

# **Volunteer to Career Programme: Findings report**

**University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (UCLH)**  
**May 2024**

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# Programme overview

The **Helpforce Volunteer to Career (VtC) programme** is designed to support volunteers to take up a career in health and care. Helpforce has worked alongside health and care organisations to set up and implement volunteering projects which incorporate career pathways for volunteers. They have worked in partnership with organisations, such as ours, to implement the Volunteer to Career Pathway and to provide support in evaluating its impact. The VtC programme has been designed to support **organisational** improvement across **three key strategic components, identified as essential to achieving systemic change:**

- **Clinical/health and care leadership** - Developing a network of senior clinical/health and care leaders to harness their expertise to positively influence wider effective engagement, and ultimately adoption of, VtC projects.
- **Environment and culture** - utilise best practices to raise the value of the volunteer workforce in the health and care environment to enhance the likelihood of volunteers wanting to adopt a career in health and care.
- **Volunteer to Career Pathways** - Develop innovative and impactful volunteer roles and career pathways, linked to local recruitment needs, to encourage and enable volunteers to use this as a route to a career in the NHS.

## UCLH's programme overview and objectives:

The aim of the VtC Pathway programme was to formalise employability pathways for volunteers at UCLH, by working with clinicians and education teams to explore volunteer roles tied to specific careers. The project aimed to gain recognition across the Trust of the value of volunteering as a pathway to paid jobs. The project sought to embed volunteering within workforce strategies and the Trust's work around widening access, inclusion, and participation.

Clinical leadership for the project has been provided by a Project Steering Group chaired by Susie Scott, Assistant Chief Nurse for Education.

# UCLH's VtC programme objectives in detail

The VtC programme began in April 2023 and the initial programme ran until March 2024. With programme management and evaluation support provided by [Helpforce](#), we implemented and delivered our VtC programme to achieve these programme objectives.

Key objectives were as follows:

- Creating a sustainable VtC Pathway through adapting one existing volunteer role and developing further structured roles with a minimum commitment of 100 hours of volunteering, designed to give experience of working at UCLH (see next slide for full details of the VtC pathway)
- Recruiting diverse participants to the pathway to take up these new roles. Reviewing the general volunteer application process on Better Impact, adapting it to better identify volunteers who apply for volunteering speculatively and may be interested in the VtC Pathway or a career in the NHS more generally
- Running sessions on employability training (separate sessions on application/ CV-writing skills and interview skills,) and supporting participants to apply for jobs/clinical training.
- Delivering quarterly online 'Inspiration Sessions' aimed primarily at young people (aged under 25), to increase the number of volunteers with an interest in pursuing a career in health and care, and to recruit volunteers to VtC Pathway. These 'Getting into the NHS' inspiration sessions focus on a different career or pathway into the NHS (e.g., allied health professionals, nursing, dental, pharmacy, and apprenticeships), with an opportunity to hear from real-life clinicians and staff about their jobs.
- Producing a bi-monthly e-newsletter promoting VtC pathway roles to all volunteers, signposting to potential paid roles being advertised at UCLH and across the North Central London Integrated Care System (NCL), and providing other useful information (e.g., case studies, careers spotlights)

# UCLH's VtC Career Pathway

## 1. Volunteer induction and resource pack

Voluntary Services provides an initial welcome to the organisation. We introduce the career pathways available to volunteers and an overview of the VtC programme and expectations of being part of the VtC pathway, within a Learning Log document.

## 2. Initial career discussion, identify career goals

During induction, new inductees complete a self-reflection questionnaire identifying their skills, confidence, and areas for personal development, and initial career goals and agree the steps needed within the programme to achieve them.

## 3. Volunteer Impactful Roles

The volunteer role is mapped to local recruitment needs (specific skills, experience, and exposure). Voluntary Services collaborate with workforce management and clinicians throughout the role design process to ensure the role is delivered well and will provide the skills needed to enable the volunteer to progress through the pathway.

