Volunteering and its Effects on Social Capital and Wellbeing in the UK: Insights from the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study

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Contents

Executive Summary

- The purpose of this report is to use the distinctive data of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) to examine three important elements of contemporary research and policy interest in volunteering in the UK: the rates of volunteering across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; the benefits of volunteering for mental health and wellbeing; and the benefits of volunteering for social capital.

- The report also contains discussions based on extensive literature reviews of academic and third sector research relating to the definition and measurement of volunteering.

- The analyses show that, on average, one in five adults in the UK volunteers in a given year, most of whom do so one or more times a week. If, however, a broader timeframe than a single year is used (such as the eight years afforded by the UKHLS panel), the data shows that about two in five adults have volunteered at least once (and in many cases more frequently) between 2010 and 2018.

- The analyses repeatedly show that there are few differences between the four nations of the UK in terms of volunteering rates, the frequencies with which people typically volunteer, or the relationship between volunteering and other characteristics (such as age, gender, social status, wellbeing or social capital). While there are some small exceptions to this rule, in every analysis the four nations of the UK were shown to be far more similar than different in terms of volunteering, and little is gained from considering the data for a particular nation in isolation. To the extent that this reflects the impact of different policies and funding models employed by the governments of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (including devolved and local government) it suggests that they have had no better or worse impact than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

- The most notable exception to this concerns changes in the rates of volunteering over time. Since 2010, the number of people volunteering in the UK has remained very stable. However, people under-18 in Wales and Scotland stand out for having become more likely to volunteer, while there was no change among those in England.

- Volunteering is heavily influenced by age and the life cycle, with young people in full-time education and the recently retired being the most likely to report volunteering in any given

year. The least likely to volunteer are those who have recently left full-time education. If the broader, eight-year timeframe is employed, however, the difference between the recently retired and everyone else disappears, and young people are shown to be the most likely to have volunteered. In other words, since 2010, people under 21 have been the most likely to volunteer at least once.

- The other key determinant of volunteering explored in this study is socio-economic status, with people with higher educational qualifications and/or in professional, managerial or technical occupations the most likely to volunteer. The least likely to volunteer are those in poorly paid, insecure employment.

- The analyses of the relationship between mental wellbeing and volunteering provided little evidence of volunteering having a beneficial impact. While those who volunteer were found to have better wellbeing in later UKHLS surveys, this had far more to with them also having better wellbeing before they volunteered than the benefits of their volunteer experience. There were some indications of a positive impact from volunteering on wellbeing, but it was very small. By far the more important causal relationship between these two characteristics is that people with better mental wellbeing are more likely to choose to volunteer.

- The analyses of the relationship between volunteering and social capital (measured in terms of membership of community associations, neighbourhood cohesion and neighbourhood connection) showed that volunteering is an effective means of increasing social capital. There is clear evidence that those who chose to volunteer are more likely to have higher levels of social capital to begin with, however it is also clear that those who volunteered (regardless of their social capital to begin with) were likely to generate more social capital as a result.

- That said, there is also a darker side to the positive effect of volunteering on social capital, in that it is a source of widening inequalities in that valuable resource. The difference in social capital between those who volunteered and those who did not was always larger than any positive change in social capital associated with volunteering; moreover, in some cases, the beneficial impact of volunteering was greater for those with the highest levels of social capital. While those with less social capital can increase it through volunteering, therefore, they are unlikely to ever close the gap between themselves and those with higher levels of

social capital. At the same time, those with higher levels of social capital are likely to, at least according to some indicators, derive more of a benefit from their volunteering.

Chapter One: Introduction

The significance of volunteering and social action on the policy agenda of countries in Europe, America and Australasia has rarely been as high as today. Since the turn of the millennium, governments have increasingly promoted volunteering as a way of achieving a growing list of policy objectives, from combating crime, anti-social behaviour, social exclusion, loneliness and poor mental health, to arresting the decline of youth political participation, increasing employability, delivering public services and promoting 'good citizenship' (Paine et al 2010; Volunteer Scotland 2017; Brodie et al 2011; Doyle et al 2014; Bussell and Forbes 2002; Vromen 2003). Even in times of spending restraint and economic difficulty, governments continue to spend millions on schemes that promote and facilitate volunteering – particularly among young people. Moreover, volunteering contributes billions of pounds to domestic national economies, and is argued to make further indirect contributions by reducing the expenditure associated with social problems (such as crime) (Holliday 2018; WCVA 2016). At the same time, a growing number of academics highlight the increasingly important role of volunteering in the political repertoire of modern citizens (Sloam 2014; Dalton 2013; 2015) – with more and more (often younger) people using volunteering to promote their political agendas beyond the realm of traditional, formalised political activity (such as voting).

The growing importance of volunteering to policymakers, citizens and academia has led to an increased interest in social research relating to it:

- how it can be defined and measured; what characteristics, motivations and circumstances make people more or less likely to volunteer;
- how people can be encouraged to keep volunteering once they have started; and
- what the consequences of volunteering are for individuals and communities.

While there is a healthy debate on all these issues, studying the consequences of volunteering is, perhaps, the most challenging because of the difficulty in obtaining reliable data on characteristics (such as health or political engagement) change over time. In particular, the study of volunteering is hindered by the lack of panel data – i.e. data collected from the same group of individuals over an extended time. While some qualitative data of this kind has been collected for academic and third-sector research (usually through interviews with volunteers), there are virtually no large-scale social surveys with representative samples of national populations that can be used to study volunteering. This has made the identification of the consequences of volunteering for individuals' health, political behaviour, employability etc. extremely difficult, and continues to cast doubt on the validity of many conclusions about the individual benefits of volunteering.

This report contributes to these debates and attempts to overcome some of these limitations by analysing a relatively under-used resource for the study of volunteering: the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). The key advantage of UKHLS over other surveys is that it interviews the same sample of households every year, and asks the same questions on a regular basis.[1] It also collects data on a host of social, economic, health-related and political characteristics, meaning it can be used to explore the consequences of volunteering for a wide range of individual-level (and, indeed, community level) traits with greater reliability and validity than is possible from other surveys. In addition, UKHLS is a UK-wide survey and applies the same methodology and interview to all participants. This means that it can be used to compare rates, causes or consequences of volunteering across the UK more reliably than comparisons based on the use of nation-specific surveys (such as the Community Life Survey, the Scottish Household Survey and the National Survey for Wales), which tend to use different sampling and data collection techniques, and measures of volunteering (Volunteer Scotland 2017a). This makes UKHLS uniquely placed to explore many questions of interest to leading third sector and governmental actors regarding volunteering, and its consequences, in the UK.

Produced as a part of the Understanding Society and Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods funded study, *Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box*, and in collaboration with colleagues from Volunteer Scotland, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), the Welsh Government, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), this report uses the UKHLS to study two key areas of volunteering:

1. It looks at rates of volunteering in the UK as a whole and across the four nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and explores what panel data can tell us in comparison with cross-sectional surveys.
2. It uses UKHLS to examine the consequences of volunteering in two areas of particular relevance to current social policy (particularly in Scotland and Wales): mental wellbeing and social capital.

Together with the rest of the *Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box* study, this report provides a detailed assessment of how volunteering policy can be used to address concerns regarding poor mental health and wellbeing, social capital and cohesion, and (youth) political engagement.

[1] Though some households do not participate in the survey every year, and sometimes it adds different questions or modifies existing questions for specific survey waves.

The report is organised as follows. Chapter Two discusses some of the debates surrounding what is actually meant by 'volunteering' and how it is measured in UKHLS, and what some of the advantages and disadvantages of the UKHLS measure are for this research. It also provides details on UKHLS itself, and how the analyses presented in the rest of the report have been conducted and organised. Chapter Three then reports what UKHLS can tell us about volunteering rates in the UK (and the four nations), and how they differ by age, gender, socio-economic status and the urban/rural divide. Chapter Four starts by discussing the challenges of assessing the consequences of volunteering in social research and highlights the advantages and limitations of UKHLS in studying them. It then examines the consequences of volunteering for wellbeing and social capital, and considers some of the implications of its findings for the different policy approaches used to promote volunteering across the UK.

Chapter Two: What is 'Volunteering' and how can we measure it?

