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An Exploration of Volunteer Experiences for Third Level Students in Ireland from a Student Volunteer and Volunteer Manager Perspective.

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Caitríona McGrattan

M.A. in Child, Family and Community Studies   2014

Declaration

I hereby certify that the material, which is submitted in this thesis leading to the award of Master (MA) in Child, Family and Community Studies, is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic purpose, other than the partial fulfilment of the award named above.

Signed _____

Date _____

Abstract

Since the establishment of Campus Engage in 2007, student volunteering and student-led activities have received more attention on a national scale. Despite this, the area remains under researched; to date there has been no nationwide review of student volunteerism. This research aimed to explore the volunteer experiences of third level students across in a number of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland. For this qualitative study, in-depth interviews were carried out with five student volunteers and three volunteer managers across a spectrum of voluntary activity. The participants were asked to discuss their personal experiences and perceptions of student volunteering. The findings suggest the students thoroughly enjoyed their volunteering roles and felt supported by the volunteer managers and host organisations, similarly the volunteer managers and their organisations benefited from having student volunteers. While the students and volunteer managers that took part in this study were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of student volunteering, this study recommends three policy and practice related action points to further improve the student volunteer experience: the implementation of robust recruitment policies by host organisations, the introduction of volunteer recognition programmes across all HE institutions and the immediate reform of the Garda Vetting procedure. In addition, this study recommended that future research into student volunteering should include the experiences of specific student cohorts including international students, students with disabilities, mature students and students from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the students and volunteer managers who kindly 'volunteered' to speak with me about their experiences. This thesis would not have been possible without their valuable time and contributions. I am reminded of the phrase *'if you want something done, ask a busy person'* when I think of you all.

Secondly, I would like to extend my sincerest of thanks to my supervisor, Dr Carmel Gallagher, who from day one has supported me. Thank you for your genuine interest, invaluable comments and your limitless patience.

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Glossary of terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Student Volunteer: An individual, who is attending a Higher Education institution and is actively engaged in voluntary activity.

Higher Education (HE):   Post-second level education. Higher Education encompasses both Higher Level and Third level education. For the purpose of this study the terms higher education and third level education will be interchangeable.

HE Institutions: In the Irish context include: private colleges, affiliated colleges, Institutes of Technology and Universities.

Volunteer Manager: A paid member of staff within a volunteer-involving organisation who has responsibility for the full or partial management, co-ordination or supervision of volunteers.

Host Organisation: An organisation that engages with volunteers for some or all of its activities.

HE Volunteer Programme: A formal programme within a HE institution that promotes volunteerism, encourages students to volunteer and recognises/rewards students' voluntary work.

Campus Engage: A national network to support civic engagement in 18 HEIs, established on a pilot basis in 2007

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives of Study

The main aim of this study is to explore the volunteer experiences of third level students from the perspective of student volunteers and volunteer managers who work with students.

A number of key research questions will inform this study:

-What motivates students to begin and continue volunteering?

-What are the perceived benefits and challenges of volunteering as a third level student?

-What factors contribute to volunteer attrition?

-What fosters a positive relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation?

In addressing these questions, students' and volunteer managers' perceptions and experiences of volunteering were explored. Likewise, the study aimed to gain an insight into the relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Students are involved in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. "Outside the classroom, students, historically and currently, actively plan and deliver a wide range of activities for their individual benefit and the benefit of others" (Tansey, 2012, p. 125); these students and their activities are the subject of this research. As Tansey noted, there is nothing new about the concept of student volunteering; however, in recent years the area has received more attention with the establishment of Campus Engage and the inclusion of student volunteering in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Hanrahan, 2013).

Hanrahan (2013) also noted that "Higher Education student volunteering and student led engagement is receiving a much higher profile in higher education policies worldwide in recent years" (p. 2). Despite this however, the area remains under researched (Tansey, 2012).

In contrast, the broader concepts of volunteering and volunteerism have been widely researched and indeed informs most of the literature review. Roy and Ziemek (2000) argued that the literature of volunteering is "vast and rich" (p. 6). A great deal of this literature is dedicated to volunteer motivations; MacNeela (2008) suggested that "volunteer motivation is the key phenomenon around which research into the psychology of volunteering behaviour has been based in the recent past" (p. 125). Research into volunteer attrition and retention constitutes another comprehensive sub-category within the literature of volunteerism. Yanay and Yanay (2008) have argued "excessive dropout can be fatal to the organisation, which is a good reason to study its causes and factors" (p. 66). Similarly, Kim, Trail, Lim and Kim (2009) have suggested that "it is imperative for academics and practitioners alike to understand the factors that influence volunteer retention" (p. 550). Their research suggests that volunteer motivation, commitment as well as the practices and processes of the host organisation all influence volunteer retention.

Equally, Tansey (2012) commented that "a significant body of literature on volunteering explores the experiences of youth or young people", which may include students, although she noted "attendance at HE is not always explicitly stated" (p, 128). As third level education is a unique time in one's lifespan it is important to differentiate between young volunteers and student volunteers. While some research into student volunteering does exist at a campus level in some HE institutions, this information is often localised and is not generalisable. Similarly, there is literature available from other countries, in particularly the UK and the USA, however, this information is often not comparable, especially in the context of the US as their model of student engagement (service learning) is very different.

As such, this research will focus on third level student volunteers attending Irish HE institutions. This study aims to investigate and understand each of the facets of volunteer participation specifically in relation to the student volunteer experience in the Irish context; how and why students become involved in volunteering, how students perceive their voluntary roles and experiences as well as their relationships with their host organisations in order to inform and progress the development of student engagement at HE institutions across Ireland.

1.2.1 From a personal perspective:

As a volunteer for her four years of University, the researcher understood how enjoyable yet challenging being a full-time student and an active volunteer can be. Moreover, the researcher gained an appreciation of the level of support needed and the importance of communication with the host organisation the more she developed a deeper involvement in volunteering. After graduating, the researcher also held a number of positions with responsibility for managing student volunteers; from this perspective she understood the challenges of recruiting and retaining volunteers and the frustrations that can arise from volunteer dropout. As such, the researcher wanted to harness her personal and professional experience of both 'camps' and study the relationship between volunteer and host organisation in depth.

1.3 Delimitations

Due to time and space restrictions, the researcher has purposely chosen the parameters of this study. The following aspect of the research topic will not be included;

1.3.1 Specific voluntary activities

Rather than focusing on one particular voluntary activity such as tutoring/mentoring, sport or advocacy it was deemed more beneficial to engage with students and volunteer managers from a variety of areas across the spectrum of voluntary activity, in order to capture the breadth of the voluntary participation. As Tansey (2012) noted; "there is little

research on the activity of volunteering itself, including a lack of description regarding the activities students engage in and the nature of their voluntary roles within community" (p. 129).

1.4 Outline of the study

The study adopted a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews with five student volunteers and three volunteer managers. The students were all enrolled at Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in Dublin and Limerick. The volunteer managers worked for host organisations that engaged with student volunteers attending HEIs across the country. The participants represented a broad spectrum of voluntary activity. They were asked to discuss topics which covered the key research questions detailed above.

The following is an outline of the chapters of this study:

Chapter One: Clarifies the aims of the research, details the rationale for the study and provides an outline for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two: Presents a literature review of past and current literature related to volunteerism. This chapter introduces the key areas of volunteer literature including: the theoretical perspectives behind the motivation to start volunteering, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of volunteering and the key factors that influence volunteer dropout and retention. Much of this literature relates to volunteers in general, as such this chapter also highlights that lack of research into student volunteering in Ireland.

Chapter Three: The methodology of the study is presented in chapter three. This chapter accounts for the choice of research method and research instrument in light of the research objective and questions. This chapter also outlines the sample, procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter Four: Presents the findings of the in-depth interviews with the participants. These key findings are presented by theme, which are further divided into the sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis.

Chapter Five: This chapter presents the discussion of the key findings of the interviews with the student volunteers and the volunteer managers. The correlations between these findings and the current literature on student volunteering are highlighted, as are the instances where they differ from similar research.

Chapter Six: Presents a conclusion to the research study and the resulting recommendations for further research, practice and policy development.

1.5 Conclusion

The present study found a dearth of research into the experiences of third level students from an Irish perspective, despite the growing numbers of students participating in voluntary activity on and off the campuses of Ireland (Tansey, 2012). As such, the present study aimed to address this and explored the experiences of student volunteers across a number of HE institutions in Ireland. In particular it focused on the students' perceptions of volunteering and their relationships with their host organisations. Although the number of students and volunteer managers interviewed was small, it was hoped that this study will contribute to the understanding and promotion of student volunteering in the Irish context.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research aimed to explore the experiences of third level student volunteers from the perspective of students and volunteer managers. The research, which aimed to investigate students' and volunteers managers' perceptions of volunteering, was informed by a number of research questions; what motivates students to begin and continue volunteering? What are the perceived benefits and challenges of volunteering as a third level student? What factors contribute to volunteer attrition? Likewise, the study aimed to gain an insight into the relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation. This chapter presents a critique of the current literature on volunteering in light of the research questions and provides the context for this research.

2.2 The Irish Policy Context of Volunteering

Hanrahan (2013) noted that "Higher Education student volunteering and student led engagement is receiving a much higher profile in higher education policies worldwide in recent years" (p. 2). In the Irish context, student volunteering has also received more attention with the establishment of Campus Engage and the inclusion of student volunteering in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Hanrahan, 2013). However, Tansey (2012) noted that student volunteering is not a new concept; "Outside the classroom, students, historically and currently, actively plan and deliver a wide range of activities for their individual benefit and the benefit of others" (p. 125). Volunteerism in Ireland went through a similar period in the spotlight in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Van Hout and colleagues (2011) have noted that "the Irish volunteering infrastructure began to gain ground in the late 1990s" (p. 39). The first Volunteer Resource Centre, which later became Volunteer Ireland, was established (*ibid*), and within a few years the white paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* was published by the then Department for Social, Community and Family Affairs in March 2000, which proposed a framework for supporting voluntary activity and developing the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. Shortly after this, the National Committee on Volunteering was

established and presented their report and recommendations to government in 2002 on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland, entitled *Tipping the Balance*. These two policy documents have helped to shape the landscape of volunteerism and are central to understanding the context of voluntary activity in Ireland. A third policy paper, the Report on '*Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland'* by the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, published in 2005, was also developed.

This Report to the Houses of the Oirechtas suggested that "a clear strategy" on volunteering was needed (Joint Committee*,* 2005, p. v). It made nine recommendations; six relating to volunteering policy and three regarding funding issues. Interestingly, there was specific mention of student in one of the recommendations; Recommendation 1(e) outlined a number of actions to be taken in the education sector "with the specific aim of increasing volunteering among students" including the establishing of "volunteer centres on the campuses of third level institutions" to ensure "comprehensive exposure of students to the voluntary sector" (pp. v-vi).

2.3 Current Context of Volunteering in Ireland

Almost a decade has passed since the publication of this report; it would be interesting to revisit these recommendations as it has been argued that more organisations are looking to recruit volunteers. Roy and Ziemek (2000) have noted that "demographic and socio-economic trends of the last years, such as the aging population and high unemployment rates, have made policy makers increasingly turn to volunteering as a possible solutions" (p. 3). Van Hout and colleagues (2011) have argued this is certainly the case in Ireland, suggesting that as a consequence of the latest recession, which has led to reduced funding for staff positions and diminishing incomes, many community and voluntary organisations increasing rely on volunteers.

