressive survey 'Time well Spent' by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. Translating it into practice might benefit from evidence about volunteer management practice, for example, in the third edition of 'The Complete Volunteer Management Handbook' or collaboration with the Association of Volunteer Managers.

4.3   The question of the message

Successful implementation of a policy in any size of organisation requires a common understanding with clear KPIs to monitor progress. This becomes even more important in large and complex organisations such as Network Rail. The senior management itself needs to be clear about the objectives - corporate social responsibility or health and wellbeing of staff. The messaging to staff and line managers should be consistent with these objectives and, crucially, simply expressed. Given the complexity and diversity of the organisation, the routes and means of communicating the message are likely to vary, as will the role-holder who are best placed to share the messages. Messaging also needs to be consistent in the face of staff turnover. It needs to be robust and continuously communicated to new managers and staff through local inductions.

In both the survey and the interviews, we found evidence of a lack of clarity about what was considered to be volunteering and the range of opportunities that might be available. Interviewees also reflected on potentially conflicting objectives - is the volunteering good for business or good for staff. Interviewees also felt that some of the messaging should come through peers and utilise informal routes such as social media.

At a more practical level, access to and operation of the ESV leave scheme need to be as easy as and flexible as possible. Consideration needs to be given to how staff across the organisation might have access to IT for booking leave and finding volunteering opportunities.

Finally, whilst remaining sensitive to the concerns around reopening of economic and social life during the ongoing pandemic, there is the possibility of harnessing the community spirit of helping one another that has been a feature during the COVID crisis. Network Rail may find it useful to focus on local communities for community spirit.

4.4   Summary

With this work we tried to address three questions given to us by Network Rail, to:

> ***better understand how volunteering is beneficial for staff, especially their mental health and wellbeing***;

The evidence is clear and compelling, volunteering can be good for the mental health and wellbeing of the volunteers. This research confirms that Network Rail staff are already benefitting from this through their own activities outside work and that this may be further supported through ESV. However, the evidence is equally clear that these benefits only accrue if the ESV enables volunteering, for which it needs to be reactive to staff needs and circumstances. By better understanding the needs of staff and better planning ESV might in fact support those who would most benefit, be it during live crisis or life transitions. It is not sufficient to say here are five days additional leave if people cannot take it, and if it is not for the type of volunteering that actually benefits their health and wellbeing.

better understand how to support both the rail industry's Million Hour Challenge and Network Rail's own desire to see an increase in the number of volunteer days used by Network Rail track staff and Network Rail contractor track staff;

These are two separate but related questions. Increasing the number of volunteers is likely to require the specialist skills of volunteer management and involvement and close attention to the points made above, about being reactive to staff needs. This also applies to the Million Hour Challenge. However, in the latter it also requires the recognition that the needs of the Community Partner may not match what many Network Rail staff can or want to give. The most obvious example are shift patterns, but the level of commitment is also highly relevant, if staff report that they cannot balance such an extra commitment with existing work commitments. With regards to community partnerships the advice by the industry body CIPD is that

> *"Both companies and voluntary organisations have different working cultures, challenges and expectations. If time is not taken to understand and examine these, relationships can falter at an early stage."*

inform a strategy with practical steps as to what will be most effective in encouraging people to get involved in volunteering, specifically Network Rail track staff and Network Rail contractor track staff.

We point to some practical steps in section 5 about conclusions and implications. Those reflect that the challenges here are within a complex system. In complex systems strategic planning requires clarity of the overall aims and careful backwards planning, identifying suitable measurements, of the steps required to achieve those aims. On the evidence we have available further clarification of Network Rail's purpose of its ESV is necessary, followed by a revision of the designs included in the ESV offer, taking into account in particular the needs and circumstances of staff. And finally, it seems necessary to bring in specialist expertise around volunteering to assist not just during the planning and design stages but also the implementation, dissemination, including in particular required training.

5 Conclusions and implications

The original brief for this project set out the objective: "*help inform Network Rail of the potential ways that it can seek to persuade those not already engaged in volunteering to do so*". Based on existing evidence and confirmed by this research, answers might be found in three distinct but connected ways. Below we briefly discuss their rationale and implications.

