The Impact of Investing in Volunteers

Final Report

By the Centre for Voluntary Action Research

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Authorship

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Volunteer Managers, other senior staff and volunteers from:

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Children’s Trust, Tadworth
Health and Well Being Project (Llanelli)
Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospital and Fenland PCT
Lead Scotland
Rethink (Northern Ireland)
Student Volunteering Cardiff – University Union
Trinity Hospice
Volunteers Greenwich

Senior staff from the four national volunteering infrastructure bodies:

Volunteer Development Agency Northern Ireland
Volunteer Development Scotland
Volunteering England
Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Three Investing in Volunteers assessors
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an Executive Summary of the Final Report of a Study carried out by the Centre for Voluntary Action Research at Aston Business School for Volunteering England between October 2005 and January 2006.

The Study had two principal aims:

- **To gather evidence of the benefits and impact of the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers**
- **To develop a framework for the future development of impact measurement for organisations using Investing in Volunteers.**

**Part One: Our Approach to the Study**

In Part One we describe our approach to the Study. In order to gather information about the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*, we carried out semi-structured face to face interviews with Volunteer Managers (or equivalent) and senior staff from nine organisations using the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard. We held focus groups with volunteers from each organisation. We also conducted telephone interviews with senior staff from the four national volunteering infrastructure bodies and with three *Investing in Volunteers* assessors.

**Part Two: The Study Context**

In Part Two we describe the context in which the Study has taken place. We refer to the development of the ‘quality movement’ in the UK, and the increased interest in, and use of, quality systems in the voluntary and community sector. We note how some organisations have experienced significant external pressure to use a particular quality system.

We describe the heightened interest on the part of central government in the promotion and development of volunteering. We refer to the establishment of the Volunteering Hub as one aspect of the growth in infrastructure support for volunteering and those working with volunteers. We note the increased importance attached in recent years to making volunteering a positive experience for volunteers. We suggest that *Investing in Volunteers* builds on earlier work on good practice in volunteering and the efforts of the volunteering infrastructure bodies to promote high standards of volunteer management.

**Part Three: The Study Findings**

In Part Three we set out the findings from the semi-structured interviews with Volunteer Managers, senior staff and volunteers from nine organisations pursuing *Investing in Volunteers*, senior staff from the four national volunteering infrastructure bodies and three *Investing in Volunteers* assessors. We present these findings under ten main headings:

- The background to organisations’ decisions to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Anticipated benefits
- The challenges of working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Support for the *Investing in Volunteers* process
- Changes made as a result of working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Volunteers’ reactions to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*
- Benefits gained
- Critical success factors
- Reflections on the *Investing in Volunteers* process
- The wider impact of *Investing in Volunteers*.
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The background to organisations’ decisions to work towards Investing in Volunteers (section 4)

In most of the nine organisations studied, the initiative to work towards Investing in Volunteers had been taken by the Volunteer Manager, usually with strong support from senior staff and board members. They had been motivated by a desire to promote volunteering further within their organisations, to demonstrate professionalism and good practice and to gain external assessment of their work and recognition for their standards of volunteer management. Some organisations with less well-developed volunteering structures saw Investing in Volunteers as providing them with a structure to help them develop their practice.

Anticipated benefits (section 5)

Study participants had welcomed the opportunity provided by Investing in Volunteers to review organisational policies and practices. They anticipated that receipt of the Award would lead to increased recognition of the contribution made by volunteers, and that the organisation would benefit from external publicity and recognition. Organisations adopting Investing in Volunteers hoped that it would enhance their fundraising potential and thought that it might help them attract more volunteers.

The challenges of working towards Investing in Volunteers (section 6)

At the outset of the Investing in Volunteers process, organisations had anticipated challenges in relation to the volume of work to be undertaken, the need to develop new systems and policies, communicating the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers to organisational stakeholders and covering the cost of the process.

The main challenges actually experienced related to the time commitment, the amount of paperwork involved and promoting the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers within the organisation.

Support for the Investing in Volunteers process (section 7)

Study participants who had undertaken the Investing in Volunteers process were generally aware of the support available to them from national and local volunteering infrastructure bodies, and had found it useful. They had needed some help in clarifying aspects of the Standard and the evidence needed, in accessing model policies and in dealing with issues such as risk assessment. They had also valued the support they had received from within their own organisations. They made a few suggestions for additional support that might be useful.

Changes made as a result of working towards Investing in Volunteers (section 8)

Organisations using Investing in Volunteers had made a variety of changes in areas of volunteering policy and practice. These included modifications to their general volunteering and other policies and the introduction of regular policy reviews. They had altered their recruitment practices or increased the training opportunities available to volunteers. Organisations had also made efforts to improve the clarity of information they provided to volunteers. Particular attention had been paid to issues relating to diversity and to risk assessments. Some organisations had adopted a more collaborative approach to working with volunteers.
Volunteers’ reactions to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* (section 9)

Organisations that had already received the *Investing in Volunteers* Award had informed their volunteers of their intentions to work towards the Standard at an early stage. Others had not always informed all volunteers. Volunteers’ awareness of *Investing in Volunteers* varied considerably, as did their reactions to its adoption and use within their organisations; while some were very enthusiastic, others were either ambivalent or uninterested. They were generally supportive of the concept, but often saw the Standard as having limited relevance to their work as volunteers.

**Benefits gained** (section 10)

Study participants felt that organisations in receipt of the Award had benefited from good publicity and a raised organisational profile. Some impact on volunteer recruitment was noted, although evidence for this is so far limited. Several organisations felt that their *Investing in Volunteers* status was viewed positively by external bodies as one aspect of a well-managed organisation. None had as yet been able to link this with successful fundraising, although one organisation was in a position to enter into a partnership with a national body as a result of its newly acquired *Investing in Volunteers* status.

Within organisations, it was suggested that work towards *Investing in Volunteers* had raised the profile of volunteering, cemented the place of the volunteer programme within the organisation and led to an increased sense of pride in the work of volunteers. It had also contributed to the development of a more consistent approach to volunteering across different organisational settings through the review of policies and procedures.

While the main benefits appear to have been organisational, Volunteer Managers have also benefited personally. They have, for example, gained a sense of achievement, along with reassurance and confidence as a result of their practice being externally assessed. They valued the opportunity provided by *Investing in Volunteers* to review systems.

Volunteers expressed pride in their organisations’ *Investing in Volunteers* status, but generally felt they had gained few new benefits; this was usually because they considered organisations had had high standards of volunteer management prior to embarking on *Investing in Volunteers*.

**Critical success factors** (section 11)

Study participants identified four ‘critical success factors’ in facilitating the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*. It was suggested that the commitment of key stakeholders, not only the Volunteer Manager but also senior staff and trustees, was crucial. The support of other staff and volunteers was also felt to be important. Study participants further stressed the importance of an organisational ethos that values volunteers and volunteering.

The need for resources – both of time and finance – was recognised, as was the existence of external sources of support and advice.

**Reflections on the *Investing in Volunteers* process** (section 12)

Study participants were overwhelmingly positive in their comments on the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard and the process. They felt that it is appropriate to most organisations that involve volunteers, but that it needs more publicity, and that its accessibility, especially to less well-resourced organisations, should be increased.
The wider impact of *Investing in Volunteers* (section 13)

Study participants noted that there is a substantial amount of interest in *Investing in Volunteers* amongst volunteer involving organisations, some of whom are using it as a basis for their work without necessarily registering for the assessment process. Some local authorities and funding bodies have also indicated an interest.

Part Four: The Future Development of *Investing in Volunteers*

We note the overwhelmingly positive views of Study participants about the *Investing in Volunteers* process, the growing interest in the Standard and the fact that there are clear indications of the potential for more widespread use. We suggest that, in order to capitalise on the current interest in *Investing in Volunteers*, consideration is given to the key learning that emerges from the experiences of Study participants. We discuss four key learning points for volunteer involving organisations:

- The importance of a ‘quality champion’
- Achieving organisational ‘buy-in’ to the process
- The availability of resources
- The need for external support and information.

We suggest that an organisational ‘quality champion’ can help steer the *Investing in Volunteers* process, ensure it has strategic commitment and coordinate the various aspects of the work. We note the importance of other internal stakeholders’ ‘buy-in’ to the process, and suggest that the initial workshop held by assessors can help in achieving this. The need for adequate resources, both of time and money, will become more acute as take-up of *Investing in Volunteers* extends amongst small and less well-resourced organisations. The availability of external support with covering the costs may be needed more than at present, along with advice and information about aspects of the Standard.

We propose a further five main issues for consideration by Volunteering England and other volunteering infrastructure bodies in order to create a framework where the impact of *Investing in Volunteers* can be maximised:

- Continuing publicity about the Standard
- Promotion of the benefits of adoption
- Ensuring the accessibility of the Standard
- Provision of information
- Assistance with financial resources.

As we have noted, interest in *Investing in Volunteers* is growing, but needs to be publicised further through a variety of means, building on the positive experiences of the organisations that have already received the Award. We suggest that promotion of the benefits of using *Investing in Volunteers* should constitute a significant part of any future publicity, including the varying benefits that might accrue to different types of organisation, and that the distinctive nature of *Investing in Volunteers* should be further emphasised. We also note the important role of partnerships with local Volunteer Centres in promoting use of the Standard.

We note Study participants’ views that the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard and process are appropriate to volunteer involving organisations of all types, and suggest that it is important that the Standard is seen as widely accessible. As part of this process, the continuing availability of information and support on volunteering issues will be particularly important as organisations with less well-developed volunteering structures or less involvement in volunteering networks engage with *Investing in Volunteers*. Likewise assistance with
resources to cover the costs associated with Investing in Volunteers is likely to be needed more in the future.
INTRODUCTION TO THE FINAL REPORT

This is the Final Report of a Study carried out by the Centre for Voluntary Action Research at Aston Business School for Volunteering England between October 2005 and January 2006.

