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Does volunteering improve employability? Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey

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Abstract

There is considerable support in the literature for the idea that volunteering helps improve employability and acts as a route to employment. Policy initiatives are consistent with this message. We analysed longitudinal evidence from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) to test this theory. Our analysis found that volunteering has a significant, but weak, effect on employability in terms of entry into work. The frequency of volunteering, however, makes a difference to its effects on employment outcomes. The effects also vary according to demographics. The evidence on job retention is weaker, and volunteering appears to have zero or even negative effects on wage progression. While the BHPS has limitations for this kind of analysis, we suggest that too much has been made of the link between volunteering and employability, and indeed that intention is infrequent among volunteers.

Keywords

Volunteering, employability, retention, unemployment, employment, progression.

Contents

1. Introduction

High levels of unemployment in the UK (and elsewhere) have contributed to an on-going interest in volunteering as a route to employment. Volunteering is seen to offer participants the chance to develop new skills, extend networks, build CVs, try new vocations and gain experience (for example, DirectGov, 2012). As such, it fits well as one of the range of mechanisms promoted in the UK as part of the 'contemporary pursuit of employability' (Smith, 2010: 279).

Current interest in volunteering extends beyond its potential to enhance employability. It is a central feature of the UK Coalition's vision for a 'Big Society' and was a regular theme under New Labour (Zimmeck, 2010). Indeed, successive administrations since the 1960s have seen volunteering as a potential solution to a variety of social ills (Sheard, 1996). Links to employability/employment have, however, been a regular theme.

New Labour was prolific in its development of volunteering initiatives, within many of which enhancing employability was one of the goals. Towards their final years in office, for example, they launched the Volunteer Brokerage Scheme which sought to match 34,000 unemployed people with 'access to work focused' volunteering placements, aiming to improve employability. A series of initiatives was aimed at young people for whom the potential of volunteering to help gain employment was particularly highlighted (see for example Davis Smith et al., 2002; Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010; Yarwood, 2005).

To date the Coalition Government has been less explicitly instrumental in their aspirations for volunteering and less enthusiastic about specific initiatives (Zimmeck and Rochester, 2011), with some exceptions. Work Together was launched in 2012 as a nationwide initiative to 'encourage all unemployed people to consider volunteering as a way of improving their employment prospects while they are looking for work' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012a). National Citizen Service (NCS), which involves young people in a mix of volunteering and team-building activities, aspires in part to build skills and employability.

These programmes and the wider policy agendas within which they fit assume that volunteering increases employability, acting as a pathway into employment. Recent research for the Government's Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) found a positive effect of their Work Experience scheme for young people on the probability of leaving benefits (DWP, 2012b), but evidence to support a specific effect of volunteering on employability and employment remains scarce (Smith, 2010; Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010).

The central question that this article seeks to address is whether volunteering can help people improve their position in the labour market. After reviewing the current policy landscape and the existing evidence on the link between volunteering, employability and employment, this article will take a longitudinal perspective by drawing on data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), 1996-2008, which included questions on both volunteering and employment over seven waves. The data is analysed using multivariate techniques. We explore the effect of volunteering on the move from being out of work into work, on retention for people in employment, and on progression within employment in terms of increases in wage rates. We finish the paper by offering a set of potential explanations for our findings.

2. Background

2.1 Interest in employability

UK unemployment rose to 2.67 million in January 2012, reaching 22.5% among those aged 16-24 (Office for National Statistics, 2012). These figures are set against an increasingly work focused welfare state, with emphasis placed on skills-based solutions to economic problems and labour market participation viewed as the solution to social exclusion (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). In line with this, for the past decade or so we have seen an employability based approach within labour market and welfare to work policies (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

The concept of employability has been variously defined; used by different people to mean different things. Hillage and Pollard (1998: 2) suggest that 'In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment'. McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) extend this definition, arguing that employability consists of three sets of factors: individual factors (employability skills and attributes, demographics, health and well-being, job seeking, adaptability and mobility); personal circumstances (household circumstances, work culture, access to resources); and, external factors (demand factors, enabling support factors). Further, and importantly for this paper, Hillage and Pollard (1998) stress that employability is not just about the capability to gain/move into initial employment, but also to maintain employment and to obtain new employment. It is also about the quality of employment.

Within UK policy, the focus has been on the move from unemployment into employment, and within that it has been on certain individual factors alone, with 'employability' often used as shorthand for 'the individual's employability skills' (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; see also Wilton, 2011). By stressing the importance of building individuals' skills, confidence, and knowledge of work-based modes of conduct, the emphasis has almost exclusively been on the supply side of the equation, with little consideration of the demand side (Peck and Theodore, 2000; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Underlying this emphasis on the supply side and on individual skills and abilities is an assumption that the relationship between employability and employment is straightforward. Volunteering fits firmly within the category of supply side interventions.

