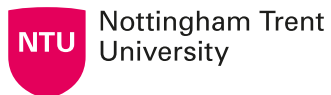




# Respond, recover, reset: the voluntary sector and COVID-19

February 2021



Funded by



# Project partners



Nottingham Trent  
University

## The Centre of People, Work and Organisational Practice at Nottingham Trent University

The Centre of People, Work and Organisational Practice is based at Nottingham Trent University and works with organisations and policy-makers to understand and to seek to improve how people are managed within organisations. We are committed to producing theoretically rigorous work that is not only published in top academic journals but also transforms lives and society. Working with collaborators from different parts of the world, CPWOP has conducted research with and for organisations such as the CIPD, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Government Equality Office and the Lloyds Foundation. The centre focuses on the way in which people are managed in the face of critical challenges facing the economy and society, given growing concerns about work quality and a proliferation of insecure and precarious jobs within the UK economy.

**Sheffield  
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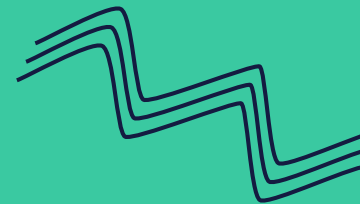
## The Voluntary Action Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University

The Voluntary Action Research Group (VARG) brings together researchers from across Sheffield Hallam University. VARG serves as a forum to showcase and build on internationally significant research and evaluation and shaping debates about the past, present and future of voluntary action.

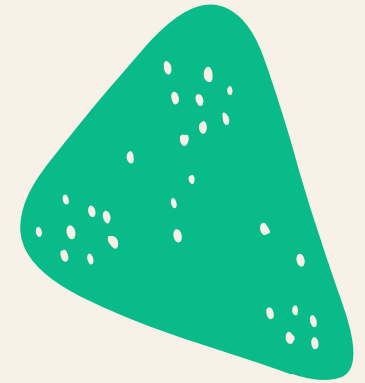
**NCVO**

## National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

With over 15,500 members, NCVO is the largest membership body for the voluntary sector in England. It supports voluntary organisations (as well as social enterprises and community interest companies), from large national bodies to community groups working at a local level. NCVO believes its members, and those with a stake in civil society, need the best quality evidence base to help them inform policy and practice, and plan for the future.



# Introduction: Volunteering during the pandemic



Volunteers are at the heart of many voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. With the vaccine rollout, mutual aid and informal groups through to foodbanks, volunteers have been core to many communities' responses to the pandemic. This month's report looks at the impact of COVID-19 on voluntary organisations and how they are responding.

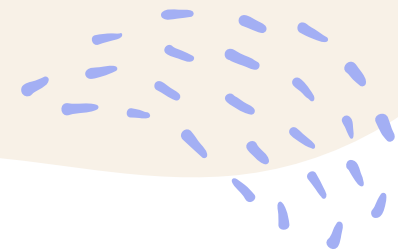
There are some interesting findings. Whilst there has been concern that the NHS Volunteer Responders 750,000 scheme would draw volunteers away from voluntary organisations, our results show 88% of the organisations say they were unaffected by the scheme. The wider impact on volunteering is also mixed, with 20% reporting an increase but 35% decrease in number of volunteers and 27% reporting an increase and 40% a decrease in the time given by volunteers.

More work though has to be done to maintain contact with volunteers. Our interviews and survey show some shifts in who is volunteering, particularly with age and underlying health conditions preventing some from volunteering whereas furloughing and for some greater availability of time, has meant that some have more opportunities to volunteer. Good communication, engagement and support are vital to keeping volunteers going.

The picture of the wider impacts on the pandemic continues to show a difficult landscape. Over the last month our respondents say demand is up with 44% saying they have had an increase and concerningly a significant deterioration of finances, with 40% reporting a worsening financial position over the last month. As we approach year end, many organisations are uncertain over their future. The Wave 5 barometer will explore the impact of COVID-19 on voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations finances.