The Study had two principal aims:

- *To gather evidence of the benefits and impact of the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers*
- *To develop a framework for the future development of impact measurement for organisations using Investing in Volunteers.*

In Part One we describe our approach to the Study. In Part Two we outline the context in which the Study has taken place. In Part Three we concentrate on the first of the Study aims by describing the findings from the fieldwork phase, focusing in particular on the challenges *Investing in Volunteers* has posed for organisations, the changes they have made as a result of adoption, volunteers’ reactions and the benefits derived from use. We also outline Study participants’ views of the critical success factors in implementing *Investing in Volunteers* and consider its wider impact on the field of volunteering. In Part Four we address the second of the Study aims by discussing issues for further consideration by Volunteering England and its partner agencies, and by organisations adopting *Investing in Volunteers*, in relation to the future successful adoption and use of the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard.
PART ONE: OUR APPROACH TO THE STUDY

1. **Aim of the Study**

The Study had two principal aims:

- To gather evidence of the benefits and impact of the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers
- To develop a framework for the future development of impact measurement for organisations using Investing in Volunteers.

1.1 **Methodology**

In order to gather information about the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers, we carried out semi-structured face to face interviews with:

- Volunteer Managers (or equivalent) from nine organisations using the Investing in Volunteers Standard

and

- Senior staff from the nine organisations (for example Chief Executive, Project Manager).

We also conducted focus groups with volunteers from each organisation. Numbers of volunteers attending focus groups ranged from three to nine.

The ideas put forward by these nine organisations were complemented by material supplied in telephone interviews carried out with senior staff from the four national volunteering infrastructure bodies (Volunteer Development Agency Northern Ireland, Volunteer Development Scotland, Volunteering England and Wales Council for Voluntary Action) and with three Investing in Volunteers assessors.

1.2 **Organisational details**

The nine participating organisations comprised:

- Four based in England
- One based in Northern Ireland
- Two based in Scotland
- Two based in Wales.

All except the two Scottish organisations were local in focus (although one English organisation drew some of its service users from a wide geographical area). The two Scottish organisations provided services in their particular fields of work for service users across almost the whole country.

Organisations’ principal activities related to:

- Providing care, education and therapy for children with multiple disabilities
- Promoting the health and well-being of people aged 50+
- Running hospices for children
- Enabling disabled people to be involved with learning activities
- Providing primary health care services
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- Supporting individuals with mental health problems
- Running a range of projects to work with disadvantaged people, including children, people with mental health problems, homeless people and asylum seekers
- Palliative care
- Promotion and development of volunteering.

Eight of the nine were voluntary and community organisations (VCOs); one was a statutory sector body (an NHS Trust).

Organisations varied considerably in size, with the smallest having four paid staff and the largest (the NHS Trust) over 4000. All except one had a dedicated Volunteer Manager post or equivalent. Most involved relatively large numbers of volunteers: only three organisations had fewer than 100 active volunteers; the remainder involved between 200 and 1000 people, and usually in a large number of different roles.

Six organisations had received the *Investing in Volunteers* Award (two during the research process); the other three were in the early stages of working towards it.

Six organisations had also achieved *Investors in People* status.

1.3 Interview and focus group questions

We asked Volunteer Managers and senior staff the same broad range of questions, covering:

- The background to their organisations’ decisions to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- The challenges anticipated and experienced
- The support they received in working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- The changes to their volunteering policies and practices made during the process
- Volunteers’ reactions to *Investing in Volunteers*
- The benefits derived – for the organisation, Volunteer Managers and volunteers
- Their views of the ‘critical success factors’ in working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Their reflections on the *Investing in Volunteers* process.

Our questions to senior staff of the four volunteering infrastructure bodies and to the three *Investing in Volunteers* assessors covered the same broad range of issues, but also sought their views about the appropriateness of *Investing in Volunteers* to different types of organisation and its impact on the wider field of volunteering.

The questions addressed in focus groups with volunteers covered:

- Their understanding of the background to the decision to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Their reactions to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*
- Their awareness of changes made as a result of the adoption of *Investing in Volunteers*
- Their views of the benefits derived
- Their perceptions of the organisational challenges involved.
1.4 Presentation of data

The data from the interviews and focus groups have been analysed thematically, resulting in the emerging findings presented in Part Three.

Given that this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative study, we do not attribute numbers to those holding any particular point of view, although we do highlight points made by several interviewees. As is the usual case, we are presenting the findings anonymously, simply referring to ideas as being put forward by 'Study participants', or, where appropriate, by particular groups of Study participants (Volunteer Managers, senior staff, volunteers, volunteering infrastructure bodies or assessors). Unattributed quotations are presented throughout this Final Report in italics.
PART TWO: THE STUDY CONTEXT

2. Introduction

This Study, and the development of *Investing in Volunteers* itself, takes place at a time when several interlocking themes have assumed considerable prominence. These are:

- The development of the ‘quality movement’ in the UK
- Increased interest in, and use of, quality systems in the voluntary and community sector (VCS)
- A heightened interest in volunteering issues on the part of government agencies
- A growth in infrastructure support for volunteering and those working with volunteers
- Heightened awareness of the need to make volunteering a positive experience for volunteers.

2.1 The development of the ‘quality movement’ in the UK

Previous work by CVAR\(^1\) has highlighted the way in which work on quality initiatives elsewhere, especially in the US and Japan, moved into the UK and ultimately into the VCS via the public and statutory sectors. Early (i.e. before the 1980s) quality developments in manufacturing industry (Morrison, 1990) gradually moved from that domain into the service, health care and public sectors, eventually merging with mainstream management thinking (Scott and Cole, 2000). Quality initiatives developed in the public sector were influenced by factors such as the desire to be more accountable to service users, emphasis on ‘value for money’ in public services and, most significantly, the shift in the role of local authorities from being dominant providers to purchasers of services (Donnelly, 1999).

As this trend continued, and as voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) became increasingly part of the ‘mixed economy of care’ (Lewis, 1996), providing services purchased under contract by statutory bodies, the latter became increasingly concerned with finding new ways of ensuring quality. The advent of the ‘Best Value’ approach placed new demands on VCOs; the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment to local authorities in 2002 continued this trend, looking at performance from various perspectives to provide a better understanding of how best to target activities to bring about improved performance.

Since then, the government’s desire to see VCOs take on a more major role as providers of public services\(^2\) has continued, and with it an ongoing concern with improved standards of organisational performance. The Strategy Unit Report (2002, section 6.36), for example, suggests that ‘there has been insufficient focus throughout the charitable and not-for-profit sector as a whole on measuring and improving organisational performance (defined as the extent to which an organisation meets its aims’). A later report (HM Treasury, 2005) refers to the existence of skill gaps amongst VCOs in a number of areas, including the management of volunteers.

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\(^2\) ‘Public services’ are defined as ‘services that are wholly or partly funded, or could be funded, from the public purse, including national, regional and local government and statutory agencies at all levels’ (*futurebuilders*, HM Treasury, 2003).
2.2 Increased interest in, and use of, quality systems in the voluntary and community sector

CVAR’s research in 2003 (CVAR, 2004) with VCOs in England found a growing interest in, and use of, quality systems such as Investors in People, PQASSO, Quality Mark and others. VCOs were influenced to adopt a quality system by a complex mix of internal and external drivers. Internal drivers included a desire to assure users of service quality or demonstrate accountability to a variety of stakeholders, a general commitment to organisational development or a concern for internal consistency. The external driver most commonly cited was the influence of funders, or an understanding of the general funding environment and an awareness that at some point funders might demand adoption of a recognised quality system.

Some of the organisations that participated in the earlier study had experienced significant external pressure to adopt a particular quality system. In some cases this caused problems of 'fit', with the required system not always relating well to the organisation’s objectives, way of working or size. Integration of an imposed quality system into all aspects of an organisation’s way of working often became a major issue and in some cases posed significant organisational problems.

The CVAR research also highlighted substantial benefits resulting from the use of quality systems in relation to organisational development and sustainability, service development and improved external relations. It also demonstrated the importance for successful adoption and use of stakeholder involvement, leadership, an implementation plan and structure, integration with other processes and adequate resources.

2.3 A heightened interest in volunteering issues on the part of government agencies

Central government interest in the development and promotion of volunteering has a long history, taking different forms and having different drivers under Conservative and New Labour administrations. Recent attempts to involve more people as volunteers have included the Make a Difference programme, Millennium Volunteers, the Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative and the Experience Corps. Most recently, the establishment of the Volunteering Hub as one of six national Hubs of Expertise provides a substantial strategic impetus to support for volunteering. The ChangeUp Report (Home Office, 2004, p.38) states that ‘There should be a commonly branded local volunteering infrastructure linked to the achievement of quality standards available from the end of 2005’. It also notes (p.39) that ‘Poor management of volunteers in the local voluntary and community sector continues to be a major cause of volunteer drop out. There is a need to develop high quality programmes to enhance the skills of paid and voluntary managers of volunteers’.

2.4 A growth in infrastructure support for volunteering and those working with volunteers

The establishment of the Volunteering Hub adds significantly to the infrastructure support previously available to volunteering and to Volunteer Managers. Local Volunteer Bureaux / Volunteer Centres, the former Volunteer Development England (previously National Association of Volunteer Bureaux), former National Centre for Volunteering and the volunteering development agencies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have long performed a valuable role in this respect, but have not always been adequately resourced.
The merger of Volunteer Development England and National Centre for Volunteering to form Volunteering England, followed by the development of the Volunteering Hub, enhances the volunteering infrastructure and further raises the profile of volunteering nationally. Along with earlier initiatives such as the establishment of the National Volunteer Managers Forum and National Occupational Standards for Volunteer Managers, such developments play a major part in promoting high professional management standards amongst those working with volunteers.