2.2 The volunteering fit

Despite pervasive, and narrow, stereotypes (Lukka and Ellis Paine, 2001), volunteering encompasses a wide range of activities, undertaken by a diverse range of people and driven by many different motivations. Volunteering in the UK has been defined as '… an activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives' (Compact, 2001: 4). It is generally considered to be based on three core principles: it is unpaid; it is un-coerced; it is for the benefit of others (see Ellis Paine et al., 2010). Volunteering is often divided into two main categories – formal volunteering (conducted within or through a group or organisation) and informal volunteering (conducted outside of group structures, on an individual basis). Within these two categories a vast array of different volunteering activities are

encompassed, from coaching a local football team, to befriending a young person, or acting as a school governor.

In 2010-11 55% of England's population volunteered informally at least once during the year; 39% volunteered formally during that time (CLG, 2011). Regular volunteering – on a monthly or more frequent basis – is less common, at 29% and 25% for informal and formal volunteering respectively. Levels of volunteering have been fairly static for the past decade (CLG, 2011).

How surveys ask about volunteering, however, makes a considerable difference to the levels of participation they report (Lynn, 1997; Lyons et al., 1998; Hall, 2001).The figures quoted above are based on findings of the Citizenship Survey, which asks the most comprehensive volunteering question and reports one of the highest levels of volunteering out of the main UK-based surveys. Other surveys, with more restricted questions, tend to report considerably lower levels of volunteering (we return to this point later).

Levels of volunteering vary across different demographic groups. Most notably for the purposes of this paper, levels of volunteering are higher among employed people (particularly part-timers and the self-employed) than among those that are not in employment. Levels of volunteering are lower among young people (16-24 year olds) than among most other age groups. Those with no qualifications are also less likely to volunteer, with the highest levels of volunteering found among those who have a degree level qualification or higher (Low et al., 2007; CLG, 2011).

A desire to learn new skills and to help get on in a career have both been recognised as important motivations for volunteering, although both are found to be less significant than more altruistic motivations such as wanting to improve things or to help out with a cause that is felt to be important (Low et al., 2007). Motivations, however, have been found to vary with age, and other demographics. While 7% of all volunteers in one survey said they were motivated by a desire to get on in their career and 19% by a desire to learn new skills, these figures rose to 27% and 46% respectively among 16-24 year olds (Low et al., 2007). There is some sense then, that, certain volunteers at least, get involved in volunteering because of employability related reasons although it is unusual for these to be cited as prime motives.

Various pieces of existing evidence also give clues as to why it might be assumed that volunteering has a positive impact on employability and can act as a route to employment. Indeed, several studies have found that volunteers certainly believe that volunteering increases their employment prospects: more than half of those volunteering in one study of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, for example, felt that volunteering had a positive impact on their chances of finding a job (Hirst, 2001; see also v, 2008; Gay, 1998 for similarly positive findings).

Despite policy and practice interest in increasing the number of qualifications associated with volunteering, however, uptake is low. One study found that, in 2006/7, 6% of volunteers had gained qualifications directly through volunteering while 9% had used their volunteering experiences to contribute to a qualification (Low et al., 2007).

It is claimed that volunteering helps with the maintenance and/or development of job specific or 'hard' skills (see for example Hirst, 2001; Cook and Jackson, 2006). It has also been found to help with softer skills, such as team work and communication (see for example v, 2011). It may help with

the development of 'work attitudes' and behaviours (Krahn et al., 2002), more broadly to the acquisition of human capital, and also generally in the growth in confidence and self-esteem (Low et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2001; Newton et al., 2011).

Claims are also made for the role of volunteering in building social capital (see for example Wilkinson and Bittman, 2002; Muthuri et al., 2006). Taking the indicator of trust, for example, Kitchen et al. (2006) found that 54% of volunteers said that they felt many people in their neighbourhood could be trusted as compared to 45% of people who did not volunteer. Greater stocks in social capital may have the employability benefit of enabling participants to tap into their newly extended networks to learn about or access job opportunities (Gay, 1998).

There is some (weak) evidence that employers say that volunteering experience listed on a CV will enhance employment prospects. In one survey, for example, 90% of employers said that volunteering can have a positive effect on career progression (v, 2008). Timebank (2004) found that 81% of employers view employees who do voluntary work positively. Such surveys have, however, also found that employers only fully acknowledge the importance of volunteering when it relates directly to the role being applied for (v, 2008).

This evidence base is likely to have influenced thinking about the link between volunteering and employability, contributing to some of the claims made on behalf of volunteering. More concrete or longitudinal evidence to test out or substantiate the claims that volunteering acts as a route to employment is harder to find.

Very few studies have explored more directly the link between volunteering and employability or employment. A few case studies have been conducted within specific volunteer-involving organisations or initiatives, which together give further weight to the positive association argument. The Conservation Volunteers (2004) found that 45% of their Key Volunteers went on to find work in the environment sector, 16% within the organisation itself. A survey of VSO international volunteers and managers reported that 68% of returned volunteers were in employment in the first three months of being back in their home country, while 83% had found 'appropriate work' within six months (Cook and Jackson, 2006). A broader programme of research into Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) – participants within which are generally volunteers – concluded that LETS indirectly provide a bridge into employment by improving employability, although they were most effective in terms of building business for the self-employed and were hampered by the existence of barriers for unemployed people joining and participating in LETS (Williams et al., 2001). Most of these studies, however, do not use comparison or control groups and participants are unlikely be representative of the UK's population.