In this report we continue to look at how organisations are faring and also what lessons have been learnt from the first lockdown. If you want to get involved, or just find out more please email us at [CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk) or visit the website [bit.ly/3pwF44L](https://bit.ly/3pwF44L)

“ Whilst there has been concern that the NHS Volunteer Responders 750,000 scheme would draw volunteers away from voluntary organisations, our results show 88% organisations say they were unaffected by the scheme. ”





# COVID-19 voluntary sector impact barometer, January 2021

## The monthly barometer survey

The purpose of the monthly barometer survey is to produce timely snapshots of the condition of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) throughout the life of this project. We have tried to create a survey that is inclusive, quick and easy to complete. As the pandemic-weary world welcomed 2021, we explored the outlook for the voluntary sector in Wave 4 of the barometer. Similar to previous waves of the survey, we also included a small number of topical questions on volunteering which is currently one of the important aspects in the sector's response to the pandemic. We plan to continue observing the changes in the way voluntary organisations respond to the pandemic in 2021 with continuous extension of the lockdown restrictions across UK. This information will also be available online via the [data dashboard](#). The dashboard now includes an analysis of trends across the four waves of the survey completed so far.

The fourth wave of the survey was completed between 15th January and 29th January. This generated responses from 710 organisations across the UK. In this wave, we saw an increased level of responses from the nations, but we remain keen to extend coverage of the survey in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as this will allow us to better understand any geographic differences in the impacts of the pandemic on the sector.

## The sample

As we saw in the last three waves of the survey, a wide range of organisation types and a hugely diverse range of activities are represented in this sample. 88% of the organisations identified as registered charities, around a fifth indicated that they have limited company status, a total of 7% of participants reported being community interest companies or voluntary associations.

**22%** of organisations (153) identified themselves as a social enterprise

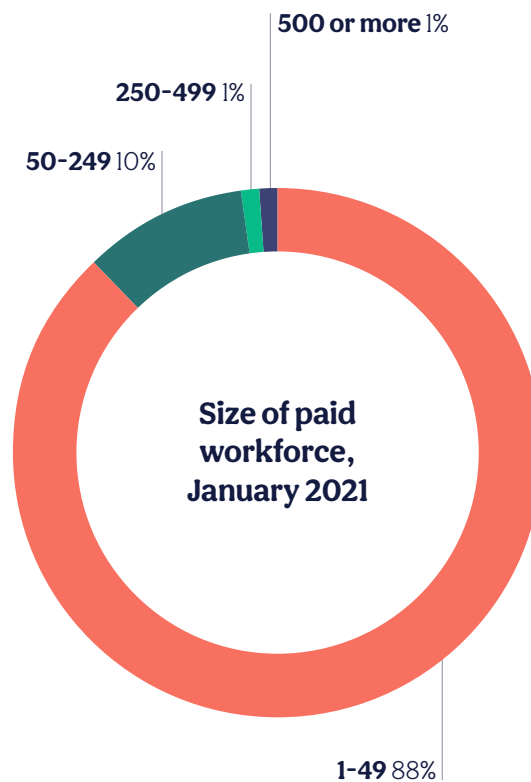
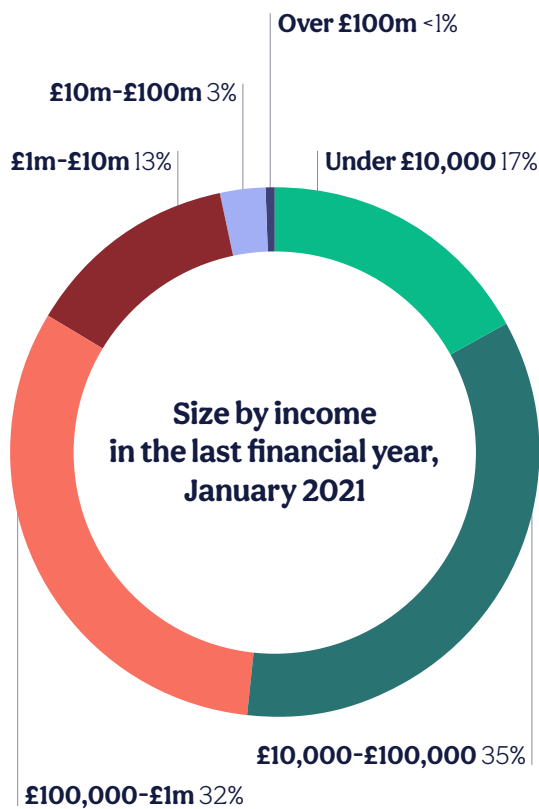
**20%** (138) described themselves as age-specific

