

Could skilled volunteering transform the NHS?



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1 Forewords

Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England and co-founder of Pro Bono Economics

The NHS benefits a lot from well-designed volunteering initiatives, with individuals contributing across a range of roles. These might be grounded in innate human skills – such as a mealtime companion – or those that many of us have acquired throughout our lives, say by serving as a driver. Regardless, they all enable staff to deliver high-quality care that goes above and beyond core services.



A volunteer might also bring professional skills to a role however, the kind of which could cost hundreds of pounds per hour to acquire from specialist external experts. I feel there is real value to be had if such skills could be utilised more and in a way that complements the support existing volunteering programmes are already bringing to the NHS. Given plans to increase the number of volunteers from 78,000 to 156,000 in the NHS over the next three years, the time is ripe for a new wave of thinking about what volunteers can offer.

This is what makes this report so timely. Four out of five (81%) doctors surveyed here say that skilled volunteers in the NHS could help safeguard its future. Of the 60% of Britons that do not currently volunteer, one in five say that they would prefer to put their professional skills to use, as opposed to interpersonal skills, if they were to do so. The ingredients exist for skilled volunteers to play a big role in helping the NHS's future.

Young people in particular also have a pivotal role to play here; doctors see and value the skills they can bring while the individuals themselves appear motivated to give their time. If this capacity can be leveraged the evident potential here could be realised to secure the future vitality of the NHS, as well as considerable benefits for people giving their time; a new revolution in progressive volunteering.

Mark Lever, CEO, Helpforce

There is a huge appetite for volunteering in the NHS: over the last five months alone we have recruited 34,000 new volunteers, many of whom have valuable professional skills to bring to their volunteering roles, complementing the compassion and comfort they provide every day – whether directly or indirectly – to patients.



With 81% of doctors and GPs agreeing there is room for more volunteers to play a part in the NHS, the opportunities are huge. This is evidenced in the growing national conversation on our Helpforce Network, a unique platform which connects healthcare professionals, and volunteer managers across the country to share their experiences of bringing volunteers to every part of the patient journey. As GPs, doctors, nurses, and other staff in the NHS embrace the valuable roles volunteers can play, we will ensure volunteers are trained and given roles that have the power to make a difference to all our lives.

2 Executive Summary

This research, commissioned by Pro Bono Economics report in collaboration with Helpforce, explores the view of doctors and the wider British public on the potential role for skilled volunteers in the NHS and GP practices.

2.1 Key takeaways

The appetite for volunteering among Britons could more than double if they had more free time – Over one third (36%) of individuals say they have volunteered in the last 12 months by helping groups, clubs and organisations – such as the NHS and charities – in an unpaid capacity, but 43% of people who currently do not volunteer say they would do so in the future if they had more free time.

Providing more skilled volunteering opportunities could also increase overall levels of supply – Of the total number of people who did not volunteer over the past 12 months, 46% say they would want to volunteer using their personal skills, while 28% would prefer to use their professional skills.

Eight in 10 (81%) hospital doctors and GPs say that volunteering in the NHS could be expanded in future to include more skilled volunteers – This relates to people who use both their professional and personal skills in their volunteer roles. Doctors who themselves currently volunteer are more likely to be in favour of skilled volunteering (87%), compared to those that have never volunteered (73%)

Doctors say that young people stand to benefit the most from volunteering their time to the – Over half (51%) of doctors surveyed say that people under 25 are the group most likely to benefit from their volunteering role, as it would teach them valuable life and people skills. According to doctors, established professionals who would most benefit from increasing their 'EQ' by volunteering include: politicians (45%); employees of major tech companies (23%); management consultants (22%); civil servants (16%); economists, journalists and lawyers (14%); bankers (13%), and employees from social media firms (10%).

Although most doctors are supportive of skilled volunteering in the NHS, some have concerns that volunteers will be used as a replacement for paid clinical staff in order to cut costs, which could compromise patient safety – Relevant comments from doctors in this regard include:

- “Utilising skilled volunteers in the NHS will limit employing proper professional support in areas where they are desperately needed within our organisation” Specialist registrar, Midlands.
- “Skilled volunteers need managing and that takes resources.” Consultant, Midlands
- “If skilled volunteering was managed from grassroots people, not politicians, it could be very beneficial.” Specialist registrar, North West