## 4. 1:1 Mentoring, career chats with clinical and/ or admin staff

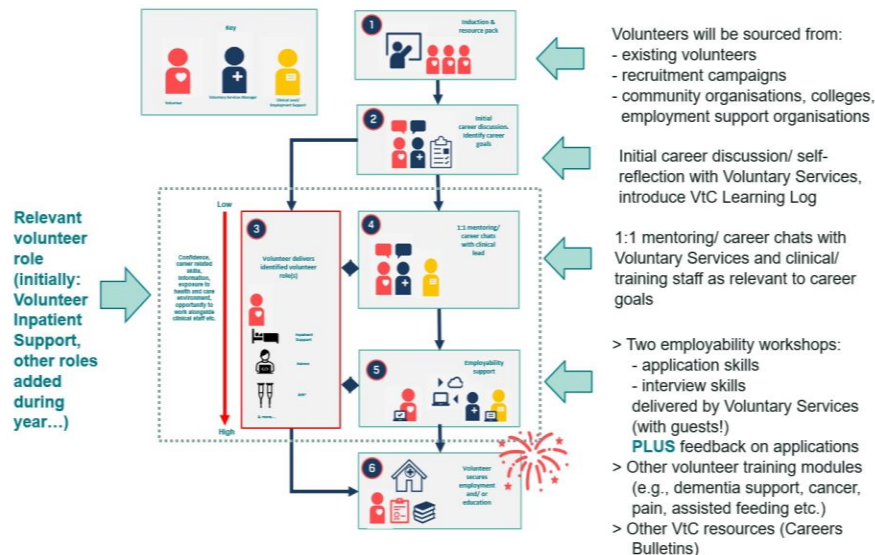
This is an opportunity for volunteers to have a mix of informal and more structured career-based conversations with relevant identified mentors, in UCLH's nursing education and AHP education teams and with experienced admin and clerical staff (as relevant for the volunteer's career goals).

## 5. Employability Support

Provision of employment skills workshops, including application skills and interview skills, together with more personalised support with job applications as appropriate.

## 6. Securing Employment/ Education

At UCLH, in the broader NHS - or beyond.



# Volunteering activity

Across the duration of the initial delivery period, there was a great deal of volunteering activity within the VtC programme at UCLH:



Within the 9-month initial delivery period, VtC volunteers supported almost 2,583 patients (according to our survey data) and 200 staff (according to our estimates). This support was delivered by 16 volunteers, delivering 957 hours of volunteering support.

## Volunteering activity in detail

- Most VtC volunteers were in the **Volunteer Inpatient Support (VIPS)** role. Day-to-day responsibilities in this volunteer role include attending multidisciplinary team meetings (MDTs), ensuring contact with family, communicating with the ward staff and wider medical teams, befriending patients and keeping them company, and ensuring patients have access to all other services provided by volunteers (e.g., patient shopping, boredom busting etc.).
- One VtC volunteer was in an **Administrative Support Volunteer** role, supporting the Radiotherapy department. Duties there included phoning patients about appointments and rescheduling if necessary, communicating with patients directly in the waiting room regarding non-clinical queries with their procedures, checking patients in at reception, collecting and distributing mail, scanning and copying documents, data entry, and other ad hoc tasks.
- UCLH also developed a brand-new role for the VtC pathway, **Physitrack Support Volunteer**, with the first two volunteers starting in March 2024 (outside the scope of this report). In this role, volunteers work with physiotherapy staff to implement certain patients' exercise intervention programme, ensuring patients have access to the Physitrack app for their personalised exercise plan, answering basic questions on how to complete exercises, ensuring patients are carrying them out safely, and encouraging patients to complete exercises through befriending and motivation.



# Helpforce's evaluation approach

Using its established ***Insight and Impact*** evaluation service, Helpforce follows a consistent methodology to determine the impact of volunteering roles on health outcomes. Target **outcomes are identified across a range of beneficiaries representing the people and organisations involved, and then the necessary data is collected to prove and evidence the outcomes.**

The evaluation sought to answer three key questions.

- What was the impact of the VtC programme on:
  - Corporate behaviours towards volunteering?
  - Enabling individual volunteers to progress towards a career in health and care?
  - The attitudes of front-line staff towards volunteer services?