**12%** (86) described themselves as a deaf and disabled peoples' organisation

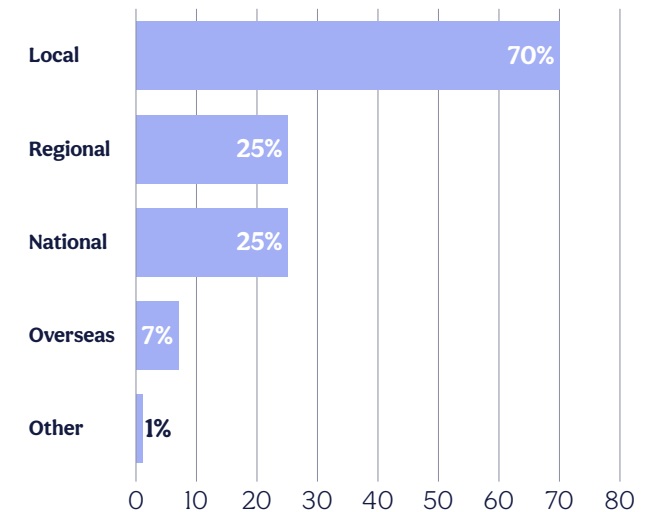
**11%** (78) described themselves as a BAME organisation

**10%** (74) described themselves as a women's organisation

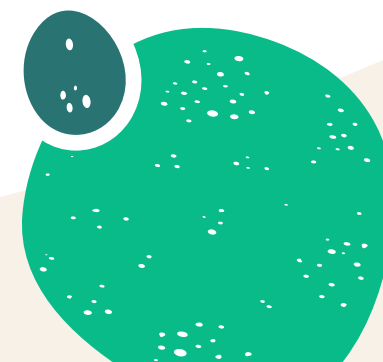
**5%** (32) described themselves as LGBTIQ+ organisations

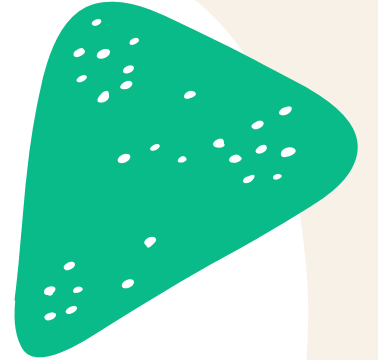
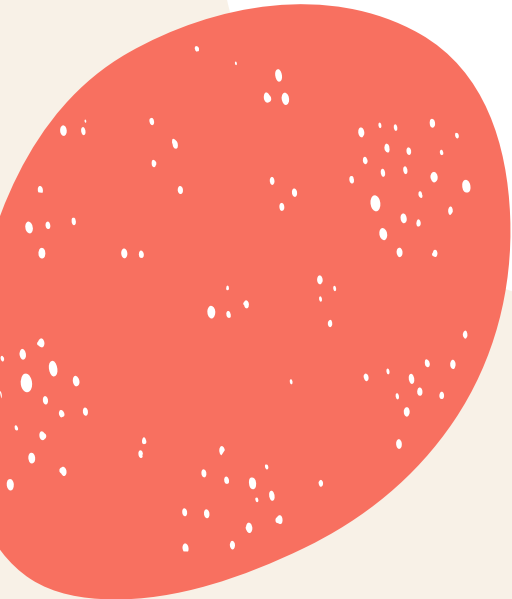
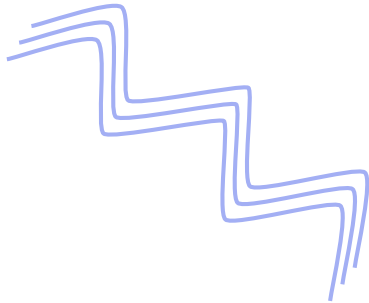


**At what level does your organisation operate, January 2021**



The most common activity types reported by survey respondents were in health, hospitals and nursing homes (including mental health) (14%), Culture and arts (7%), Community and economic development (7%) individual and family social services (7%), and education (6%).





