

The Creative and Cultural Skills podcast: Build Back Fairer Episode five: Volunteering in the arts – the fine line

Volunteering is a long-established practice in many cultural organisations, and there are numerous reasons that can motivate someone to volunteer - often social or altruistic reasons. But volunteering can also be used as a route into work.

Volunteering can build confidence and introduce skills to help people make the next step into paid employment. But are organisations in the creative and cultural industries doing enough to support this type of volunteer?

During this episode we hear from Esther Lisk-Carew, Volunteers Coordinator for the [Manchester International Festival](#) (MIF) and co-chair of the [Heritage Volunteering Group](#) in the North West and Rosie Wylie, Community Engagement Manager at [Historic Environment Scotland](#). Throughout the episode, we also hear from Maya, Amy and Dylan, who recently volunteered at MIF 2021.

The podcast is hosted by Robert West, Director of Partnerships and Delivery at Creative & Cultural Skills.

Transcript

Esther Lisk-Carew Successful creative and cultural organisations do value their volunteers. The level to which they're able to support that programme might differ, and they might be doing more work to do it more effectively, but I don't know anyone who has a volunteer programme who does not reap amazing rewards from having volunteers within them.

Dylan Mosengo I enjoyed myself, I would do that again. That's how good it was. And I would recommend it to anyone else.

Amy Telfer Sometimes, with volunteering, they get a bit scared because they think, "oh, there's so much more to it than I thought, and I can't do any of this." But actually, you can just learn as you go, really. You just gotta take the plunge.

Maya Mardania If there were specific skills that employers are looking for, it'd be a really good chance for these kind of senior people to direct others.

- Rosie Wylie** Is it easy to stray into exploitation? I would be thinking, well, "what has the organisation done to mitigate that?" You can find yourself in a situation where that volunteer's actually spent the day doing something that isn't their role, but perhaps it is something that a staff member would have been doing, but they allowed the volunteer that experience.
- Posy Jowett** This is the Creative and Cultural Skills podcast: Conversations and key questions about the future of our cultural sector. Here's our host, Rob West.
- Rob West** Volunteering is a long established practise in many cultural organisations, and there are many reasons that can motivate someone to volunteer - often social or altruistic reasons. But volunteering can also be used as a route into work. Volunteering can build confidence, and introduce skills to help people make the next step into paid employment. Yet are organisations in the creative and cultural industries doing enough to support this type of volunteer? Joining me to discuss this is Esther Lisk-Carew, Volunteers Coordinator for the Manchester International Festival, and co-chair of the Heritage Volunteering Group in the North West. Welcome, Esther.
- Esther Lisk-Carew** Hi, hello.
- Rob West** Rosie Wylie is Community Engagement Manager at Historic Environment Scotland. She's been an active volunteer for many years, and volunteer programme development and management has featured in her work for the past 10 years. Part of her role as Community Engagement Manager with Historic Environment Scotland is the oversight of their national volunteer programme. And she's a member of the Make Your Mark in Volunteering Campaign Partnership group. She's also director on the Board of Volunteer Scotland, and an independent assessor for the UK wide Investing in Volunteers Quality Assurance Award. Welcome, Rosie.
- Rosie Wylie** Hello, thank you.
- Rob West** So let's start with that first question, then; are organisations in the creative and culture industries doing enough to support volunteering as a step towards paid employment? Esther, what's your thoughts?
- Esther Lisk-Carew** It's such a huge industry, the creative industry. So, some organisations are absolutely wonderful at it. Some try their best, and some really do have quite a lot of learning around them. I've been working with volunteers for roughly 15 years in lots of different kinds of organisations, and I definitely think that output, that thinking around volunteering as a step into work, is something that people are much more aware of in terms of how they set up their programmes. There's definitely a real understanding of the need to be building people's employable skills into that. The ways in which that might work in different organisations will often depend on whether or not they're paying their volunteer coordinator or their volunteer management, whether that's a specific role, or if it's a blended role within an organisation. So actually, if the infrastructure is there to support the people who support your volunteers, you're much more likely to get an organisation that's geared up to support specific groups of people - whether it's young people, whether it's people who've not had access to opportunities in the arts before. You're much more likely, if you're supporting your volunteer coordinators with a good volunteer policy and volunteer strategy, to actually have

that support in place. If you're not doing that, then it's usually down to the individual - and whereas actual individuals tend to be incredibly good at doing that kind of support, sometimes it's not supported by the organisation as a whole.

Rosie Wylie I think that we need to explore and look into what are the sectors doing to work together and support the organisations that they represent? And also, what are governments, local authorities, etc. doing in terms of frameworks and working together to support and encourage, and look at inclusive volunteering, and working with trade unions and suchlike? And there's lots to unpack in that, and to discuss.

Rob West Esther has the title of Volunteers Co-ordinator and you've got Community Engagement Manager - how does volunteering fit into your role?

Rosie Wylie So in Historic Environment Scotland, we have a national volunteer programme. It's actually quite within its infancy, in terms of a lot of the country. We used to be civil service - part of our organisation, then historic Scotland, was merged with the Royal Commission and Ancient Historic Monuments of Scotland in 2015. And at that point, we decided to develop our volunteer programme, and a big part of that was consultation with staff, was consultation with our trade unions, and potential volunteers - "What could it actually look like?" And so that kind of picks up on the point that Esther made about "how does an organisation actually support the infrastructure and the investment in the volunteer programme development? The investment in the volunteer managers?" I think it's about the organisational culture, and what do you actually want to achieve out of the volunteer programme that you have? And is one of those motivations to support routes into employment in that organisation, and into the sector? Or is it more about wish-list? Is it about visitor engagement? Lots of different elements.

Rob West Deciding what you want to achieve out of a volunteering programme is a key one to ask at the beginning, and in terms of motivation. So, is it's about engagement or is it about development opportunities? I guess that leads me to another question of; in whose interests is being a volunteer?

