



MONASH UNIVERSITY - ACER

CENTRE FOR THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**VET AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR:
DEALING WITH AMBIGUITIES**

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CENTRE FOR THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Funding

CEET receives its main funding from ANTA as a Key VET Research Centre and undertakes consultancies for a range of other authorities.

Focus of Work

CEET's research focuses on the contribution of education and training to economic and social development. CEET's recent work includes:

- the costs of vocational programs in schools, in TAFE and in industry;
- models for assessing demand for training;
- labour turnover and the effect on jobs for entrants to the labour market;
- the impact of globalisation on the occupational structure;
- evaluation of 'user choice' for apprenticeship training;
- analysis of the efficiency and equity in the training market;
- policies to improve the transition of youth from education to work;
- framework for performance measures of school completion and transition to work and study;
- the impact of VET research on policy and practice;
- equity and VET;
- models for analysing student flows in higher education and in vocational education; and
- returns to investment in enterprise training.

Background

When concerning ourselves with vocational education and training for work, we usually concentrate on work that generates income. But what of work undertaken by volunteers? If we consider their products and services, and the resulting increased wellbeing of individuals, together with increased social capital, and the sense of fulfilment gained by the volunteers themselves, their work has significant worth.

CEET took the view that the contribution of volunteers could be encompassed within a broad analysis of the economics of VET. That analysis commenced with a literature search, an exploratory seminar and the identification of the direction of subsequent research.

Policy Context

Volunteers were not mentioned in the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (Australian National Training Authority 1998). Was it because their learning needs had been adequately addressed in other ways, or because they had lost out to what were judged to be higher priorities, or because provision had been implicitly subsumed in that for the market economy? Or had the relevance of VET for volunteers not been considered?

This is not to suggest that the voluntary sector has had no place in the vocational education and training system. As reported by Rogers (1997), there is nationally accredited training in place for managers and coordinators of volunteers, and some other accredited training such as a course in home and community care. But what has been missing has been a big picture perspective on the training of volunteers. This is essential if governments are to develop policy on volunteer training to support the most effective operation of volunteers for the benefit of themselves and the wider community.

The research literature in the area is not a rich one. Neither the mainstream literature in economics nor in vocational education and training has given much attention to the work of volunteers. Managing volunteers finds a place in the management literature. There is also a research literature on the economics of households as sources and users of both capital and labour, whether relationship-based, voluntary or paid. But reports on the work of volunteers are few outside the specialist journals, such as the Australian Journal of Volunteering.

Developments on a number of fronts suggest that the training of volunteers might be deserving of the attention of policy makers and therefore an important area of potential research.

- Firstly, volunteering may have an increasing role in meeting people's need for fulfilling work. Jeremy Rifkin, in his book, *The End of Work*, suggests that the world is changing to one where the demand for products and services from the market economy, will be inadequate to meet people's need for fulfilment through socially useful activity (Rifkin 1996). He argues that the voluntary sector has the potential to utilise this excess productive capacity for the benefit of the individual volunteer and society as a whole. In similar vein, Don Edgar argues, for Australia:

Part-time and contract work may well be inadequate and full of insecurity, but they alter the nature of time available for other pursuits, and my guess is that the domination of people's lives by the fixed-term, fixed-location workplace will end.

More people will observe what is missing from local and regional community life and act to fill the gaps (Edgar 1999).

- Secondly, it seems that volunteers are playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of social services. Within Australia, governments are decreasing their delivery of support services and instead contracting them out to not-for-profit organisations; work that often involves volunteers.
- Thirdly, volunteer work may provide an alternative route to paid employment, especially for young people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found that, in June 1995, 46,000 volunteer workers were looking for paid employment, 43,000 of whom sought full time work (Trewin 1996).
- Fourthly, and perhaps most significant of all, there is lifelong learning policy. The notion of learning for work is no longer of an intense period of study undertaken on leaving school. Instead it is of a lifetime process of change, development and fulfilment where the boundaries between learning and contributing, and indeed, being, are not easily distinguishable. To suggest that work in this context means paid work, but not voluntary work, would be contrary to the holistic intent of a lifelong learning approach.

The Focus of the Research

In order to research the training of volunteers it has been necessary, first, to define a volunteer worker. The ABS definition has been chosen: 'those who willingly give unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group' (Trewin *ibid*). The ABS treats those in receipt of small tokens such as tee-shirts, but not monetary reward, as volunteers.