Defining Volunteering

The term 'volunteering' is typically used in academia, education, government, communities and the third sector to refer to activities that are thought to provide individual and communal benefits and involve some kind of donation of time to help others (Cnaan et al 1996; Carson 2000). Developing a working definition of 'volunteering', however, is extremely difficult, with much research focused solely on trying to work out what 'volunteering' actually is and (perhaps more challengingly) what it is not. Given that most people seem to have some idea of what 'volunteering' is, and that these ideas seem to be (on the surface) largely similar, worrying about a more refined and accurate definition may seem trivial, or even counterproductive, if it is something that nobody can agree on. Without having a clear idea of what 'volunteering' is and is not, however, it is difficult to come up with reliable ways of measuring it, studying its consequences, or assessing policies that are designed to promote it.

Moreover, once what is meant by 'volunteering' is interrogated the apparently cosy consensus starts to crumble: does it include, for example, the volunteering that school children in Wales are compelled to do to obtain the Welsh Baccalaureate? Some definitions would exclude such activity because it is not entirely voluntary (Cnaan et al 1996). What about activity in which people receive pay for their work, or are paid to 'volunteer' by their employer instead of their normal duties? Some argue that 'volunteers' must, by definition, freely donate their time and not receive payment, while others suggest that it is the outcomes of the 'voluntary' activity that matters more than the benefits the volunteer receives (Adler and Goggin 2005). Does the motivation of the volunteer count, and if so what if the motivations are not altruistic but instrumental, such as someone who volunteers not to help others but to improve their CV (Wattenberg 2012; Cnaan et al 1996)? Is it still 'volunteering' if the volunteer gains more from their experience than the beneficiary of the activity, or gains nothing from it (Handy et al 2010; WCVA 2016; Gaby 2017)? While some argue that the key contribution a volunteer makes is their time, others wonder whether donations of other resources – such as money, tools and equipment, or even anatomy (such as blood) – could also mark someone as a volunteer (Bussell and Forbes 2002; Adler and Goggin 2005)?

Attempts to identify a single definition have also been criticised for overlooking the enormous scale and variety of activities that 'volunteers' undertake, and the range of organisational contexts in which they do them (Bussell and Forbes 2002; Yeung 2017). There is a large difference – in terms of the time and skills required, the motivations and reasons the individual might have, and the

expected benefits for the individual and their community – between, for example, the chairman of a tenants' and residents' association, a warden in a local church, someone who picks up litter from their street on their way home from work, someone who raises money for charity through sponsored runs and someone who works with a local community group to organise shopping trips for elderly neighbours. All would be considered examples of 'volunteering', yet could a single definition of what exactly a 'volunteer' is hope to capture the complexity and variation of the skills, benefits, motivations, experiences and contexts associated with them? While some argue that it is possible to develop such a definition, others suggest that considering the full range of 'volunteers' that exist in modern society as a homogenous group is not only unrealistic but overlooks the distinct experiences and activities of people of different ages, gender, communities, religions, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds (Bussell and Forbes 2002; Hustinx et al 2010a).

The debate is complicated still further by the fact that whatever 'volunteering' is, it is changing and evolving. In part this is because of changes in the way the public mindset understands volunteering and the uses to which 'volunteers' are put by government. During the interwar years, for example, a 'volunteer' used to refer to someone who became a soldier to fight for their country without being conscripted. Since the end of the last century it has become associated with civil society and conceptions of citizenship, while more recently it has referred to forms of civic activity and contribution that increasingly challenge traditional conceptions of 'volunteering' because the 'volunteers' are paid or coerced (Hustinx et al 2010a; Brodie et al 2011). The encouragement of citizens to 'volunteer' and take over the running of public services and welfare schemes following the implementation of the 'Big Society' initiative, for example, or the increasingly common requirement that applicants to universities must volunteer, or the growing number of businesses that donate money to community causes by allowing their employees to volunteer during work hours, have all affected what it means to be a 'volunteer' (Hustinx et al 2010a; Adler and Goggin 2005).

On top of that is the evolution of what 'volunteers' actually do. One area of consensus in the academic literature is that 'older', more traditional forms of volunteering connected to social institutions (such as churches or community associations), which tend to involve long-term memberships or commitments, and for which altruistic motivations are expected to play a key role, are becoming less common (Rehberg 2005; Paine et al 2010; Wilson 2000). They are being replaced by 'newer' forms, in which volunteers have specific and often far more limited expectations as to the extent, form and content of their involvement, and in which the benefits to the volunteer are more important. It may also involve challenging, rather than supporting, traditional organisational structures (Hustinx et al 2010b). These 'new' forms of volunteering include more short-term or

discrete tasks that commit individuals to specific objectives rather than a long-term organisational commitment; this is known as 'episodic volunteering'. There is also 'virtual volunteering', where people (particularly technologically competent young people) volunteer without being physically present, such as managing online content, sharing campaigns, raising funds or spreading information through social media and the Internet. There are also examples of 'voluntourism', where people (again, typically young) go to foreign countries to volunteer in exotic locations, often related to economic development or environmental campaigns. This trend towards 'new' forms of volunteering is suggested to be driven by generational changes in the way citizens relate to society and their communities: older people are more likely to remain committed to more traditional forms of volunteering, while younger people are more likely to embrace newer forms with clearer expectations of what they wish to get out of (and what they want to contribute) to the work (Rehberg 2005; Wilson and Musick 1997).

There are, in short, no straight-forward, universally accepted definitions of volunteering. If one were to be developed there is a good chance that it would either be better suited to describing the volunteering of some people rather than others, or be out of date within a few years as the way people interact with their communities, the way they understand 'volunteering', or the institutional and communal opportunities for people to volunteer (such as those afforded by governments inviting people to run public services) continued to evolve. Studies that have grappled with how we might define and understand volunteering have instead emphasised a series of principles that lay behind most definitions and that can be used to give some idea of what we are talking about (Cnaan et al 1996; Hustinx et al 2010a; Bussell and Forbes 2002; Paine et al 2010; Handy et al 2010). These include:

- Some element of exchange, in which volunteers give their time to achieve or receive some other benefit, and indeed the decision about whether to volunteer at all may be affected by a 'cost benefit' analysis of the consequences (for them or others) of their activity;
- A contribution on the part of the volunteer for the benefit of others – as noted above, for some this is time, while for others it could mean other resources;
- The activity is undertaken with at least a partial objective of benefitting others or one's community (i.e. at least part of the motivation for volunteering is altruistic)
- The activity is undertaken freely by the volunteer (i.e. they are not coerced);
- The volunteer receives no payment (though they may receive non-monetary rewards or their expenses covered)

The importance of these principles is that they are not only consistent with most academic definitions of 'volunteering', but are also reflected in public understandings of the term and of what a 'volunteer' is and why the activity can be considered praiseworthy (Handy et al 2010; Adler and Goggin 2005; Bussell and Forbes 2002; Cnaan et al 1996). In other words, while it might be all but impossible to identify a clear definition of volunteering that is universally accepted and fits all activities that people may suggest are associated with the concept, these principles are the basis of common, broad understanding of what the concept refers to that is shared by academics, citizens, policy-makers and volunteers themselves.

Measuring Volunteering in Social Surveys

There is an equally difficult debate regarding the way in which volunteering can be measured in social research, and particularly surveys. Recognising the complexity of defining the concept and accounting for the full range of activities that could be considered 'volunteering', there are generally two approaches. The first, and by far the most common, is to simply ask whether respondents recalled volunteering in a given time frame (usually the previous twelve months). Sometimes, more detail is obtained by asking a follow-up question of how common such activity was, or by distinguishing between activities with an organisation (such as a church or the Scouts) and those that were outside of an institutional framework. This approach is relatively cheap and easy to implement, requiring no more than two or three questions, and it produces data that is relatively straight-forward to analyse. Using such questions makes it far easier to collect measures of 'volunteering' in a range of social surveys, and to justify their inclusion in high-quality but extremely expensive surveys (such as UKHLS). If such simple and affordable questions could not be used, there would be far less data available on volunteering in the UK (and elsewhere). A further advantage is that the question is more flexible when dealing with the evolution of the understanding of the term 'volunteering'; as noted above, its meaning has evolved substantially in recent decades, such that people who say they volunteer today could be referring to quite different activities from those who said they volunteered forty years ago. By basing the question around whatever the respondent interprets as 'volunteering', this approach is capable of measuring volunteering while keeping up with the evolution of its meaning (although it cannot shed any light on how that meaning might have evolved).

