Research to understand environmental volunteering amongst young people

Report

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Executive summary

Aims of the research

In February 2018, Defra commissioned Traverse to design and deliver a qualitative and quantitative research project to understand the motivations and drivers of young people aged 16 – 24 to participating in environment-based volunteering projects. The project also aimed to understand:

- The current forms of and pathways into environmental volunteering and the types of environmental volunteering that are most popular amongst young people.
- The barriers and challenges for those that do not participate, including people from different backgrounds and with different characteristics (e.g. location, ethnicity).
- The opportunities there are to make giving time to the environment more attractive, relevant and accessible to this target group.

The policy context for this research is the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and its policies to encourage more children and young people to connect with the natural environment and take action to protect and enhance it. This research aims to directly inform Defra’s work with Step Up to Serve and other environment and youth sector partners to help children and young people from all backgrounds to engage with nature and participate in social action to improve the environment during the 2019 Year of Green Action.

Summary of research activities

A co-production approach was used to design the research. The research activities included a review of existing evidence and a combination of qualitative research (involving over 120 young people) and quantitative research involving a nationally representative sample of 1001 young people. On the next page we summarise the research activities in an infographic. More details about the research can be found in a separate appendices report.
Key findings

Who is taking part in environmental volunteering?

Drawing on the nationally representative survey, 71% of 16-24-year-olds based in England indicated that they have taken part in some form of volunteering. Of these, 26% or 212 respondents have taken part in environmental volunteering at least once. In terms of sub-group differences:

- Socio-economic background is a key predictor of taking part in environmental volunteering; with social grades ABC1 being more likely to say they have taken part than those in social grades C2DE (29% compared with 20%).

- Early exposure to natural spaces and the attitudes and values of one’s family and friends matter. For example, young people who had taken part in environmental volunteering were more likely to say that growing up their family had enjoyed spending time outdoors (a finding which was also reflected in the focus groups with young people).

- When it comes to gender, race and ethnicity, and whether based in urban, town and fringe or rural areas, no significant differences emerged in terms of rates of participation.
Motivations, drivers and benefits

There is robust evidence across the research that young people, regardless of their backgrounds, are motivated to take part in environmental volunteering by a desire to develop skills, confidence and knowledge which can support their academic and career paths. When it comes to environmental volunteering, a desire to make a tangible difference is also key to attracting and maintaining their involvement. Young people may also have leading motivations that are not specifically linked to environmental causes or to the volunteering activity. This can include a desire to be outdoors, to have new and exciting experiences, to make friends and have fun, and to feel a sense of collective purpose.

There is strong evidence across the strands of the research that young people are often focused on the outcomes and benefits associated with taking part in any type of volunteering activities and that they are prepared to ‘shop around’ and try out different things. Activities that offer a lack of variety (in terms of tasks) or a lack of rewards or progression opportunities will find it more challenging to sustain participation.

The focus groups with young people found that the benefits associated with taking part in environmental volunteering are often greater than anticipated, and can include:

- Increased confidence and higher perceived self-efficacy;
- Increased ‘sense of place’ and connection with their community;
- Meeting new people and varied people, and building friendships;
- Improved physical and mental wellbeing e.g. reduced stress, increased energy levels;

For marginalised groups, improved confidence is an important and common benefit that was reported. The evidence review also found that environmental volunteering may offer young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with alternative routes to gaining skills and employment.

Pathways into environmental volunteering

The routes into environmental volunteering often come about through young people’s education settings (e.g. teacher encouragement, links with key subjects such as geography, fresher’s fairs or volunteering schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award), their social networks, and to a lesser extent through other groups and settings, such as churches and youth groups.

The barriers and challenges for those that do not participate

Young people who do not participate pointed out that the coverage relating to the environment often has a ‘doom and gloom’ quality and some perceived it as something that was playing out at a global scale. Because of this some felt that it was hard to feel inspired or motivated to take action.

Beyond David Attenborough, participants often struggled to identify figures
in popular culture who they associated with environmental social action and some felt that environmental volunteering was something which older people do and lacked relevance to their life. Not all saw the potential personal benefits of volunteering, instead defining it as “unpaid work” or “working for free”.

During the focus groups, the barriers and challenges for young people who had no experience of taking part in environmental volunteering included:

- Feeling uncertain about the relevance and benefits associated with taking part
- Not knowing what was available to take part in
- Having limited time/energy and competing demands such as paid employment or having to prioritise study and exam revision.
- Costs and travel related barriers, which was frequently identified by those based in rural areas.

**How to make environmental volunteering more attractive, relevant and accessible**

Drawing on the focus group with young people and the national representative survey, some clear priorities emerged about how to make environmental volunteering more attractive, relevant and accessible. These are set out in the table below and are described more fully in the main body of the report.

*Table 1: Design, communications and marketing priorities identified by young people*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Communications and marketing</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Make offers convenient and accessible, e.g. cover costs and provide travel.</td>
<td>✓ Promote offers as a means of achieving relevant outcomes and benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Offer a range of activities and maximise the learning opportunities.</td>
<td>✓ Convey credibility and professionalism in the marketing materials to instil confidence in the opportunity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Offer flexibility and different levels of involvement, e.g. tasters and one-off opportunities, alongside routine activities.</td>
<td>✓ Include inspiring and attention-grabbing content, not just information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Work with participant’s existing skills and interests, and give them opportunities to take leading roles.</td>
<td>✓ Use carefully selected images of the people taking part.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Tread carefully when considering the use of celebrity endorsements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓ Work closely with education providers to promote environmental social action.</td>
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✓ Focus on building strong relationships between the staff and young people.
✓ Place an emphasis on fun and friendship and on having rewarding experiences.
✓ Focus on what’s been achieved and celebrate the successes.
✓ Use peer to peer recruitment approaches and social media to raise awareness and participation.

Young people in the focus group emphasised the importance of creating environmental volunteering spaces that were welcoming and inclusive, and which encouraged a mix of people to come together in terms of ages and backgrounds. Participants pointed out that environmental volunteering spaces are sometimes dominated by certain types of people. This can make it daunting or less appealing for people from different backgrounds to take part.

To raise participation from underrepresented groups, young people felt that volunteer providers should:

✓ Consider offering a range of rewards and incentives to get people through the door.
✓ Highlight the benefits of taking part that matter to both young people and their parents.
✓ Make it as convenient and easy to take part in as possible.
✓ Recognise that many young people have to prioritise paid employment over volunteering or lack the resources or means to take part.
✓ Be ready to provide extra support and encouragement to those who lack confidence and are unfamiliar with the activity and setting.

**Suggested actions and next steps**

Exploring these findings with stakeholders working in the volunteering and environmental sector, five main opportunities emerged where action by environmental providers and government could make giving time to the environment more attractive, relevant and accessible to this target group:

1. **Facilitate a more strategic and systematic approach to improving the volunteering ‘offer’ by creating a shared vision and language for promoting environmental volunteering.**
2. **Sustain and grow current participation by building upon or adapting the current volunteering offer to deliver more high-quality volunteering experiences.**
3. **Ensure opportunities remain attractive and relevant to young people by**
continually improving marketing and communications so that they are targeted and tailored to the age group.

4. Bring greater focus on developing ‘progressive pathways’ of participation and increasing the visibility of opportunities at different stages of young people’s lives through more effective and creative cross-sector collaboration, especially between education providers, employers, the youth sector and environmental volunteer providers.

5. Focus on raising participation from underrepresented groups in policy and programme design.

Underneath each of these five opportunities, in Section 5 of this report we present the suggested actions from workshop stakeholders for further consideration.

Beyond the five opportunities and actions, the research raised a number of follow-up questions and gaps in the evidence base, which could merit further research. This includes:

- Considering a review of existing online volunteering directories, to understand how frequently they are used, and what the barriers to young people and agencies using/promoting them are.
- Conducting research to understand what the findings related to sector improvement will mean for different types of environmental volunteering organisations and the barriers and challenges they might face when it comes to developing their offers.
- Explore the levers and incentives that could result in education providers more consistently promoting volunteering and social action.
- Drawing on the survey results, non-BME and BME rates of volunteering appear broadly similar. However, the survey does not capture potential differences in the quality, intensity and type of volunteering experiences these groups are having. Further qualitative and quantitative work could shed light on this.
1. Introduction

1.1. Background and aims of the research

In February 2018, Defra commissioned Traverse to design and deliver a qualitative and quantitative research project to understand the motivations and drivers of young people aged 16 – 24 to participating in environment-based volunteering projects. The project also aimed to understand:

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The policy context for this research is the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and its policies to encourage more children and young people to connect with the natural environment and take action to protect and enhance it. This research aims to directly inform Defra’s work with Step Up to Serve and other environment and youth sector partners to help children and young people from all backgrounds to engage with nature and participate in social action to improve the environment during the 2019 Year of Green Action.

1.2. Definitions and scope of the research

The following broad definitions were used:

- **Volunteering** – which includes both formal and more informal types of volunteering being undertaken by 16-24 year olds.
- **Environmental volunteering** – which includes activities which may involve administration, but primarily focussed on activities which brings people into contact with the natural world (rural and urban) in ways that they are putting something back and or taking stewardship roles.
- **Environmental volunteering providers**: We have taken a broad definition which incorporates:
  - Traditional conservation groups;
  - Environment-based organisations that provide opportunities for activity and volunteering (e.g. National Parks);
  - Organisations doing activities in nature settings (e.g. Outdoor Centres); and
  - Education establishments and education-based activities (e.g. schools, residential, field study trips, school grounds, surveys, citizen science).
1.3. **Summary of the methodology**

A co-production approach was used to design the research. At the start of the project we undertook 10 stakeholder interviews to understand their views on the topic, investigate existing evidence on barriers and enablers to environmental volunteering for young people, and to understand what would be useful for them to know from the research. These stakeholders were invited to form a steering group, which was reconvened at the interim and reporting stages of the project.

Following the stakeholder engagement, we conducted a rapid evidence assessment, drawing on both academic and grey literature relating to the research questions. In parallel, we ran a Call for Evidence survey with those overseeing and delivering environmental volunteering, to raise awareness of the research, get their views on the research questions and identify relevant evidence to be included in the rapid evidence assessment.

Sixteen discussion groups were held with young people from across England who were based in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The first eight groups were run with young people already involved in environmental volunteering, this was followed by two groups of young people involved in volunteering in other sectors, and six groups of young people who were not volunteers. A nationally representative survey of 1001 young people supplemented this qualitative research to test emerging findings and insights.

The infographic presented on the next pages provides a summary of our approach.
1.4. Reading this report

1.4.1. Structure of the report

The research combined primary and secondary research. The report covers the secondary research first, as it provides the evidence base used to inform the primary research. The report is laid out as follows:

- **Chapter 2** summarises the findings the evidence review.
- **Chapter 3** summarises the findings of the stakeholder interviews, call for evidence, focus groups with young people, and survey of young people.
- **Chapter 4** summarises the key findings across the evidence sources.
- **Chapter 5** summarises the research conclusions and recommendations.

In a separate report we provide the following appendices:

- **Appendix A**: an overview of the focus group sampling approach.
- **Appendix B**: the detailed rapid evidence review.
- **Appendix C**: the source summary tables for the rapid evidence review.
- **Appendix D**: the example marketing campaigns used in the focus groups.
- **Appendix E**: the nationally representative survey questions.
2. Secondary research

A rapid evidence review was conducted to understand the context of the research and to summarise existing evidence relating to the research questions on young environmental volunteers. The full review is presented in Appendix B, with all sources listed in Appendix C. The following chapter is a summary of the key findings and recommendations.

Our process involved the following steps:

- **Initial searching**: We gathered as many sources as we could, drawing from interviews with stakeholders, bibliographies from other evidence reviews and a relevant Cochran review. We then conducted further searches by using key words via Google scholar. All results were logged in a matrix in excel. Evidence specialist Chris Cooper guided the process.

- **Sifting and further searching**: We reviewed the abstracts and keywords for these sources to assess relevance, giving them a rating out of 5. If they got a low rating, we excluded them. If they were rated quite highly, we checked the bibliography for further relevant studies to add to the ‘long list’.

- **Refining**: Of the remaining items, any with a relevance rating of lower than 4 was excluded, unless they had a specific focus that added value to the overall body of evidence, e.g. particular focus on barriers facing disadvantaged young people.

- **Reviewing**: Each item was read in full and key findings and quotes were added into the matrix under the relevant columns (e.g. barriers facing young people).

The evidence drew on a total of 39 sources of the following types:

- Qualitative studies (13)
- Large scale surveys (11)
- Case studies & evaluations (5)
- Other evidence reviews (10)

2.1. Guiding research questions

- What are the key frameworks and behaviour change models for understanding environmental volunteering and volunteering more generally?
- What are the motivations, benefits, barriers, and challenges experienced by young people when it comes to participating in environmental volunteering and other types of volunteering?
- What recommendations are given to better recruit and retain young volunteers?
- What are the key gaps in the evidence base?
2.2. Theories and frameworks for understanding Environmental Volunteering

2.2.1. Key Findings

The secondary evidence suggests that:

- There are different stages to the volunteer journey;
- Volunteers tend to hold multiple leading motivations;
- Leading motivations may change over time;

These points should be considered when designing opportunities and when recruiting and managing volunteers.

2.2.2. The volunteer journey / stages to involvement

Several research studies into both environmental and general volunteering literature pose the idea of the ‘volunteer journey’, made up of several stages:

The importance of these stages is that the individual has different motivations at each stage, and that organisations must meet them to maintain their engagement.

For participation to start, there must be motivation, a ‘trigger’ to take action, sufficient resources, and an opportunity. For participation to continue, the volunteer must have a good experience, gain desired outcomes, and have continued resources.

Participation will stop if they have a poor experience, lack of resources, or a change of personal situation (e.g. moving away).

A key finding is that volunteers may have more than one leading motivation to volunteer and these are likely to change over time. Often the motivations that drive an individual to start volunteering in the first instance and the motivations that drive them to continue their involvement are different.

This could be as they find unexpected benefits in the experience that motivate them to stay.
2.3. Motivations

Opportunities that clearly provide career benefits will be appealing to many young people, as this was broadly found to be the leading motivator amongst young people.

Designing programmes that foster social ties through group work, informal communication and a friendly and relaxed culture will retain volunteers for longer. Marketing materials that reflect this will help recruit young people who are motivated by the social benefits.

Clearly communicating the environmental cause, and precisely how participant’s work will impact it will help distinguish opportunities as young people have heightened awareness of environmental issues, yet are anxious that their time and effort has a meaningful impact.

Young people want to be considered as partners not delegates and given influence, a say in decisions and opportunities for leadership roles.

2.4. Benefits

As well as practical benefits including increased skills and employability, participants have been shown to gain personal benefits, including increased confidence and self-efficacy, a sense of belonging within community, building friendships and improved physical and mental wellbeing.

2.4.1. Benefits specific to subgroups

The potential benefits for underrepresented groups are amplified, yet often unrealised due to the barriers faced. Participation can help overcome confidence issues and help tackle social exclusion. For young people from socio-economic disadvantage, volunteering (environmental and general) can provide alternative routes to qualifications and employment that can improve prospects for participants.

2.5. Barriers

A perceived lack of time is the biggest practical barrier to participation as young people have competing priorities, such as studying, exams, part-time jobs, and social lives, and are time pressured.

A lack of awareness around environmental volunteering generally means that young people do not consider it, do not learn about the benefits, understand what it entails, or find out about specific opportunities.

A lack of confidence in their capability or ability to join a group of new people can prevent some young people from taking part, although they may consider it. A feeling that they cannot make a difference to the cause prevents some people taking part.

Negative perceptions of environmental volunteering may act as a barrier for young people. These include it being seen as ‘uncool’, uninteresting, or as something primarily aimed at older people.
People leave when they have poor quality experiences. These can include:

- Poor social experiences (not very social, or do not fit in with group)
- Poor roles and activities (lack of variety, enjoyable roles, or learning)
- Feeling undervalued or having no influence
- A lack of flexibility for commitment required or timings of activities
- Poor management and communication from organisers

They also leave for employment, further education or if they move from the area. This could be because the opportunity has helped them meet their goals e.g. becoming employable. Where this has happened, this should be embraced and used for marketing.

2.5.1. Barriers specific to subgroups

Barriers are harder to overcome for those with socio-economic disadvantage due to a lack of financial, emotional, and informational resources. They may have less spare time if they need to work paid jobs, less encouragement, or lack of network that can introduce them to opportunities. Costs for travel, food and equipment may also exclude these young people.

A lack of diversity within specific volunteering groups or in the marketing and communications materials may make ethnic minorities feel less welcome, and contribute to a perception of environmental volunteering as an exclusive activity.

Physical and language barriers (e.g. lack of information in braille, lack of access to buildings, physical nature of activities) affect disabled people and people who do not speak English fluently (e.g. difficulty finding information, being unsuccessful in applications, not feeling accepted by groups).

2.6. Recommendations from the secondary research

Environmental volunteering providers should strive to make the volunteering experience mutually beneficial. Activities should be designed with young people’s leading motivations in mind and should offer a variety of roles and experiences, including physical activities, desk work such as organising programmes, and creative tasks such as website design and marketing. This will help to build demand for opportunities, sustain participation and encourage people to re-engage later in life.

The sector should strengthen the networks between organisations to create pathways and share knowledge. This can be digitally, via a database of opportunities for young people to browse opportunities, or working with employers and educational organisations to provide and promote direct paths to developing specifically sought-after skills.