Whilst accepting the ABS definition it must be borne in mind that there is not a single, agreed definition in use, resulting in blurring of the boundaries (Paull 1999). For instance, overseas aid volunteers usually receive a living allowance, and out of pocket expenses are normally paid for all volunteers, including those recognised as such by the ABS. Some of those who think of themselves as volunteers, may be in receipt of honoraria that are not commensurate with commercial rates. Some voluntary organisations fail to distinguish between those whose work is truly voluntary and those who are unpaid but are coerced, for example, as the result of a court order. And for work that conforms to the ABS definition, one could also question whether disinterestedness should be an issue. For instance, work on committees and boards may be as much about furthering careers as about assisting others; and much volunteer work flows from parental concerns. Hence, as a group, people claiming to be volunteers can neither be treated as homogeneous in terms of altruism nor, in regard to payment (at the margins), are they easily distinguishable from employees in the paid labour force. It must be borne in mind too, that by accepting the ABS definition of a volunteer, all work falling outside structured bodies is excluded.

In order to examine volunteers' training needs and the social and economic implications of the work of volunteers, it has been necessary to look more broadly, by investigating the organisations that employ them. It is immediately apparent that the organisations which have volunteers are very diverse; there is no such thing as a typical volunteer organisation. Furthermore, the voluntary sector is composed not only of voluntary organisations employing volunteers. Many voluntary organisations have some paid employees, especially in

management. And volunteers operate within public instrumentalities, such as schools and hospitals, that are not voluntary organisations in the normal sense, and where the majority of personnel are paid. On the other hand, volunteering is not characteristic of non-service based public sector instrumentalities, beyond advisory boards and the like.

Volunteer Workforce Statistics

The 1994-1995 survey undertaken by the ABS remains the main statistical source. Table 1 brings together key measures of Australia's volunteer workforce as found by the ABS in its survey. Volunteers constituted about one fifth of the adult population – about a third of the number of persons over 15 years who participated in the paid workforce. The estimates are based on ABS labour force data, November 1994 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994). About two thirds of volunteers were also in the paid workforce. However, when one looks at the number of hours that volunteers worked as compared to people in the paid workforce, the picture is rather different: volunteers worked only about three percent of the hours that paid workers did.

The figures for occupational categories suggest that voluntary work was more likely to be provided by those with more education than by those with less.

Table 1: Volunteers, Australia, 15 Years and Over, July 1994-June 1995

| Measure | Figure |
|---|-------------|
| Number of persons who undertook some volunteer work | 2.6 million |
| Percentage of population who undertook some volunteer work | 19% |
| Hours of voluntary work | 434 million |
| Ratio of Males to females | 17:21 |
| Percentage of volunteers who are in full or part time paid employment | 65% |
| Percentage of occupational groups who undertake volunteer work | |
| Professionals and managers | 29% |
| Paraprofessionals | 23% |
| Clerical personnel | 20% |
| Trades-persons, sales and personal services workers | 14% |
| Machine operators and labourers | 12% |

Source: Trewin 1996, Tables 1, 2 and 6

Table 2 gives a breakdown of the fields in which the work was undertaken, as a percentage of the total population, and for the age groups 15-24, 35-44 (the peak), and 65 and over. It can be seen that sport/recreation/hobby, and welfare/community services were the largest fields both by percentage involvement and by hours of volunteer work. The age group 15-24 had relatively low participation and over a third of the contribution was concentrated in the sport/recreation/hobby area. For the oldest group, by contrast, participation was close to that for the population as a whole, but more than half of the group worked in the welfare/community services area.

Table 2: Fields in which Volunteers Worked, Australia, 1994-1995

| Field of volunteer work | Percent of population 15 years and over | Million hours | Percent of selected age groups | | |
|--|---|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | 15-24 | 35-44 | 65 and over |
| Sport/recreation/hobby | 6.0 | 105 | 4.0 | 10.5 | 3.3 |
| Welfare/community services | 5.6 | 106 | 2.8 | 5.3 | 8.9 |
| Health | 1.3 | 24 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 2.0 |
| Emergency services | 0.9 | 15 | 0.7 | 1.4 | 0.4 |
| Education/training/youth development | 4.8 | 61 | 1.6 | 11.7 | 0.9 |
| Religious | 3.4 | 71 | 1.8 | 3.9 | 4.1 |
| Other including culture, international | na | 53 | na | na | na |
| Total | 19.0 | | 11.2 | 27.4 | 17.4 |

