

FREE TO FEEL GOOD

BY PENNY COTTEE

How do you inspire, motivate and reward unpaid volunteers? A new CIPD programme has some ideas

A group of charity workers will have cause to celebrate when they receive their CIPD Certificate in Personnel Practice later this year. They are the first to complete a ground-breaking course designed specifically to bring professional people management qualifications to those who manage volunteers.

“Although experienced in their roles, sometimes managing hundreds of volunteers, most of the students were new to studying. To gain this qualification is a considerable accomplishment,” says Charles Prior, chairman of BPP Malpas, which is a major provider of CIPD flexible learning and which delivered the course.

And that’s the key point for David Wood, chief executive of the National Association of Hospital & Community Friends (NAHCF), who drove the pilot. “My inspiration was the need to start recognising the skills employed every day by those people managing unpaid workforces, and then to accredit those skills for the first time with a professional qualification,” he says.

The volunteer managers who took the course were drawn from five charities: the NAHCF, Community



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Service Volunteers, the National Institute for Mental Health in England, the National Association for Voluntary Service Managers and WRVS.

“Some course delegates were paid staff, others were themselves volunteers; some were responsible for a handful of volunteers, others for several hundred,” says Prior. “But they were all managing people despite having little or no formal HR training.”

The seeds for the course were sown in 2003 when a joint government and voluntary-sector working party concluded that effective management of volunteers was central to the success of voluntary organisations, and that the people managing those volunteers needed development opportunities and support. A course was seen as a way of equipping volunteer managers for their role, as well as opening up a recognised career route for them.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, it was decided to use the CIPD’s well-established Certificate in Personnel Practice (CPP), slightly adapted for the voluntary sector.

“We set about proving the business case – to create 100 qualified professionals – and secured grants from the Department of Health and the Home Office for the first year’s pilot,” says Wood. “The charities we approached to take part all worked in healthcare, either in hospitals or in the community, which made a sensible funding proposition.”

Adapting the CPP meant building in examples and case studies relevant to volunteer settings, and highlighting areas where HR practice might be incompatible with volunteer management. How, for example, do you “dismiss” a volunteer?

Some of the terminology used on the course also needed changing. Participating charity partners were wary of causing offence by using such terms as “performance management” and “selection” when referring to people who gave their time and efforts for free. “While maintaining

the people management principles, we changed these terms to ‘enhancing volunteer contribution’ and ‘matching’,” explains Wood.

But if one of the aims of offering a recognised qualification to volunteer managers was to raise their professional standing, it was obviously important that the CPP was not seen as “diluted”. BPP Malpas, the NAHCF and the CIPD worked closely together to make sure that, despite the amendments, the value of the qualification was undiminished.

“It was vital to ensure that the adapted course offered exactly the same standard, which it does,” says Digby Ingle of CIPD’s quality management team.

And so in September 2004, BPP Malpas course tutor Steve Moreton began a staggered roll-out of the course in the nine local government regions of England. Selected because of his own experience in managing volunteers, Moreton ran all nine courses, which were based around two one-week blocks of study, each followed by distance learning and a management report assignment.

“Although obviously keen to gain the qualification, most students had enrolled to learn how to improve their daily practice rather than for professional development ends, and they made it clear from the outset that they were looking for applicability and practicality on the course,” explains Moreton. “Anything not directly applicable to their experience was given short shrift.”

If it sounds as if the students knew exactly what they wanted, it’s because they did. “The cohort was not your usual group for the CPP – a foundation level course usually studied by those starting careers in HR,” says Moreton. “These students were older and had significant experience of their roles, in some cases more than 30 years.

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PRISON BREAK

The CPP course clarified many things for Chris Douglas, a volunteer who manages 25 other unpaid workers operating a visitors’ tea bar at the new women’s prison, Bronzefield, in Middlesex.

“Most of all, it made me realise that my job is too big to be voluntary,” she says.

As chairwoman of the prison’s League of Friends, Douglas set the tea bar up but soon realised there was more to managing a team of volunteers than she had thought. The job is about constantly processing application forms, recruiting and inducting new people, training them and carrying out security checks – as well as managing existing volunteers.

“But I picked up many professional concepts from the course, such as equal opportunities and setting up appraisals, and a better understanding of the voluntary sector,” says Douglas. “I had no idea how much work the course would mean, but I now have a sense that I’m working within a structure, and with a more professional outlook. I’m clear about what we need to put in place now – which includes getting funding for a part-time paid person!”

COURSE OF TREATMENT

As hospital services manager for the Friends of Northampton General Hospital, Sally Dring has managed 100 volunteers for six years. She leapt at the chance to take the CPP course because it offered a professional qualification geared to her particular situation.

“I found the course to be extremely practical, looking in depth at issues such as performance management and recognition and reward, which are different for volunteers. It had an immediate benefit, helping me to improve and update my daily practice, and also built my confidence by confirming that much of what I was doing was right.”

Writing management reports allowed Dring to network widely within the hospital, which raised the profile of the services her team offered. “It was valuable to work with others, too, to swap ideas and get different perspectives on your practice. I just wish it had been available earlier in my career,” she says.



confident, resourceful and an independent thinker,” he continues. “Given the varied roles and philosophies among the groups, we had genuinely constructive disagreements and lively discussions. Overseeing group dynamics was both challenging and stimulating.”

Since most course participants were unfamiliar with study at this level, significant extra support was made available. “We developed a web resource, purchased a reference library, set up one-to-one sessions with students, and helped them to research internationally using different terms – for example, ‘orientation’ rather than ‘induction’ and ‘reviews’ instead of ‘appraisals,’” says Moreton.

The opportunity to network proved important for students, too. “Volunteer management can be an isolated role, and working with others on the course was highly beneficial for the students,” he says. “Several partnership projects have since been started, which is exciting as the sector is traditionally very fragmented.”

Feedback from students and partner charities has been positive from the start, and the fact that about 80 students should receive their certificates this year is in itself testament to the scheme’s success. So much so that Wood has already secured funding for two more courses in London and Manchester.

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VITAL STATISTICS

Facts about the voluntary and community sector workforce:

- The voluntary sector employs around 569,000 paid staff, representing 2 per cent of the total UK workforce.
 - 85,000 jobs were created in the voluntary and community sector between 1997 and 2002.
 - The estimated number of regular volunteers across the UK is 11.1 million, the equivalent of 1.3 million full-time jobs.
- Source: *Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation, 2004.*

Wood is keen to develop plans to offer the CIPD Leadership and Management course, similarly orientated towards the voluntary sector, and funding is currently being negotiated for this.

The CIPD is pleased with the results of the course. “It was quite an unusual model for us, but it’s great to see these HR standards being brought successfully to people who may not normally have access to them,” says Digby Ingle.

It is perhaps surprising that personnel qualifications designed for volunteer managers have not been on offer before now. After all, managing volunteers is at least as demanding as managing any other group of people.

“Volunteer managers work in a complex environment,” says Wood. “In many ways it’s harder to manage volunteers than paid staff. How do you create a sense of leadership and inspire, motivate and reward people when they are unpaid? These managers have real people management skills that should be recognised outside the sector as well as within it.” ■

Further info

The CIPD’s Certificate in Personnel Practice provides a firm foundation in all the core areas of personnel and HR management and leads to associate membership of the CIPD. There are two methods of studying: fast-track and modular.

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