Organisers should try to remove as many of the logistical barriers as possible, by providing transport services or help, providing meals or equipment, and being conscious of the time and commitment levels that young people can offer.
Marketing campaigns should:

- Be designed in collaboration with young people
- Be targeted to specific audiences and their motivations, not generic
- Explicitly explain what they get in return for their time and efforts
- Convey that volunteering is a social opportunity
- Provide clear practical info, including:
  - what the activities are
  - what level of commitment is required
  - how the organisation helps with planning and/or costs (coach booked, equipment provided, food served)

2.7. Key gaps in the existing evidence

2.7.1. Underrepresented groups

Due to underrepresentation of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, socio-economically disadvantaged or disabled groups, the sampling for many research studies has often acknowledged that there are limited findings about these groups. To date, understanding about their attitudes and experiences has not been well researched.

2.7.2. Post participation

Research that explores barriers often looks at pre-participation barriers and barriers that have been overcome by participants. Some research has looked at reasons for ceasing to volunteer, although this is limited.

2.7.3. Why choose an environmental cause?

Sources looking into motivations for environmental volunteering and general volunteering have consistently demonstrated that many young people are driven to participate for personal benefits (such as gaining work experience and making friends) and because they want to do something generally worthwhile with their time.

However, little insight has been sought as to what drives these young people to choose environmental causes specifically, e.g. did they happen to see information about this before other opportunities, did they feel more confident that this opportunity would meet their objectives than other opportunities, or did they feel that this cause was a higher priority than other causes such as homelessness?
3. Primary research

3.1. Stakeholder interviews and call for evidence

We conducted telephone interviews with a sample of 10 representatives from organisations who have experience of providing and overseeing environmental volunteering opportunities for young people.

We also ran an online ‘Call for Evidence’ survey aimed at environmental volunteering providers which received 28 responses. The list of stakeholders invited to take part in interviews and in the Call for Evidence was provided by Defra and represented a range of charities and organisations across England in terms of size, focus and type of volunteering offered.

In both the stakeholder interviews and Call for Evidence survey we explored the following questions, but also gave them space to provide wider reflections on the research questions:

- Do you have any insights about what seems to help or hinder young people from participating in environmental volunteering, or volunteering more generally?
- Is there anything that seems to attract young people to environmental projects in particular?
- When it comes to what helps and hinders young people from taking part in environmental volunteering or volunteering more generally, are you aware of any key differences in terms of young people’s backgrounds/characteristics? For e.g. socioeconomic group, educational attainment, life stage, where they are based, whether they have had previous association with organised groups.

Responding to the Call for Evidence stakeholders provided a combination of existing evidence (e.g. in-house or national survey and qualitative research findings from workshops and focus groups), feedback collected from colleagues and anecdotal evidence. Respondents talked about both volunteering and social action and rarely made a clear distinction between the two.

3.1.1. Motivations and benefits

Across the Call for Evidence and stakeholder interviews a key message was that the motivations and benefits of taking part in environmental volunteering are multiple and are interlocking (e.g. working on a task as part of team can offer fun, friendship, and enhanced wellbeing). Furthermore, volunteers’ leading motivations may shift over time depending on their life stage and circumstances.

Four broad categories of motivations and benefits emerged from the Call for Evidence and stakeholder interviews which have been summarised below.
Fun and friendship

Making new connections and friendships were identified as key motivators which both attracts young people to environmental volunteering and helps to sustain their involvement. Stakeholders emphasised that programmes that actively encourage and support social connections will be more valued by young people.

“Young people want to make friends they care about the social element. We’ve introduced regional meet ups, as many were interested in getting together to discuss things, socialise and to develop leadership capacity.”

It was felt that environmental volunteering which often involves an emphasis on team working and groups work, can play an important function of bringing together like-minded young people and fostering friendships and networks.

As well as valuing the connections with their peers, some young people also value the relationships and support that they can receive from staff running volunteering activities.

“I believe that some of the young people we engage in environmental volunteering do so because of their relationship with us as youth workers not because they are specifically interested in the environment.”

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of making environmental volunteering programmes fun and enjoyable, especially since there are likely to be competing with academic, social, and paid work commitments. It was suggested that fun and enjoyment are particularly important for attracting and sustaining participation in younger age groups (e.g. primary and secondary aged).

Wellbeing

When it comes to volunteering in natural spaces, several stakeholders pointed to the mental and physical wellbeing benefits, which can help to draw and sustain participation in environmental volunteering. One stakeholder pointed to recent evidence from the Our Bright Future Programme and to research carried out by the University of Essex which found that young people volunteering with the Wildlife Trusts – especially those who were new to volunteering – saw marked improvements in their levels of mental wellbeing.

Making a difference

Stakeholders highlighted a wealth of evidence that young people want to see tangible changes as a result of their input and that they value contributing to changes which cannot easily be undone by others. This could include helping to creates changes in legislation, gaining media exposure around an issue or tree planting.
“Tree planting is our most popular activity. It only takes a few minutes to plant a tree sapling. But once it has grown, the tree can have a lifespan of more than 100 years. This is a great example of how a small-time investment, can produce a huge beneficial outcome in the long term.”

Feeling confident that a volunteering activity will make a difference can help to reassure participants that their time has been put to good use and can inspire them to take further action. It can also help to attract new people who might be initially unsure about whether it’s worth giving up their time.

Stakeholders felt that the most appealing and fulfilling environmental volunteering offers help participants to understand the theory of change behind the activities and build in opportunities for the participant to reflect on and celebrate what has been achieved.

“Helping young people understand and celebrate the impacts of their action, particularly the cumulative impact of regular, smaller actions, is crucial for long-term fulfilment and involvement.”

**Individual development**

Stakeholders stressed that young people increasingly see volunteering as a means of developing skills, knowledge and confidence which can support their academic and career development. For example, a survey of young people run by the NUS, Scouts UK, Canal and Rivers Trust and RSPB found that 57% would be encouraged by learning new skills to help them get a job and 64% said the chance to gain work experience could encourage them to get involved. For this reason, the individual development benefits of any volunteering offer need to be clearly spelled out.

Stakeholders identified a range of actions that can help to maximise individual development opportunities offered by environmental volunteering offers:

- Clearly communicating the individual development benefits/outcomes associated with an offer.
- Taking the time to understand what young people want to get out of the experience and tailoring the activities/programmes to their needs.
- Forming links with employers to make volunteering offers more appealing and relevant.
- Offer a range of activities and learning opportunities within schemes. This should include tasks like fundraising and back office functions alongside the more traditional volunteering tasks, and training, e.g. first aid, how to use specific equipment.
- Creating links and or complimenting young people’s courses and fields of

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• Thinking about how young people can describe/communicate their experience to employers and academic institutions and potentially offering a form of accreditation recognised by employers.

• Building in opportunities for young people to undertake self-directed learning, e.g. bushcraft.

One stakeholder suggested that careers focused volunteers tend to take an instrumental or transactional approach; dipping in and out of activities and programmes to gain what they need and then moving on. It was felt that this presented challenges for the sector, which needs to encourage long-term and ‘deeper’ involvement in environmental volunteering to successfully achieve their goals.

3.1.2. Helping and hindering factors

Early engagement with nature and the outdoors

Stakeholders cited a mixture of anecdotal and academic evidence that young people who had exposure to nature and the outdoors in their childhood in family settings tended to be more interested in environmental volunteering and in taking part in nature based activities.

Other factors influencing attitudes to environmental volunteering included the extent to which young people had access to relevant education programmes and resources (most crucially during post-primary school years) and to networks of other young people interested in environmental volunteering.

In school settings, passionate teachers in subjects like geography and biology play a key role in inspiring young people to engage with environmental issues, and were seen as a key “bridge” when it comes to reaching young environmental volunteers:

“Our work with schools greatly relies upon the willingness of teachers to support young people undertaking project work and guide them in their actions. This support is largely dependent on the amount of time teachers can dedicate to each student, which is often limited.”

Stakeholders highlighted the fact that young people have differential access to early positive experiences and opportunities to engage with environmental issues. Action for Conservation described how their WildED programme aimed to address this challenge by working with school pupils.
Good practice example: WildED

The WildED secondary school workshop programme has produced particularly interesting changes in young people’s attitudes towards environmental volunteering. WildED supports young people from ‘deprived’ urban areas to design and lead their own environmental campaign or project, whilst broadening their understanding of what being a conservationist can look like. For many students, this is the first time they’ve been given the opportunity to engage meaningfully with environmental project work, with the complete freedom to design a campaign around an issue they are passionate about. When this three-month programme is complete, 67% of participants report that they are more likely to join an environmental volunteer group than before the programme and 77% report that they are more interested in conservation either as a career or as part of their everyday lives.

Stakeholders pointed to several other examples of good practice in education settings that were helping to embed volunteering and social action.

Good practice examples: education settings promoting volunteering

| In the South West of England guidance developed as part of Natural Connections is being used by teachers, schools, and their networks to develop outdoor learning | East Kent College has social action weeks in the last week of each term where students are expected to work on a social action project | Warwick University have a dedicated team of professional volunteering organisers who help students to volunteer in the local community |

Despite areas of good practice, a few stakeholders identified challenges in the education sector which would potentially need to be addressed through changes to policy:

- The extent to which schools, colleges and universities promote and facilitate volunteering opportunities is still too variable. Here a stakeholder questioned the extent to which Ofsted values efforts made by schools to promote and embed social action and volunteering.
- There was felt to be an insufficient focus on the environment in school curriculums. One stakeholder suggested that there is a need for a practical equivalent to an A-level or GCSE provided by schools which requires a given amount of environmental volunteering.

Awareness and access

A major barrier to environmental volunteering was that young people did not know what was available and did not have sufficient opportunities to consider taking part.
“In general, young people that aren’t seeking a career in conservation but like working/being in the outdoors don’t hear about volunteering opportunities.”

“We know from our social action survey of young people that for a large proportion who are not involved it’s because it never occurred to them or because no one asked them. It’s just not on their radar, especially those in lower socioeconomic groups.”

Stakeholders called for investment in searchable directories, more professional and youth focused marketing and communications campaigns, and better-quality information on specific volunteering offers.

Barriers relating to accessibility and affordability were also widely raised by stakeholders. This included the need to prioritise paid employment rather than volunteering which particularly impacted on young people from low income backgrounds. A lack of affordable transport options also emerged as a key barrier, especially for young people living in more rural areas.

“Our volunteer base is predominately retired, fairly well-off individuals who live locally. We know there is a desire from youth groups within surrounding conurbations who would like to volunteer but cannot access the New Forest via public transport.”

Stakeholders recommended that wherever possible, organisations should either organise or cover the cost of transport and they should choose accessible and convenient locations where possible. It was also seen as critical to provide the necessary clothing, equipment and to offer food and refreshments.

“I know that for many of the young people we work with they would not be able to access sessions without transport being provided.”

Other barriers included:

• Unfounded or exaggerated views that safe guarding and insurance are barriers to developing volunteering and social action – requiring the promotion of clear guidance and myth busting information, e.g. when you do and do not need an enhanced DBS check.

• Parental concerns about their child’s safety especially when taking part in volunteering in rural and remote areas, which can be overcome by forming links and partnership working with well-known schemes (e.g. the DofE), and inviting parents to join activities or offering improved information and inductions.

Language and perceptions

Stakeholders highlighted the challenge that young people may have negative stereotypes or perceptions of environmental volunteering. For example, some may see it as something primarily done by older people, as “uncool”, or as not relevant to their lives.
“One of our youth ambassadors who is particularly passionate about tackling plastic pollution expressed that her peers perceive this topic as “uncool” and that she finds it difficult to feel confident about her environmental interests. While we believe young people’s attitudes toward environmentalism are shifting, social stigmas still exist and act as a barrier to involvement.”

For one stakeholder working more with popular culture figures was seen as a way of addressing these issues:

“We are aiming to reach out to existing popular culture figures to begin to explore environmental framing and participating in discussions with environmental funders and other NGOs around how to create more compelling long-term narratives around the environment.”

It was suggested that for some young people the word “volunteering” can be off putting. Other words that could be disengaging to those not already involved in environmental volunteering included words like ‘green’ and ‘sustainability’.

Beyond the perceptions of young people themselves:

- A few stakeholders reported anecdotal evidence that participation can be limited where parents and carers do not see volunteering as a valuable learning experience or something that detracts from academic study.

- When it comes to environmental organisations there was felt to be a perception that young people are hard to reach and difficult to engage unless they have an existing interest in the environment, for example, having grown up in a rural area and spent more time in natural spaces. It was suggested that this can create a disconnect between urban youth and environmental volunteering programmes.

**Making environmental volunteering feel relevant**

It was felt that young people are increasingly seeing volunteering in a way that is “transactional” and outcomes focused. It was suggested that providers are beginning to respond to this shift by promoting projects focused on the environment as a means of achieving a wide range of outcomes. These could relate to careers development, artistic expression or health and fitness or having a good time with friends.

“It’s about not being in a rigid bounded bubble, we need to become the playing field on which everything happens.”

“Through our focus groups what emerged was the importance of making the environment feel more relevant, a feeling that it intersects with everything they are concerned about social mobility and mental and physical wellbeing.”

Stakeholders suggested that working in this way involved environmental
volunteering providers becoming more explicit about the intersections between the environment and other issues that matter to young people and working more effectively with partners across different sectors to develop appealing and relevant offers. This needs to be grounded in an appreciation that the environment, and perhaps the volunteering might be incidental to young people’s primary motivations.

### 3.1.3. Raising levels of participation

#### Adopting a co-production approach

Stakeholders emphasised the value of embracing co-production approaches with young people. This can lead to more engaged and motivated participants and to achieving better outcomes.

“From our experience, allowing young people to be creative in the design and delivery of the project whilst also empowering them to lead the major decision-making processes attracts them to environmental project work and maximises the impact of the project itself.”

Some stakeholders suggested that environmental volunteering has traditionally been organised in a more top-down manner, where young people labour on pre-defined tasks, have fewer opportunities to shape and lead what they do, and are less focused on impact.

“Devolving responsibility can ensure more in-depth engagement as students are able to focus attention towards issues that resonate most with them, rather than participating more passively in top-down, directed opportunities.”

“When it comes to barriers to taking part in social action, ‘we were not asked what social issue we would like to take action on’ was cited most often.”

“For the 2019 Year of Green Action to be truly impactful and engage widely, we will need very different opportunities to be created for young people, where the young people perhaps play a role in a wider project that collectively has the sort of impact that the young person seeks.”
Good practice example: John Muir Award

The John Muir Award is a UK wide environmental scheme which encourages people to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places. People from all ages and backgrounds are encouraged to take part either as individuals, groups, or families. To achieve the award participants must complete four challenges: discover a wild place, explore it, do something to conserve it and share their experiences.

The Award is not a pre-defined programme, instead it offers a structure to support participants’ own activities and interests and provides a platform for adventure, personal growth, enjoyment, art, culture, and creativity. The Award is delivered through partnerships with a range of provider organisations, including youth groups, schools, clubs, environmental NGOs, local authorities, residential and outdoor centres, adult and family support groups, ranger services etc.

The Award has seen year on year growth for the last 20 years, with 1800 organisation and 36,000 people participating each year.

It was suggested that while co-production approaches have great potential, it was noted that young people also need to work within some pre-defined boundaries, and they will benefit from having some level of steer and support to ensure that what they are doing will lead to real impacts.

Stimulating interest and building confidence

Stakeholders identified a range of good practice when it comes to building interest in environmental volunteering and helping young people to take the first steps:

- Organising taster sessions for young people to build up their courage and reduce any anxiety they might have.
- Offering guided walks, which give people a chance to experience nature and build an interest in taking part in future activities.
- Using ‘issues-based’ hooks (e.g. food waste or recycling) to capture initial interest before introducing concepts like sustainability that are harder to make sense of.
- Offering a choice of commitment levels and a range of activities, including one-off volunteering days which can benefit young people who are in employment and education who have limited time.

“For many secondary school students, the lack of time or perceived lack of time available to volunteer due to overscheduled lives and pressures of revision expectations linked to the pursuit of post-secondary and career goals prevents their involvement, with some schools now recommending up to 6/7 hours of revision time a day during holidays and weekends.”

- Offering incentives and rewards to take part e.g. t-shirts, free food,
certificates, socials.

- Having staff with the right skills/experience who can effectively engage young people.
- Using tools like Instagram to document young people taking part in activities and then using this to publicise future events.
- Working with peer influencers who having had a positive experience themselves can encourage others.

There was a view that giving young people transformational experiences at an early age should be the shared priority if the aim is to encourage lifelong volunteering and engagement with the environment.

“What’s important is activating environmental volunteers early on who can keep at it; what really in many ways is not so important is that at the end of the programme they have clocked up 30 to 60 hours, what’s vital is a shift in behaviour, getting them addicted, we want them to get the bug for volunteering into the future, which is what will really support a 25-year plan.”

Raising participation from underrepresented groups

Stakeholders offered reflections and recommendations about different underrepresented groups:

- Those from deprived backgrounds may be just as interested in taking part in environmental volunteering. However, barriers linked to cost, available time and access to transport may be magnified. It was noted by several stakeholders that schemes that provide travel costs for all volunteers will ensure a more level playing field.
- When it came to ‘hard to reach’ groups (i.e. socio economically deprived, minority groups etc) they had found that ongoing face to face support with volunteering is the most successful way to derive meaningful impact.
- People who are disabled tend to require extra support at each stage of participation. This includes encouragement and support to agree to take part and feel ready, help to get them to the volunteering opportunity and extra support to help them to take part.
- It was suggested that underrepresented groups can be best influenced by appealing to the benefits linked to individual development, e.g. getting fitter, getting a job, activities that interest them.
- Stakeholders pointed out that they have come across a perception amongst some young people that conservation does not and cannot take place in urban areas.
- Young people from BAME backgrounds may take part in volunteering within their communities. They may need encouragement to think about volunteering more cross-societally.
- Benefits claimants may not volunteer due to a fear that universal credit would be refused or sanctioned. Clarity is therefore needed by government that this isn’t the case.
3.2. Qualitative research with young people

3.2.1. The journeys and experiences of volunteers

We ran eight focus groups with environmental volunteers and a further two focus groups with those taking part in volunteering activities not related to the environment. We worked with a range of intermediaries, often organisations who run volunteering schemes, to recruit the environmental volunteers and ensured that there was a mix of participants in terms of types of volunteering experience they had, gender, ethnicity, where they were based (urban/ rural/ suburban) and socio-economic background.