Esther Lisk-Carew I think there are so many benefits to individuals who volunteer. But yes, organisations do really, really, hugely benefit from that labour and that breadth of expertise. If you look at any benchmarks for what funders look for in organisations, they're looking for organisations that are diverse, that reach diverse audiences, that work with a vast number of people. And if you look at volunteer programmes, they're a lot larger a lot of the time than staff teams. So you're really going to impact on that ability to reach out to people. So really developing a volunteer programme to engage in those areas will do that - and you will only do that by supporting your volunteers with what they need, and what they want to get out of it. So, building into your benchmarking for what you do with your volunteers; how many are we getting into employment? How many have gone on to volunteer for another organisation? How many are actually involved in the community, and have brought people in from their communities as well? You can't underestimate the value of a volunteer. And the outdated notion that 'volunteering is free', I think is thankfully going out of the window. There have to be budgets attached to supporting volunteer programmes. And just because a volunteer is giving of their time does not mean that they should not be supported in that endeavour.

Rob West And to what extent do you then take into account a volunteer's needs, as opposed to the organisation's needs?

Rosie Wylie If you are lucky enough in an organisation to be building your volunteer programme from scratch, with people who have experience and knowledge of doing that, then you should be absolutely pulling in from both sides: So why does the organisation want to engage volunteers? What's the motivation? What are we needing in our annual operating plans? What are the corporate plans mapping back to? What's the rationale? But then, on the balance of that, absolutely has to be what will give an excellent experience for that volunteer. People are giving up their time freely to support something for the organisation, as well as their own personal motivations for career development, personal development, social health and well-being benefits, etc. But without thinking about how you support and develop those individuals, you will very quickly lose individuals to other organisations. Volunteering is absolutely a community as well, so if people come in and they don't have that quality of experience from the start, then you may lose other potential volunteers through that. I am an independent assessor for the Investing in Volunteers in the UK accreditation, and a big part of that is about "how are volunteers involved in the decision making of the organisation? How are volunteers involved in the actual programme that they will be part of? How do they provide their feedback? Are every level of the organisation aware of volunteers and what they do, and what their aspirations be for it?" So, if you are not aware of the different range of motivations to volunteer, and your programmes can't match that, you're not going to give the quality of the experience that volunteers deserve, and then have the sustainability of your programme - and often it is volunteers that might change and do some different roles who will stay in an organisation, and then perhaps become staff members if that is one of the aspirations. When I joined the organisation over 12 years ago, it was counting flowers in Edinburgh's Hollywood Park when I started as a volunteer, and that was to get experience and to get a foot in the door.

Rob West And how do you go about recruiting volunteers for your various programmes?

Rosie Wylie We have sites, properties in care, throughout the country, that we have different volunteer roles: That might be tour guides, might be 'meet and greet'... We have a couple of musician's roles at our Engine Shed, within our collections teams, our archives... We have event volunteering, we have volunteer rangers... So there's a big range of different roles that we have there. So we first of all look at "where are we looking to recruit? What's the role?" And then do a bit of a mapping exercise around that locality, around that community. And then do physical poster campaigns; that might be on social media, it might be reaching out to partner groups, it might be reaching out to groups in the community that we think may have membership or interested people that they support who they can share it with, newsletters, etc... Word of mouth is a really strong thing. So it is a bit case by case per site, but that's all the kind of general ones we would use. We would link to a local volunteer centre, for example, link to volunteer Scotland. That's the type of media we'd use. In terms of how we think about our volunteer recruitment, we run taster sessions; we never expect volunteers to commit to anything prior to doing a taster session, we don't want people to go through an interview, security checks, etc., before they've had a chance to have a taster session with us. And that also gives people a chance to share any information about them on an individual or personal level, so we could make any changes,

etc. to be able to accommodate individual needs and suchlike before they would invest the time in committing to ourselves as an organisation. So we absolutely take the approach of it being a mutual benefit from either side, and if we can make adjustments we would - and we would try and work through that with individuals on an individual basis.

Rob West

And is that the same for you, Esther, at Manchester International Festival?

Esther Lisk-Carew

So we have a really long process for recruiting our volunteers. We do that passive recruitment where you've got your static website, you've got an application form that people can just go on to the website once it's open and go and do that - although this year's been a massive challenge because it was in lockdown when we were doing our recruitment: It was full lockdown, we couldn't do any of our physical outreach where we go to parks, community centres, and go into those communities where, particularly looking back on previous years, we've not had as many volunteers for certain areas. So, we start with our targets and look at where the gaps are. The festival's been going since 2007. We do half and half returning volunteers and new volunteers, so we absolutely want to make sure that our programme is populated with people who'd never volunteered with us before, and targeting different age groups and different areas. So we'll come up with a list of people who represent those groups and those areas, and we will go out to those groups. Now, we're doing a lot of that over Zoom, as opposed to physically going and meeting them where they are - but supporting that application, supporting them to come to us with any questions, and if they need support, filling in applications, making sure that we can help do that... Because, again, there's a lot of a shift towards digital applications, and that is not for everyone. And the festival has the ethos that it is for everyone, and it is for all of the people of Manchester. So we want to make sure we remove as many barriers as possible. Like, for example, with things like taster sessions, if I was in a different environment. But then in our environment, we also do an in-person induction where we're supporting people with all of the information that they need. And we have meeting days and conversations with people so that we can give them as much information as possible about what they're volunteering experience is going to be like, answer those questions about what they want to get out of it, maybe direct them into other routes into our festival as well - because sometimes volunteering isn't the most appropriate route, or it can be supplemented with something else. So, for example, we get the question over and over and over again; "could you get a job with the festival if you've been a volunteer?" And we absolutely make sure that if there are paid opportunities within the festival, the volunteering team and anyone who's applied to us as volunteer knows about those as well - because realistically speaking, if that is your end goal, we need to create as many opportunities for to do that... And also the fact that, by volunteering, we get them to make those connections with people within the festival so that they can get further opportunities, because the festival is 18 days. (We do have a period of volunteering before the festival was set up as well.) But after those 18 days of the festival are over, our job isn't finished: We're still creating means of getting people into other opportunities, whether it's other volunteering opportunities or paid opportunities as well. And for the first time this year, we also alongside our recruitment programme are recruiting for our training academy. So the idea is, as a festival, we want to get people trained up to work in the arts. And not everyone gets the opportunities to grow up with culture every day, and have access to culture every day, so we really want to target people through our training academy who might not have