## Headlines

### People

**710** organisations responded to the survey

**70%** employ paid staff

### Finances

**40%** reported a deteriorating financial position in the last month

**19%** saw their financial position in the last month improve

**39%** reported a stable financial position in the last month

**53%** expect their financial position to remain the same over the next month

**37%** expect their financial position to deteriorate over the next month

### Services

**44%** indicated that their range of services has decreased since March 2020

**38%** reported an increase in their range of services since the beginning of the pandemic

**47%** expect an increase in demand for their services over the next month

### Outlook

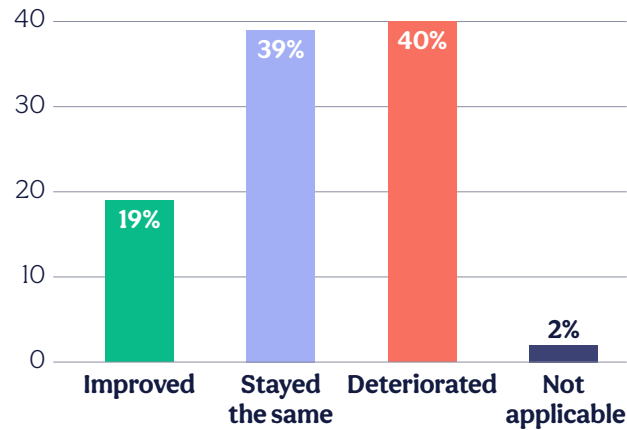
**77%** of respondents expect Covid-19 to have a moderate or significant negative impact on delivering their objectives next year

**11%** reported that it was quite likely or very likely that their organisation would no longer be operating next year (an increase compared to 7% last month)

## Finances and Operations

In Wave 4, 40% of the organisations reported that their financial position has deteriorated in the last month compared to 19% who reported an improvement in their organisation's financial position over the last month. In Wave 3, 26% of the organisations reported that their financial position has deteriorated in in November compared to 27% who reported an improvement in organisation's financial position.

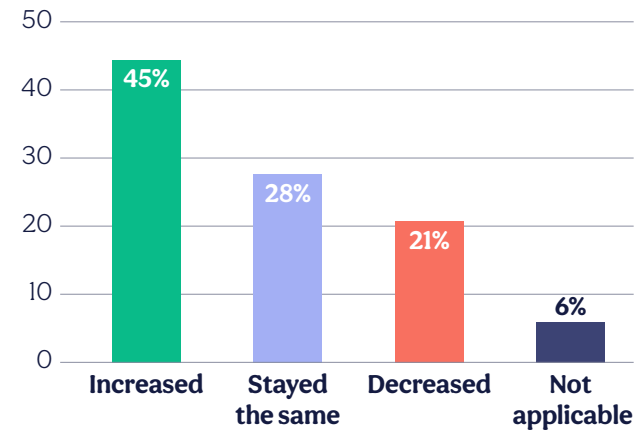
**Change of the financial position over the last month, January 2021**



Looking at the funding sources and how they have changed as a result of the pandemic, organisations have reported a moderate change in the combination of their funding sources with a very slight increase in grant share (3%) and a small decrease in the trading income (2%). Otherwise, the shares of service delivery through contracts, investment income and public donations (including legacy) are very similar in pre and post COVID-19 times. The wave 5 survey will include some additional questions on finances as we move towards the end of the financial year.

Over the last month demand for services provided by the voluntary and community sector maintained the strong upward trajectory revealed in the last 3 waves – with 45% of organisations reporting an increase in the demands for their services.

**Demand for services over the last month, January 2021**

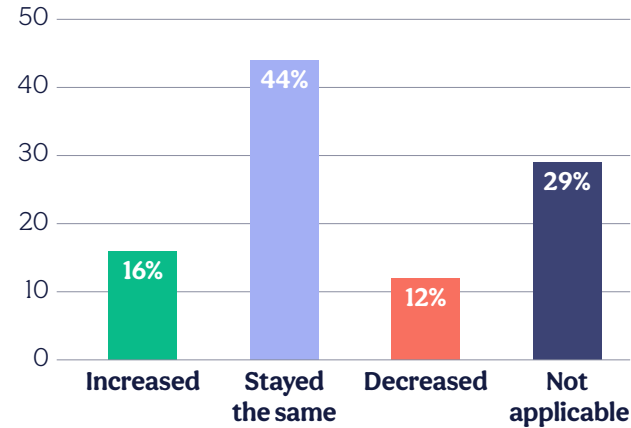




## Workforce and volunteers

Over the last month, the employment position in the sector is reported as relatively stable, with 44% reporting the same number of paid employees compared to previous months.