The two groups with non-environmental volunteers were professionally recruited. The groups took place across England and included participants based in urban, suburban, and more rural settings and from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Some groups were exclusively students or those in training, while others were a mix of students and those in employment. Across the focus groups, a variety of volunteering roles and tasks were represented.

Focus groups started with a warm up activity (word association for non-environmental volunteers and for environmental volunteers, introducing themselves to a partner using a photo representing their experience as an environmental volunteer). This was followed by a guided discussion with a set of questions covering four of the phases of the volunteering journey (considering, planning, taking part, and keeping at it). The non-environmental volunteers reviewed a set of hypothetical environmental volunteering packages (see section 3.2.4). Finally, all groups reviewed a set of advertising materials (see section 3.2.7).

Feedback from environmental and non-environmental volunteers, while relating to different sectors, shared many common features across the four phases of the volunteer journey. They are reported separately below to reflect that the views are in relation to different experiences.

Across the four phases of the volunteer journey, there were some differences in motivations and barriers, but many remain throughout the process. For example, the importance of making a difference and being able to see that impact, social interactions, personal development, and physical and mental well-being.

Motivations and barriers among environmental volunteers were generally similar across different age groups and genders, as well as between students and employed participants, and those from urban and rural areas. Any significant trends or differences observed are highlighted in the sub-sections that follow.
The considering phase

What made people consider taking part in volunteering?

The most significant motivation among environmental volunteers to consider volunteering is the need for experience and skills development towards employment, as well as to narrow down or confirm one’s interests (similar to career guidance). The other two most commonly mentioned influencers were academic encouragement and support, and the availability of free time and wanting to utilise it constructively.

Other motivations and enablers include a specific interest in the issues or activities, family encouragement and support (such as parents seeing it as a valuable contribution to their child’s life, and therefore encouraging participation), involvement in other programmes (such as scouts), having friends who are participating, exposure to nature and the outdoors growing up, opportunities to develop social skills and make friends, opportunities to visit interesting places, desire to keep active, opportunity to have fun, and a desire to make a difference.

“Needed more practical/theory experience to help with a future career in wildlife conservation.”

Among non-environmental volunteers, the main motivations to volunteer were that they had friends that were doing it, it was a requirement of the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) programme, and the desire to contribute to society or one’s community. Other motivations mentioned were having free time, wanting to gain experience before studying, building one’s CV, and being prompted by other programmes such as the Guides.

What drew people to environmental volunteering specifically?

Reasons for being attracted to environmental volunteering were varied, came at many different life stages, and weren’t always driven by environmental motivations.

The primary reason participants were drawn to environmental volunteering was an interest or passion for the environment, animals, climate change, and sustainability. This was often influenced by young people’s upbringing and family, such as having had positive outdoor experiences, being nature or wildlife focussed, or a desire to have outdoors experiences due to having grown up in a city. As a result of an interest or passion for the environment, environmental volunteering was particularly relevant for career development and providing opportunities for experience.

Why DofE?

- It’s good for university applications and CVs
- Friends or family were doing it
- It looked fun
- It’s encouraged through schools
“My family have always been outdoorsy, and I have a keen interest in the environment.”

Another important motivator that drew people to environmental volunteering is feelings of responsibility, and the desire to make a difference and contribute to society. Some participants had not intended to do environmental volunteering, but rather to deliver on social justice or equality for example, and found that achieving many of these objectives can be achieved through environmentally-oriented tasks.

“It didn’t start from an environmental perspective, but when you start doing your research a lot of it is connected to the environment.”

For some, it was general features of environmental volunteering, such as working in teams, social interaction, working outdoors, doing interesting things, and being active. In a few cases, it was specific aspects of the environmental volunteering programme, such as hosting more events in a year or being easier to take part in because it required less training.

Other participants were encouraged or influenced in other ways, such as by teachers, experiences in school, relevance to academic programmes, media, campaigns, programmes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award or David Attenborough Green Rangers, or from previous exposure to environmental volunteering through other programmes. Some had experience in other volunteer sectors and wanted to do something different.

“We have a school club where you find out about different careers if you’re not sure. A head of conservation was talking about his job, and now I am interested in that as a career and I want to get experience”

Why might young people never consider taking part in environmental volunteering or volunteering more generally?

Environmental volunteers and non-environmental volunteers identified similar reasons as to why young people they knew did not consider volunteering or environmental volunteering. Four key issues emerged:

- lack of awareness of opportunities;
- perceived barriers;
- lack of motivators; and
- alternative options.

Many groups felt that young people would not consider taking part as the environment, volunteering, or working outdoors is not a personal interest; or that it is seen as “boring” or “uncool”. Some groups felt that young people may not see how participation is relevant to their personal development or career. A small number of groups felt that people don’t feel their contribution will make an impact, or can’t see how their personal strengths would contribute. It was also mentioned that one’s local environmental can
seem less important in the light of significant global environment concerns. The most frequently mentioned barriers were time commitments, timing, and financial implications (costs and reduced capacity to earn). Other barriers mentioned were a lack of confidence, nervousness about starting something new and meeting new people, the level of commitment required, personal and family circumstances, travel, and group demographics.

“I think it would be the same reason that people don’t volunteer to other causes – time. People my age have way less free time, and I see this because the average age in my group is 40s or 50s.”

Some groups discussed a lack of awareness of opportunities and misconceptions about what is involved as key issues. This was in part attributed to a lack of encouragement or availability at school, and a lack of links to other focus areas (such as making links for art students).

“They don’t know it exists, didn’t know it was a thing. Needs to be more advertised”

A few groups mentioned alternative options for contributing to the environment and society, such as getting involved in recycling, pursuing a related career, or pursuing other programmes (e.g. overseas volunteering).

**Amelia’s volunteer journey:**

Amelia is a student in her twenties. She grew up in a suburban area and spending time outdoors was a big part of her childhood. She lived near trees, fields, and natural areas – she appreciated what that meant to her, and wanted to encourage the next generation to get outside. She has always had an interest in wildlife and the environment.

“I had an interest in wildlife and the natural world since I was young. I was quite an independent child and enjoyed walking in forests and natural spaces. I saw environmental volunteering as a cheap way of getting to cool wild places - like islands.”

She knew where to find out about environmental volunteering opportunities, looking on environmentjob.co.uk and social media pages for organisations like the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts. Her first volunteer programme was on an island, where she enjoyed engaging with people about wildlife. That experience opened up many other opportunities and she continued to visit other places and returned to that island to volunteer, as well as volunteering at more accessible nature reserves closer to home.

Amelia feels that environmental volunteering builds a healthy ecosystem and sees it as the most rewarding and enjoyable type of volunteering as it not only benefits you and society, but also wildlife. She would like to do more, but finds it is costly and time consuming. If she wanted to do more local volunteering, she would have to organise it herself as there aren’t many environmental volunteering opportunities in the area.
The planning phase

How did participants find out about volunteering options?

Both Environmental volunteers and non-environmental volunteers mostly find out about environmental volunteering options through face to face interaction or online. There was a common view amongst environmental volunteers that information online is often hard to find or vague, and only a few participants mentioned finding information on social media. Participants under the age of 18 were significantly less likely to have find out about options online.

“I googled ‘environmental sustainability volunteering’ and came across the Groundwork ambassador programme. It wasn’t easy to find – I didn’t get many results that I wanted to see, about actual volunteering.”

Face to face sources of information included family and friends, universities, or schools (freshers’ fairs or specific teacher encouragement), word of mouth, and other organisations (such as churches or other volunteer groups). A small number found out through advertising materials such as leaflets, posters, or competitions. A couple of participants mentioned being directly approached, and directly contacting known organisations themselves.

What drew them to particular options?

The primary attraction for environmental volunteers was options that were local, accessible, and convenient. Relevance to future careers (such as working with young people and wanting to be a teacher); having a personal connection (such as knowing people, or it being connected with other programmes you participate in); and exposure to wildlife or nature reserves was also particularly important. Other attractors mentioned to a lesser extent were the timing, age of participants, frequency of sessions, availability of
information, opportunities to grow and show independence, and effect of the tasks on improving mental wellbeing.

“Our biology teacher used to work in environment and talks to us a lot about volunteering and competitions – got us. There was a sign-up sheet on the door of biology, and I saw other friends signing up, so I signed up too.”

Non-environmental volunteers reported a variety of features that drew them to particular volunteering activities, those that featured more strongly were limited planning requirements (where programmes make arrange everything), an existing connection through family or friends, or being required or approached to participate (for example through the DofE programme). Other features that drew people to particular options were having an interest in or experience with the issue, the ability to help others, relevance to career, being local, and providing opportunities to travel.

“I was always interested in sports and loved to teach younger children about them so decided that volunteering as a coach would be a good way to do both.”

What were the practical issues they had to think about to take part?

Non-environmental volunteers and environmental volunteers raised similar issues, although some participants had virtually no practical issues as their school or the programme planned most things. A variety of specific practical issues were raised, these can be clustered into three main things – making sure you are available for the role, making sure you are ready for it, and making sure your personal needs are met.

Figure 3: Practical issues that participants face in the planning phase

Most participants raised issues relating to accessibility of volunteering opportunities, in terms of distance and transport. Some highlighted cost implications, the additional time used up in commuting to participate, or a dependency on others (such as parents) to provide transport. Half of the focus groups raised the issue of costs, mostly in relation to transport or cost of taking part, but also in terms of the need to take up part-time employment to financially support the cost of living while participating in long-term volunteering opportunities. Time was the second most commonly raised issue by participants, which included both the time of day and the length of the volunteering activity, and the perspective of the need to plan one’s time.
around different commitments, such as studies or employment.

“It had to be convenient – transport needed to be easy and cheap, as uni work comes first.”

A few groups discussed preparation for the role or tasks that they would be performing. Participants reflected on opportunities that require volunteers to do training, or have prior experience; while a few reflected on their process of reading up beforehand. Some groups raised the need for suitable clothing, and specific equipment, such as binoculars or computers. A couple of groups discussed establishing trust and making contact with the organisation ahead of participating as a practical issue to consider.

“The practical issues I had to think about was preparation as I didn’t know how to prepare or if I was prepared enough as I had a lack of experience.”

A few groups raised issues around safety that require consideration in the planning phase. These issues related to personal security in a given location or time of day, and to using equipment and performing certain tasks. Other personal needs discussed were the need to arrange food, particularly for opportunities where volunteers travel and over-night. For a small number of volunteering opportunities, participants needed to consider accommodation, either because the opportunity required overnight stays, or because the opportunity was long-term and some distance away, presenting a case to move rather than arrange transport.

It was also suggested that certain roles need DBS checks and that having minor offences could present a major barrier to those wanting to take part and become a different person.

Did they have any concerns or questions?

Some environmental volunteer groups felt that it is natural to have concerns or doubts as part of starting something new. Some had no concerns or doubts as they were not committed to a programme or had known other participants for a long time.

“I never doubt it when it’s part of this group because I’ve known them for so long so we’re like a big family and always feel comfortable around them.”
Most concerns experienced by environmental volunteers related to confidence in their ability to fit in socially, and their ability to contribute. Concerns noted to a lesser extent were about seeming uncool, the hard work and whether they’d enjoy it, being alone and scared to ask questions (particularly about expenses), the implications of having special needs, being able to attend regularly, and the early start times of some activities. The main concerns mentioned by non-environmental volunteers were the ability to meet the required commitment, and whether they would enjoy the experience.

“I generally wondered what it was going to be like and what they would expect of me.”

Some environmental volunteers suggested several approaches that alleviated their concerns:

- meeting or contacting organisers before starting;
- people being friendly;
- knowing what to expect before starting;
- going with someone you know;
- not being tied in to a commitment;
- knowing that everyone is in the same situation (i.e. entering a group of new starters as opposed to an established volunteer group);
- having space to work alone if needed; and
- knowing that you would be taught everything you needed to know during the programme.
Liam’s volunteer journey:

In his personal life, Liam had been struggling with confidence and direction for his future due to autism. His work coach suggested he join a year-long volunteering programme, and he received lots of encouragement from his family.

He was really nervous about joining an environmental volunteer programme. He didn’t know what to expect or how it would work. He had never been in a team before and the idea of working closely with six people he did not know was intimidating.

Liam overcame these concerns by meeting the team organiser ahead of the start of the programme, to get to know him and get a better picture of what would be involved. He gained insight into how it would work and what to expect. In terms of working in a team, the organiser explained that Liam didn’t need to worry, because working in a team meant that others would help him, and they would work together to get the tasks done. Liam found this really helpful, and it gave him confidence about being able to participate and contribute. It also made him actually want to participate in the programme, rather than feeling pushed to do it by his work coach or family.

“I was really nervous at first, but I met up with the organiser before. It was really helpful, after that I actually wanted to do it, before I was unsure and felt pressured to do it.”

Liam faced significant travel barriers as he lived ruraly, there were no public transport options, and he couldn’t drive himself. A few of the volunteers chatted about it on the first day and agreed to arrange a lift club between three of them that would pick Liam up. Without this Liam wouldn’t necessarily have been able to accept his placement.

Is there anything that can put people off once they are aware of options?

Environmental volunteers felt that the main things that could put people off are:

- the social dynamics of working with others (meeting new people or being the only young person);
- transport and costs associated with taking part; and
- the image of environmental volunteering as being uncool or boring.

“The social aspects – people might not want to do it alone, or they might want to do it alone.”

Other discouraging factors are time commitments, inflexibility of options, expectations of knowledge and skills, preparation (such as the need for specific equipment or clothes), the type of work, values and interests, safety concerns, the time of day or year, DBS checks, parental consent, and being
nervous about doing something new where they did not know others who were attending.

“The idea of not knowing people there can put people off.”

Non-environmental volunteers also found the time commitment of volunteering generally to be discouraging. In terms of environmental volunteering options specifically, they felt that the prospect that the issues are so significant that one cannot make a real difference was discouraging.
Rose and Emily’s volunteer journey:

Rose and Emily attend the same school, and were inspired by their geography teacher who is actively involved in volunteering and in the local community. He encouraged them to go on a conservation trip to Wales, and also takes students on regular local litter picks.

For the trip to Wales, the biggest challenge for the students was getting permission to go, as their parents were concerned about them going so far away.

“Wales is so far, and persuading family to give permission to go was hard. We wondered, were we actually going to go? We are happy we went, as otherwise we wouldn’t be involved now. We would like to go to Wales again!”

On the trip, they gained in-depth knowledge about the damage being done to the world’s seas and oceans and they didn’t expect there to be so much litter washed up on the beach.

“The locals thanked us and told us the difference it’s making to the area. It makes you realise the impact, and the positive experience makes you want to do more and tell other people. “

When they got back to school, the geography teacher spoke about the trip as a real accomplishment, and featured it in the school newspaper.

“When people heard about our trip to Wales, they understood our experience more, and that it was fun. We were selling it, but in a genuine way. One girl applied because she heard what we did. Although some people were more interested in the trip to Wales than the actual volunteering”

The girls say that the teacher has got quite a few other students involved in the volunteering. He does all the planning for the local litter picks, arranging equipment such as wading boots, and site access. Rose and Emily just have to find their way there, but because activities take place locally it’s easy for them to get there.

They say it is very easy to become involved, and that they get to do work that would otherwise be difficult to do. For them, contributing to their local community is humbling and makes them feel good and this spurs them on to do more. They find their geography teacher’s involvement in the community ‘inspirational’.
The taking part phase

What was it like taking part? Initially and over time

Some participants in the environmental and non-environmental volunteer groups felt nervous initially, as everything is new, and you don’t know anyone. They found the initial experience to be “scary” or “difficult”, feeling that they weren’t appropriately skilled, or awkward or intimidated by working closely with people they didn’t know. But this improved over time, becoming easier, more enjoyable, and comfortable as their confidence grew, they built relationships, learnt more, and felt able to do more tasks.

“I had no idea what to expect. What would the people be like? At first it was quite intimidating, but I settled in quite quickly.”

“Well, I’d say it started off slightly awkward for me but over time it got more relaxed and I enjoyed taking part.”

Generally, environmental volunteers found taking part to be enjoyable and rewarding, but also tiring and physically challenging. Taking part is often interesting, informative, exciting, and inspirational. A few, however, found the experience to be alienating and elitist, particularly as a non-environmentally focussed individual or in highly professional working environments. Some were surprised about the extent of environmental problems (such as litter), while others felt more empowered and less hopeless about these issues now that they were taking action. A few found it to be intense and stressful. A few found that over time it became repetitive and more time consuming.

“It feels good initially and over time it’s a nice feeling to know that you’ve helped sustain certain ecosystems.”

Groups discussed various ways that the experience was or could be improved, including knowing people beforehand, meeting up with organisers beforehand, having a ‘taster day’ or practical interview, taking part in training, teaching the volunteers at the start and throughout sessions, and staff being friendly, welcoming, and passionate.

Was it what was expected?

In both the environmental and non-environmental volunteer groups a few participants were not sure what to expect from the experience. For some the experience was as they expected, but for many of the environmental volunteers it turned out to be more positive and rewarding than expected.

“It was better than I expected, and I didn’t really know what I wanted.”