The outcomes the evaluation aimed to measure included...



**Note:** The analysis in this report is provided by the Helpforce Insight and Impact team, and the contextual information has been provided by UCLH's Voluntary Services team which managed UCLH's VtC project.



# Evaluation approach: methodology

Within the VtC programme, **Helpforce** utilises three data collection methods:

- **A 'VtC Self-Assessment Tool'** (referred to as SAT) was completed by the project's clinical/health and care lead at the start and then again near the end of **the** project. The tool measures the organisation against a series of identified categories and questions associated with their volunteering strategy. Also, as part of the SAT, volunteers and staff are invited to complete some additional feedback surveys to provide insight into their perceptions of organisational change.
- **Volunteer surveys** were designed to capture data around the volunteers' level of interest in a health/care career, how they are finding their volunteer role and the VtC programme. The surveys were completed **twice**, both at the beginning of their volunteering and at a later period (referred to as 'start' and 'latest').
- **Staff surveys** were completed at the start and near the end of the VtC project (referred to as pre and post surveys).

During the course of the VtC programme **the following surveys were completed:**

14

volunteer pre-surveys  
were submitted

14

volunteer post-surveys  
were submitted

20

staff pre-surveys were  
submitted

16

staff post-surveys were  
submitted

## Evaluation findings: organisation

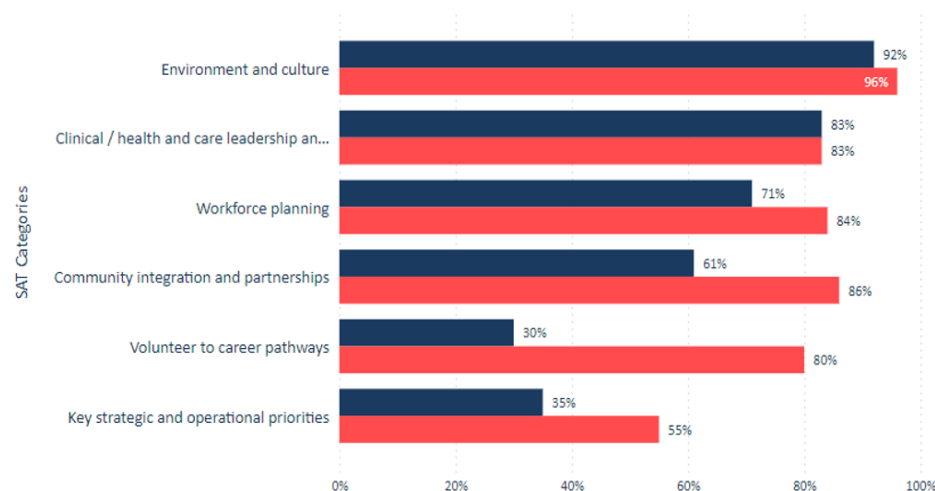


After completing the VtC programme, there was an **increase in the overall SAT score, which improved from 64% to 81%.**

Similar to the positive change in the overall SAT score result, **we have observed an improvement in the scores for five of the individual elements of organisational improvement for volunteering.**

First and Second Average SAT Scores Overview

Submission ● First ● Last



**Key areas for improvement in the scores came from:**

**Integration with workforce planning:** UCLH Voluntary Services improved internal links with various workforce teams (including the Reservist programme and HCA recruitment team), to link into UCLH's work around widening access, inclusion, and participation

**Recruitment and outreach:** UCLH Voluntary Services has developed extensive outreach links with several local council-funded and third-sector initiatives to source volunteers who may be interested in a career in the NHS.

**Awareness of VtC pathways to key teams:** UCLH Voluntary Services raised the profile of efforts to improve volunteers' employability with key teams, especially through the project steering group

## Evaluation findings: volunteer outcomes

8 volunteers completed the pathway out of 16 volunteers recruited.

Through the VtC programme and the career support provided, volunteers applied for jobs and attended interviews. These applications resulted in **5 volunteers securing employment in the NHS**, into roles such as Pharmacy Assistant and Healthcare Assistant. In addition, **1 volunteer secured employment in care sector** as a Care Assistant.

