

# Students, Volunteering and Social Action in the UK: History and Policies

When will student social action become the norm and not the exception?

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A brief history of over a century of student social action, and policy lessons drawn from historical and contemporary research

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Produced to accompany the launch of A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980, Georgina Brewis (Institute of Education, University of London)

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# About Student Hubs

We believe students have the power and potential to shape a better world, and student leadership is at the core of everything we do.

Our vision is of a world in which every student engages with social and environmental challenges during their time at university, inspiring them to become active citizens for life.

Our mission is to mainstream student social action, supporting the next generation of leaders, consumers and citizens to achieve positive change now and in the future.

In 2014-15 we will support 32,000+ students: offering them a broad spectrum of opportunities with which to engage and make a difference, whether they have volunteered all their lives or are brand new to social action.

We are not defined by a single cause, but by our purpose to support more students to discover theirs: that is why we offer such a wide range of opportunities. We support students in every way we can to enable them to achieve the social change that they believe in.

We are inspiring a new generation of volunteers, social entrepreneurs, campaigners and citizens.

Student Hubs is a founding member of Generation Change - [www.generationchange.org.uk](http://www.generationchange.org.uk)



To find out more visit [www.studenthubs.org](http://www.studenthubs.org)

## A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980, Dr. Georgina Brewis

Published summer 2014, Georgina Brewis takes a long view of the experience of going to university in Britain over a hundred year period. She explores students' extra-curricular volunteering, fundraising, campaigning and protest activities in Britain and beyond to show that voluntary action was central to the emergence of a distinct student movement. The book draws on rich historical sources and a wider range of student testimony than any earlier study to tell the fascinating story of how ordinary students engaged with the pressing local and international problems of the twentieth century.

With thanks to those who have supported and developed this work since 2010:

We are very grateful to all of the researchers who have taken an interest in this field over recent years, in particular Professor Clare Holdsworth at Keele University, without whom few of the thoughts in our work would have developed.

We are also indebted to the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement and through them vinspired, for so thoroughly researching student volunteering in the contemporary context.

For the historical work, Georgina's book includes much fuller acknowledgement but special mention must go to the original and founding sponsors of this work which include the Institute for Volunteering Research, St John's College, Oxford, and the Economic History Society.



# Summary and Key Recommendations

## Background:

Studies undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research in 2010 show that around 15% of all first year university students in Britain indicate that they volunteer 'for a charity' and around 30% undertake some form of voluntary activity which benefits the wider community.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, higher education students in the UK have a long tradition of volunteering and social action, from university settlements and missions in the nineteenth century, to workcamps for the unemployed in the interwar period, to CND protesting and Student Community Action after the Second World War and throughout the later part of the 20th Century.<sup>2</sup> The past decade also saw significant policy and funding interventions, with substantial resources committed through HEFCE and then vingspired to support new initiatives, create new staff posts and support the movement's development.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this development, levels of student volunteering and social action at universities still remain lower than they could be - with estimates of between 40 and 75% of students in the United States and Canada doing some form of formal volunteering during their time at university.<sup>4</sup> Despite long involvement in this type of work, no historical or contemporary research of UK student social action has ever suggested that the number of students taking part in volunteering and social action on a monthly basis in the UK has at any time been higher than approximately 30%.<sup>5</sup>

With the launch of the Step Up To Serve campaign, which has an ambition of doubling the levels of 'double benefit' youth social action to over 50% by 2020, questions must once again be asked about what contribution university students can make to their communities and how levels of social action in the higher education sector can be increased.<sup>6</sup>

This piece of summary research and commentary brings together key conclusions from recent contemporary research, and more notably new in-depth historical research. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's vingspiredstudents project between 2009 and 2011 conducted very thorough research into the landscape and benefits of contemporary student volunteering, with over 4,000 students and 6,000 graduates participating in the study. The findings are rich, and after years of the sector calling for more in depth studies into its work, it is hard to see how this work could be bettered without very significant investment. Since the start of 2010 Student Hubs and the Institute for Volunteering Research have also been carrying out research that aims to fill key gaps in the history of the sector. The launch of Georgina Brewis' book on student volunteering from 1880 to 1980 completes much of the historical analysis and this short study helps bring the picture to the present day.

## How can we increase levels of student volunteering and social action? How can social action amongst university students be as impactful as possible?

The key conclusion that we draw from both historical and contemporary studies is that we need a radically different way of thinking to ensure that future approaches do not face similar challenges to the past. The barriers and motivations for student volunteering have been well known for many years, but as yet have never been effectively addressed.<sup>7</sup> Lack of implementation, not analysis, seems to be the sector's curse, especially at a national level.

As yet there is no single or dominant model for how universities or students should approach the support of these activities - student volunteering exists within institutions in careers services, in students' unions, in independent institutions aligned to universities, such as Student Community Action teams and Student Hubs' own local Hubs developed over the past seven years. Clearly the historical picture, whilst showing a very rich contribution from students to the community, is also a tale of highs, lows and treading water.

Can we really break through the 30% barrier and do so in a way which is meaningful and impactful? If anything is to change there is a strong need to explore the student volunteering and social action movement's history, reassess its priorities, reaffirm its importance and collectively work out the best way forward.

In the face of these challenges, this report only suggests how an approach could look in some respects and we would welcome further dialogue and debate. To map potential routes forward, conversations with universities, Step Up To Serve, Generation Change, NUS, the Student Volunteering Network, the Quality Assurance Agency, HEFCE, Universities UK and many others are vital.

We would like to highlight the following key findings and recommendations from both historical and contemporary research:

1. National support is a vital element and must be strong and sustainable

*Recommendation: Support for student social action should not be beholden to boom and bust. We need to hold a cross-sector review of how national support can be sustainable and reliable long into the future. into the future.*

2. Students must shape and lead their social action for this work to be both effective and popular amongst students in the long term.

*Recommendation: National infrastructure and frontline delivery organisations should exist to guide, support and incubate student leadership in social action. A tri-annual audit of the state of student-led volunteering should be conducted both locally and nationally.*

3. Students do their best work in the community when it is relevant to their academic skills and interests, following the service learning model in the US.

*Recommendation: A review should be conducted to look at barriers to the uptake of service learning in the UK.*

4. A desire to make a difference continues to be the primary motivation for student volunteers

*Recommendation: To encourage more students to volunteer, we need to appeal to their interests, skills and desire to make a difference. Even if enhanced employability can be a positive outcomeconnectionbetween volunteering for individuals, these messages and should not be overemphasised effortto increase levels of involvement.*

5. A plurality of routes into student volunteering and social action exists, depending on the culture and needs of individual institutions, and many students engage in activities without formal support from their institution

*Recommendation: A range of tailored, localised approaches should continue to be supported. No one-size-fits-all model can be adopted, but setting more common standards of impact measurement would help to raise the quality of provision at different institutions.*



# Introduction: Unlocking the Impact of Student Volunteering and Social Action

## Win, Win, Win?

Contemporary research into the impacts of student volunteering and social action is extremely thorough and there is no need to extensively review all the material here. This section provides an outline for readers who may be less familiar with the literature in this area.

**Student Social Action has a well documented Double Benefit:** The double benefit model is a set of quality principles based on the oft-quoted but rarely implemented ideal that student social action should benefit both the individual and their community. The work of Generation Change and Step Up To Serve has created a set of quality principles which are to be the hallmark of all effective youth social action going forward. These will ensure that 'double benefit' becomes reality rather than rhetoric.

Double benefit is more than students clocking up community volunteering hours in exchange for coveted CV points. It is about giving students the opportunity to critically engage with the issues they are tackling through their action; and to use this awareness to effect sustainable change for their causes and formulate their own social action identities for life. The double benefit model puts people and impact at the centre of all social action.

## Impact on Students

Much recent research shows the benefits of volunteering to students themselves<sup>8</sup>:

- 85% of students said that engaging in volunteering increased their communication skills;
- 79% said that it had increased their confidence in their own abilities and 77% said that it increased their understanding of other people;
- 78% of recent graduates under 30 years old talked about volunteering in interview;
- 51% of recent graduates under 30 who are in paid work say that volunteering helped them to secure employment.
- NCCPE have found that “students identified the opportunity to burst out of the student ‘bubble’ as one of the most valued aspects of volunteering”

Overall, engaging with social and environmental issues outside of their studies enriches the student experience: making their higher education experience more relevant to today’s society and equipping them for their future lives and careers.<sup>9</sup>

## Impact on Society

With an estimate of 30% of students volunteering thirty hours per academic year, the UK benefits from a monetary value of over £160m each year<sup>10</sup>. This value arises from the time that students devote to volunteering for causes as varied as tutoring in schools, tackling food waste, befriending older people or supporting a wide range of community organisations.

