

Sea Cadet Volunteering Strategy – summary of findings and actions

Summary of findings

We are entirely reliant on volunteers to deliver the Sea Cadet experience, fundamentally without a significant pool of skilled, trained, enthusiastic and supported volunteers, it would be impossible for the Sea Cadets to achieve its aim of “giving young people the best possible head start in life through nautical adventure and fun based on the customs and traditions of the Royal Navy”.

Historically we, like many volunteering organisations, have relied upon a substantial number of long term and deeply committed “career volunteers” who give a huge amount of time to the Sea Cadets. Unfortunately, because of the increasing time pressures on people in modern society (from work, family, social expectations etc.) there has been a real reduction in the number of people able and willing to volunteer in this way. This means that it is critical that we rethink the way we offer volunteering opportunities.

We need to make the volunteering opportunities we offer much more flexible, essentially making the volunteering fit the needs, expectations and availability of the potential volunteer, rather than expect every volunteer to fit our expectations. This is termed “flexible volunteering”.

There are many ways of doing this including role sharing (such as two or more people taking on the functions of the Training Officer or Admin Officer), creating smaller roles (volunteers just committing to do part of a “traditional” role – such as just managing course bookings), or even running a rota for parade evenings with volunteers committing in advance to which parades they will (and will not) attend.

“Flexible volunteering “does not mean that volunteers will be “unreliable”, simply that their level of commitment is agreed in advance and understood by all in order to allow volunteering to fit with their other commitments.

Flexible volunteering also needs to be available for existing volunteers. Many volunteers leave the Corps because of changes in their personal circumstances, often when they get a new job. Many want to stay involved, but because of the expectations, feel that they have to leave. Allowing such volunteers to stay involved, even on a very infrequent basis, would allow them to continue to be part of the Sea Cadets and many would come back when their other commitments allowed.

In terms of recruiting new volunteers, many Units do limited active recruitment, instead hoping that potential volunteers will come to them rather than actively going out and recruiting. We know that 50% of new volunteers are the parents of cadets, and so Units should be taking active steps to encourage parents to get involved.

Ways of doing this would include asking parents of new cadets (perhaps particularly Juniors) whether they have a D1 driving licence and could drive the minibus, have a hobby or job that could be of use or would be prepared to volunteer in another way.

Other methods include having a “vacancy board” in the Unit that advertises roles or tasks that need doing. These might include smaller, more flexible roles like “gardener / grounds person”, “handyperson” as well as the more traditional roles. Roles should also be advertised using non Sea Cadet language (“admin person” as opposed to “Admin Officer”) in order to make them more accessible to the non-Sea Cadet audience.

Another key source of recruits are former cadets. Keeping track of former cadets when they go to college or university, can be really useful. Whilst many may live away during term time, involving them in the holidays can keep their interest and involvement as well as using their significant skills and experience.

Similarly, for those former cadets that go into work, having time to commit to cadets as they establish themselves in their new job can be a challenge, but keeping in touch and involving them when they are available will can keep them interested for the future.

For new volunteers without a Sea Cadet background, joining the Corps can be quite daunting. We talk in a different language (“heads”, “galley”, “main deck”, “colours” “PO”, “SCRs” etc), to the uninitiated our ceremonies may seem very strange and we definitely have a certain way of doing things.

We need to welcome new volunteers, explain things (in non-Sea cadet language) and critically make them feel both valued and useful. For potential instructors, one really good way of doing this is by asking them to assist with the instruction of new entry cadets. This will enable them to work alongside and be supported by another instructor, get to know the basics of the Corps, and feel that they are actively contributing.

From a systems and process point of view, we also need to review, revise and streamline the on-boarding process for new volunteers. Currently the process takes too long and new volunteers are unable to see where they are or what they need to do next.

At an organisation wide level, the training we provide new volunteers needs to be reviewed. In particular, we need to ensure that both the induction training and core modules are provided in an accessible, flexible and timely manner. It is also important that we properly recognise prior learning and experience (RPLE) that many volunteers bring with them. Each of these elements has been identified as a need and will be covered by the current work on Corps Education.

For our key managers (particularly COs and UMT Chairs), we also need to provide more support and training on the leadership and management of volunteers. COs and Unit Chairs are absolutely critical in building a supportive, positive culture within a Unit and for making the volunteers in their Units feel welcomed, valued and engaged. It is recognised that currently we do not provide sufficient support or training in these areas, however again, much of this will be picked up by the work on Corps Education.

Actions

There are a number of really important actions that can be taken locally:

- Target potential volunteers
 - Actively engage new parents (ask about their skills / interests and how they will help)
 - Draw volunteers in slowly (through P&SA, Unit Assistants, CI roles etc.)
 - Advertise roles (using non Sea Cadet language)
- Enable and encourage “flexible volunteering” (for both new and existing volunteers)
 - Make roles smaller
 - Operate a rota or availability based planning

- Make sure that everyone makes new volunteers feel really welcome, and provide a really good induction
 - Explain the customs, traditions and language of the Corps
 - Help them through the on-boarding process
 - Make them feel useful quickly (and use their skills)

- Manage volunteers effectively
 - Use their existing (and new) skills
 - Make volunteering fun and enjoyable
 - Say thank you