2.5 Heightened awareness of the need to make volunteering a positive experience for volunteers

A further strand to the recent history of volunteering is provided by the increased emphasis placed by Volunteer Managers and others on making volunteering a positive experience for volunteers. A plethora of publications on the subject of good practice in volunteering, the development of Volunteer Charters and training sessions on the rights as well as the responsibilities of volunteers have exemplified this school of thought.

At a more strategic level, the question of not exploiting volunteers was on the agenda of volunteering infrastructure bodies back in 1975, when the first *Guidelines for Relationships between Volunteers and Paid Workers in the Health and Personal Social Services* (Volunteer Centre UK, 1975) were developed. Much later, the *Volunteering Compact* (Home Office, 2001, p.3) again provided strategic recognition for the idea of volunteering as a two-way process when it noted that ‘Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also receives. Benefits that volunteers expect to gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, experience and contacts, sociability and fun, and inclusion in the life of the organisation’.

2.6 Investing in Volunteers

The *Investing in Volunteers* Standard, conceived in 1995 by the then Director of Wandsworth Volunteer Bureau, subsequently piloted in four south London boroughs and now rolled out across the UK, encapsulates all of the above themes. It was originally described as ‘a radical development that has at its heart the idea that volunteers, agencies and the wider community can all benefit from a Standard of good practice’ (Wandle Valley Volunteer Bureaux, 1997) and more recently as ‘a quality standard … which recognises organisations that have the policies and good practice in place to give volunteers a worthwhile and fulfilling experience’ (Volunteer Development Agency Northern Ireland, 2005).

*Investing in Volunteers* builds on much of the earlier work on good practice and the efforts of volunteering infrastructure bodies to promote high standards of volunteer management. It is unique in being the only quality system focused specifically on the ways in which organisations value and manage their volunteers. The framework of ten indicators is designed to be robust, but also sufficiently flexible to be used to assess and improve performance across the wide range of organisations that involve volunteers. In this context, a study of its benefits and impact is particularly timely.
PART THREE: THE STUDY FUNDINGS

3. Introduction

In Part Three we set out the findings from the semi-structured interviews with Volunteer Managers, senior staff and volunteers from nine organisations pursuing *Investing in Volunteers*, senior staff from volunteering infrastructure bodies and three *Investing in Volunteers* assessors. As indicated earlier, we shall refer to the Study findings as emanating from ‘Study participants’ unless there is a specific need to distinguish the views of any of the above groups.

We present the Study findings under ten main headings:

- The background to organisations’ decisions to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Anticipated benefits
- The challenges of working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Support for the *Investing in Volunteers* process
- Changes made as a result of working towards *Investing in Volunteers*
- Volunteers’ reactions to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*
- Benefits gained
- Critical success factors
- Reflections on the *Investing in Volunteers* process
- The wider impact of *Investing in Volunteers*.

4. The background to organisations’ decisions to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*

In most of the nine organisations studied, the initiative to work towards *Investing in Volunteers* had been taken by the Volunteer Manager, although senior staff and board members had usually given strong support.

Study participants tended to refer to four main drivers that had led organisations to work towards achieving the Standard:

- A desire to promote volunteering within the organisation
- A wish to demonstrate professionalism and good practice
- A desire to gain an external assessment of their work and external recognition for their practice
- An opportunity to improve and develop practice.

4.1 A desire to promote volunteering within the organisation

The nine organisations studied generally had an existing commitment to valuing volunteers and their contribution, yet several described themselves as motivated by a desire to promote volunteering further, seeing *Investing in Volunteers* as ‘a wonderful opportunity to promote volunteering within the organisation’, a chance to ‘keep volunteering on the agenda’ and to demonstrate to both paid staff and volunteers themselves the value of volunteers’ contributions. The existence of a specific quality standard for the field of volunteering was seen as a major step forward in this respect: ‘a great opportunity to establish a management standard for volunteers and demonstrating to them that they were important’. In some organisations, securing an Award that related specifically to volunteering was a
natural extension to previous use of quality systems, in particular Investors in People.

4.2 A wish to demonstrate professionalism and good practice

Closely related to the desire to promote volunteering was a concern to demonstrate professionalism and good practice, both within the organisation and externally. Achieving the Investing in Volunteers Standard was seen as a demonstration that work with volunteers was well organised, ‘a model of good practice’, ‘it’s not enough to develop good practice; you need to get the mark as well’; ‘it is good to show we take the idea of training on board as we promote training to volunteers’. Study participants often expressed a view that, while they thought they had good volunteering policies and practices, achieving Investing in Volunteers would provide confirmation of this, and offer a visible demonstration of their professionalism.

4.3 A desire to gain an external assessment of their work and external recognition for their practice

External verification of the existence of good practice was felt to be very important. Study participants from the volunteering infrastructure bodies, whose knowledge of Investing in Volunteers covered a wider range of organisations than the nine studied in detail here, commented on the importance to organisations of ‘an externally branded mark’, ‘the recognition and credibility that what they’re doing is good’; and ‘to be able to put the tick on your letters’.

Volunteer Managers saw external assessment as providing an opportunity to gain an objective view of their way of working. As one Volunteer Manager put it, without external assessment it would be possible to wonder ‘Is this just grounded in me?’ The Investing in Volunteers assessment would prove that the organisation’s views of good practice were rooted in a broader understanding of good practice; ‘that what we thought we were doing was good practice’. Volunteers too referred to the importance of external assessment: ‘to prove we are a good organisation if people see we’ve been through the Award’.

4.4 An opportunity to improve and develop practice

Organisations with less developed volunteering structures often saw Investing in Volunteers as a developmental tool, providing a structure to help them develop their practice (as opposed to the opportunity to demonstrate good practice valued by those with more developed structures). The comments that ‘we thought the Standard would help us to prioritise and develop a supportive framework for us’; and ‘what we had in place was falling a little bit short’ highlight Volunteer Managers’ views of how Investing in Volunteers might help them develop their practice.

While the original intention of Investing in Volunteers was to provide a framework against which volunteering practice could be assessed, there is evidence of organisations also using the Standard as a guide when setting up volunteering systems for the first time. For example, one volunteering infrastructure body Study participant referred to the idea of some newer organisations that: ‘If I’m going to set this up I might as well set it up properly’.

5. Anticipated benefits

We asked Volunteer Managers and senior staff what benefits they had anticipated deriving from working towards the Investing in Volunteers Standard. We also asked
volunteering infrastructure body. Study participants and assessors for their understanding of the benefits organisations hoped to gain. Their collective comments fall into five main categories.

5.1 The opportunity to review organisational policies and procedures

Study participants had at the outset anticipated that the *Investing in Volunteers* process, as well as the end result of receiving the Award, would be beneficial, in providing a clear structure and process for reviewing every aspect of their work with volunteers. It was suggested that the process could highlight any weaknesses in practice, ‘give us the opportunity to review everything; help us to know what we were doing effectively and develop areas that could be more effective’, provide ‘an MOT with regard to working with volunteers’, and ‘focus our minds on what we are doing that is good and identify gaps so we could do better and be more responsive to the needs of volunteers’. The view was also expressed that going through the *Investing in Volunteers* process could provide reassurance of organisational systems being ‘as robust as possible’.

5.2 Recognition of the contribution made by volunteers

As discussed above, Study participants clearly saw *Investing in Volunteers* as providing an important opportunity to promote volunteering and to recognise the contribution of volunteers. Volunteer Managers often appeared to view the Award as being as much a reward for their volunteers as an assessment of their own management systems, and expected that receipt of the Award would lead to benefits in this area: ‘it would be an additional value and recognition for the volunteers’; ‘it was something I wanted to do for the volunteers; it was something they could take ownership of; they had their own quality system now’. Showing volunteers how much they were valued was an aspiration for many Volunteer Managers, a view which volunteers themselves recognised and appreciated: ‘I’ve always been very happy in the way I’ve been treated’; ‘I think they were doing it for us’.

5.3 External publicity and recognition

As indicated above, organisations were often motivated to work towards *Investing in Volunteers* by the desires to promote volunteering and gain external recognition for their professionalism. Study participants described external publicity and recognition for good practice and for the contributions made by volunteers as eagerly anticipated benefits of gaining *Investing in Volunteers* status. Organisations had variously hoped that receiving the Award would ‘give clout to volunteering’, ‘reassure other organisations that we are a quality organisation’ and ‘a bonus for the organisation to say – yes, we are looking after volunteers in the way that we should’.

5.4 Help with fundraising

Study participants aspired towards a further potential benefit from gaining the *Investing in Volunteers* Award: that recognition on the part of external agencies of their high standards of practice would enhance their chances of securing funding. Study participants hoped for ‘acknowledgement by other agencies that we are something to be invested in or to work with in a full or more informal partnership’, or stated that ‘we wanted the award to help our funding’. One Study participant noted that organisations had ‘quite blatantly’ stated that they saw *Investing in Volunteers* as a means to bring money into the organisation: ‘money - irrespective of their drivers for getting involved, all hope that there will be money involved’. Several organisations expressed the view that it would look good on funding applications to
state that they had *Investing in Volunteers* status, perhaps prompting funders to think: ‘this is a good organisation and I might like to fund them’.

5.5. **An aid to volunteer recruitment**

Few Study participants described the aim of recruiting more volunteers as a significant reason for their working towards *Investing in Volunteers*; indeed several stated that they already had sufficient volunteers. Nor did they see *Investing in Volunteers* as an aid to volunteer retention, since problems in that area were rarely experienced. They did, however, envisage that more volunteers might be attracted to organisations with *Investing in Volunteers* status as the Standard becomes more widely known. They also felt it was important for volunteers to be able to ‘expect a certain standard’ once involved.

6. **The challenges of working towards *Investing in Volunteers***

6.1 **Challenges anticipated**

At the outset of the *Investing in Volunteers* process, senior staff and Volunteer Managers had anticipated challenges in four main areas:

- The volume of work to be undertaken
- The need to develop new systems and policies
- Communicating the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* to organisational stakeholders
- Cost of the process.