Various other studies have focused on the link between volunteering and employability within certain groups of the population. Studies of: women (Macdonald, 1996); refugees (Stopforth, 2001); gap-year participants (Jones, 2004); and young people (Newton et al., 2011), for example, have reported employability-related and/or career-related benefits of volunteering for each demographic group. Many of these studies, however, rely on self-reported measures of impact (e.g. volunteers say they feel more employable and have gained skills or employment through their volunteering) and/or on small sample sizes.

Research among Incapacity Benefit recipients presents a more complex picture. Logistic regression modelling within an evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Advisory Service pilot projects, for example, found that those who were not volunteering while claiming Incapacity Benefit were twice as likely (in terms of probability) to have done paid work since meeting with an Advisor compared to those who had been volunteering (Loumidis et al., 2001; see also Corden and Sainsbury, 2001; Corden and Ellis, 2004; Corden, 2002).

There are very few studies which have directly explored the link between volunteering and employability or employment more broadly. Perhaps the first large-scale study of volunteering and employment was undertaken by Gay and Hatch in 1983, at a time when unemployment levels had risen to 1.5 million leading to considerable policy interest in the role that volunteering could play in reducing that figure. The research, which included a postal survey of unemployed people on Jobcentre registers in five local areas, alongside interviews with unemployed volunteers and volunteer managers, found that volunteering levels among unemployed people were low and that while unemployed volunteers felt that their participation had improved their self-confidence, filled time and gave them an opportunity to use their skills, very seldom was the link between volunteering and employability or employment made (Gay and Hatch, 1983; Gay, 1998).

A Department for Education and Skills commissioned study in 2001 explored the links between volunteering and employability for recipients of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) (Hirst, 2001). Despite finding that 88% of those still looking for work and 41% of those already in work felt that volunteering would/had helped them find a job, JSA claimants who had volunteered were not more likely overall to move off JSA than those who did not volunteer. Volunteering did have a marginally positive impact on employability for some people but only those people whose motive for volunteering was employment related. Indeed, overall, volunteers tended to have a longer duration of unemployment than non-volunteers (McKay et al., 1999).

A comparative study of volunteering and employability in Britain and Germany made use of the British Household Panel Survey and the German Socio-Economic Household Survey (Strauß, 2009). It found a positive effect of volunteering on re-employment chances among unemployed people, particularly among young British men. There was less of an association in Germany. Our reading of this study, however, suggests that results are based on analysis of a question within the BHPS about participation within voluntary associations, which was equated to volunteering; rather than of the question on unpaid voluntary work which we use in this paper (both questions are problematic and our analysis below suggests they are measuring different things with different employability outcomes).

As Hillage and Pollard (1998) remind us, employability is not only about moving into employment; it also relates to job retention and progression. Here we find even less evidence of the role of volunteering. Through a survey with a nationally representative sample of 8,168 French households, public sector volunteers were found to receive a positive wage premium (equal to 5.5%), while in the private sector the premium was found to be negative (equal to –1.7%) (Prouteau and Wolff, 2006). Overall the study concluded that there was no difference in hourly wages between volunteers and non-volunteers. Day and Devlin (1998) had earlier found that volunteers' incomes were on average

7% higher than those of non-volunteers, although it was not possible to infer any causal connection between volunteering and the wage premium from this study (Prouteau and Wolff, 2006).

Overall, as a number of others have noted, it is hard to find statistical evidence of the link between volunteering and employability (see for example Prouteau and Wolff, 2006; Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010; Smith, 2010; Corden and Ellis, 2004). Many studies fail to establish a direct link. Further, where a link has been suggested a number of factors can be identified that influence the intensity of the link, including: how much volunteering an individual does; what the volunteering is; the reason for getting involved (e.g. whether volunteering is part of an employment strategy); the nature of the role; the variety of tasks, and the contact with others when delivering the task (Hirst, 2001); the closeness of fit between the volunteering role and the employment role being sought; and the nature and quality of support provided to the volunteer (Gay and Hatch, 1983) including the opportunity to review and reflect on the volunteering experience (Hirst, 2001). Overall the picture is mixed and somewhat confusing, with different conclusions being reached by the varying studies, leaving a considerable gap in our understanding of the links between volunteering, employability and employment.

The remainder of the paper sets out to address this gap. Using longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), which includes questions on volunteering and employment, we set out to test the effect of volunteering on employability outcomes – specifically access into employment; employment retention; and on progression in terms of wage levels.

3. Methods and data

3.1 The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)

The BHPS is a long-running panel study with data available for an 18 year period from 1991 through to 2008/09, among individuals living in private households across the UK. The survey includes questions on a range of standard human capital and demographic variables, including education, occupation, age, gender, earnings and hours worked.

Since 1998 the survey has included, on a biennial basis, a question on voluntary work and another on participating with local groups (see Box 1). The questions are relatively narrow. Respondents are asked how frequently they do unpaid voluntary work and how often they attend meetings of local groups – at least once a week; at least once a month; several times a year; once a year or less; never or almost never.

Box 1: BHPS questions on volunteering

We are interested in the things people do in their leisure time, I'm going to read out a list of some leisure activities. Please look at the card and tell me how frequently you do each one.

…

Attend meetings for local groups/voluntary organisations?