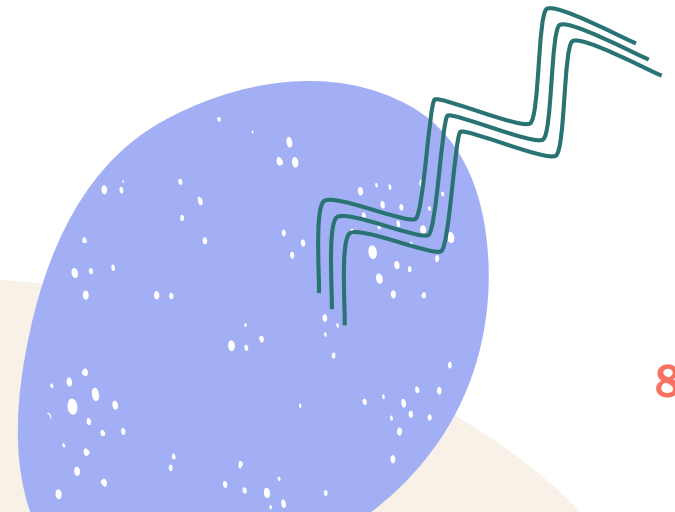
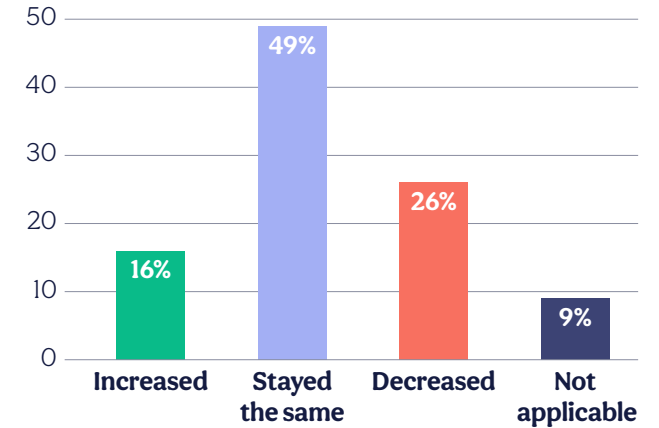
**Paid workforce over the last month, January 2021**



The changing pattern of volunteering within the sector is a major theme of this wave of the survey and different aspects of it will be explored in some depth over the next year – both through this barometer survey, the panel survey and in-depth interviews that are being conducted as part of this project.

In December 2020, the number of organisations with a decrease in number of their volunteers has increase to 26% compared to 19% in November 2020. 16% of the organisations have reported an increase in the number of their volunteers which is similar to Wave 3.

**Volunteers over the last month, January 2021**





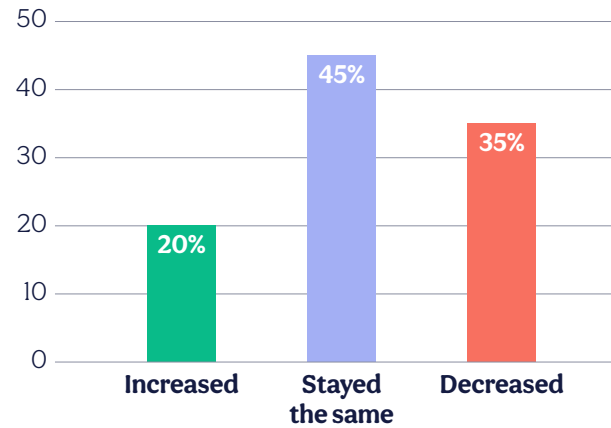
## Changing Pattern of Volunteering

Given the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic across the UK, it is not surprising to see changes in the pattern of volunteering during a time of crisis. In this wave of the barometer, we explored changes in the number of volunteers in VCS organisations, in their demographics and their level of involvement since March 2020.

Research studies show that volunteering can help individuals feel purposeful in times of crisis, it enables them to cope with the anxiety of being exposed to negative news and also it helps them to establish a sense of solidarity through joining others in working towards a common purpose. At the same time, the unique nature of the pandemic and its consequences including lockdowns, social distancing measures, remote working, home schooling and a considerable decrease in social activities can act as a barrier to volunteering while there is evidence that remote volunteering has benefited certain groups, such as disabled volunteers or furloughed employees interested in volunteering.