5

volunteers have taken up  
employment in the NHS

1

volunteer has taken up  
employment in a different sector

75%

of volunteers completed the VtC  
pathway secured employment

A volunteer provided some additional insights into their experience of being a VtC volunteer...

*"I feel like it has given me an opportunity to understand what kind of field of work interests me whether its supporting in patients or whether I want to work in another field of health care."*

## Evaluation findings: volunteers

After the VtC programme, the proportion of volunteers who **knew definitely what they wanted to do with their working lives remained the same at 57%**. Additionally, **78% of volunteers maintained or increased their certainty** in their ambitions through the VtC programme.

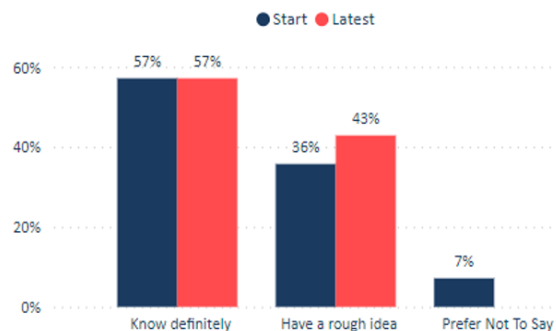
The proportion of volunteers who had **high degree of confidence in their career ambitions increased from 36% to 64%** by the end of the programme. In addition, **86% of volunteers maintained or increased their confidence** in achieving these ambitions through the VtC programme.

After the VtC programme, the proportion of volunteers who were **very interested in an NHS or social care career decreased from 100% to 86%**, meaning that **86% of volunteers maintained their interest** in this career pathway as a result of participating in the VtC programme.

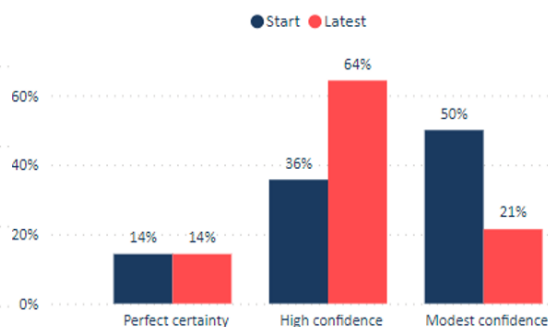
**Focus on volunteer employability:** UCLH Voluntary Services promoted awareness of NHS career opportunities to **all** volunteers, making employability skills workshops and Careers Bulletins available to all UCLH volunteers, not just those on the VtC pathway

*N= 14 pre- and post-surveys*

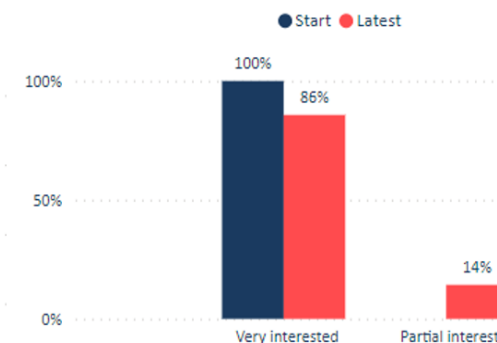
Ambitions for working life over the next 5 years



Confidence in career ambitions



Level of interest in NHS or social care career



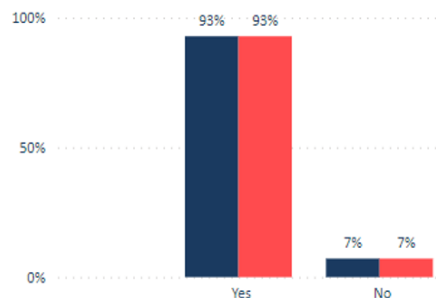
## Evaluation findings: volunteers (2)

Volunteers were also asked about their hopes and if they wished their volunteering role would result in certain outcomes related to their careers, future education, and training. At the end of the programme:

- **13 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to employment with our organisation.
- **12 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to employment in a similar health or care organisation.
- **10 volunteers** hoped their volunteering role would lead to further education aligned to their career goals.