6.1.1 **The volume of work to be undertaken**

Study participants described how they had experienced concerns at the outset of the *Investing in Volunteers* process over the potential volume of work involved in developing and revising policies and procedures and in providing evidence of meeting the Standard. The volume of paperwork that they thought was involved was a daunting prospect: ‘juggling the paperwork with the daily work that needs to get done’. They had serious worries about the resources of time and staffing that might be required: ‘where do you start, I’m rushed off my feet already?’; ‘time is a big one’; ‘a lot more work, a lot of written work, and supporting the volunteers through it’. Some worries had been expressed at the outset about the amount of time that might also need to be committed by staff who would not necessarily see a direct benefit from gaining the Award.

6.1.2 **The need to develop new systems and policies**

For some Study participants, the need to develop new systems and policies was a concern in itself, in addition to the amount of time it was thought this would take. Organisations were aware of gaps in existing policies, and thought that, for example, ‘working towards ensuring the required systems are in place would be hard with time and writing the policies’. In some instances policies that were largely verbal rather than written needed to be translated into paper documents.

In some organisations there was also an early concern about whether aspects of the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard would fit with existing policies: ‘I was worried about the conflict between *Investing in Volunteers* and our own policies and procedures’, or whether it would be applicable to a particular organisation’s way of working.
A further concern related to the assessors’ possible responses to policy documents: ‘would we meet the Standard? What gaps would they identify?’

6.1.3 Communicating the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers to organisational stakeholders

Few Volunteer Managers or senior staff had anticipated there being much resistance from other staff, volunteers or trustees to the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers, but some had worried that staff or volunteers who had been involved for some time might not see the necessity for, or the relevance of, the Investing in Volunteers Standard. Some Volunteer Managers had been concerned at the outset about how to communicate their wish to introduce Investing in Volunteers to other stakeholders in such a way that they would see the benefits. For example, one Volunteer Manager expressed how she had anticipated her colleagues’ response and her own reactions as ‘oh well – what’s this? And then I’d have to jump through hoops to say it was quite grounded’.

Communicating the potential benefits around an organisation with a complex and geographically dispersed structure had been anticipated as a further dimension to this challenge for some Study participants.

6.1.4 Cost of the process

Organisations introducing Investing in Volunteers had thought that the cost of the assessment process would be a further challenge: ‘where’s the money going to come from?’ While Investing in Volunteers was usually seen as ‘a worthy investment’, covering the costs had still been seen as a potential difficulty.

6.2 Challenges experienced

Organisations undertaking the Investing in Volunteers process have, from their own accounts and those of the volunteering infrastructure bodies and assessors, encountered a range of challenges, although not necessarily to the extent originally anticipated: ‘the challenges I anticipated have not so far materialised’; ‘there have not been any significant challenges so far’. The challenges organisations have experienced have fallen into three main categories:

- Time commitment
- The paperwork involved
- Promoting the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers within the organisation.

6.2.1 Time commitment

As one Volunteer Manager put it, ‘it was a substantial amount of time’, while one volunteering infrastructure body Study participant felt that ‘many organisations under-estimated the time it would take’. Volunteer Managers spoke of the ‘huge time commitment involved’; one commented that: ‘we’re in the early stages of the process but I think getting it done in the time available is a logistical nightmare’. The need to review documents, develop new policies and procedures, promote the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers to organisational stakeholders and assemble evidence constituted a major time commitment, which has been a particular problem for those organisations with limited staffing resources and / or minimal existing written volunteering policies and procedures.
In some organisations particular aspects of the *Investing in Volunteers* process needed substantial allocation of time: the organisation of groups of volunteers to meet the assessors was cited as one example of this.

Volunteering infrastructure body study participants noted that progress in some organisations had been slow as a result of difficulties in making the necessary time available: ‘starts were a bit slower than I hoped for’; ‘a number have signed up to working towards Investing in Volunteers, but have not got very far’.

Organisations addressed the issue of time commitment in a variety of different ways: ‘we just got on with it’; ‘this just became a priority’, or by sharing responsibilities amongst members of a working group. Senior staff noted that the tenacity and commitment of Volunteer Managers was a major factor in their managing to carry out the work within agreed timescales. Some organisations that experienced staff shortages mid-way through the process, however, needed to delay their *Investing in Volunteers* work until new staff were in post.

### 6.2.2 The paperwork involved

The amount of paperwork involved – ‘it was a tremendous amount of paperwork’ - had constituted a major challenge for Study participants. As well as the general review of policies that all had undertaken, work on some particular documents had been very time-consuming. This had not always been anticipated: ‘we had taken things for granted and hadn’t reviewed enough’. Issues relating to health and safety, risk assessment and diversity had required particular attention. One Volunteer Manager noted that the organisation’s volunteering policy was ‘awful; it was very basic, there should have been safety nets in place to protect the company and volunteers’. Some organisations had had to make changes they had not initially anticipated: ‘some were confident at the outset that they had robust systems in place but then had to make changes’.

In some instances there had been difficulties relating the wording of the Standard to the nature of the organisation’s work: ‘we adapted the Standard to how we work because we don’t fit into that kind of mould’.

Gathering the evidence for the assessors had also been resource-intensive and difficult for some. One experienced Volunteer Manager commented that ‘had I not had experience of putting together a portfolio of evidence I would have found it very difficult’. Support from colleagues, local or national volunteering infrastructure bodies or assessors, or experience gained elsewhere through study courses or previous jobs, had all proved helpful in relation to gathering evidence and clarifying what was needed.

### 6.2.3 Promoting the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* within the organisation

Although resistance to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* had not been a major challenge for Study participants, some Volunteer Managers had nevertheless needed to devote time to explaining the principle and potential benefits, especially to colleagues and board members, and in some instances to volunteers. As one Study participant commented, ‘Volunteer Coordinators often feel they have done a lot of pushing’.

Some Volunteer Managers had devoted considerable effort to promoting the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* to other organisational stakeholders,
running training sessions and producing information sheets for volunteers, getting staff to agree to new working practices or trying to encourage board members to support the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers. In some organisations the establishment of a steering group comprising representatives of different parts of the organisation had helped.

7. Support for the Investing in Volunteers process

7.1 Sources of support used

Study participants who had undertaken the Investing in Volunteers process were generally aware of the support available to them from national and local volunteering infrastructure bodies and from Investing in Volunteers assessors, although it was also suggested that ‘it’s all quite piecemeal where you get information from’ and that it is not necessarily immediately clear that, for example, information provided by Volunteering England is relevant and useful in other countries of the UK.

Volunteer Managers had found the support available from the national volunteering infrastructure bodies, both face to face and through written and electronic media, helpful. Their assistance, and that of the assessors, particularly in clarifying aspects of the wording of the Standard and evidence required, was felt to be useful: ‘the step by step guide taking you through the assessment process is very clear’; ‘the Volunteer Development Agency is very supportive …. We regularly meet them or call them to discuss or clear issues’. Model policies, information sheets and advice on ‘technical’ issues such as risk assessment were very much valued.

Support and advice had also been secured in relation to particular aspects of volunteering from local Volunteer Centres, Councils for Voluntary Service and other bodies such as the TUC. External support was valued particularly in relation to specialist areas where expertise was lacking within the organisation, for example risk assessment.

Volunteer Managers had also appreciated the general support available from within their organisations, from colleagues, volunteers and trustees. The commitment of trustees and senior managers was seen as important in creating a culture where volunteering would be valued and accorded resources and status. One Volunteer Manager, for example, spoke of the importance of the Chief Executive’s commitment in this respect: ‘he was always very supportive of volunteer activity and knew the value of having volunteers on site; he was always supportive of volunteer functions and was always there’. Others likewise felt that support from their own Manager: ‘she is a good support and really owns the process’ - and volunteers – ‘they were very keen to be involved, to be interviewed, to tell their stories and give up extra time’ – helped substantially in making the process easier to manage.

7.2 Additional support needed

Volunteer Managers generally felt they had received adequate support in helping them work towards achieving the Standard. A small number felt that the process would have been easier for them if they had had more high-level organisational backing, or the freedom to concentrate on volunteering issues without being drawn into other work because of staff gaps elsewhere in the organisation.

Another suggestion was that it would be useful for organisations undertaking Investing in Volunteers to be able to contact others for peer support and ideas about
8. **Changes made as a result of working towards Investing in Volunteers**

Discussions with Volunteer Managers and senior staff indicated that organisations have made a wide range of changes to their volunteering policies and practice as a result of working towards Investing in Volunteers. When we asked volunteers, however, about their perceptions, they were usually unaware of much having altered. Volunteers frequently expressed views such as ‘I haven’t really noticed anything’, ‘things were just as normal’, ‘I noticed no major change in the approach of the volunteers department’. Some volunteers, particularly those who were closely involved in their organisation and had been for some time, felt that the Investing in Volunteers process had ‘tightened up everything’; generally volunteers expressed views along the lines of ‘I thought the department was very well run; they [i.e. the Investing in Volunteers assessors] pointed out how it could be even better’. The comment of one Volunteer Manager that ‘it has given us the opportunity to consider things in a different way’, complements this viewpoint.

The theme of ‘tightening up everything’ expressed above seems borne out in the changes described by Volunteer Managers, senior staff, volunteering infrastructure bodies and assessors. These changes can be described under seven main categories.

8.1 **Changes to policies**

Organisations have made changes to their policies, in particular their general volunteering policy, to meet the Standard. Policies have often been amended to provide greater clarity, for example over the procedures for claiming expenses or situations in which criminal records checks are required.

Several organisations have introduced regular policy reviews, described by one Volunteer Manager as a ‘more robust process’ involving a group of staff, the Volunteer Manager and volunteers.