5.1 Volunteering works – train to gain

The evidence from the survey, the vignettes and the interviews provide some important messages in terms of developing a common understanding of what is volunteering and the importance of line managers in supporting staff use of ESV to enable staff's volunteer activities. ESV is not a free resource. Arranging and supporting it requires specialist knowledge that needs to be communicated sensitively and inclusively. In fact, if it is perceived to get in the way of productivity or other targets, it might be seen as an obstacle. In order to gain mutual benefits for company, staff and community, which are briefly described in section one of this report and are comprehensively supported by existing literature, investment is required to ensure that people have a shared understanding, commensurate with the strategic relevance of ESV,is required. This does not just relate to financial resources but to dedicated long-term strategic planning and regular comprehensive evaluation.

5.2 Volunteering for all – design to deliver

The fact that volunteers and non-volunteers alike cite lack of information, time commitments at work and at home as barriers, suggest that there is the potential to adjust the design of the ESV system. While the Industry's business requirements such as shift patterns cannot be changed, the barriers these create to volunteering might be removed or reduced by bespoke ESV designs. The evidence from this research shows that staff are engaged with a very wide range of groups, self-identify as volunteering across a diverse set of organisations and gain satisfaction from 'making a difference' or 'helping others'. This suggests that a system which is easy to use and stresses these more altruistic motives may be more successful. While this was not specifically explored in this research, earlier research also stresses the need for long-term and strategic partnershipswith the local communities in which the volunteering takes place. Some responses we received speak of 'thinking local'. ESV design therefore requires a systematic review and subsequent adjustment to establish how different forms such as time off for individual volunteering or a programme such as a team challenge event or an ongoing arrangementwith a community partner relates to purpose and possibility.

5.3 Volunteering for impact – choices and voices

The research revealed a lack of knowledge around the complexities of the lives of particular groups of staff, in this case track staff. The evidence points to the need for an ESV offer to be reactive to individual staff's circumstance. The successful volunteer involvement of a young new recruit, who is single and moves frequently around the country is likely to be very different from a parent in a family with more than one person working in the rail industry, looking after three children and working in shift patterns. The

design of a sustainable ESV offer in an industry as large as the Rail Industry needs to be informed by the varying circumstances of its staff and components of the volunteering landscape, what volunteering opportunities are available or can be developed. In terms ofoutcomes, health and wellbeing are particularly associated with older volunteers whereaslearning of new skills and building new networks are associated more with young people, and specific benefits are associated with people who are currently experiencing difficulties. For the company this might point, for example, towards support for staff preparing for retirement as a major transition, support for new recruits to gain skills identified in staff development and support for staff experiencing difficulties or potential recruits receiving extra support.

6 Appendix

6.1   Survey Questionnaire

Volunteering in the Rail Industry Survey

Volunteering in the Rail Industry Survey   This survey is for all Rail Industry staff, whether or not you have ever volunteered. Completing the survey will take no more than 10 minutes. All information given is anonymous and confidential. The survey will ask about your job role and your views on volunteering. Then a scenario will be described and you will be asked how you would advise those involved. The survey ends with some final quick questions which aid our research. All questions are optional and the information given cannot and will not be linked back to you.

 You can use the arrows at the bottom of the screen to move forward or back.

 By clicking to take this survey: I consent to take part in the research as described and give permission for the data I provide to be anonymously used and quoted in reports, research papers and other relevant publications. I give permission for the data I provide to be anonymised and archived by the University of East Anglia and at the UK Data Archive, so that it may be made available for future research and learning. I confirm that I understand that participation is voluntary and it is possible to withdraw at any time.

Please see the Participant Information Sheet for more details.

Section 1: about your job

Q1.1 Which of the following **companies** do you work for?

Drop-down menu

Q1.2 Which of the following best describes your **job role**?

Office or frontline

With dropdown menus on Area and Role

Q1.4 How many **hours** do you **work** in a **typical week**?

Q1.5 Do you work regular hours or does your **shift pattern change** often?