Despite this need, it has been argued that very little is known about the size and scale of the voluntary community in Ireland. Indeed, there are no official statistics complied on the

extent of volunteering in Ireland (DKM Consultants Ltd, 2005, p. 5). Not much is known of the scale of student volunteering either. While some HE institutions have measured voluntary activity at campus level, for example the IT Tralee Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey, 2010 noted "60 per cent of ITT students volunteer, committing an average of three hours per week" (cited in Hanrahan, 2013, p. 3), no national survey of student volunteerism has been undertaken to date. Tansey (2012) also noted that "there is research on the activity of volunteering itself, including a lack of description regarding the students engage in and the nature of their voluntary roles with the community" (p. 129). Such research is hampered by the lack of common definition for student volunteering.

2.4 Defining volunteer*

Student volunteerism is not alone in this predicament. Roy and Ziemek (2000) argued that defining volunteering and volunteers is not easily done; "finding a workable definition for volunteering is not an easy task as activities are very diverse and complex" (p. 6). As these terms are central to this research, the variations of definitions will be discussed below.

2.4.1 Volunteers

Volunteers are a very heterogeneous group. Rochester and colleagues (2012) noted that "volunteer-involving organisations vary enormously, while volunteers can be found not only in the voluntary but also the public and even private sector" (p. 151). The roles played by volunteers within organisations also vary enormously; there are practitioners and performers, teachers and directors, match officials and coaches as well as those in administrative and support roles (*ibid,* p. 234). Simplistic definitions, like those provided in the Oxford English dictionary-"A person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task" and "A person who works for an organization without being paid" (2014)- do not capture the full extent of the contribution made by volunteers. Instead of trying to formulate a prescribed, predetermined definition of what the role of a volunteer should be, a more accurate definition may come from asking volunteers to define what they do. Rochester and colleagues (2012) have noted that "volunteer involvement is as much about

how volunteers see their roles as it about simply directing effort" (p. 155). Similar to volunteers, volunteering is also a "much more complex and multi-faceted phenomenon than is commonly appreciated" (*ibid,* p. 235).

2.4.2 Volunteering

Van Hout and colleagues (2011) noted that the definition of volunteering is also disputed. It has been suggested that "definitions of volunteering vary culturally in terms of level of participatory activity and dimensions of 'net cost' to the volunteer" (Van Hout, 2011*,* p. 40). While Martin (2011) noted "searches for a new and more 'inclusive' term than volunteering have so far been unable to find an alternative word or phrase that succinctly conveys whatever it is that volunteering is all about" (p. 10). In their attempts to define volunteering, Roy and Ziemek (2000) cited Smith's (1999) list of criteria along which volunteering definitions may differ, which included level of commitment and organisational setting.

Level of Commitment

A frequently asked question on volunteer surveys and questionnaires refers to how often an individual volunteers; weekly, monthly, occasionally, etc. Questions like these may suggest that volunteering requires a certain level of commitment and regularity, however the White Paper on *Supporting Voluntary Activity* suggested that volunteer commitment can and does cover a spectrum of involvement; "It can mean anything from occasionally helping out in a local sports club to participation in major national organisations" (Department for Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000, p. 2).

Organisational Setting

Some scholars have attempted to define volunteering based on the environment in which it takes place, i.e. in formal or informal settings. Roy and Ziemek (2000) have argued that while "most operable definitions focus on the institutionalised i.e. formal form of volunteering" (p. 7), valuable work is still carried out in informal settings. In the context of student volunteering, it has been suggested organisational setting is relevant to the

definition of volunteering; "we can distinguish between students engaged in what we might more formally recognise as student volunteering, working for a charity shop off-campus, from those whose involvement is less community-focused, such as running a society" (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 426).

Other definitions

The Oxford English dictionary (2014) defined volunteering as "work for an organisation without being paid". Definitions like this, which juxtapose volunteering with paid work, are arguable unhelpful. Ganesh and McAllum (2010) have suggested that such definitions of volunteering may be as a result of the lack of status accorded to volunteer roles and duties in comparison to paid work; "when volunteering and professionalism are held in tension, the very practices that constitute volunteering can be understood as forms of unpaid, amateur and low status labour" (p. 4). This down-grading of the work of volunteers, to "only tasks that are peripheral to an organisation's core mission" is, they argued, systematic of a view, which suggests "organisations should assume that volunteers are neither reliable nor accountable" (*ibid*).

2.4.3 Voluntary Activity

Many definitions of voluntary activity refer exclusively to voluntary activity as service. Rochester and colleagues (2012) have, however, argued against the use of this limited understanding of volunteering. They proposed two additional categories of voluntary activity- volunteering as activism and volunteering as serious leisure to allow for the vast array of voluntary activity. These were developed to be in-keeping with the typology of volunteering developed for the UN International Year of the Volunteer. The UN IYV aimed to promote four types of volunteering activity; philanthropy and service to others, self-help and mutual aid, participation in the political process and advocacy and campaigning (cited in Rochester et al, 2012, p. 234). These broad categorisations for voluntary activity reflect the heterogeneous nature of volunteers.

Rochester and colleagues (2012) have noted a "growing diversity of the activities undertaken by volunteers" (p. 103). In their online how-to guide for volunteering, Volunteer Ireland (2013b) suggested that the range of voluntary activity currently undertaken in Ireland is endless. They list sixteen categories of possible volunteering options in this guide, including; advice work, befriending, fundraising, working with people with physical, mental and learning disabilities, conservation work and work with children and students (*ibid* , pp. 8-13). In addition to the activities outlined above, new ways to volunteer are constantly being explored and developed. In 2012, Ellis reported that the latest trends in volunteering include; virtual/online volunteering, pro bono/highly skilled volunteering and entrepreneurial volunteering (2012, p. 23). Similarly, Rochester and colleagues (2012) have suggested that virtual volunteering is among the top three newest ways to volunteer alongside episodic volunteering and employer-supported volunteering. The National Youth Council of Ireland have noted the change in how people give their time to their organisation; in discussions on volunteer attrition "the Council did not believe that the numbers of volunteers was falling, rather that people were volunteering in different ways; e.g. virtual volunteering" (DKM Economic Consultants Ltd, 2004, p. 26).

2.5 Overview of the literature

Students have been active in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities for generations (Tansey, 2012). Despite this, Tansey (2012) noted that "literature on student volunteering is particular is hard to find" (p. 130). As such, much of this literature review has been informed by the broader concepts of volunteering and volunteerism, which have been widely researched. Roy and Ziemek (2000) argued that the literature of volunteering is "vast and rich" (p. 6). A great deal of this literature is dedicated to volunteer motivations; "volunteer motivation is the key phenomenon around which research into the psychology of volunteering behaviour has been based in the recent past" (MacNeela, 2008, p. 125). Research into volunteer attrition and retention constitutes another comprehensive sub-category within the literature of volunteerism. Yanay and Yanay (2008) have argued "excessive dropout can be fatal to the organisation, which is a good reason to study its causes and factors" (p. 66). Similarly, Kim and colleagues (2009) have suggested that "it is

imperative for academics and practitioners alike to understand the factors that influence volunteer retention" (p. 550). In a previous study, McNeela (2008) argued that the benefits and challenges associated with volunteering warrant a higher profile in research into the volunteer process. The lack of literature relating to the experiences of volunteer-involving organisations is also noted.

2.6 Motivations

2.6.1 To start volunteering

According to Rochester and colleagues (2012); "a very high proportion of the volunteering literature has been devoted to exploring the motivation to volunteer" (p. 238). Motivations to start volunteering are most often classified into two categories: altruistic and self-serving motives. Although, some social researchers are critical of these classifications; suggesting that they are unhelpful to understanding the holistic volunteer experience.

Classification of motives.

MacNeela (2008) has noted that most volunteers can identify their initial reasons for volunteering; these motives he suggests can be categorised as "self- or other-orientated" (p. 130). Most literature suggests that volunteers they are either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (DKM Consultants Ltd, 2004). In contrast, Roy and Ziemek (2000) have stated that "while some individuals are motivated because they feel truly altruistic, there are several other motivations" that may also be driving them to volunteer (p. 15), suggesting that most volunteers start volunteering for more than one reason.

Altruism.

Roy and Ziemek (2000) have argued that although difficult to quantify, "altruism is probably a continuous variable" among volunteer motives (p. 19). The literature on volunteer motivations suggests that altruistic reasons for beginning to volunteering include; a desire to help others, to make a contribution to the community and to challenge the status quo

(MacNeela, 2008; Rochester, 2012). Linked to altruism, volunteers also often sight a "perceived obligation" as a reason for beginning and for continuing to volunteer, particularly in the health and social care sectors (MacNeela, 2008, p. 125). Similarly, volunteers with a pre-existing relationship or connection with an organisation or cause, benefiting from its service either personally or through a family member, often see their volunteering as a means to 'give something back' (*Ibid*).

Self-Orientated Motivations.

Yanay and Yanay (2008) have suggested that not all volunteers are motivated exclusively by altruistic reasons; they argued that "studies have shown that volunteering is a self-rewarding activity" and continue to suggest that "It is not unreasonable to assume that people who volunteer expect that volunteering will contribute to their positive self-image and feelings" (p. 65). Similarly, Van Hout and colleagues (2011) have proposed that "Volunteering processes appeared increasingly utilised for self-serving purposes within reciprocal relations, so as to gain experience, undertake training, learn new skills and fill time in a productive work directed manner" (p. 50). Examples of self-serving or extrinsic motives that lead individuals to volunteer include; self-fulfilment, development of new social networks, learning new skills and valuable training opportunities (Van Hout et al, 2011; Volunteer Ireland, 2013; Rochester et al, 2012) Linked to this reason, MacNeela (2008) has suggested that some "volunteers identified a career development motive as a primary reason for becoming involved" (p. 131).

In the context of student volunteers, career progression is a commonly cited reason for beginning to volunteer (Holdsworth & Brew, 2014). For Holdsworth (2012) there is too much emphasis is placed on 'career progression' when considering students' motives to volunteer: "In seeking to define and make sense of motivations it is all too easy to assume that students have clearly articulated reasons for volunteering that are directed either towards their own career or incorporate more 'traditional' motivations" (p. 435).

Holdsworth and Brew (2014) also critiqued the current literature on volunteer motivations, arguing it is preoccupied with "defining and interpreting individual motivations" (p. 205). Holdsworth (2010) warned of the "limitations of developing fixed categorisations to define motives" suggesting that this may lead to an "implicit assumption" that individuals "are motivated by strategic rationale, as opposed to developing more contingent and habitual approaches to volunteering" (p. 435). In addition to this, Rochester and colleagues (2012) also noted that "there are many motivations as there are volunteers" (p. 119), so perhaps understanding what motivates a volunteer *to continue* volunteering is more useful information the volunteer experience.

2.6.2 To work with volunteers

In contrast, there is a marked absence in the volunteer literature regarding why non-profit or charity organisations would choose to work with volunteers; it is mostly assumed that they do. This is possibly because, Van Hout and colleagues (2011) noted, many community and voluntary organisations increasing rely on volunteers as a result of the latest recession, due in part to reduced funding for staff positions and diminishing incomes. Similarly Martin (2011) noted, "charities and voluntary groups need reliable and committed volunteers" (p. 6).

2.7 Advantages and disadvantages to volunteering

MacNeela (2008) has argued the perceived benefits and challenges of volunteering are significant to *the volunteer experience*; "the key issues seems to be not whether volunteering is ego inspired or altruistic, but rather to identify the principles of benefit maximising and cost minimising across the variety of ways in which volunteering takes place" (p. 137). He also argued that volunteers cite the perceived benefits of volunteering among the reasons they continue to volunteer. The advantages and benefits of volunteering are well documented, they include; an increased personal well-being and sense of purpose, meeting new people and making new friends, and a sense of giving something back (Van Hout et al, 2011, p. 49). Similarly, Kim and colleagues (2009) have noted that "volunteers

are concerned about the non-monetary benefits they receive from volunteering such as knowledge and skill obtainment" (p. 557).