thought about different ways and routes into education. So we worked alongside our skills and training team to be able to recruit people, and either have them both do a placement with us and do the training academy, which is more formalised learning, but also confidence building and giving people those of the skills that you need to get into employment to feel confident working with people, to understand what it is you want out of your journey, because some people just don't know what they need. So volunteering isn't just about coming, supporting an event, and going away - it's actually about using that within your life to either find a way of connecting with people, or find a way to move forward with your plans and ambitions. And we hope that we can support people with that.

Rosie Wylie Well said! Well said, that last couple of lines. I mean, it was all well said, but that really hit the nail on the head.

Rob West Well you've both described some really effective recruitment campaigns, and considered thought through recruitment campaigns. As part of this programme. We talked to some young volunteers as well. One of the things they talked about was the need to advertise volunteer opportunities more.

Maya Mardania I do feel like there is more awareness needed for these roles. When I was looking for roles, I used the website Action Together - I don't feel like everyone knows about that website, or knows where to find volunteer opportunities anyway. But for Manchester International Festival specifically, I found it through Action Together, and I didn't really see advertised anywhere else.

Amy Telfer Maya was actually asking me where she could volunteer, and what opportunities there, and I gave her few links like the Manchester Volunteering Centre - they have a newsletter that I sign up to. But you've got to have a good rummage. And I think volunteering needs to be advertised a lot more - especially those very small organisations, like the community centre I work for, that's tiny, and no-one knows about it. Maybe a lot more funding needs to go into that as well. I think a lot of young people need to volunteer, because it really helps them later in life, but it's not always advertised.

Rob West So are there things that perhaps you do, perhaps you don't do, that you think the sector could be doing or should be doing? Rosie.

Rosie Wylie Hopefully by the end of this month, we are going to launch a sector wide volunteer recruitment campaign in Scotland for the heritage sector called 'Make Your Mark in Volunteering'. And that is about our sector coming together, pulling together, organisations that support small to medium volunteer involving organisations... And we're going to put on a recruitment campaign on their behalf, because we know some of the impacts from the pandemic is loss of volunteer numbers, and then not necessarily having the resources, the skills, the energy, the tools, etc. to rebuild volunteer programmes up again. So we are creating a heritage focussed portal online where organisations for free can sign up to that, and it's one place for volunteers - prospective volunteers and also engaged volunteers who may want to try a new role - but new volunteers, people who maybe have felt inspired through volunteering in the pandemic. There's, of course, been a lot of talk over the past couple of years about volunteering and the benefits, and the absolutely crucial role they had in pivoting to supporting communities when covid broke out. So we want to try and capture that energy in

people who may not have thought about volunteering in their local place, local historic environment, etc., and just try and give that focused one place to go to, and that will then link out to volunteer Scotland, TSIs, etc. What is really important is a sector coming together, or maybe a group of organisations with shared interests, coming together to make the journey as easy and is interesting for prospective volunteers - almost like a menu. "What are the opportunities?" And I think it's about moving away from feeling that organisations are your competition for volunteers, because we've got to look at the supply and the demand side - and actually, it's about how can we make our sector, our organisations, as appealing as possible? Because volunteers are always going to choose the organisation that they want to be with. So you shouldn't really be competing against each other, because it's about having those individuals come in and start engage with the sector - but that would make it easier for volunteers to travel within these sectors, especially if we're looking at professional development and suchlike for individuals. You want to get as many possible opportunities and rules as you can. And, as I say, I think organisations coming together to make that journey will allow better retention of volunteers in a sector.

Rob West When did you say, Rosie, Make Your Mark in Volunteering is going to start?

Rosie Wylie So, the Make Your Mark Volunteer Participation Campaign - that's something that we have been running since last year. As Esther said, as well, we had to go very quickly into a digital delivery model. So at the moment, the campaign has been supporting volunteer managers in the Scottish heritage sector in terms of knowledge sharing events, and the Heritage Volunteering Group are actually partnered up with us on some of those events to try and make the knowledge share UK wide. And we've been developing inclusive volunteering activities, resources, and there's also a volunteer organisers network associated with Make Your Mark. So it already exists. But we're hoping, by November or December this year, that we're going to launch the volunteer recruitment campaign. So that will look at not just having the audience of volunteer managers that we support, but also having that wider community of volunteers - almost like the matchmaking service. So we're hoping by the end of the year. I don't want to give you a firm date at the moment because, as we all know, the climate that we're in with the pandemic and other alterations and changes and resources and suchlike... It's quite hard to plan more than a couple of months in advance at the moment. So let's say the end of the year. (CHUCKLES)

Rob West Very wise. Esther, are there any things that you do at Manchester International Festival that you think other organisations could be doing - or maybe you're not doing - to promote your opportunities?