In Wave 4, 35% of the organisations have reported a decrease in the number of people volunteering with their organisation since March 2020 while 45% of the organisations have remained the same in terms of their volunteer staff members.

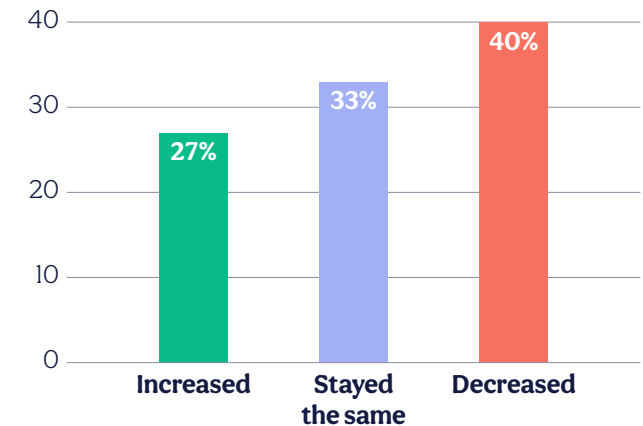
### Change in the number of people volunteering with organisations



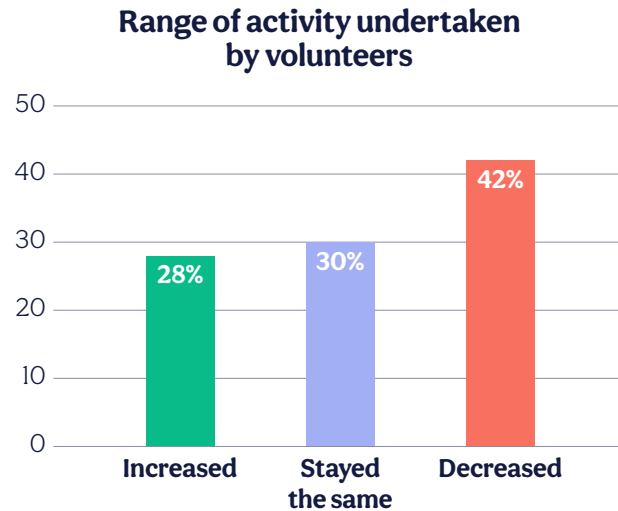
While VCS organisations continue to be pressured by the pandemic, some of the main activities such as fundraising events that would've taken place in normal times have been cancelled due to social distancing measures and lockdown restrictions. At the same time, many people who usually volunteer outside of their home may now choose to stay at home until the end of lockdown restrictions or shielding requirements and that will affect how charities and community groups can provide services to the communities in need.

This survey reveals the amount of unpaid time contributed by volunteers has decreased in 40% of organisations since March 2020. 27% of the organisations have reported an increase in the amount of time that volunteers contribute to the organisations' activities.

### Change in the amount of unpaid time contributed by volunteers



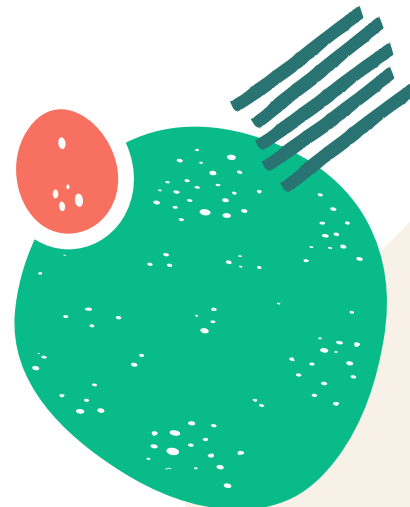
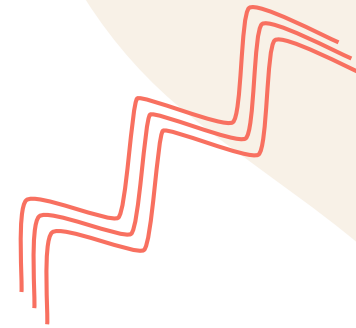
Similarly, the range of activity undertaken by volunteers also decreased in general as is demonstrated in the chart below:



The demographic profile of the volunteers was another aspect that was explored in Wave 4, with 18% of the organisations reporting a shift in the demographic of their volunteers.