On the other hand, MacNeela (2008) has noted that while most people are happy with their volunteer experience, costs and challenges sometimes developed. These challenges can relate to the person and/or to the organisation and wider environment. The person-related challenges associated with volunteering include; volunteer burnout, reduced time spent with family and friends and on other leisure pursuits (DKM Consultants Ltd, 2004). While the organisation-related challenges can include: "inefficient use of volunteer time, tension among the volunteers and professional staff and a lack of professional support" (Yanay and Yanay, 2008, p. 67).

2.8 Volunteer Attrition-Why volunteers leave?

Yanay and Yanay (2008) have argued that one of the most basic challenges faced by volunteer organisations is volunteer dropout. They noted that deciding to drop out is an extremely difficult decision for most volunteers brought on by an unavoidable change in their personal circumstances, e.g. moving house, gaining employment, looking after dependents. It has been argued that external factors such as "the pressures of modern life with longer working hours, longer commutes and increasing individualisation are putting increasing pressure on volunteering." (DKM Consultants Ltd, 2004, p. 24)

2.9 Volunteer Retention

McCrudden (2009) noted that "retaining volunteers is essential to the success of an ongoing volunteer-involving project" (p. 74). However, Rochester and colleagues (2012) have noted that "there is no single authoritative explanation of retention-why some volunteers choose to stay in their volunteering role and for how long" (p. 238). As noted previously, volunteers

will stay involved with an organisation if they feel like they are contributing. The *volunteer experience* is an evolving process as demonstrated by the attributes below;

Community Involvement and Integration.

Van Hout and colleagues (2012) have suggested "that levels of volunteer participation increase as individuals perceive themselves to me more involved in the community and experience greater levels of trust within their community" (p. 49). Similarly, they noted "the volunteer ethic is ground in trust, reciprocity, sense of belonging, shared norms and values, and social embeddedness" (p. 41).

Growing Commitment.

Similarly, Van Hout and colleagues (2011) have argued that "participation increases as individuals perceive levels of trust within reciprocal volunteering arrangements and over time may become entrenched within these communities" (*ibid,* p. 42). Rochester and colleagues (2012) have noted that long-term volunteers, with proven high levels of commitment to an organisation or cause, develop a connection to the organisation and this connection keeps them volunteering. For Ellis (2012) 'evolving loyalty' was key to volunteer retention. In her view, the way to develop loyalty is through keeping volunteers fulfilled.

Self- and Role Development.

Volunteer Ireland (2013) has suggested that volunteers who grow with an organisation, who develop new skills and whose roles do not become stagnant are more likely to remain feel self-fulfilled and interested in continuing as a volunteer.

2.10 Volunteer Management

The role of the volunteer managers in the volunteer experience was discussed frequently in the literature, with most commentators advocating for volunteers managers to be recruited to all volunteer-involving organisations.

2.10.1 Support for volunteers

Volunteer Ireland (2013) have suggested that organisations should have a named person responsible for volunteers, who should be available to meet with volunteers and discuss their involvement; "this person should ensure each volunteer is given adequate support" (p. 17). Rochester and colleagues (2012) suggested that volunteers want "somebody within an organisation [who] is thinking about the best and most effective way to involve them" (p. 150). Similarly, McCrudden (2009) argued "there is much that volunteer managers can do to influence retention and ensuring that volunteers are supported, motivated, developed…" (p.74). Rochester and colleagues (2012) argued that organisations that look after their volunteers keep their volunteers, but that there is a fine line; "other evidence tells us that too much management and bureaucracy is off-putting to volunteers" (p. 157).

2.10.3 Volunteer and Host Organisation Relationship

For, Volunteer Ireland "volunteering is a two-way relationship, one that should benefit both the volunteer and the organisation" (2013a). Researchers have found that many volunteers seek "the development of reciprocity of relations in the form of *giving and getting something back* within their volunteer experiences" (Van Hout et. al, 2011, p. 44). The development of quality relationships and positive mutuality between volunteers and their host organisations are therefore arguably, central to the volunteering process.

2.11 Recognition

McCrudden (2009) argued that "ensuring that volunteers feel valued is part of the responsibility of the volunteer manager and goes a long way to help retain volunteers" (p. 75). Common approaches to formal volunteer recognition include "awards, certificates, plaques, badges and recognition dinners or receptions to honour volunteer achievement" (McCurley, Lynch & Jackson, 2012, p. 339). McCrudden (2009) noted that the limitation of formal recognition structures; "Formal reward structures are most suited to those who seek community or peer approval for their work, but are irrelevant, and sometimes disliked, by those whose primary aim is helping others" (p. 83). McCurley, Lynch and Jackson (2012) advocated for informal recognition practices: "the most effective volunteer recognition occurs in the day-to-day interchange between the volunteer and the organisation, through the staff expressing sincere appreciation and thanks" (p. 339).

In the context of student volunteering, formal recognition through the HE Intuitions was recommended in the *Hunt Report*: Higher Education institutions were advised to "recognise civic engagement of their students through programme accreditation, where appropriate" (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 79). Hanrahan (2013) noted that "HE Institutions are in the early stages of acknowledging and rewarding student volunteering" (p. 2). Four HE institutions have introduced programmes of formal recognition for student volunteering and student-led activities: University of Limerick, Trinity College Dublin, IT Tralee and NUI Galway.

Notwithstanding the advancements made by the colleges named above, Holdsworth and Brew (2014) are sceptical of programmes that recognise and promote volunteering in HE institutions: "the challenge for HE volunteering is to resist becoming a tick-box activity, which would undermine the choices that students make about getting involved" (p. 215). They recommend that volunteering at HE level should "remain a diverse and loosely defined activity in universities and one which students can access through a number of different routes in accordance with their varied needs and expectations" (*ibid*).

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the main debates, theories and arguments in relation to the field of volunteering and volunteerism. This review of the current literature also exposed the dearth of research and literature available on student volunteering in the Irish context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of third level student volunteers. The objective was to investigate and understand the perceptions and experiences of student volunteers. In addition, the study also aimed to gain an insight into the relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation. A qualitative approach was adopted for this research; in-depth interviews were carried out with five student volunteers and three volunteer managers. The chapter will present the rationale for the research design, sample selection, research instrument and procedures and the data analysis method. It will also outline the ethical considerations of this research.

3.2 Research Design

Bell (2010) noted that "the approach adopted and the methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required" (p.6) suggesting "the initial questions is not 'Which methodology?' but 'What do I need to know and why?'" (p. 117). The two most common methods of social research are quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methods, according to Denscombe (2010a), are most effective when working with large numbers of respondents, as such tend to be associated with large scale studies. Conversely, qualitative research is concerned with the depth rather than the breadth of information.

3.2.1 Suitability of Research Design

A qualitative research was adopted for this study. Qualitative research has been described as "a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (Davies, 2007, p. 10), in this case the world of the student volunteers and volunteer managers. Dawson (2009) suggested that "qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences...It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants" (p. 14). There is an

opportunity, through a qualitative research method, to engage at a deeper level with the experiences of the students and volunteer managers.

While quantitative research has its place; Davies (2007) suggested that quantitative research findings have "a certain 'definiteness' about them, which make it possible for conclusions to be drawn to a specifiable level of probability" (P. 11). Bell (2010) has argued "surveys can provide answers to the questions of 'What?', 'Where?', 'When?' and 'How?' but not so easy to find out 'Why?' (p.12). One of the main aims of this research is to explore the *why* of student volunteering; why students begin volunteering, why host organisations engage with students, and why students continue volunteering. Bell (2010) has suggested that "researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world" (p. 5); as another of the main aims of this research is to understand the experiences and perceptions of student volunteers and volunteer managers a qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate for this study.

3.2.2 Phenomenological Approach

In order to capture both the essence of student volunteers' involvement and the depth of the knowledge held by volunteer managers a phenomenological approach will adopted, which emphasises an individual's personal experiences and views (Denscombe, 2010b). The phenomenological approach to research, according to Denscombe (2010b) "concentrates its efforts on the kind of human experiences that are pure, basic and raw" (p. 94). It is explorative in nature and therefore supports the aims of this research.

3.3 Research Sample and Selection

3.3.1.The sample

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of third level student volunteers from the perspective of students and volunteer managers who work with student

volunteers as such it was important to have both parties represented in this research. A profile of each participant is presented in the appendices (refer to Appendix A).

Student volunteers.

The criterion for taking part in this research was that respondents had to be a student attending an Irish HE institution and currently engaged volunteering activity. Five student volunteers were interviewed for this study. The students attended Dublin and Limerick-based HE institutions including an institute of technology, a university and a private college. The sample included students who volunteered via university activities and those who volunteered off-campus. They range of student voluntary activity included: educational programmes, mental and physical heath projects, befriending, youth work and sport. Most students were involved in more than one volunteering activity.

Managers and Co-Ordinators of Volunteers.

Given the marked absence from volunteering literature of the voice of those managing volunteers within organisations, three volunteer managers were interviewed for this study. For volunteer managers, the criterion for participating in the study stipulated they must work for a volunteer-involving organisation and have responsibility for the management, co-ordination or supervision of third level student volunteers. All the volunteer managers were Dublin-based; however two were employed by national organisations so engaged with students from a number of HE institutions across the country. Similarly to the sample of student volunteers, the diverse range of voluntary organisations were represented including; developmental education and sustainability, sports and mental health.

3.3.2 Sampling

Hall and Hall (1996) argued that sampling for qualitative research tends to be purposive rather than random. Purposive sampling, according to Denscombe (2010b) "operates on the principle that we can get the best information through focusing on a relatively small number of instances deliberately selected on the basis of their known attributes" (p. 34-35). The

individuals who participated in this research were purposely selected, based on their employment experience and participation in voluntary activity. To achieve maximum variation student volunteers and volunteer managers were selected on the basis of their association with a particular voluntary activity.

3.3.3 Sample recruitment

The student volunteers were invited to take part in the study by letter (refer to Appendix B). This letter, which included a brief overview of the study and an invitation to contact the researcher if eligible, was sent by email to all students registered with the Civic Engagement office and Clubs and Societies office in two HE Institutions; this yielded 15 responses. Due to time and travel limitations of the researcher, three of these students were chosen to participate. The letter was also emailed to all volunteers in two volunteer-involving organisations were the researcher had previously worked; this yielded five responses. Two of these students were eligible to participate in the study.

The volunteer managers were also invited to participate in the study by letter (refer to Appendix C). This letter, which also included a brief overview of the study and an invitation to contact the researcher if eligible, was emailed to organisations associated with the Civic Engagement office in one institution; this yielded two responses, both of which were eligible to participate. The third volunteer manager was self-referred to the study; the manager in question spoke to another volunteer manager involved in the study and requested to take part.

3.4 Research Tools

Bell (2010) has suggested "Research instruments are selected and devised to enable you to obtain answers. The instrument is merely a tool to enable you to gather data…" (p. 122). However, she also argued "decisions have to be made about which methods are best for particular purposes and then data-collecting instruments must be designed to do the job" (p. 117). Research methods or instruments typically associated with a qualitative approach

include: interviews, focus groups, case studies, observation and documentary analysis. The case study approach, which "provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth" (Bell, 2010, p. 8) was considered as a research method for this study, however it was deemed to be too specific for the aims of the research. Bell (2010) noted that "some question the value of the study of single events" (*ibid,* p. 9). The time-frame for this research would not allow for a meaningful or even adequate observation approach.