Esther Lisk-Carew So, there are a couple of things. Similarly with Rosie, as part of my Heritage Volunteering Group North West, we are actually a collective of volunteer managers and we've come up with our own joint portal for advertising opportunities in culture across the city. We were going to launch it last year at Volunteers Week, but unfortunately, because of the pandemic, we have put that to this autumn. So that's VolunteeringCulture.org.uk. We're partnered up with Volunteer Centre Manchester for processing, so that we can again be tied into those community groups who might not be thinking directly about volunteering with culture, but have that dialogue going forward. One of the things that we did with the international festival this year, which I thought was incredibly groundbreaking - but it involved in amount of capacity, support and finance that

most organisations don't have - we had paid rolls of 'Community Connectors'. So, there were people from the six areas of Greater Manchester that we don't traditionally engage with as actively and wanted to engage with more, and people from those communities applied for those jobs. Again, those applications weren't as a traditional application process. Looking at how people apply to these roles, both as volunteers and staff roles, is really important in making sure that they're engaged and diverse. So we targeted people who were really embedded in their communities, and they help support the outreach that we do. So it's not just the volunteering team that's doing it, but we also had a community team who were looking at ways to engage events, but also to engage people in the volunteering programme and talk to them about what opportunities we had. And that was really, really successful in terms of reaching people where you've got one mindset sometimes, traditionally, about who you're going to go and talk to. For example; universities. It's a really easy hit, you get lots of young people. But actually, making sure that we're going to community groups, going to groups that we might not have heard of. So we engage these Community Connectors, and we worked with them to identify people that either we'd go to or they could talk to about the programme as well. There's always more, I think, that can be done, and we always fall back on "how much time, how much capacity do we have?" But just keeping building on those connections - because once you are in those communities, they will do that word of mouth. They will do that advocacy for you. Doing the work of supporting volunteers does the work of supporting your organisation. It isn't either or. They are some of the best advocates that we have for the work that we do. So, that investment in time and in that effort, in going out and reaching as widely as possible, is the work that will ultimately benefit the organisation.

Rob West Can I ask if either of you work with the job centres? And if not, why not?

Esther Lisk-Carew It's not a route that has always been easy for me in past roles. I have in the past worked with job centres - but, again, the outputs of job centres don't necessarily align specifically with the needs of volunteering, in that volunteering should be voluntary. So, you do not want to have that conversation where someone feels like they're forced into volunteering because it's a condition of any benefits they need. So in terms of working with job centres directly, I've tended not to do that. I worked with CVS, Community Volunteer Services, and through them had connections with job centres. So it's usually through a connection organisation, not directly with job centres.

Rob West But job centres have career coaches as well. And if we're saying volunteering is an opportunity to build your career, and they have people in the job centres, are we missing a trick by not involving them?

Esther Lisk-Carew I think it's a different relationship with a job centre. It could be an opportunity, but it's never really worked out in the way that I think people would hope as a direct "they come to us to volunteer, and that gets people into work" kind of way. Volunteering, I think, is a bit more holistic than that. That possibly is a bias, and a prejudice on my part, in terms of experiencing job centres from both sides of the equation, but it could be an opportunity. But I think I would possibly be expecting an approach from them, rather than me going to them with my opportunities.

Rosie Wylie I would completely agree with what you've just said there. So we have not used a job centre yet. I wouldn't say that we would not use a job centre, because it's case by case depending where we are recruiting - and we would do that local mapping. And we haven't had a situation where we have thought that advertising in a job centre has been a better means for recruitment than other sources within a community. From our perspective, it's absolutely not an endless source of time that people have to support volunteer recruitment. So, a job centre would be lower down on our list because, generally speaking, you would be going to a job centre looking for paid employment. And, exactly what Esther has said, I think I would probably want to hear from a job centre proactively saying "we're looking at volunteering, and we're going to do something around about showcasing the benefits of volunteering and suchlike - do you have anything you want to advertise to us?"

Rob West There's an interesting tension that I picked up in both your answers there. I'm sure you're thinking the same as I am: Job centres and their relationship to creative and cultural industries has never been particularly strong. And yet, if we're saying that volunteering could be a step towards paid employment, there seems to be a missing part of the jigsaw. You're both saying you're waiting for them to come to you, and they'd probably say they'll wait for you to come to them. And meanwhile, there's this constituency of people who perhaps aren't being seen as an opportunity to really use volunteering to make that next step into paid employment.

Rosie Wylie I would say there, then, the issue is to do with the relationship between the job centre, TSIs, volunteer centres; because we would always work with a volunteer centre in terms of recruitment. So if there is more demand than there is supply in that local community area for volunteering roles, then I wouldn't say that that's down to the individual organisations that are recruiting to solve that. I would say that that's more about the communications and recruitment, as I say, between the different interfaces that support those individuals - where they are looking, possibly casting a wider net than drilling down into individual organisations. Because, as both Esther and I said, if a volunteer is interested in our organisation for whatever motivations to support that organisation, they will come most likely directly to us anyway. That is more about the relationship within the third sectors that support people when there isn't necessarily those identified roles as yet.

Rob West Let's go on to the practicalities of being a volunteer, then. Something we say in our CCSkills guidance sessions on volunteering is "you shouldn't put a volunteer to a role that is business critical". But is there an ambiguity that muddies the water still, between being an employee and a volunteer?

Esther Lisk-Carew It's such a boring answer, but, for me, it's about making sure that when you're making your volunteer strategy and your volunteer policy, you're doing that alongside your volunteer coordinator who knows volunteering, and you're staffing people who know what staff need are - and making sure that that's symbiotic. Because then you've got a real clear line of communication about what roles are staff appropriate, what roles are volunteer appropriate, what support happens between them, and how that's managed. In organisations where you're really clear; this is what needs to happen so you can open the doors, this is the added value you get from your volunteer programme; it's a lot easier to push back against any of that sometimes blurring of roles. But also, to say where it might be appropriate where it might blur - if it is a stage into

potentially getting someone into employment within that organisation. But also, you really do have to face those criticisms, which are valid criticism if people are concerned that that blurring is happening - because you've got to be able to say with a firm voice, "no, we would not put a volunteer in an inappropriate position that is a workplace scenario." It can happen, but it needs to be addressed. And I do think that, actually, modern thinking around volunteering is much better about creating that support for volunteers that is distinct from being a job role. And it is really important that that is done - because at the end of the day, people giving their time aren't being paid, and they require support in a different way to how staff need support. And that is something that needs to be sometimes reemphasised within an organisation.