It can be criticised, however, because research has shown that – while *most* people tend to share common conceptions of what 'volunteering' is – there are several small groups (such as ethnic minorities or people from poorer communities) who have different understandings of 'volunteering'

(Davis-Smith 1999; Smith et al 2005). Some have even cast doubt on the assumption that common understandings of 'volunteering' exist in survey respondents at all (Hall 2001). A second problem is that the term 'volunteering' is perceived by some to have inherent political or ideological connotations that they do not wish to be associated with, meaning that even if they engage in activities that are considered to be 'volunteering' by most academic definitions they reject the description of them as such (Davis-Smith 1999). Davis-Smith (1999) found that young males, and especially those from poorer backgrounds, were the most likely to reject their acts as 'volunteering' for these reasons. Finally, this approach has been criticised because it is insensitive to the nuances of different forms of volunteering; as noted above, for example, there is a lot of difference between the chairman of a local tenants' and residents' association and someone who raises money for charity through sponsored running; they are likely to have different motivations for what they do, to have different demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and to produce different benefits for themselves and their community. In a survey question asking whether they had volunteered in the past year, however, the two would be indistinguishable, and so our understanding of their respective volunteering activities more limited. A final criticism is that this approach tends to understate the levels of volunteering respondents engage in, because respondents are not given much encouragement to think about their activities and consider whether they are volunteering, or a reminder of things they may have done that they consider volunteering but forgot about (Rooney et al 2004; Hall 2001; Steinberg et al 2002). Somebody who regularly picks up litter in their street, goes shopping for an elderly neighbour and picks their friends' children up from school may, by some definitions, be considered to be an active volunteer in their community, but they may not consider such acts to be 'volunteering'. As a result, they may answer 'no' to a single question asking whether they had volunteered. Moreover, this is particularly problematic for measuring some of the 'newer', episodic forms of volunteering that may not have been particularly important or demanding for the individual (Hall 2001). Conversely, if they were presented with a series of questions that prompted them to think about what they had done for their community, or invited them to identify whether they had engaged in any acts from a list that included going shopping for neighbours etc., the survey may produce quite different estimates of how active a volunteer that individual is.

The second approach is to use an extensive and extremely detailed survey dedicated almost entirely to measuring volunteering, which includes many questions and usually invites respondents to identify the acts associated with volunteering they have engaged in from a long and detailed list (sometimes accompanied by open answer questions as well). An example of a survey using this approach is the Community Life Survey, which provides estimates of volunteering (or social action) in England through asking respondents whether they have engaged in any of the acts in a list of

more than fifty associated with volunteering and social action. The advantage of such a survey is that it addresses many (though not all) of the short comings of the more common approach outlined above. It produces more detailed data on the types of volunteering people have engaged in, and the various characteristics and benefits associated with those different types, and it is not as susceptible to under-reporting because it does not face the same problem with having to use the term 'volunteer' that might have negative connotations for some respondents. Moreover, survey participants are given more prompts (from the extensive questions) to think about and remember their volunteering activities, which usually results in much higher estimates of volunteering rates (Rooney et al 2004; Hall 2001). Finally, it does not rely on all respondents having the same understanding of what 'volunteering' is because they are not asked whether they 'volunteered' but rather whether they had engaged in a specific range of activities (Hall 2001; Steinberg et al 2002; Yeung 2017; Rooney et al 2004).

The drawbacks to this approach are that, first, restricting what is considered 'volunteering' to a specific list of activities means that what is being measured is the researcher's understanding of 'volunteering' translated into a list of activities. The possibility for respondents who may have engaged in activities that they consider to be volunteering, but the researcher either overlooked or does not consider as such, to be identified as 'volunteers' in such a survey is removed. The second is that this can be a prohibitively expensive approach, costing many times more than the alternatives. It is for this reason that surveys using a detailed battery of questions to measure volunteering are rare: there is no regular survey that uses anywhere near as many questions as the Community Life Survey, and the highest quality social surveys that use large samples and face to face interviews for data collection cannot afford to include them. Some alternatives use far more limited batteries of no more than a dozen questions (such as the National Survey for Wales or the Scottish Household Survey) to try and get some of the benefit of the more detailed approach while avoiding all the pitfalls of the former.

Measuring Volunteering in UKHLS

UKHLS – also often referred to as 'Understanding Society' – is the largest longitudinal survey of its kind. Every year, the same sample of around 40,000 households (and more than 50,000 individuals) in the UK are interviewed, with every member of participating households over the age of 16 invited to participate. The survey allows for members of households to be matched with each other, making it one of the few surveys in the world that allows for a direct study of relationships between spouses, siblings, parents and children etc. Moreover, UKHLS also includes a 'Youth Panel', in which

children as young as 11 in participating households are invited to completely a smaller, simpler survey; boost samples for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that allow for representative analyses of the four nations to be conducted; and an 'Ethnic Minority Boost Sample' through which additional samples of the five largest ethnic minority groups in the UK (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African and Caribbean) are recruited. UKHLS is also unrivalled for its capacity to link survey respondents (or their households) with various geographic identifiers, including not only country within the UK but a host of others such as parliamentary constituencies, local authority wards and even post-codes.[2]

UKHLS uses the most common approach to measure volunteering: relying on survey respondents sharing a common understanding of what 'volunteering' is and that their face-to-face method of data collection minimises error arising from them not being clear as to whether their activities count as 'volunteering'. Respondents are first asked 'in the last 12 months, have you given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity?'. Those who reply 'yes' are then asked 'Including any time spent at home or elsewhere, about how often over the last 12 months have you generally done something to help any of these organisations?'. Respondents are given the choice of the following responses: 'on 3 or more days a week', 'twice a week', 'once a week', 'once a fortnight', 'at least once a month', 'quite often but not regularly', 'just a few times', 'one-off activity' or 'helped or worked on a seasonal basis'.

This question format has two main advantages:

- While suggesting that volunteering is activity limited to interaction with a formal organisation of some kind, it does not necessarily imply membership of an organisation for an activity to be counted as 'volunteering' (a problem among particularly older surveys and academic studies of 'volunteering' is that they simply associated it with membership of community associations), and
- it does not impose a particularly restrictive definition of the term on the respondent, who is free to consider virtually anything that was unpaid and helpful to any organisation as 'volunteering'.

The follow-up question also provides for considerable variation between frequencies of volunteering, and the fact that this data is collected through a face-to-face interview means that the

[2] More information on the UKHLS sample, its design and the questions it includes can be found here: https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/documentation.

interviewer can provide prompts or answer questions that will improve the response rate and quality of the data. That said, the measure can be criticised because it almost certainly produces a more conservative estimate than it would if a more detailed range of questions was used. Some respondents who have (as far as academic definitions are concerned) volunteered also may say that they have not because of the negative connotations they associate with the term. Finally, it is not sensitive to differences in the understanding of what 'volunteering' is between the respondents, or between the respondents and researcher.

While the survey question of UKHLS is problematic in some ways, the survey design of UKHLS is vastly superior to other surveys of volunteering in the UK. First, it is the only panel survey that regularly collects data on volunteering in the UK. Second, it has a very large, high-quality sample, including over 40,000 households. Considerable resources are spent encouraging sampled households to participate in the survey (far more than is spent by, for example, online surveys), meaning the sample is also typically more representative and suffers from fewer problems associated with non-response bias. Third, UKHLS collects data on a host of social, political, medical and economic characteristics, with most questions asked every year. This means that the link between volunteering and this wide range of characteristics can be studied, and because we can directly examine how those traits change over time depending on whether someone volunteered (or how frequently they volunteered compared with others), we can be far more confident about the causes and consequences of volunteering than is possible in most other research. Fourth, UKHLS collects data from most of its sample through face to face interview (some elements of the survey are completed through a paper questionnaire, and any members of the Youth Panel – aged between 11 and 15 in participating households – are surveyed using a questionnaire rather than an interview). This method is known to provide higher quality data than alternatives (such as online surveys) and is particularly effective in minimising non-response. Finally, UKHLS uses almost the same methodology to recruit and survey participants across the UK, making it far more suitable for comparing rates of volunteering (or the causes and consequences of volunteering) across the UK's different nations and regions than the main surveys used to study volunteering in England (the Community Life Survey), Wales (the National Survey for Wales) and Scotland (the Scottish Household Survey) (Volunteer Scotland 2017a).