3.4.1 Interviews

In-depth individual interviews were deemed the most appropriate instrument for this research. The benefits of using interviews as a method of data collection have been well documented. Interviews, according to Hall and Hall (1996) "provide data, which give fuller expression to the informant's views" (p. 157). It has been argued that "interviews designed to yield rich or in-depth data can be very useful in practical social research projects" (Hall and Hall, 1996, p. 156). Bell (2010) has also suggested that interviews can provided additional insights -for example tone, facial expressions, hesitation and use of silence- that would be missed in a written submission. However, Hall and Hall (1996) have queried the reliability of in-depth interviews suggesting that interviewees may not be quite as honest in course of the interview, particularly if asked sensitive or controversial questions, as they would be if they self-completed, for example, a survey. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, the interview remains a valuable tool for data collection; Bell (2010) claimed that a "skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings" (p. 161), all of which are relevant to this research.

3.5 Procedure

A semi-structured interview format was used so as to provide for discussion on the main topics while also allowing flexibility for the participants to expand on their unique, individual experiences. Bell (2010) also noted that semi-structured interviews produce "a set of responses that can be fairly easily recorded, summarised and analysed" (p. 162). This was

important for data analysis. The student volunteers and the volunteer managers were asked a separate series of questions so as to capture their different perspectives on student volunteering. The interview questions are included in the appendices (refer to Appendix D & E).

Each participant chose their preferred location. The interviews with the students were conducted on their campus. Two volunteer managers were interviewed in their place of work, the other in the researcher's place of work. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. They were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim. Excerpts from both a student volunteer and volunteer manager interview transcription are included in the appendices (refer to Appendix F & G).

3.6 Data Analysis

It has been argued that data collection, through surveys, interviews, observations or otherwise, are just large amounts of information "until they are analysed and evaluated" (Bell, 2010, p. 209). As the format for the interviews were semi-structured, with a framework of topics developed in advance, the recording, analysing and the evaluation of the data collected was made simpler for the researched.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Through the repeated reading the interview transcripts, the researcher sought to identify comparisons and contrasts within the data. The data was first analysed using the pre-determined themes and sub-themes, informed by the research questions, literature and framework of interview topics and then reviewed for any newly emerged themes. The analysis of the data was made more efficient by the use of data coding by theme and sub-theme. It has been argued that the categorisation of data, or coding, is necessary "to allow for comparisons between informants and to show how widespread certain feelings and attitudes may be" (Hall & Hall, 1996, p. 199). For sampling coding please refer to Appendix H. The data was presented in chapter four under the key themes which emerged.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

While this research worked exclusively with adults (aged 18 years and over), it was not without ethical issues, namely; the wellbeing of participants, confidentiality for participants and organisations, and the bias of the researcher.

3.7.1 Confidentiality and Anonymity

It has been noted that regardless of the size of a project, the researcher must "explain to the respondents as fully as possible what the research is about, why you wish to interview them, what will be involved and what you will do with the information you obtain" (Bell, 2010, p. 160). As such, each of the participants received an information sheet with full details of the study in advance (refer to Appendix I & J). Participant wellbeing was paramount before, during and after the interviews.

For this purpose of this research, confidentiality is understood as "a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form" (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996 cited in Bell, 2010, p. 49). Anonymity, the "promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondents" (*ibid*), was not application to this research.

3.7.2 Consent

Bell (2010) has argued that the principle of 'informed consent' requires "careful preparation involving explanation and consultation before any data collecting begins" (p. 46), as such each participant was written to in advance of their interview. Initial contact detailed the purpose of the study and outlined the proposed research methods (refer to Appendix B & C) and provided with a details description of the study (refer to Appendix I & J). Before the students and volunteer managers participated in the interview, they also were asked to read and sign a consent form indicating they were willing to proceed (refer to Appendix K).

3.7.3 Bias

Bell (2010) has noted "many factors can result in bias and there are always dangers in research carried out by individual researchers, particularly those who have strong views about the topic they are researching" (p. 169). Similarly, Grönlund (2011) noted, "the insights of the researcher are central" suggesting that "another researcher might have used different ways of analysis and arrived at different conclusions" (p. 871). As a previous volunteer and volunteer manager, the researcher has personal experience of volunteer processes, procedures and policies; it would be unrealistic to suggest, that left unchecked, that would give rise to completely unbiased research. Bell (2010) also noted that there is a particular danger of bias creeping into interviews, due to their subjectivity nature. As such the researcher remained aware of her personal biases and perceptions throughout the study.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Wilson (2000) discussed the both "the difficulties of measuring volunteer work" and "complexities of gathering accurate data" in relation to volunteering. Some of the limitations of researching the area of volunteerism include participant objectivity and differing understandings.

3.8.1 Participant Objectivity

Hall and Hall (1996) have queried the reliability of in-depth interviews; "would two different researchers get the same data from interviewing the same person using a loosely structured schedule?" (p. 44). They also suggest that interviewees may not be quite as honest in course of the interview, particularly if asked sensitive or controversial questions, as they would be if they self-completed, for example, a survey. It has been also argued the participants can exaggerate their involvement in voluntary activity in order to appease the interviewer (Joint Committee, 2005, p. 5). Congruently, Hall and Hall (1996) have argued that "perceived characteristics of the interviewer-sex, ethnic group, age, social class-may bias the

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information given, as informants provide the answers they think the interviewer wants to hear" (p. 101).

3.8.2 Definitions and Understanding

Bell (2010) has noted that "imprecision about what is meant by both terms can result in serious misunderstandings between researchers and participants" (p. 49). This is particularly relevant to research into volunteering and voluntary activity as both are contested terms. Wilson (2000) also noted that "different groups in the population attach different values to the same volunteer work…Highly generalised value questions fail to capture this variation."(p.219)

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology of this research study. Although some limitations of the research method were discussed, its selection was justified due to the strengths of the design and its suitability to the research aim and questions.

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The main aim of this research was to explore the experiences of third level student volunteers from the perspective of student volunteers and volunteer managers. In this chapter, the key findings of the research are presented. These findings are based on in-depth interviews with five student volunteers (Aoife, Ernest, Megan, Michelle and Séamus) and three volunteer managers (Cathy, Helen and John); the participants' are profiled in the appendices (refer to Appendix A). The students and volunteer managers were asked separate questions in order to explore their different experiences of student volunteering. The findings are presented under four broad themes; motivations, volunteer attrition, volunteer retention and volunteerism and society. The research questions and literature informed the pre-selection of majority of the themes and sub-themes, which in turn informed how the data from the interviews was analysed and coded. One theme that emerged unexpectedly from the data was 'volunteerism and society'.

4.2 Motivations

As one of the key research questions and much of volunteer literature relates the motives behind volunteering, asking the students why they began volunteering and why organisations work with volunteers was an obvious place to begin discussions. The reasons why the students continued to volunteer were also discussed.

4.2.1.To start volunteering

The motivations that drew the five students to volunteering included a combination of altruistic motives, family and friend connections, as well as having 'free time'.

Altruistic motivations were common amongst the student volunteers; three students spoke of their desire to give something back or a sense of duty to contribute to the community:

"I think it [volunteering] was always something that I knew I wanted to do and I wanted to be involved in. I've always been passionate about helping people…So I think that's going to be an ongoing thing for the rest of my life that I'll feel the sense of duty to help out other people". (Aoife)

Social Networks also appeared to have played a key role in encouraging the students to take up voluntary activities:

"Growing up, my mother was always involved with something, like volunteering her time somewhere so it seemed kind of normal…" (Séamus).

For another student, having some free time meant an opportunity to start volunteering:

"I had a kind of a spare summer…so I decided to volunteer for two weeks in the summer just to fill some time and help out". (Michelle)

Interestingly, none of the students discussed career progression amongst their reasons for starting, yet one volunteer suggested it may be the reason why other students take up a voluntary role:

"I think a lot of people nowadays the point of volunteering to them is volunteering for a CV or volunteering to make connections to further a career." (Aoife)

4.2.2 To work with volunteers

The volunteer managers were asked why their organisations engaged with student volunteers. One reason mentioned by all managers was that volunteers are a valuable resource. Other reasons included; students' willingness to get involved, credibility and the benefits they bring to the service users.

The most common motivation to work with student volunteers mentioned was their capacity as a resource:

"I think the advantage of using volunteers is very much…well, I think it's a resource. If we were to pay for what they give towards us, they would be a huge resource …the other advantage is just time, they save time". (John)

Another motive was related to students' eagerness to get involved, for example:

"Sport brings lots of passion…and that's why it's great to work with sports club volunteers because they are usually very involved, they're very passionate and they'll always go the extra mile". (Cathy)

For one of the organisations, having student volunteers involved in their work was very important to them for creditability purposes:

"We're a service for young people aged 12 to 25. So we're very much along the mind frame that the young people of that age need to inform us about what the service is. They also make it very real for their own age group". (John)

Student volunteers were also valued because of the difference they make to the lives of service users; one student summarised the contribution made by volunteers at her organisation:

"There are 60 volunteers at [named organisation] and if we weren't there the kids wouldn't be coming, they wouldn't be getting the activities, they wouldn't be getting the time with their friends in a safe environment. Some of them might not have the positive role models". (Michelle)

4.2.3 To continue volunteering-advantages of volunteering

The motivations that inspire a student to begin volunteering do not necessarily dictate if or why a student will continue to volunteer. Enjoyment, sense of accomplishment and feeling part of something were common reasons the students gave for continuing to volunteer. Other advantages included gaining practical experience, learning new skills and making new friends and connections.

Most students commented on how much they enjoyed their voluntary activity:

> *"I just really love it and I love to work with the kids".* (Michelle).

Similarly, several students mentioned the sense of achievement they experience through volunteering:

> *"it's that sense of accomplishment where you set out to do something and then go to work, when you've done it, it just feels good."* (Séamus)

'Feeling part of something' was also a key reason for wanting to continue to volunteer; as one volunteer manager summarised:

> *"One person described as that his life is basically his family, his college, his friends and [named organisation], that it's part of him. It's part of his life. They [student volunteers] tend to commit a huge amount because it's part of what they do. It's part of their identity".* (John)

The volunteer managers and students mentioned 'gaining experience' as an advantage to volunteering;

> *"Students want the practical experience as well, and if somebody wants a practical experience and a learning experience, students will learn from other students."* (Helen)

Similarly, the opportunity to acquire new skills while volunteering was also highlighted. One volunteer manager commented:

> *"We're also up-skilling them [student volunteers]. I would say that there are lots of young people with very good, solid core skills because of their interactions with us".* (John)

Friendships, relationships and connections made were also highlighted by several volunteers:

> *"…the advantages would be you get to meet a lot of people. I've met a lot of nice people… and I've met some great children from it as well so".* (Michelle)

4.3 Volunteer Attrition

The students and managers were asked to identify the reasons why a volunteer may give up their voluntary roles. As a preamble, the challenges or disadvantages of volunteering were also discussed.

4.3.1 Disadvantages of volunteering
While the students were overwhelming positive about their voluntary experiences, they were asked to discuss the challenges associated with being a third level student and a

volunteer, these included; time management, emotional strain and a lack of clarity. Family/personal and academic commitments were also added by the volunteer managers.