Some of the expectations that environmental volunteers had were that it would be like a 09:00-17:00 working day; they would be assigned tasks with limited or no choice; and that there would be challenges or things outside of their control.
exceeded expectations included:

• opportunities for skills development and learning;
• having a say in task allocation;
• feeling they were creating a positive impact;
• enjoyment and fun;
• having a variety of activities;
• the pace of activities (both being slower and faster than expected);
• not as physically or intellectually challenging as expected;
• people being more understanding and flexible; and
• feel that there was a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere.

“I got a lot more than I expected from the experience. I gained friends, more experience and it made me happy.”

Some of the areas where environmental volunteering experiences fell short of expectations included:

• being repetitive or boring;
• being more tiring;
• needing more skills and knowledge;
• objectives being harder to achieve;
• receiving less acknowledgement or less fulfilment;
• being designed for a different volunteer demographic – older, not pursuing a career in the industry, and less focussed on task completion; and
• being less structured.

“There were very few young people so work slower pace and often aimed at 'leisure' than getting a job done. I would love more pressing, hands-on jobs.”

What was more rewarding and enjoyable? What was challenging?

The aspects of volunteering found to be most rewarding and most challenging overlap with the motivations and challenges at other phases in the volunteering journey. Environmental volunteers most often reported rewarding and enjoyable experiences as those where they could see the difference they were making, or where they received recognition or a positive reaction from people in the area for their efforts. Other commonly reported rewarding and enjoyable features of volunteering were the social aspect (meeting people and making friends), seeing wildlife and interesting things, and the sense of satisfaction that comes with helping the environment. Other rewarding and enjoyable features were experiencing in the words of one young participant ‘diamond moments’ (great but rare moments), skills development, finding a passion, getting outdoors, and
having social engagements together after volunteering activities.

“You get diamond moments – cool moments that you don’t get every day, but you have to go every day to get them”

Aspects of environmental volunteering that participants found to be challenging were the physical demands placed on them, the regular commitment required, the need for that initial confidence and effort to fit in, poor weather conditions and supporting monitoring activities, where a lot of time and effort is spent, although for some the reward of seeing the impact emerge over time was significant.

“The long days of manual labour are difficult though.”

For non-environmental volunteers the more rewarding and enjoyable experiences were those where they could see the difference they were making, those that presented unique experiences, and those that utilised their personal strengths. The challenges were similar to those noted earlier in the volunteer journey – predominantly maintaining the commitment and balancing other time commitments, physical exertion, and the need to take part in mandatory training.

**Has taking part benefitted your life in any ways?**

Nearly all participants from the environmental volunteer groups found that taking part had benefited their lives. Many of these benefits overlap with the aspects of volunteering that were found to be most rewarding and enjoyable. The benefits noted most often, related to personal development and supporting career development, such as learning new skills, gaining knowledge, and having practical experiences to inform their career paths. Some also mentioned improvements in their physical and mental wellbeing such having more energy, feeling happier and having an improved mood.

“It affects my mood, I always feel better after, which I really didn’t expect. I think this was because of that mixture of connecting to nature and the social side, connecting with people.”
Table 2: Benefits experienced by participants, grouped into benefit type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical and mental wellbeing</th>
<th>Personal development and career support</th>
<th>Social and belonging</th>
<th>Esteem and self-actualisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Making friends</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved mood</td>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>Connect with people with similar interests</td>
<td>Sense of fulfilment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time outdoors</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Feeling inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>Improved work ethic</td>
<td>Sense of accomplishment</td>
<td>Feeling motivated to do more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved energy levels</td>
<td>Content for CV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports college acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training and education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A cluster of the benefits identified by participants related to connecting with or safeguarding the environment. This included:

- increased eco-consciousness;
- connecting with nature;
- increased passion and pro-activity about environmental issues; and
- increased understanding of the environment and wildlife.

“Once you care and respect the environment, you’re going to do things. Now, if I see something on the floor like clingfilm that an animal could eat, I’ll clean it up. It’s the small daily actions.”

“I have become much more passionate about wildlife and the environment. I am also more confident and passionate in all my views.”

**Has it changed how they feel about the environment?**

Generally, environmental volunteering changed participants’ feelings toward the environment. Those participants whose feelings hadn’t changed, were previously environmentally focussed.

“I care about it even more, and want to pursue it in the future with a geography degree.”

The experience was felt to have:

- given them increased awareness of environmental impacts, particularly
your own;
- reinforced and strengthened existing feelings, passions, and interests;
- made them realise the importance of the impacts (both positive and negative) of different behaviours;
- motivated them to further contribute to positive environmental change;
- increased their appreciation of local biodiversity;
- expanded their knowledge and understanding, in some cases enabling them to form their own opinions on issues; and
- made them realise and appreciate how hard environmental volunteers work.

“It has changed my way of thinking around how to turn a nonchalant attitude towards the environment to a more careful and considerate approach to doing things that affects the environment.”

Lucy’s volunteer journey:

Her first environmental volunteering experience was negative – they were all older people and were not welcoming to her as a young person. She left and didn’t consider it again for a while.

When she was in university, she suffered from severe social anxiety, and in the end decided she needed to spend time doing something mentally rewarding and meeting new people, so she decided to do EV. When looking at options, she found some parts of the process quite elitist, and she was made to feel alienated and self-conscious because of her non-nature/science based background.

She signed up for a year-long environmental volunteering training programme. It took her quite a while to feel comfortable, as she found it hard to approach the volunteers and staff. If she hadn’t signed up for a long-term programme she would have quit.

Once she had bonded with the other volunteers, and became engaged with the learning and the work, she started to see strong wellbeing benefits, as her anxiety was significantly reduced, and her confidence and happiness improved.

“Environmental volunteering organisers should also push messages about happiness and ‘joy-making’ not just goal meeting”
The keeping at it phase

What has helped them maintain their involvement?

Almost all environmental volunteer groups felt that an important motivator for continued involvement is a sense of accomplishment – seeing progress and the positive impact of their efforts. Some participants were motivated after seeing negative environmental impacts, and the desire to contribute to environmental conservation and have a positive impact. The volunteering experience being rewarding is also an important factor for non-environmental volunteers to maintain their involvement.

“My desire to have an impact. I am passionate about what I am working on. Knowing I can have an impact.”

For many of the participants, having frequent activities, as part of an established routine (such as weekly) was valuable to maintain involvement. Although some environmental and non-environmental volunteers found that flexibility, or low levels of commitment expected by the programme helped them to continue to take part.

Organisers, volunteer coordinators, and leading team members play a significant role in motivating volunteers to maintain involvement, through:

- providing regular updates on the programme and the need for volunteers;
- informing volunteers about other opportunities;
- providing support;
- being friendly, helpful, and organised;
- contributing to volunteers’ personal development; and
- keeping activities and involvement enjoyable.

Positive, enjoyable and unique experiences, supportive social interactions, and friendships within the volunteer groups are also a vital factor for many environmental and non-environmental volunteers to continue their involvement.

“I’ve been enjoying the activities we do, and the support provided by our close-knit group.”

As volunteering often forms part of a larger career plan, personal development is a key factor in continued involvement in a programme. Participants emphasise the importance of having a variety of programmes or activities available; and providing opportunities to participate in different, interesting tasks.

Internal factors that contribute to maintaining involvement include self-motivation, passion, and interest.
Do they do as much volunteering as they’d like to?

Most environmental volunteers said they would like to do more. Those environmental and non-environmental volunteers who said they would like to do more, identified a range of reasons why this could be difficult. Below we list these reasons in order of frequency (those at the top of the list = mentioned most often).

- competing commitments (such as their studies) and hobbies (for example art), and time availability;
- timing of activities (for example on weekdays or during holidays when you return home from university);
- lack of and seasonality of activities and opportunities;
- finances and difficulties getting to and from activities;
- a desire to be doing more practical, to do hands-on conservation;
- relevance of opportunities to future goals;
- cancellation of activities due to low uptake; and
- under-resourced groups and organisations.

“Exam pressure is the main thing hindering environmental volunteering. Also to some extent my other hobbies such as art. Many volunteering events are in the summer holidays so they often clash with other holidays and events that have been planned.”

Those participants that were happy with the amount of environmental volunteering they are participating in, comment on:

- their participation once to twice a week being sufficient;
- their placement in a long-term programme;
- the outcomes are satisfying;
- their contributions are better than nothing; and
- their desire to do other things with their time (e.g. sports, socialising).

“I am doing as much as I want, there are certain days I would rather be doing something else.”

What future plans do they have when it comes to volunteering?

The graphic below describes participants’ reflections on their future volunteering plans.
Environmental volunteers generally feel they would like to continue environmental volunteering in some way for as long as possible, but that this would depend on other commitments and careers, and the opportunities available. Some would only continue in the absence of employment, while others would only continue once they have the security of earning an income. Some were not sure about their future plans, saying that it would depend on other factors in their lives, or that they simply did not yet have plans.

"I want to carry on with what I do now and find some work related to the environmental when I go to university."

Those that discussed moving on from environmental volunteering, explained that this is because volunteering is not necessarily a long-term part of their lives, and that they would move into employment. Some mentioned that if their career was in the environmental sector, they would probably volunteer in a different sector; but if their career was not in the environmental sector, they would like to continue doing environmental volunteering.

The non-environmental volunteers that discussed their future plans mentioned continuing, and in a couple of cases pursuing environmental volunteering opportunities.

Is there anything that makes it hard to keep at environmental volunteering?

Some reasons for dropping out at the Keeping at it phase of the volunteer journey are similar to those of the previous phases – time, commitment, finances, transport, accessibility, availability of opportunities, confidence, self-motivation, and relevance to one’s future. For some participants, the absence of a proper commitment made it easier to quit when things became challenging.

“Time! Hate to sound like a broken record, but ... because lack of free time leads to people quitting volunteering.”

Some participants spoke about stopping at exam time, due to not having enough time, or due to pressure from parents and teachers. They tend to drop out of the volunteering programme, instead of discussing with organisers and arranging to take a temporary break. Once this break
happens, young people found it challenging to get involved again, as there is no trigger to motivate them to resume.

“I ended volunteering to focus on my GCSEs (after finishing DofE). Everyone told us GCSEs were going to be really intense, so we dropped everything else.”

Other reasons for dropping out at this phase mentioned by environmental volunteers are:

- having achieved your goals
  - you volunteer to get experience for your CV, and get a job;
  - delivering environmental benefits in other ways, such as through a job in the environmental sector;
- increasing need to earn an income;
- social interactions
  - experiencing loneliness in the programme;
  - being perceived as uncool by your friends; and
  - having negative experiences with other participants and/or staff;
- the nature of the programmes and activities
  - finding activities to be more difficult or demanding than expected;
  - finding the experience to be boring;
  - large gaps between activities such that you forget to re-engage;
  - short-notice cancellations (due to weather or insufficient turn-out);
- not receiving direct praise or reward, or seeing how the tasks fit into a bigger picture; and
- losing interest.

Would you consider environmental volunteering?

Young people taking part in the non-environmental volunteer groups were asked to consider whether they would be interested in environmental volunteering opportunities. Most identified the environment as an important issue, but more of a global one than something they could impact on through taking local actions. Many value their local environment and parks, and felt they would not want them to be dirty or littered, but they were not interested in participating in litter picking.

Some non-environmental volunteers had developed an interest in the environment or environmental volunteering, since starting as a volunteer, or with it becoming a focus in the school curriculum. The most appealing opportunities including volunteering for animal-oriented causes (as they are seen as helpless, or the impact is felt immediately), to volunteer overseas, or those that tie in to other interests (such as working with children). The barriers to participation that were mentioned were a lack of local opportunities matched with interests, and not knowing where to start.
“If someone said, ‘if you do this it’s going to help with pollution immediately’, I’d get straight on it.”

Those who were not interested in environmental volunteering stated that they did not identify as ‘environmental people’, or felt that there are more rewarding things that you can do with your time.

**Laura, Madelyn, and Edward’s volunteer journeys:**

Laura, Madelyn, and Edward are at university and grew up in semi-urban areas. They all pursued environmental volunteering out of passion and value for the natural world, created out of childhood exposure and experiences. They are studying in environmentally-related fields, and intend on pursuing careers in the sector.

Despite initial fears of taking part, they found themselves enjoying the experience, making friends, and growing in confidence. They found that the most rewarding part of environmental volunteering was acquiring knowledge and learning new skills. They have struggled at times to maintain their involvement to the level they would like, as their studies have had competing commitments; but their passion, interest, enjoyment, and career development kept them going.

As they are nearing the completion of their studies, they have had to start thinking about their long-term goals and plans, and find that getting an income is a higher priority. Laura might volunteer once she is settled in a high-paying career, while Edward hopes to build a career in the sector and so if he was to continue volunteering, would likely pursue a different type of volunteering.

“The hardest thing for me is that I am now looking at my career. I have volunteered for a long time, I have lots of experience. Enough to get jobs. So now I just want to work because money is important.”
3.2.2. Raising levels of participation

This section explores young people’s views about how participation in environmental volunteering could be increased drawing on all 16 focus groups. We explored this question by asking:

- Participants across all 16 focus groups to say what they liked and didn’t like about a selection of environmental volunteering marketing materials, including information booklets, promotional images, social media images and posters.
- Participants in the non-volunteer groups to reflect on their attitudes towards the environment and towards volunteering and to explore why they did not take part in environmental volunteering activities.
- The non-volunteers and those volunteering in non-environmental activities to consider a suite of environmental offers and to say what they liked and disliked about each one and to rank the in the order which they liked best. They were also asked to think about what their ideal offer might look like.

Non-volunteer’s attitudes toward the environment and towards volunteering

In the groups attended by non-volunteers, we asked participants to explore their understanding and attitudes towards the environment and towards taking part in volunteering.

Attitudes and awareness toward the environment

Younger participants reported that they had learned about the environment at school, specifically in geography and biology lessons. Some participants referred to the content of the curriculum as having educated them about environmental issues like climate change, pollution, and the importance of recycling. It was also common for participants to highlight the influence of specific teachers who inspired them to become involved in environmental volunteering.

“The only time I’ve learned properly about the environment is in school, in geography and biology. That’s the only reason that I know what I know, apart from David Attenborough. I don’t think many young people would watch stuff about it.”

“We have a Friday activity at school called horticulture, basically it’s just gardening. You could choose to do it on your Fridays. I didn’t do it.”

Compared with the environmental volunteer groups, it was less common for these participants to talk about the role and influence of family members in educating them about environmental issues.

Participants across all of the groups said that they had regularly heard about the environment on the news and on documentaries, with many mentioning
the BBC’s Blue Planet series and to a lesser extent on social media. Older participants in particular said that they were aware of national and local issues, such as campaigns to ban plastic straws, efforts to save the UK’s bee populations, and local petitions against motorway building and housing developments on green spaces.

When it came to media coverage of environmental issues participants often mentioned global issues like climate change and pollution and those affecting faraway places such as the coral reefs, rain forests and the polar ice caps. Many young people also felt that a lot of the coverage relating to the environment was ‘doom and gloom’ in its tone.

“TV and radio – is where we hear a lot of stuff – 80% of the news items are negative, decline seems to be the key word.”

“Environmental stuff in the media is usually negative, it’s a feeling of impending doom. There’s never any positive stuff.”

Because the coverage of environmental issues was often so negative, some felt that it was hard to feel inspired or motivated to take action.

“If you can’t work on the bigger stuff you might as well not bother with the smaller stuff.”

“There is some stuff you can’t really save, like the great barrier reef, that’s dying already you can’t bring it back. If we stop now is it going to get better or will it still die out?”

Young people often said that they did not think they can make a difference to the issues that they learn about. Whilst it is the big, global issues that are taught in schools and portrayed by the media, which can shock and entice, these are not as relatable as local issues. For this reason, participants felt that it was important not to be vague when talking to young people about helping the big environmental issues. Instead, show them exactly how their actions can make a difference.

In the warm-up activity when participants were asked to describe their associations with people who help to improve the environment, the common language used by participants included ‘caring’, ‘kind’, ‘conscientious’, ‘tree hugger’, ‘do-gooder’, ‘a minority’, ‘protesters’, ‘activists’ and ‘mostly older people’. Participants based in rural areas also identified ‘farmers’ and others whose livelihoods depended on looking after the environment.

**Attitudes and awareness towards volunteering**

When asked to describe their understanding of volunteering, many participants immediate responses were positive: ‘helping others’, ‘making a difference’, ‘being selfless’, and ‘being involved in the community’. However, others across the groups pointed out that volunteering can also be something which people do ‘for their own gain’, ‘to make themselves look good’.
“My mum does amateur dramatics volunteering, but she likes being the centre of attention, it’s for your own self gain and it can be good for your image “look at me, look how good I am.”

Reflecting on these different motivations, it was suggested that whatever an individual’s reasons were for taking part, volunteering was a win-win situation, because it benefited both the people taking part and the wider environment and community.

In several of the older groups some participants described volunteering as ‘unpaid work’ or ‘working for free’, and saw volunteering as a distraction from real work or exams or as something mainly done by older people.

Young people generally agreed that environmental volunteering might be perceived as uncool by some of their peers. A few existing volunteers said they do talk about it to their friends, and get teased ‘in a friendly way’, which they do not mind, or that their friends are not interested enough to really listen, or that they like the sound of it but do not consider it seriously themselves.

“I tell my friends about it all the time! But I do get the piss taken out of me a lot, about wearing fleeces or being an ‘old lady’”

However, a few full-time environmental volunteers spoke of their friends being jealous of their environmental volunteering activities because they could see what the benefits of taking part were.

Some non-volunteers were deterred by environmental volunteering offers that took place in public spaces, especially the litter picking activity as this was something they associated with community service or with school punishments.