Source: Trewin 1996, Tables 9 and 11
na, not available

About a quarter of volunteers who viewed themselves as unemployed but in the labour force, saw learning new skills as a benefit of volunteer work. This was double the percentage for those not in the labour force, and somewhat more than for those also in paid employment (Table 3). For the former group too, gaining work experience and references was more important than for the other groups. However, skills-related benefits were not very important to any group, and fell well behind personal satisfaction and social contact for all four groups listed in Table 3. Not surprisingly then, training was an issue of concern for only about five percent of volunteers, though the percentages were higher for some groups of volunteer work (for example, lobby/advocacy/policy research 14 percent; search and rescue/first aid/fire fighting, personal care assistance 11 percent).

Table 3: Percentage of volunteers who claimed skill-related benefits through voluntary work

| Personal Benefit | Working full time | Working part time | Unemployed | Not in the labour force | Total |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Learned new skills | 18 | 20 | 25 | 12 | 17 |
| Gained work experience/ reference | 7 | 12 | 17 | 5 | 8 |
| Used skills/experience | 13 | 13 | 11 | 8 | 11 |

Source: Trewin 1996, Table 19

It seems that training was not perceived as a major issue amongst volunteers. It is noted, however, that the survey was not primarily about training. So it was unlikely to have engendered reflection by respondents about their actual as against possible volunteer work performance. Moreover, the responses may have reflected a culture that has associated training more with paid than with voluntary work. It is possible, too, that managers of the

organisations for which those volunteers worked may have viewed the training issue differently.

The Value of the Work of Volunteers

The (then) Industry Commission (1995), in its report *Charitable Organisations in Australia*, considered that estimating the value of the work of volunteers was problematic and it chose not to do so (see Box 1).

Box 1: Estimating the Monetary Value of Volunteers

The input cost approach is based on the assumption that paid employees and volunteers are perfect substitutes. The value of volunteers is calculated by multiplying volunteer hours by the hourly wage of the employee alternative. In addition to the doubtful assumption upon which this calculation is based, the determination of the appropriate wage rate presents practical problems. For example, is the appropriate wage rate the minimum award rate, average weekly earnings or some discounted factor of these?

The opportunity cost approach is based on the view that volunteers value their time spent in voluntary activity more highly than the next best use of their time (paid employment or recreation). The value of volunteers is calculated by multiplying volunteer hours by the hourly value of their foregone activity. This is conceptually more soundly based than the input cost approach. However, given the diverse nature of volunteers, it is not clear whether the next best alternative is employment or recreation. Further, earnings foregone and the value placed on recreation are both unknown. In periods of chronic unemployment for example, a paid position may not be a real opportunity and estimates based on paid employment will, therefore, over-estimate the opportunity cost.

The deprival approach bases the value of volunteers on the value of the services which they provide. It requires agencies to decide if they would continue to provide the service if volunteers were no longer available, and if they would, to cost service provision using normal paid staff. The focus on outputs rather than inputs has conceptual appeal. It is also more practical than opportunity cost approach as it does not require estimates of how individuals value their time. As few of the outputs ... are sold in markets however, their market value is difficult to determine, so their value would have to be derived from the cost of providing the service utilising paid employees.

Source: Industry Commission 1995.

In spite of the Commission's justified concerns, an approximate figure can be gained using an input cost approach. If it is assumed that the work of volunteers has a mean value, on an hourly basis, the same as that provided in the market economy, then three percent of gross domestic product (GDP) for 1994-95 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995) yields a figure of about \$12.5 billion. This is less than Duncan Ironmonger's estimate for 1992 of \$31 billion. However, his figure was based on a broader definition of voluntary work, that included some forms of informal work and that allowed for non-time contributions such as car usage. Ironmonger concluded

If the households and organisations paid the full cost of the benefits they received in the form of voluntarily provided goods and services received, the money involved would be equivalent to about eight percent of GDP (Ironmonger 1998).

As Ironmonger pointed out, the value of the contribution of volunteers to the community on a dollar equivalence basis appears to be comparable to that of individual industry sectors in the market economy. To that contribution should be added, conceptually if not in monetary terms, what Ironmonger refers to as the 'non-transferable process benefits' to the volunteers

themselves. And perhaps there should be an additional component, as social capital, that results from the voluntary nature of the contribution. Baum et al (1999), on the basis of a study of volunteers in western Adelaide, found volunteers to be more involved than non-volunteers in a range of community activities beyond volunteer work. They saw that involvement as further contributions to social capital. Whilst there are questions about cause and effect, they tentatively suggest that volunteering may engender a willingness to make this greater contribution.