The use of UKHLS in this Report

UKHLS Survey Waves

UKHLS was first fielded in 2010/11 and has run every year since. Each individual UKHLS survey is called a 'wave'. Owing to its large sample and complex design, the data collection period of UKHLS is extensive – while every household is interviewed annually, each wave of data collection takes around two years to complete. There have been a total of eight UKHLS waves since 2010, with the ninth in the field at the time of writing. Each wave is identified by a letter, corresponding to the 24-month period of data collection, as follows:

Wave 1 – A 2010/11

Wave 2 – B 2010/12

Wave 3 – C 2011/13

Wave 4 – D 2012/14

Wave 5 – E 2013/15

Wave 6 – F 2014/16

Wave 7 – G 2015/17

Wave 8 – H 2016/18

Throughout the report, the waves are referred to by the years in which the data was collected. Data on volunteering was collected in the 2010/12, 2012/14, 2014/16 and 2016/18 surveys, and these are the focus of the report. Data on some of the characteristics related to volunteering (such as wellbeing or social capital) was collected in some of the other waves.

Details of Analyses Used

Most analyses in this report are based on descriptive statistics: comparing proportions or average scores across different groups within the UKHLS sample (such as volunteers and non-volunteers). While more complex and sophisticated analyses are, of course, possible to study the causes and consequences of volunteering, they are also far more intensive and require a great deal more explanation and statistical detail, which is beyond the scope of this report. At various points, however, reference will be made to whether the difference between two figures in the data is 'statistically significant'. This is simply a reference to the estimated reliability of the claim that there is a difference between those two figures in the true population (in our case, the population of the UK or the four nations); it does not mean that the difference is necessarily large or of any great

importance. Testing whether a statistical is 'statistically significant' is a way of assuring that the figure we have found is not simply the result of random chance. For example, in our sample of the UK we may find that people 50 per cent of adults in Scotland volunteered in 2010/12, while 30 per cent of adults in Wales did so. This 20-point difference might reflect a genuine difference in the propensity of Scottish and Welsh adults to volunteer, or it might reflect random chance (e.g., we may simply have more volunteers in the Scottish sample). Social researchers use tests of statistical significance to give an idea of how confident we can be that such a finding is 'real' i.e. that it exists in the population we surveyed to learn about in the first place. For most social research, the confidence threshold of 95% is the basis of significance testing i.e. we are comfortable identifying a finding as 'real' (that is, statistically significant) if the probability of it *not* being find in the real population is below 5 per cent.

For some of the analyses in this report, differences between groups (such as nations) were tested to determine whether they were statistically significant, simply to provide a further indication of how much attention should be given to what are often very small differences. Just because a difference is statistically significant, however, does not mean that it is substantively significant; later in the report, for example, a difference in volunteering rates between England and Northern Ireland of around 3 percentage points will be reported. This difference is statistically significant; however, a difference of around 3 per cent in the proportion of adults volunteering between England and Northern Ireland is hardly indicative of a dramatically different civic culture or volunteering policy intervention. Where significance tests are reported, the reason for doing so and the attention that should be given to the conclusions will be outlined in the text. Unless otherwise reported, determinations of statistical significance were made using two-tailed t-tests in Stata and a confidence threshold of 95 per cent.

Comparisons across Nations

One of the key purposes of this report is to examine how levels of volunteering vary across nations of the UK, and to consider whether some of the relationships between volunteering and other characteristics (such as age, gender or social capital) vary between those nations. For this reason, the charts and tables (particularly in Chapter Three) include data for the whole of the UK as well as broken down by nation. For the analyses in Chapter Four, however, the nation breakdowns are not always provided, for two reasons. First, as will be discussed below, the national differences within the UK in volunteering rates or the relationship between volunteering and other characteristics are very small: the four nations are far more similar than they are different, and virtually nothing is gained by analysing data for England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland as opposed to the UK as a

whole. Second, in some instances breaking the data down by nation – in addition to whether respondents volunteered and their levels of social capital or wellbeing – leads to small samples. Rather than produce analyses of questionable reliability as a result and given that there are no substantial differences between the four nations, the focus is on the UK-wide sample in these instances. While new and much larger samples would be needed for the four nations of the UK to make certain of this, the analyses in this report provide considerable evidence that assuming that results found at the UK level are applicable to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is reasonable.

Chapter Three: Volunteering in the UK

Volunteering Rates across the UK

When assessing rates of volunteering across the nations and regions of the UK, or internationally, as well as the effectiveness of policies designed to promote volunteering implemented by different governments, an enduring challenge for academics, policymakers and the third sector is measuring volunteering in a comparable way across those nations. The Institute for Government (2016) has called the UK a 'policy laboratory', because devolution to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has meant that there are numerous different governments developing different approaches to solving social problems. While all the governments of the UK see volunteering as important, they take quite different approaches to promoting it. Any assessment of which (if any) policies are the more effective requires a comparable approach of measuring volunteering across the four nations.

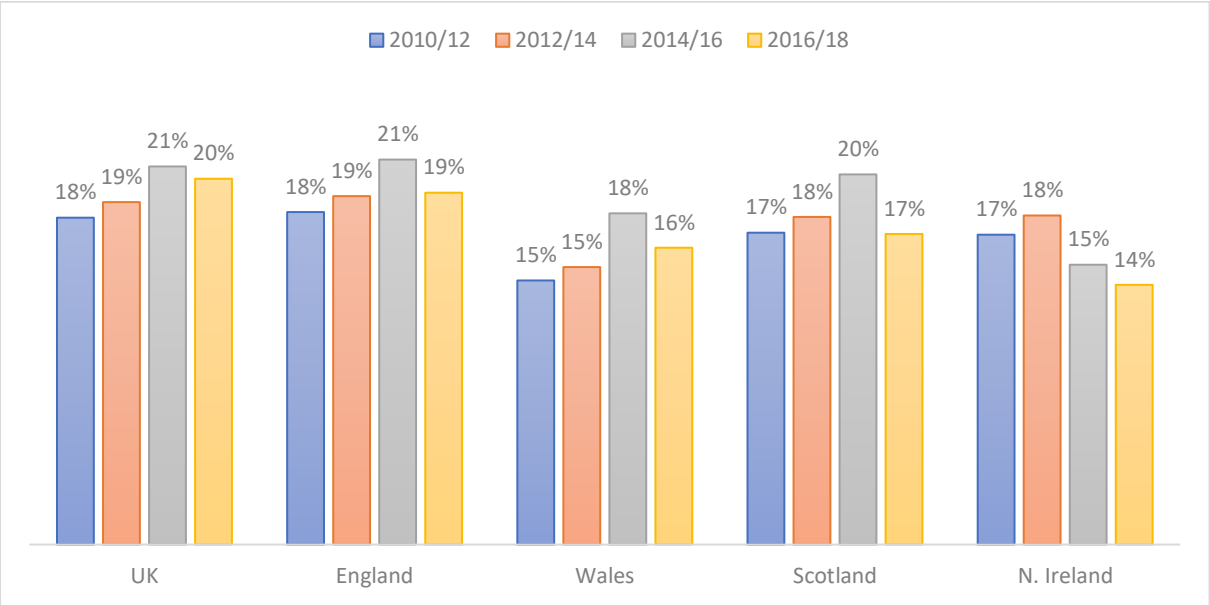
With the primary surveys used to study volunteering in the four nations (the Community Life Survey in England, the Scottish Household Survey in Scotland and the National Survey for Wales, with Northern Ireland not having a dedicated survey), however, this is all but impossible. Volunteer Scotland's 2017 report 'Volunteering Participation: Comparative Analysis across the UK' provides a detailed assessment of this problem. It shows that while the surveys are similar in so far as they interview people over-16 years old, use face-to-face interviews (though this is changing in England) and recruit nationally representative samples, they are also different in three key ways: (1) they use different definitions of volunteering, (2) different designs of question to measure it, and (3) different prompts to stimulate respondents' thinking about volunteering and social action. As a result, when such surveys identify differences in volunteering rates between the four nations of the UK – as they frequently do, with the Community Life Survey suggesting around 40 per cent of adults volunteer in England compared with 27 per cent in Scotland, for example – we cannot be sure whether this is a genuine finding or reflects differences in survey methodology.