Some participants made a distinction between local volunteering and volunteering for larger more global issues. In these instances, there was a view that taking part in local volunteering activities could potentially be more rewarding because you would be more likely to see the impact of your work. Others by contrast, felt unsure about whether taking action at a local action was worthwhile in the face of global environmental challenges like climate change and threats to biodiversity.

A few participants made the point that volunteering can be viewed as a waste of time by young people, but even more so by parents and teachers who may be entirely focused on academic studying and achievements. This can stop people starting environmental volunteering or, it can stop people openly discussing environmental volunteering.

“Some people look down on [full-time] environmental volunteering as you are not earning or being independent. They say, ‘you should have a career by now’. This can get you down. “

“I deferred going to university to try something out through a volunteering scheme, and my parents were like ‘dude, come on!’. They are fine with it now because they can see a future to it”
### 3.2.3. Reasons for not taking part in volunteering

Participants in the non-volunteer groups who had not taken part in any type of volunteering were asked to explain why this was the case. The key reasons are summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Not Taking Part</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what’s available</td>
<td>Across the groups, there was a widely held view that compared with sectors like sport, there were fewer environmental volunteering options available to take part in. Many – especially those in the younger age groups – also said that they were not sure about how they’d find out about opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty about relevance/ Suitability</td>
<td>Participants stated that environmental volunteering activities tended not to be specifically aimed at or marketed with young people in mind. In some cases, the environmental and other types of volunteering that they were aware of in their area (e.g. local litter picks, charity shop volunteering) seemed to be dominated by older and retired people. A few older participants who had volunteered in the past said that they had stopped once they had realized that it wasn’t considered ‘cool’ to be taking part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited time/ energy and completing demands</td>
<td>Many participants across the groups cited limited time and competing demands as barriers to taking part. This would make it especially difficult for them to commit to volunteering activities that would require regular attendance. Students often talked about having to prioritise revision and studying, and those in employment often said that in their limited free time their priority was unwinding and catching up with friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs and travel barriers</td>
<td>Participants particularly those based in rural areas cited barriers around the costs and difficulty of getting to and from volunteering activities. A few participants had the perception that environmental volunteering activities were expensive to take part in (e.g. equipment and travel costs) and competitive to get places on, especially when it came to activities that take place abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty about the value of taking part</td>
<td>Some participants said that they did not feel clear about the benefits and positive outcomes associated with environmental volunteering. Participants who were aware of options reported that they were not always convinced that existing local activities would be interesting or give them a sense of pride and accomplishment. A few reported that volunteering activities focused on helping disabled people or the homeless seemed like they would make more of a tangible difference compared with environmental volunteering.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.4. Reflections on how volunteering offers are designed

Across all of the groups with volunteers and non-volunteers, participants were asked to discuss the key considerations and ‘must have’ features that an environmental volunteering offer should have.

Covering costs and making it convenient

All young people agreed that easy or pre-arranged and paid for transport would help to make volunteering more accessible. Volunteering opportunities held in convenient local locations also appealed to many because no transport would be required. Those who had done other types of volunteering often said that the fact that activities were taking place in convenient locations was often the deciding factor in choosing it.

“They need to come to you and arrange everything, accommodation, food. With mine you get on the bus from school with a whole group and get taken everywhere”

Young people were often put off volunteering offers that required them to bring their own equipment and felt that schemes should cover this. Many also felt that food and refreshments should be provided where possible. For example, one group felt that having dinner provided would make a weekday evening activity much more appealing.

Participants valued volunteering staff using easy methods of communication between sessions. Several felt that use of WhatsApp was an easy and efficient method of communicating with young people.

Offering choice and flexibility

Across the groups, participants felt that providers should offer flexibility and choice about how and when young people take part. A common suggestion across the groups was offering monthly and fortnightly schedules, alongside occasional one-off activities that anyone can join, as well as options for remote or independent working, with the ability to adjust to their own schedule. Many young people said that it was common to have Saturday jobs that would prevent weekly participation.

“Once a fortnight would be a good balance – you could get more comfortable and build friendships”

In terms of time of the week, weekends and weekday early evenings were when young people said that they would normally be available. Participants also found activities involving late nights off-putting.

“I don’t want it to take part too late in the evening. Better to go to volunteering straight after work or school.”

Offering new and rewarding experiences

Participants, especially those in the younger age groups, wanted to take part in volunteering activities that promised to be enjoyable and give them new and rewarding experiences. Many liked the option of going to a
national park because it offered them a chance to experience a new place.

“You’d be seeing places and getting outdoors, I love looking at places that have some natural beauty.”

Clarity about the outcomes associated with taking part

Many participants wanted to see evidence that volunteering offers were well organised and had clear outcomes and goals that participants would be working towards. Activities with immediate or visible impacts were felt to be more motivating, especially if this impact is seen in your local community.

If the impact of a volunteering activity is not visible or instant, the organisers should make efforts to evidence the impact achieved by volunteers. When reviewing the environmental volunteering offers, participants often dismissed options where they were not convinced that they would have a genuine impact on the cause.

Some participants, particularly those from the older age groups, were more interested in activities where there was the promise of achieving some kind of longer-term impact, addressing the cause of a problem rather than a quick fix. This was very clearly illustrated when young people considered the litter-picking volunteering option, which was appealing to some for its immediate and visible impact, but not appealing to others because it was not addressing the root causes of the problem (people’s propensity to drop litter).

“Litter picking can always be done, but the litter will always come back. If you could change attitudes that might be more impactful.”

“If it was my park you’d clean it on Saturday and it’d be dirty the next day anyway. One Saturday is not really going to do anything.”

Young people from all groups wanted to take part in activities that would enhance their CVs and employability. Participants often said that they would be prepared to commit to more demanding volunteering schedules where they were confident about the skills and experience that they would gain from taking part.

“Once a fortnight is quite a big ask, but then again it’s a really good skill. You can put this in your UCAS application. You might not get an opportunity like this again.”

Offering a range of activities and learning opportunities

Participants felt that environmental volunteering offers should try to offer a range of activities, roles, and experiences “under one roof”. It suggested that this would help to attract and retain participants. Participants felt that there should be both physical and outdoors based activities alongside activities such as campaigning work that involved working at a desk or giving presentation other young people. When participants were asked to consider
a volunteering offer that involved supporting a social media campaign, some felt that the experience of working alone and of not knowing what the impact was unappealing.

“I would prefer to go out and actually do something. You don’t feel like you’re doing anything just typing.”

“You’d feel lazy doing this sitting and clicking, it doesn’t feel you’d be achieving something.”

However, others saw desk based work as a chance to develop specialist skills which would look good on their CV and help them progress.

**The mix of people attending**

Many participants preferred environmental volunteering offers that were attended mainly by people of a similar age group to them as this offered more potential to make friends.

“If giving up time on your weekend you need to know that there is the social side, with young people!”

“The age mix is really important, as it makes it more of a social event, also you might be able to persuade friends to come along.”

However, many preferred it if a mix of age groups attends activities. These participants felt that it would be beneficial to meet adults in a new context and gain social skills and learn from them. An older group specified that a mixed age group might be better for one-off sessions, such as a litter picking event, but for longer term activities where the goal was forming friendships, it might work better being targeted at particular age groups.

Participants especially those from the older age groups strongly welcomed spaces that encouraged people from different backgrounds to come together. These participants often made the point that environmental volunteering offers may often be dominated by certain types of people. This can make it daunting or unappealing for people from different backgrounds to take part in.

“It’s really obvious that everyone in this group is white and similar to each other.”

“It’s hard to connect and integrate if you do not see someone that represents you… You won’t fight to overcome other barriers (finance, travel, confidence) if you feel less included or welcome.”

**Utilising young people’s existing skills and talents**

Participants felt strongly that staff running volunteering schemes should support young people to use their existing skills and talents. For example, it was suggested that those studying arts or with creative skills and interests should be given the opportunity to help make campaign materials, because they have the right skills, they need experience and they have a good
understanding of the target audience. Participants in the younger age groups felt that it was important that staff were committed to trusting them, listening to their views and to not “treating them like kids” or school pupils.

“You don’t want staff to be bossy like teachers, you want to feel valued.”

Some young people said they would be more interested in offers that provided opportunities to take on leadership roles, or which gave them room to be creative or where they could lead the decision-making process.

Volunteer Example: One young environmental volunteer told us that she had designed an environmental volunteering project focused on improving mental health. She is currently promoting her idea to the adult decision makers in the volunteering organisation. However, she feels frustrated that even if they move forward with her idea, as a volunteer, she will not have the opportunity to be involved in it.

“It’s hard for young people to own opportunities, even if they make them themselves”

Supervision and safety

It was emphasised that staff should offer guidance and support and they should flex this support depending on what young people’s needs and confidence levels are. They should assess how comfortable each young person is with independent working as some found the prospect of doing so daunting.

Young people were drawn to activities that seemed safe, welcoming, and inclusive. Some participants particularly those in the younger age groups, found the offer that involved taking part in environmental activism daunting and were nervous that it could place them in situations where there was conflict, or where the atmosphere was intimidating.

3.2.5. How to market environmental volunteering offers more effectively

Across all of the groups with volunteers and non-volunteers, participants were asked to how to market and communicate environmental volunteering offers effectively.

The importance of segmentation

Young people across the focus groups said that it is important to tailor marketing materials to young people. They felt that ‘generic’ messages will be less likely to appeal and connect with young people. It was felt that organisations need to listen to what young people are saying, and run campaigns focused on their needs so that the messages feel relevant to them.
Addressing young people’s concerns

Participants felt that promotional materials should attempt to address head-on the common concerns that they might have when considering taking part. Concerns could include that young people are not capable of taking part because they lack the skills and confidence, and concerns about their safety when taking part, or that they might be ‘left to get on with it’. Highlighting the training and support arrangements to help them start and continue taking part would help to address this.

Signalling credibility

Young people want to be involved in activities and schemes that have external credibility. It was felt that credibility can be demonstrated by having professional looking materials, by providing thorough information, by creating affiliations with brands they know and like, and by giving young people a recognised certificate (or similar) when they have completed. Actions to support the credibility and skills gained from volunteering will also help to encourage support from parents.

Some environmental volunteers suggested that EV’s wellbeing benefits, such as building social confidence and being happy and active, should also be communicated to young people.

It was also noted that the credibility of volunteering and charities has been damaged by recent charity scandals, with several young people referring to charities as scams, or expressing significant doubt that they make any impact.

Offering incentives

There was a view that incentives might be needed to tempt some young people to try volunteering. Some participant felt that shopping vouchers or concert tickets could be appealing. A few felt it was important to offer young people something that appeals to them personally which they can’t buy easily, or cheaply.

Role models and popular culture

Across the groups, participants felt that there should be more “relatable” environmental role models, particularly from ethnic minorities and people from more deprived backgrounds. This was more frequently raised during the focus groups held in urban settings and by the older participants.

“If a rich, white person tells me to save the environment, I’m not going to do it. But if you bring in someone who’s on their level and they tell you things, you’ll take it on.”

“Environmental sciences and volunteering is a very white pursuit, people are shocked when they find out I study geography let alone that do environmental volunteering. It’s important that the

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2 This approach can be seen in the RockCorps programme [http://www.rockcorps.com/]
Some compared the status and prominence of sports role models to the lack of environmental role models. They said that when they were children, sports role models are ‘heroes’, always on the TV, and inspiring passion for the topic. It was also suggested that children learn to associate “the outside” with sport rather than the environment, as this is how they play outdoors.

Many young people felt that compared with sport there are few comparable role models for the environment. David Attenborough was mentioned as the only major environmental role model in almost every focus group. Many saw him as an inspiring and influential figure when it came to caring about and taking action on environmental issues.

“I want to volunteer just for him – David Attenborough – he is a national hero, he needs to be protected at all costs!”

However, some said that he can also seem a bit distant due to his age.

**Negative stereotypes about mistrust of young people**

In some of the groups, young people said that they were affected by negative stereotypes which adults had about them. Some reported that they do not feel welcome in predominantly adult spaces and a couple said that they had experienced unwelcoming attitudes and behaviours by older volunteers and organisers when taking part in environmental volunteering activities.

“My first experience (age 14) was all old people, which was a huge barrier. They can be patronising, or at the very least always discuss your age or relate everything to your age.”

In some of the non-volunteer groups there were a few cases where participants said that they had been made to feel undervalued as young people in other contexts where they interact with older people (e.g. in school). Some also reported that adults can assume they are disinterested or even that they are untrustworthy.

“People don’t trust youth, it’s often an attitude of ‘we don’t trust you – go weed the carpark’”

“Everyone generalises us, in my local Sainsburys, only two young people are allowed in there, so we have to queue, one person does something stupid and all 15-year olds are treated like devils.”

“If people see litter they instantly blame young people, young people are easy to target - stupid kids”
Using celebrities to appeal to young people

Two of the environmental volunteering offers which participants were asked to review included celebrity and royal family endorsement.

The response to this was very mixed. Some younger participants felt that both hypothetical packages would benefit from gaining high levels of publicity and public interest driven by the celebrity involvement.

“It’s not for me personally, but people would be interested. It would give it a load more popularity if someone said Beyoncé is involved, people would go and find out what it was”

“I’d do that! Because… Beyoncé”

As well as gaining attention to the cause, a couple of young people suggested other ways the link to a celebrity could be beneficial, including raising the credibility of the experience on their CV, and reassurance that the organisation is well funded.

However, many participants were not so positive about the idea of celebrity endorsement. This was partly because there was a suspicion that they may not be genuinely involved or interested, and it was more for the celebrity’s own image than for the cause.

“I hate stuff like that, it makes her look good. She’s just doing it so she looks like she’s helping the environment. She’s absolutely minted, if she wanted to really help the environment they should donate money or sponsor them. It’s a bit tacky”
Others felt that the use of celebrities could appear too ‘try hard’. Some also felt that it could damage the appeal of a volunteering offer if the celebrity used was not deemed relevant to the issue or cause.

“If that flashed up on my social media I’d have to look at it again, because sometimes things are fake… Beyoncé and endangered animals – I’d have to look twice to see if it was legit.”

“To me this feels very try hard, it assumes just sticking Beyoncé in front of this will bring more attention”

A couple of young people who had previously volunteered in other sectors felt that the people leading change for the cause should be used instead, making them more prominent and in turn creating role models.

“I would rather shake hands with the people actually doing the cause; I’m not sold on Beyoncé”

“Give them [environmental volunteering leaders] recognition for it… rather than use celebs, you should make them into the celebs”

3.2.6. Marketing approaches

Participants emphasised that the information about volunteering must be easy to find and promoted using a range of channels and approaches.

A database of volunteering opportunities

Those who volunteered in other sectors often expressed interest in environmental volunteering but said they had heard about other opportunities first, or didn’t see environmental options when they were planning their volunteering.

“I think it would be interesting, I didn’t even know that it was a sort of volunteering… I think there are people out there who would definitely be interested, but maybe I’m a bit ignorant and don’t know enough about what’s out there”

– a non-environmental-volunteer regarding a hypothetical environmental volunteering opportunity

Young people who had volunteered, both for the environment or for other sectors, suggested that there should be a database for searching and browsing volunteering offers (environmental and otherwise), according to the individuals own criteria (their available time, skills they want to learn).

Some said this would make it easier for them find something that appealed to their interests as well as being compatible with their schedule and location. Some said this would help young people find opportunities they didn’t know existed, and would present environmental opportunities alongside better-known types of volunteering, raising awareness and enabling a comparison of benefits.

“Where do you look to find something that is legit? Say ‘this is what I am interested in’ then you could get a load of offers – a
website that could give customised results would be good.”

Social media
Young people across all groups tended to agree that social media platforms such as Instagram were one of the most effective ways to reach them as they are unlikely to seek the information out unprompted, and so it should come directly to them.

"I have volunteered for a lot of companies, but I still don’t regularly check their website. I am busy. It’s my time – better if these things just pop up on social media “

Some said they would use social media to see if any of their friends like the organisation or are involved in the opportunity already. Most young people reported that they could not remember seeing any environmental volunteering opportunities in their social media feeds.

"It’s not appearing on social media to encourage us to get involved. If I were more exposed to it I’d be more inclined to do it."

Visiting and collaborating with schools
Young people felt that schools were an important way to reach large numbers of young people, yet there was a view amongst young people that few organisations were working with education providers as much as they could. Furthermore, the extent to which schools were promoting volunteering was felt to be varied.

"My school did lots to encourage volunteering, they liked having different clubs – but the students didn’t want to take part that much, it was more the school pushing it."

"The only volunteering available was setup by the students themselves – the school wasn’t interested."

"My school never explained the point of volunteering, they just used it as a promotional photo opportunity. Go there and let us take photos of you."

An environmental volunteer in one of the older and predominantly urban focus groups, said that schools should consider that people who struggle academically or are interested in environmental careers may benefit from being outside, and exploring alternative routes to learning, either alongside or instead of studying books.

"I didn’t get into it earlier because I found a lot of pressure from school to only do academic things. By the time I was old enough to volunteer I was heading towards 6th form and had to spend time on studies. My school was not accepting of environmental volunteering. They didn’t understand that it is a route to a proper career."
Some young people who had volunteered in other sectors, recollected that the organisations that recruited them had visited their school, and had sometimes given a presentation on the cause and/or the benefits of participating. Several of these people reported that this harnessed peer influence, triggering a snowball of sign-ups; once a couple of people put their names down, their friends joined, creating a larger movement that made even more young people sign-up out of a fear of being left out.

“You should be getting involved in schools as people want to follow each other. If they see other people getting involved they will want to take part – there needs to be presentations, workshops, things that are memorable, so people will go and learn more or go on the website.”

“We had an assembly at school with the National Citizen’s Service. Loads of my friends were filling out forms in assembly and I didn’t want to be the only one not doing it”.