To see a real change in social issues in the UK and abroad it is crucial to invest in student volunteering, as students:

1. Form an increasingly large part of society, as almost half of young people now go to university

2. Are the leaders, consumers and decision-makers of tomorrow and university is a highly formative stage of their life. Research shows that the ideas and activities that students engage with now heavily influence their views and actions in the future. Indeed how much a student volunteers at university substantially impacts on their later civic engagement.<sup>12</sup>

Under-investment in student social action has future repercussions, as successive generations of students leave university without the knowledge, skills and passion for addressing society’s most pressing social and environmental issues of the future. In the long term, this limits society’s capacity to innovate, leads to lower levels of civic engagement, and produces a civil society sector that does not attract the talented leadership needed to drive it forwards – this at a time when our society needs more leaders who are ‘socially focussed, less driven solely by the profit motive and thinking more about the future of the next generation in a global context’.<sup>13</sup>

## Impact on the HE sector

In relation to social action in higher education, the double benefit model in fact has a third benefit: the positive impact on universities in which action is organised. When universities make an appropriate investment in high quality provision of student volunteering, they not only support students and communities, but they can derive benefits aligned with their strategic plan and improve the value added to students beyond their studies:

- Social action can demonstrate institutions’ commitments to serve the public good and increase the university’s public benefit. Through high quality social action, students will demonstrate leadership in the local community, contributing to the role of the university as a positive agent for change in their locality.
- Social action contributes to improving the overall student experience in a number of ways, including improvement of employability skills through experiential learning, something which is increasingly recognised by employers. The dual impact seen here is exemplary of the ‘double benefit’ model being

pioneered by Step Up To Serve's quality principles as a hallmark for the sector.

- Meaningful, impactful and sustained student social action for the local community also improves institutions' brand and identity, increasing public support and appreciation of the that work they do. With the public's judgement increasingly founded in personal experience and peer review rather than traditional marketing and outreach, it is vital that universities are seen to positively engage with the communities in which they are based in order to remain competitive in a commercialising higher education market.
- Finally, student involvement in social action can help to build a culture of philanthropy and giving back. US research shows how students who learn how to give back while they are at university are more likely to give to charity in the future.<sup>14</sup> Given long term fundraising needs for the Higher Education sector, universities have a vested interest in ensuring they are educating tomorrow's philanthropists.

## Questioning the status quo

Currently only 15-30% of university students are engaged with social action. This is largely due to three overarching problems that remain constant across UK universities:

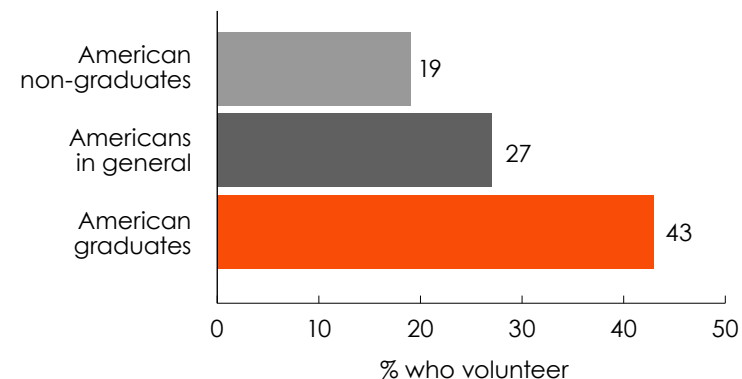
1. Engagement with social and environmental issues is rarely prioritised as a key element of the student experience in both curricular and extracurricular activities
2. Students are unaware of opportunities available to them to make a difference<sup>15</sup>
3. Social action undertaken by students is often disparate, of limited scale, and not as effective or sustainable as it could be

These problems arise from a lack of support for student volunteering in the UK, particularly in comparison to other student activities such as sports and the arts. In sharp contrast to this, American universities invest heavily in their responsibility to create future civic leaders - and usually over 60% of students volunteer

on a regular basis. This is a driving factor in the advanced culture of philanthropy and volunteerism in America. Indeed research conducted into student volunteering in America concludes that how much a student volunteers during college has a very 'clear and substantial effect on how much that student volunteers after college' and that 'the importance of colleges...to volunteering cannot be overstated'.<sup>16</sup>

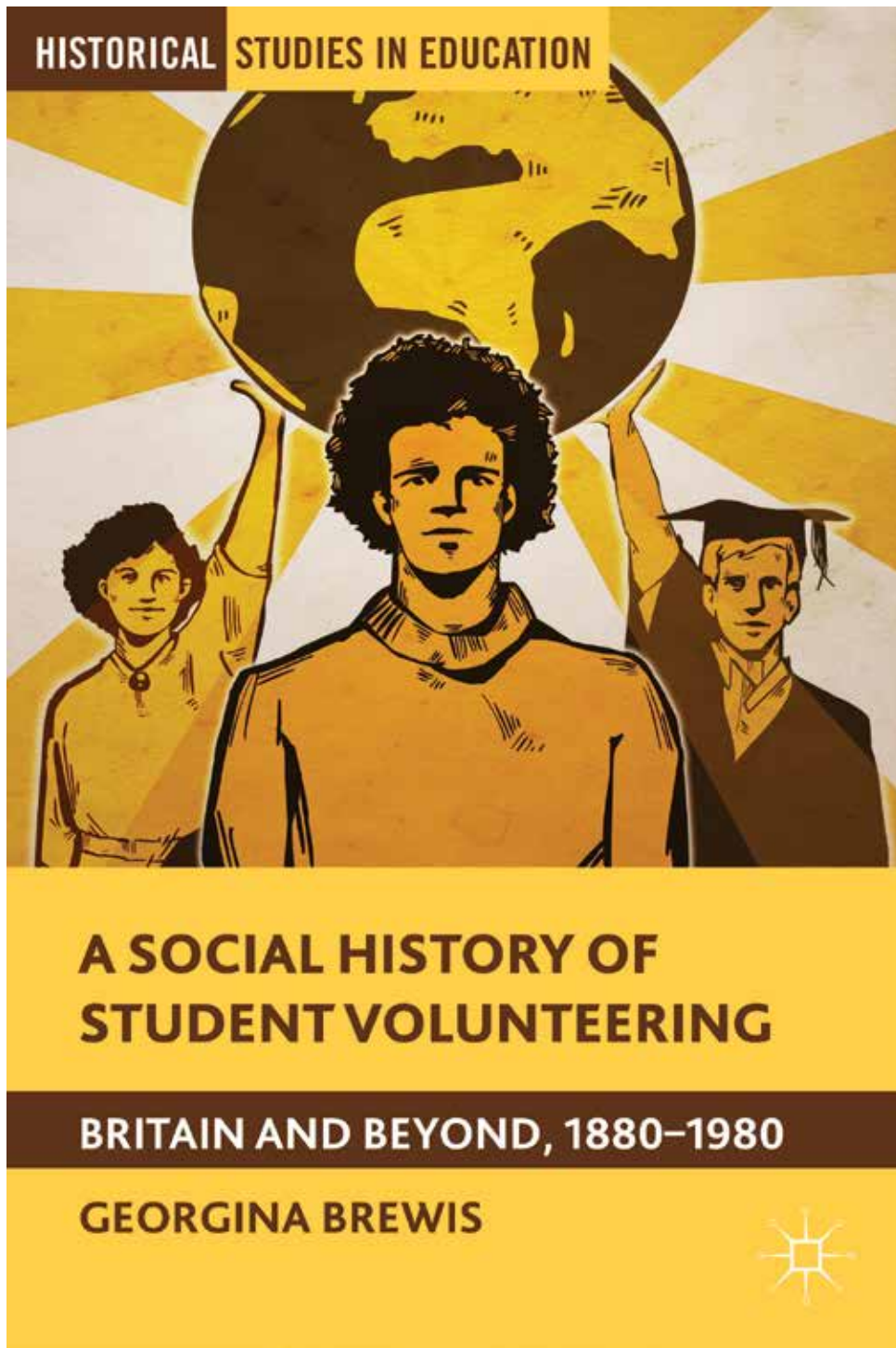
It is important that we build on the US model by critically engaging young social activists with the issues that they seek to tackle: enabling them to increase the impact and sustainability of their actions, while at university and beyond. Increasing the number of student volunteers is proven to increase the number of lifelong volunteers, philanthropists and active citizens. Only by inspiring and supporting more graduates to leave university with a mission to change systems and find innovative solutions to embedded problems will we see long-term positive societal impact.