UKHLS provides a unique insight into volunteering rates across the UK because it collects data in the same way in all four nations. While there are concerns about its likely under-estimation of volunteering rates (see above), this does not affect its ability to compare rates of volunteering across the nations of the UK. Figure One shows the levels of volunteering in the UK and each of the four nations according to the four UKHLS surveys that include the volunteering questions (i.e. 2010/12, 2012/14, 2014/16 and 2016/18). It reports the proportion of respondents who reported volunteering at all (regardless of frequency) in any of the four surveys. Consistent with other analyses that have suggested volunteering rates have been stable in the UK for some years (e.g., Volunteer Scotland 2017), the data shows little variation in the proportion of adults reporting

volunteering since 2010/12, though there was a small increase in the proportion of volunteers after 2012/14. In the 2010/12 survey, for example, around 18 per cent reported volunteering; by 2014/16 this had increased to 21 per cent, and was at 20 per cent in the 2016/18 survey. This pattern was replicated in England, Wales and Scotland – though not Northern Ireland, where there was a small decline in volunteering between 2012/14 (when 18 per cent of adults reported volunteering) and 2016/18 (when 14 per cent did so).

There are also some small differences in the overall proportions of volunteers in the four nations. The highest volunteering rate was found in England, where an average of 19 per cent of adults volunteered between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys. This was followed by Scotland on 18 per cent and then Wales and Northern Ireland, where the average was 16 per cent. The difference in the volunteering rates for the latest survey (2016/18) between England and Wales, and between England and Northern Ireland, were statistically significant, but those between England and Scotland were not. There is, therefore, evidence of a marginally greater propensity among adults in England and Scotland to volunteer than those in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Figure One: Volunteering in the UK, 2010 – 2018 (% volunteered)



Figures Two and Three show the data on the frequency of volunteering in the UK and the four nations, respectively. Respondents were categorised depending on whether they had volunteered as a 'one-off' or infrequently, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, or three times or more a week. The graphs show that most volunteers do so weekly, with around 7 per cent of UK adults volunteering once or twice a week – a figure that has barely changed since 2010/12. The second most common is 'infrequent volunteering' (with around 6 per cent of adults volunteering infrequently) followed by monthly volunteering (around 4 per cent). Around 2 per cent volunteer more than weekly. The very slight growth in volunteering rates identified in Figure One is the result of more people volunteering 'infrequently' or 'monthly' – though between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys, the actual proportion of adults engaging in volunteering either infrequently or monthly rose by barely 1 point.

There are no indications of notable differences, or changes over time, in the frequencies of volunteering across the four nations. The pattern in all four countries mirrors that of the whole of the UK, with no more than a 1-point difference between them for any given frequency of volunteering in any given survey. The decline of volunteering in Northern Ireland after 2012/14 shown in Figure One is reflected in a small decline in all four frequencies of volunteering in Figure Three, suggesting the country has witnessed a small decline in overall volunteering of many forms rather than of a particular type or frequency. In general, the story of volunteering in the UK since 2010 is one of stability. Around one in five adults volunteer in any given year, regardless of which of the four nations they live in, and most of them do so at least once a week, with a minority doing so

on an irregular basis. There is evidence of a tiny increase in the minority of adults who volunteer less frequently, but it is so small as to be virtually irrelevant. The rate of growth in such volunteers is equivalent to less than 0.001 percentage points a year.

Figure Two: Frequency of Volunteering in the UK, 2010 – 2018 (% volunteered)

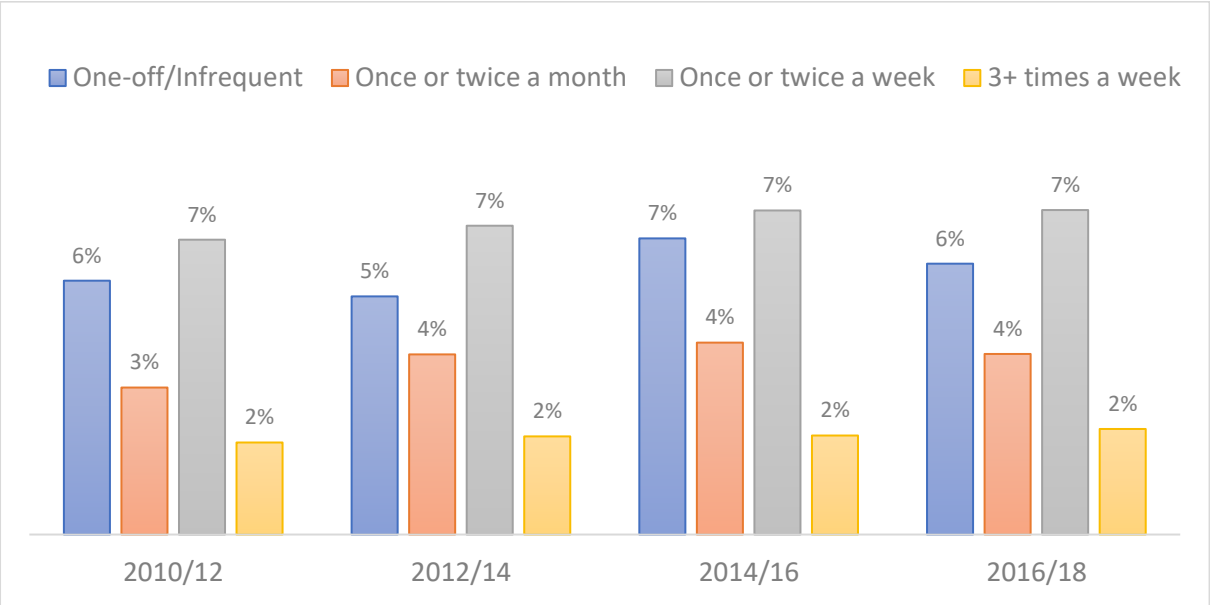
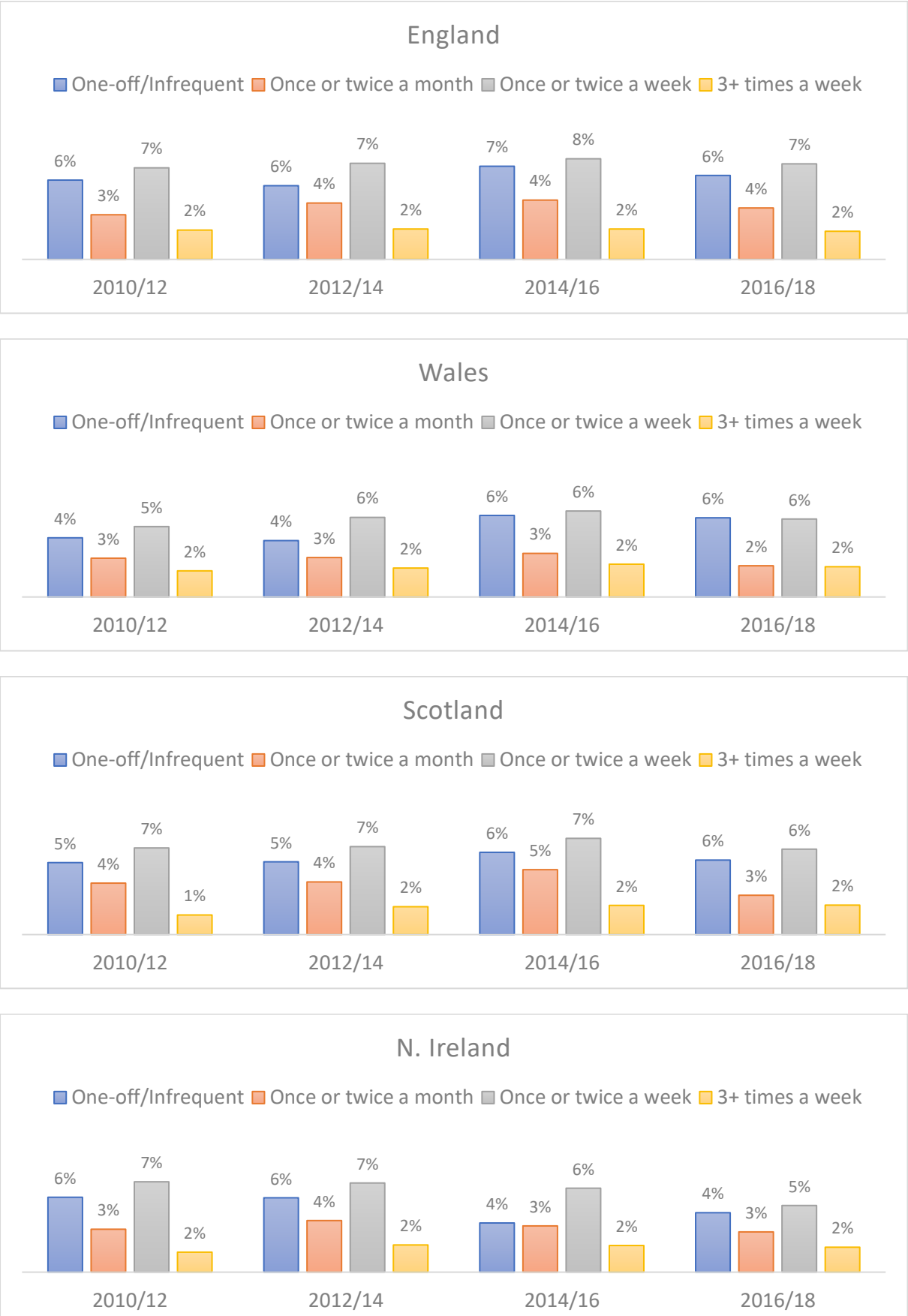