Some recommended arranging volunteering fairs at schools and universities, to push the benefits of volunteering generally, but also to present a range of options to consider with evident links to career and educational paths.

**Peer-to-peer recruitment approaches**

There was a view that ‘just being asked’ by the right person can sometimes be enough of a trigger to help people to take part. A few volunteers (environmental and in other sectors) said that they had brought along a friend or sibling to their volunteering activity, leading to their sustained involvement.

It was suggested that young people who were the most confident and passionate about environmental volunteering could become more formal ambassadors and role models for their peers.

“It’s fun
you’ll make a difference to an important cause
you’ll learn lots and gain skills
• it’s fun
• you’ll make a difference to an important cause
• you’ll learn lots and gain skills
• **you’ll meet people and make friends**

Campaigns did not need to contain all of these “hooks” to be appealing, but if they lacked all of them or most of them this could lead to a poor reaction from participants.

“This is confusing. It’s not specific enough. It’s not telling me what they’re doing; just what I can get.” (campaign E)

“It’s just a load of information but it doesn’t get you interested at all as there is no explanations of the cause.” (campaign E)

The design can also indicate to young people whether it is suitable for their age. Details such as the font, colours and type of images used often gave the impression that the campaign were ‘too young’ for our participants, particularly for campaigns C and E, which use a wide range of primary colours and text bubbles or speech bubbles.

“looks like something that would be up in a school hall like ‘stages of learning’, looks a bit young” (campaign C)

“The font is for 5-year olds, curly and childish” (campaign E)

**Using photographs of volunteers**

A lack of photos often put young people off, by making the opportunity seem vague or making it difficult to picture themselves actually taking part in the activity.

“There are no photographs, so you don’t have an impression if where you would be. This could be in an urban park, or a woodland – it isn’t clear” (campaign C)

“It doesn’t tell you what you’re actually doing, I’d rather see a photo” (campaign C)

While images were seen as important, if used, young people will scrutinise who is shown in the photo, what they are doing, and how they appear to be finding the experience.

Participants often commented on the range of ages and backgrounds of photographed volunteers, being discouraged by a lack of diversity, and encouraged by seeing young people in the group and a balance of genders.

“There is ethnic diversity… ethnic diversity is the main thing the environment needs” (campaign G)

“All men and a bit older, I wouldn’t be as excited to get involved…I would look at this and think oh there is another barrier to cross” (campaign B)

A couple of groups said that while showing ethnic diversity is important, campaigns should be careful not to try too hard and uses images that could appear stereotypical or as if the photo is staged to ‘tick boxes’.
What the people photographed are doing is also important. Photos of volunteers that do not show the actual volunteering activity often drew questions about what was involved in the opportunity.

“Do they just sit in a circle? What are they doing? Are they having a barbecue?” (campaign A)

“Some kind of before and after photos would be good, to show difference made” (campaign B)

However, whilst photos that do show the activity were encouraging for many young people, others were put off by photos showing manual labour. This was particularly the case for campaign H, as the volunteers photographed were wearing high-vis jackets. Some were also put off where the photos showed outdoors scenes where there was bad weather.

“It’s just the high-vis thing…don’t put that on the front. “

“If you didn’t already know what was going on it may look like community service because of the high-vis jackets.”

Photos of volunteers have stronger appeal when the subjects look happy or as though they are forming friendships; participants always commented on this positively.

“A big bit of it is community, devoting so much time, so want to be around nice people. Mainly the cause that gets you that, but the social community element is important. “ (campaign A)

However, if images of people having fun or working together looks overly staged or forced this can be off putting and less genuine. Some participants felt that the “unnatural” or “staged” look of the photos in some of the marketing materials resembled stock photos.

“The people with spades are cringey but I can see what they are doing. Looks a bit like a staged photo, people shovelling don’t really smile do they?” (campaign F)

“Cringey - adverts shouldn’t try too hard. Avoid staged or “forced fun” images” (campaign A)

“Look at the faces in the top left-hand picture, how fake does that look?” (campaign G)
Getting your attention and making you care

Across the groups, participants valued campaign materials that were attention grabbing and which contained images and language that was memorable, shocking, funny, enlightening or thought provoking. These were contrasted with materials that had lots of text, no clear focal point and no clear message or hooks. Many young people really liked a set of adverts for a campaign aimed at highlighting plastic pollution on the UK’s coastlines. The campaign involved a series of striking images which placed items that caused coastal pollution alongside sea animals and objects like surf boards.

“It makes you think, it doesn’t tell you”

“some images are so overused and don’t issue a response, these are new and make you think”

Some said that the use of familiar objects such as the plastic bottle, forced them to think about the impact of their own everyday activities.

“You’d remember that, you’d be thinking about it when you put your plastic bottle in the bin or buy another water bottle.”

However, a few participants did not like the approach which evoked words such as “death”, “guilt”, “apocalyptic” and “hopeless”. Comparing it to another campaign, a participant said the shocking images are ‘scaremongering’ and overly negative, giving a message that ‘we’re all going to die’. However, other participants in the group countered this by commenting that the negative feelings are what encourage you to think about changing your behaviour.

“If you saw a picture of a cow being killed, you wouldn’t want to eat meat. This makes you shocked and want to make a change.”

“It’s showing us how it’s our fault as well – we’re responsible for litter and pollution, so it makes us feel guilty.”

While participants thought that eye catching materials that had few text could be impactful, they should be backed up with some sort of link so that you could find out more.

“This image is very powerful and gets you interested, but it’s not obvious what the next step is – needs a website or number or email something” (campaign D)

The materials that were deemed to be less eye-catching to participants, were compared to school text books, or posters they would see in a doctor’s waiting room. Some young people said that these would blend into the background.

“You see a lot of stuff like this – it doesn’t catch your eye… it looks like it would be in doctor’s surgery or school” (campaign E)

“You know when you’re in primary school and you have to analyse those weird things in text books and they’re 10 years out,
that’s what it reminds me of” (campaign F)

**Professional design and branding**

Young people made significant conjectures about the volunteering offer and organisation by assessing the quality of the presentation and graphic design.

“It looks well designed and the good photography helps. Bad design would stop me going” (campaign B)

Materials that are well designed and which look professional helped to convey that the volunteering offer was credible and worth participant’s time.

“This looks professional, a proper organisation who knows what they’re doing” (campaign B)

“Looks like it’s been thrown together on word. Needs to be creative but also professional” (campaign G)

“These people can’t even produce a poster, why would I go to them for technology?” (campaign G)

Where participants recognised brands and logos it helped to give the campaigns and materials more credibility. For example, one item benefited from its affiliation with the National Lottery Fund. Participants also liked it when marketing materials used a consistent style and branding approach as this could help them to build awareness of a scheme.

**Finding out more**

Once the materials have got people’s attention and interest participants would then want to be able to access need to know information quickly and easily. It was felt that a lack of information can leave young people feeling less sure about the opportunity.

“I love it – plays on your human curiosity. Someone is more likely to look it up if it is just a picture.”

“immediately effective as relevant. It might not get people involved straight away, but it’s the first step as it could start the thoughts that eventually lead to action”

Participants do not necessarily want all of the information on the initial material that they see, as this can lead to text heavy outputs which are not engaging. However, for a leaflet that is aiming to be more informational at a minimum it should outline:

- What is the cause, and who is the organisation?
- What do volunteers need to do and what can they gain?
- Where can they find out more?

Some young people said that if a campaign grabs their attention while they are on the move (e.g. at a train station) they will take a note or a photo of
the poster on their phone and research it later. For this they need to see a website address or an organisation and key word to search.

Some young people suggest using hashtags as a quick way of directing to information, as they are easily searchable and familiar to young people.
3.3. Survey of young people

Having completed the focus groups with young people and analysed the different strands of evidence we designed a survey to test the key findings with a nationally representative sample of a 1001 young people aged 16 – 24-year in England. The survey was co-designed, with Traverse, YouGov and Defra all inputting into the design. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix E of the appendices report.

The survey was conducted between 1st-5th October 2018 using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 800,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Email invitations containing a generic link were sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The responding sample has been weighted and is representative of all 16 to 24-year olds in England. The profile was derived from census data.

Throughout this chapter, we only report on sub group differences where they are statistically significant.

In Figure 4 below, we provide a summary of the key findings from the survey. We have used the abbreviation ‘EV’ for environmental volunteering.
Figure 5: Key findings from the nationally representative survey of young people

### Survey overview

1001 young people aged 16 – 24-year in England were surveyed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the last twelve months most respondents had visited a…</th>
<th>BME and C2DE respondents were less likely to visit natural spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>park or green space</td>
<td>ABC1 respondents were more likely to show pro-environmental behaviour and attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Non-BME respondents were more likely to say that their favourite places are outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seaside or coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or a woodland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteering was promoted a lot in respondents’ sixth form/colleges, and universities (20% and 21%)

But the extent to which education settings promote any form of volunteering varies a great deal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considering</th>
<th>Taking part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>It’s rewarding</strong> 50%</td>
<td>62% of respondents felt that working with schools, universities, and employers would be helpful to make EV more accessible to younger people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It’s educational</strong> 40%</td>
<td>To make EV more appealing, 49% of respondents thought one should show the personal benefits, and 44% thought that one should offer rewards or incentives to encourage people to try it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It’s hard work</strong> 45%</td>
<td>Desk based work was most often seen as top priority type of EV amongst C2DEs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45% of respondents had seen some type of volunteering encouraged on social media in the last 12 months – of these, 22% had seen EV encouraged

27% of respondents were aware of some type of EV option in their area

Females and ABC1s were more likely to consider taking part
3.3.1. Attitudes towards the environment

Respondents were asked to say to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about their attitudes and behaviours relating to the environment. The overall results are presented in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Environmental attitudes and behaviours. Base 1001

Across many of the statements, respondents in social grades ABC1 are more likely than those in C2DE to show pro environmental behaviour and attitudes. When it comes to ethnicity and race, non BME respondents are more likely to say that their favourite places are outside, in nature, and that they take notice of the wildlife wherever there are.

Respondents who agreed with the above statements were much more likely to have taken part in environmental volunteering. For example,

- 82% of environmental volunteers indicated that they ‘know people close to them (e.g. friends, family, colleagues etc.) who are passionate about environmental issues’, while 13% disagreed.
- 85% of environmental volunteers indicated that ‘growing up their family enjoyed spending time in the outdoors’, while 12% disagreed.
- 80% of environmental volunteers indicated that ‘their favourite places are outdoors’, while 17% disagreed.
3.3.2. Visiting natural spaces

Respondents were asked to say whether they had been to a range of natural spaces in the last 12 months. The overall results are presented in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Natural spaces visited in the last 12 months. Base: 1001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Space</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A park/ green space</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The seaside/ coast</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woodland</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A National Park (e.g. Lake District, Peak District etc.)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A nature reserve</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/ can’t recall</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of sub group differences, compared with non BME respondents, fewer BME respondents said that they had visited a range of natural spaces:

- The seaside/ coast (77% compared to 50%)
- A woodland (66% compared to 39%)
- A nature reserve (44% compared to 21%)
- A national park (50% compared to 32%)

Respondents from social grades C2DE are also less likely to visit all of the natural spaces outlined in Figure 7 compared with those in ABC1. When it comes to gender and age (16-20 vs 21-24) there are no significant differences.

3.3.3. Rates of volunteering

Respondents were asked to say how often and what types of volunteering they had done across different time periods. Drawing from NCVO’s definition\(^3\), volunteering was defined to participants as where you “spend time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit someone who you’re not closely related to, the environment, or the local community. The decision to volunteer is a choice freely made by the person taking part.”

- 71% of respondents indicated that they have taken part in volunteering in the past, with:
  - 25% doing so in the last 3 months.
  - 16% within the last 3-12 months

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\(^3\) Definition available at: [https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering)
- 31% more than 12 months ago (BME respondents were more likely to select this option, 33% compared with 20%)

- When it comes to types of volunteering people have taken part in in the past 12 months, ‘the environment/ animals’ is the fourth most common type:

Figure 8: Types of volunteering carried out over the past 12 months. Base: 403

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Volunteering</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth/ Children’s activities (outside schools)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, disability and social welfare</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s education/ schools</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The environment/ animals</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local community of neighbourhood groups</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies, recreation, arts, social clubs</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport/ Exercise</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping neighbours/ people in your community</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elderly</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice/ Human rights</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/ First aid</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union activity</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Thinking about their most recent volunteering experience, respondents were asked to say how often they had taken part:
  - 25% had done so on a one-off occasion;
  - 24% had done so on an ad hoc basis (more than once but not on a regular basis); and
  - 43% had done so on a regular basis.

- All respondents who said they had volunteered at any time in the past

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4 The volunteering categories are taken from the Community Life survey: [https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey)
were asked if they had ever taken part in environmental volunteering, with 26% or 212 respondents saying that they had done so. In terms of sub group differences:

- ABC1s were more likely to say they have taken part than C2DEs (29% compared with 20%)
- When it comes to gender, race and ethnicity, and whether they are based in an urban, town and fringe or rural area there are no significant differences, although urban respondents were more likely to have taken part (27% compared with 23% for town and fringe and 21% for rural).

- ABC1 respondents were more likely to say that family members had volunteered for any cause (51% compared to 35%) and to say that friends had volunteered (65% compared to 51%).
- In terms of the profile of respondents who have never taken part in any type of volunteering: roughly equal proportions are either ABC1 or C2DE, aged 16-20 or 21 to 24, are BME and non BME. They are more likely to be male (23% compared with 16%) and unemployed (34% compared with 17% who were full time students, 18% who were in full time work and 19% who were in part time work).

3.3.4. **Awareness of volunteering options**

Respondents were asked to say whether they were aware of environmental volunteering options and whether they had ever considered taking part:

- 45% of respondents said they had seen some type of volunteering encouraged on social media in the last 12 months, and of these, 22% said they have seen environmental volunteering being encouraged on this platform. This compares with 21% who had seen environmental volunteering being encouraged on “some other website” and 18% who said they had seen environmental volunteering encouraged in the press.
- 54% of respondents were aware of one or more volunteering opportunities in their area, with participants from social grades ABC1 being the most likely to be aware of 3 or more opportunities in their area.
- 66% of respondents said that they would know where to go to find out about volunteering opportunities if they needed/wanted to, while 34% said they would not.
- 27% of respondents said that they were aware of some type of environmental volunteering option in their area.
- Respondents were asked to say whether any of the following people in their life had encouraged them to take part in environmental volunteering. The overall results are as follows:
  - Teachers 24%
  - Friends 22%
  - Family members 21%
  - Colleagues 12%
Youth workers 8% (BME respondents were more likely to select this option (13% compared with 7%)

3.3.5. Considering taking part

- Of those who have never taken part, 38% have never considered taking part in environmental volunteering while 39% have.
- Females and social grades ABC1 were more likely to have considered taking part.
- Those who had considered taking part were asked to say what their reasons were for not doing so were.

Figure 9: Reasons why respondents did not take part in environmental volunteering. Base: 313

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t have the time</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It didn’t suit my schedule</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a lack of information about what to expect</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was too difficult to take part in (e.g. getting there)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are things I like doing more</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one I know does it</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.6. Promotion of volunteering in education and work settings

Respondents were asked to say the extent to which any kind of volunteering was promoted in different types of settings. Those who said volunteering had been promoted to any extent, were then asked about the promotion of environmental volunteering. As shown in Table 3 below, the extent to which any kind of volunteering was promoted in education and work settings varied considerably.
Table 3: Extent to which volunteering is promoted in different types of settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Promoting any kind of volunteering (base: 1001)</th>
<th>Promoting environmental volunteering (base: variable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>Not very much/ not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary schools</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary schools</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth form / colleges</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplaces</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.7. What young people associate with environmental volunteering

All respondents were asked to say what words they associated with environmental volunteering by ticking the words or phrases that they think best applied. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Words/phrases associated with environmental volunteering. Base: 1001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive perceptions</th>
<th>Negative perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding 50%</td>
<td>Hard work 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational 40%</td>
<td>It’s mostly older people who do it 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social 31%</td>
<td>It’s not for me 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to find out more 21%</td>
<td>Boring 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting 12%</td>
<td>Difficult 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun 16%</td>
<td>Daunting 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncool 5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who are female and in social grades ABC1 were more likely to select the option “I’d like to find out more”. Non BME respondents were more likely to select the option “rewarding” (52% compared with 42%).
3.3.8. Reasons why young people are not taking part in environmental volunteering

Respondents who indicated that they had not taken part in volunteering/environmental volunteering were asked to say in an open-ended question what would make them more likely to take part in the future. The main types of responses are presented below in order of frequency.

- If I had more free time
- If there were more nearby/local options
- If the options were more convenient and flexible e.g. days/times/duration/commitment level
- If there was more advertising and information, including about what it entails
- If my friends and/or family were taking part
- If it were more embedded/promoted in my workplace or education setting
- If I were less socially anxious
- If there were more young people taking part

3.3.9. What would encourage young people to do more environmental volunteering

Respondents who indicated that they had taken part in environmental volunteering were asked to say in an open-ended question what would encourage them to do more in the future. The types of responses are similar to those raised by respondents who had not taken part (see 3.3.8):

- If I had more free time
- If there were a greater range of convenient opportunities
- If it were more embedded/promoted in my workplace or education setting
- If there were more nearby/local options

3.3.10. Causes and types of environmental volunteering that are most appealing

All respondents were asked to imagine that they could give their time to help an environmental cause and then select the ONE cause, if any, that would most appeal to them. The overall results are set out in Figure 10 below.
Figure 10: Which ONE environmental cause would appeal to you the MOST? Base: 1001

The types of environmental volunteering that respondents would consider taking part in are presented in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11: Which of the following environmental volunteering options would you ever consider taking part in? Base: 1001
Across many of the above options (maintaining a national park, collecting data about wildlife, taking part in a local litter pick), social grades ABC1 were more likely to select any option compared with social grades C2DE.