Always the same; Rarely changes; Sometimes changes; Always changes; Prefer not to say

Q1.6 How **satisfied** are you on a scale from 0-10, where 0 is completely dissatisfied and 10 is completely satisfied with...life in general, work in general, work-life balance?

Section 2: about any volunteering that you have undertaken

Q2.1 Have you ever **volunteered**?

Yes; No; Prefer not to say

Q2.2 Have you been **involved** with any of the following groups, clubs or organisations during the **last 12 months**? (choose as many as you like)

- **Children's education/schools** (e.g. Parent Teacher Associations, School governor, Fundraising, Helping in school, Running pupils' clubs)
- **Youth/children's activities (outside school)** (e.g. Youth clubs, Sports clubs, Hobby or cultural groups for children)
- **Adult education** (e.g. Attending or teaching classes, Mentoring, Cultural groups, Students Union, College governor)
- **Sport/exercise (taking part, coaching or going to watch)** e.g. Sports clubs or groups (e.g. football, swimming, fishing, golf, keep-fit, hiking), Supporter clubs)
- **Hobbies, recreation/arts/social clubs** (e. g. Railway Heritage, Clubs or groups for the Arts (e.g. theatres, museums, amateur dramatics, orchestras), Hobby or cultural groups (e.g. local history club, Social club)
- **Religion** (e.g. Attending a place of worship (church, chapel, mosque, temple, synagogue) , Attending faith-based groups, Saturday/Sunday School)
- **Politics** (e.g. Membership of, or involvement with, political groups, Serving as local councillor)
- **Older People** (e.g. Involved with groups, clubs or organisations for older people e.g. Age UK, Pensioner's clubs, visiting, transporting or representing older people)
- **Health, Disability and Social Welfare** (e.g. Medical research charities, Hospital visiting, Disability groups, Social welfare (e.g. Oxfam, NSPCC, Samaritans, Citizens Advice Bureau), Offering respite care, Self-help groups (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous))
- **Safety, First Aid** (e.g. Red Cross, St. Johns Ambulance, Life Saving, RNLI, Mountain Rescue, Helping after a disaster)

- **The environment, animals** (e.g. National organisations (e.g. Greenpeace, National Trust, RSPCA), Local conservation groups, Preservation societies)
- **Justice and Human Rights** (e.g. Special Constable, Magistrate, Legal advice centre,

Victim Support, Prison visiting or aftercare, Justice and peace groups, Community or race relations, LGBT groups, National organisations (e.g. Amnesty International))
- **Local community or neighbourhood groups** (e.g. Tenants' / Residents' Association, Neighbourhood Watch, community group, local pressure group)
- **Citizens' groups** (e.g. Rotary Club, Lion's Club, Women's Institute (WI), Freemasons)
- **Trade Union Activity** (e. g. Membership of, or involvement with, a trade union.)
- **None of the above**
- Prefer not to say

Q2.3 In the last 12 months, have you given **unpaid** help in the above activities in any of these ways? (choose as many as you like)

- Raising or handling money/taking part in sponsored events
- Leading a group/member of a committee
- Getting other people involved
- Organising or helping to run an activity or event
- Visiting people
- Befriending or mentoring people
- Giving advice / information / counselling
- Secretarial, admin or clerical work
- Providing transport/driving
- Representing
- Campaigning
- Other practical help (e.g. helping out at school, shopping)
- Any other help. Please state: _____
- Prefer not to say
- None of the above

Q2.4 How **often** do you **usually** volunteer?

3+ times a week; once a week; once a month; infrequently; prefer not to say

Q2.5 How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the frequency of your volunteering?

More often; About the same; Less often; Prefer not to say

Q2.6 In your opinion, what is the **purpose** of volunteering? (choose as many as you like)
- To make a difference
- To help others
- Improve CV
- Learn new skills
- Help mental health
- For enjoyment

- To meet other people
- Try something new
- Utilise skills
- Other. Please state: _____

Q2.6 In your opinion, what are the **main barriers** to volunteering? (choose as many as you like)

- Not interested
- Not knowing where to start
- Lacking the right skills/experience
- Lack of support
- Not considering it
- Not being asked
- Too much effort
- Too busy at work
- Too busy at home
- Negative past experiences
- Negative stigma
- Other. Please state: _____

Q2.7 Are you aware of your **employer** offering **volunteer leave**?