To address these challenges, volunteering charity Helpforce, which aims to help double the number of volunteers in the NHS by 2021, recently launched a charter showing how volunteers can make a valuable contribution to the NHS in England, without undermining paid staff or affecting patient safety. Among the key principles enshrined in the charter are:

- Volunteers should not undermine paid staff, with essential care tasks reserved for health employees; and
- No volunteers should be included in the workforce numbers for individual trusts and they must be clearly identified as volunteers. Unions will monitor how volunteers are used within organisations, with patient safety and confidentiality the primary concern

3 Methodology

3.1 General population survey

The online general population survey, conducted by YouGov questioned 2022 adults with fieldwork undertaken between 16th - 17th May 2019. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

3.2 Doctors survey

The online doctors survey, conducted by MedeConnect Healthcare Insight, questioned 1,004 doctors – 203 GPs and 801 secondary care doctors in the UK – between 26th April – 2 May 2019.

Table 1 Breakdown of survey respondents by role

Job role	Number
GP partner / principal	111
Salaried GP	53
Locum GP	35
GP Registrar	4
Consultant	571
Associate specialist	89
Speciality registrar	106
Other training grades	25
Foundation doctor	10
Total	1004

Figure 1. Breakdown of survey respondents by region

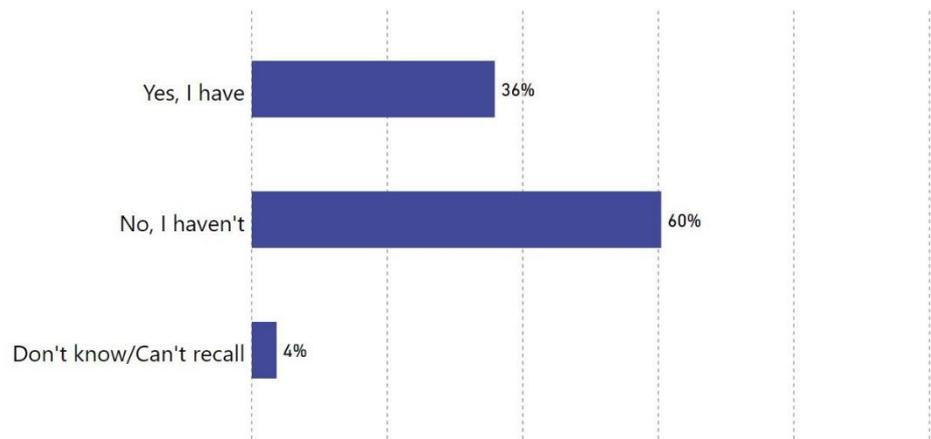


4 General population survey results

4.1 **Question one:** “For the following question, by 'volunteer', we mean helping any groups, clubs or organisations in an unpaid capacity. Thinking back over the last 12 months (i.e. since May 2018) ...Have you given up any of your time to volunteer for anything?”

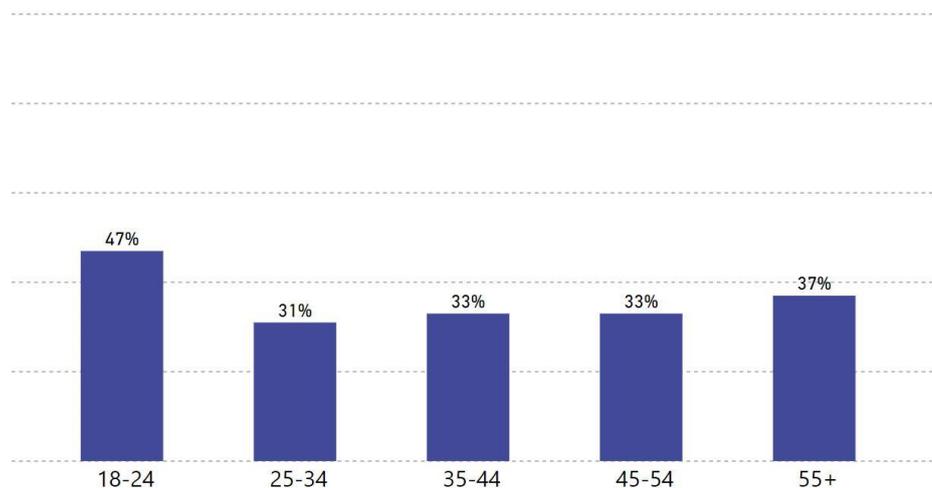
Summary of responses: Over one third of Britons (36%) say they have volunteered in the last 12 months by helping groups, clubs and organisations – such as the NHS and charities – in an unpaid capacity, but this figure could nearly double in the future as 43% of people who currently do not volunteer say they would do so if they had more free time.