### 3.3.11. Making environmental volunteering more accessible and appealing

Respondents were asked to say what option would help MOST to make environmental volunteering more **accessible** to younger people. The overall results are set out in Figure 12 below.

**Figure 12: Which ONE if any of the following would help to make environmental volunteering more accessible to young people? Base: 1001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with schools, universities and employers to connect young people with environmental volunteering opportunities</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling environmental volunteering opportunities at times that suit young people (e.g. during school/ university holidays, certain times in the week etc.)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More accessible and convenient options (e.g. easy to get to)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a national media campaign to raise awareness of the opportunities and benefits of environmental volunteering</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it easier to find local environmental volunteering opportunities online</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked to say what option would help MOST to make environmental volunteering more **appealing** to younger people. The overall results are set out in Figure 13 below.
Figure 13: Which ONE if any of the following would help to make environmental volunteering more appealing to young people? Base: 1001

- Offering rewards/ incentives to encourage people to give it a go (e.g. a shopping voucher): 26%
- Showing the personal benefits of doing environmental volunteering (e.g. getting new skills, boosting CVs, making friends etc.): 20%
- More volunteering opportunities specially designed for young people: 12%
- Trying to break myths and negative stereotypes about environmental volunteering held by young people: 7%
- Hearing from other young people like me about their positive experiences of taking part: 7%
- Offering taster sessions: 6%
- Not applicable – I don’t think anything would help: 10%

Across both the above questions on how to make environmental volunteering more accessible and more appealing, respondents from social grades C2DE were more likely to select the ‘don’t know’ option, and to select the option ‘not applicable, I don’t think anything in particular would help to make environmental volunteering more appealing to young people’.
4. Key findings across the evidence sources

In this chapter we look across the evidence strands to identify the key findings across the research activities. These have been grouped around the following four headings:

- Attracting and sustaining participation
- Marketing and communications
- Collaboration and cross-sector working
- Raising participation from underrepresented groups

Below we present an infographic which draws on all strands of the evidence to identify the key communication messages and the enablers and barriers to environmental volunteering across the different stages of participation.
Figure 14: Summary of key messages, enabler and barriers across the environmental volunteering stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messages to communicate</th>
<th>Enablers</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What the cause is</td>
<td>• Being asked</td>
<td>• Don’t know what’s available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What they can do about it</td>
<td>• Value to career development</td>
<td>• Not clear what’s involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Benefits of participation</td>
<td>• Want to help the cause</td>
<td>• Activities don’t feel relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where to find out more</td>
<td>• Feels relevant to personal situation</td>
<td>• Not convinced that activities will lead to positive impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Friends are doing it</td>
<td>• Need to have equipment or specific clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Realising it could be fun</td>
<td>• Training pre-requisites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expected barriers can be overcome or don’t exist</td>
<td>• Social dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling clear about the benefits &amp; outcomes of taking part</td>
<td>• Transport and finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic encouragement</td>
<td>• Feels like it doesn’t fit their personal image or identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Free time</td>
<td>• Significant time commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available support, e.g., travel or costs</th>
<th>Ways to involve friends to make it more fun</th>
<th>Flexible ways to participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clear information about what’s involved</td>
<td>• Ways they can promote the benefits and boast about their achievements</td>
<td>• Options with different levels of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incentives and rewards</td>
<td>• Training at the start and throughout sessions</td>
<td>• How to stay involved after a break, e.g., after GCSEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal connections to programmes</td>
<td>• Friendly, welcoming, and passionate staff</td>
<td>• Relationships and networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Arrangements are made by the organisation</td>
<td>• Fun and friendship</td>
<td>• Being given ownership or leadership responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of accomplishment</td>
<td>• Learning new skills</td>
<td>• Energizing &amp; transformative experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Free time</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of accomplishment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Enablers**
- Upbringing
- Family values
- Childhood environmental experiences
- Interested in the cause or the benefits

**Barriers**
- Precontemplation
  -Never become aware of opportunities
- Considering
  - Barriers feel insurmountable
  - Feels like it doesn’t fit their personal image or identity
  - Can’t imagine doing it
  - Don’t know anyone
  - No call to action
  - Not convinced that taking part will make a difference
  - Doesn’t seem relevant to their life or interests
  - Offers don’t seem aimed at young people

- Planning
  - Physically demanding
  - Significant time commitment
  - Transport
  - Costs
  - Work is unrewarding or not seen to have an impact
  - Young person has gained the skills or experience they were seeking

- Taking part
  - Travel costs
  - Entering busy time periods
  - Entering busy periods (e.g., revision and exams)
  - Change in circumstances, e.g., entering paid employment or going to university

- Keeping it up
4.1. Attracting and sustaining participation in environmental volunteering

4.1.1. How do we make sense of environmental volunteering?

Studies of environmental and general volunteering frequently pose the idea of the ‘volunteer journey’, made up of several stages, starting from the initial interest and planning, through to taking part stage, and then on to deciding whether or not to continue. A stage-based approach recognises that taking part in volunteering is more usefully understood as a process or journey that you go through rather than an event.

At different stages in the volunteering journey, individuals’ motivations and needs will vary, which volunteering providers must understand and meet in order to attract and maintain involvement. Volunteers tend to have multiple motivations, and these are likely to change over time as a person grows and develops and has critical moments and turning points in their life.

4.1.2. What are the key trends in terms of rates of participation?

Drawing on the national representative survey of young people, 71% of 16-24-year olds based in England indicated that they have taken part in some form of volunteering in the past. Of these, 26% have taken part in some form of environmental volunteering. In terms of sub group differences in those who do/ do not take part in environmental volunteering, the survey findings indicate that:

- Socio-economic background was a key predictor, with those from more advantaged backgrounds being more likely to say they have taken part.
- Those who had early exposure to natural spaces and family and friends with pro environmental attitudes and values were more likely to have taken part in environmental volunteering.
- When it comes to gender, race and ethnicity, and whether based in urban, town and fringe or rural areas, no significant differences emerged.

4.1.3. What attracts young people and sustains their participation in environmental volunteering?

Looking across the evidence strands, the reasons for being attracted to environmental volunteering were varied, emerged at different life stages for young people, and were not always driven by specifically environmental concerns:

- **An interest or passion for environmental social action**: This is often strongly related to the influence of a young person’s upbringing and family, such as having had positive outdoor experiences, being nature or wildlife focussed, or by a desire to have outdoors experiences due to having grown up in a city. School teachers and subjects like biography and geography which offer outdoor learning opportunities (e.g. fieldtrips, residential), also emerged as key influencers who can build an interest in environmental social action, including volunteering.
• **Individual development**: Young people increasingly see volunteering as a means of developing skills, knowledge and confidence which can support their academic and career paths. There is growing encouragement in education settings for young people to take up volunteering opportunities, although the extent and effectiveness of this promotion varies across different institutions.

• **Making a difference**: Environmental volunteers are motivated by a desire to take responsibility and to make a positive difference to their environment and community. Young people want to take part in activities where they can see tangible changes as a result of their input and value contributing to changes which cannot easily be undone by others.

• **Fun, friendship, and wellbeing**: Environmental volunteers are often attracted to elements of the volunteering experience that are not specifically about the environment. This can include a desire to: work in teams, make friends and feel a sense of belonging, work outdoors, do interesting and rewarding things, and to be physically active.

Across the evidence strands, young people are focused on the outcomes and benefits associated with taking part, and will ‘shop around’ and try out different activities. Volunteering is often understood by young people as a transactional process, where both the person giving their time and the volunteering provider should be benefiting.

Across the evidence review, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders a clear set of benefits emerged from taking part:

- Increased confidence and higher perceived self-efficacy;
- Increase their ‘sense of place’ and helps them to connect with their community;
- Meeting new people and varied people, and building friendships;
- Improved mental health and general wellbeing, reduced stress;
- For marginalised groups, improved confidence is an important benefit reported;
- Opportunities can offer socio-economically disadvantaged young people alternative routes to gaining skills and employment.

Drawing on the qualitative focus group evidence, it is possible to identify two broad categories of young environmental volunteer. This is described in the table below.
Table 5: Typology of volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: Environmental volunteers motivated by a longstanding passion and commitment to the environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people who are often studying subjects such as biology or ecology and were focused on a career in research, conservation, ecology or similar. They were more likely than those in category B to emphasise how their early years had instilled a passion for nature, outdoors, conservation etc. They tended to have participated in a greater range of environmental volunteering activities over a longer time period. They tend to see engaging with environmental issues as central to their identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B: Environmental volunteering as a vehicle rather than a destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people who are focused on achieving goals relating to personal development/education/careers progression and or seeking fun and friendship. Environmental volunteering may have been chosen from a range of options because it was most the most attractive option or was most in line with their priorities. This category incorporates both:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Those who engage with volunteering in a more transient and episodic manner; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. More ‘serious volunteers’, who recognising the benefits, seek out ongoing opportunities and experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We found a few examples of young people who shifted from category B to A, following particularly rewarding and transformative experiences when taking part in environmental volunteering.

4.1.4. What are the barriers to taking part in environmental volunteering?

Across the evidence strands some clear barriers emerged across the different stages of the volunteering journey. These are summarised in Figure 15 below.
Some consistent messages emerged across the evidence strands about how volunteering providers can better attract young people with little or no environmental volunteering experience or interest:

- **Offering incentives and rewards** to take part (e.g. concert tickets, t-shirts, socials).
- **Organising taster sessions and guided walks** to build up young people’s interest and confidence to take part.
- **Using ‘issues-based’ hooks initially** (e.g. food waste or recycling) to capture initial interest before introducing harder to understand concepts like ‘sustainability’.
- **Offering one-off volunteering days** which can benefit young people who are in employment by minimising any loss of income.
- **Having staff with the right skills/experience** who can effectively engage young people. This is particularly important when considering young people from underrepresented backgrounds.

### 4.1.6. Offering high-quality experiences

Across the strands of evidence, some clear messages emerged about what a high quality environmental volunteering experience might look like:

- **Convenience and accessibility**. Make it easy to find and get to activities, and where it’s needed sort out the transport and cover any associated costs. This is especially important for young people living in rural areas and those with limited resources.
• **A range of activities.** Offer a range of activities, roles, and levels of responsibility so that participants can choose what suits them and have progression opportunities within a volunteering scheme.

• **Flexibility and different levels of involvement.** Include both one-off activities and more regular volunteering opportunities for those who are able to commit (e.g. fortnightly or monthly). This will help to attract a greater range of participants and allow volunteers to step-up and step-down their level of participation.

• **Working with participant’s existing skills and interests and give them opportunities to take leading roles.** For example, those studying arts or with creative skills and interests should be given the opportunity to help make campaign materials.

• **An emphasis on fun and friendship.** Create enjoyable and rewarding experiences which maximise the social opportunities. For example, building in camps, trips and holidays into programmes was seen as a way to support fun and friendship.

• **Maximising the learning opportunities.** This includes identifying participant’s learning goals, thinking about how young people can communicate their experience to employers and academic institutions, creating links / complementing young people’s courses and fields of study.

• **Build strong relationship between staff and young people.** Employ staff who have the skills and appetite to form good working relationships with young people and promote good communication between volunteers and staff using a range of channels.

• **Being clear about the impacts.** Help volunteers to understand and see evidence that what they are doing is making a positive and lasting difference.

• **Celebration and acknowledgement.** Organise celebration events and offering certificates to acknowledge participants’ contributions. This can be especially important where the work is physically demanding or where it involves lots of ‘bitty’ tasks.

### 4.1.7. A mismatch between what young people want to do and what some environmental volunteering providers need

A stakeholder pointed out that the preferences and patterns of engagement by young volunteers might not always meet the needs of the sector. For example, organisations collecting bio-data benefit from having longer term volunteering placements which may be hard to fill with young people, who tend to dip in and out of volunteering opportunities. Similarly, environmental volunteering providers may struggle to accommodate young people’s desire to get involved in a range of activities.
4.2. Communications and marketing

4.2.1. Raising awareness about what’s available

A major barrier to environmental volunteering highlighted by all research strands is that young people do not always know what is available and they have not always had sufficient opportunities to consider taking part. For example, drawing on the nationally representative survey:

- 38% have never considered taking part in environmental volunteering while 39% have.
- 27% of respondents said that they were aware of some type of environmental volunteering option in their area.

There was a consistent message that environmental volunteering providers and wider stakeholders (e.g. universities, volunteering centres, Defra) could step up their efforts to communicate with young people, building on the growing interest and concern that they have about issues like climate change, conservation, and recycling.

4.2.2. Effective marketing and communications approaches

Stakeholders in particular, felt that current marketing and communications materials produced by environmental volunteering providers are not particularly youth focused, and do not appear to have considered the needs of defined market segments who require tailored messages.

In developing marketing campaigns and recruitment approaches, the evidence suggests that the most effective approaches are those that:

- **Promote environmental volunteering as a means of achieving the outcomes and benefits that young people care about.** This can include careers development, artistic expression, health and fitness, and having a good time with friends. This approach could involve understanding the environment as a ‘platform’ where young people can flourish and pursue the things that matter to them.

- **Convey credibility and professionalism, which helps to give young people confidence that taking part will be worth their time.** This is supported by having well designed materials, by providing thorough information, creating affiliations with brands young people know and like, and by giving young people a recognised certificate (or similar).

- **Include inspiring and attention-grabbing content that has the ability to stop you in your tracks and make you think.** Young people felt that simply presenting good quality information on the details of an environmental cause or volunteering offer may not be enough to inspire people to take action.

- **Use carefully selected images of the people taking part.** Young people respond less favourably where photos of people appear to be ‘staged’, ‘cheesy’, ‘posed’, or like a stock photo. Providers should get in the habit of photographing their volunteers taking part in order to help bring to life
their offer.

- **Direct young people to engaging and high-quality information about what’s involved once it’s got their interest.** Many young people suggested that social media sites like Instagram could play a key role in raising awareness and then directing them to websites where they could find out more (e.g. by viewing videos, FAQs and case studies). Because young people cite limited time as a key barrier, providers should be clearer about the amount of time/commitment that is required in all opportunities, to empower young people to make informed choices based on their time available.

- **Tread carefully when considering the use of celebrity endorsements.** Young people have mixed views about the effectiveness of using celebrities to endorse environmental campaigns. Whilst some were very positive about the use of pop stars and royals, others suggested that these choices could be a turn off for some young people. All agreed that ideally, people endorsing environmental campaigns should have some track record of credibility in relation to the issues or cause.

Across the evidence several consistent recommendations were made about the most effective communication channels and recruitment approaches that should be considered:

- **Partnership working with education providers and the wider voluntary sector to promote social action and volunteering around environmental issues.** This could involve visiting schools to give presentations or taking more embedded approaches, such as working with groups of students on environmental themed social action projects.

- **Use of peer recruitment approaches and young ambassadors.** Peer-to-peer influencing, and recruitment approaches are effective approaches to increasing participation. Where young people are confident and willing, they should also have opportunities to take on more formal ambassador type roles to support recruitment.

- **Use of volunteering apps and directories.** These would allow young people and others to search and browse volunteering offers (environmental and otherwise), according to the individual’s own criteria.

- **Use of social media to promote environmental volunteering.** Young people often learn about volunteering offers via social media and they see it as an effective way to reach them given that young people are unlikely to seek the information out unprompted.

### 4.2.3. Perceptions of environmental volunteering

Stakeholders stated that young people’s attitudes towards environmentalism are beginning to shift in a positive direction through exposure to information through news outlets, social media, and documentaries like Blue Planet. The survey results also suggest that pro-environmental attitudes are now fairly widespread. For example:
• 81% of respondents agreed that they think about how their actions affect the Earth (e.g. recycling, pollution etc.).
• 74% agreed that they take notice of the wildlife wherever they are.
• 57% agreed that they read environmental news.
• 61% agreed that their favourite places are outside, in nature.

However, across the evidence strands there was a recurring message that young people do not always have a positive attitude towards environmental volunteering or see it as relevant to their life. For example, drawing on the survey results, 18% of respondents think that environmental volunteering is ‘something which older people do’ and 14% that it is “not for them”. Around one in ten respondents describe it as “difficult”, “daunting” or “boring”. The perception that environmental volunteering is “uncool” also emerged in the focus groups as key negative perception, however, in the survey just 5% of respondents appeared to hold this view.

Responding to these challenges about young people’s attitudes and perceptions, stakeholders called for more working with popular culture figures to begin exploring environmental framing as well as working with funders and NGOs to create more compelling long-term narratives around the environment.

There was evidence that for some young people the word “volunteering” can be off putting and stakeholders were able to point to good practice examples of where volunteering was branded in a way that better appealed to young people.

Stakeholders pointed to anecdotal evidence that participation can be limited where parents and carers do not see volunteering as a valuable learning experience or as something that detracts from academic study.

When it comes to environmental organisations there was felt to be a perception that young people are hard to reach and difficult to engage unless they have an existing interest in environmentalism. This can create a disconnect between urban youth and environmental volunteering programmes.

4.3. Collaboration and cross-sector working

4.3.1. Seeing environmental volunteering as a ‘vehicle not a destination’

The stakeholder interviews and focus group evidence suggests that young people are often approaching volunteering in a way that is “transactional” and outcomes focused. This involves episodic patterns of volunteering, where young people dip in and out of activities, as they seek particular types of experiences and benefits. For some young people the environment, and even the volunteering is incidental to their primary motivations for getting involved.