8.2 **Changes to volunteer recruitment process**

Organisations appear to have made a variety of changes in relation to the recruitment and selection of volunteers, for example introducing a timescale for responding to initial enquiries, being more consistent about recruitment practices across different parts of the organisation or introducing ‘task profiles’ for all areas of work. Some Volunteer Managers described their organisations as changing their emphasis towards ‘more productive volunteering opportunities’ or giving more thought to the process of matching volunteers with opportunities: “with every volunteer who is in the organisation there has been a lot of conversation about what they’d like to do”.

8.3 **An increase in the availability of training**

Several organisations stated that they had introduced compulsory induction training for volunteers; some have also made a wider range of training courses available to volunteers, some in areas specifically related to their current roles (for example on risk assessment or challenging discrimination) and others of more general application (e.g. computer training). Volunteers were generally aware of the...
availability of training, and welcomed the opportunities available: ‘training here gives you the opportunity to do something you haven’t studied for and enjoy it’.

8.4 Greater clarity of information

Organisations have increased their efforts to provide clear information to volunteers about relevant issues, such as how to claim expenses or the range of insurance cover available. They have often also become more explicit about their expectations of volunteers, and have clarified these through, for example, the Volunteers Handbook, volunteer agreements or a re-introduced Volunteer Charter.

8.5 Risk assessments

Volunteer Managers and senior staff described the substantial amount of attention that has been paid to the issue of risk assessment of volunteer roles as a result of their work on Investing in Volunteers. Comments such as ‘Investing in Volunteers has made us look at the safety aspects of volunteering’, and ‘the big change is work that is still ongoing in relation to risk assessment’ were frequently heard. Organisations have clearly made a substantial commitment to reducing risk. One volunteer driver described how he was ‘just let loose with a set of keys’ when he began several years ago, whereas now drivers have detailed induction training and sessions alongside another driver before they are allowed to work alone.

8.6 Attention to diversity

Investing in Volunteers has also clearly provided organisations with an opportunity to pay increased attention to issues of diversity, considering, for example, the ethnic makeup of their volunteer group in relation to the local population or ways of involving more young people as volunteers. In one organisation the work on diversity was seen as a real opportunity that would ‘help us open doors’, while in another work looking at the census breakdown of the local population was prompting ongoing discussions about diversity.

8.7 A more collaborative approach to working with volunteers

A further change identified relates to an increasingly collaborative approach on the part of Volunteer Managers to working with volunteers. In some instances this took the form of a more detailed discussion with volunteers about their skills: ‘we listened to what they said about using their skills’; ‘we are more clear in identifying volunteer opportunities and looking at things more from the volunteers’ point of view’. In some organisations a broader approach to consulting volunteers was also described; one Study participant, for example, commented that ‘working on Investing in Volunteers has established processes for involving volunteers in that consultation which has been really valuable for the organisation and for volunteers’. Volunteers themselves frequently made similar points, occasionally identifying this collaborative approach as a new departure: ‘we felt excluded from the team but we have noticed a change in culture’, but more often as an extension of an existing collaborative approach: ‘staff always listen to what you say’.
9. **Volunteers’ reactions to the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers**

9.1 **Volunteers’ awareness of the Standard**

Volunteer Managers and senior staff from those organisations that had already received the *Investing in Volunteers* Award stated that they had informed their volunteers, either via a newsletter or in person, of their intentions to work towards *Investing in Volunteers*. Those still in the early stages of the process at the time of the research had not always informed all volunteers. It was clear from discussions with volunteers attending focus groups that their awareness of *Investing in Volunteers*, their understanding of what was involved and why the decision had been made to work towards the Award varied considerably, even within a single organisation. Those who had taken part in interviews with assessors were quite knowledgeable (but often claimed to have had minimal information about *Investing in Volunteers* before being asked to participate in the assessment process). Others who had been informed in person, by the Volunteer Manager or another staff member, appeared conversant with the principles of *Investing in Volunteers*, while those who had been informed by written means such as a newsletter often had little information, even if they had been volunteering for some time.

9.2 **A range of reactions**

Volunteer Managers and senior staff described a wide range of reactions to the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers* on the part of those volunteers who had been informed and had expressed a view. Likewise volunteers themselves indicated that their views on finding out about *Investing in Volunteers* varied considerably. Few volunteers appear to have been resistant to its introduction to their organisation, but some felt that ‘it’s irrelevant’; ‘it smacks of the American system – does it mean anything?’ or asked ‘what does it mean?’ or commented ‘I don’t really see the point; it doesn’t mean anything to me when I see the logo’.

Volunteer Managers described some of their volunteers as generally uninterested in the adoption and use of *Investing in Volunteers*, either because their sole interest was in the performance of their role and their work with service users – ‘a large proportion of volunteers aren’t interested in the strategic side of the organisation’ - or because they saw conformance with a standard as part of an unwelcome move towards greater formalisation of volunteering: ‘I’m just volunteering my time; informality is part of the attraction’. Some volunteers, although broadly supportive of the *Investing in Volunteers* principle, saw it less as a new initiative and more as an extension of an existing way of working, where ‘we couldn’t be better looked after’; ‘they are always looking for ways to recognise volunteers’ and ‘it’s been an ongoing process’.

Other volunteers, however, expressed enthusiasm for the introduction of *Investing in Volunteers*: ‘they were as excited as we were’; ‘it’s really good that you’re doing this’. Volunteers felt strongly about the messages that receipt of the Award would give to the outside world; that it would, for example: ‘send out messages that the organisation takes pride in its volunteers’ which might result in more people volunteering. Volunteers also valued the recognition that they felt the Award would provide for the work of the Voluntary Services Department: ‘it reinforces that we must be looked on as doing the right thing’ and ‘gaining accreditation means that others can see how well the organisation is doing’.

Volunteers’ largely positive reactions appear to be influenced by their strong identification with the Voluntary Services Department staff (or equivalent) and the
intensity of their commitment to the organisation. As one group of volunteers commented: ‘they [the Volunteer Manager and Coordinator] are always very protective of us; those two individuals are very critical to the rise and fall of voluntary services’. Another perspective on volunteers’ reactions was offered by a Volunteer Manager who suggested that ‘the level to which they’re involved affects their reaction’ and ‘some who are more into the politics of volunteering would have more of a concept of what it means’.

Volunteers, then, have been broadly supportive of the Investing in Volunteers concept, but have expressed a wide range of views about its relevance. While those most involved have been knowledgeable and enthusiastic, others have seen the Standard as having limited relationship to their work as volunteers and minimal impact on the wider organisation.

10. Benefits gained

Study participants described a number of internal and external benefits they felt organisations had gained as a result of their Investing in Volunteers status or their work towards achieving the Standard. They also referred to benefits for Volunteer Managers and volunteers.

10.1 Organisational benefits

a) External benefits

10.1.1 Raised organisational profile

Study participants frequently referred to the good publicity, raised profile and prestige they felt organisations already in receipt of the Award had gained: ‘we are seen as an organisation that truly values volunteers and volunteering and invests in them’; ‘lots of people have got to know about it’; ‘there was lots of publicity’. Examples were given of articles that had appeared in local and voluntary sector press, of letters received from Members of Parliament on receipt of the Award, and of external bodies such as the Care Standards Commission taking note of the Award. One volunteer, whose role mainly involved giving promotional talks about her organisation’s work, commented that ‘you can see their eyebrows going up; they know it’s some sort of award and are impressed, even if they haven’t heard of it before’.

Some Study participants, however, added a note of caution to their comments about publicity for the Award, for example: ‘for people in the know it’s an achievement’; ‘I think it should have been balloons and celebrations; in these days of awards we need to make more of it…… people see the signs ‘Positive about Disability’, Investor in People etc but I’m not sure they’d recognise it’.

10.1.2 An aid to volunteer recruitment

Organisations that had been among the first to receive the Award reported some impact on volunteer recruitment: ‘the public have noticed it; we’ve had a small flurry of people enquiring because they’ve seen it in the press’. One Study participant noted that their local Volunteer Centre was promoting the Investing in Volunteers status of organisations that had received the Award. Others, however, felt that it was too early to discern any effect on volunteer recruitment; some Study participants felt that knowing an organisation had Investing in Volunteers status might increase potential volunteers’ sense of confidence about approaching an organisation and
lead them to prefer organisations with Investing in Volunteers status over those without. It was suggested, for example, that ‘people might contribute more if they thought it was a well-run organisation’; ‘people would feel more confident about coming in’. It was also suggested that the positive feeling engendered within an organisation as a result of its Investing in Volunteers status might lead existing volunteers to encourage more people to get involved. As yet, however, the evidence for actual increased volunteer recruitment is limited.

10.1.3 An aid to fundraising

As discussed earlier, organisations had hoped that achieving the Investing in Volunteers Award might increase their fundraising potential. No organisation had so far been able specifically to link their Investing in Volunteers status with successful fundraising, although several have referred to their receipt of the Award on funding applications and thought that it was viewed positively as one aspect of a well-managed organisation: ‘it’s got to be another string to our bow organisationally’. One organisation was able to enter into a partnership with a national body as a result of its newly acquired Investing in Volunteers status.

b) Internal benefits

Study participants were able to identify a number of internal organisational benefits relating both to the process of working towards meeting the Standard and the actual receipt of the Award.

10.1.4 Raised profile for volunteering

Study participants suggested that work towards Investing in Volunteers had raised the profile of volunteering issues within organisations to positive effect: ‘the fact that [Volunteer Development Agency] staff have been to talk to staff and volunteers about Investing in Volunteers means that volunteering is high on those organisations’ agendas’; ‘internally it’s allowed them to ensure that more paid staff are aware of volunteers and the volunteer programme’. One senior staff member commented that ‘it has enshrined the practice of volunteer management and development even further into our strategic planning process’. In organisations where a few staff had previously been resistant to the idea of working with volunteers, the discussions that had taken place as part of the Investing in Volunteers process had allowed difficulties to be aired and addressed to the extent that Volunteer Managers now felt able to say ‘we’ve moved on; volunteers are here to stay’ and ‘it has firmly cemented the volunteer programme within the organisation as having value’. One Volunteer Manager felt that the fact the organisation had received the Award created an onus on everyone involved to maintain their good practice and would ‘make it harder for volunteers to be given less credence in times of senior staff change’.