The Initial Investigation

The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS 1996), in its report *Volunteering in Australia*, to the Australian Government, made recommendations with respect to training:

Volunteer work, and unpaid work more generally, should be considered a source of development of skills and competencies relative to entry and progression through formal training and paid work (Recommendation 15); and

A system of accrediting skills gained or extended through formal volunteer work should be developed as a matter of urgency. Such a system should ultimately be generic rather than industry or sector specific, as the skills gained through volunteer work are transferable to a wide range of sectors. In the short term and as a first priority, a model should be developed and trialed in the community services sector given its extensive use of volunteers, its rapid expansion, and the preponderance of women in both paid and volunteer roles (Recommendation 16).

But what of voluntary organisations in sectors other than those that are the focus of ACOSS? Is the training of volunteers and the recognition of that training an issue for them? If so, are the competencies also thought to be generic? An overview of training issues associated with volunteers requires that all sectors that employ them be considered.

Method

It was conjectured that, by bringing together key speakers who had an interest in the area, and providing opportunities for interchange, an overview of the issues and complexities would be gained. Given the size and diversity of the voluntary sector, it was impossible to have participants from all major groups. However, invitations sought to ensure that speakers from the sector, together, constituted a fairly representative sample of the sorts of organisations within it.

Table 4 lists the invitees who attended as speakers at CEET's one day seminar. The seminar was conducted in November 1999 and entitled *VET and the Voluntary Sector: conceptualising the issues*. Professor Meredith Edwards, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Canberra, undertook the summing up. Participants also included individuals who registered to attend as contributors from the floor.

Table 4: CEET Seminar November 1999 - Invited Speakers

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Ms Margaret Campion | Volunteer Co-ordinator, 3 RPH Radio for the Print Handicapped |
| Ms Georgie Cane | Executive Officer, Business Skills Victoria (ITAB) |
| Ms Sha Cordingly | Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering Australia |
| Ms Dianne Cowan | Volunteer Involvement Program Officer, Australian Sports Commission |
| Mr Tony Duckmanton | Senior Consultant-Program Development, Country Fire Authority Victoria |
| Mr Michael Gibbs | Manager, South Australian School of Volunteer Management |
| Mr Rex Hewett | Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union |
| Ms Linda McGuire | Lecturer, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University |
| Ms Kath Nicholls | President of CAMCARE (a Community Information Centre) |
| Ms Rena Pritchard | School Council President on behalf of Victorian Council of School Organisation |
| Mr Stephen Quirk | Principal Project Officer, ANTA |
| Professor Andrew Strickland | Adjunct Professor, University of South Australia |
| Ms Dianne Weidner OAM, (opening address) | Chair of Australian Council of National Trusts |
| Ms Liz Wright | Manager-Projects and Priorities, Victorian Community Services and Health ITB (ITAB) |

In order to give direction to the addresses and discussion, the day was structured around a series of questions:

- In an ideal world, what training would be provided and by whom, how would it be provided, and in what way would it be recognised both within the employing voluntary organisation and externally?
- How do volunteers currently gain their training?
- To what degree does training currently meet the needs of the organisations for which volunteers work?
- Do volunteers want more or a higher standard of training?
- What are the current constraints on training of volunteers?
- What would be the funding implications (of a suitable level of provision)?
- To what degree does voluntary work provide a path to paid work, and might a different approach to training increase passage along this path?
- Are the National Strategy for VET and Training Packages applicable to the needs of the voluntary sector?

Findings

The seminar provided some initial, albeit incomplete, answers to the questions that had been raised. In order to promote a free flow of discussion, participants were assured that individual persons would not be identified in relation to particular views and comments. Given the adoption of Chatham House rules, contributions have been brought together and discussed below without attribution.

An ideal world

In an ideal world, organisations would have an optimal mix of volunteer and paid personnel. It was said that volunteers “provide a distinctive capability for the organisation”. Management’s understanding of the respective roles provides a basis upon which the best mix can be established. Voluntary organisations, like enterprises in the market economy, need to be strategic and sensitive to the changing requirements of the environments in which they operate.