All the participants mentioned lack of time as a major challenge for third level students:

> *"Multitasking of everything is just challenging. I'm part of three committees and then schoolwork. So it's challenging to maintain a good balance with everything and still meet a deadline".* (Megan)

Similarly, one volunteer manager also noted that the students' personal circumstances impact on how much time they have to volunteer:

> *"People getting boyfriends and girlfriends definitely makes a huge difference in their lives. Parents and jobs make a huge difference and just the pressure of college as well makes a huge difference".* (John)

One student also spoke about emotional impact of volunteering had on her:

> *"My biggest challenge is that I really feel things hard so I think sometimes I get way too upset by things…I find a lot of the situations that people are in very unfair".* (Aoife)

Another student described about the lack of clarity in her role and how she found this challenging:

> *"I didn't know what my role was…so it was challenging to know how much I should do or how little I should do. It was like I had to find my feet…for the first few weeks or so I was treading tensely trying to figure it out".* (Michelle)

4.3.2 Why students leave?

The students were also asked why they or their peers had given up a voluntary role. The responses included; lack of appreciation, poor management of their time and/or skills, lack of training/support and the role not meeting their expectations. 'Time to move on' was another popular response.

Many of the students felt that being taken for granted was a reason why many of their peers gave up volunteering:

> *"Well I think if you aren't too pleased that could be a big reason why you would leave, like if you don't feel like what you're doing is being valued…"* (Michelle)

Another student commented that her skills and time were not utilised wisely and this led her to stop volunteering with an organisation:

> *"I wasn't enjoying my time there and I didn't feel like I was being very effective in helping anybody really".* (Aoife)

Some students also felt that a lack of training and support often led students to stop volunteering:

> *"If you don't get the training you need and you don't know what you're doing. And so if things go wrong you're not supported enough I'd say people would leave".* (Michelle)

An experience not meeting a student's expectations was also mentioned by both a student and volunteer manager as a reason for ending a voluntary role:

"Some of them [student volunteers] can just get disenfranchised with it as well because they're young, they're very idealistic and feel that the world can change overnight and they can change the world and sometimes volunteerism gives you an experience of the real world and you go, "That's not what I thought it would be or that's not what I wanted it to be". (John)

"But most of the time they are leaving…because they signed up to something then realise now that's not my thing". (Ernest)

For the same volunteer, feeling like it was the 'right time' led them to finish up previous a voluntary role:

"But this year I realised, I may have been a leader then but I need to have new opportunities…Because I think I had accomplished everything I had signed up for." (Ernest)

4.3.3 Taking a step back

Despite the challenges listed above, none of the students spoke about wanting to give up their voluntary roles completely; instead they opted to take a step back from their voluntary roles for a short period.

For one student, the pressure of study and work commitments forced her to take a break from volunteering for a period of time:

"I took a step back from this voluntary role last year because I got a full-time job and I was doing a full-time job, studying and I just didn't have the time. Something had to go and unfortunately the volunteering was the first to go…literally I just didn't have enough time". (Michelle)

4.4 Volunteer Retention

Both the students and volunteer managers were asked about the factors that influence volunteer retention. Volunteer retention was identified as a key priority for the volunteer managers.

4.4.1 Challenges for organisations

Volunteer managers have the difficult task of finding and retaining the *right* volunteers for *right* roles. It was clear from the interviews with the volunteer managers that host organisations are keen to understand more about how to recruit and retain suitable volunteers.

> *"A lot of larger organisations spend all of their year with designated staff just recruiting through third level institutions. We haven't had capacity to do that."* (Helen)

Indeed, one volunteer manager commented on the challenge sporting clubs often face in trying to fill certain voluntary roles:

> *"We need stewards and we need linesmen…We tell our club officers bring in people from the outside, maybe they're injured or whatever. But unless you have an interest in sport in the first place, it's very hard to get people to come in and fill these roles"* (Cathy).

Another volunteer manager also commented on the challenge faced by organisations relying on voluntary manpower:

> *"Sometimes a volunteer, it's just who wants to volunteer gets selected. Therefore, they might not be the right person for it…"* (John).

4.4.2 Volunteer/Organisation Relationship

The importance of a partnership between the host organisation and a volunteer in sustaining voluntary activity was highlighted by one volunteer manager:

"we wouldn't be able to operate without volunteers, and we have two volunteer staff. We have an intern and a volunteer administrator in our staff…" (Helen)

The importance of detailed role descriptions at the time of recruitment and adequate training was highlighted by several participants. Without these students can be left with misconceptions as to what their role and responsibilities are:

"I think some people think that sometimes they are going to be thrust into the deep end and they are just going to have to figure out how to talk to an elderly person on their own or something like that. And I think they don't realise that there is always people to sort of tell you what to do and help you out". (Aoife)

It also emerged that communication is key to a lasting volunteer/organisation relationship. For example, one student commented on how poor communication can affect the voluntary experience:

"There can be a misbalance of relationships between the volunteers and the staff because they expect you to always let they know when you're not gonna be there. But I feel sometimes if I text them, the coordinators won't respond. So I feel like that should work both ways…I feel sometimes like maybe you know you're not fully appreciated when things like that happen". (Michelle)

In the same vein, students expected their time to be effectively managed. One volunteer manager explained how his organisation meets this need:

"We have an overall panel of volunteers but then they have specific groups of people who are interested in fundraising, people who are interested in communications. So we're not asking everyone to do everything. We're asking specific groups to do specific things that they may have an interest in." (John)

Support was mentioned by several students as an important feature in their relationship with their host organisation:

"And then if there is a problem you know you can talk to her and I think that makes a big difference". (Michelle)

4.4.3 Volunteer Recognition

There were different views expressed on the importance of volunteer recognition; one student felt that formal recognition was important to her for career purposes, three volunteers felt it is a positive to be acknowledged; one student felt it was unnecessary. The volunteer managers were unanimously in favour of recognising the work of their volunteers.

One volunteer supported formal recognition like that offered by HE Volunteer Programmes:

"It's not necessary that you need to have recognition in terms of like "Way to go you!", but if you're trying to get a job it would show that you developed skills and such from doing it, which is what people are looking for in jobs". (Megan)

For another student, he would prefer not to be formally recognised:

"I realised it's the young person who brings their own recognition on-board…I realised I like it more when I'm learning than standing up there being recognised." (Ernest)

While another student summarised why it's *nice* to be acknowledged:

> *"I think at the end it's just nice to be appreciated as well, and so you know, I think I would be fine without it but I think it's something that's nice to have and nice to say that you did it…and you got a little certificate from it."* (Aoife)

4.5 Volunteers and Society

The final theme that emerged from the data analysis was the role or place of volunteers and volunteering in Irish society. This was somewhat unexpected as it was not one of the research questions that pre-determined the coding for analysis. The support and management of volunteers also emerged as key points during the data analysis, both in in relation to volunteer retention and also in the sustainability of working with volunteers in organisations.

4.5.1 Diminished value

Several participants spoke about the lack of standing volunteerism seemed to have in our society. One volunteer manager suggested:

> *"Volunteerism is not given any weight in society or in colleges…We seem to see community service in our limited capacity where that's punishment. So if you are a criminal and you do something wrong, you have to do community service…"* (John)

4.5.2 Volunteer Management

Although the concept of 'volunteer management' was not explicitly mentioned during the interviews with the students, it emerged that support and guidance from their host organisation was significant to them.

One volunteer commented:

"So far in organisations that I've dealt with there's always been someone to support you and say "look, we're here" and I think that is important…" (Aoife)

The volunteer managers all noted the importance of having an individual responsible for volunteers within an organisation, but that this came at a cost;

One of the volunteer managers argued:

"The thing about it, a great resource, you have to resource the resource. You can't do volunteerism without having a key point of contact who is lead, leading the whole thing, bringing volunteers on board, recruiting them, training them, making sure they're doing what they're doing". (John)

4.5.3 National policies and procedure

In addition to funding issues, the volunteer managers were also asked about which, if any, national policies impacted on their work with volunteers. All of the volunteer managers spoke about their frustrations at the current system for Garda vetting volunteers. Another volunteer manager called for more regulation in the voluntary sector to protect volunteers and organisations.

One volunteer manager outlined how the current Garda vetting procedures impact on his organisation's ability to retain new volunteers:

"It's incredibly difficult somebody wants to volunteer in January, minimum 14 weeks to get their vetting through. We've lost them after 2/3 months. So vetting, while it's incredibly important, it's incredibly detrimental to certain elements of volunteering." (John)

The need for regulation in the voluntary sector was highlighted by one volunteer manager:

> *"From a policy perspective, we are overdue regulation. We're self-regulatory,*
> *as are most organisations, the onus is ourselves to actually self-regulate*
> *because there is no regulatory area."* (Helen)

4.6 Conclusion

The main findings of this study have been presented. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the research questions in light of current literature.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main themes that emerged from the findings will be discussed. The findings were based on in-depth interviews with five student volunteers and three volunteer managers. The findings are discussed in relation to the four broad themes; motivations, volunteer attrition, volunteer retention and volunteerism and society. These four themes will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter with a view to understanding the student volunteer experience. This chapter will observe where the findings correlate with literature and also where they deviate.

5.2 Motivations

The motivations that inspire students to begin volunteering and organisations to begin working with volunteers are important to our understanding of the student volunteer experience. They are the first, tentative steps on the volunteer journey.

5.2.1 To begin volunteering

According to Grönlund (2011), "altruistic, learning, career and social motives have been found in more or less all research on the motives for volunteering" (p. 853). The findings of this research broadly correlate with the literature. Social motives were particularly evident among this cohort of student volunteers; Aoife, Megan and Séamas all discussed how family and friend connections drew them to volunteering. Similarly, two students, Ernest and Aoife, spoke about their sense of duty to give back to their community:

> "*I think it's important to give to those around you.*" (Aoife)

Where the findings did differ from previous research was in relation to career-related motivations; while there was anecdotal evidence provided by some of the participants to suggest some students may begin volunteering for career purposes, none of the student volunteers in this study discussed employability as an explicit reason for taking up volunteering. One student commented:

"I think a lot of people nowadays the point of volunteering to them is volunteering for a CV or volunteering to make connections to further a career." (Aoife)

In his research, MacNeela (2008) stated that "some volunteers identified a career motive as a primary reason for becoming involved" (p. 131). The negative impact of assuming all students primarily care about their own employability is that it dismisses the genuine, altruistic motives many students have for volunteering, such as the sense of duty to their community, and it undermines their values. For Holdsworth (2010) there is too much importance placed on 'career progression' when considering students' motives to volunteer: "for many students volunteering is not necessarily part of a strategic goal to enhance CVs" (p. 421).

McCrudden (2009) also argued that making assumptions about why people volunteer or not considering a volunteer's motivations are mistakes that organisations often make, which in turn influence their capacity to recruit and retain volunteers. She argued:

As a volunteer manager, knowing what motivates people is crucial in promoting your opportunity to potential volunteers, recruiting them to a role that can give them what they're looking for, managing their expectations and keeping them interested (McCrudden, 2009, p. 12).

5.2.2 Continuing to volunteer-the advantages of volunteering

That said, research has also suggested that volunteer motivations are not a fixed state; rather they are dynamic and can change over time (Grönlund, 2011; McCrudden, 2009). As such it is as important to develop an understanding of why students choose to continue to volunteer and what benefits they gain from volunteering as this provides an insight into the evolution of their volunteering experience. MacNeela (2008) argued "the benefits and challenges merit a higher profile in research into the volunteer process" (p. 125), suggesting that the reasons volunteers continue to volunteer are linked to the benefits achieved through volunteering.