10.1.5 An increased sense of pride

Along with a raised profile for volunteering went an increased sense of pride in the work of volunteers and a feeling of achievement at having gained the Award. This was especially apparent amongst those organisations that were early recipients of the Award: ‘I’m amazed at how proud the staff are; staff all want to have the Investing in Volunteers logo on their emails’; ‘it helps the board feel part of a dynamic organisation’; ‘it is a real boost when staff can see their role in working towards something that is a nationally recognised standard’. It is clear from such comments that the sense of achievement and pride at gaining the Investing in Volunteers Award
frequently extended well beyond those staff most closely involved in working with volunteers.

10.1.6 A more consistent approach to volunteering

Study participants also felt that work towards *Investing in Volunteers* had contributed to a more organised or consistent approach to volunteering, and had provided ‘an opportunity to review policies and procedures’. One group of volunteers felt that ‘there is a benefit in every two or three years having a look at the whole picture of what you’re doing; if you’re forced to look at the whole spectrum of what you’re doing there may be lots of opportunities to re-think what you’re doing and iron out inconsistencies’. One Volunteer Manager commented that ‘before we were like ostriches burying our heads in the sand; now we can do a tick list and work through that’.

In one organisation with large numbers of volunteers working in several different settings it was felt that the *Investing in Volunteers* process had led to ‘more joined up working between the groups’. In others, changes such as work on diversity, risk assessments and aspects of the volunteer recruitment process were all seen as contributing to a more streamlined approach to volunteer management. One senior staff member felt that improvements in the way in which staff record information relating to volunteers ‘makes us feel more professional; it’s a more professional approach to what we do. That transparency of practice is important’.

10.2 Benefits for the Volunteer Manager

We asked senior staff, volunteers and Volunteer Managers themselves about the benefits they felt Volunteer Managers had gained from work on *Investing in Volunteers*. Volunteer Managers themselves were generally relatively modest in their responses; nevertheless their comments and those of their senior colleagues and volunteers indicate that they have derived some benefit.

It was suggested that Volunteer Managers have gained a deep sense of achievement not only from gaining the Award but also from the fact that the crucial role of volunteers had been recognised. As one Volunteer Manager put it: ‘they are part of the place, part of the team; I felt we’d arrived, I’m walking on air’ and another: ‘it puts volunteering on the map and creates an awareness amongst organisers that they’re further down the track than they think’. The fact that an external assessment had been made of all aspects of work with volunteers had provided Volunteer Managers with a boost to their confidence and a sense of reassurance: ‘it gives some clout to what I say’; ‘it will give me the confidence that I’m doing it right, that there’s an easier route to managing volunteers’. In some instances this had raised the status both of the Volunteer Manager role and of volunteering: ‘and the one for me is that there is official recognition for my role…. the process for Investing in Volunteers has given me limelight, it’s put me on the map’; ‘it’s really helped her revisit her role, look at her job description in a different way and has assisted with her training’.

Volunteer Managers felt that the *Investing in Volunteers* process had provided a valuable opportunity to review systems, or put new procedures in place, which would benefit volunteers and in some instances make the system easier to manage: ‘I valued the opportunity and exercise of reviewing and self-assessment’; ‘I think it will make it easier for anyone who comes after me to pick up the manual and know the standard and what needs to be done’.

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10.3 Benefits for volunteers

Volunteers in general felt they had gained few benefits from their organisations’ Investing in Volunteers status or work that had been done towards achieving the Standard: ‘we don’t think things have altered’; ‘to be honest – none’; ‘the Award is immaterial’. Volunteers often expressed pride that their organisation had achieved the Award, describing themselves as ‘very proud’, ‘gives me a good feeling of getting up and coming to work here’, and were pleased that their organisation received recognition for the high standards of volunteer management they felt had always existed. Volunteers were not usually able, however, to identify major changes that they felt had come about as a result of work towards Investing in Volunteers. Comments such as ‘I can’t see how it would be any better’ were common.

Likewise senior staff and Volunteer Managers did not feel that Investing in Volunteers would change significantly their way of working with volunteers. While some changes had been made (see section 8 above) these were largely modifications to existing good practice rather than major adjustments to policy or procedures, and took place within a general culture of valuing volunteers’ contributions: ‘it was a confirmation; it doesn’t seem to have been hard work to get there – lots of things were there already’. The benefits for volunteers, they felt, would lie in an increasingly professional approach to volunteer management, greater consistency in areas such as volunteer recruitment, more training opportunities, or a more consultative approach: ‘we’re listening to them more’; ‘we’ve become more consultative, for example getting volunteers to review the volunteering policy; they have a more direct voice in the organisation’.

11. Critical success factors

We asked Study participants about the factors that made it easier for organisations to work towards the Investing in Volunteers Standard and achieve the Award. A range of ‘critical success factors’ were suggested, relating to the commitment of key stakeholders, the organisation’s commitment to volunteering, the availability of resources and the existence of external sources of support.

11.1 The commitment of key stakeholders

The existence of a committed key individual, usually the Volunteer Manager, to drive the process forward and take on the majority of the work, was seen as crucial. Study participants advocated ‘dedicating someone to do it as their number one job’; ‘a dedicated Volunteer Manager is an absolutely fundamental part of it; I think every organisation we have on board has a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator post’ or suggested that ‘where there isn’t someone championing volunteering it will definitely be harder going through the process’. Volunteers in one organisation felt strongly that the key staff member has a strategic role, giving them the ability to command resources and involve other staff in the process.

It was also felt that Chief Executive and trustee support are vital: ‘if they don’t recognise what you’re trying to achieve and the workload involved it will be very difficult; ‘they need to be aware of what volunteers are doing and contributing to the core objectives’. Study participants described the positive commitment that boards had made to the process and how ‘outstanding commitment from the board’ or ‘the endorsement of the board that this is a positive thing’ had provided a lead and enabled resources of time and money to be committed to Investing in Volunteers.
The support of other staff was also considered important, in helping to create a culture where working towards *Investing in Volunteers* became an organisation-wide commitment rather than solely an initiative of the Volunteer Manager. Some organisations had found the establishment of a steering group comprising a range of staff and volunteers particularly beneficial, for example in providing a slightly more objective view of volunteering issues: ‘I think I was lucky in having a steering group who were quite harsh with ourselves so we used this as a learning experience’. Others felt that, with hindsight, involving more staff in the steering group would have been beneficial.

Volunteers’ willingness to be involved was seen as critical, in terms both of their commitment in some organisations to membership of a steering group and their keenness to participate in the assessment process. As one Volunteer Manager put it: ‘they told it how it was’.

11.2 The organisation’s commitment to volunteering

Study participants stressed the importance of an organisational ethos that values volunteers and their contribution: ‘there has to be a complete and utter culture of volunteering throughout the organisation’. Without this, Study participants felt, it would be difficult to achieve *Investing in Volunteers*.

Some Study participants commented that a relatively developed volunteering infrastructure, in terms of the prior existence of comprehensive policies and procedures, would make it easier to achieve *Investing in Volunteers*. Others, however, noted that some organisations had found it relatively easy to work towards the Standard because they were setting up their volunteering systems from scratch, based on the indicators, as part of a new project.

11.3 The availability of resources

As discussed earlier (section 6) some organisations attempting *Investing in Volunteers* found that the volume of work and time commitment needed presented them with substantial challenges. Study participants suggested that a strategic commitment to make sufficient time available was beneficial. Organisations had adopted various approaches; for example providing the Volunteer Manager with extra administrative support to free up time, allocating additional hours to a part-time post or earmarking specific blocks of time for *Investing in Volunteers* work. Others acknowledged the need to be more realistic at the outset about the time commitment involved. Either way, freeing up the necessary time to carry out the work within the agreed timescale was felt to be critical.

The need to commit financial resources to *Investing in Volunteers* was also acknowledged; ‘it is not a given that we could just have found the money’; ‘organisations need to be financially placed to go for the Award and think if that is where they want to spend their money’. It was suggested that making a strategic commitment to fund the work rather than covering the costs through underspend in other areas was an important aspect of giving the work status and priority.

11.4 The existence of external sources of support

A further critical success factor identified was the existence of support and advice from outside as well as within organisations working towards *Investing in Volunteers*. Volunteer Managers felt that the assistance they had received from assessors or the national volunteering infrastructure bodies had provided a valuable complement to
their own organisation’s support: ‘I have real faith in the staff we’ve been dealing with there’. They had also benefited from the ideas they had gained through means such as ‘attending courses and conferences on good practice in volunteering’, a university-run course: ‘during that I was able to evaluate my own competence as a manager’ or from other organisations operating in the same field of work.

12. Reflections on the Investing in Volunteers process

12.1 A positive experience

Study participants were overwhelmingly positive in their comments on the Investing in Volunteers Standard and the process: ‘I hope it will become a Standard that is expected and that organisations will take volunteering and volunteer management seriously’; ‘I have a very positive feeling about this Standard. I think it’s a good thing’; ‘this is the best thing that has happened to the sector’. Organisations that had been through the process and gained the Award were keen to maintain the momentum and be challenged in relation to their volunteering practice. One Volunteer Manager commented that there were areas in which the Standard might be more challenging: ‘being inclusive can involve quite a lot of work – we needed to be challenged a bit more about what that means. We weren’t challenged enough on the practicalities of inclusion by Investing in Volunteers’. The only criticism related to the assessment day, which Study participants often felt was too pressurised.

12.2 Appropriateness to different volunteer involving organisations

Study participants felt that Investing in Volunteers is appropriate to most organisations that involve volunteers. Volunteering infrastructure body interviewees and assessors, reflecting on their experiences with a wide range of organisations, suggested that: ‘I think it’s appropriate for any organisation and is a good thing for any organisation’; ‘it is broadly applicable to most organisations’. Others commented, however, that ‘perhaps it lends itself more to organisations with staffing structures in place’ and ‘they need to be comfortable with a certain degree of bureaucracy’.

