

National volunteer development plan: Promoting volunteering through education

Vision

To encourage a more diverse and skilled volunteer base in Ireland by integrating volunteering into formal education at all levels and as such empowering young people from all backgrounds to become active, engaged citizens.

Introduction

Volunteering is a cornerstone of Irish society, strengthening communities and helping to develop people's skills. However, our volunteer base does not fully reflect the diversity of our society, and pathways into volunteering can be informal or exclusive. As well as this, a recent survey shows that whilst 80% of volunteers learn new skills through volunteering, only 57% receive support from their organisation to articulate them, and 33% have never included these valuable skills on a CV or job/education application.

This development plan aims to create a shift in Ireland's volunteer base through the use of the formal education system. By embedding service learning and civic education into education, we aim to make access to volunteering opportunities equal, instil its value from a young age, and in turn build a more diverse and skilled volunteer base.

As well as this, the development plan directly supports the strategic objectives of the Blueprint for European Volunteering (BEV) 2030. It does this by supporting BEV's pillars of:

- **Enable** – By putting supportive policies and legal guidelines in place within the education system.
- **Engage** – By promoting inclusive and accessible volunteering for young people.
- **Empower** – By building the capacity of Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs) to recognise and articulate the skills gained through volunteering.

Actions

1. Integrate volunteering into the school curriculum

By embedding service learning into the national curriculum, we can create a shift in mind set from casual or informal volunteering to a more formal structure.

Action: Develop a National Service Learning Framework (NSLF) for primary and post-primary levels, making community projects a core component of subjects like CSPE and SPHE.

Implementation: Pilot a 'civic engagement /community service credit' in Senior Cycle, where a minimum of 20 hours of reflective volunteering is required for the Leaving Certificate. This will help to demonstrate the value of civic engagement to employers and Third Level education institutions.

Diversity: Ensure the NSLF promotes inclusive, accessible projects with diverse community organisations, ensuring volunteer roles are relevant and available to every student.

2. Improve VIO's ability to clearly communicate skills

Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) are key to helping volunteers recognise and communicate the value of their experience. Our survey shows clear demand for this, with 78% of volunteers knowing how to communicate their skills, but only 57% having received support to do so.

Action: Create a resource toolkit for VIOs focused on 'Skills Articulation'.

Implementation: Deliver workshops and online modules for VIO's on how to identify, document, and validate the transferable skills (e.g., leadership, communication, project management) volunteers gain. This will directly address the 33% who don't use these skills on applications for work or education.

Outcome: Empower volunteers to confidently present their volunteering experience on CVs, in interviews, and on platforms like LinkedIn, enhancing their employability and in turn demonstrating the value of volunteering to wider society.

3. Rollout a 'Diversity in volunteering' programme

To ensure volunteers reflect the diversity of the population in Ireland, we will aim to break down barriers to participation.

Action: Establish a programme to create targeted, accessible volunteering pathways for underrepresented groups.

Implementation: Partner with schools and VIOs to create opportunities for people from migrant backgrounds, those with disabilities, and from socio-economically disadvantaged communities. This includes promoting flexible volunteering such as micro-volunteering and virtual roles ensuring all volunteer opportunities are accessible in design and nature.

Focus: Shine the spotlight on diverse volunteer role models and strengthen the messaging around volunteering as a pathway to developing skills and community connection for everyone.

Conclusion

This national volunteer development plan outlines a practical approach to securing the future of volunteering in Ireland. By focusing on the education system, we aim to reach every young person. By building VIO capacity, we can maximise the personal development of volunteers. And by prioritising diversity, we ensure our volunteer community is vibrant,

inclusive, and resilient. Together these three actions will ensure volunteering remains an important force in building a better Ireland for all.