Do unpaid voluntary work?

Doing unpaid voluntary work is our focus of interest, as it seems to relate most closely to the concept of volunteering, although we recognise well the limitations of the question (see below).

We begin with some exploratory analysis of the most recently available data – that for 2008/09 – and show in Table 1 that 23% of people did some unpaid voluntary work, while 27% participated, to some extent, in local groups. These rates are lower than found in other UK surveys, such as the Citizenship Survey referred to above, a reflection of the narrow scope of the volunteering question within the BHPS. Across time, however, 37% of the panel had volunteered at some point (among those appearing in at least one wave where the volunteering question was included).

Table 1: Types of participation in voluntary activity in BHPS 2008

Column percentages

Frequency	Attend meetings for local groups/voluntary organisations	Do unpaid voluntary work
At least once a week	15	5
At least once a month	4	8
Several times a year	4	6
Once a year or less	4	4
Never/almost never	73	77
Unweighted sample size	13,454	13,454

Note: results weighted by RXRWTUK1.[1]

Table 2: Types of participation in voluntary activity in BHPS 2008

Row percentages

	Weekly	Monthly	Few per yr	Annual	Never	Unweighted base
Men	5	6	6	4	79	6,069
Women	6	9	6	4	75	7,385
Class						
I	5	11	13	7	64	418
II	4	7	8	6	74	2,810
IIIN	4	6	5	4	80	1,853
IIIM	3	3	3	3	88	1,398
IV	5	5	5	3	82	1,202
V	2	5	5	3	85	248

Note: results weighted by RXRWTUK1.

[1] As recommended in the survey documentation for the BHPS, these results are weighted by the variable RXRWTUK1. This allows for differences in attrition over time among different groups of respondents, to maintain a sample that is representative of the UK in 2008/09.

The most common frequency of participation in unpaid voluntary work was monthly. Women were more likely to volunteer than men, and they volunteered more often. There was also something of a gradient with social class, with the professional and managerial classes the most likely to be volunteering (table 2).

Volunteering is higher amongst those who are employed compared to those who are unemployed. Among those in employment, volunteering levels are highest among those who work for non-profit organisations and are lowest among those who worked in the private sector. The volunteers were also more likely to be older than younger; and those with degree-level qualifications and above are more likely to volunteer than those with low or no qualifications. This demographic profile of volunteers is similar to that found in other surveys of volunteering in the UK (Low et al., 2007; CLG, 2011).

3.2 Panel analysis of the British Household Panel Survey

We created a longitudinal dataset taking the seven BHPS waves in which the volunteering question has been asked. It contained over 92,000 observations (25,000 different individuals observed for an average of close to four of the relevant waves of the survey). We use data on the current employment situation and the employment situation from one year before, and consider how the association between the two is mediated by reports of volunteering.

We ran a series of regression models of the relationship between volunteering and employability. There were three separate models of employability – moving into work, remaining in work, and earnings levels. Each model controlled for education, and a range of socio-economic characteristics. Time and regional dummy variables were included.

To examine the effects of volunteering on entering employment we carried out a series of logit regression models, where $y_{i,t}$ takes the value *1* if from period *t-1* to period t the individual has entered employment, and 0 otherwise:

$$\mathbf{y_{i,t}} = \begin{cases} \mathbf{1} \\ \mathbf{0} \end{cases}$$

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\mathbf{y_{i,t}} = \mathbf{1}|\mathbf{x}) = \frac{\mathbf{e^{x\prime\beta}}}{\mathbf{1} - \mathbf{e^{x\prime\beta}}}$$

In this equation *x* is a set of explanatory variables that capture individual socio-economic characteristics, time and regional dummy variables.

For retention we use the same approach to explore the odds of exiting employment, but with a starting point of those in work, rather than those not in work, so $y_{i,t}$ takes the value *1* if from period *t-1* to period t the individual has exited employment, and 0 if they are still in employment.

For wage rates we estimated a standard wage equation using OLS, for the log wage received by individual *i*, at time *t*,

$$\mathbf{ln}(\mathbf{w_{i,t}}) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 VOL + \alpha_2 GEN + \alpha_3 AGE + \alpha_4 AGE^2 + \alpha_5 MAR_{ST} + \alpha_6 \mathrm{JOBSEC} + \alpha_7 \mathrm{EMPTIPE} + \alpha_8 \mathrm{EDU} + \alpha_9 \mathrm{WAVE} + \mu_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

Where VOL indicates extent of volunteering, and the other variables refer to personal and job-related characteristics (with an individual specific term μ_i that may be estimated using either fixed or random effects). We use each category of the volunteering question, to consider the effect of different frequencies of volunteering.

4. Results

In this section, we look at the extent to which volunteering is associated with our measures of employability: moves from being out of work into employment, staying in employment, and earnings progression.

4.1 Entry into work

Having controlled for differences in education we found a statistically significant, but weak, effect of volunteering on entry into work. Volunteering on a monthly basis had a positive effect on the chances of people not in work one year moving into paid employment the next year. However, those volunteering on a weekly basis or a yearly basis had *lower* than average chances of moving into paid work.