Figure 2. Total number of people who have volunteered in the last 12 months



Unweighted base: All GB Adults (2022)

Figure 3. Total number of people who have volunteered in the last 12 months, by age

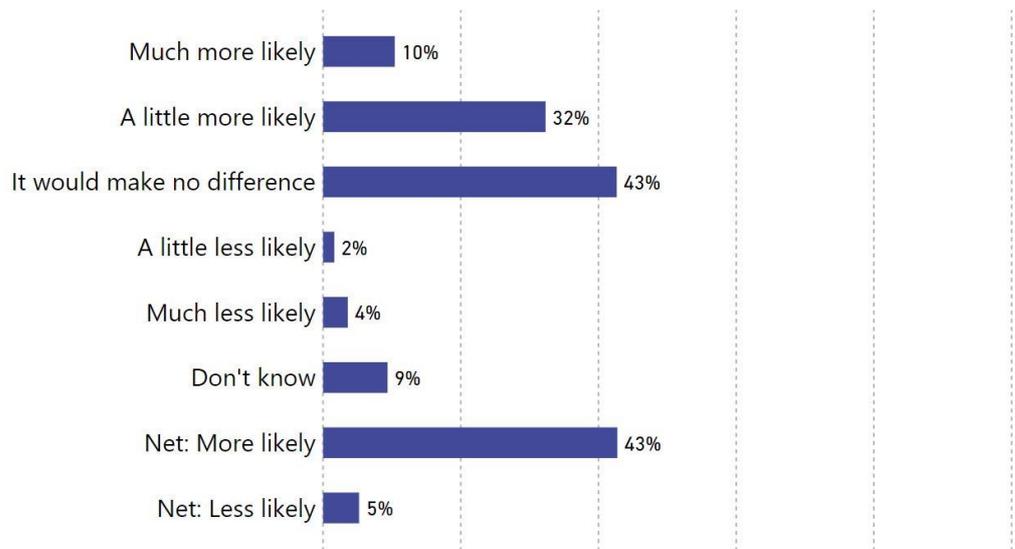


Unweighted base: All GB Adults (2022)

4.2 **Question two:** “Please imagine that you had more free time...How much more or less likely would you be to volunteer, or would it make no difference?”

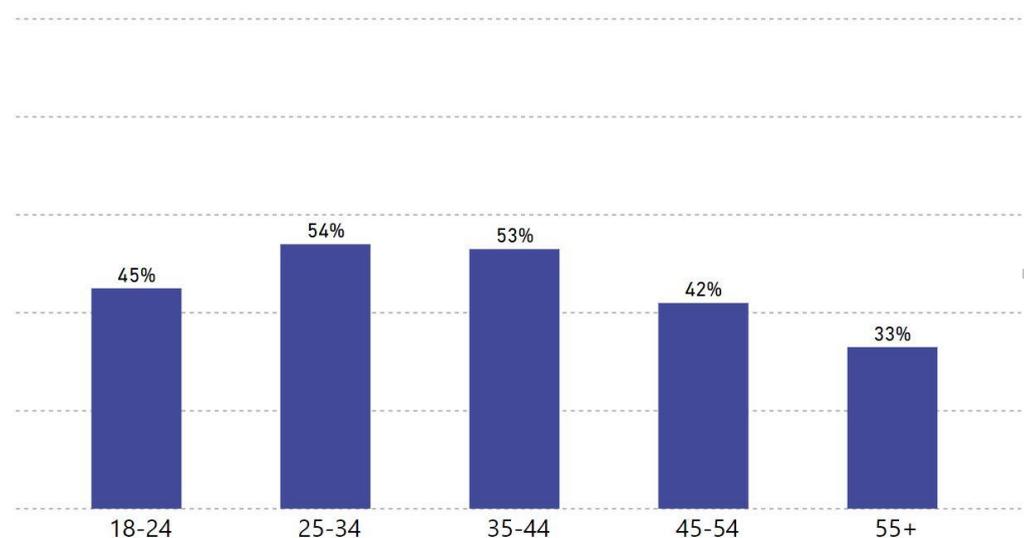
Summary of responses: In the representative survey some 60% (1200 people) reported that they do not currently volunteer. Of those 1,200 people 43% say they would be more likely to do so in the future if they had more free time.