## Graduates in America are substantially more likely to volunteer than non-graduates



Source: Corporation for National & Community Service





# A Brief History of Student Volunteering and Social Action in UK Higher Education

Dr. Georgina Brewis

There is a long tradition of voluntary action by higher education students in the UK. The movement has grown from the eighteenth century into the form that we know today. The following summarises the evolutions of the movement decade by decade.

## A Decade by Decade Overview:

### Before-1880

The roots of student voluntary action lie in the religious societies formed at universities during the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, some of which organised volunteers to visit sick people and prisoners. In the early nineteenth century overseas mission work was supported by missionary associations started at

the Scottish universities, Oxford, Cambridge and London medical schools. During the 1870s and early 1880s several Oxford and Cambridge colleges founded 'college missions' by sponsoring a curate based in a poor parish in South or East London. These missions grew to have considerable institutional presence and offered a wide range of social, recreational and religious services. Students were encouraged to visit and help out at the college mission during vacations and annual visits to Oxford or Cambridge were arranged for clubs, youth groups and sports teams from the mission districts.

## 1880s and 1890s

From the 1880s students were increasingly receptive to new ideas about social problems and social service that were being put forward by a range of writers and thinkers, and the universities became important pools of volunteers for many social institutions. Most famous of these was the university settlement movement – founded in 1883 by Anglican clergyman Samuel Barnett – which drew strong support from students at Oxford and Cambridge, but also in university cities including London, Glasgow, Manchester, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Bristol. The model relied on long-term residence of recent graduates in a settlement house supported by a pool of volunteers who helped keep clubs, classes, services and programmes of visiting running.

Students spent vacations volunteering on summer camps, Christmas treats and sports tournaments. In addition to delivering services to local people, settlements and college missions served a wider function of providing social education and training to students. Women were particularly involved in the movement, and several women's colleges founded their own settlements. While relatively small numbers of students actually took part in practical activities at a settlement there was wider support for the ideals of university settlements and pride in the possession of one. Student philanthropic societies also flourished in the Catholic women's colleges in Ireland, where for instance, the Sodalties of the Children of Mary became a significant part of college life.

## 1900 - 1914

Although representative student politics was in its infancy, social service and social study were central to the emergence of a vibrant associational culture at universities and colleges before 1914. A key force that helped channel student volunteering was the Student Christian Movement (SCM) founded in 1893. With branches in 130 colleges and universities and a membership of more than 5,000 students by 1908, the SCM began to see itself as a national student body with responsibility for the wider social education of students. In 1909 its Social Service Committee began promoting and coordinating social service in colleges and universities across Britain; it published textbooks, study outlines and training materials and issued advice pamphlets to volunteer student secretaries. In several colleges joint social service committees were formed by the SCM, Christian Social Union branches, Fabian societies and suffrage societies. Social service also served an important function as a common point of contact between British students and students internationally, in North America, Australia, New Zealand as well as in India, China and Japan. Social service became one of the most popular topics addressed at international student gatherings. For example a 1912 SCM conference in Liverpool on the theme of 'Christ and Social Need' attracted 2,000 students and was accompanied by a touring exhibition on social and missionary service.

## The First World War and after

University students, particularly women, played a part in the significant increase in volunteering on the home front during the First World War. Although student numbers declined heavily as both men and women joined the armed forces and auxiliary services, students were involved in providing support to refugees from Belgium, first aid training and volunteering with the Red Cross, on farm labour camps during college vacations and in extensive fund-raising for war charities. The war opened up new opportunities for women's leadership in student clubs and societies, helping to raise the profile of social service in many universities. Students were closely involved with post-war relief efforts for central Europe and

Russia through a special Universities' Committee of the Imperial War Relief Fund which channelled aid to a new body known as European Student Relief (ESR). In Germany and Austria, for instance, ESR set up pioneering student 'self-help' schemes such as canteens, print-works and cooperative buying schemes.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s similar activities were also being trialled in colleges in Wales and the north of England, where economic distress was beginning to affect students; and these gradually evolved into the activities of students' unions we recognise today. The formation of the National Union of Students of England and Wales (NUS) in 1922 was in part an outcome of this post-war movement for cooperation and reconstruction. Another important feature of student voluntarism in the 1920s was the development of fundraising for local hospitals and medical charities associated with rag weeks.<sup>17</sup> Both European Student Relief and rag helped strengthen student identity in what remained a fragmented higher education system.

## 1930s

In the 1930s student voluntarism was tested as never before. Students were keen to distance themselves from the perceived escapism of the previous generation and the decade was marked by increased social and political activity, including a noticeable surge of left-wing action on campus. The universities and colleges were a source of funds, gifts-in-kind and volunteers for a wide range of domestic and international causes and campaigns. The Depression led to a renewed interest in social study in the universities while some students became involved with innovative workcamp schemes and on residential camp programmes for unemployed men and women.<sup>18</sup> International concerns such as the rise of fascism impinged increasingly on student life, and students were closely involved with extensive fundraising for refugees fleeing Nazism, the victims of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) and students affected by Japanese aggression in China. Traditional methods of fundraising and collecting gifts-in-kind continued alongside new forms of student social and political action such as boycott of Japanese

goods and protest over the government's non-intervention policy in Spain. Students from a range of different religious and political traditions collaborated with others on social action, forging what might be seen as a 'student popular front' by the end of the 1930s.

## 1940s

Once again, the outbreak of war had a major impact on the universities. While thousands of students immediately joined the forces, those returning to college faced the multifaceted challenges of evacuation and Air Raid Precautions (ARP) as well as uncertainty over their very future as students. Student ambivalence towards the war came to a head during the 1940 NUS conference at which a majority of students passed an anti-war motion. However, during the Blitz attacks on UK cities later in 1940 students organised themselves to help in air raid shelters, in first aid posts and at rest centres. Gradually, most universities introduced schemes of voluntary 'war work' including making camouflage netting, running activities for evacuated children, helping in hospitals and canteens and providing educational or recreational activities for locally stationed troops.

The NUS took on a role in helping co-ordinate the student contribution to the war effort, publishing pamphlets detailing how student volunteers could help out, as well as organising agricultural aid camps. British students also supported the work of World Student Relief, an extensive relief programme for student victims of the war. Students played a part in post-war educational reconstruction in Europe and the Far East through sending food, books and study materials, providing hospitality to student visitors from liberated Europe, exchange programmes and a range of schemes to bring the German universities back into contact with the rest of the world. A 1944 NUS report explored ways to break down the barriers that existed between students and the outside world, concluding that such problems of integration might be better solved by drawing university students from a wider section of population than had previously been the case, rather than through increased social service schemes.

## 1950s

The post-war years marked a period of rapid expansion in higher education and student numbers. The rag tradition was revived with increasingly outrageous fundraising stunts that were raising around £200,000 a year by the mid-1950s. The decade also marked the beginning of a new wave of student social action on a range of international and domestic issues, including juvenile delinquency, apartheid and antiracism, refugee students, and the antinuclear movement. Older models of student social service—such as clubs, camps and settlements—gave way to new-style youth clubs and university social service groups. Workcamps at home and abroad grew in popularity.<sup>19</sup> Events in Suez and Hungary in 1956, H-bomb tests and growing awareness of apartheid in South Africa led to renewed discussion of social and political questions in the universities, and although activism on any issue was confined to a small minority of students, activities to aid Hungarian refugee students, high-profile campaigns such as World Refugee Year (1959-1960) or solidarity with students worldwide through World University Service succeeded in drawing larger numbers of students into voluntary action.

Another important new post-war development was the formation of student social service organisations at several universities. These involved small numbers of regular volunteers in a range of social service activities in the immediate vicinity of their college or university, such as at borstals, long stay hospitals and children's homes.

## 1960s

From the early 1960s student support was a vital force behind the rapid growth of a range of new voluntary and campaigning movements in Britain including Voluntary Service Overseas, CND, Amnesty International, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Child Poverty Action Group and Shelter. By the mid-1960s students at some universities had become dissatisfied with the traditional models of student community engagement and rag fundraising and began to press for more effective involvement of students with

community problems, marking a transition from traditional social 'service' to community 'action', and giving rise to a new, national Student Community Action (SCA) movement.<sup>20</sup> The movement spread outside the universities and university colleges and by 1978 there were 100 Student Community Action groups across universities, polytechnics and teacher training colleges in England and Wales with a further 100 students' unions involved in similar work.

In 1969 a new association called Third World First – an offshoot of Oxfam started by Oxford students - emerged to channel funds to development NGOs and raise student awareness of issues of overseas aid and development. Both SCA and Third World First should be seen as an alternative approaches to protest, different to but in many ways aligned with the wider questioning of the values of higher education in the late 1960s. Perhaps even more than many of the sit-ins and protests of the 1960s and 1970s, SCA had a lasting impact on national student politics. For example a motion passed by NUS conference in November 1969 decried a lack of student activity in wider communities and urged unions to make community action a "majority activity" of students.