Yes; No; Prefer not to say

Q2.8 Have you **used** the **volunteer leave** offered by your **employer**?

Yes; No; Prefer not to say

Q2.9 Which **organisation** did you volunteer for?

Dropdown list

Q2.10 Did you volunteer **primarily** on your **own** or as part of a **team**?
Individually; As a team (with friends/co-workers); As a team (with strangers)

Q2.11 Has it improved your **mental health**?

Yes; No; Not sure; Prefer not to say

Q2.12 Do you feel like you **made a difference**?

Yes; No; Not sure; Prefer not to say

Q2.13 What are your main **criticisms** (if any) of the company's **volunteer programme**?

- No criticisms
- Too complicated
- Too time-consuming
- Not flexible enough
- Not enough options
- Too many options
- Have to catch up on missed work
- Difficult to find information
- Other. Please state: _____

Q2.14 **Why** have you chosen not to use the volunteer leave offered?

- Not interested
- Too complicated
- Too time-consuming
- Not enough options
- Too many options
- Not flexible enough
- Have to catch up on missed work
- Difficult to find information
- Other. Please state: _____

Section 3: vignettes
Please read the following description and **offer advice** to the person involved.

Q3.1 John/Sally works as an office/frontline worker part/full-time in the transport industry, is single/married and has 0/2 children. John/Sally wants to volunteer but doesn't know where tostart. A peer/supervisor/senior manager with lots of volunteering experience advises John/Sally tofind a local/national charity that John/Sally is either passionate about and sign up for whatever help they need, or one where John/Sally skills will be useful. John/Sally struggles to find a suitable charity. What should John/Sally do?

- Give up
- Keep looking
- Choose a random charity
- Ask for more advice

Q3.2 John/Sally finds out that their company offers volunteer leave and provides a list of suggested charities. From this list, John/Sally finds some charity work that interests them. How often do you think John/Sally should volunteer

- Never
- Infrequently
- Once a month
- Once a week
- or more times a week

Q3.3 John/Sally is allowed 5 days of volunteer leave from work per year. However, the charity says they only need volunteers on weekends and the company says the volunteer leave cannot therefore be used. What do you think should happen?

- John/Sally should choose a new charity which needs help on weekdays
- The company should allow John/Sally to volunteer on the weekend and take a weekday off work instead
- John/Sally should volunteer on the weekend and not use the volunteer leave
- John/Sally should volunteer on the weekend, as well as finding a new charity to use the volunteer leave
- Other. Please State: _____

Section 4: about you

Q4.1 Please state your **age**.

Dropdown menu

Q4.2 Which of the following best describes your **gender**?

Male; female; other; prefer not to say

Q4.3 Do you consider yourself to be actively practising a **religion**?

Yes; No; Prefer not to say

Q4.4 Which of the following best describes your **ethnicity**?

Dropdown list

Q4.5 In which **region** do you normally **live**?

Dropdown list

Q4.6 Do you have any of the following **caring responsibilities**?

School age child or children; A dependent partner/relative/friend; An older dependent

Q4.7 Are you the **main earner** in your family/household?

Dropdown list

Q4.8 How would you describe your...

	Very Poor	Average	Excellent	Prefer not to say
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			
... mental health? ()				
... physical health? ()				

Q5.1 If you have **any additional comments** on volunteering in the rail industry, please give them here.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

If you would **like to know more** about us, our research, and/or would like to contribute further to this project, please follow these links:
About us: https://www.uea.ac.uk/groups-and-centres/institute-for-volunteering-research
Project Info: http://bit.ly/railsurveyinfo
Participant Info: http://bit.ly/railsurveyparticipantinfo

We're also looking for volunteers to be **interviewed** about volunteering. If you are interested in taking part in an interview (to be held on the phone or video conference), or want to receive further information once the project is completed, please let us know on: info.ivr@uea.ac.uk

6.2   Consent Form

Contact email

Salutation

Please consider being involved in a research project entitled:

Enhancing the impact of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) on Employees' Well-being: A case study - Network Rail.