An ongoing theme in the presentations and discussion was the ambiguous nature of the volunteer role. Volunteers give of themselves and expect that their skills and contributions will be valued, without what are perceived to be threatening assessments of their skills, knowledge and performance. What is more, many volunteers have considerable, high-level experience in the paid labour force. As one speaker said: “We also need to ensure that training is not perceived as insulting.” Notwithstanding, duty of care, and/or potential for litigation, and/or the hazardous nature of tasks mean that work must be competently performed. For many of the one and a half million volunteers working in sporting groups, child protection responsibilities have learning implications. Nor is the recipient satisfied with ‘second best’. As was said for fire fighters: “People just want a BRT (big red truck)”. People whose property is aflame are not interested in whether those in the truck are paid personnel or volunteers. A balance needs to be found between the validity and reliability of assessment, and the expectations of the volunteer, as worker and learner.

In an ideal world, too, volunteers and potential employers in the market economy would be aware of the relevance of volunteer learning to subsequent employment in the market economy. For instance, volunteers in community radio operation are commonly highly skilled in the key competencies, as well as having more industry specific skills; but few volunteers recognise the transferability of their capabilities. Employers in firms and the public sector seldom do either. Ideally, volunteer work would sit alongside paid work in CVs, and be treated as a valuable indicator of employability. Furthermore, firms that employ people who undertake work as volunteers would gain prestige from supporting their personnel in carrying out their voluntary work, rather than viewing the work as a potential liability and distraction.

Current training arrangements

Given tensions between the voluntary nature of the work and the need for competence, the tendency is for some training to be provided but learning not to be formally assessed. In sport, there is a dual system where most volunteers undertake informal training through a Volunteer Improvement Program yielding a certificate of participation, whilst about ten percent choose to undertake the Certificate II in Sport and Recreation. Similarly, in fire services, some volunteers have undertaken the Certificate II in Fire Operations, whilst the rest have undergone only informal training. But an objective of the fire services is that every fire

fighter in the country will eventually be formally qualified. Those who work in community advisory services also undertake various more or less informal courses. In Victoria, public provision of recognised training for volunteers has had a relatively long history. A course was first accredited statewide in 1984 as a certificate for volunteers working in Citizen Advisory Bureaus. It was said: “Volunteers have to deal with almost any situation, including when the drunken aggressive walks in; they have to be trained!”

Trewin concluded from the ABS survey that ‘the nature of a person’s voluntary work was closely related to their type of employment’ (Trewin *ibid*), though scrutiny of the published data reveals only a weak relationship. But if it is so, many people bring to their voluntary role, skills that they have already acquired through paid employment. However, one person at the seminar queried whether there are duties and tasks which volunteers perform that would not normally be part of the job profile of a paid worker. The question, put rhetorically, was never addressed, but remains fundamental in considering training issues. It is, perhaps, implicit in a concern of Steer (2000), in relation to the work of volunteers in organisations like the Institute for the Blind:

A highly labour intensive work environment can often result in little opportunity for progression in level of assignment, so that there is some likelihood that many volunteer opportunities will be limited to less interesting and less personally satisfying tasks (for example, extensive photocopying or collation).

Recruitment processes were said to be important in ensuring that volunteers are already capable in aspects of the work to be performed, or at least are of a suitable physical or emotional disposition. For instance, the National Trust pre-tests would-be volunteers and Radio for the Print Handicapped assesses relevant skills of those applying to be readers.

It seems that many of the skills exhibited by volunteers, especially the general ones, have been acquired before commencement of voluntary work. Induction training, informal short courses and in some cases, formal training, are employed to skill the worker further, as they are in firms and public sector enterprises.

Training needs

It was suggested that a need for a higher standard of training does not always mean a higher level of outcome. Rather, it can mean that training delivery should be of a higher standard. It was felt that, in many cases, a better standard of delivery would go some of the way to overcoming the tensions associated with the training of volunteers by making training more satisfying.

Volunteering Australia, with nearly four thousand organisational members, has a Code of Practice that requires organisations that adopt it to provide volunteers with adequate training to perform work effectively, and to provide professional development. Of course, just what amounts to ‘adequate’ training is a fundamental question. There may be differences in the opinions of managers and volunteers. Typically, managers have less leverage with volunteers than when dealing with paid employees. It seems that volunteers must first see the relevance of the proposed training. It was said that volunteer radio workers willingly undergo radio-specific training, but few have been willing to undertake general training in assisting the visually impaired person.