Rob West

We heard from young people at the start of their careers - we heard their desire to use volunteering as a way of learning new skills and gaining experience. But our industry is still sadly known for its use of unpaid internships. Is it too easy just to cross over into exploitation? What do you think on that, Rosie,

Rosie Wylie

Is it too easy to cross over into exploitation? Well I think, going back to what Esther's just said, and agreeing absolutely on everything that she's just said, it is about the organisation planning, having a good framework, having a good strategy, having all your policies for safe, secure, healthy environments, for volunteers, for staff, etc... Being really, really clear on "this is what our staff do. These are not volunteer roles. Volunteers should never be used in generating profits for owners, you know. Anything to do with putting legislation sideways, to do with minimum wage. They shouldn't be used to disguise the fact that certain rules haven't been backfilled by staff, etc..." So in terms of "is it easy to stray into exploitation?" I would be thinking, well, what has the organisation done to mitigate that? Are they involving their unions in this conversation? Is there really clear rules for internships? What about work placements? And then volunteers; is that a strategy and a policy that differentiates between all of those? Is everybody clear on what everyone does? The staff that support these roles - are they clear on the differences between them, and the aspirations and the outcomes of those roles? And if an organisation, like what Esther said, is not clear on that together internally, you probably could stray into exploitation - possibly not doing it consciously, though. That's the other thing that can happen quite easily. We've all been in situations as well where you have volunteers engaged and they said, "oh, I'd just like to try this. Ooh, could I just have a shot at that?" And staff want to support that individual and suchlike, and it's not being done in an exploitive way - but then, you can find yourself in a situation where that volunteer's actually spent the day doing something that isn't their role, has benefited to them, but perhaps it is something that a staff member would have been doing, but they allowed the volunteer that experience. So in that sense, you can stray into that, but in a very innocent way. I would stress again that to avoid doing that is about the organisation, to pick up on one of Esther's earlier points, is investing in your volunteer managers, investing in your coordinators, you know, your board, your SMT - everyone being clear of what volunteers will actually do, and sticking all to those policies, and sense checking it. And that should prevent the exploitation happening. But it's not going to prevent it happening in every case, I will say that. And it's about how do you then look at resolution and conflict? You don't want to end up in a situation where staff feel threatened by the presence of volunteers, and if they think volunteers are being exploited and coming one stage closer to staff, then there's all those issues as well.

Esther Lisk-Carew I'm a huge advocate for having people who are part of the volunteering team on boards because, obviously, the board itself is a volunteer role, being a trustee - but in getting that voice in the room, you have someone there who, when you're saying, "well actually, we're going to cut the budget for this because of this reason", but someone to actually say, "well, who's going to do that? If you cut that budget, is that going to fall to volunteers? Is that going to be appropriate to fall to volunteers?" - having that voice in the room. And, looking at boards and trustees, and their involvement, and their education and understanding around what a volunteer is is really important - because sometimes you can educate all the staff on what those roles are, and what those relationships are, but then the board's like, "well, I'm just expecting that a volunteer's going to pick this up" - and actually having them have that knowledge right at that strategic level within an organisation is incredibly important as well.

Rob West That's a very good point, isn't it? About the knowledge going to board level and trustee level as to what the purpose is, what the function is, of volunteering. Do you find within your organisations, or the organisations you associate with, that's a particular challenge? And what are the levels where the challenges come? Is it a trustee level, is it at senior management level? Where were the barriers?

Rosie Wylie I think within the heritage sector, certainly, volunteering is part of the culture of most of the organisations that support and care for our historic environment and wider heritage. So, there's obviously that advantage - because if you don't have a good internal culture of volunteering within that organisation, then that programme is really going to suffer. So certainly, in Historic Environment Scotland, it's not an issue at all. Our board, our SMT, our staff - they feed into our policies. We are an Invested in Volunteers accredited organisation, and you can't get that accreditation unless you can prove that actually all parts of the organisation support and involve volunteers as part of that culture of the organisation.

Esther Lisk-Carew We had a really interesting situation this year - and I don't know whether it's the first time it's happened - but one of our trustees actually became a volunteer for the festival this year. It's certainly the first time I'm aware of it having happened. But, from that point of view, that's something that I would always encourage any of the trustees to come down and do some volunteering with the organisation, and be part of those processes and that volunteer journey. And, other organisations I've worked for, it very much varies on whether or not any of the trustees have actually done that; their real understanding of those messages that you're trying to communicate to them. So, having trustees actually come and be part of the volunteering journey I think's actually something that's really valuable - and I'm hoping that from that, having had the trustee this year, when we go back and say, "well, this is what capacity needs to be added, or this is how the dynamics of the organisation might be improved", you've got that extra buy in from board. So it can be a really positive thing, and hopefully is the kind of direction that they're willing to go into.

Rosie Wylie Yeah, I think it's really good as well, from our volunteers' perspective, to meet members of the board, meet other staff. So sometimes when we've had board visits and such to some of our properties in care, and the volunteers have met them, and they've provided a guided tour, and everyone's really felt that that's been a really authentic experience of what it's like to be in a local community, and have a real passion for your site... It's just always been a really positive

experience because we are all part of the same organisation, and volunteers should always be made to feel that they are part of the wider team, that they're not just a side engagement opportunity.

Esther Lisk-Carew And I think boards and the staff members are generally just really impressed with how much the volunteers know, and how engaged, and how much ownership they have. And it's never a bad thing for them to see that as regularly as possible. (CHUCKLE)

Rosie Wylie Absolutely.

Rob West All the types of roles that lend themselves better to volunteer opportunities? When we were talking to our young people, I heard them talk about a need for more creative opportunities; photography, design.

Maya Mardania One thing I would say is that there needs to be maybe a bit more opportunities for people like me in the arts industry, because there isn't a lot of that. So a lot of voluntary stuff I did with photography was through connections through, like, actually family. So, my mom works at the University of Bolton, and so she has connections through that, and people. So that's something I would say - there needs to be more photography opportunities, especially for other people. My cousin's a graphic designer, and I remember him saying that there wasn't a lot of opportunities for him to experiment with his work, and get that experience. So I do think there needs to be opportunities for those people in those arts sectors.