Figure 4. Total number of people who currently do not volunteer but would do so in the future if they had more free time



Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

Figure 5. Total number of people who currently do not volunteer but would do so in the future if they had more free time, by age



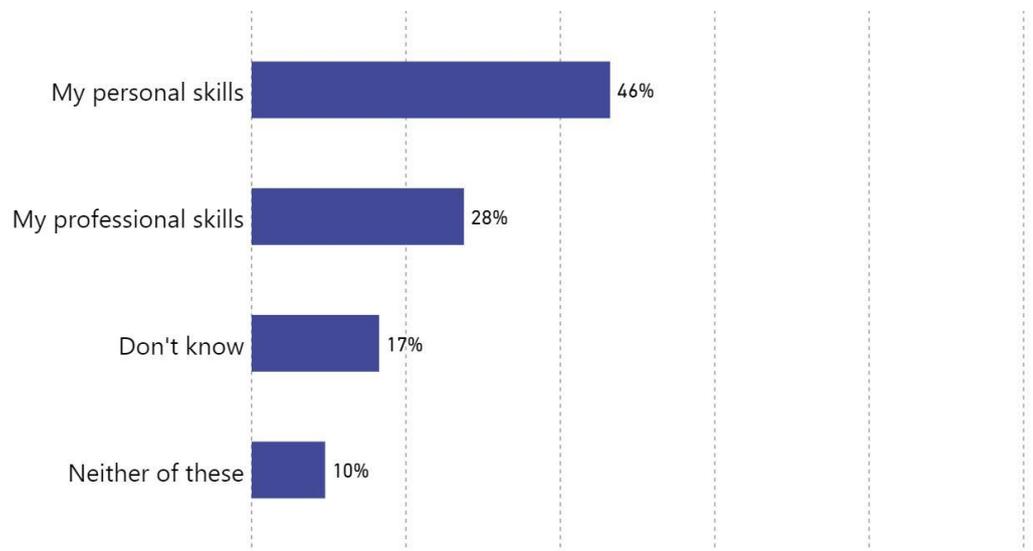
Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

4.3 **Question three:** “For the following question, by 'personal skills', we mean intangible qualities or traits that enhance our interactions (e.g. having a positive attitude, being able to communicate ideas clearly, listening well to others, etc.). By 'professional skills', we mean 'hard' skills that are acquired through education or work and can be measured (e.g. computer programming skills, economics knowledge, etc.).

Please imagine that you were to volunteer for a group, club or organisation of your choosing. Thinking about the type of role that you would like to have, which, if either, of the following types of skill would you MOST prefer to use? (Please select the option that best applies)”

Summary of responses: Of those 1,200 people who currently do not volunteer, nearly half (46%) say they would want to volunteer using their personal skills, while 28% would prefer to use their professional skills. The idea of ‘professional volunteering’ is particularly attractive to the younger generation: 34% of under-35s who answered this question liked the idea, compared to 23% of over-55s.

Figure 6. Types of skills people would want to use in their volunteering roles



Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

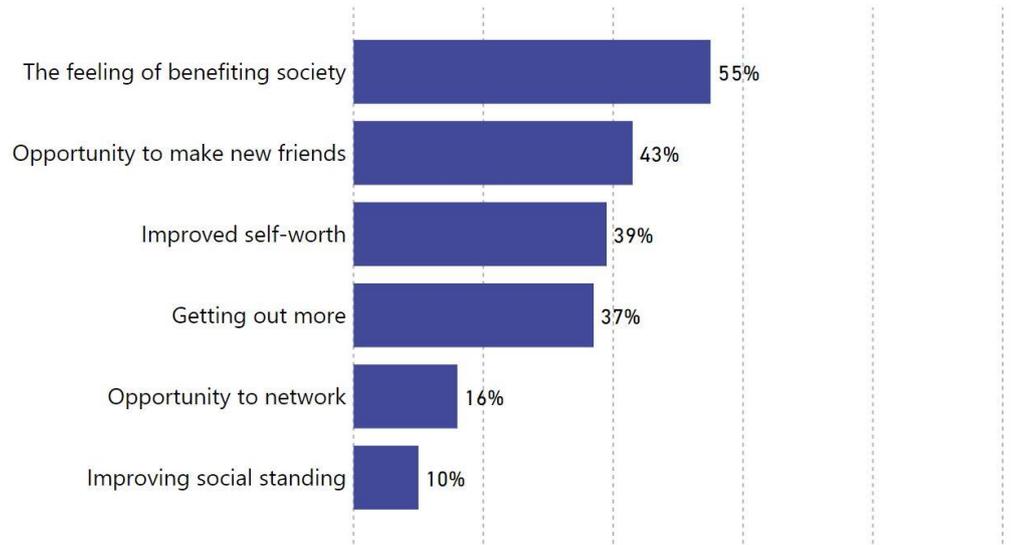
Figure 7. Types of skills people would want to use in their volunteering roles, by age