## 1970s

In the 1970s volunteering, fundraising and campaigning came to be seen as mainstream activities of students' unions and university clubs and societies. From 1970 to 1978 the National Union of Students ran a Student Community Action programme, enabling the development of a national network of Student Community Action groups across colleges, universities and polytechnics. The activities of these groups varied from 'volunteer' or 'service' oriented work such as decorating, putting on entertainments, teaching immigrants, mental health projects, work with older people, support for Shelter or the Samaritans to more radical campaigns on such issues as alternative education, housing, squatting, radical media, anti-racism and tenants' rights. The SCA movement was highly self-critical in its early days and its leaders determined to mark a break with a 'do-gooding' past. Students also increased their activities on a range of social, political and moral questions including anti-apartheid, feminism, gay rights and the environment.

## 1980s

Student Community Action remained the dominant model of student voluntarism through the 1980s and into the 1990s, although its influence on national student politics began to wane. In 1981 a new Student Community Action Development Unit was set up with funding from the Voluntary Services Unit of the Home Office. In the mid-80s there were SCA groups in 90 universities, colleges and polytechnics involving 15,000 students a year. As in previous generations, students modified their models of voluntary action to meet changing social needs.

With unemployment growing in the early 1980s, students became involved supporting centres for the unemployed, particularly the young unemployed. Student Community Action Groups also lobbied for 'community access', aiming to make colleges and student unions more accessible to local people. In this climate too there was increased recognition of the skills students themselves gained from involvement in volunteering and the potential of SCA involvement for influencing career choices. In addition SCA groups began to place greater emphasis on training for students volunteers. A further interest was in problems faced by disabled people living in British society while other campaigns focussed on anti-racism, women's issues and how to involve more black students in SCA.

## 1990s

Since the 1990s there has been a shift away from student-led community engagement towards university or students' union-based brokerage services placing individual volunteers with local organisations. Like the voluntary sector in general, the field has become increasingly professionalised, with hundreds of paid staff making up a network for many years known as Workers in Student Community Volunteering (WiSCV) and now the Student Volunteering Network<sup>21</sup>.

The 1990s saw continued changes to student volunteering connected to changes to higher education funding and students' union reform. A growing emphasis on student volunteering for skills

development and enhancing employability was part of the response to such challenges. In the 1990s youth and student volunteering were issues high on the policy agenda through John Major's Make a Difference Strategy (1994-1997). There was a further shift in the recognition of the role that student volunteering and community action could play in improving a university's relations with its local community.

The national infrastructure to support local groups (now renamed the National Centre for Student Volunteering) offered advice on training and good practice in volunteering, and worked hard to promote the benefits of student volunteering. The 1980s and 1990s also marked the rebirth of student rag. Having survived the criticisms of the SCA movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, rag groups continued to raise large sums of money for charity, although the carnivals and processions, sexist and racist 'rag mags', and beauty contests which characterised rags in mid-century had largely disappeared. Student began to redefine rag as 'raise and give' and a number of post-1992 universities embraced it as an important aspect of student culture.

## 2000s

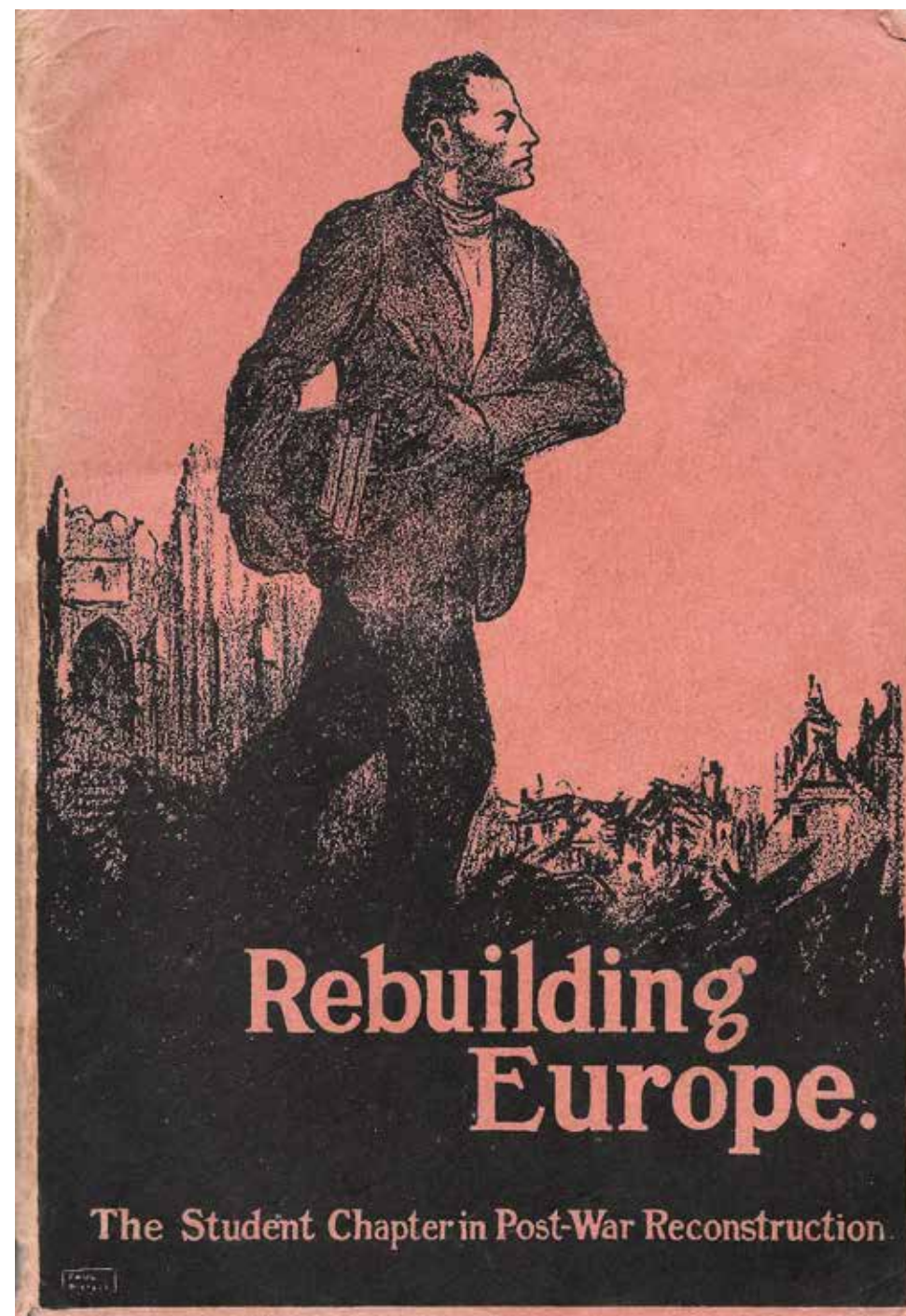
In the 2000s there was a clear shift away from students accessing volunteering mainly through SCA or rag groups to a much broader platform of opportunities through university employability units, students' union voluntary service units or as part of an academic module. Significant government investment in the student volunteering sector was channelled through the Labour government's Higher Education Active Communities Fund and the youth volunteering charity v. In December 2010 the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, set up in 2008 to increase the social impact of universities locally, regionally and nationally through better public engagement, published a manifesto which included pledges about student volunteering.<sup>22</sup>