Rob West But if you're looking at it from the needs of the industries, often our skills gaps and challenges are in particularly non-creative roles as well. So how do you square that circle - that somebody may be interested in volunteering because they're seeing this as a way of volunteering their creativity, but actually that's not where the need is from your organisation?

Esther Lisk-Carew I think one of the things that generally people learn when they go in with that mindset that it's, again, either or - you're either creative, or you're someone who just does stuff behind the scenes - you can develop an understanding that, actually, quite a lot of creative practitioners need both sets of skills, and that you don't lose out from one by doing that kind of role. Because we have roles that are about making sure the festival happens, we get volunteering for people who are doing things behind the scenes, supporting the office roles, as well as supporting the artists' roles, the artists' activity. So just having that breadth... I used to manage work experience programmes as well, for young people, and the ones that had the most valuable experience were in multiple departments. They weren't just in one. So I don't think it's about just saying, "well, we need more creative opportunities". I think it's about having that range of different roles, and that range of skills and opportunities, that they can engage with.

Rosie Wylie I would absolutely agree with that. There's an opportunity, almost like a second layer, once you're engaging volunteers in a role, in terms of an individual's creativity. So, not every organisation has the luxury of being able to meet with an individual - "what's your interest? What's your motivations? Fantastic, we can create a volunteer role for you." That's the ideal outcome, but that's very, very unrealistic for a lot of organisations for all the reasons that we've just been discussing. So, again, it's that kind of wish-list approach: You have your paid core roles, creative roles and suchlike - can you bring volunteers in to support those

paid roles? - Which allows them to do more. But those paid creative individuals, they need to have a genuine interest and appetite to be a volunteer coordinator, and to engage volunteers. So I think you kind of have to look at that side of things. But also, once you have engaged volunteer into a role, how can you then allow their own creativity, possibly, to come through? Which is, as I say, that second layer opportunity for retention. So with our volunteer tour guides, for instance - when we do our recruitment, we say "we would love to have some tour guides at the sites". We don't see that the tour is going to be about X, Y and Z, and give a script. Part of our recruitment is about us saying "we will work with you to develop a tour of your own personal interest". They're called the Secret Stories Tours. So you can go to different site, and hear tours because it's the volunteers' interest, and passion, and creativity. So they'll do the research, the write it, that'll get looked at by our interpretation, our collections, cultural resources team, etc., so that everyone is happy with accuracy and facts, which of course is very important. But it is the creativity and passion of the individuals. And our visitors have fed back that they really enjoy hearing that personal interest and such. I suppose it's that; can you think about what the middle ground is, maybe? If you can't provide every creative role an individual would like, how could you work with that individual once they are recruited to really have that buy-in and passion for the role? Because, certainly from a personal perspective, if I do some volunteering I'll very quickly lose interest if it's not actually something I really want to do... Which kind of takes us slightly back as well, to the job centre discussion and points as well - we'd both discussed about "there's a difference between recruiting volunteers for their own motivations versus people who have been told to do a specific thing for a different reason". And that's part of that nervousness around the relationships with such centres.

Rob West

And our young people also talked about volunteering being good for confidence, and good for skills, and that's something you hear regularly from volunteers.

Dylan Mosengo

The first day, when we met the people, I'm not gonna lie - I was shy. Very, very shy. I don't know how... "Oh, am I overdressed for this? Overdressed for that? Oh, man, am I gonna say the wrong things?" But everyone was so welcoming. I learned things that I didn't know before. (CHUCKLES) Now, I use these skills in my daily life, in regards to jobs, or other activities and stuff. I felt more confident, coming every single day, and more comfortable being about people I didn't know at hat time. We are now friends, now, we have a group chat - which also gives connections,

Rob West

Do you set out at the beginning and say "this is what you can expect to gain out of this volunteering experience"? Or is it all just a journey of discovery?

Esther Lisk-Carew

I don't think any of my inductions, even the ones that are sort of following a format, are ever the same. But one of the points that you do always want to hit on is about getting them to feel comfortable about communicating to you what they need, and what they want, and where their starting point is. So, you will very clearly get volunteers who do not need help with confidence. If you're doing an induction with a big group of volunteers, you want to convey to them that it's about getting them to whatever point they feel they will be best, but being able to communicate with you one-to-one about what that is. So, if you identify a volunteer who clearly isn't particularly forthcoming or confident in a particular area, you might be trying to nudge them into a certain area, or buddying them up with someone to help them gain that confidence - because they might not be

able to articulate that that's something that they need. So it's about being able to respond to the volunteers that you have in front of you. But I would never lay out "you're going to get this, this, and this and this". But I might say "one of the opportunities available for you is... Great social value, getting a greater understanding of this..." But also keeping it open to the idea that there might be more that I haven't thought of, that they might be able to get out of it, because I'm constantly being told by volunteers that they get stuff out of it that I haven't even thought, in ways that I hadn't imagined they would. So I can't be closed to the idea, or be prescriptive in a way that someone's volunteer journey is going to go. And one of the outcomes might be that volunteering isn't for them, and we also need to be open to that possibility as well - and maybe helping direct them into something that's more appropriate.

Rob West You both talked about the need for a volunteer policy, ideally having a volunteer coordinator or at least a named person within an organisation. Does size matter? Is it something, volunteering, that works better at a large organisation, or a small organisation?

Rosie Wylie I wouldn't say that the scale of an organisation dictates the success of a volunteer programme, and I think it just goes back to... Everything that we've already discussed is about investment in your volunteer programme, planning for it. And if that is set up well, if you have laid your foundation correctly and you have your culture within that organisation for the volunteering programme, then it shouldn't matter what size the organisation is. And bear in mind, as well, that a lot of small organisations are completely volunteer-run. It is the volunteers that are carrying out the roles, and that running the organisation. So it's hard to compare, I suppose.