It is interesting to note that these changing motivations are not always immediately apparent to the volunteers either, one student commented on the shift in his perception of volunteering as he continued to volunteer:

> *"But along the way I also learned that actually it's not about making the change anymore, it's about improving your personal self. So that's where I am at this stage that I'm not just volunteering for making the change, but also for personal benefit".* (Ernest)

The benefits of volunteering are well documented, they include; a sense of giving something back and sense of purpose, enjoyment and meeting new people and making new friends, as well as gaining new skills (Van Hout et al, 2011; Kim et al., 2009). The findings in this study correlate with the past literature and research; all of the student volunteers commented on how much they enjoyed their voluntary experience. They also discussed a sense of achievement/accomplishment and feeling part of something, gaining practical experience, learning new skills and making new friends and connections. Van Hout and colleagues (2011) have suggested that "levels of volunteer participation increase as individuals perceive themselves to more involved in the community and experience greater levels of

trust with the community" (p. 49). This was also apparent from the findings, one student commented:

> *"I feel like I am part of [named the centre]. I feel like I am part of the family. And I think after three years you know how everything is done, all the managers and you know everything. I think being there for three years does really change it…"* (Michelle)

5.2.3 To work with volunteers

Conversely, there is very little discussion in volunteer literature about why non-profit or charity organisations *should* work with volunteers; it is mostly assumed that they do. This is possibly because, as noted by Van Hout and colleagues (2011), many community and voluntary organisations increasing rely on volunteers as a result of the latest recession, due in part to reduced funding for staff positions and diminishing incomes. Similarly Martin (2011) noted, "charities and voluntary groups need reliable and committed volunteers" (p. 6). This was also evident from the findings; the organisations represented in this study all engaged with volunteers because of their capacity as a resource. For some groups, their organisational structure dictated it; in this study both Cathy and Helen's organisations had only a very limited number of paid administration staff with all other roles filled by volunteers. This can present both benefits and challenges for a volunteer-involving organisation. The obvious benefit is having additional manpower if and when required. A challenge associated with needing to work with volunteers was summed up by one volunteer manager:

> *"You're interviewed on your merits and your qualifications and your personality [for a paid role], whereas sometimes with a volunteer, it's just who wants to volunteer gets selected. Therefore they may not be the right person for it…"* (John)

Despite the necessity of having to work with volunteers, the volunteer managers also discussed the other advantages of engaging with student volunteers, including the passion

volunteers can bring to their role, their enthusiasm and the benefits they bring to the service users.

It is evident from the findings above that the volunteer recruitment processes within an organisation must be robust enough to attract and recruit only the most suitable student volunteers. One student suggested that prospective volunteers should be interviewed and asked the following questions:

> *"Do you know what you're signing up to and what you want to achieve as well as what would you like to give?"* (Ernest)

McCrudden (2009) argued "the right volunteer recruited to the right role, and looked after well will not only be a motivated team member, but also a sterling advocate for your organisation" (p. 9).

5.3 Volunteer Attrition

Volunteer attrition is a consistent challenge faced by all volunteer-involving organisations; "the life expectancy of a volunteer organisation depends on its ability not only to enlist volunteers but also to retain them" (Yanay & Yanay, 2008, p. 66).

5.3.1 Disadvantages of volunteering

MacNeela (2008) noted that volunteers are "generally happy with their voluntary experience, but costs and challenges sometimes arose" (p. 133). The same was evident in the present findings; the students were overwhelming positive about their voluntary experiences to date but they did discuss the disadvantages of volunteering as they perceived them. The literature on volunteering suggests the challenges can include; volunteer burnout, reduced time spent with family and friends, inefficient use of volunteer time, tension between the professional staff and the volunteers and a lack of support (DKM

Consultants Ltd, 2004; Yanay and Yanay, 2008). For the student volunteers in this study, the challenges associated with being a volunteer and a third level student included; time management, emotional strain and a lack of clarity, while the volunteer managers also noted finding time for family/personal and academic commitments. Staff/volunteer relations were not a concern for the student volunteers.

5.3.2 Taking a step back

Despite the challenges listed above, none of the students in this study spoke about giving up voluntary roles, in most instances the students opted to take a step back from their voluntary roles when under pressure rather than giving up entirely. However, this may not be the norm for the general student volunteer cohort; the students interviewed, were by definition, current volunteers. The literature often discusses volunteer dropout as if it were a fait accompli; students are either volunteers or they are no longer volunteers. And yet, Wilson (2000) noted that the most common pattern of volunteer participation is "one of intermittent involvement" (p. 230). A longitudinal study or a study of middle age adults who volunteer that would obtain data on the volunteering 'careers' of graduates would be necessary to confirm this.

5.3.3 Why students leave?

However, we do know that some students do stop volunteering entirely. Wilson (2000) suggests that most people who stop volunteering do so because "their efforts went unrecognised, their skills and interests were not properly matched with the assignments they were given, or they were not given enough autonomy or freedom to help those they wished to serve" (*ibid,* p. 230-231). The findings concur with Wilson's summation. Lack of appreciation, poor management of their time and/or skills, lack of training/support and the role not meeting their expectations were among the anecdotal reasons for student volunteer dropout cited in the findings. One student, who had previously volunteered with a national organisation, gave up that role for a number of reasons:

"I think it was a bit much with everything else I was doing and my college work…I wasn't enjoying my time there and I didn't feel like I was being very effective in helping anybody really." (Aoife)

What was also evident from the research is that some reasons were inevitable, for example life progression and moving on to new opportunities, while others were preventable. The implication therefore is that organisations and volunteer managers can work towards addressing the preventable reasons. Van Hout and colleagues (2011) argued that "both volunteers and host organisations need to develop realistic expectations around volunteer roles and responsibilities" (p. 51). It has also been suggested that "a measure of benefits and challenges would facilitate data collection for intervention designs and as an everyday tool for volunteer managers" (MacNeela, 2008, p. 137).

5.4 Volunteer Retention

Rochester and colleagues (2012) have noted "there is no single authoritative explanation of retention-why some volunteers choose to stay in their volunteering role and for how long" (p. 238). Neither did a 'one-size-fits-all' model of student engagement emerge from the findings. What did emerge, however, was a combination of practices that worked for the volunteers and organisations in question, which included: recruitment and training, communication, efficient management of skills and time and support related practices. The need for consistent best practice policies and procedures in the areas of recruitment and training, communication, and effective management also emerged from the findings.

5.4.1 Volunteer/Organisation Relationship

Similarly, the importance of a partnership between the host organisation and a volunteer in sustaining voluntary activity was highlighted by both the students and the volunteer managers. Volunteer Ireland noted that "volunteering is a two-way relationship, one that should benefit both the volunteer and the organisation" (2013a). Ultimately, it has been

argued "any organisation fares better when somebody is looking after the needs of the volunteers" (Rochester et al., 2012, p. 159). Volunteer Ireland (2013b) also recommended that organisations should have a named person responsible for volunteers, who should be available to meet with volunteers and discuss their involvement; "this person should ensure each volunteer is given adequate support" (p. 17). The findings certainly correlate with this. The student volunteers were asked if they had a named point of contact in their host organisation; all of the students had and were in regular communication with their co-ordinators. One student commented on the value of this relationship:

> "And then if there is a problem you know you can talk to her and I think that makes a big difference." (Michelle)

5.4.2 Volunteer Recognition

McCrudden (2009) suggested "ensuring that volunteers feel valued is part of the responsibility of the volunteer manager and goes a long way to help retain them" (p. 75). While the volunteer managers all advocated for formal recognition of their student volunteers, the students themselves were less clear on whether they wished to be appreciated or recognised. One student felt that formal recognition was important to her for career purposes, three volunteers felt it is a nice to be acknowledged and one student felt it was unnecessary.

It is important to note the difference between being valued or appreciated and being recognised. McCrudden (2009) reported that "formal reward structures are most suited to those who seek community or peer approval for their work, but are irrelevant, and sometimes disliked, by those whose primary aim is helping people" (*ibid,* p. 83). This begs the question do we need formal volunteer recognition programmes in HE Institutions? Each of the students was in favour of some form of volunteer programme for students, if only to promote volunteerism:

> "if you had that support I think more students would volunteer and I mean that could only be good…I think if all institutions across Ireland got involved, I

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think would just be brilliant, I mean not every student would volunteer but I think it would see a big increase." (Michelle)

5.5 Volunteers and Society

It has been noted that "volunteering should be viewed as a vital part of society, rather than merely in terms of value of services or activities provided" (Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005, p. 28). Several volunteers and volunteer managers also argued for the increased visibility of volunteerism and awareness of the contribution volunteering makes to society. A student in particular commented that volunteer work and volunteers are often misunderstood in our society:

> *"And one thing I have noticed is sometimes maybe volunteering is not recognised very well in some places…if you take volunteer work, I said before, I think that volunteer work is just seen as a fundraising event rather than volunteering".* (Ernest)

A volunteer manager also commented on the harmful impact this lack of awareness has on the profile of volunteering in Ireland:

> *"Another thing that is a real detriment to volunteerism is that it's not given any weight in society or in colleges…We seem to see community service in our limited capacity where that's punishment. So if you are a criminal and you do something wrong, you have to do community service…"* (John)

But what can be done? Almost ten years ago the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2005) published a report entitled 'Volunteers and Volunteers in Ireland', which called for "a national campaign to promote volunteering and its positive effects, especially appealing to young people to come forward…" (p. v).

5.5.1 Volunteer Management

In a similar vein, the 2005 Report also acknowledged the role of volunteer management in the development of volunteering in Ireland:

> "Given the importance of proper volunteer management for the attraction and retention of volunteers, the State should give financial incentives to organisations, which can show that they have the proper structures in place" (Joint Committee, 2005, p. v).

The significance of volunteer management also emerged as a key point in the findings, both in relation to volunteer retention and also in the sustainability of working with volunteers in organisations. One volunteer manager commented:

> *"You can't do volunteerism without having a key point of contact who is leading; bringing volunteers on board, recruiting them, training them, making sure they're doing what they're doing. So it's great. It is a huge resource but you need to resource the resource..."* (John)

Wilson (2000) also argued that a "Lack of resources can help explain some of the dropout rate" (p. 230). McCrudden (2009) sums up the importance of volunteer management; "anyone giving their time as a volunteer should have the right to know they will be safe, supported and cared for, and those managing volunteers deserve recognition for their professional skills" (p. 3).

5.5.2 Implications of National Policy and Guidelines

In discussing volunteering uptake, Martin (2011) argued "so many rules and regulations have emerged over recent years that it is easy to be put off" (p. 5). Amongst these are national policies and guidelines, which in the Irish context include Garda vetting requirements and Child Protection guidelines. While all the participants recognised the importance of having some sort of screening process, all of the volunteer managers and a

number of the student volunteers spoke about their frustrations at the current system for Garda vetting new volunteers. Accessing appropriate Child Protection Training and guidelines was a concern for another volunteer manager.

The 2005 Report also called for a clear strategy on volunteering (Joint Committee, 2005, p. v). This strategy has not yet been developed but is clearly still required to address such issues as volunteerism promotion, resourcing volunteer management and clarifying and simplifying national policies and procedures.

In summary, the findings suggest that the participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of student volunteering to date. While there were issues to be addressed on a local and national scale, all the students and volunteer managers indicated their intention to continue volunteering/working with volunteers.

5.6 Conclusion

This brings to a close the discussion of the main findings. In the next chapter conclusions will be drawn and recommendations in relation to how to expand and improve the experiences of student volunteers will outlined.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the volunteer experiences of third level students from the perspective of student volunteers and volunteer managers who work with students. The main objective of the research was to investigate and appreciate the perceptions and experiences of volunteering held by students and volunteer managers. The study also aimed to gain an insight into the relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation. This chapter concludes the present study. It presents the key implications of the findings of the research and makes three recommendations for future policy and practice actions. The limitations of the present study are noted and a recommendation for further study is presented.