Early in the Pandemic, the NHS launched a national appeal for volunteers to support the community in March 2020. Based on the data in our sample, the effects of this national appeal have been modest on the wider voluntary sector, with only 12% of the respondents reporting a perceived impact in the number of their volunteers.

This project will continue to monitor the impacts of the pandemic on the nature and extent of volunteering through the barometer survey, panel survey and in-depth qualitative interviews that are now underway.



# Behind the headlines: Volunteering during the pandemic

The aim of this project is to draw out insights into what it has been like within the sector as we go through the pandemic. This month's barometer has found a real mixed picture on both the time and availability of volunteers. In this section we delve a little deeper into these experiences and the lessons learned around supporting and working through the pandemic.

## Increase in availability of some volunteers

About 20% of respondents to our barometer said they have seen an increase in the availability of volunteers. Furlough, increased time available due to lockdown or a desire to do some good in a time of national crisis did bring in some new, often younger, volunteers. Many interviewees stated this was particularly prevalent at the beginning of the pandemic:

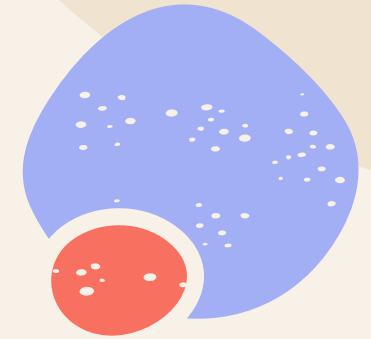
“ So in the beginning we were inundated with volunteers because everyone was furloughed and we were really lucky, we had so many requests which was great, as time's gone on so it's been a fluctuation really ”

Many found this heartening. An ageing volunteer base has been a longstanding concern in the sector, but the pandemic has shown that there is an appetite by people of all ages, to volunteer.

“ What it's shown me is that people are still really keen to get involved, which is brilliant. People want to support us ”

One outcome has been that some of these new volunteers have brought with them new skills, abilities and outlooks, refreshing what the organisation can offer.

However recruiting new volunteers for some organisations has been hard, particularly during the pandemic when they don't have the resources to recruit.



## Decrease in availability of other volunteers

In the barometer 35% reported a decline in volunteers. A major challenge for many voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations is that the risk of severe illness with Covid-19 increases with age, and older adults are at highest risk. Older adults and those with underlying health conditions are therefore more likely to be impacted by Covid, and therefore vulnerable to the disease. According to the Community Life Survey over 50% of volunteers are aged over 65, for many voluntary organisations that relied on older volunteers this has been particularly difficult, as they have been shielding, and not able to participate, even when face to face was allowed.

“ We had to operate without most of our volunteers as they were told to shield. Chances are we will lose most now because they will have got out of the habit of volunteering, and the operational changes we have had to make (e.g. online) are ones they will not be prepared to work with. ”

But it is not just older volunteers who have been impacted. Many volunteers with young families have also been impacted, particularly with school aged children.

“ A lot have very young children who are school age children. So we might think we've got one volunteer back and visiting a family home or calling them, and then their child is sent home from school and all of a sudden you're back to square one. ”

Organisations reliant on volunteers to deliver services, have been particularly vulnerable to the changing fluctuations in volunteer availability.

“ It is a risk, we will lose volunteers and I think probably on our risk register that's one of our highest risks ”

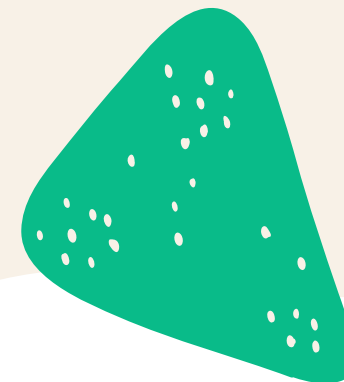
## Keeping volunteers engaged

Whilst much of the focus has been on the impact of volunteering during the pandemic, some organisations are concerned that this will not just impact volunteers during the pandemic but that it could have long-term consequences, as people fall out of the habit of volunteering. With some volunteers unable to volunteer for almost a year, keeping the relationships going has been core to maintaining volunteer engagement, not just now, but for the future.