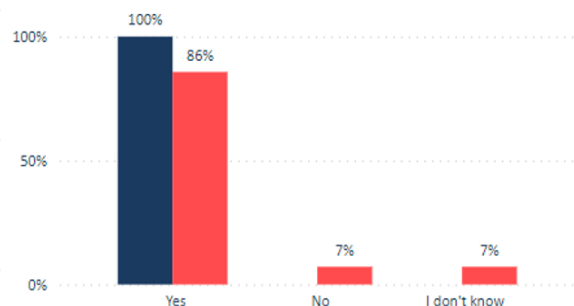
Hopes to work in this organisation

Submission ● Start ● Latest



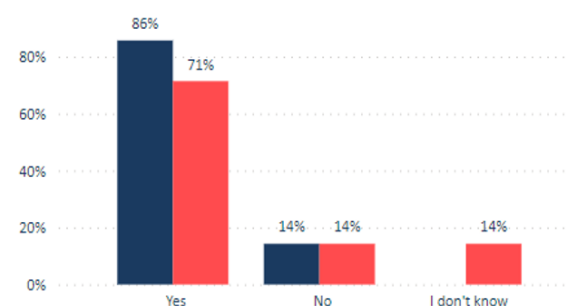
Hopes to work in a similar organisation

Submission ● Start ● Latest



Hopes to secure further education

Submission ● Start ● Latest



N= 14 pre- and post-surveys

These outcomes indicate that their VtC experience maintained our VtC volunteers' employment and education aspirations. The Careers Bulletins which formed part of the VtC programme provided a focus on how to plan a career as well as the range of opportunities that are available for NHS careers, both at UCLH and beyond.

# Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study



## Alison Asante's Story

Alison was one of the first onto the Volunteer to Career pathway. In her volunteering role, she volunteered two days per week as a Volunteer Inpatient Supporter (VIPS, for short) on two different inpatient wards. In this role, day-to-day responsibilities included attending multidisciplinary team meetings (MDTs), ensuring contact with family, communicating with the ward staff and wider medical teams, befriending patients and keeping them company, and ensuring that patients have access to all other services provided by volunteers (e.g., patient shopping, boredom busting). Alison joined the UCLH Talent Pool for Healthcare Assistants (HCAs), and successfully applied to become an HCA in the Endoscopy Department at UCLH in October 2023.

### What skills were you able to build through your volunteering?

"I learnt so many skills and had a very good experience. The main skill I developed was communication. The right way to communicate to a patient with patience, compassion, and empathy. I enjoyed speaking to different patients, being able to help them and getting a grasp of the environment of different wards."

### How is being a staff member different from being a volunteer?

"With being a staff member, there is more responsibility. What I find most rewarding is when I am able to avail myself to help a patient during a procedure. With Endoscopy, most patients cannot tolerate the procedure very well. As a result, they need comfort and reassurance that they can do and that they are fine. I always find it rewarding that I am able to support them in such a time."

### What challenges have you faced in your new role?

"As with every role, there are challenges. One of the key ones I've come across is being unable to communicate with patients due to language barrier. It's also been a steep learning curve to get to understand the different procedures and different equipment used."

### What did you enjoy most about the volunteer to career pathway?

"I got to meet different people from different backgrounds. This helped me to understand and respect the opinions and beliefs of different people. I was resistant with certain things (such as speaking up and asking for help when I needed it), but volunteering helped me open up and learn more. Volunteering was the best. It really, really helped me."

### Do you have any advice for someone wanting to make the change from volunteering to employment in the NHS?

"I'd advise that you make sure you learn everything you can whilst volunteering. I would definitely recommend volunteering to anyone looking to get into the NHS."

## Evaluation findings – Volunteer case study (2)

### Abu Ahmed's Story

Abu was one of the cohort of Volunteer to Career volunteers. His volunteer role has been as an Administration Support Volunteer in the Radiotherapy department, a broad reception-based role which includes phoning patients to confirm appointments, communicating with patients in waiting rooms about their expected procedure times, answering non-clinical queries, and general administrative support. He has accepted a full-time role in the UCLH Inpatient Pharmacy through NHS Reservists.