Esther Lisk-Carew I've worked with volunteer programmes where I was part of a staff team of technically 1.5 or 1.7, and I currently work in an organisation that's absolutely humongously huge. The approaches shouldn't change, and you should always be tailoring it to what's appropriate to you. So size makes absolutely no difference whatsoever.

Rob West It's interesting, isn't it, that point you've made, Rosie, about very small organisations - think of the heritage windmill, who will often rely on someone opening it up, and the big, large events that tend to be associated with volunteers - City of Culture type events. Is the issue, then, with some of those organisations in the middle - that actually those small-to-medium scale...? Because not everybody offers a volunteer programme. If you were suggesting to some that they might, what would you say to them to encourage them to do that? Because often what you hear back from them is "we haven't got the capacity, we haven't got the time to do this". Unlike the small windmill, they don't have the need.

Rosie Wylie Maybe I'm misunderstanding your question, Rob, but if they didn't have the capacity and they didn't have the need, I'm not sure that one would be saying you should definitely have a volunteer programme. But what I would possibly be saying is "could you be linking up with other organisations who do have a volunteer programme?" Perhaps, "is their projects where you're collaborating? Volunteers and other organisations could maybe work in some of your programmes, but they were managed through the volunteer programme of a partner, etc.?" So, again, I think it's thinking about building back stronger and suchlike. For me, a massive thing - it always has been, but it's just really the

pandemic's put it right into focus - is collaborating with others, sharing resources, sharing tools, sharing energy, sharing knowledge and expertise. Thinking creatively, and with an open mind, and how we can work with others. And engaging volunteers absolutely could be part of that skills development, absolutely can be part of that. We can work with an organisation who doesn't engage volunteers, but we might do a joint project with them. We do events every summer - big public events at some of our properties in care - and we have event volunteers, but we also have a partnership with the Police Scotland Youth Volunteer programme. This isn't a fantastic example, because both organisations have volunteers, but I think it puts a bit of context on what I'm saying. So with the Police Scotland Youth Volunteers, they will come and they will support our visitor engaging events that we have - and those young people, they sat "that's the first time I've ever been to a historic site. I never thought about going there before, and through my volunteering, I've come, I've really enjoyed that event, and my family are going there next weekend just to enjoy ourselves." We still could have done that with HAS, working with Police Scotland, even if we didn't have our own volunteer programme. So my point is, with these organisations, I think you've got to explore what the other opportunities are, and to work together to still provide people with the opportunities for volunteering.

Rob West So let me phrase that in a different way, then, to you Esther. Do we as a creative and cultural industry sector value the volunteering experience?

Esther Lisk-Carew I would say successful organisations do. I don't know anyone who has a volunteer programme who does not reap amazing rewards from having volunteers within them. I would say if it was less successful in supporting those volunteers, they're going to have a higher turnaround, which is going to create more work than it needs to. They're probably going to struggle with advocacy for their organisation. There's going to be a lot of mixed messages. So, I'd say successful creative and cultural organisations do value their volunteers. The level to which they're able to support that programme might differ, and they might be doing more work to do it more effectively, but it's very hard for me to posit a situation where people are dismissive of the role of volunteering - because I just think that's the mindset of the past, and I'd be very suspicious of someone who espouses that kind of thinking.

Rob West And how does volunteering sit alongside something like work experience, that you raised Rosie? Do you see them as very separate things, or are they potentially answers to the same questions?

Rosie Wylie That's a debate that has been in organisations for a long, long time. (LAUGHS) That question! I would say, with volunteering, maybe you have a very short term role - maybe it's one day coming to help out with an event. Maybe it's 10 days coming out to help with the festival. Maybe it's completely open ended. Some of our volunteers have been with the organisation for 15 years, 20 years, wonderful! With work placements, it tends to be an agreed time, for specific tasks related to learning about a defined role within an organisation. So you come in, and you might do your work placement within five days. You might do a day a week for 12 weeks. Whatever. It is defined differently. We talk about our commitment to volunteers - about health and safety, expenses, etc. So they understand the safeguarding, and support, and supervision, and suchlike. But we don't say "you would get X experience, Y skills" because that's more about an individual basis, where I think with work placements it is absolutely about an individual who's

coming in to learn about doing that one specific role, or family of roles. So for me, there is a difference, but it can be muddled when the organisation isn't clear internally what the difference is. But I think if you were to do a paper-based, desk-based exercise, you absolutely could define between work placements and volunteering. I'd be interested to know, Esther, what your view on that is.

Esther Lisk-Carew I agree with that. A work experience placement can lead to volunteering, and sometimes does. And again, you have sort of two strands of work experience. It might be someone who just contacts you to say "I want to do a placement for a fixed amount of time in a specific department because I need to add this to my CV." It might be a student who's coming through schools - and most of my experience with work experience tends to be school level placement. So it's giving you an experience of that organisation, that organisation's culture, as well as getting work skills. But again, that's sometimes part of a placement within a school and scholastic programme. And again, that gives you, automatically... Outcomes, parameters, and goals, that you're setting for that kind of experience, whereas volunteering is a lot more flexible. It is the idea that you're coming in to support, possibly, a specific role, but for as long as you enjoy doing it - whether that's doing it for a couple of weeks, or doing it until you physically can't do a particular task. Or having a role that adjusts to your physical capabilities, or any other support needs that you have. So, I think sometimes people lump work experience and volunteering together because you're thinking about it in terms of "the end game is gaining experience" - which both of them are. But the ways in which you gain experience is differentiated, I think, as Rosie said - hopefully by the organisation, but also by what those end goals are.

Rob West I think I'd agree with you - I'm sure at Creative and Cultural Skills we would agree with the notion that an industry placement is about a specific role, and should be attached to some kind of training towards that role. And I think you're right too, Esther, in when you're looking at work experience, which is often introducing a sector or particular area, that can get more confused with volunteering. But I think you've both been very clear about what the difference is in terms of a volunteer and what a volunteer can get out of that. Something our young people talked about, as well, was liking hearing about previous volunteers, and what had happened to them - what they're doing now.