Within the sample we found the effect of volunteering varied according to different demographic characteristics. For example, the effects varied according to age (see table 3). Volunteering had a positive effect on the chances of moving into work for people aged 45-60 years old when undertaken on a monthly or slightly less frequent basis. We found no positive effect of volunteering on young people's (16-25 year olds) employment, no matter how much they did: infrequent volunteering had no effect; regular (monthly or weekly) volunteering had a negative effect. Among 26-44 year olds, volunteering had very little effect – either positive or negative – on the chances of moving into employment.

The effects of volunteering on moving into work also varied according to the reason why people were not employed – whether they were unemployed, undertaking family care, students or disabled (see table 4). For the unemployed, volunteering several times a year had a positive effect on the changes of moving into employment, while volunteering on a weekly basis had a negative effect. Monthly and yearly volunteering had no significant effect. For those out of work with family caring responsibilities, volunteering on a monthly basis had a positive effect, taking part on a weekly basis had a negative effect. Among students, volunteering on a monthly basis had no significant effect, while any more or less volunteering had a negative effect. Among disabled people, volunteering several times a year was found to have a positive effect on the move into employment, while doing more or less than this had little effect either way.

Overall then, our analysis suggests that some volunteering *can* have a positive effect on the likelihood of people moving into employment, but it depends on who you are, why you are out of work, and on how much volunteering you do. Doing 'too much' volunteering (i.e. on a weekly or more frequent basis) had a universally negative effect, particularly among young people and/or students.

Table 3: Logit results for entering in employment – all sample and age group

Dependent variable: Entering employment	***All sample***	*16-25*	*26-44*	*45-60*
Current labour force status				
Unemployed	base	base	base	Base
Maternity leave	1.347***	0.303	1.768***	0.789
	(-0.159)	(0.320)	(0.207)	(1.528)
Family care	-1.560***	-1.94***	-1.373***	-1.78***
	(0.081)	(0.174)	(0.124)	(0.247)
FT studt, school	-0.672***	-0.630***	-0.325	-0.63
	(0.081)	(0.094)	(0.164)	(0.557)
LT sick, disabld	-2.461***	-2.300***	-2.00***	-3.56***
	(0.110)	(0.359)	(0.162)	(0.311)
Gvt trng scheme	0.518***	0.640***	0.154	0.043
	(0.197)	(0.217)	(0.442)	(0.941)
Other	-0.162	-0.645	-0.022	-0.75*
	0.154	(0.285)	(0.250)	(0.451)
How often: Do voluntary work?				
Never	**base**	**base**	**base**	**Base**
At least once a week	**-0.235****	**-0.258****	**-0.225**	**-0.171**
	(0.099)	**(0.152)**	**(0.157)**	**(0.296)**
At least once a month	**0.247***	**-0.114*****	**0.296**	**0.746****
	(0.126)	**(0.211)**	**(0.200)**	**(0.363)**
Several times a year	**-0.004**	**-0.488****	**0.256**	**0.695****
	(0.109)	**(0.158)**	**(0.184)**	**(0.342)**
Once a year or less	**-0.205****	**-0.331**	**-0.154**	**0.451**
	(0.103)	**(0.130)**	**(0.183)**	**(0.396)**
Male	base	base	base	Base
Female	-0.087	-0.005	-0.122	-0.348
	(0.060)	(0.070)	(0.119)	(0.229)
Age	0.156***	0.529**	0.239**	0.270
	(0.015)	(0.222)	(0.110)	(0.502)
age2	-0.002***	-0.008	-0.003**	-0.003
	(0.000)	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.004)
Marital status				
Married	base	base	base	Base
Separated	-0.496***	-0.466	-0.292	-0.841*
	(0.179)	(0.611)	(0.223)	(0.494)
Divorced	-0.003	-0.666	-0.013	0.304
	(0.101)	(1.137)	(0.138)	(0.240)
Widowed	0.000	-17.45	-0.120	0.253
	(0.250)	(4716)	(0.516)	(0.454)
Never married	-0.273***	-0.046	-0.444***	-0.807**
	(0.085)	(0.189)	(0.110)	(0.357)
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-2.582***	-7.59***	-3.92	-5.23
	(0.352)	(2.22)	(1.92)	(12.94)
Rho	0.256	0.098	0.292	0.227
N. Observations	17282	5978	6004	4160
N. Individuals	8482	3751	3078	1942

Notes: *= significant at 10%**= significant at 5%;***=significant at 1%.