6.2 Conclusions

Students and volunteer managers across a range of voluntary organisations were asked to discuss their personal experiences of third level student volunteering. Their responses were analysed and discussed in chapter five under four broad themes: motivations, volunteer attrition, volunteer retention and volunteers and society. The findings of this study suggest that students are no different to other volunteers vis-à-vis the motivation to start volunteering. Students, like all volunteers, begin volunteering for a variety of individualised reasons, both altruistic and self-serving. Rochester and colleagues (2012) summed up the variation of motivations to volunteer: "there are as many motivations as there are volunteers" (p. 119). In his research, MacNeela (2008) noted that when asked why they continue to volunteer, participants in his study spoke at length about the benefits they had accrued through their voluntary work. The findings of this study suggest the students continue to volunteer because they enjoy their work, learning new skills and making new friends.

The literature details a number of ways of encouraging volunteers to remain, but no definite remedy to volunteer dropout. No precise model for volunteer retention emerged from the findings either but rather a combination of best practices, which worked for the student volunteers and the volunteer managers in their organisations. These practices related to volunteer recruitment and training, communication, efficient management of skills and time and support. The students and the volunteer managers held different views on how best to reward and recognise the contribution made by the students to their campus and wider community. The volunteer managers strongly advocated for formal recognition, as does much of the literature. The students were undecided on what level of acknowledgement they would like.

In this study, the perceived mutuality of the relationship between the student volunteer and host organisation also emerged as a key factor in volunteer retention. By virtue of their inclusion in this study as active volunteers, the students interviewed were only able to provide anecdotal evidence as to why some students may give up volunteering. Interestingly, from a personal perspective they spoke about taking a step back from their voluntary duties for a time, rather than giving up completely. The volunteer managers also spoke about student volunteers needing to take a break from volunteering at certain times of the year.

The final theme, volunteers and society, emerged unexpectedly during the data analysis. The student volunteers and volunteer managers were evidently disappointed about the lack of awareness of voluntary activity and volunteerism in Irish society. Some of the participants were also frustrated by the current system for vetting volunteers as they felt this hampered the recruitment of new volunteers. The findings of this present study have informed the recommendations for future policy and practice actions as outlined below.

6.3 Recommendations for further policy and practice development

While the volunteers and volunteer managers interviewed for this study were overwhelming positive about their personal experiences of student volunteering to date, the following are recommended actions to improve the volunteer experiences of third level students;

Recruitment

Host organisations, in recognising that students have a myriad of reasons for wanting to volunteer as well as expectations, should implement robust recruitment policies, including detailed job descriptions, so as to attract and recruit suitable students.

Recognition

All HE institutions should explore ways of recognising the contribution of their students to the campus and wider community, bearing in mind that some students do not wish to be formally rewarded for their work.

Reform

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in conjunction with the Garda Síochana should expedite reform of the Garda Vetting procedure.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Though the findings of the study have provided an insight into the experiences of student volunteers across a number of campuses, several limitations have been identified in this research including with the sample, the research method and the research approach.

6.4.1 The Sample

The results of this study are based on a limited number of student volunteers and volunteer managers. As Grönlund and colleagues (2011) observed, "The context of volunteering takes on different meanings in different settings" (p. 88), the experiences of these volunteers and managers are unique to their organisations, and cannot therefore be generalised.

The size of the sample also limited the discussion of atypical student volunteer experiences. Not all of the students interviewed for this study were 'traditional students', those who entered HE directly after their post-primary education; one student was a mature student. Similarly two students were international students. However their experiences were not discussed in light of these differences as the size of the sample was considered too small.

6.4.2 The Research Methods

While the in-depth interviews carried out for this research yielded invaluable insights into the personal experiences of five volunteers and three volunteer managers; the qualitative nature of this research limited the number of participants due to time and space restrictions.

6.4.3 The research instrument

It has been argued that individual interviews on sensitive or personal experiences may not yield entirely unprejudiced information: "in case of volunteering, people might want to exaggerate their involvement if they feel that would make them look good in the eyes if the interviewer" (Joint Committee, 2005, p. 5). While the researcher does not feel like this situation arose during the interviews for this study, it is worth noting the potential of segued results.

6.5 Recommendations for further study

It is recommended that further study be undertaken to investigate the experiences of different cohorts of volunteers within the student body. While the student population of most HE institutions comprise mainly of traditional students, other cohorts of students are present including; mature students, students with disabilities, and students from different cultural and economic backgrounds. Research into how different cohorts of students experience volunteering would add to our understanding of how all students engage with volunteering, while also providing insights into how best to work with all HE students, promote opportunities to get involved and also to support them in their voluntary roles. It would also add to the dearth of knowledge on *the student volunteer experience*.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

A profile of each participant in the study is presented in below. These profiles include details of type and frequency of voluntary activities undertaken by each of the student volunteers and an overview of their host organisations. The organisations that the volunteer managers work with are also profiled and their duties relating to student volunteers are summarised.

Student Volunteers

Aoife

Aoife currently volunteers with three projects; an educational mentoring programme for people with mental disabilities, a national respite programme for terminally ill children and a student-led society on her campus. Aoife has volunteered with each of these projects for one year. She volunteers on average 2-4 hours per week during the academic year and for weekend and week-long blocks during the holidays.

Ernest

Ernest volunteers with four organisations regularly; a youth club in his local community, a mental health awareness project, an educational programme for third level students from socio-economically disadvantaged areas and a peer support programme at his college. Ernest has volunteered on a number of projects before starting college; he can't remember when he first volunteered. He now volunteers for a least three hours a week for two of these organisations; the other projects involve a commitment of one day per month and like Aoife, he regularly volunteers for a week throughout the summer and Christmas holidays.

Megan

Megan volunteers with a social entrepreneurial organisation; her main voluntary activity is a befriending the elderly/social history project. This is her first year volunteering. She is also a member of her campus Green Committee. Megan volunteers for up to five hours some weeks during the academic term.

Michelle

Michelle currently volunteers with an after-schools project in a socio-economically disadvantaged area organised by a national family support organisation, she has volunteered with this project for over three years. Michelle regularly attends twice a week, volunteering up to 4 hours per week during the school year; she volunteers on a summer camp with the same children during the summer months.

Séamus

Séamus volunteers with his local mountaineering club. He began hiking with them three years ago, now he is one of the main co-ordinator for safety training and trips for the other members of his club. The time he volunteers per week varies; some weeks it can be 2 hours but there is a big trip coming up it could be 20 hours.

Volunteer Managers

Cathy

Cathy is an administrator with a university-based sports body. She works with approximately 150 student volunteers on a daily basis during the academic year. Her tasks including managing the organisation's budget, delivers training to the student volunteers and providing support to club captains, secretaries and treasurers all of whom are students.

Helen

Helen is the member of the management team of a small developmental education organisation. She works with student volunteers on the campuses around Ireland on a number of projects including a second-level schools workshop programme, a horticultural project and overseas developmental experiences.

John

John works with a national mental health organisation. Among other tasks, he is responsible for the involvement of young people in the work of his organisation. He works regularly with student volunteers across a range of projects and events.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER EMAILED TO STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Dear Student,

As a postgraduate student in DIT, studying on the MA in Child, Family and Community Studies programme, I am undertaking research into the volunteer experiences of third level student volunteers. The aim of my research is to investigate and understand the experiences of student volunteers from the perspective of students and volunteer managers who work with volunteers. This research complies with DIT ethics guidelines.

I hope to gather the views of young volunteers through a series of one to one interviews. I would like to understand more about your experiences as volunteer; what motivated you to start volunteering, what you hoped for/expected from your voluntary activity and why you continue to volunteer. The information generated at through these interviews will, I hope, inform further investigation into the factors which influence volunteer retention.

I would really appreciate if you could give me and my research an hour of your time; interviews will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour approximately. I can make myself available at a time that suits you. If you have any questions, suggestions and/or comments or would like to learn more about my research, please feel free to contact me either by email (caitriona.mcgrattan@gmail.com) or by phone ███████████.

Kind Regards,

Caitriona McGrattan

APPENDIX C: VOLUNTEER MANAGERS' RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Volunteer Manager,

As a postgraduate student in DIT, studying on the MA in Child, Family and Community Studies programme, I am undertaking research into the student volunteer experience. The aim of my research is to investigate and understand the experiences and perceptions of third level students and the volunteer managers who work with students. This research complies with DIT ethics guidelines.

I would like to understand more about the role of the volunteer manager in the recruitment and retaining of volunteers; why does your organisation recruit and work with volunteers, what expectations do you have of new volunteers and what approaches, both formal and informal, do you use to engage with your volunteers. I hope to gather the views of those co-ordinating and managing volunteers within community and voluntary organisations through a series of one to one interviews. The information generated at through these interviews will, I hope, inform further investigation into the factors which influence volunteer retention.

I would really appreciate if you could give me and my research an hour of your time; interviews will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour approximately. I can make myself available at a time that suits you. If you have any questions, suggestions and/or comments or would like to learn more about my research, please feel free to contact me either by email (caitriona.mcgrattan@gmail.com) or by phone ████████ . ████████

Kind Regards,

Caitriona McGrattan

APPENDIX D: STUDENT VOLUNTEERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Demographics

1. First Name
2. Institution
3. Which organisation(s) do you volunteer with and what is your role?
4. How many hours a week do you volunteer?

Motivations

1. Why did you start volunteering?
2. Why do you continue to volunteer?
3. What do you get out of volunteering?
4. What do the people you volunteer with get out of it?
5. Does the length of time you volunteer change how you feel about volunteering?

Advantages and Disadvantages

1. What are the advantages of volunteering?
2. What are the challenges of volunteering as a student?

Volunteer Attrition

1. If you have ever given up a voluntary role or thought about giving up, what were the reasons behind it?
2. What do you think are the main reasons why young people take a step back from volunteering or give up completely?
3. Is there anything you don't like about volunteering?

Host Organisation

1. Do you volunteer with an organisation? If you do, do you know who your point of contact is within the organisation is?

2. Do you have a relationship with this person?
3. Do you feel supported by your organisation? Can you please elaborate in what ways?
4. Do you feel you make a contribution to the work of the organisation? Why do you feel like this?
5. Would anything not happen if you didn't volunteer?

Volunteer Programmes in Higher Education Institutions

1. Is there a volunteer programme(s) at your College/University?
2. Can you describe this programme to me?
3. Do you engage with this programme? Why/why not?
4. What are the benefits of the programme?
5. What are the downsides of the programme?
6. Would you recommend a volunteer programme to institutions which do not currently have one?
7. Would you continue to volunteer without the volunteer programme?

Understanding Volunteering

1. What is the role of a volunteer?
2. Use three words to sum up your volunteer experience.

APPENDIX E: VOLUNTEER MANAGER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Demographics

5. First Name
6. Organisation
7. Can you describe your role?
8. Do you work directly with young students? Approximately how many does your org have at any one time?

Working with volunteers

6. Why does your organisation work with student volunteers?
7. How to you recruit new volunteers?
8. Do you provide a formal orientation and/or training for new volunteers? What does this entail? Is there any ongoing training and support provided to the students?

Advantages and Disadvantages

3. What are the positives that come out of working with student volunteers for your organisation?
4. What benefits does your organisation get from working with student volunteers
5. What are the benefits for your services users?
6. Are there any disadvantages associated with working with volunteers?

Communication & Recognition

6. How often do you communicate with your volunteers? What are the main methods of communication?
7. In what ways do you engage directly with your volunteers?
8. Do you formally recognise the work of your volunteers in any way?
9. Do you think volunteers make a contribution to the work of your organisation? Why do you feel like this? Explain why you say this
10. To what extent do you think your volunteers feel part of the organisation?