Maya Mardania Well I always think is really good about Manchester International Festival is that they show what's previously happened, and current and previous volunteers. I always like to see what previous volunteers are doing now, and what other organisations they've got involved with. Another thing I love about MIF is that, when they recruit, they have a trailer and it's very exciting. And I think that should be shared out in other organisations, saying "this is what's happening, this is what you can get involved with".

Rob West Have you both got evidence that volunteers with you have benefited in terms of employment from originally starting as volunteers with you? Or is that something else that we still need to get better at creating that evidence for?

Esther Lisk-Carew So we're incredibly lucky with the international festival in that we have a lot of demonstration of that; from the fact that our Head of Artist Liaison was a volunteer originally for the festival, to the fact that within the festival we were able to get paid roles in Front of House roles for some people who'd applied for the volunteer programme. But also, one of our volunteers who'd gone from being

a volunteer to being a volunteer team leader was also able to have a Venue Manager paid role during the festival this year, and she 100% attributes that to having volunteered with the festival previously. So, we do have a lot of evidence of that happening, and also in that being something that we're looking to advocate within the processes that we apply as well. But we're very lucky in that we're a large organisation with a lot of those roles, and in other organisations that's just not always very realistic. And one of the things that we also do when we have one of our stages of recruitment is have former volunteers talk to potential new volunteers about what they've got out of it; be at work, or be it general enjoyment, or... Relief from isolation was a big one this time around. The friendships that people have made - and sometimes that is professional friendships and professional contacts, and sometimes that is just social. And creating ways in which people can meet professionals in their desired environment is something that we're really proud that we can do. But again, I think it's something that we're good at, and I'm really happy that we do. But also, it's not something I would necessarily apply to all volunteer programmes, just because the scale of the festival is something that's quite different from anything I've experienced anywhere else.

Rosie Wylie

You've just inspired me there, you just give me a thought there, because actually we do have informal qualitative information related to volunteers, and if they've gone on for paid roles. Because, myself included, and quite a few colleagues started off volunteering with the organisation - but we don't actually have that as a case study, which would actually be really nice. I'm quite process driven - being in such a big, large national organisation, you have to be - and so we don't have a formal process in place as part of the volunteer journey to catch up with outgoing volunteers to see where they are, and "can we demonstrate that?" But, actually, there's nothing to say that I can't take the success within the organisation at the moment and turn that into a bit of a showcase and a case study. So, that's made me have a think there, thank you Esther.

Rob West

So one of the things that we're keen to do at CCSkills with volunteering is get organisations to think about it more proactively - because I think historically it's been thought of as a reactive thing. And we started by looking at whether volunteering can help people make that step into paid employment. This podcast, no doubt, is going to be listened to by people who don't run volunteering programmes. So finally, what I'd like to invite you both to do, is to do a little pitch to those organisations that don't have volunteering as a programme. Why should they consider doing it as a proactive part of their organisation?

Esther Lisk-Carew

In terms of any of an organisation's targets for their outputs - be it diversity, income generation, community engagement... They are all well served by having a volunteer programme. And volunteers are an amazing tool for advocacy when you support them correctly, and any benefit they get is a benefit to your organisation. So I would actively encourage any organisation to embed a well thought-out... Even if it's a small volunteer programme... To help them have a listening ear, and a pool of people that they can get response from and reaction from that will help them grow as a business.

Rosie Wylie

Agreeing with everything that is just said, there. Volunteering can allow you to achieve more as an organisation. It can help you achieve more in terms of a wish list with activities, it can help support existing roles. Most importantly, it can help

you reflect the local community that that organisation is actually part of by helping volunteers. You can understand challenges, views, aspirations. How might that community want the organisation to actually be in having, as I said, a well thought out, well planned volunteer programme? Even if that's just to recruit three volunteers, the voices and ideas and passion and energy from those small number of volunteers can be really valuable within an organisation. Having a volunteer programme can also be useful in terms of looking at funding bids - what you're hoping to achieve, who you might be working with, projects, etc. A lot of them have an expectation of having volunteers. In terms of capacity of your own organisation, if your volunteer programme is planned well in terms of what those volunteer roles go on, as we've been talking about, that can convert into some experienced and ready staff members who have an understanding of the organisation. And also, from a staff perspective, you might think about first doing an employee supported volunteering programme internally - it doesn't need to be one for community members, it might be for your own staff... Health and well-being benefits, social benefits, skills development, going out and supporting your community... Having your staff a day a year going out and doing that. Maybe that would be a great place to start as well.

- Rob West** Well, you set this up nicely on a whole range of other things we could talk about, which is the development of staff through volunteering as well, which tends to happen in other sectors probably far more than it does naturally with creative and cultural industries, as well as the benefits for organisations. Certainly, as we've heard from our other contributors today, it helps people be better prepared for the world of work, and better prepared for job roles in the future. Esther Lisk-Carew, Rosie Wylie, thank you very much for joining us on the podcast.
- Rosie Wylie** Thank you very much for having me.
- Maya Mardania** Thanks for having me.
- Rob West** So, Esther Lisk-Carew, Rosie Wylie, thank you very much for taking part in the programme. Thanks also to our young people, Amy Telfer, Dylan Mosengo, and Maya Mardania, who are volunteers at the Manchester International Festival, and recently attended their training academy and placement programme. And thanks to you for listening.
- Posy Jowett** The Creative and Cultural Skills Podcast was hosted by Rob West, and produced by Jay Sykes. I'm Posy Jowett. To join in our discussion, and share your thoughts with us, please get in touch. On Facebook and Twitter, you can find us @CCSkills.
- Rosie Wylie** That was good fun. That's the first podcast I've been part of, I enjoyed that.
- Rob West** Good. You can come back. (CHUCKLES)
- Esther Lisk-Carew** (LAUGHS)