Table 4: Logit results for entering in employment – all sample and status

Dependent variable: Entering in employment	***All sample***	*Unemployed*	*Family care*	*Students*	*Disabled*
Current labour force status					
Unemployed	base				
Maternity leave	1.347***				
	(-0.159)				
Family care	-1.560***				
	(0.081)				
FT studt, school	-0.672***				
	(0.081)				
LT sick, disabld	-2.461***				
	(0.110)				
Gvt trng scheme	0.518***				
	(0.197)				
Other	-0.162				
	0.154				
How often: Do voluntary work?					
Never	**base**	**base**	**base**	**Base**	**base**
At least once a week	**-0.235****	**-0.574***	**-0.003**	**-0.348****	**-0.604**
	(0.099)	**(0.322)**	**(0.179)**	**(0.153)**	**(0.727)**
At least once a month	**0.247***	**0.391**	**0.436***	**-0.089**	**0.707**
	(0.126)	**(0.420)**	**(0.226)**	**(0.203)**	**(0.829)**
Several times a year	**-0.004**	**0.633***	**0.405**	**-0.535*****	**1.322***
	(0.109)	**(0.340)**	**(0.222)**	**(0.157)**	**(0.739)**
Once a year or less	**-0.205****	**-0.063**	**-0.149**	**-0.381*****	**-0.388**
	(0.103)	**(0.315)**	**(0.250)**	**(0.130)**	**(0.926)**
Male	base	base	base	Base	base
Female	-0.087	-0.163	-0.352	0.024	-0.364
	(0.060)	(1.148)	(0.290)	(0.071)	(0.361)
Age	0.156***	0.112***	0.160***	0.339***	0.047
	(0.015)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.123)
age2	-0.002***	-0.00191	-0.000**	0.005***	-0.002
	(0.000)	(0.00)***	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Marital status					
Married	base	base	base	Base	Base
Separated	-0.496***	-0.743	-0.299	-1.135*	-0.098
	(0.179)	(0.386)	(0.301)	(0.667)	(0.862)
Divorced	-0.003	-0.465	0.288	-0.236	0.834*
	(0.101)	(0.246)	(0.176)	(0.352)	(0.440)
Widowed	0.000	-0.623	0.145	0.992	0.047
	(0.250)	(0.817)	(0.392)	(1.151)	(1.263)
Never married	-0.273***	-0.324	-0.373	-0.020	-1.362***
	0.085	(0.207)	(0.170)	(0.203)	(0.506)
Years dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regions dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-2.582***	-1.274	-4.544***	-6.320***	-2.44784
	(0.352)	(0.873)	(1.018)	(0.595)	(2.91)
Rho	0.256	0.561	0.045	0.000	0.84
N. Observations	17282	2667	5392	4641	3195
N. Individuals	8482	1986	2459	3169	1461

Notes: *= significant at 10%**= significant at 5%;***=significant at 1%.

4.2 Retention

Alongside exploring the impact of volunteering on the move into employment, we explored its impact on job retention: remaining in employment rather than leaving a job. Volunteering several times a year had a (significant but weak) positive effect on job retention for the sample as a whole; whereas more or less frequent volunteering had no effect (see table 5).

Results varied somewhat by age (see table 5). For those aged 26-44 years old volunteering several times a year had a positive effect on retention (more or less frequent volunteering had no effect); whereas volunteering had no effect on employment retention amongst those aged 45-60 years old, no matter how frequently they participated. Amongst 16-24 year olds, while volunteering once a year or less was found to have a positive effect on job retention, volunteering at least once a month had a negative effect – although volunteering weekly or several times a year had no effect.

Table 5: Logit results for exiting employment – all sample and age group

Dependent variable: Exiting employment	*All sample*	***16-25***	*26-44*	*45-60*
How often: Do voluntary work?				
Never	**Base**	**base**	**base**	**base**
At least once a week	**0.148**	**0.342**	**0.110**	**0.084**
	(0.112)	**(0.298)**	**(0.157)**	**(0.224)**
At least once a month	**.119**	**0.807****	**0.100**	**-0.348**
	(0.137)	**(0.352)**	**(0.196)**	**(0.298)**
Several times a year	**-.223***	**-0.278**	**-0.328*****	**-0.234**
	(0.130)	**(0.314)**	**(0.191)**	**(0.256)**
Once a year or less	**-.130**	**-0.620****	**-0.072**	**0.180**
	(0.109)	**(0.265)**	**(0.148)**	**(0.222)**
Male	Base	Base	Base	Base
Female	0.886	0.424***	1.336***	0.590***
	(0.059)	(0.123)	(0.085)	(0.129)
Age	-0.202)	0.181	0.005	0.295
	(0.014)	(0.444)	(0.095)	(0.352)
age2	0.002***	-0.010	-0.001	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.010)	(0.001)	(0.003)
Marital status				
Married	Base	Base	Base	Base
Separated	0.291*	0.63	0.098	0.726
	(0.162)	(0.76)	(0.200)	(0.322)
Divorced	0.261***	2.33	0.065	0.579***
	(0.098)	(1.50)	(0.132)	(0.167)
Widowed	0.017	-14.96	0.538	0.335
	(0.248)	(306)	(0.454)	(0.357)
Never married	-0.180	-0.39***	-0.203**	0.378
	(0.078)	(0.22)	(0.091)	(0.234)
Years dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regions dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
constant	0.878	-1.81	-2.49	-13.58
	(0.36)	(4.69)	(1.64)	(9.13)
Rho	0.329	0.381	0.266	0.44
N. Observations	40,633	4,811	20,515	12,962
N. Individuals	13,434	2,980	7,715	4,922

Notes: *= significant at 10%**= significant at 5%;***=significant at 1%.