Figure Three: Frequency of Volunteering in the nations, 2010 – 2018, (% volunteered)



A Broader Measure of Volunteering over Time: The Recurrence of Volunteering in the UK

The data above is based on a 'conventional' measure of volunteering, i.e. a question asking whether UKHLS respondents reported volunteering in a given survey year, and how often they did so. This is comparable to the measure used in most other surveys of volunteering, which are cross-sectional i.e. they collect data from a single point in time and ask respondents about their previous behaviour. The panel nature of UKHLS makes it possible to measure volunteering in a different way: namely, by taking account of respondents' answers to the questions in all four survey waves simultaneously, essentially providing data on the recurrence of volunteering over an eight-year period between 2010 and 2018. As opposed to identifying how many respondents reported volunteering in a given year, it shows the proportion that volunteered over a sustained period, intermittently or for a brief period only in those eight years. It can give an indication, therefore, of how many people volunteer only once over a long period (even if they do so frequently, such as several times a week, within that time), how many volunteer for a sustained period of their lives, and how many may volunteer on and off to an extent not captured by a survey asking about activity over the previous twelve months.

Respondents were placed into one of seven categories as follows:

(1) those who never volunteered at all between 2010 and 2018;
(2) those who volunteered in one survey wave only (regardless of which survey it was, and how frequently they did so at the time);
(3) those who volunteered in two inconsecutive surveys,
(4) those who volunteered in two consecutive surveys;
(5) those who volunteered in three inconsecutive surveys;
(6) those who volunteered in three consecutive surveys; and
(7) those who volunteered in all four surveys.

The proportion of respondents in each is presented in Table One. What is immediately apparent is that the figures above understate the extent of volunteering in the UK: based on any single survey wave, UKHLS shows that almost 80 per cent of UK adults do not volunteer in a given twelve-month period. However, when account is taken of the period between 2010 and 2018, this figure falls to 60 per cent. While the 'average' UK adult is still shown not to volunteer, therefore, volunteering is nonetheless more common than might otherwise be assumed once we take a longer time frame into account. The reason for this is that volunteering is evidently more 'fluid' than most surveys assume: while we know many people 'drop' in and out of volunteering over a given period, questions about volunteering that reference the previous 12 months assume that such 'dropping in and out'

essentially evens out over a year, and that by asking about the previous 12 months we can get a good idea of how many people, on average, will have volunteered to some extent. This data challenges this assumption and shows that the time between volunteering stints can be considerably longer than twelve months.

Table One also shows that what could be called 'intense' or 'sustained' volunteering (i.e. volunteering over a period of two years or more, equivalent to two surveys of UKHLS) is quite rare. Around a fifth of respondents report volunteering in one survey only – equivalent to 46 per cent of everyone who ever reported volunteering to UKHLS between 2010 and 2018 – and no more than around 5 per cent reported volunteering in two or more consecutive surveys. That said, the table shows that among those who volunteered in more than one survey, sustained volunteering (i.e. volunteering in more than one consecutive survey) is more common than 'disjointed' volunteering (i.e. volunteering in more than one inconsecutive survey). Overall, around 16 per cent of respondents – and 41 per cent of all volunteers – reported volunteering in more than one consecutive survey.

Finally, Table One also shows more substantial differences between nations than were apparent in the graphs above. While there are no notable differences in terms of the recurrence of volunteering, with a broader time period than a single year accounted for volunteering is shown to be marginally more common in England than Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: while 67 per cent of respondents in Wales and Northern Ireland, and 64 per cent of those in Scotland, reported not volunteering between 2010 and 2018, 60 per cent did so in England. This marginally greater propensity to volunteer is accounted for by slightly higher proportions of respondents who volunteered in a single survey wave, and either three or all four waves consecutively.

Table One: Recurrence of Volunteering in the UK, 2010 – 2018 (%)

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
No volunteering	61	60	67	64	67
Volunteered in…					
One survey	18	18	16	17	17
Two unconnected surveys	3	3	2	3	2
Two connected surveys	6	6	6	6	5
Three unconnected surveys	2	2	2	2	2
Three connected surveys	4	4	3	4	3
All four surveys	6	6	3	5	3

Volunteering and Age

Existing research from academia and the third sector is all but unanimous that age has an important effect on both the likelihood of people volunteering and the nature of the volunteering they are likely to engage in. There is disagreement, however, as to exactly how this relationship works, with some studies arguing that young people are more likely to volunteer than their elders (e.g., Adler and Goggin 2005; Volunteer Scotland 2017b; Carson 2000), or that the middle aged are the most active (e.g., WCVA 2016). Still others argue that there is a curvilinear relationship, with the youngest and oldest respondents being the most likely to volunteer because they are more likely to have the time and resources (such as encouragement at school or social networks) to do so (e.g., Wilson 2000).

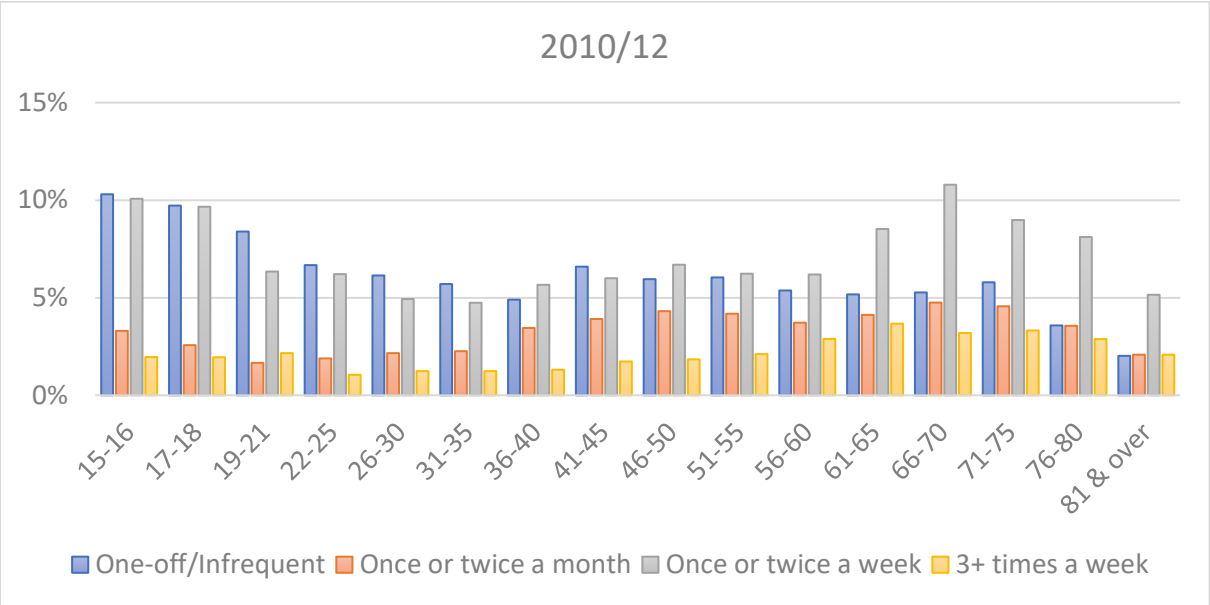
The large sample of UKHLS makes it well placed to study the link between volunteering and age because it has a much higher number of respondents than average from those age groups that are usually poorly represented in social surveys (particularly those under-20 years old). Figure Four shows the frequency of volunteering by age for the UK between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys. While there is a clear relationship between age and volunteering, aside from some small and short-lived fluctuations all four graphs show a similar pattern, suggesting that the way age is related to volunteering has not changed substantially over the past decade. Collectively, the graphs show that overall volunteering rates are highest among the youngest respondents, and those who are recently retired. On average across all four surveys, almost 30 per cent of respondents aged 15-16, just over a quarter of those aged 17-18, and a fifth of those aged 19-21 reported volunteering to some extent.