Regardless of how successful recruitment and induction have been in providing a pool of skilled volunteers, organisational change means there will, sooner or later, be a need for further training, if the requirements of the organisation are to continue to be met. This can result in loss of services where the volunteer does not wish to undertake the new duties or adapt to the new technology. Given that volunteers are not dependent on their work for financial income, they are freer to resign than are paid workers. Conversely, those things that caused them to volunteer in the first place, such as a wish to contribute or a desire for social contact (Trewin *ibid*), may induce them to stay.

However, the new skills required may be very different and not amenable to brief periods of training. In Victoria under the previous government, school boards and committees were being expected to adopt a management role complementing the community-input role that they had performed previously. It was said that, not only have many volunteer members felt unable to do so as they have lacked the necessary skills, many have walked away suffering from burnout. It was claimed that there are now “too many experts on committees, with a loss of people with a civic consciousness”.

Constraints on training / path to paid work

Most speakers referred to the constraints on training of volunteers. Financial limitations were, naturally, a major one. It was claimed that, for many small organisations, provision of the ideal level of training would be beyond their resources and “would amount to self-destruction”.

Volunteer organisations face a similar investment question to firms when it comes to training – will the person in receipt of training stay with the organisation long enough to deliver a return that justifies the investment? One opinion was that many young volunteers who train, leave the organisation because, in contrast to most older volunteers, they are using volunteering as a path to paid work. Certainly, it is an important observation that deserves further exploration. It is not possible to confirm this from the ABS study, though sixteen percent of the 15-24 age group reported gaining work experience/reference as a reason for undertaking voluntary work, with smaller percentages for older age groups (Trewin *ibid*). If well founded, the conclusion may be an incentive to government to provide more training to young people through the voluntary sector. However, the issue is problematic. Cordingly, elsewhere, critically examined the issue of involving the sector in provision of volunteer work as part of labour market programs (Cordingly 1997). She judged that, not only do volunteer organisations lack the resources to act as on-the-job training providers, they may experience disharmony amongst volunteers as the result of creating two groups – those whose attendance is formally monitored and those who are treated more trustingly. The need to maintain good relationships between volunteers and paid workers can impact on training in other ways too. The seminar revealed that training can create resentment between volunteers and paid workers, if provided differentially.

There are other constraints also. Voluntary organisations commonly lack people with the skills to train others. Setting up new centres at a considerable distance to existing ones was mentioned as problematic: there is no one already located there who can pass on the necessary skills. Existing volunteers cannot be expected to provide them, given the time and travel demands. Furthermore, volunteers typically are busy people, for whom finding the time to train is a problem. It was suggested that training should be provided at times during which

volunteers normally work. For class-based training, this may be impracticable, because volunteers are often rostered round the clock, with few on the job at any one time.

Funding

There was general agreement that the amount of training for volunteers falls well short of that required for the sector to function at its most effective. It was considered that a strong case can be made for provision of public funding to support volunteer training and especially, for trainers of volunteers. It seems that governments are increasingly contracting voluntary organisations to deliver services that may involve unpaid personnel. One participant remarked, “If government is withdrawing from service provision, it should be training the organisations to train, that pick up the contracts”.

It was suggested that, should the sector argue for funding support for training, the whole of the education budget should be considered, not only that for VET.

About one and a half million people were said to be working in sport and recreation, nearly twice the number found by the ABS in 1994-95.

The National Strategy for VET and Training Packages

For some voluntary services, Training Packages are viewed as a suitable resource in the training of at least some volunteers. For fire protection personnel it was said, “There is only one standard – the fire competencies”. These are now being incorporated into the Training Package for emergency services. Competencies are finding a place, not only in training, but also in identifying people skilled to undertake a particular task, and in evaluating brigade performance. Competencies for Community Information Centre workers, too, are being made part of a Training Package.

Seminar participants pointed out that a voluntary organisation’s adoption of competencies as a resource allows them to be customised, and they can be used in different ways. A scheme was described that brought together competencies from a range of sources as a basis for training of volunteers and supervisors in Red Cross retail outlets.

Although there was broad support by the organisations at the seminar for formal training and use of competencies for at least some volunteers, the complexities of the VET system were considered to remain a hindrance to its acceptance by volunteers. As one speaker said, “Give me something easy to understand so that I can promote it.”