4.3 Progression

Table 6: Standard wage equation

Dependent variable: Ln(wage)	**Fixed effects**	**Random effects**
How often: Do voluntary work?		
Never	**Base**	**Base**
At least once a week	**-0.040*** **	**-0.019** **
	(0.010)	**(0.009)**
At least once a month	**-0.015**	**0.014**
	(0.010)	**(0.009)**
Several times a year	**-0.025*** **	**0.008**
	(0.008)	**(0.008)**
Once a year or less	**-0.017** **	**0.004**
	(0.007)	**(0.007)**
Female		-0.221***
		(0.007)
Age	0.066***	0.744***
	(0.006)	(0.001)
age2	-0.001***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
SECTOR		
Private firm/company	base	Base
Civil Srv/Cntrl Govt	0.054***	0.087***
	(0.014)	(0.011)
Local Govt/town hall	0.066***	0.105***
	(0.009)	(0.007)
NHS or higher educ	0.051***	0.109***
	(0.011)	(0.009)
Natnalised industry	0.065**	0.072***
	(0.028)	(0.026)
Non-profit orgs.	0.020	0.029**
	(0.013)	(0.011)
Armed forces	0.047	0.076**
	(0.039)	(0.032)
Other	-0.039*	-0.034*
	(0.020)	(0.018)
Married	Base	Base
Separated	-0.017	-0.039**
	(0.014)	(0.012)
Divorced	-0.026**	-0.054***
	(0.011)	(0.009)
Widowed	-0.007	-0.031
	(0.029)	(0.021)
Never married	-0.002	-0.031**
	(0.010)	(0.007)
No education	Base	Base
High education	0.050***	0.330***
	(0.167)	(0.001)
GCE or equiv	0.002	0.163***
	(0.17)	(0.01)
Years dummies	Yes	Yes
Regions dummies	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.814***	0.507***
	(0.202)	(0.033)
r-sq overall	0.140	0.372
Between	0.095	0.387
Within	0.336	0.322
N. Observations	46,852	46,852
N. Individuals	15,159	15,159

Notes: *= significant at 10%**= significant at 5%;***=significant at 1%.

As an indicator of progression within the labour market, we also explored the effect of volunteering on wage rates. Our analysis suggests that, if anything, volunteering has a negative effect on wage levels (see table 6). We present results both from a fixed-effects specification (effectively, separate intercept terms for each respondent) and from a random-effects approach (intercepts based on a distribution). This is assessing the effect of a change in the amount of voluntary work.

Frequent (weekly) volunteering and infrequent (several times or once a year) volunteering had a negative effect on wage rates, while the effect of monthly volunteering was not significant. According to this analysis volunteering doesn't appear to help people get on in their career, in terms of earning more, and if anything has the opposite effect.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis of the BHPS has found that volunteering has a weak effect on employability, in terms of moves into employment, job retention and progression. Volunteering can assist the move into employment, but seemingly only if done at the right frequency (not too regularly, not too infrequently) and for certain people (older people and those with family caring responsibilities). For young people and students in particular, and if done too frequently, our analysis suggests volunteering can have a negative effect on the move into employment and on earnings.

We are left with a bit of a puzzle. Policy and practice discourses have put great store on the link between volunteering and employability. Evidence to date has largely substantiated these claims through reporting that volunteers felt more employable, that employers viewed volunteering on a CV positively, and that volunteering positively affects relevant human and social capital indicators which in turn have been associated with individual employability gains. Our findings run somewhat contrary to this'. Below we offer several ideas which may go some way towards an explanation.

5.1 Survey and analysis limitations

We are not aware of any other research in the UK which has used such a large dataset in the exploration of the link between volunteering and employability. Size is not, however, everything and the BHPS has some specific limitations for this analysis. The volunteering question is very narrow, limiting the number and potentially the diversity of people who identify themselves as volunteers. Strauß's (2009) analysis of volunteering and employability, which made use of BHPS question on participation in associations as a proxy for volunteering, found that volunteering had a positive effect on employment, indicating the significant difference that the way we measure volunteering, even within one survey, can make.

We also know nothing about the nature of volunteering that was being undertaken by BHPS respondents, beyond how frequently it was done – and we have demonstrated above that this influences the effect of volunteering on moves into employment. From previous studies we might expect that the different forms that volunteering takes – the nature of the volunteering role; the intensity and duration of involvement in individual and multiple roles; the different motivations that volunteers bring to the role (Hirst, 2001); and the different support structures that are in place for volunteers may qualify the effect that volunteering has on employability (Rochester, 2009). The BHPS

does not provide us with any insight into these different aspects of the volunteer role and experience and this creates a major limitation.

Further, the time period within which the BHPS data was gathered may be influencing the results, as might the treatment of time within our analysis. The data was collected from 1996-2008 at a time when there was considerable policy interest in the link between volunteering and employability, but before which there was such pressure on the labour market through high levels of unemployment and declining job opportunities. The timing of the survey may also have specific implications for the results found for students. The negative effect of volunteering on employability found here for students (and young people) is particularly surprising, given the weight of counter evidence/argument, but this may in part be explained by the design of the survey and our analysis as it may be that we are picking up students in their first or second year of study who we would not expect to have moved into employment the following year (our analysis does not directly measure year of study). Further, our analysis has explored the effects of volunteering one year on the moves into (and out of) employment the following year. We might find different results if we explored longer term effects.