Drawing on the stakeholder interviews, there was evidence that
environmental volunteering providers are increasingly responding to this trend by positioning environmental volunteering as a way for young people to achieve a wide range of outcomes. These could relate to careers development, artistic expression, health and fitness or having a good time with friends.

“It’s about not being in a rigid bounded bubble, we need to become the playing field on which everything happens.”

It was suggested that working in this way involved environmental volunteering providers becoming much more explicit about the intersections between the environment and other issues that matter to young people and working more effectively with partners across different sectors to create schemes and pathways that resonate with young people.

4.3.2. Developing a joined-up approach so that young people can engage in progressive pathways

Drawing on the evidence review, more joined up and cross-sector working was felt to be important because it would allow providers to create pathways which support initial engagement through to increased career opportunities via a range of experiences.

**Between environmental volunteering organisations**

- so that volunteers can move between different opportunities and find those that suit them best, rather than leaving the sector if they struggle with their first experience (whether for logistics, activity type, or social reasons).
- so that the organisations can learn from each other, or work together to develop joint projects.

**With non-environmental volunteering organisations**

- so that young people looking to volunteer can see environmental options alongside other types, or try something new in a different area.
- so that environmental and other organisations can develop integrated options and partnerships that are mutually beneficial e.g. youth organisations who can share expertise in working with young people.
- so that the wider sector can better promote volunteering and improve the searchability of environmental volunteering opportunities.

**With youth achievement schemes**

- so that young people taking part in schemes that require volunteering (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, Guides/scouts, National Citizen Service, John Muir Award) can more easily find environmental options when looking for their cause. In the focus groups there were examples of young people going for the first opportunity they found, rather than weighing up different options.
- so that environmental volunteering providers are better placed to meet
demand from young people. It was suggested that the availability of social action programmes was not even across England; and there were some distinct ‘bottlenecks’ in some parts of the country where young people struggled to get places on particular schemes.

**With employers**

- so that volunteering providers are prepared to support young people to develop the skills that are valued by employers, which will in turn add credibility to the opportunities and the sector.
- so that young people hoping for a career related to the environment can see the skills and experience that potential employers are looking for.

**With job centres**

- so that job centre can easily recommend and share volunteering opportunities, providing they can overcome benefits related barriers relating to full time volunteering.

4.3.3. **Closer working with schools**

There was robust evidence that education settings are playing a pivotal role in building awareness of environmental issues amongst young people and in supporting people to access volunteering opportunities.

However, drawing on the focus groups and the survey the extent to which education settings are promoting any kind of volunteering varies considerably between institutions (particularly in the case of primary and secondary schools). When asked to consider what would make the most difference in terms of raising participation, young people answering the survey were most likely to call for improved working with schools, universities, and employers to connect young people with environmental volunteering opportunities should be the top priority.

Stakeholders highlighted other challenges relating to education settings, including the fact that volunteering providers do not always consider academic timetables when scheduling activities and an overreliance on building links with individual teachers, rather than having structures and processes in place to facilitate volunteering.

4.4. **Raising participation from underrepresented groups**

4.4.1. **Socio-economic backgrounds**

There is a well-established relationship between socio-economic advantage and formal volunteering among both adults and young people. This relationship was reflected in the results of the survey, where respondents in social grades ABC1 were:

- More likely to say they have taken part in environmental volunteering than C2DEs (29% compared with 20%).
- More likely to say that they would be interested in environmental volunteering activities such as maintaining a national park, collecting
data about wildlife and taking part in a local litter pick.

- More likely to agree that their favourite places are outside, in nature, that they know people close to them who are passionate about environmental issues and that growing up their family enjoyed spending time in the outdoors.

Stakeholders pointed out that young people from deprived backgrounds may be just as interested in taking part in environmental volunteering. However, many of the barriers linked to cost, available time and access to transport can be magnified. These heightened barriers were also cited by multiple sources in the evidence review, together with the challenge that young people may have different priorities for their time, sometimes having to prioritise paid work, a finding which also emerged in the focus groups with non-volunteers.

Alongside helping young people to get to and from activities, stakeholders observed that young people from deprived backgrounds may benefit from more intensive and ongoing support from staff. It was suggested that having skilled youth workers can be a decisive factor in how successful engagement is with this group. This is supported by the evidence review which found that young people from deprived backgrounds may lack confidence and perceived self-efficacy.

Drawing on the evidence review, when considering underrepresented groups, including those from deprived backgrounds, a number of sources suggested that offers focused on appealing to individual development motivations (e.g. getting fitter, employability) and those which framed activities in a way that was relevant were seen as key enablers to raising participation.

Additionally, stakeholders reported that benefits claimants may not volunteer due to a fear that universal credit would be refused or sanctioned.

### 4.4.2. Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds

The evidence review cited evidence that people from BME backgrounds are underrepresented in environmental volunteering schemes. This can contribute to feelings that they do not fit in and to them feeling less at ease. It can also discourage them from joining activities in the first place if this disparity is visible in promotional photos and marketing materials.

A few environmental volunteers from BME backgrounds who took part in the focus groups said that they were often the only person from a non-White background and that they had come to expect this when joining projects related to conservation and the environmental issues. They felt that there needed to be a bigger push to encourage young people from different backgrounds to engage with natural spaces and to invest in creating role models and targeted communications.

Drawing on the survey, while race and ethnicity appears to have a considerable impact on the extent to which respondents reported visiting
natural/outdoors spaces such as woodlands, national parks, and the seaside/coast (see page 63), it does not appear to have a big impact on levels of volunteering, environmental or otherwise. For example:

- In terms of how recently BME and non-BME respondents had taken part in any types of volunteering, the proportions are very similar.
- In terms of how many had ever taken part in environmental volunteering, the proportions are very similar (26% of BME respondents and 27% of non-BME respondents).
- The same or similar proportions of BME and non-BME respondents indicated that they were aware of environmental volunteering options in their area (27%/27%), and that they had never considered doing environmental volunteering (39%/38%).

A gap in the survey is understanding about the specific types of environmental volunteering activities that young people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are more or less likely to be taking part in, the pathways that led them to certain activities, and how often they are taking part.

Drawing on the stakeholder interviews, it was suggested that young people from BME backgrounds may be taking part in volunteering but are often doing so within their communities. This finding is supported by the survey, where BME respondents were more likely to say that they have taken part in volunteering activities related to ‘religion’ (14% compared with 7%). Stakeholders suggested people from BME backgrounds may need encouragement to think about volunteering more “cross-societally”.

Additionally, the evidence review pointed out that people with limited English can struggle to find out about opportunities (because translated materials are rare) and they may struggle to progress through application processes for certain roles.

4.4.3. Disabled people

Stakeholders and the evidence review reported that a common barrier to participation in environmental volunteering is having health problems and being disabled. Evidence sources highlighted that there can be a lack of accessibility planning, for example, a lack of suitable support roles and suitable transport provision.

Stakeholders and the evidence review reported that people who are disabled tend to require extra support at each stage of participation. This includes encouragement and support to agree to take part and feel ready, help to get to the volunteering opportunity and extra support to help them take part.
5. Conclusions and suggested actions

This study has aimed to understand the environmental volunteering experiences of 16-24-year olds in England and to inform the best ways to increase participation by this age group by making it more attractive, relevant and accessible. To achieve these aims the project has combined an evidence review, stakeholder interviews, 16 focus groups involving over 120 young people, and a nationally representative survey of 1001 16-24-year olds based in England.

Who is taking part in environmental volunteering?

Drawing on the survey, 71% of 16-24-year olds based in England indicated that they have taken part in some form of volunteering in the past. Of these, 26% have taken part in some form of environmental volunteering. In terms of sub group differences, evidence from the national representative survey of young people indicates that:

- Socio-economic background is a key predictor, with those from more advantaged backgrounds being more likely to say they have taken part.
- Those who had early exposure to natural spaces and family and friends with pro environmental attitudes and values were more likely to have taken part in environmental volunteering.
- When it comes to gender, race and ethnicity, and whether based in urban, town and fringe or rural areas, no significant differences emerged.

What are the motivations and benefits of taking part?

There is robust evidence from across the strands of the research that young people, regardless of their backgrounds, are motivated to take part in environmental volunteering by a desire to develop skills, confidence and knowledge which can support their academic and career paths. Making a tangible difference is another key initial motivation and is also a big part of wanting to keep at it. Young people may also have leading motivations that are not specifically linked to environmental causes, a passion for nature or to the volunteering activity. This can include a desire to be outdoors, to have new and exciting experiences, to make friends and have fun, and to feel a sense of collective purpose.

Regardless of the type of volunteering, there is strong evidence across the study that young people are focused on the outcomes and benefits associated with taking part and that they are prepared to ‘shop around’ and try out different things. Activities that offer a lack of variety (in terms of tasks) or a lack of rewards or progression opportunities will find it more challenging to sustain participation from young people.

The focus groups with young people found that the benefits associated with taking part in environmental volunteering are often greater than anticipated and may include:

- Increased confidence and higher perceived self-efficacy;
• Increased ‘sense of place’ and connection with their community;
• Meeting new people and varied people, and building friendships;
• Improved physical and mental wellbeing, e.g. reduced stress, increased energy levels;

For marginalised groups, improved confidence is an important benefit that has been reported. The evidence review found that environmental volunteering opportunities may also offer young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with alternative routes to gaining skills and employment.

**Suggested actions for raising participation**

Towards the end of the project, we held a workshop with stakeholders from a range of environmental volunteering providers. At the workshop we presented the key emerging findings and worked with them to generate key opportunities and actions that could help to raise participation in environmental volunteering amongst the target group.

Exploring the findings with stakeholders, five main opportunities emerged where action by environmental volunteering providers, government and others could make giving time to the environment more attractive, relevant and accessible to this target group.

Underneath each of the five opportunities listed below we present the actions suggested by workshop stakeholders for further consideration. Prioritisation and decisions on what actions should be taken forward as next steps is outside the scope of this report.

In setting out the suggested actions, we use the abbreviation ‘EV’ for environmental volunteering. We have taken a broad definition of environmental volunteering providers, which incorporates traditional conservation groups; environment-based organisations that provide opportunities for activity and volunteering (e.g. National Parks); organisations doing activities in nature settings (e.g. Outdoor Centres); and education establishments and education-based activities.

1. **Facilitate a more strategic and systematic approach to improving the volunteering ‘offer’ by creating a shared vision and language for promoting environmental volunteering.**

   1.1. Government and EV sector could consider working together to create a shared vision about what can be achieved through EV and a common language to explain the skills and experiences that can be gained by taking part in it. This could be widely shared, including across government and with educators, businesses and corporates, and to the voluntary sector more generally.
2. **Sustain and grow current participation by building upon or adapting the current volunteering offer to deliver more high quality volunteering experiences.**

2.1. EV providers could review what they offer for young people, and could consider the following:

   2.1.1. Having a diverse offer, including types of tasks and learning opportunities, and high profile one-off activities and tasters through to longer-term offers, that give young people a chance to regularly participate.

   2.1.2. Developing activities that are outcomes focused, allow participants to set and work towards goals and which offer progression opportunities.

   2.1.3. Embedding young people into their governance/leadership structures and embracing co-design approaches when designing activities and programmes.

   2.1.4. Consider using diverse and unrelated incentives to attract young people, who do not necessarily have a long-standing passion or interest in the environment, acknowledging that the benefits will be realised once young people are involved.

2.2. EV providers could consider better promotion of early age engagement with nature/the environment, such as developing whole community/whole family volunteering opportunities and other similar strategies.

2.3. EV sector could consider developing connections with other groups/schemes/programmes (not related to the environmental causes) and attempt to relocate activities to natural spaces, so that young people have more opportunities to engage with nature, e.g. doing sports/learning outside.

2.4. EV providers and youth organisations could consider working together to create packages of volunteering activities to increase uptake and provide greater progression opportunities. Government could consider incentivising this through commissioning of programmes that call for cross-sector delivery.

3. **Ensure opportunities remain attractive and relevant to young people by continually improving marketing and communications so that they are targeted and tailored to the age group.**

   3.1. Volunteering providers could work together to create best practice guides and ‘cheat sheets’ to support improved marketing and communications approaches.

   3.2. Government and EV sector could consider developing programmes/partnerships that involve established brands from a range of sectors sharing best practice/informing EV providers communications and marketing approaches.
3.3. EV providers could involve more young people in the development of marketing materials and campaign communications, to ensure it is culturally relevant and the language is “right”.

3.4. All involved in providing EV could be clear about the unique added value for young people and produce high quality content to support communications and social media campaigns. This should include:

3.4.1. Pitching EV as hitting a wide range of outcomes and using topical issues as hooks to engage wider interest.

3.4.2. Creating targeted messages/campaigns aimed at the transient, episodic volunteers who are not specifically focused on environment volunteering.

3.4.3. Making more use of case studies and short films that quantify and bring to life the benefits of taking part.

3.4.4. Marketing volunteering as “the thing to put you over the top” for university or job interviews and the promotion of stories showing that corporate employers value volunteering.

3.4.5. Developing tailored offers to prevent attrition, for e.g. a post exam stress buster EV activity to avoid losing young people at exam time – emphasise scalability of commitments, tell teachers and parents too, emphasise benefits to post GCSE life.

3.5. EV providers could consider developing social media strategies (e.g. use of Instagram to bring to life EV activities) backed up by high-quality user friendly ‘home pages’ containing need-to-know information.

3.6. EV providers could support young people to influence and recruit their peers e.g. by materials/content that young people can give to each other.

3.7. Government and EV providers could find new/diverse/relevant influencers to promote different forms of EV from different sectors/walks of life, drawing on the success of the #iwill ambassadors.

4. **Bring greater focus on developing ‘progressive pathways’ of participation and increasing the visibility of opportunities at different stages of young people’s lives through more effective and creative cross-sector collaboration, especially between education providers, employers, the youth sector and environmental volunteer providers.**

4.1. To help lay the foundation for life long engagement with the natural environment and environmental social action, government could consider the extent to which it promotes outdoor learning as a key part of teacher training and that ongoing support is provided for teachers.
4.2. EV providers could consider working with education providers to align their activities/programmes with pupil’s academic schedules, embed activities into the classroom and through the organisation of volunteering fairs and presentations.

4.3. Government could consider the scope for supporting schools to create central functions in each school/college to connect young people to volunteering opportunities.

4.4. Government could consider the development of universal volunteering opportunities beyond Key Stage 3 – not an add on or linked to specific subjects – to support the participation of post 16-year olds.

5. **Focus on raising participation from underrepresented groups in policy and programme design.**

5.1. Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) could consider a government-wide strategy to support disadvantaged young people into all types of volunteering, including EV. Additional steps could include:

5.1.1. Reviewing and working to address any benefits system barriers.

5.1.2. Considering setting up an Equality and Diversity task group for the voluntary sector.

5.1.3. Introducing teacher led incentives to get more of their disadvantaged pupils into volunteering to help create the habit from an early age.

5.2. EV providers could consider developing more opportunities that reflect the cultural backgrounds of underrepresented groups, co-designed with young people.

5.3. EV providers could consider the development of organisational strategies for improving the representation and diversity of participants. This should include reviewing transport and finance issues affecting access and forming links with organisations who can reach young people from underrepresented backgrounds.

5.4. Government could consider ways of providing funding support to young people most in need, to cover the costs related to taking part in EV (based on an appreciation of the benefits associated with taking part).

5.5. Government could consider increasing funding for youth workers who can focus on supporting disadvantaged young people to participate in volunteering.

5.6. Government could consider creating incentives for businesses to support growth in volunteering amongst underrepresented/hard to reach groups, e.g. tax relief, social impact bonds.

5.7. Government could consider reviewing decision making relating to funding to ensure that it is representative across diverse groups and that panels issuing funding are diverse.
5.8. EV providers could consider the scope for working more with youth groups, faith organisations and education providers to reach a more diverse range of young people.

5.9. Government could consider finding a high profile influential body to design an award for the environmental sector, celebrating the organisations making the most impact in engaging disadvantaged young people.

**Further research**

There was a widespread suggestion (by young people, stakeholders, and in the evidence review) for the creation of searchable directories and apps to connect young people to local relevant EV opportunities. This highlights a possible need to conduct a review of existing volunteering directories/portals (for e.g. those offered by DofE, vInspired) in terms of their EV/wider offers, how they are promoted, how frequently they are used, and what the barriers to young people and agencies using/promoting them are.

Similarly, there would also be value in considering the case for funding the development of volunteering passports which would allow young people to record/accrue volunteering hours with possible rewards, given that stakeholders suggested that they could be a route to encouraging participation.

This research brings to light how providers of social action and volunteering offers can raise the quality, relevance and attractiveness of their offers and improve their marketing and communications approaches. To continue to support increased participation in EV in this age group, we recommend further research is considered in the following areas:

- Mapping the environmental volunteering sector, profiling the different types of organisations and what they currently offer in terms of youth social action, including volunteering.
- Understanding how different types of providers (size/remit/organisational model) rate their own ability to deliver high quality youth focused social action, including volunteering.
- Understanding the challenges faced by different types of providers in delivering high quality offers and how these can be addressed.
- Understanding how good practice is currently shared and disseminated across the EV sector and what channels/umbrella organisations/forums/approaches are most effective.

The extent to which schools are promoting and encouraging volunteering is variable. There was a view from stakeholders that Ofsted could play a key role in incentivising more consistent practice. There may be an opportunity for research to establish the extent to which Ofsted inspectors are recognising and valuing what schools/sixth forms are doing around social action/volunteering, and what steps could be taken to increase their focus on this, if it is found to be lacking.

Non-BME and BME rates of volunteering appear broadly similar to each other.
but the survey results are unable to capture differences in the quality, intensity and type of volunteering experiences these groups are having. Further qualitative and quantitative work could shed light on this.