#### **What was the most important skill you were able to build up during your volunteering?**

"Good communication is a major soft skill which I gained during volunteering."

#### **What did you enjoy most about volunteering?**

"I enjoyed using my skills of problem solving, teamwork, and management to help deliver an impact on the experience of patients. I also enjoyed feeling like a valuable member of the team and meeting like-minded people."

#### **How is being a staff member different from volunteering?**

"It's the rights and the responsibilities of being part of the staff team. Obviously, I'm on site more too, so I feel much more integrated; I was volunteering one day a week, but I'm full time now."

#### **What do you find most rewarding and most challenging about your paid role?**

"To be very honest with you, I think the most rewarding part of my job is when I see that all my efforts and learning are giving positive results for my personal and professional development, and also contributing to the growth of my team and the NHS. It's a very supportive workplace and so far, I haven't faced any major challenges."

#### **Do you have any advice for someone wanting to make the change from volunteering to employment in the NHS?**

"Develop your skills! Don't avoid going outside your 'comfort zone'. Volunteering provided me with a healthy boost to my self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, and was a key part in me finding a job here."

#### **Do you have any feedback about the volunteer to career programme?**

"Your suggestions, new ideas, training, team activities and effective management moved me forward. The things I learnt are areas I want to focus on to improve my performance in my new role."

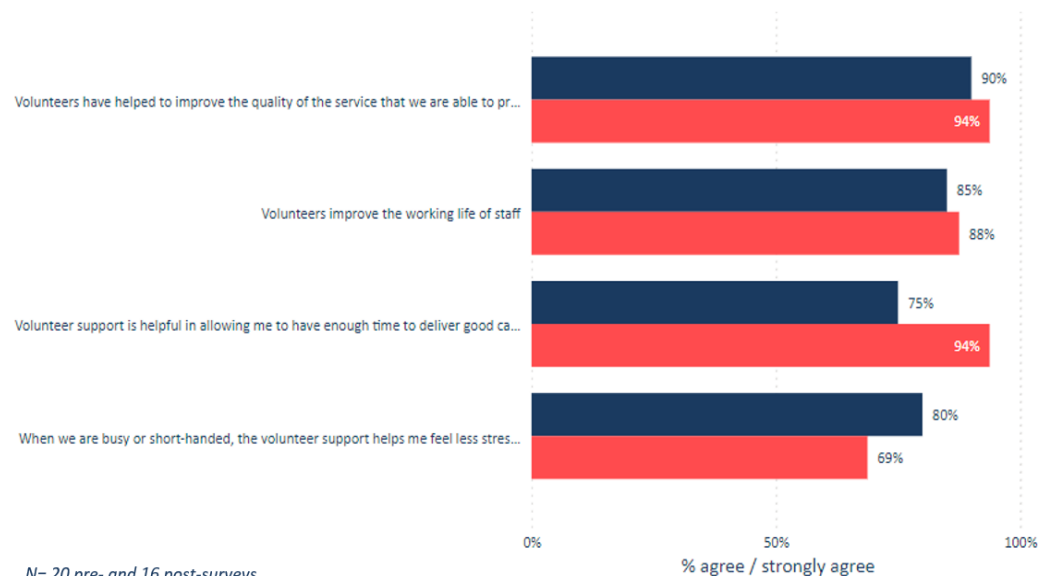


# Evaluation findings: staff

The VtC programme illustrated some improvement in staff perceptions of the impact volunteers can have for them and their organisation.

## Staff perceptions on the VtC volunteers

Submission ● Pre ● Post



UCLH's VtC pathway complemented its existing well-established volunteer programme. By basing the main VtC role on an existing volunteer role, the project had good buy-in from staff on inpatient wards who were already used to working with volunteers.