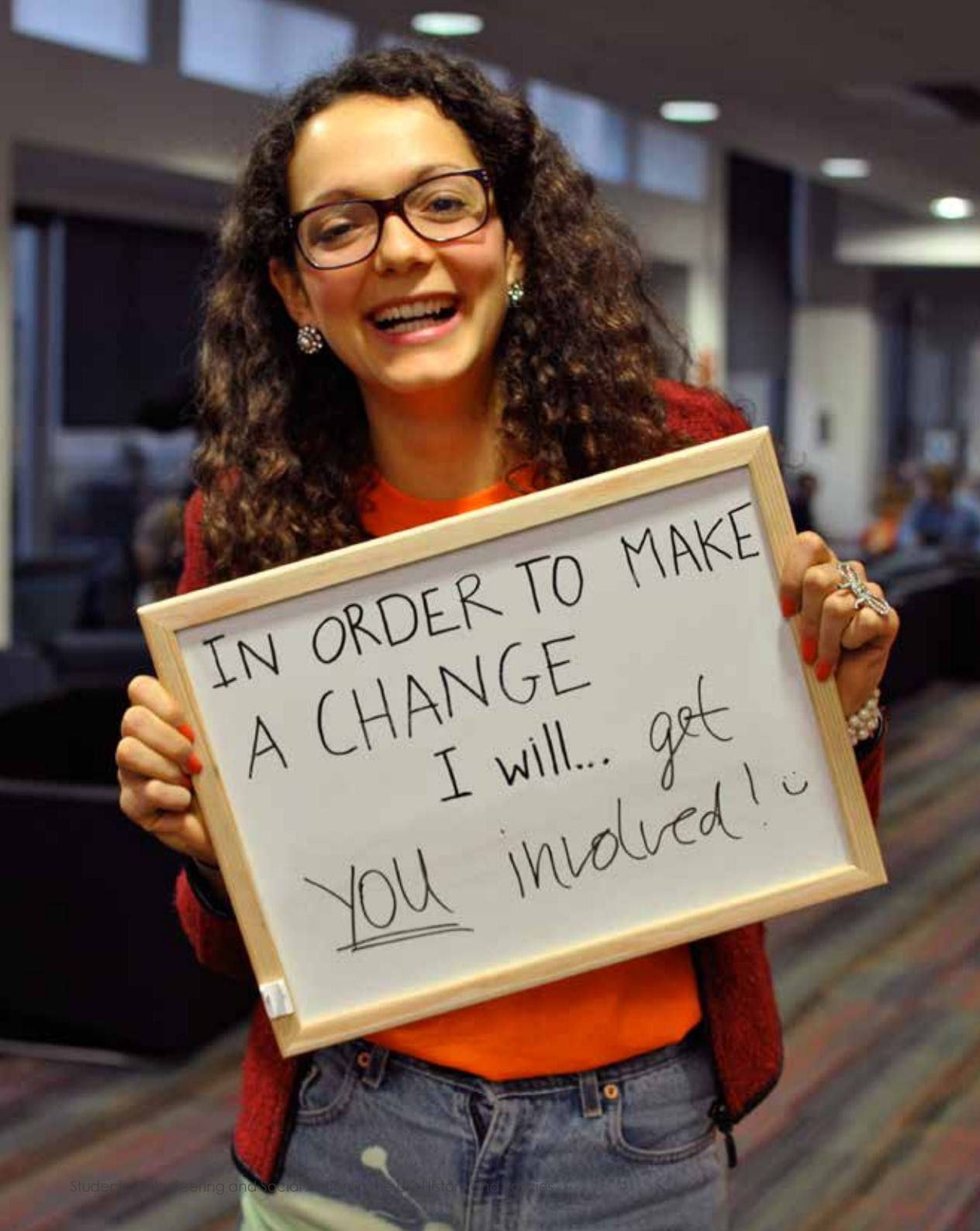
Other changes included the launch of Student Hubs at several universities; a new network of local 'Hubs' aimed to be a focal point for all charitable, volunteering and campaigning activity

within participating universities. A wide range of actors on all sides of the political spectrum stressed the transformatory potential of volunteering for students, as for young people more widely, leading to the incorporation of volunteering into the 'student experience'. This has raised questions about students' freedom of choice and the potential downsides of choosing not to get involved.

Over time student voluntary action has shown remarkable resilience, continually being reinvented by new generations of students and reflecting changed social conditions. A central tenet that cuts across the different periods is the idea that university students have special responsibilities to the community and the nation, and that through fulfilment of these obligations students can help demonstrate the wider social value of higher education in modern Britain.

This overview is summarised from Brewis, G. (2014) *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.





# Conclusions and Policy Recommendations arising from Historical Research

1. National support and infrastructure is extremely important but has typically been very fragile and unsustainable

- National coordination to promote and support local-led activities has existed or been created in all decades of the past century
- Universities might be expected to take up the reins of encouraging social action locally, but not nationally
- However, in recent decades national support has faced some very perilous funding commitments and patchy support from national university and voluntary sector institutions, and from government
- The most sustainable support came for c. 20 years from the organisation which became Student Volunteering England, which merged with Volunteering England in 2007, but even then the organisation waxed and waned with funding
- No other organisation, from the Student Christian Movement to NUS, the Home Office or vInspired has managed to sustain support nationally for student volunteering for more than a half a dozen years at a time
- If more students are to engage in volunteering and social action in the future, then a more sustainable form of national

infrastructure will certainly need to be created

- In America, initiatives such as Campus Compact point towards possible models but more analysis will be required<sup>23</sup>

*Recommendation: Building on in-depth historical research, for a new cross-sector review of how national support can be provided to the student volunteering and social action sector on a more sustainable footing than in the past, involving contributions from voluntary, private and public sector bodies*

## Historical Context and Analysis:

History points to a need for effective national coordination to promote and support the voluntary action of students at universities and colleges.<sup>24</sup> Such support has included the publication of newsletters and publicity materials; the development of training programmes and social study courses; and the facilitation of national and regional conferences or meetings. In the Edwardian period the Student Christian Movement (SCM) - which had affiliated groups in 130 colleges and universities by 1908 with a membership of more than 5,000 students - took on a role developing and coordinating the student social service movement. Indeed in many universities and colleges before 1914 the branch of the SCM was the only student society concerned with questions of social service and citizenship. Its central Social Service Committee published text-books, arranged lectures and organised conferences. In the late 1930s the National Union of Students made efforts to 'inculcate a social consciousness among students', reflecting a new-found recognition of the problems caused by higher education remaining a minority experience.

The February 1939 issue of its journal *New University* contained a 'social service supplement' to motivate students to get more involved. During the Second World War the NUS was to develop this role by helping coordinate the student contribution to the war effort. The NUS organised a number of conferences and published a series of pamphlets detailing how student volunteers could help out.

Central to the rapid spread of student community action in the early 1970s was the establishment of a development project to promote its philosophy and sustain its growth, the Birmingham-based Student Community Action, funded by the Barrow and Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust between 1969 and 1971. In the first six months staff visited over 30 university campuses to hold meetings with members of relevant student clubs and societies groups to discuss the potential for student community action.

The NUS set up its own programme in 1971, which and ran under a variety of guises until financial problems with NUS Travel necessitated closure in 1978. In 1981 the Student Community Action Development Unit (SCADU) was set up with funding from the Voluntary Services Unit in the Home Office and remained an independent group until merger with the national volunteering organisation, Volunteering England, in 2007. SCADU played an important role in supporting local groups through facilitating training, conferences, policy development and a network of paid workers and was based in one of the original university settlements, Oxford House in Bethnal Green, providing a neat link to the movement's history.



## 2. Students must continue to be given sufficient freedom to tackle social needs that they see as important

- Student volunteering and social action has shown itself to be very resilient over time owing to students' ability to respond rapidly to changing social needs
- The historical picture shows that there are five distinct types of activity in the sector:
  - » Support (RAG; collecting money and gifts-in-kind; awareness raising)
  - » Social service (practical service, volunteering)
  - » Social study (social education, training, discussion groups / conferences)
  - » Social action (Student Community Action, campaigning)
  - » Self help (bursary schemes for fellow students, food co-ops)
- Often students have led the way in responding to social needs that the voluntary sector has taken up more widely later
- However, responding to new needs has often meant that each generation of students has dispensed with the work of the previous, sometimes sacrificing wisdom entirely for innovation

Recommendation: Any national infrastructure which supports 'frontline' social action should remain cause agnostic, politically and religiously neutral and have the agility and entrepreneurialism to support student action wherever it appears, for whatever cause - incubating the grassroots, student-led passion for the issues at hand. National infrastructure should model themselves as a 'backbone' to student volunteering and social action and should have healthy capacity for innovation.<sup>25</sup> A tri-annual 'audit' of the state of student volunteering should be conducted, led by students, to review how the movement needs to respond to changing needs and tread a path between new and existing models of action.

## Historical Context and Analysis:

A key feature of student volunteering and community action over time has been the ability of student-led groups to respond to changing social needs. The inter-war Depression produced a movement for organised economy and relief among the student community which gradually evolved into many of the most recognisable activities of students' unions today, such as subsidised books, food and rail travel. Another innovation of the 1930s was the organisation of holiday workcamps for unemployed men. Such camps began on a small scale organised by disparate groups of students across the country, but developed with financial support from the National Council of Social Service (NCSS - now NCVO) and government to involve hundreds of student volunteers, mainly drawn from London, Oxford, Cambridge and the Welsh colleges, and thousands of unemployed men and their wives.