Although it was generally felt that the Standard is appropriate to a broad range of volunteer involving organisations, it was suggested that there needs to be greater recognition that statutory as well as VCS organisations use the Standard, and hence that some references (e.g. to management committees or to charitable status) may need adapting. Some Study participants also felt that more thought needed to be given to applying the Standard in larger / national organisations: ‘it will be interesting to see what happens with bigger organisations – across the country with multiple sites’.

12.3 The need for more publicity

Study participants were keen to see Investing in Volunteers gain more publicity, for example with more case studies and information about the potential benefits. It was suggested that ‘they can’t improve on the Standard, but need to improve their marketing’. One person commented that: ‘those who are most aware are those who have a relationship with their local Volunteer Centre, but many aren’t, so it is a bit hit and miss if they know the Award exists’. It was suggested that many organisations are interested in the adoption and use of Investing in Volunteers, but are waiting to see how others progress before taking the step of registering to use the Standard themselves. ‘The Award is still gaining status; word of mouth publicity from organisations that have gained the Award will encourage others to get involved’.
12.4 Increasing accessibility

As well as needing more publicity, it was suggested that some steps might be taken to increase the accessibility of *Investing in Volunteers*, especially to smaller and less well-resourced organisations.

Study participants acknowledged that ‘for some organisations the cost is going to be prohibitive’ and ‘money to cover the costs’ would help. As one senior manager commented ‘I think the cost of £2000 might be too much for organisations …. and that might be a barrier to them getting the Award or even trying for it. And it’s usually the smaller ones that rely on volunteers a lot more’. Some volunteering infrastructure bodies and funders have provided assistance with the cost of *Investing in Volunteers*. This was welcomed, although it was also suggested that ‘people don’t value things if they are offered free of charge’.

There were also some suggestions that the Standard (or the discretion given to assessors) needs to be made more flexible in order to fit the circumstances of the smallest organisations: ‘assessors need to be less rigid / more flexible and given scope instead of saying you don’t fit that criteria’.

Finally, it was suggested that the process of re-accreditation needs to be more flexible in order to ensure that organisations that have already received the Award put themselves forward for re-accreditation: ‘we need to look at making it more accessible for them, financially and in terms of time, without it losing its integrity’.

13. The wider impact of *Investing in Volunteers*

As well as considering issues affecting organisations actively pursuing *Investing in Volunteers*, assessors and volunteering infrastructure body Study participants reflected on the wider impact of *Investing in Volunteers*.

Study participants referred to a substantial amount of interest in *Investing in Volunteers* amongst volunteer involving organisations: ‘the word is getting out there and there is interest’. Roadshows to promote the Standard have been well attended, as have presentations by staff of volunteering infrastructure bodies at events such as Volunteer Managers Forums. Volunteer Centres around the UK have been encouraging local organisations to work towards achieving the Standard. A number of organisations appear to be using the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard to structure their work with volunteers without necessarily formally registering with Volunteering England for the assessment process: ‘a lot of organisations we haven’t even heard from have downloaded the indicators and used them as a tool for good practice’. *Investing in Volunteers* has also provided a structure for training on volunteering issues and acted as a focus for Volunteer Managers to raise matters of volunteering practice in their organisations: ‘it’s a framework for many things’.

Some interest has also been discerned within local authorities, not usually at Chief Executive level, but amongst staff of individual departments. A number of funders have shown their commitment by providing financial support, either with bursaries or with assistance to local infrastructure bodies such as Volunteer Centres to support organisations towards attaining *Investing in Volunteers* status.

With this degree of interest, the enthusiasm expressed by organisations that have already obtained the Award, and many new organisations registering for *Investing in Volunteers*, the challenge is to find ways to maximise the impact of *Investing in Volunteers* for individual organisations and the field of volunteering as a whole.
PART FOUR: THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS

14. Introduction

In Part Three of this Final Report we concentrated on describing Study participants’ experiences of the adoption and use of the Investing in Volunteers Standard. ‘Impact’ was understood by practitioners largely in terms of the:

- challenges involved in meeting the Standard
- changes made to organisational policies and practices
- benefits gained - both internal and external, actual and anticipated.

It is apparent from the interviews and focus groups carried out during the fieldwork phase of the Study that the nine organisations involved had a long-standing commitment to valuing volunteers; most also had a relatively well-developed volunteering infrastructure before embarking on the Investing in Volunteers process. They were able to commit the necessary resources to implement the Standard, make changes and support the assessment process. While all experienced some challenges, they were usually able to address these with relative ease. They viewed the Investing in Volunteers process as overwhelmingly positive, and considered that their organisations had benefited from the work done to meet the Standard. They identified key benefits in terms of:

- raised organisational profile
- an enhanced awareness of volunteers and volunteering within the organisation
- an increased sense of pride in volunteers’ contributions
- a more consistent approach to volunteering.

They hoped for future gains in terms of increased volunteer recruitment and fundraising potential. The range of benefits identified by Study participants, alongside their experience of implementation, provides an outline framework for understanding the potential impact of the Investing in Volunteers Standard.

Organisations that have implemented the Investing in Volunteers Standard have been able to make changes to their volunteering policies and to some of their practices, for example the ways in which they recruit and select volunteers, offer training and provide volunteers with information. Particular attention has been paid to risk assessments and to addressing issues of diversity. Some organisations have developed a more collaborative approach to working with volunteers. Overall Study participants felt that the work on Investing in Volunteers had raised the profile of volunteering and cemented its place at a strategic level in the organisation. This in turn had had a positive impact on the way in which the role of the Volunteer Manager and the contribution of volunteers were perceived by colleagues.

The benefits derived can thus be seen as primarily organisational, building on existing good practice to make it even better. The adoption and use of the Investing in Volunteers Standard has led to enhanced and more consistent volunteering practice rather than to significant improvements in the experiences of individual volunteers. The fact that volunteers themselves have not necessarily discerned major changes is in line with earlier CVAR work on quality systems, which indicated that it could be difficult to trace direct links between use of quality systems and benefits for service users. The potential of Investing in Volunteers for improving

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^3 See footnote 1.
internal organisational arrangements, policies and practices strongly suggests, however, that benefits are, in time, likely to accrue to volunteers and ultimately to service users through improved support for volunteering.

As discussed in section 12 above, Study participants were aware of a growing interest in *Investing in Volunteers* amongst volunteer involving organisations, local infrastructure bodies (especially Volunteer Centres), funders and, to a lesser extent, local authorities. There are thus clear indications of the potential for more widespread use of the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard. In order to advance this process, and capitalise on the current interest in *Investing in Volunteers*, consideration will need to be given to the key learning that emerges from the experiences of Study participants. The application of this learning will enable Volunteering England to move towards a situation in which the potential impact of *Investing in Volunteers* can be promoted and experienced more widely.

15. **Key learning for volunteer involving organisations**

Study participants highlighted a number of ‘critical success factors’ for implementation of *Investing in Volunteers* which we suggest need more attention amongst organisations considering adopting the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard. Taken together with their broader reflections on the *Investing in Volunteers* process and with other CVAR work on the adoption and use of quality systems, they provide a framework for ensuring the continuing impact of *Investing in Volunteers*. We suggest that the following four key learning points need particular attention:

- The importance of a ‘quality champion’
- Achieving organisational ‘buy-in’ to the process
- The availability of resources
- The need for external support and information.

15.1 **The importance of a ‘quality champion’**

As we noted in section 11.1, the existence of a dedicated Volunteer Manager to take the initiative on *Investing in Volunteers*, act as a focal point for work on the subject and generally drive the process through to its conclusion, has been crucial. Volunteer Managers’ enthusiasm and commitment appear to have done a great deal to influence the volunteering ethos within their organisations. Where those people have been members of their agency’s Senior Management Team, their strategic role has helped ensure that resources could be committed to the *Investing in Volunteers* process and that volunteering remained a high organisational priority.

As interest in *Investing in Volunteers* widens and more organisations adopt the Standard, those without a dedicated Volunteer Manager post will undoubtedly wish to participate. Our experience of the adoption and use of quality systems in the VCS suggests that it will be valuable for organisations considering *Investing in Volunteers* to appoint an internal ‘quality champion’ (either a paid staff member or a trustee) to steer the process, ensure it has strategic commitment and coordinate the various aspects of work required. This needs to be someone with an understanding of the strategic place of volunteering within the organisation, but need not be a dedicated Volunteer Manager if suitable external support on matters of volunteering policy and practice is available.

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4 See footnote 1.
15.2 Achieving organisational ‘buy-in’ to the process

Study participants spoke of the importance of other internal stakeholders as well as the Volunteer Manager being committed to the *Investing in Volunteers* process. Again, our earlier work on quality systems supports this idea; we found that organisations whose senior staff had not taken a lead on quality issues felt that quality had not been accorded sufficient priority, while those whose Chief Executives or trustees had set the tone appear to have had fewer problems integrating quality issues into their work.

The findings from these two studies suggest that the initial workshop held by assessors with organisational stakeholders will be increasingly important in helping to ensure buy-in to the process as more organisations consider *Investing in Volunteers*. It will be advantageous prior to such an event for key stakeholders to spend time considering why they wish to undertake *Investing in Volunteers*, what they hope the benefits will be and the extent to which they hold a shared view of the likely outcomes.

15.3 The availability of resources

Study participants had generally not experienced major problems finding the necessary resources of time and finance to do the work required to meet the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard. Organisations had been concerned about the possible time commitment and the amount of work involved, and some had indeed found the paperwork onerous, but they had developed ways of dealing with it, by prioritising the work, setting a realistic timescale or allocating additional hours to part-time posts.

Likewise cost had not ultimately been a major problem, perhaps partly because the nine organisations studied were so committed to *Investing in Volunteers* and hence prepared to find the necessary money.