**A staff member reflected upon the difference VtC volunteers had made to patients and staff...**

*"I can't imagine the floor now functioning without volunteers. You can't underestimate the impact the volunteers have on the patients and clinical teams."*

**Senior clinical staff member - UCLH inpatient ward**

# Evaluation findings: staff case study

The Critical Care Holistic Support Volunteer role was not formally part of the Volunteer to Career project at UCLH. However, it has attracted several volunteers who are looking to develop a career in the NHS and/or go on to clinical training, from medicine to clinical psychology. These volunteers have had access to the employability support which Voluntary Services have built up as part of the VtC project, including regular training opportunities (job application/ CV writing and interview skills), and Careers Bulletins.

**A member of the Critical Care Unit team discussed their experience of having volunteers on the unit.**

## **How do volunteers support staff on the Critical Care Unit?**

"Volunteers supplement the critical care team by providing holistic and practical support to patients and their families that the critical care team might otherwise struggle to provide. This might be taking the time to listen to and befriend patients, charging a phone, or signposting to other support services. Their presence can significantly reduce the workload on nurses and doctors by handling tasks that, while not medical, are essential in improving the experience of patients and their families."

## **What skills do volunteers build through their volunteering experience that will be useful for potential future NHS careers?**

"Volunteering in Critical Care offers a unique learning ground for individuals aspiring to health-related careers. Key skills developed include empathy and communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem solving, and exposure to a healthcare environment."

## **What are the main challenges of having volunteers in a Critical Care setting?**

"Critical Care is a daunting place, especially if you are not a healthcare professional and it can have an emotional toll. The Critical Care Volunteers are well supported by Voluntary Services and the Critical Care CNS. They also have support available from the Critical Care Psychology Team if needed."

## **What is the best thing about having volunteers on Critical Care?**

"The most significant benefit is the human touch volunteers bring; they often have more time to sit, listen, and provide companionship to patients and their families, offering comfort during difficult times. This not only improves patient and family experience but can also positively affect patient outcomes. Volunteers also bring fresh perspectives, which can be invaluable and uplifting for the clinical team."

## **What advice would you have for other service areas looking to involve volunteers in their service?**

"Develop a structured volunteer programme with clear roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. It's crucial to offer training that prepares volunteers for the specific challenges and needs of the setting. And you should design and refine the service with the volunteers, as they need to have a good experience, feel valued, and know that their contribution matters."

## Evaluation findings: staff case study (2)

One of the Volunteer to Career volunteer roles that UCLH developed was the Physitrack Support Volunteer, supporting the Trust's Haematology Physiotherapy team. The role focuses on potentially clinically vulnerable patients who are undergoing a stem cell transplant and at high risk of physical deconditioning. Volunteers are involved in supporting these patients to access and safely undertake the exercise plan set by the physiotherapy team through the Physitrack app. It's ideally suited to volunteers who are considering a career as an Allied Health Professional.

**One of the staff members discussed their experience of working alongside volunteers in this role.**

### **How do volunteers support physiotherapists in your team?**

"Critically, having volunteers on board allows the physiotherapist to be able to prioritise other tasks that might otherwise not be able to be done due to time. It also improves the care that patients are receiving, as it allows patients to have increased access to the Physitrack app and education around physical activity."

### **What skills do you feel volunteers can build through their volunteering experience with you that will be useful for potential future NHS careers?**

"There's a range of skills that volunteers can develop, especially around communication with patients and understanding the importance of prioritisation. It provides great exposure to ward environments and the opportunity to observe the work of therapy teams, which can be difficult to deliver even with a work experience scheme. And for our particular area, volunteers can gain an understanding of haematological cancers."

### **What are the main challenges of having volunteers working alongside you?**

"Rota planning is more difficult as you need to build in more flexibility with managing volunteers."

### **What is the best thing about having volunteers working with you?**

"Again, it's the practical support that volunteers provide to the team. It allows the physiotherapist who is responsible for the volunteers to develop their leadership, mentoring, and education skills. And hopefully, we're helping volunteers find a potential career too."

### **What advice would you have for other service areas looking to involve volunteers in their service?**

"It is a great way to allow the development of your service without having to add more to already stretched to-do-lists, as you can delegate specific tasks to the volunteers."