5.2 Neglect of the demand side of employability

The concept of employability found within policy discourses has been subject to considerable critique for its over-emphasis on individuals' skills and abilities – the supply side of the labour market (Peck and Theodore, 2000; Wilton, 2011; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Employability concerns locate both the problem and the solution in the supply side of the labour market, which may be insufficient to tackle unemployment as they make little impact on the structural causes of unequal labour market opportunities (Peck and Theodore, 2000); they do not address the disadvantages that certain groups face in the labour market (Wilton, 2011).

Our findings can be seen to add weight to these critiques. Although not possible to test within the BHPS (another limitation to the survey), it may be possible that (as other studies have suggested – see above) volunteering adds considerably to the supply side – by building volunteers' skills, confidence, work practices, and social contacts – but as it does little to address any limits within the demand side of the labour market any gains are ineffective. Structural barriers which exist for those looking to move from unemployment into employment, or to stay or progress within existing employment, continue whether or not volunteering has enhanced individual employability factors.

Indeed, the demographic profile of volunteers suggests that volunteering itself is subject to the same structural barriers to participation as found in the labour market (IVR, 2004). Rather than opening up access to labour market participation, volunteering may be reinforcing the existing barriers by itself being an exclusive activity.

Further, it could be suggested that the recent push for volunteering coming through the Big Society agenda that is happening at the same time public expenditure is being slashed, is weakening the demand side of the labour market, perhaps even with volunteers replacing paid staff (see, for example, recent media debate about the role of volunteers in libraries and museums).[2]

[2] http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/1092329/analysis-balancing-staff-volunteers/

We find support, therefore, for McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) more holistic framework of employability, with its three sets of factors, interactions between which are critical: individual factors (employability skills and attributes, demographics, health and well-being, job seeking, adaptability and mobility); personal circumstances (household circumstances, work culture, access to resources); external factors (demand factors, enabling support factors). While volunteering may add to individual factors and personal circumstances, it may not add (and arguably should never have been expected to add) to external factors and so the overall positive effect on employability is weakened.

5.3 Volunteering is about more than employability

Despite the attention that has been paid to the potential link between volunteering and employability, only a minority of volunteers claim to be interested in the link. For many participants volunteering is disconnected from their paid work. Surveys from the UK have found that only a minority of volunteers state potential employability related gains as a motivation for getting involved, and while more recognise it as a benefit, only a minority recognise it as an important benefit of volunteering (see for example Low et al., 2007). Focusing on the link between volunteering and employability assumes an investment model of volunteering – that people participate to get something (instrumental) out of it – rather than the alternative consumption model of volunteering.

Not only are many volunteers uninterested in possible employability gains from volunteering, they may also be different types of people or have different value sets from non-volunteers and this may influence their wider approach and attitude to work. One could theorise, for example, that volunteers are less likely to be driven by career progression and financial reward, and this may be influencing the results (a selection bias, in effect).

Further, as others have argued, rather than being a route into work volunteering may act more as an alternative to work, or as additional to work (Corden and Ellis, 2004; Hardill and Baines, 2008; IVR, 2004; Perkins and Rinaldi, 2002). Indeed, treating volunteering as work is only one way to conceptualise it: it can also be conceptualised as a: leisure, service, or caring activity (Rochester et al., 2010). Conceptualising volunteering as something other than work shifts the focus from employability-related outcomes to other impacts, such as individual sociability, enjoyment and well-being, and social capital gains.

5.4 Reclaiming volunteering

Policy and practice discourses are awash with stories of individual's gaining employment through their volunteering experience. We do not doubt the validity of these testimonies. Our longitudinal analysis has found that volunteering can have a positive effect on the likelihood of people moving into employment. Whether or not it does, however, depends on who you are, why you are out of work, and how frequently you participate. In general, volunteering on a monthly basis has a positive effect on the chances of people who are not in work one year moving into work the next, but volunteering on a more or less frequent basis reduces or even reverses the effect. While policy discourses have particularly focused on the potential of volunteering to act as a route into employment among young people, our analysis has failed to substantiate this claim. Overall, volunteering does not appear to have as strong

or as positive an effect on employability outcomes – on moves into employment, on retention and progression – as suggested in both policy rhetoric and in some previous research.

Survey and analysis limitations go some way towards providing an explanation for the gap between the rhetoric and our findings. More convincing, however, are the arguments for the need for both a broader understanding of employability and of volunteering. While volunteering may enhance an individual's skills, confidence and self-esteem and may help to build their CV and contacts, it is unlikely to affect the demand side of the labour market and therefore any employability gains are muted. Volunteering alone cannot tackle the structural inequalities which underlie the labour market – indeed volunteering is itself subject to those same inequalities – reducing its effect on employment outcomes.

In unison with others, we suggest that volunteering may be better thought of as an alternative to employment, or rather to be conceptualised in ways other than as a form of work or solely as a personal investment activity. Employment related motivations are not the most significant triggers for most volunteers, and this is recognised by those practitioners within the volunteering movement who have been arguing that too much emphasis has been placed on the link between volunteering and employability. While volunteering can enhance employability outcomes for some individuals in some contexts, the true value of volunteering, arguably, lies elsewhere.

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