4.4 **Question four:** “Please continue to imagine that you were to volunteer for a group, club or organisation of your choosing. Which, if any, of the following do you think would be benefits of volunteering for you personally (excluding the benefits provided to others)? (Please select all that apply. If you do not think that there would be any benefits in particular of volunteering for you personally, please select the 'Not applicable' option).”

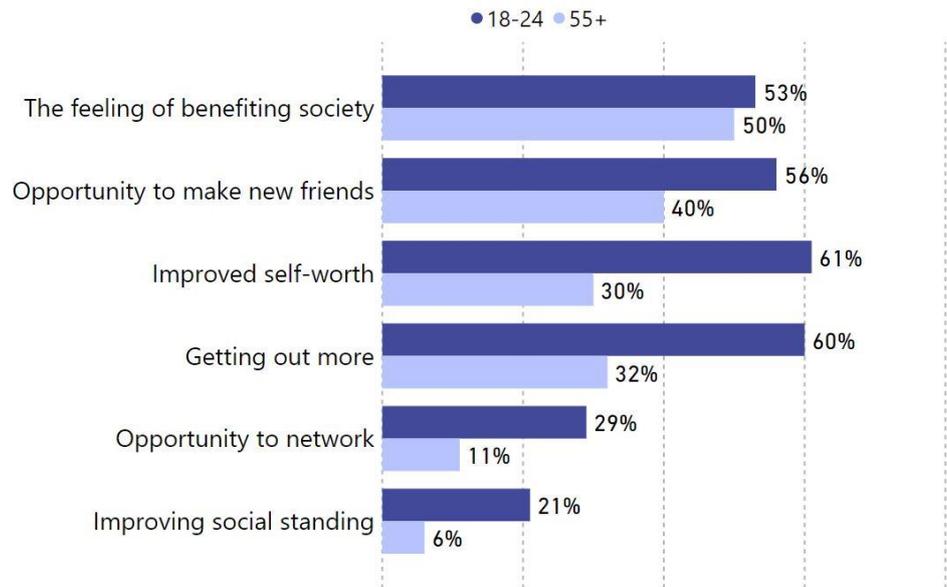
Summary of response: For 55% of the 1,200 people surveyed who do not currently volunteer the main perceived benefit of volunteering is “the feeling of benefiting society.” However, in a world dominated by social media, under 25s are almost twice as likely to volunteer as a way to make new social connections compared to over 55s.

Figure 8. The perceived benefits of volunteering



Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

Figure 9. The perceived benefits of volunteering, 18 to 24 year olds vs over 55s



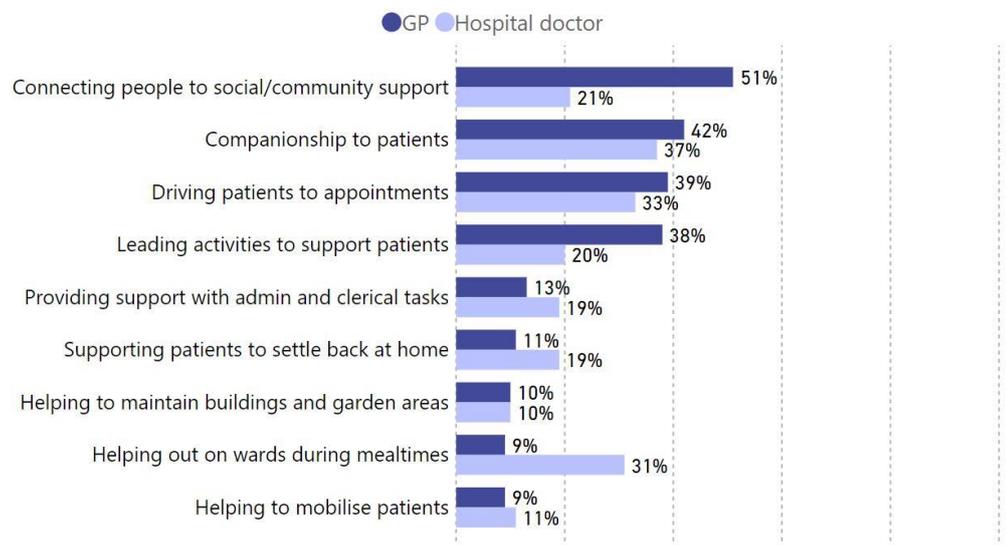
Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