The view was expressed at the seminar that there is no fundamental reason why ANTA’s National Strategy could not include the voluntary sector within its priorities, and address matters such as the management and training of volunteers.

Discussion

One seminar participant said, “All the requirements of the workplace in the market economy for paid workers are also the requirements of voluntary workers”. Nevertheless, the seminar demonstrated that there are ambiguities in the role of the volunteer. These are associated with volunteers’ views of their role, and they also arise when interpreting employment and training issues in accordance with the dominant paradigm of the market economy.

The fact that the primary purpose of volunteer work is to assist others rather than to generate profit, means that the effectiveness of training should be judged in terms of consequences for the recipients of the assistance. In her summing up, Professor Edwards said “Research is needed to evaluate training outcomes, not just for the individual, but more broadly – for organisations and for society”.

If, however, an attempt is made to justify training expenditure on volunteers in terms of the value of the ‘product’ (service) delivered, is that product measurable where it is not sold? Perhaps approximations can be made, in monetary terms, for the product of volunteer work. But as they fail to reflect social capital generated or maintained, and the benefits that flow to the volunteer, and as they depend on questionable assumptions about pricing, the approximations have many shortcomings. In spite of these limitations, it is apparent that volunteers contribute to societal wellbeing on a substantial scale; and in dollar value terms, the worth of their product appears to be comparable to that of most industries in the market economy.

Social capital, or the network of relationships between community members that provide the basis for a functional society, is undoubtedly promoted by the work of volunteers, given that it assists individuals to function more effectively. But there appear to be other positive externalities that flow from volunteer work. Considering those sectors that participated in the seminar:

- Fire control at one site extends well beyond that site;
- Radio based information services to the print handicapped improve the life of families and associates;
- Sports leadership makes for a healthier society and reduces demands on remedial health services;
- The National Trust assists in preserving the national inheritance for enjoyment by all for generations to come, and also contributes to industries such as tourism; and
- Community information services help avoid and alleviate crises, and the demands which would otherwise pass to health, emergency and correction services.

Whether voluntary work provides a significant path to paid work remains unclear, although there was strong anecdotal support at the seminar for it doing so. The matter deserves further investigation, along with the associated training delivery issues. The seemingly poor recognition that is accorded to voluntary work by the market sector must act against the potential for voluntary work to facilitate access to paid work. Formal recognition of competence against national standards would no doubt help alleviate this ‘blindness’ amongst employers. Greater community awareness of the nature of the work of volunteers would also be helpful.

The seminar suggested that volunteers bring with them considerable ability, as a consequence of experience, interest, motivation, and selective recruitment processes. But, just as in the market economy, induction and ongoing training are essential if volunteers are to be able to apply those abilities within the context of their organisations and to adapt to changes.

The Australian National Training Authority’s strategy for VET (1998) states:

Vocational education and training enhances Australia’s wealth and improves the lives of Australians. It plays a vital role in our economy, labour market and society (Page 1); and

The policy, planning, funding and delivery mechanisms for vocational education and training need to be inclusive of the needs of all (Page 15).

Given that volunteers make a considerable contribution to the economy (albeit not measured), society, and (probably) the labour market, the quality of that contribution has significance for the community as a whole. It follows that the quality of the training they receive has important consequences for the nation. Furthermore, given that the benefits that flow from it are so broadly distributed, a case can be made, consistent with the National Strategy, for government support.

There is a need to know how much of publicly and privately funded education and training ostensibly delivered for or by the market economy, effectively contributes to volunteer performance. Not only are there those who transfer their learning from their paid job, presumably there are others who enrol in mainstream courses to assist them in their volunteer role.

As has been noted, volunteers have disproportionate numbers working in management and professional (paid) employment. This suggests that learning through publicly funded tertiary education finds application in voluntary work. Volkoff, Golding and Jenkin (1999), sampling enrollees in adult community education (ACE) and TAFE institutes in three states, found that about 27 percent of ACE enrollees and about 13 percent of TAFE enrollees were working as unpaid volunteers. Less than five percent in ACE or TAFE considered themselves to be undertaking 'general interest' courses. About 62 percent of the ACE group and 40 percent of the TAFE group viewed their studies as vocational education, with the balance being general preparatory, English second language and adult literacy/basic education. However, it is not possible to tell anything about the study patterns of volunteers in particular. In 1998, the number of enrolments in vocational programs in TAFE was about five times that in community education providers (NCVER 1999). On an approximate basis, the figures imply that participation of volunteers in ACE and TAFE was a little less than the 19 percent participation level for the community (15 years and over) as a whole. The findings suggest that ACE/TAFE are contributing to the development of the work capabilities of volunteers, but to a slightly lesser extent than they are for the community in general. The conclusion is consistent with the finding, by the ABS in 1995, that volunteers themselves did not view training as a priority issue.