In the 1970s two key issues around which the Student Community Action groups mobilised perhaps most successfully were on issues of homelessness and housing - with many groups undertaking surveys of empty properties - and on mental health problems. Students took a lead in developing experimental residential projects such as 'Group Homes' where students and people with learning disabilities could live together. With unemployment growing in the early 1980s, students became involved with centres for the young unemployed and lobbying for 'community access' to universities, aiming to make colleges and students' unions more accessible to local people. Indeed a key feature of students' voluntary action in the past has been the willingness to challenge university authorities and to critique the very role of higher education in reproducing inequalities. This is a far cry from the role that student volunteering is expected to play today in seeking to make up for the injustices of the higher education system.

### 3. Students do their best work in the community when it is in some way linked to their academic skills and interests

- As yet, very little student volunteering and social action in the UK happens alongside students' academic courses
- Yet often students have found themselves involved in action historically which makes best use of their academic skills and knowledge
- There is likely much that could be learnt from service learning initiatives in the United States and Canada
- Again, Campus Compact in the United States has much to commend it as well as initiatives such as CFICE in Canada<sup>26</sup> and key recommendations from the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
- Research into barriers to increasing service learning in the UK are the least developed in the contemporary context
- Any recommendations here affect the pedagogy of universities, and so are perhaps the hardest to implement

*Recommendation: For a new review to be conducted to look at barriers to the uptake of service learning in the UK*

#### Historical Context and Analysis:

History suggests that voluntary activities have the greatest impact when they are closely linked to students' skills. For instance, during the height of the Blitz in 1940, students from all over the country volunteered in air raid shelters and rest centres in London's East End. Anxious to avoid 'the Lady Bountiful activity of dealing out a pity-prompted charity', students also conducted a survey of conditions in air raid shelters to help the preparation work for student groups in other cities not yet facing the bombs. A 1943 pamphlet prioritised voluntary 'work for which our training

particularly fits us' over unskilled part-time war work where possible. Examples included geography students teaching map-reading to Home Guard groups; language students arranging meetings for foreign troops stationed locally; and students passing on skills in music, handicrafts or physical training to local youth. Such experiences began to break down the sense of separation many university and colleges students had from the rest of society.

During the 1960s and 1970s a key theme in the early discourse on Student Community Action was 'curricula reform'. When NUS President Jack Straw wrote to potential funders asking for money to set up a new NUS programme in 1970 a central goal was to research 'the desirability of securing the greater integration of community service into the curriculum of institutions of further and higher education'. Students championed the development of courses that included socially useful project work as well as raising questions about root causes of poverty. Some of the very first 'community action' projects organised by students included medical students conducting surveys of hypothermia amongst old people or working with tenants groups on rent campaigns. In the short term, student groups failed in their quest to significantly modify the courses offered by universities and colleges, and student community action remained an extra-curricular and often marginal activity. Wider social changes, however, including the expansion of student numbers in higher education, mean that today such calls for student volunteering to be 'learning-linked' are once again increasing.

## 4. Students must remain as the leaders and decision makers of their action for the work to be both effective and popular amongst students

- Full-time workers can add value in supporting student volunteering and social action but the leadership of students should never be taken away
- Following substantial investment through HEFCE, there was a trend to more staff-led volunteering during the 2000s
- Students themselves are those who have best responded to changing social needs and are remain strong advocates for volunteering amongst their peers<sup>27</sup>

*Recommendation: National infrastructure organisations should exist to guide, support and incubate student leadership in social action - but not to take over or set agendas according to university and/or government targets. A tri-annual audit of the state of student led volunteering should be conducted both locally and nationally*

### Historical Context and Analysis:

A driving force behind student voluntarism over the past 120 years has been the leadership that has come from students themselves. Since the late nineteenth century, while there has been a need for full-time workers to be employed in development and coordination roles, change has been driven by student groups. For instance the Student Christian Movement's turn to social service was a policy directed by a student-led sub-committee established in 1909. In the Edwardian period students involved in social service sought closer co-operation with their peers through the formation of joint social service committees between student branches of the SCM, Christian Social Union, Fabian society, social study groups and suffrage societies. Thus social service became a unifying issue among students at that time heavily divided by religious and denominational differences.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s students were central to the formation of the new social service groups in many universities, including Cambridge, Hull, London, Manchester, Birmingham and Swansea. Likewise the shift to a more politicised form of community 'action' towards the end of the decade was dictated by students pressing for more effective involvement with community problems. In 1968 and 1969 students at the universities of Birmingham, Aston and Southampton led the way by experimenting with 'action weeks' as a replacement for the more common 'rag weeks', generating widespread interest among contemporaries in other universities. Some of the key individuals involved in student community action were returned international volunteers who had been radicalised by their experiences overseas. Again, during the 1980s students were heavily involved in setting the agenda for the national SCA movement and in directing the work of SCADU. The work was led by a student committee and 250 student representatives were brought together at annual national conferences to debate and make policy and then to take such messages back to their colleges and universities.

## 5. Students do their best work only when they are enabled to understand social issues through proper social education

- A drive to better understand the social issues with which they were working has often come from students
- Students have been very keen in successive decades to take a rigorous approach to analysing whether they were tackling symptoms or causes
- Each successive generation of student volunteers must approach their voluntary action with sufficient humility to realise that they will not have 'solved' issues compared to older generations

*Recommendation: Charities that work on the whole range of social issues that students work on should be enlisted for support in better social education of students - currently operating as an informal network through the InterAction group of national charities. These charities should work to inspire and support their next generation of supports through better engagement in the higher education field, focusing beyond fundraising to deliver more social education.*

### Historical Context and Analysis:

The success of student voluntarism is connected to the provision of social education.

In the Edwardian period educationalists came to recognise that the value of much voluntary service depended on how well students had been prepared through social study and this led to the widespread development of social study groups. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a strong push towards social education and consciousness-raising among students. A critical stance towards the very concept of 'volunteering' was a strong vein running through the movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The Student Community Action movement started with the view that

most voluntary service undertaken by students merely papered over the cracks. Hence merely visiting older people or helping in long-stay hospitals did not give students an understanding of the wider structural issues of poverty or inequality. Student Community Action in the 1970s may best be described as 'radical community service' which provided benefits to recipients while raising awareness of social problems among the students involved. Even in the 1980s recognition that students' energy and enthusiasm alone weren't enough meant there was widespread reluctance to simply send volunteers to local organisations without extensive discussion about the meaning of their work and development of training at local level. In the 1980s an important theme of SCA became widening access to volunteering among Black and Minority Ethnic students, LGBT students and students with disabilities coordinated through series of regional and national special interest groups.



# Conclusions and Policy Recommendations arising from Contemporary Research

## Background to recent research

The basis for much of the contemporary research in the sector is NCCPE's vInspired students report *Bursting the Bubble* produced by the Institute for Volunteering research in November 2010. It was preceded by an extensive literature review looking at barriers and motivations to student volunteering and social action. We restate some of the findings of the work here. We also draw from the analysis of Andrea Rannard and Jamie Darwen in *Student volunteering in England: a critical moment*, two of the key figures of the student volunteering sector in the 2000s, who led both Student Volunteering England and NCCPE's vInspired students respectively.

With the disappearance of any dedicated support at a national level for student volunteering after 2011, there has been little development of contemporary research or policy making. Yet most of the recommendations of earlier research seem to stand.

Many of these recommendations also align with a submission Student Hubs made in 2010 to an Office of Civil Society Consultation on Supporting a Stronger Civil Society. As the

historical analysis of the sector shows, sometimes the same matters come around fairly frequently. All the material is updated with the conclusions of a Roundtable meeting hosted at the House of Lords in 2011, held by Student Hubs and the Workers in Student Community Volunteering Network (WiSCV), now the Student Volunteering Network.

In NCCPE's own words about their work:



*The vinspired students project [was] funded by vinspired... to provide evidence of the benefits of volunteering and to encourage universities to recognise the value of student volunteering as part of their core activity.*

*In 2009, the NCCPE published Student Volunteering – Background, policy and context, which provided a benchmark of current activity, mapped the policy landscape around student volunteering, and identified themes in how universities are managing volunteering.*

*Bursting the Bubble was commissioned to explore further the motivations for, routes into and perceived impacts of volunteering on students, universities and the wider community. Volunteering by university students remains an under-researched topic, with little reliable national data on the number of students involved or their experiences, and this study attempts to address some of these gaps in our knowledge.*



NCCPE concludes their research with the following statement, which seems as true in 2014 as in 2010.



