

**Institute for
Volunteering
Research**

**PROVIDE Volunteer Impact Assessment
Final Report**

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provide.
qmsu student volunteering


**STUDENTS'
UNION**
QUEEN MARY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Executive Summary

Introduction

Provide Student Volunteering at Queen Mary Students' Union, University of London, commissioned research to assess the impact of its work and identify areas for development within the volunteering programme. The research was undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR), a specialist research agency within Volunteering England. Provide is the student volunteering programme at Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL) and has been in place for more than six years. Provide Volunteering offers Queen Mary students the opportunity to get involved in the local community. These opportunities range from a variety of one-off volunteering opportunities through to regular placements with over 120 local groups. Provide currently sits within the Students' Union and has one full-time staff member.

This impact assessment included an online survey, three focus groups and background research. All data collection took place between January and March 2009 and included both quantitative and qualitative data from primary and secondary sources.

Key Findings

The Nature and Frequency of Volunteer Involvement:

- Most students had volunteered before attending QMUL but 19% of respondents did not have previous volunteering experience.
- The most commonly cited reasons for volunteering were to improve things or help people (80%), to add to their CV (60%) and to make new friends (59%).
- Community Action Days (CADs) are the most popular type of volunteering with 63% of respondents taking part in these events.
- The majority of volunteering through Provide takes place within educational organisations such as schools, universities and colleges (60%).
- The majority of respondents were satisfied (85%) with the range of volunteering opportunities that Provide offers.

Impact

The survey and focus groups respondents reported that volunteering has had a wide range of impacts:

- Develops 'employment' skills; particularly event planning, teamwork, leadership, decision-making and problem-solving;
 - Develops communication skills such as presentation skills and public speaking;
 - Builds confidence, improves self esteem; and
 - Helps develop friendships and networks.
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- Fifty eight percent of survey respondents felt that their chance of getting the job they want had increased as a result of their volunteering experience.
 - The majority of graduate respondents agreed that volunteering through Provide had increased their employability.
 - Approximately seven out of ten (73%) respondents felt their sense of feeling part of the local community had increased and their sense of feeling a part of the university had increased (68%) due to volunteering.

- Eighty seven percent of survey respondents felt that volunteering through Provide had improved their experience of being a student at QMUL.

The overall theme to emerge in this area is that volunteering directly develops the ‘soft skills’ related to job-seeking and future employability such as communication skills, teamwork and social skills but likely has a more indirect impact on specific job or technical skills or in areas such as earning potential.

The key areas of strength that were highlighted from the research relate to Provide’s human resources, the flexibility and diversity of its services, the skills that are developed through volunteering, the associated social capital that is created from its activities and of course the actual volunteer projects themselves.

The immediate challenges for Provide according to the research results are in relation to publicity, training for volunteers and additional capacity for projects and services.

Looking further into the future, the challenges for Provide will be to create better linkages with university strategies and programmes and to develop a sustainable programme with a clear and strategic mission and target audience. Finally, each of the areas discussed carries with it resource implications and another key challenge will be to match an appropriate level of resources with each of the programme goals.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Recommended short term actions include:

- **Effective Publicity and Promotion** – This was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the research. Increasing awareness of Provide’s services and support, website improvements and additional publicity have been recognised as areas for improvement.
- **Partnership working** – Provide should develop partnerships both internally within the university and volunteer-involving organisations.

Recommended medium term actions include:

- **Increasing the frequency and variety of volunteering opportunities** – This is particularly important for the CADs, as this links to decreasing the barriers faced by non-volunteers.
- **Training** – There is an opportunity to develop a training programme for volunteers, particularly around skills that are linked to career paths.
- **Quality Assurance** – Provide should solicit feedback, reflect on its programme and assess its impact on a regular basis. This type of information should directly inform future goals and strategies of Provide.

Recommended long term actions include:

- **Develop employability links** - Strategies could link to emerging and growing employment sectors.
- **Service learning** - Provide should explore further the potential to develop and facilitate course-related volunteering.

I would recommend it [Provide] highly to everyone. It's a must to get the best university experience. – Survey respondent