On the other hand, the seminar revealed, at least for the voluntary organisations that participated, training of volunteers to be a major issue, and a problematic one. As discussed earlier, it was also a priority for ACOSS in 1996. But, in contrast to the ACOSS recommendations, seminar participants saw a need for recognition and support for relatively specific competencies, as exemplified by the demands of fire fighting, radio operation or explaining history, as well as the more generalist ones of communication, problem solving and dealing with conflict. It seems that, whether or not workers are paid, their organisations expect them to exhibit a high level of capability.

An obvious area of similarity between the work of volunteers and paid workers is the need for safety. Jordan (1998) wrote:

If volunteer workers in an organisation are regarded as workers, then they should be treated accordingly. For example, the health and safety aspects of their work tasks in

that organisation should be included in the induction, information, instruction/training and supervision that is provided by their organisation to their volunteer workers.

But the seminar revealed sensitivities attached to assessment of volunteers that do not apply where training for paid work is involved. It seems that volunteers think of themselves as workers alongside paid employees in terms of creating value through their contribution, but different in terms of commitment due to their choosing to give of themselves. Formal assessment can be viewed as a failure to value and respect the gift. As workers, volunteers may resent training that favors paid employees, but as gift givers, they may expect that assessment will remain formative rather than become summative. It is contended that the ambiguity in the role of volunteers as a consequence of the employee-gift giver dichotomy is at the heart of the tensions associated with formal assessment.

Government recognition of vocational education and training, under the Australian Qualification Framework, has brought with it debate about commodification of learning. Similarly, there are concerns that moves towards recognition of training undertaken by volunteers is resulting in a loss of perspective on what matters most. Creyton (1999) has an outcomes perspective:

(A)s volunteering becomes more recognised by government and business so it also becomes increasingly bureaucratic and managed...There is an ever increasing focus on the mechanics of recruiting, training, managing and evaluating volunteers and less discussion on how people can participate in changing their communities for the better. While good management practices, fundamental orientation and basic skills training are essential for any volunteer program, we must also consider the far greater opportunities for the types of learning which contribute to self development and community development which are available through meaningful volunteer work.

The effectiveness of services in achieving the social objectives set for them is a fundamental concern for organisations. But, as a basis for assessing individual contributions, as required for formal assessment of competency, the association is too diffuse. Creyton advocates a Habermasian approach to volunteer development – that is, one that includes communicative and emancipatory learning as well as instrumental learning. The seminar revealed that there is a high level of support for Training Packages being used in the training of volunteers, as long as they are drawn on and applied selectively and sensitively. (This is not to imply a major difference between their use here and within the market economy – Maglen, Hopkins and Burke (2000) found, in their study of firms in four very different industries, three of them to be employing Training Packages in this way.) In any subsequent consideration of curricular issues, Creyton's proposal should be revisited in the context of Training Packages.

Conclusions

Based on the research to date, the tentative conclusion is drawn that, subject to some process to ensure worth of the particular service and accountability, a government contribution to the training of volunteers is justifiable. Training Packages have a place in the training of volunteers, as long as they are employed selectively, creatively and sensitively. Whether to undergo formal assessment against competency standards should be the choice of the individual volunteer. For those who choose not to undergo formal assessment, perhaps there should remain the option of longer-term recognition of competence through ongoing job performance.

Subsequent research is required to examine these tentative conclusions further, especially for volunteer organisations in sectors other than those that participated in the seminar. It would also be valuable to explore further, the place of voluntary work as a pathway to paid work and *visa versa*. There is also a need to clarify possible implications of changes that are taking place in the makeup of the volunteer workforce (Lyons and Fabiannson 1998). The seminar strongly supported the desirability of further research in areas considered by this Working Paper.

The seminar generated some other research questions that, whilst not fundamental to resolving training issues, are nevertheless important ones:

- Is there a role for peak bodies to champion the training interests of voluntary organisations?
- To what extent do businesses gain a return from support for voluntary organisations and the volunteer work of their personnel?

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