5 Doctors survey results

5.1 Question one: “In your experience what type of volunteers benefit your department, clinic or practice most at present?”

Summary of response: An estimated three million volunteers are already active in the NHS and social care. The 1,000 doctors surveyed described diverse and numerous activities undertaken by volunteers, such as helping patients and visitors find their way around the hospital and providing drinks in waiting areas, while others describe less obvious volunteering roles. For example, one doctor mentioned volunteers helping in the lab, and peer support from ex-service user volunteers such as mental health mentors and advocacy from legal advisors.

Figure 10. Volunteering roles that benefit hospital departments, clinics, or practices most



Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)

5.2 Question two: “In the future do you think that the NHS could benefit from skilled volunteers – people who use their professional skills as volunteers as opposed to their personal skills - beyond the current volunteering roles, to help safeguard its future?”

Summary of response: Eight in 10 (81%) of hospital doctors and GPs say that volunteering in the NHS could be expanded in future to include more skilled volunteers; people who use both their professional and personal skills in their volunteer roles. Doctors who themselves currently volunteer are much more likely to be in favour of skilled volunteering (87%), compared to those that have never volunteered (73%).

Figure 11. Should volunteering in the NHS be expanded to include more skilled volunteers to help safeguard its future?

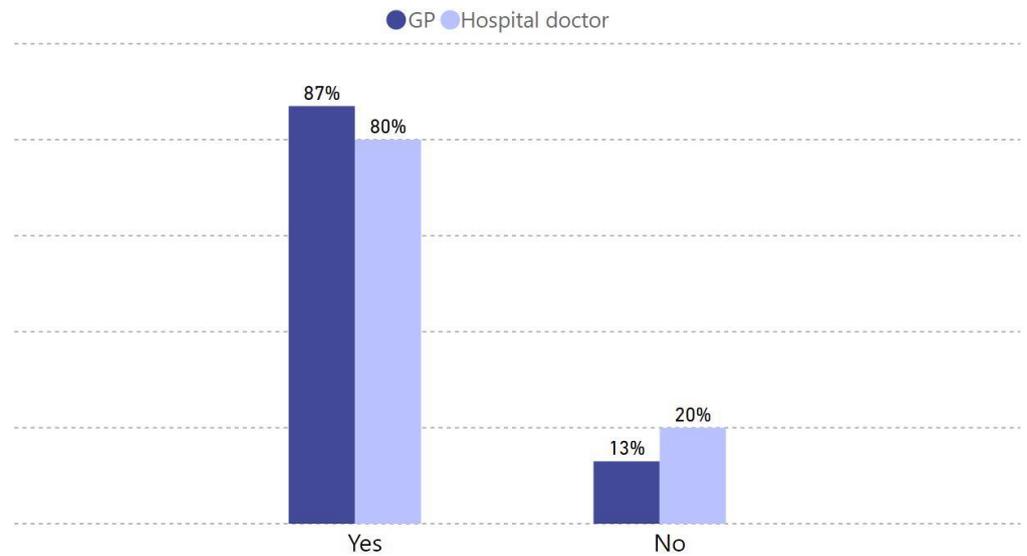


Figure 12. By region - Total number of doctors who agree that volunteering could be expanded in the NHS to include more skilled volunteers to help safeguard its future