But as the take-up of *Investing in Volunteers* extends, particularly amongst small, less well-resourced organisations, problems with covering the cost, and with making the necessary time available, may become more acute. In the longer term, organisations may feel impelled to adopt *Investing in Volunteers* because of peer pressure, questions from volunteers aware of the Standard or even compulsion from funders, as has been the case with other quality systems. If *Investing in Volunteers* is to have a positive impact on organisations well beyond the original cohort, then they will need to budget for the time and financial commitments, be realistic about timescales and consider ways of sharing the work amongst stakeholders with the relevant expertise.

External support with covering the costs may also be needed, for example through the further development of bursary schemes or funding allocated to local Volunteer Centres to support organisations through the process.

15.4 The need for external support and information

It appears that the early users of *Investing in Volunteers* have needed relatively little external support; where they have, they have usually been able to locate their own sources, from local and national volunteering infrastructure bodies, assessors and a variety of other specialist sources. Organisations subsequently adopting *Investing in Volunteers* may need more support and information, particularly if they do not employ a dedicated and experienced Volunteer Manager. It will be particularly
important for them to consider at an early stage what support they might need in relation to aspects of the Standard, and to seek the advice of their assessor or the appropriate volunteering infrastructure body in identifying sources of support.

16. Key learning for volunteering infrastructure bodies

Discussion of the critical success factors in implementation of *Investing in Volunteers*, and Study participants’ reflections on the process, suggest that five main issues need consideration by Volunteering England and other volunteering infrastructure bodies in order to create a framework in which the impact of *Investing in Volunteers* can be maximised. These comprise:

- Continuing publicity about the Standard
- Promotion of the benefits of adoption
- Ensuring the accessibility of the Standard
- Provision of information
- Assistance with financial resources.

16.1 Continuing publicity about the Standard

As Study participants noted, awareness of, and interest in, *Investing in Volunteers* is growing. Roadshows, promotional events, the volunteering infrastructure body websites and written materials have all played their part. As we noted in section 12.3, however, organisations that are less involved with local networks, and with their local Volunteer Centre, may miss out on valuable information. Despite ChangeUp, some areas still lack a developed volunteering infrastructure. And small and poorly resourced organisations have less opportunity to take part in meetings and other events where information is disseminated.

This suggests that there is an ongoing need for existing volunteering infrastructure bodies to publicise *Investing in Volunteers* through all means at their disposal. More publicity might perhaps be given to the distinctive nature of *Investing in Volunteers*. Its unique position as the only quality system focused solely on issues of volunteer management proved attractive to some Study participants, and may need more emphasis given the growing number of quality systems being developed for use both in the VCS and the public sector.

There is also scope for building more on the experiences of organisations that have already received the Award. This might include the further development of case studies and increasing the opportunities for contacts between organisations that have received the Award and others just considering getting involved. One way of facilitating contacts might be through adapting the model of ‘Regional Quality Champions’ used by the former NCVO Quality Standards Task Group, in order to promote *Investing in Volunteers* to organisations in a particular region or sub-region. The development of further partnerships, especially between the national volunteering infrastructure bodies and local Volunteer Centres, could also offer an effective way of promoting the Standard to a wide range of potential user organisations. The role of local partner organisations such as Volunteer Centres will be important in promoting *Investing in Volunteers* to smaller and very local organisations outside the reach of the national volunteering infrastructure bodies.

It was also suggested during the research that there needs to be more publicity attached to receipt of the Award itself – some Study participants felt that publicity was too localised and low-key, and hence less likely to be noticed by other organisations who might consider following suit. This suggests a need both for local
Volunteer Centres to publicise the achievements of member organisations more widely and also for more publicity at the national, regional and local levels for organisations receiving the Award.

16.2 Promotion of the benefits of adoption

As we discussed earlier, Study participants identified a number of organisational benefits from adoption of Investing in Volunteers – external recognition following achievement of the Standard and internally in relation to the review process itself, the raised profile accorded to volunteering and greater consistency of practice resulting from the review. Future benefits were anticipated in relation to increased recruitment of volunteers and assistance with fundraising. While benefits for Volunteer Managers and volunteers appeared less substantial than the organisational benefits, they were still discernible in the form of a raised profile for the Volunteer Manager role and for volunteering (and might have been more so if the nine organisations studied had started from a lower base line in relation to their volunteering practice).

The findings in relation to the importance of the process itself as well as the ultimate receipt of the Award are again in line with the findings of our research on quality systems, where Study participants commented that ‘the journey is as important as the end product’. While Investing in Volunteers Study participants strongly valued the opportunity for external assessment of their policies and practices, and welcomed the recognition given, they were clearly also motivated by a desire to ensure that all possible systems were in place to support and value their volunteers, and to go through a process that either confirmed that this was the case or highlighted areas for improvement.

Volunteering infrastructure body Study participants indicated that a number of branches of national agencies are piloting Investing in Volunteers before the Standard is rolled out across the whole organisation; they and others also suggested that more organisations might be encouraged to embark on Investing in Volunteers if they could see the likely benefits. Promoting the benefits gained by the nine organisations studied and by other early users of Investing in Volunteers therefore appears to be an important task for Volunteering England and partner agencies, in conjunction with local Volunteer Centres and any future ‘Investing in Volunteers champions’ who might be appointed.

In promoting the benefits of Investing in Volunteers to potential user organisations, it may be helpful to consider the fact that different types of organisation may be motivated by different potential benefits. Larger agencies with complex structures and local branches may, for example, be concerned to achieve greater consistency of volunteering practice across the whole organisation, while those operating in a crowded field with many perceived competitors may be particularly interested in recruiting more volunteers.

The above also suggests that it will be important at an early stage of contact with potential Investing in Volunteers users to secure details about their organisational profile, current reasons for involving volunteers and their desired outcomes from using Investing in Volunteers, since that may dictate the nature of any future information provided to them. It will also be useful for Investing in Volunteers assessors to be in possession of this intelligence when making their first contact with organisations.
16.3 Ensuring the accessibility of the Standard

Study participants were of the opinion that the *Investing in Volunteers* Standard and the process adopted for assessment is appropriate to volunteer involving organisations of all types, although some questions were raised about whether both are more geared to organisations with at least some paid staff. It is noteworthy that most of the nine organisations studied had a dedicated Volunteer Manager post and a relatively developed structure to support volunteering. It was also suggested that the language of the Standard in places is more applicable to voluntary rather than statutory sector bodies.

While it is clear from the interviews with volunteering infrastructure bodies and assessors that there is scope for some flexibility in interpreting aspects of the Standard to fit the circumstances of both very small VCOs and statutory agencies, it will be important that it is not only accessible to the broad range of volunteer involving organisations but seen to be so. Continuing promotion of case studies from statutory bodies such as NHS Trusts and the development of such from the smaller organisations coming through the *Investing in Volunteers* process will be important. Some form of mentoring system for the smallest organisations (separate from the assessor role) might also be a positive initiative to encourage participation.

16.4 Provision of information

As discussed above, organisations so far going through the *Investing in Volunteers* process have generally been well able to utilise the support available from volunteering infrastructure bodies and assessors and to find other sources of support or information where necessary (for example in relation to risk assessments). This relative self-sufficiency may, however, change as organisations with less well-developed volunteering structures or less involvement in volunteering networks engage with *Investing in Volunteers*. Questions relating in particular to risk assessments, health and safety issues or insurance often require a degree of specialist knowledge that may be beyond the scope of the smallest organisations.

This suggests that assessors may need to play a more in-depth role in signposting organisations to appropriate sources of information, or that the concept of mentoring, suggested above, may need further consideration. It also implies that Volunteering England, its partner agencies and local Volunteer Centres will need to consider further ways of making information available relating to aspects of the Standard to ensure that organisations are not deterred from proceeding by lack of information.

If assessors do take on a more detailed signposting role, it will be important that their role as objective outsiders does not become diluted. Consistency of practice amongst assessors will assume greater importance, as will the need for clarity of information on the part of organisations using *Investing in Volunteers* about the boundaries of the assessor role.

16.5 Assistance with financial resources

Study participants indicated that the cost of the *Investing in Volunteers* assessment and other financial outlay might be prohibitive for some organisations. The nine Study organisations were strongly motivated to embark on *Investing in Volunteers* and hence willing to cover the costs; organisations that were less committed might accord the work less priority and therefore not prioritise expenditure. It seems important that organisations should not be debarred from participating on grounds of cost. Organisations that are less willing to prioritise volunteering issues may be those...
that need to consider *Investing in Volunteers* the most; it is important therefore that ways are found to help subsidise the costs. The bursary schemes being developed in some areas, and the funding being provided to Volunteer Centres to support local organisations through the process, are developments to be encouraged at a strategic level. The model of financial support from Learning and Skills Councils for VCOs undertaking *Investors in People* might also be replicated. Consideration could also be given to developing a comparable charging system in different countries of the UK to ensure equity of access.

17. **Conclusion**

In this Final Report we have provided evidence of the benefits and impact of *Investing in Volunteers* from the perspectives of nine Study organisations, senior staff from the four national volunteering infrastructure bodies and three assessors. We have highlighted the positive experiences of *Investing in Volunteers* and suggested that these provide some key learning points for organisations considering adoption of *Investing in Volunteers* and for Volunteering England and its partners in the UK Volunteering Forum. We have stressed the importance of continued promotion of this unique Standard and the benefits that can be derived from adoption, the need for the Standard to remain accessible and for further resources to be directed to supporting its use. We have suggested that it will be useful to build on the experiences of the organisations that have already achieved the *Investing in Volunteers* Award and for the national volunteering infrastructure bodies to continue to work with local partner organisations. By promoting the benefits of *Investing in Volunteers*, and building on the learning that has emerged from the experiences of Study participants, we hope that the impact of the Standard can be maximised and the contribution of volunteers continue to be valued in volunteer involving organisations of all types.
REFERENCES


