



## Durham University Volunteering and Community Outreach Strategy 2023-28

### The Wider Student Experience Strategy

Durham University invests in its Wider Student Experience – an environment of enriching extra-curricular activities and high quality student support – because we believe it is an investment in the personal growth and quality of our students, helping them to become graduates who go on to make a positive and purposeful difference in challenging and ever-changing local and global environments.

### Volunteering & Community Outreach and the Wider Student Experience Strategy

This sub-strategy aims to build upon the University's [Wider Student Experience Strategy](#) and further develop Volunteering and Community Outreach, a key pillar of Durham's enrichment offer for both students and staff. It will promote a culture where students and staff understand the value and importance of service to others, increasing the breadth and range of opportunities and breaking down barriers to participation to **enable more volunteering to take place more often**. Understanding impact and community need - ensuring that all projects add significant value to and meet the direct needs of the wider community while being safe and ethical - will be at the heart of the sub-strategy. There will also be a focus on raising the profile of volunteering and outreach activity highlighting the outstanding efforts of students and staff and the University's commitment to the wider community. By providing methods and opportunities for all participants to reflect on and capture their volunteering and outreach experience, students and staff will also be given the opportunity to better understand their personal growth and the mental health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering.

### Vision

***Supporting wider community needs and volunteer development through enabling and providing impactful, ethical and safe volunteering opportunities for all.***

### Goals & Principles

Our vision will be underpinned by five overlapping and mutually beneficial priorities and seven guiding principles:

#### Goals

*Our goals are to:*

1. Promote a culture where students and staff understand the value of volunteering and outreach and the importance of service to others.

2. Increase the breadth and range of opportunities and break down barriers to participation to enable more volunteering to take place more often.
3. Understand impact and wider community need, ensuring that all projects add significant value to and meet the direct needs of the wider community while being safe and ethical.
4. Raise the profile of volunteering and outreach activity highlighting the outstanding efforts of students and staff and the University's commitment to the wider community through the collation of case studies, data and inspirational stories.
5. Provide methods and opportunities for all participants to reflect on and capture their volunteering and outreach experience so that they can understand their personal growth and the mental health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering.

## Principles

*Guided by our principles we will be:*

- a. **Inclusive**, championing and recognising the fact that all staff, all students and every member of the wider community can make a positive difference.
- b. **Collaborative and partnership-driven** embracing the energy, expertise, knowledge and resource that is spread throughout the institution, and also amongst our many and remarkably supportive and committed friends, partners and wider stakeholders.
- c. **Innovative and entrepreneurial** embracing new opportunities and at the forefront of new developments in relation to enabling technology and impact measurement.
- d. **Increasingly evidence-based** and data-driven in decision making drawing upon new and innovative approaches to measure impact and success.
- e. **Committed to continuous improvement** through stakeholder and partner review, ongoing consultation and data analysis.
- f. **Proactive and responsive**, recognising that change is inevitable and that wider community need, and student and staff interests, will continually shift.
- g. **Focused on maximising University and external partner investment**, ensuring that Durham University Volunteering and Community Outreach is extremely well placed to bid for – and ultimately be awarded – external grants, donations and awards.

## Measuring Success

- The success of volunteering will be measured through a range of methods; partner growth and breadth of quality opportunities enabled, partner organisation feedback, achievement of project specific goals, volunteer engagement, retention, feedback and personal development. In addition, there will be a focus on building further outcome based metrics throughout the duration of the sub-strategy and as we develop and define these metrics, additional measures and targets will emerge.
- We understand that over emphasising the importance of hours undertaken can be off-putting for many volunteers, and some partners. That said, reporting on hours will be a natural outcome of managing volunteer activity and therefore this will remain one of the quantitative indicators of progress. We will aim to record 85,000 student and staff volunteering hours per year by 2028 – honing in on 100,000 hours per year by 2030. If we build a culture of service to others, provide the right opportunities and promote those opportunities effectively, more volunteering will take place more often.

## Strategy Acknowledgements

- It should be recognised that this Strategy does not take into account the volunteering contributions of both our students and staff in relation to internal activities. The number of students and staff that volunteer to support Common Rooms, Clubs and Societies and a range of broader events and activities that take place in our Colleges, Academic Departments and PSS Departments is quite outstanding. This should be

recorded, celebrated and further developed but the purpose of this Action Plan is to develop volunteering and community outreach in the context of the wider community.

- Further to this, and in recognition that there are a range of independent organisations providing a platform for young people to access national and international volunteering opportunities, the priority will be to focus most of our resource on enabling volunteering and outreach opportunities locally and regionally. There will, however, continue to be a commitment to supporting the University's longstanding contribution to the Sport in Action Zambia outreach programme and a further commitment to co-create strands of outreach activity with appropriate partners in overseas University student recruitment target markets.
- The Action Plan will also focus on the continued co-creation of projects with our volunteers – in particular our student leaders – and our community partners in relation to student volunteering projects. Longstanding experience suggests that this approach is the most effective and sustainable and that, whilst there is always space to act as a volunteer broker (where students and staff are signposted to third-party projects), relationships and partnerships are generally short-lived with a limited level of commitment from students, staff and project partners.