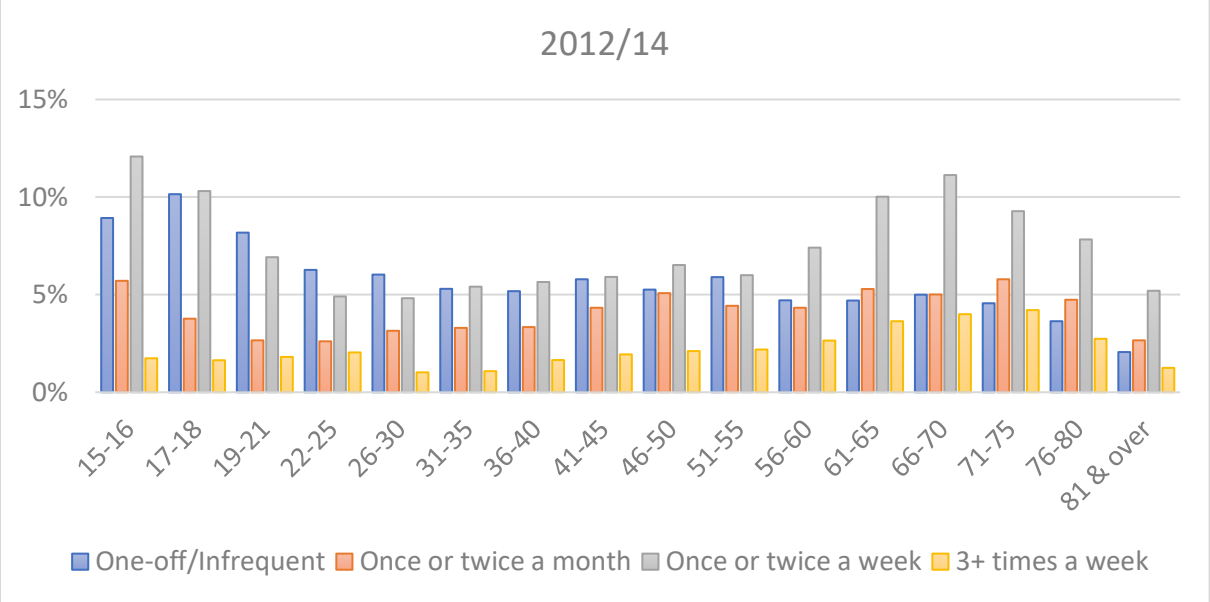
Among respondents aged 22-40, the figure was around 15 per cent; among those aged 41-50, it was 19 per cent; and among those aged 61-75, it was around 24 per cent. In short, the pattern supports a 'life-cycle theory', in which the highest rates of volunteering are found among those who are still in full-time education – because they can be encouraged or mandated to do so by schools, and have added incentives to do so to gain entry to prestigious higher education institutions or employment – and the recently retired – who are more likely to have the time, money and community links that facilitate volunteering (Wilson 2000; Wattenberg 2012; Adler and Goggin 2005; Smets 2016). Volunteering is least common among those who have recently left full-time education, who find themselves without the support and incentives to volunteer they had while in school or university and have yet to establish stable and well-paid jobs or put down roots in a community. Volunteering is marginally more common among the middle-aged, who are more likely to own their homes, have stable jobs and have children – all of which promote volunteering and social interaction – but still face demands on the time they have to volunteer from their work (WCVA 2016; Wilson 2000; Janoski et al 1998).

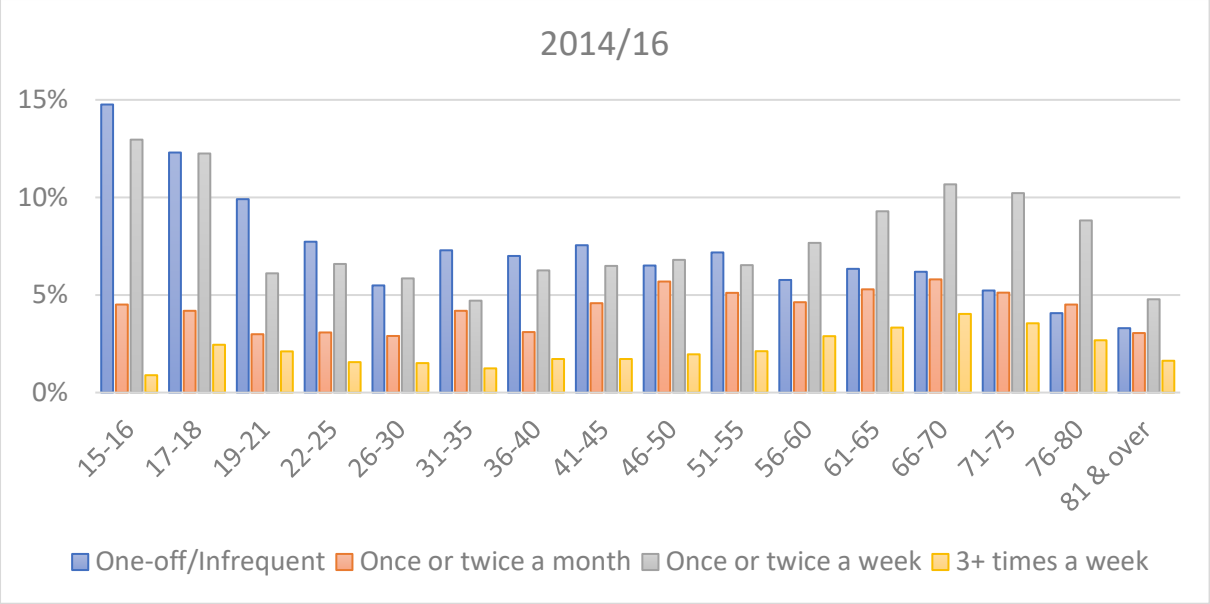
Figure Four also suggests that the *nature* of volunteering varies with age. Among the youngest respondents, for example, 'infrequent' and 'weekly' volunteering were the most common: on average, around one in five respondents aged 15-18 volunteered either infrequently or every week. These frequencies then became less common as respondents enter early adulthood (when the overall rate of volunteering falls) before stabilising around middle age, but at the same time *monthly* volunteering became marginally more common among this age group. Amongst the most active volunteers – the recently retired – weekly volunteering was by far the most common (around one in ten of those aged 61-80 volunteered weekly).