Volunteer Programmes in Higher Education Institutions

8. Do you recruit volunteers through any third level volunteer programmes?

Volunteer Attrition

4. What do you think are the main reasons why young people take a step back from volunteering or give up completely?
5. Do you complete exit interviews with volunteers if they notify you that they are discontinuing?
6. Do you get feedback from volunteers at a later date about their experiences?

Volunteer Management

1. In your opinion, how volunteers are managed as a resource by organisations in general?
2. Would any national and/or organisational policy changes help in volunteer retention?

APPENDIX F: STUDENT VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Researcher: Can you tell me why you started volunteering?

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Researcher: Why do you continue to volunteer?

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Researcher: What do you get out of volunteering?

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Researcher: Mm-hmm.

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Researcher: What do you think the people that you volunteer with get out of your
               volunteering?

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

……

Researcher: Has your attitude to your volunteering changed from eighteen year-old Aoife to now?

[REDACTED]

Researcher: Are there challenges associated with volunteering? Because I am looking at students, you know, and you are full-time undergraduate student-so what are the challenges associated with trying to marry the two?

[REDACTED]

[redacted]

....

Researcher: Do you know within your organisations who your point of contact is?

[redacted]

....

Researcher: You've mentioned that you're going to move away from your committee work, what was the main reason, again? It was it time?

[REDACTED]

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

[REDACTED]

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Researcher: What do you think are the main reasons that students either stop volunteering or take a step back from volunteering?

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Researcher: And ask, is there a Volunteer Program?

Researcher: Do you know if there is a Volunteer Recognition Programme at your College?

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[black redaction bars]

Researcher: What do you think um, are the benefits of, of having a Volunteer Recognition Program, the [named Volunteer Programme]?

[black redaction bars]

Researcher: Would you recommend this type of programme to an Institution?

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Researcher: Is there anything that you wanted to add or any observations that you've had
          during our conversations around you know, why students volunteer. Why
          they stop volunteering?

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APPENDIX G: VOLUNTEER MANAGER TRANSCRIPTION

Researcher: Do you engage with have third level students within your programme?

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Researcher: So just to say that they would have to come through school and then when they're in college they keep the link?

██████ ██

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Researcher: Yeah. And, and I do have questions but now that I'm, I'm so intrigued, is that, would that be then part of a module or is that just something that they're doing extra?

██████ ████████

Researcher: Oh, okay.

██████ ██

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Researcher: Mm-hmm.

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Researcher: Actually that's one of the questions I had, so I might jump forward. And do you think that that's something that you would like to see rolled in other institutions? So I know you mentioned UCC, UL and UCC, UL do have a programme. Um, as far as I'm know of the other don't have a forum of recognition like this. Do you recommend it? Do you think you gain more volunteer students because of it

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Researcher: So then if I go back to my first question: do you work directly then with those volunteers?

[redacted] ██
██

Researcher: So why do you work with students?

....

Researcher: In terms of training and formal orientation, do you have a programme in place?

[REDACTED]

Researcher: And, and just in terms of the training, what do the volunteers get out of this? You, you said the practical element.

[REDACTED] **[REDACTED]**

Researcher: Is there, is there kind of an emotional support that goes into it?

[REDACTED] **[REDACTED]**

Researcher: Okay.

[REDACTED] **[REDACTED]**

……

Researcher: What are the positives you got from working with volunteers?

[Redacted]

Researcher: And so I suppose then the flip side of that are there negatives of working with volunteers and I know you mentioned briefly about someone coming back with a negative experience.

[Redacted]

██

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………..

Researcher: Do you recognize your own volunteers in any way?

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……

Researcher: Do recruit using the volunteer programmes in any institutions?

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Researcher: What national policies impact on your organisations interactions with students?

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         ██

[REDACTED]

……

Researcher: I suppose and then I just have one final question. Has anything come up for you in the conversation and around what we've talked about that you'd like to share? Is there anything that's kind of striked you about student engagement and student volunteers?

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Researcher: …on behalf of the organisation or behalf of the students?

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Researcher: Okay.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE CODING

Motivations

To start volunteering

Altruistic motives:

> *"And the reason why I started volunteering was, personally, I wanted something to do in my community".* (Ernest)

Social networks (friends and family):

> *"One of my friends had an event going on for children with disabilities, to raise awareness and help the see different sports that they could do. I volunteered for that and then ended up enjoying it. So then I was like "What other volunteer things can I do?"* (Megan)

> *"I grew up in a household where I'd seen my Dad do so much for other people you know, so it was kind of a natural thing that I would want to do it".* (Aoife)

To work with volunteers

Enthusiasm:

> *"We work with students because the students are…they're not entrenched in their ideas. Their ideas are evolving. They've got an open mind, they've got a broader mind. They want to learn, they want to engage."* (Helen)

To continue volunteering

Enjoyment:

> *"it's just doing something…I've never thought of myself as a volunteer, it's just a thing I like doing."* (Séamus)

"I think I keep going with it because um, it's just something I enjoy. I've never volunteered for something that I haven't liked doing". (Aoife)

Sense of accomplishment:

"I think you feel accomplished when you get to help out with something or you are able to contribute to make something good". (Megan)

Feeling part of something:

"One person described as that his life is basically his family, his college, his friends and his volunteering, that it's part of him. It's part of his life. They [student volunteers] tend to commit a huge amount because it's part of what they do. It's part of their identity' (John).

Gaining experience:

"I think that volunteering is a massive project as the academic world because at the end of the day it's not about memorising a book, it's about having experiences that you can use…" (Ernest)

Volunteer Attrition

Challenges of volunteering

Time management

"If you have deadlines and/or assignments due in, it can be very hard to go some weeks" (Michelle).

"I'm doing a PhD so there are times that I need to concentrate on one thing and one thing only. I don't want to give up either. I'm just trying to balance all the time" (Séamus)

"They're not just a volunteer, they're also a student. And they have lots of commitments, you know, so it is hard to try and find a time to work with them". (Cathy)

Why students leave?

Experience not meeting a student's expectations:

"I mean in the last four years we've probably had upwards of 100 volunteers go out and we've had one negative experience, and that was down to somebody who thought that they were getting a different experience." (Helen)

Right time:

"You know, leaving and what was I going to say, "That's okay and that'll get dealt with by somebody else." Like, someone else can do that just as well so I felt like that was the right move to make" (Aoife).

Volunteer Retention

Challenges for organisations

"A lot of larger organisations spend all of their year with designated staff just recruiting through third level institutions. We haven't had capacity to do that. It's a capacity issue more than anything else." (Helen)

Volunteer/Organisation Relationship

"It's a two-way thing were we request for tools, they give us the tools and we do something that they really want us to do for them…it seems like a two-way relationship". (Ernest)

Support

"Four of us originally were supposed to volunteer with them, then three people and it ended up being only two of us. But he was really nice with extra support sometimes." (Aoife)

Recognition

"I suppose that's the thing. I don't do it for recognition or anything like that, but I think it is good to, like, when you go to college you get a lot of academic learning and I think volunteering is a real way to get a different type of learning…" (Michelle).

"there's that kind of formal side of volunteering is being recognised now within the third level of institutions which is benefiting us as an organisation but also benefiting the student as well because you're getting the ECTS credits and the extra-curricular accreditation." (Helen)

Volunteers and Society

Diminished value:

"And one think I have noticed is sometimes maybe volunteering is not recognised very well in some places…if you take volunteer work, I said before, I think that volunteer work is just seen as a fundraising event rather than volunteering". (Ernest)

APPENDIX I: STUDENT VOLUNTEERS' RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study:

An Exploration of Volunteer Experiences for Third Level Students in Ireland.

A number of key research questions will inform this study:

-What motivates students to begin and continue volunteering?

-What are the perceived benefits and challenges of volunteering as a third level student?

-What factors contribute to volunteer attrition?

-What fosters a positive relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation?

What is required of participants?

1. Participants are asked to participate in a one-to-one interview, which is expected to last approximately one hour.

2. The researcher will ask the participant a series of questions relating to their experiences of volunteering, the participants may refuse to answer a question(s) if they wish.

The collected data

1. With the permission of the participant the interview will be digitally recorded. This digital recording will be transcribed into text.
2. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the digital recording and transcribed data.
3. This data will be used to inform my research discussion chapter. Abstracts from this transcription will be included in the appendix of the final submission.
4. Participants will have the opportunity to review the draft material before it is published, including interview transcripts.

Confidentiality

1. For this purpose of this research, confidentiality is understood as "a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form" (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996 cited in Bell, 2010, p. 49).
2. Confidentiality will be maintained; participants will not be potentially identifiable in any published material.
3. It the responsibility of the researcher to take all reasonable steps to protect participants' privacy and to fully inform them, prior to participation, of any possible risks regarding identification in published material.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research is completely voluntary;

1. Participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences

2. Non-participation will not affect an individuals' rights/access to other services/care

This research complies with DIT ethics guidelines.

Contact details of the DIT Research Ethics Committee

Should participants wish to make a complaint on ethical grounds, please contact;

Mr Conor McCague,

Graduate Research School Office
Dublin Institute of Technology
Kevin Street
Dublin 8

T: 01 402 7920
E: conor.mccague@dit.ie

Researcher's contact details:

Caitríona McGrattan

T: █████████

E: Caitriona.mcgrattan@gmail.com

DIT Student No: C04303601

Supervisor's Contact Details:

Dr Carmel Gallagher

Dept of Social Sciences & Law

T: 01 402 4197

E:carmel.gallagher@dit.ie

APPENDIX J: VOLUNTEER MANAGERS' RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study:

An Exploration of Volunteer Experiences for Third Level Students in Ireland

A number of key research questions will inform this study:

-What motivates students to begin and continue volunteering?

-What are the perceived benefits and challenges of volunteering as a third level student?

-What factors contribute to volunteer attrition?

-What fosters a positive relationship between the student volunteer and the host organisation?

What is required of participants?

1. Participants are asked to participate in a one-to-one interview, which is expected to last approximately one hour.

2. The researcher will ask the participant a series of questions relating to their experiences of volunteering, the participants may refuse to answer a question(s) if they wish.

The collected data

5. With the permission of the participant the interview will be digitally recorded. This digital recording will be transcribed into text.
6. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the digital recording and transcribed data.
7. This data will be used to inform my research discussion chapter. Abstracts from this transcription will be included in the appendix of the final submission.
8. Participants will have the opportunity to review the draft material before it is published, including interview transcripts.

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4. For this purpose of this research, confidentiality is understood as "a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form" (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996 cited in Bell, 2010, p. 49).
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Caitríona McGrattan

T: █████████

E: Caitriona.mcgrattan@gmail.com

DIT Student No: C04303601

Supervisor's Contact Details:

Dr Carmel Gallagher

Dept of Social Sciences & Law

T: 01 402 4197

E:carmel.gallagher@dit.ie

APPENDIX K: CONSENT FORM

Researcher's Name: CAITRIONA MC GRATTAN	Title: MS
Faculty/School/Department: COLLEGE OF ARTS & TOURISM, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & LAW	

Title of Study: An Exploration of Volunteer Experiences for Third Level Students in Ireland from a Student Volunteer and Volunteer Manager Perspective.
To be completed by the: interviewee (Volunteer Manager/Student Volunteer)

3.1 Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?   YES/NO

3.2 Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?   YES/NO

3.3. Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?   YES/NO

3.4 Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and
     safety implications if applicable?   YES/NO

3.5 Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?

* at any time
* without giving a reason for withdrawing
* without affecting your future relationship with the Institute   YES/NO

3.6 Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?
                                                                                  YES/NO

3.7 Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence
     of the researcher?   YES/NO

Signed_____   Date _____

Name in Block Letters _____

Signature of Researcher _____   Date _____