*This research paints a picture of students who are keen to burst out of the student 'bubble' to make meaningful contributions to organisations and communities through volunteering. Volunteering whilst at university provides unique opportunities for students to develop social awareness and can instil a lifelong commitment to voluntary action. With support that is well developed, professional, and tailored to the needs of students and communities, volunteering can result in profound benefits for students themselves and for the wider communities in which they live and study."*

*The only question that likely remains is, whether it is a sufficient priority for universities to support this work effectively, and if not how it can be made so. Rannard and Darwen argue that there are "three interlinked challenges for those who work in or support student volunteering, which will need to be addressed in order to secure its future: impact assessment, or the ability to provide compelling evidence of the benefits of volunteering for students, institutions, business and communities; funding, and the need to demonstrate value for money and explore alternative funding streams; and integrated engagement, both within institutions and also between higher education and the wider private, public and voluntary sectors, with a strategy which takes into account the needs of all parties.*



## Impact assessment:

It could be argued that the impact of student volunteering has been as thoroughly covered as is likely to be soon. The scope of the NCCPE and IVR research was extensive. There would still be merit in a longitudinal piece of research, however, as none has yet been produced. A more standardised approach to measuring the impact of student volunteering would also enable institutions to learn from each other in order to improve their services.

## Funding:

There is only anecdotal evidence, but arguably too little has been invested in developing sustainable funding models for student volunteering in recent years, at a national level as well as locally. Student Hubs has witnessed support for student volunteering disappearing at a number of universities. In a few cases, we have been asked to step in to fill a gap through our local Hub model. Funding cannot come entirely through national means, but universities must be encouraged to develop sustainable models in a variety of ways.

## Integrated engagement nationally:

Rannard and Darwen argue:



For this case to be compelling, those who would act as champions for student volunteering need a coherent strategy and vision for its development that is relevant to all sectors, connecting HEIs to business, the public and communities. At a national level, this would enable key stakeholders, such as government, institutions, funders, employers and community organisations, to articulate the role and value of student volunteering. It cannot be assumed that the connection between volunteering and its supposed benefits will be made; ongoing gathering of evidence and profile raising is required.



## Integrated engagement locally:

Again, Rannard and Darwen:



At an institutional level, ensuring student volunteering is integrated and engaged across the university is necessary. There needs to be a flexible, innovative provision that can add value to varied objectives, adapt to meet different needs (including those of business and community), and respond to new initiatives, while always focusing on the key priorities of the institution. Having the support of senior management is crucial, as is demonstrating the value to faculties and departments, as well as central services.



In 2011 they write hopefully:



*These challenges show that one of the key reasons for the current fragile status of student volunteering - despite the success of many individual local projects - has been the lack of joined-up, strategic support at a national level. Over the last couple of years, two significant initiatives have begun to address this deficit. The merger of Student Volunteering England into Volunteering England in 2007 created a more significant resource to support an infrastructure for student volunteering, and a stronger focus and ability to develop and influence policy, and engage other sectors and the wider volunteering infrastructure into this work. The other recent national initiative is the vinspired students programme, run by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and funded by v, the national youth volunteering service... These two initiatives provide a major opportunity to present a coherent and consistent view of student volunteering and, backed up by strong evidence, to influence policy and practice at a national and institutional level.*



However, such was not to be the case for long. Dedicated support for student volunteering within Volunteering England was short lived due to funding constraints and ended in early 2011. Support from vinspired for NCCPE's work also ran out in 2011, with the drastic reductions that vinspired faced in their funding that year. Volunteering England currently support the sector, as part of NCVO, through signposting.<sup>28</sup>

Foreseeing these challenges, Student Hubs and the Workers in Student Community Volunteering Network (WiSCV), now the Student Volunteering Network, held a Roundtable meeting at the House of Lords in early 2011 to discuss ways forwards. Since then, and with limited funding, Student Hubs, the Student Volunteering Network and NUS have all played their part in supporting an integrated strategy at a national level. But owing to a lack of dedicated funding this has neither reached historical levels of scale nor the levels envisaged by Rannard or Darwen in 2011. Currently, the main national initiatives are the Student Volunteering Network and Student Volunteering Week, a partnership between Student Hubs and NUS.

The following form the main findings from contemporary research:

## 1. A desire to make a difference continues to be the primary motivation for student volunteers

- NCCPE found that “95% of students who volunteer are motivated by a desire to improve things or help people”
- Other key motivations include developing skills (88%), gaining work experience (49%) and enhancing learning from their course (49%)
- NCCPE: “Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, students from post-1992 HEIs, students with dependents, and those who did not move away to university are more motivated to volunteer by reasons connected to their personal values, such as religious beliefs and wanting to improve things or help people.”
- NCCPE: “Women, younger students and students from less advantaged backgrounds are more motivated to volunteer to enhance their employability.”
- NCCPE: “Students feel that volunteering for the ‘right reasons’ is important, and do not like to be told that they must volunteer.”

*Recommendation: Despite the importance of volunteering and social action to improving students' skills and employability, that message should not be overemphasised in any campaign to increase levels of involvement, for fear of dissuading those students motivated by other reasons. There should be a variety of ways to encourage student involvement given their range of motivations.*



## 2. A plurality of routes into student volunteering and social action exists and many students engage in activities without formal support from their university institution

- NCCPE: “38 per cent of student volunteers are introduced to volunteering through their university or students’ union”
- NCCPE: “48 per cent of volunteers give their time to formal volunteering activities that benefit the wider community but without receiving any support from their university”
- Students also find out about social action through friends and family (34%), through their secondary education (25%) and a significant number on their own initiative
- Across universities, about half of student volunteers are found to be supported by their students’ union, with the rest supported directly by lecturers and tutors, a Hub, a volunteering department or even their chaplaincy
- ● There is a wide range of types of activity in the sector, with some institutions concentrating almost entirely on a “brokerage model, matching or signposting students to local charities and community organisations”<sup>29</sup> and others supporting student-run projects

*Recommendation: A range of tailored approaches should continue to be supported. No one-size-fits-all model can be adopted but setting common standards of impact measurement would help to raise the quality of provision at different institutions*

*Recommendation: Any attempt to ‘accredit’ volunteering done by students as part of their achievement record must take account of activities done outside of formal structures*

## 3. Students that are supported into volunteering or social action by their university have a better experience overall

- NCCPE found that volunteer management and support was essential for students to have a good social action experience
- However, it was found that, though university staff are committed to volunteering, activities are typically “hampered by a lack of secure funding and a relatively low profile”
- NCCPE’s study finds that “there are many more students involved in volunteering than their universities are aware of, and that these students might benefit from additional support.”

*Recommendation: Following the removal of dedicated funding for this activity through the Higher Education Active Communities Fund, further discussion is needed between universities, their representative bodies and HEFCE as to whether this activity is fully embedded. NCCPE’s research suggests that more sustainable funding solutions are needed to support effective volunteering at a local level. Bursting the Bubble states: “further development (or even continuity) is hampered by a lack of secure funding, a perceived lack of academic support, and the relatively low profile of volunteering services within universities and students’ unions.”*

#### 4. Barriers to participation do of course exist, of which the major one in students' eyes is time

- NCCPE: “nearly half of those who don't volunteer whilst at university have been involved in volunteering previously, suggesting that being at university can also act as a barrier to some students.”
- NCCPE find that there is also a core of students who for whatever reason are just not interested in being involved with this type of activity
- NCCPE: “Volunteering is something students are able to dip in and out of and this flexibility is valued. However, those who volunteered at least once a week see greater benefits from involvement and report better experiences.”
- NCCPE: “volunteer-involving organisations prefer regular, ongoing volunteering from students.”
- NCCPE: “There is a strong demand from students for universities to help find volunteering opportunities connected with their academic course or future career.”

Recommendation: Nothing would address all the above issues but NCCPE posits that “linking volunteering to academic subjects or careers might encourage more students to volunteer”. We clarify that this would encourage more students to volunteer who otherwise would not consider it, but that employability should not be made the sole motivator for student involvement in social action.

#### 5. Contemporary research and analysis confirms historical findings around the importance of national infrastructure and support

- Rannard and Darwen state: “Although student volunteering has a long tradition in English universities and there has been investment in provision over the last decade, student volunteering is currently at a critical point due [amongst other things] to...the lack of a joined up approach across all sectors and at national institutional levels.”<sup>30</sup>
- The idea of ‘infrastructure’ is no longer a popular concept, but the Stanford Social Innovation Review shows the importance of ‘backbone organisations’. So whatever terminology is used, something nationally is needed if this work is to flourish. All recent sector discussions value partnerships between infrastructure bodies, but maintain the need for a specialist, entrepreneurial infrastructure dedicated to student volunteering. It results in:
  - » **Cost effectiveness** – some social action initiatives could never be provided cost effectively at a local level, particularly if they are to fulfil the six quality principles outlined by the Step Up To Serve campaign. When programmes are organised at a national level and disseminated to a network, their impact is multiplied and overall cost becomes reasonable.
  - » **Synergy and support** – A national student volunteering network encourages peer support, sharing of best practice and dissemination of innovative initiatives. It is important that those working at a local level devote time to providing high quality support, rather than reinvent the wheel. National support can enable this through appropriate knowledge and data sharing, and impact measurement.