What is this research about?

This project aims to:

- Understand the experience and motivations of Track Staff who volunteer
- Understand barriers and enablers for Track Staff who volunteer or not (using the Employer Supported Volunteering programme)
- Understand the difference volunteering makes to Track Staff

Who is involved in the project?

To help you decide whether you would like to be involved, it is important you understand why this case study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the attached Information Sheet. Talk to others about the project and ask questions if you wish.
If you are interested in taking part, we would be very grateful if you would get in touch with Kathleen Lane, who will be conducting the interviews; my email address is kathleen.lane@uea.ac.uk. If you have any questions that are not answered in this Information Sheet, please do not hesitate to email or contact me on kathleen.lane@uea.ac.uk or 01603 597218 (please leave a message and Kathleen will ring you back).

Many thanks for your time in considering this request for your involvement.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Lane

Participant Information Sheet

1   Title of the project
Enhancing the impact of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) on Employees' Well-being: A case study - Network Rail

2   What is the purpose of the research?
Network Rail and the Institute for Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia are working together to:

- Understand the experience and motivations of Track Staff who volunteer
- Understand barriers and enablers for Track Staff who volunteer or not (using the Employer Supported Volunteering programme)
- Understand the difference volunteering makes to Track Staff

As part of this study, we would like to undertake individual interviews with members of Track Staff. The purpose of each interview is to hear from Track Staff about their experiences and motivations, about the barriers or enablers they encounter and what difference volunteering makes to them. We are interested in each person's own views and experiences about volunteering.

3   Why have I been chosen
You have been asked to be involved because we believe that you are or were a member of staff in the rail industry. We want to involve a broad mix of people: track and other staff and those who have volunteered and those who have not.

4   Do I have to take part?
No, taking part is completely voluntary. You are also free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you decide not to take part, this will have no impact on you or bring disadvantage to you in any way.

5   What will happen if I take part?
We are inviting you to consider participating in an interview which will be held on the telephone, Zoom or MS Teams, depending on what you prefer. The interview will last about 15-20 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be recorded. After the interview, we will send you a brief summary of our discussion so that you can verify the summary points.

6   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
You might find the topic area emotive and if at any stage you don't want to answer a question or would like to withdraw, you are free to do so without giving a reason and without any effect on you.

7   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your experiences will contribute to the knowledge that we hope will inform the future of how Network Rail will plan Employer Supported Volunteering.

8   What sort of questions will I be asked?

We will be asking you questions about your experience and views on volunteering; for example, what you have done and what difference it made and your experience and views of employer supported volunteering.

9   How will you handle the data?

We will keep any information from you only for the purposes of this study as explained in this Information Sheet.

To safeguard your rights, in the process of the research we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible and will not identify people or associations by name in any reports, publications or discussion of the research.

We will keep your name and contact details confidential and will not divulge this information outside of the study team. We will use this information as needed, to contact you.

Any audio/video recordings and other personally-identifiable research data will only be collected with your explicit consent and will be destroyed within six months of collection. Until then it will be stored on a dedicated research digital server of the Institute for Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia.

In our report and any publications of the research, we will not refer to participating individuals or associations or groups by name and it will not be possible to identify individuals.

Additionally, anonymised data will be used to generate publications for scientific journals. Anonymised data will be offered for archiving in our institutional depository and at the UK Data Archive once the research is completed. The research complies with all relevant data legislation including GDPR, further information on your data rights is available at: https://bit.ly/2SLDIHP

10   What will happen if I don't want to carry on?

If you wish to withdraw, you can do this at any time and with no effect on you. You do not have to complete the survey or the workshop and if you choose to withdraw we will not contact you further or ask for a reason for withdrawal.

You can ask to withdraw the information you provided at any time even after the interview, specifically when we ask you to confirm that you are content with the summary we produce of the interview.