# Conclusions and key successes

## Conclusions:

- The implementation of the VtC programme at UCLH has been successful in organisational improvement related to volunteering and improving some staff perceptions of the impact volunteers can have.
- Improvements were seen in five of the individual elements of the SAT, with a maintenance in the remaining one. The most notable improvement was in the Volunteer to Career pathways element, with an increase from 30% to 80% across the programme.
- While some decreases were seen in some indicators around volunteers' hopes and ambitions for their careers, the same proportion of volunteers knew definitely what they want to do (57%) and hoped to work for this organisation (93%) from the beginning to end of the programme.
- The programme has helped the Trust to further integrate volunteering into workforce strategies and aided the development of effective career pathways for volunteers which have resulted in relevant paid employment in the NHS.

## Key successes:

- Incorporating a focus on employability throughout the volunteering journey, from asking the initial question about interest in an NHS career in the application form, through to focused conversations for support.
- Developing new volunteer roles that can provide valuable relevant experience for volunteers looking for specific job roles, from soft skills such as communication and teamwork through to knowledge of NHS processes and ward environments.
- Producing resources to improve knowledge of routes into the NHS (UCLH Careers Bulletins), together with training sessions to focus on the practicalities of applying for a job in the NHS.
- The VtC pathway project has extended into the 2024-25 financial year, supported by funding from the UCLH Charity. We have rebranded the project as the volunteer employability project. This recognises that many of our volunteers are seeking to improve their employability more broadly, even if they are not immediately looking to become NHS colleagues.

# Recommendations and lessons learnt

- **Messaging for recruitment and outreach:** It's vital to manage expectations of what is possible throughout the process (for instance, that there is no guarantee of a job at the end of the programme). A volunteer to career initiative is as important for people looking for a career change as for those starting out on their career journey.
- **Messaging to volunteers:** It's important to recognise that people's plans can change during their time volunteering. As well as asking the question whether a prospective volunteer is looking for employment at application, keep asking existing volunteers what support they need around employability. And remember to use a range of different communication styles to do so.
- **Make the transition to employment as smooth as possible:** Concentrating on developing referral pathways should help to ensure as smooth a process as possible for volunteers who want to transition into the NHS workforce. And recognise that individuals may seek different options, covering part-time, full-time, temporary, and permanent roles.
- **There can be a range of outcomes:** Sometimes the experience of volunteering will help a programme participant realise they **don't** want to work in the NHS (i.e., it gives them a chance to 'try before they buy'). However, for volunteers who **do** get employment within the NHS, this can lead to potentially better retention rates, as they're already warmed up to a trust's values, understand certain NHS processes, and are familiar with ward and other environments.

# Acknowledgements

Our Volunteer to Career (VtC) programme was carried out in partnership between our organisation and Helpforce, with funding from NHS England.

Helpforce has been an invaluable partner in helping us set up and deliver this programme and has also supported us in analysing the data, setting out the impact evidence of this programme.

This project would not have been possible without the participation of:

- Members of our VtC steering group (Susie Scott, Caroline Theodorou, Jo Cunningham-Davis, Kevin Rowe, and Rob Blaze), who provided valuable guidance, suggestions, and support in shaping the project
- The NCL Workforce Management Service (especially Moneeba Ahmed) and HCA Recruitment Teams, who have supported volunteers into paid employment within UCLH
- And all the clinical and administrative staff who deploy volunteers on our various inpatient wards and beyond

All findings, conclusions and recommendations are from the Voluntary Services department at University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (UCLH).

## About Helpforce

Helpforce works with health and care organisations across the UK to accelerate the growth and impact of volunteering to keep people healthy in their communities and support them during treatment and after. It is an independent, not-for-profit innovator, focused on co-creating on and evaluating volunteering projects, and rapidly sharing insights and best practice. To learn more about the charity, visit [www.helpforce.community](http://www.helpforce.community).



University College London Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

Thank you



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**Volunteer to Career**



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Analysis completed by Helpforce, 2023.