

# **Further and Higher Education attitudes to Meeting National Occupational Standards for Volunteers**

**SkillsActive, 2005**

## **Summary of research and findings**

### **Introduction**

To understand better the nature and practicalities of providing education and training to meet National Occupational Standards for volunteers, SkillsActive were commissioned to conduct a short research project among Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) providers.

### **Methodology**

The research was conducted using a structured mixture of brief and more detailed self completion questionnaires and a series of telephone interviews.

After consultation by short questionnaire and/or telephone interviews with stakeholders and a FE and HE training providers, questionnaires were distributed to 100 training and education providers cross sector and UK wide. 28 responses were received.

The information obtained from the self completion survey was supplemented by 44 in depth telephone interviews with HE and FE providers from across the UK.

### **Research focus**

The three areas of primary focus were:

1. Assess FE/HE understanding of and potential provision for NOS for volunteers
2. Investigate the practicalities of providing training and education for NOS for volunteers
3. Obtain broad opinions about providing Education, training and qualifications for volunteers

## **Key Findings**

Broadly speaking, FE and HE providers felt that, if carefully structured, well marketed and clearly focused, training, education and qualifications based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) for volunteers could be a significant asset to volunteers, organisations employing volunteers and to the FE/HE Sector in providing a new “learner market”. The sector felt that it was feasible to provide NOS compliant training and education for volunteers, however a number of factors would affect the practicality of doing so:

### **Attitudes and opinions**

1. The work to develop NOS for volunteers is not widely known of among the FE/HE sector (13% were aware of them)
2. The FE/HE sector can see considerable potential in providing training and education to meet NOS for volunteers- both as a potential market for the FE/HE sector, for voluntary organisations, and for volunteers as a form of personal development
3. However there were concerns about potential resistance by volunteers and about take up and completion of courses and qualifications
4. FE and HE providers were also concerned about the possible complexity of providing different syllabuses and courses for volunteers and for paid workers.
5. The majority of those responding felt that this may be needed to allow the two distinct audiences to be addressed, unless specific functions/ professional values in the standards were directly compatible
6. However, the sector’s preference was that NOS should be no different for paid workers and volunteers, although the majority of those consulted also thought this may be impractical in terms of learner buy in to courses and course sustainability.
7. If the core skills behind NOS were compatible for volunteers and paid workers, the FE/HE sector felt that there should be a single set of standards for all.

### **Practicalities of provision**

1. Ease of accessibility was fundamental to achieving success for this audience accessibility is determined by FE/HE providers in terms of geography, learning style, meeting specific needs, timing, length and style of courses
2. Funding, or the ability to provide free courses in some way was felt to be vital to engaging volunteers in courses to meet NOS.
3. Particular effort would be needed to make courses attractive and rewarding (intellectually and personally) to ensure volunteer buy in.

4. This would need to be continued throughout courses, to ensure learners complete courses.
5. A need for considerable flexibility of course structure and support systems was thought to be essential to provide courses for volunteers.
6. Volunteers would want to know "what's in it for them' if they work to meet NOS. This must be conveyed in non patronising terms.
7. Making it compulsory for volunteers to meet NOS could alienate them from uptake of these qualifications.

Further details of this research can be found in "Further and Higher Education attitudes to Meeting National Occupational Standards for Volunteers." SkillsActive, 2005