11 What will happen to the results of the case study?

The results of the work will be presented to Network Rail and may be published in peer-reviewed academic publications. A short briefing will be prepared for all who took part in the research and agreed to be contacted to receive further information.

12 Who is organising and funding the case study?

The work is funded by Network Rail and undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia.

The interviews will be carried out by Dr Kathleen Lane, who is based in the School of Health Sciences, University of East Anglia: kathleen.lane@uea.ac.uk. Other team members are Professor Sara Connolly and Dr Ritchie Woodard from Norwich Business School. The project is overseen by Dr Jurgen Grotz, Director of Institute for Volunteering Research.

13 What if there is a problem?

Questions or complaints about the study should be initially be addressed to: Dr Jurgen Grotz, Director of Institute for Volunteering Research J.Grotz@uea.ac.uk, Institute for Volunteering Research, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ.

If you are still unhappy and wish to complain formally about any aspects of the project, please contact the Gemma Howe at Network Rail, gemma.howe@networkrail.co.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please keep this Information Sheet for future reference.

Title of the project
Enhancing the impact of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) on Employees' Well-being: A case study - Network Rail

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN TELEPHONE OR ONLINE INTERVIEW

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate in this study unless you want to. We have sent you information in advance of this call. When our researcher calls you we will need to confirm and record that you can answer the following questions with 'yes'.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to ask any questions, which have been answered.

☐

I consent to take part in the research as described and give permission for the data I provide to be used and quoted anonymously in all output materials as detailed above.

☐

I understand that any personal data that could identify me will be removed or changed before files are shared beyond the research team.

☐

I give permission for all the anonymised data I provide to be archived at the UK Data Archive, so that it may be made available for future research and learning.

☐

6.3   Interview Topic Guide

Enhancing the impact of Employer SupportedVolunteering (ESV) on Employees' Well-being:

A case study - Network Rail.

Topic Guide
Interview with Track Staff

Job Role:

0. Can you please tell me your job role at Network Rail / as contractor for Network Rail?

Volunteer Experience

1. Have you ever volunteered in your personal life or through work?
    - ➢ *Depending on the answer, proceed to questions 2 and 3 or to question 4*

2. [*For those who have volunteered/are volunteering*] Can you describe your experience and what you find are the benefits of volunteering?

Volunteer Motivation

3. [*For those who have volunteered/are volunteering*] Why do you volunteer?

4. [*For those who do not volunteer*] Have you ever thought about volunteering? Do you know of any others who volunteer? Is there anything that would encourage youto volunteer?

Network Rail Scheme

5. Are you aware that Network Rail tries to encourage volunteering among all its workforce? Do you have any views about Network Rail's aim to promote its 5-days-a-year volunteering offer?
6. Is there anything you would suggest Network Rail do to increase the take-up of volunteering among Track Staff? [*Matching previous answers yes/no, examples etc*.]

7 **Endnotes**

[i] VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND (2011) *The practical guide to employer supported volunteering foremployers.* Volunteering England [quoted in CIPD, 2015]

[ii] VOLUNTEERING ENGLAND (2011) *The practical guide to employer supported volunteering foremployers.* Volunteering England [quoted in CIPD, 2015]

[iii] CIPD (2015) *On the brink of a game-changer? Building sustainable partnerships between companies and voluntary organisations.* CIPD, IVR [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/on-brink-game-changer_2015_tcm18-9047.pdf] last accessed 27th March 2021

[iv] https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Volunteer-wellbeing-technical-report-Oct2020-a.pdf

[v] https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/on-brink-game-changer_2015_tcm18-9047.pdf

[vi] https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/time_well_spent_ESV_report.pdf

[vii] https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience_Full-Report.pdf

[viii] https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf

[ix] https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Volunteer-wellbeing-technical-report-Oct2020-a.pdf

[x] https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/on-brink-game-changer_2015_tcm18-9047.pdf

[xi] https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/time_well_spent_ESV_report.pdf

[xii] https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/in-good-health-assessing-the-impact-of-volunteering-in-the-nhs

[xiii] https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf