

The National Trust Working Holidays Programme: An Impact Evaluation

Executive Summary

The working holidays programme currently involves over 3500 volunteers a year in 350 working holidays on National Trust properties across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This evaluation, undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR), measures and assesses the impact of the programme on participants, properties and the National Trust as a whole and identifies opportunities for the development of the programme.

Impact on volunteers

Working holiday participants and leaders reported experiencing a number of impacts as a result of volunteering with the National Trust. These ranged from the development of conservation skills to an increase in their awareness of environmental and heritage issues.

Personal development

- Most volunteers felt that volunteering helped them to develop personally, particularly in terms of making them feel they could make a useful contribution and in their willingness to try new things. Leaders particularly felt that their working holiday experiences had given them confidence in their own abilities: 74 per cent of leaders and 55 per cent of participants reported this as a benefit.

Skills development

- Volunteers felt the greatest impact of their working holiday experience was on their practical and conservation skills: 78 per cent of participants and 86 per cent of leaders felt these had increased. Forty-seven percent of participants reported that volunteering had positively affected their ability to work as a team, whilst 77 per cent of leaders felt that their leadership skills had increased.

Engagement

- Seventy-two per cent of participants and sixty-three per cent of leaders said that their interest in volunteering had developed as a result of their working holidays and 42 per cent of participants and leaders said that the experience had increased their desire to take part in local campaigns about heritage or the environment.

Environmental awareness and knowledge

- The majority of volunteers reported positive impacts on their awareness of environmental and heritage issues: 82 percent of participants and 84 per cent of leaders said this had improved following their working holiday. Most also reported positive impacts on their appreciation of the importance of the natural environment. Sixty per

cent of participants and 66 per cent of leaders said that their experiences had made them think more about their impact on the environment.

Impact on the National Trust

The working holidays programme brings significant benefits to properties and the National Trust as a whole, contributing to its strategic objectives in a number of different ways

Improving conservation and environmental performance

- The contribution and added value of working holiday volunteers to properties and conservation aims was widely recognised by property staff involved with the programme.
- More widely, the programme contributes to the National Trust's broader conservation objectives by impacting on the volunteers' awareness of, and behaviour towards the environment. Fifty-one per cent of participants and 63 per cent of leaders said working holidays had encouraged them to be more eco-friendly.

Engaging supporters

- Working holiday volunteers may encourage the engagement of new National Trust supporters by sharing the organisation's ethos and messages and their experiences of volunteering with others. Carrying forward these messages, forty-three per cent of participants and 58 per cent of leaders said the programme encouraged them to talk more with others about 'green issues'.
- Involvement with the working holidays programme can help volunteers develop their understanding of the National Trust and deepen their own engagement with the organisation. Eighty-three per cent of participants and 86 per cent of leaders felt that they had learnt more about the work of the National Trust as a result of their working holidays. Thirty-seven per cent of participants and 44 per cent of leaders said that working holidays inspired them to want to volunteer elsewhere for the National Trust (however many indicated that they had not gone on to do so).

Investing in Our People

- The working holidays programme invests in the development of skills, knowledge and awareness of participants, leaders and assistant leaders.
- Staff demonstrated how their involvement in the programme developed their skills in working with volunteers and their understanding of the role and contribution of volunteers.

Financing our future

- Working holiday volunteers contribute a considerable amount of time to the National Trust. Those involved are estimated to contribute nearly 150,000 hours a year to the National Trust.

- Most staff felt that the value of the work undertaken by volunteers far outweighed the financial costs associated with running the programme and that the benefits were about much more than the financial savings of involving volunteers.

The delivery and management of the working holidays programme

Overall, participants and leaders reflected positively on their working holiday experiences and on the delivery of the programme. However, the evaluation identified a number of key areas for development.

Successes

- Ninety five per cent of participants described their working holiday experiences as satisfactory (66% 'very satisfactory' and 29% 'satisfactory') and the majority of volunteers said that they would like to get involved with the working holidays programme again: 92 per cent of participants and 87 per cent of leaders.
- Most volunteers would recommend volunteering on the working holidays programme to others: ninety eight per cent of participants and 97 per cent of leaders.
- Eighty-five per cent of participants said that they felt their efforts were appreciated on their working holiday (4% disagreed).
- Most participants (93%) said that the purpose of the work they were taking part in on their working holiday was clearly explained to them.
- On the whole, participants reflected positively on the role of the working holiday leaders: eighty per cent of participants agreed that they were well managed by their working holiday leader, whilst ten per cent disagreed.
- Ninety per cent of leaders reported that they received good support from property staff and 71 per cent reflected positively on their support from central staff (25% neither agreed nor disagreed that this was good).

Areas for development

- Twenty-five per cent of participants felt that while they were on their working holidays 'things could have been better organised'. Fifteen per cent said that the organisation in the run up to their working holiday could have been improved.
- There were mixed views about the training provided to leaders. Whilst 67 per cent of leaders said they were satisfied with the training they received, many identified that they would welcome more or improved training or learning opportunities.

- The most commonly cited areas for improvement raised by working holiday participants included: improved base camp facilities; improved training and selection of leaders/‘better leaders’; and improved booking systems/website/brochure.
- The most frequently cited improvements suggested by working holiday leaders were: improved or more training for leaders; more feedback from participants following working holidays; and more opportunities to communicate and meet with other leaders.

Overall conclusions and recommendations

The working holidays programme enables the National Trust to involve and engage with a large number of volunteers on properties across the regions. The volunteers make a significant contribution to the National Trust and their experiences on the programme have a considerable impact on the volunteers themselves. On the whole, those involved enjoy their working holidays and feel well supported.

The programme can help to successfully engage individuals with the work, ethos and messages of the National Trust. Further, it could help make an important contribution to the long term environmental and conservation aims of the National Trust through increasing awareness and understanding of the environment and conservation and through changing behaviours.

Building on this success, the National Trust needs to continue to support and promote the programme at the central, regional and local level to help maximise the benefits, whilst addressing the identified areas of development.

A number of the recommendations arising from the impact evaluation have already been identified as priorities in the National Trust’s Development Plan including accommodation improvements; an improved online booking system; brochure replacement; and the development of leader training. This evaluation also makes the following recommendations:

- Provide more opportunities for working holiday leaders to engage with one another to facilitate peer learning and support;
- Provide more guidance and information for volunteers on other volunteering opportunities in the National Trust;
- Improve feedback mechanisms between leaders and the National Trust;
- Improve ways of communicating feedback from participants to leaders;
- Explore the possibility of a car sharing scheme for working holiday participants;
- Widen recruitment to better attract more diverse volunteers as participants and leaders; and
- Consider undertaking a full and detailed volunteer investment value audit to help evidence the value of the working holidays programme.

The evaluation was conducted between February and June 2008 and involved an online survey with 1082 working holiday participants, 197 leaders and assistant leaders, focus groups with volunteers and interviews with National Trust staff.