“ Whilst some of them will have by default drifted away now, a lot of them are still there despite the fact there's been no regular volunteering for 10 months-ish. People appreciate knowing what's going on, there's a great deal of value in just telling people what's going on because if you don't feel you know what's going on, you don't feel part of anything, whether you're a volunteer or a staff member. You can't underestimate how valuable that is ”

Communication with volunteers has been key. Some organisations have been using video conferencing to connect with volunteers in ways that they didn't do before. Webinars and Zoom calls have been used to reach across the whole UK and has led for some more engagement and participation. Many have also used phone calls to connect with volunteers, although this can be demanding.

“ Bob from North Wales basically just phones up for a chat and he's feeling really stressed and you have to have that chat but at the same time you really need off the phone. So it's trying to get that right. Yes, so definitely my role changed a lot and a lot of the focus changed I think too. More conscious of the definite active leadership ”





## Digital poverty

With the shift to online provision the issues of digital poverty impact the availability and demographic profile of volunteers. Many organisations have stated that they had volunteers who struggled to participate due to lack of resources or skills and therefore are excluded from volunteering opportunities. For others such interactions are not experienced as meaningful and therefore they have chosen not to participate.

Finding the right volunteers with the right skills has been hard.

“ Our volunteers have been unable to make the change to online support due to not having access to internet and digital media and having children at home during lockdowns has meant they haven't been able to give time. Recruiting new volunteers with the skills we need has been difficult ”

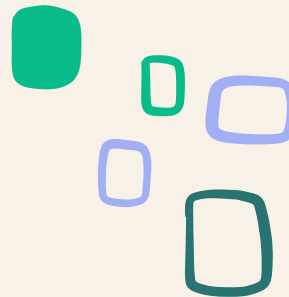
## Changing the volunteer offer

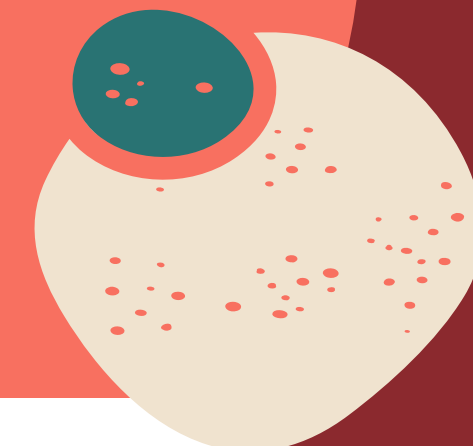
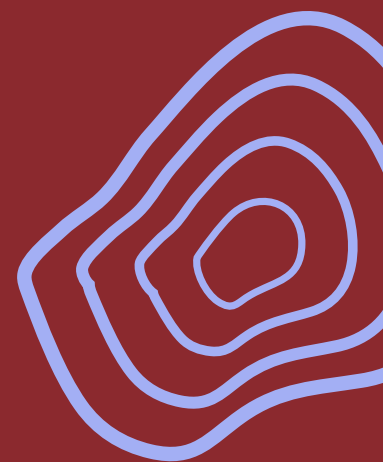
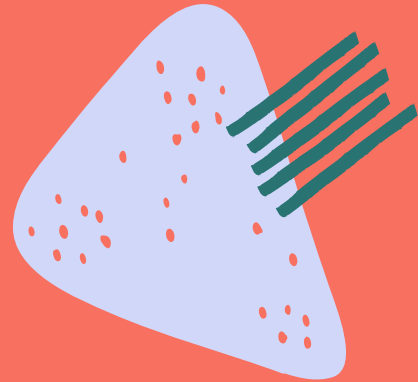
The pandemic has also meant that some organisations have innovated with their volunteer offer. Working digitally, where geography and for some roles set times are no longer as critical, has allowed organisations to experiment with different types of volunteering. As the recent *Time Well Spent* report has also highlighted new “virtual” roles, or micro-volunteering opportunities are being created that not only respond to the need in the pandemic now, but offer some models for the future.

“ we need to consider slightly more dynamic roles, certainly more in line and more virtual roles so that we can maintain a presence and keep people active. So, that's certainly something that we were reflecting on anyway but definitely the pandemic has sort of highlighted that and heightened that that needs to feature a bit more ”

## The next report

Our next report looks at the impact on finance within the pandemic. We are very interested in hearing stories about how COVID-19 has changed your income, what the impact has been, how your organisations has responded and the lessons learned for the future. If you have something to say on this please contact us on [CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk)





For further information:  
[CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:CPWOP@ntu.ac.uk)



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