*Recommendation: Building on in depth historical research, there should be a new cross-sector review of how national support can be provided to the student volunteering and social action sector on a more sustainable footing than in the past, involving contributions from voluntary, private and public sector bodies*



# The Student Hubs Approach: our blueprint for student-powered social change

We separate out this section not to crowd or overly bias the rest of the analysis, as we are active in only a minority of HE institutions, do not believe our approach would work in every university setting, and see much that we admire throughout the sector in which we operate. We cannot of course achieve our ambitions for the sector alone and our strategy from 2014-2020 involves an ambition to collaborate with a wide range of partners.

Our original intention in supporting research into the sector's history was to help us build an open and responsive organisation that works to meet many of the challenges that the sector has faced over recent decades. The policy recommendations throughout this report stand alone, rooted in historical and contemporary research. However, we do of course feel that there are merits in our approach to supporting student volunteering and social action at a local and national level, so we highlight our key learnings from the last seven years.

## 1. More than infrastructure: Local Action, National Support

We would argue that one of the failures of previous infrastructure efforts is its inability to marry local knowledge and innovation with national support and profile.

Student Hubs provides advice, capacity building and support to frontline groups much like any other infrastructure body. However, this infrastructure is rooted in our first hand experience of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating our own frontline programmes. Our staff who support other small, local organisations are those who are directly involved with running our own similar, frontline initiatives.

We would argue that substantial resources have been wasted in recent years by funding infrastructure bodies who do not have sufficient local relationships to deliver effective local projects. Funding should not flow to organisations to deliver locally based projects unless those organisations have local activities themselves. Student Hubs without its university Hubs would be entirely ineffective and out of touch with local needs.

Student Hubs thereby has a twin-tipped model through which it carries out work locally; the learning from which goes to support other small, local organisations through our national network. At Student Hubs our local Hubs are the source for much of the best practice that is fed around the network.

### What we have learned

- Infrastructure support bodies need better links to frontline services if they are to be effective; to the extent that they should coordinate frontline services themselves. New initiatives cannot be created in a vacuum. If any organisation wishes to catalyse new, frontline initiatives, it can only do so through infrastructure bodies that have easily accessible frontline capacity themselves.
- Methods for involving people with volunteering and social action should be more localised. That is one reason why Student Hubs has locally branded and tailored Hubs in each of its universities. A locally targeted model has more traction and inspires more loyalty than a national brand or centralised information about volunteering opportunities.
- Aims to centralise information about volunteering opportunities are laudable but should not be seen as a panacea. Beyond signposting, direct support of volunteers is essential to increase overall levels of student engagement in social action and sustain individual commitment.

## 2. Holistic Support for the Citizen

Student Hubs believes in a holistic approach to supporting and inspiring social action, and that infrastructure for volunteering could take account of similar strategies across the board.

### What we have learned

We have found that the following three strategies create a joined-up approach, and we believe that the learning could be used elsewhere:

#### i. Inspire students to make a difference.

We believe in the power of information. Many students suffer from a poverty of knowledge about the world's most pressing issues. We also inspire students to realise their power and potential to shape a better world; while they are at university and throughout their lives.

#### ii. Connect students to opportunities to create social impact.

We connect students to opportunities to make the world a fairer place; whether local, national or international. We work closely with community partners to ensure that our work supports those most in need. As we are not defined by a single cause we can respond to students' interests and skills to incubate projects which are relevant and meaningful for both individual and community.

#### iii. Support students and student groups, enabling their work to be both effective and sustainable

It is critical that the work that students undertake is efficient, effective and sustainable. We enable our student volunteers to develop personally and professionally and to maximise the impact of their work in the community, as well as ensuring that their projects continue to flourish and grow despite the high student turnover. We also support students as they look ahead to their future careers; encouraging them to consider how they can continue to create social impact in the workplace, whether they are in the private, public or third sector.

### 3. Efficient scale for the benefit of the local network

Our experience is that small, local volunteering agencies are unable to do many things effectively or efficiently, such as:

- » invest in staff development;
- » support impact, research and evaluation programmes;
- » invest in efficient back-office services.

Despite substantial resources committed through HEFCE to support infrastructure and governance for the student volunteering sector in the 2000s, there would be a strong argument to say that it has never reached minimum viable scale in many institutions to flourish. Most activities are supported by one or only a handful of staff at each institution and much progress can be wasted through high staff turnover of staff.

#### What we have learned

Student Hubs believes passionately in the importance of local action, but recognises the need to take advantage of the economies of scale that the private sector often exploits so well.

Student Hubs therefore advocates for a model of governance that adheres to subsidiarity, with agency and decision-making being fulfilled locally to the extent to which this is possible. This is complemented by national systems and processes that enable local staff to have more impact.

Our Hub structure, where each University is given an individually branded Hub, aims to maximise the value of local knowledge whilst benefiting from the economies of scale, synergies and mutual support that are required to build an effective and long lasting organisation, one which can develop national relationships, programmes and carry out strategic research.

### A model for implementing high-impact student social action

Our experiences and learnings over the past seven years continue to inform the development of our organisation. Drawing on constant monitoring and evaluation of our own activities naturally results in ongoing innovations and improvements on our frontline support. As a result we have developed a methodology that inspires, connects and supports students in way that is highly innovative and differs fundamentally from other current organisations that seek to engage students with societal issues.

- » We were founded by students in response to problems experienced first hand by students, and remain student-led. We are thus directly in touch with student needs and the unique environment of each university in which we work.
- » Our aim is to create active citizens for life. We therefore look beyond volunteering, and actively promote social impact careers, social entrepreneurship and lifelong civic engagement.
- » We have a focus on impact and want to see students making a significant contribution to addressing society's challenges. This requires designing projects that have both students and community partners at their core, and tap into students' unique interests, resources and skillsets.
- » We place great emphasis upon collaboration. We seek to coordinate the highly disparate initiatives to educate students about social and environmental issues, to encourage partnership building between relevant organisations and to develop, identify and spread good practice amongst all these groups.
- » We are not defined by a single cause, but rather support students to find theirs, empowering them to make a difference about the issues they care about.
- » We are highly cost effective, due to our student-led governance and delivery mechanisms
- » Our network operating model enables us to share resources

and expertise from the frontline across the network, pilot new programmes that can then be expanded elsewhere, and constantly learn from our activities.

## Working across six quality principles for double benefit

We are passionate about ensuring that each and every student with whom we work achieves the double benefit - to themselves and to society - which has been identified by Step Up To Serve and Generation Change. This is how we do it.

1. **Challenging:** We challenge students to critically engage with the issues they are tackling through social action, and to become leaders for the causes they are passionate about.
2. **Youth-led:** we were established by students, for students student leadership is still at the core of what we do. At university level we are led by student committees, and we are recruiting a national student executive who will feed into organisational strategy and delivery. We bring together all of our student committees for training and skills sharing at our bi-annual 'Hubathons'. These are also opportunities for students to shape the future of the Student Hubs network.
3. **Socially impactful:** We are committed to ongoing monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure we deliver the most positive impact across all of our activities. Impact, not hour-counting, is key to our mission.
4. **Progressive:** We are an entrepreneurial and innovative organisation which prides itself on being at the cutting edge of the sector. Our close connection to student leaders also ensures that we stay abreast of the most progressive, grassroots thinking and activity.
5. **Embedded:** Our mission is to make student social action the norm and not the exception in uK universities. By coordinating locally-branded Hubs which are tailored to the needs of each university and its student body, we aim to create a culture change

which makes student social action relevant and mainstream to the student experience.

6. **Reflective:** We encourage students to reflect on their social action activities as they progress through university: critically engaging with the causes which they are challenging and self-evaluating their personal impact at each stage.

Our model has been distilled from decades of research, learning and refining passed down through generations of student social activists. This document is our contribution to this tradition. Our aim is that it will prove as useful and insightful to the future sector leaders as previous works have been for us.

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5. For a very good analysis of the statistical history/mystery see ps 15,16: Brewis, G., Russell, J & Holdsworth, C. (2010). *Bursting the Bubble*. For the most recent analysis, supporting the figures, see Ellison, F & Kerr, H (2014). *The Student Volunteering Landscape*, NUS.
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All of our work is driven by one mission: to mainstream student social action in UK universities, nurturing a new generation of global citizens, volunteers, campaigners and effective philanthropists - and we are making ever-greater strides towards making our vision a reality.

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