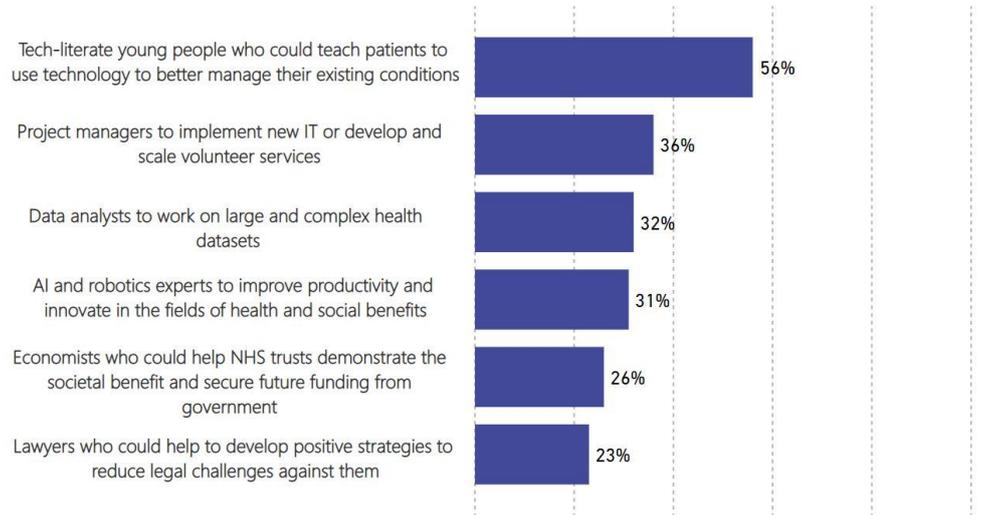


5.3 Question three: “Which of the following skilled volunteering roles would most benefit you/the NHS in the future?”

Summary of response: Over half (56%, comprising 59% of GP’s and 55% of secondary care doctors) say that the NHS would derive most benefit from tech-literate young people who could teach patients to use new technologies. One GP from South Wales commented: “I deal with the very elderly, many of whom struggle with even basic technology. Someone to support them to use current technologies would be the best use of volunteering.”

Meanwhile, a third (36%) of doctors say the NHS would benefit from skilled volunteer project managers who can play a role either implementing new IT or developing and scaling volunteer services. “Skilled volunteers need managing and that takes resources”, commented a hospital consultant from the Midlands.

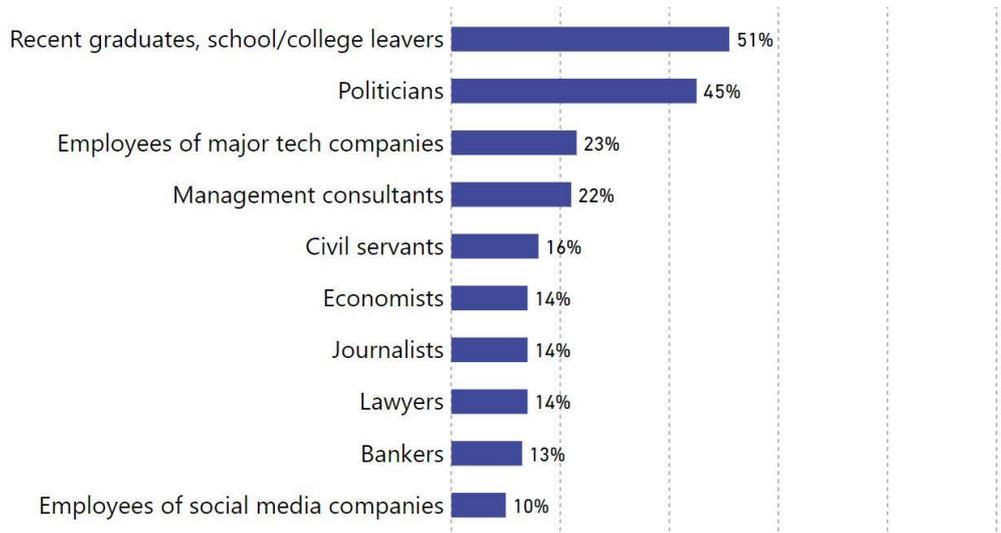
Figure 13. Skilled volunteering roles that could best help the NHS in the future



5.4 Question four: “In your view who would benefit most from volunteering in the NHS/GP practices?”

Summary of responses: Over half (51%) of doctors surveyed say that people under 25 are the group most likely to benefit from their volunteering role, as it would teach them valuable life and people skills. According to doctors, established professionals who would most benefit from increasing their EQ by volunteering include: politicians (45%); employees of major tech companies (23%); management consultants (22%); civil servants (16%); economists, journalists and lawyers (14%); bankers (13%), and employees from social media firms (10%).

Figure 14. Groups of society doctors see as having most to gain from volunteering with the NHS



Unweighted base: All GB Adults who haven't volunteered in the last 12 months (1233)