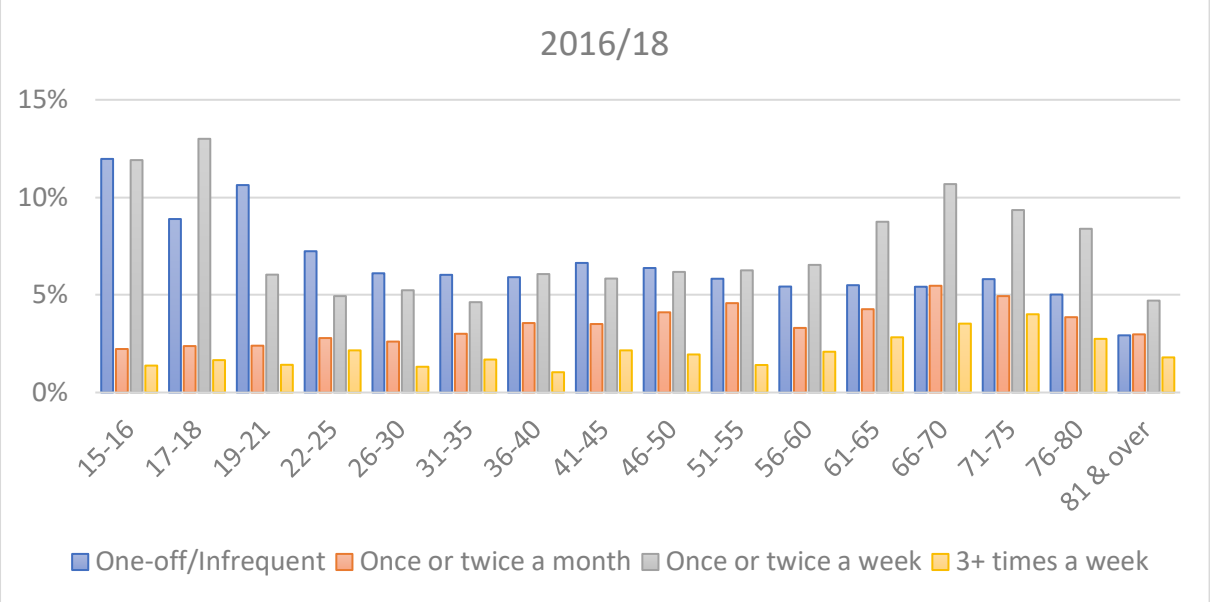
It is impossible to definitively identify what lies behind this trend with the UKHLS survey, but the most likely explanation is that it reflects the relationship between the *frequency* of volunteering and the *nature* of volunteering. As was discussed in Chapter Two, a growing literature has shown that younger volunteers are more drawn to 'newer' forms of volunteering that are typically more episodic in nature (such as taking part in a day to help clean a beach), whereas older volunteers are more active in what we might consider to be 'traditional' activities (such as chairing their local residents' association). The nature of these different forms of volunteering is related to the frequency with which volunteers are likely to be active: while the young person cleaning up a beach is likely to report volunteering 'infrequently' (because the activity is limited to a day), the older volunteer is more likely to do so 'weekly' or possibly several times a week. This link could explain the trend revealed in Figure Four.

Figure Four: Frequency of Volunteering by Age in the UK, 2010 – 2018 (%)









Figures Five, Six, Seven and Eight replicate the analysis for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively. As was seen above, while there are some small differences between the nations and/or from one survey to another, they are far more similar than different in terms of how age is related to volunteering. Some differences worth noting include, first, that the age-curve identified above – in which the youngest and recently retired are the most likely to have volunteered, with episodic volunteering being more common among young people – is more prominent in England than in other nations, and particularly, Wales. Primarily, this is because younger people and the recently retired in Wales (and to a lesser extent Scotland) were less likely to volunteer than their counterparts in England. The second important difference, however, is that the

age-curves in England and Wales became more similar across the UKHLS surveys, because younger people in Wales (and in Scotland) stood out for becoming more likely to volunteer between 2010/12 and 2016/18. Between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 waves of UKHLS, for example, there was no substantial difference in the proportion of 15-18-year olds volunteering (to any frequency) in England. In Wales, however, there was an increase of nine percentage points in the proportion of 15-18-year olds volunteering once or twice a week, and an increase of 10 points of those volunteering once or twice a month in Scotland. Northern Ireland saw a more modest growth of six points in the proportion of 15-18-year olds volunteering infrequently. There were no equivalent increases amongst the older respondents, suggesting that there has been a growth of youth volunteering (specifically, amongst those still in full-time education) in Wales and Scotland (and to a lesser extent, Northern Ireland) that is not apparent in England. These increases have not led to young people being more likely to volunteer in Wales and Scotland than their English counterparts, however. Rather, they led to the difference between the English, Welsh and Scottish young people's overall levels of volunteering shrinking.

Figure Five: Frequency of Volunteering by Age in England, 2010 – 2018 (%)

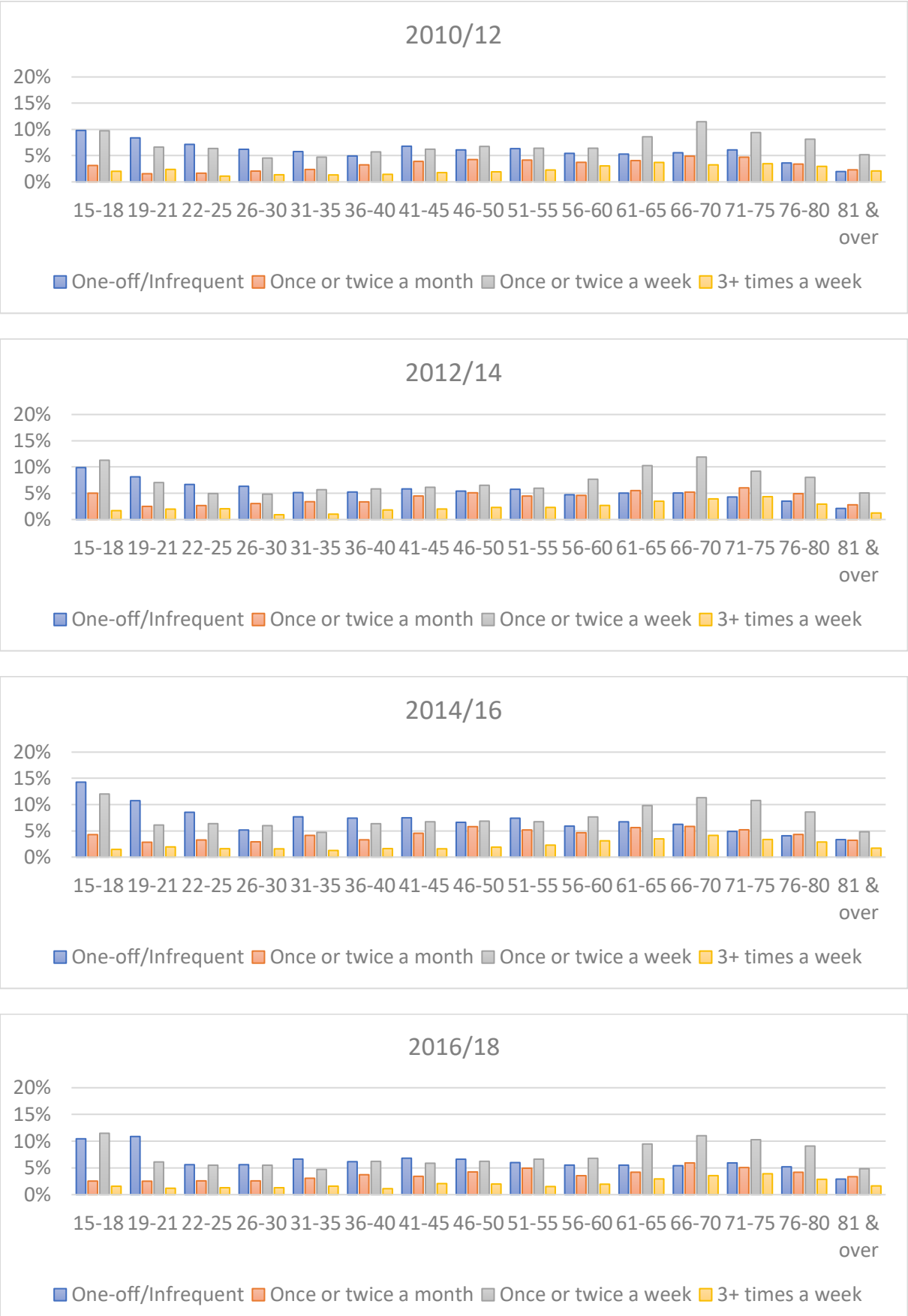


Figure Six: Frequency of Volunteering by Age in Wales, 2010 – 2018 (%)

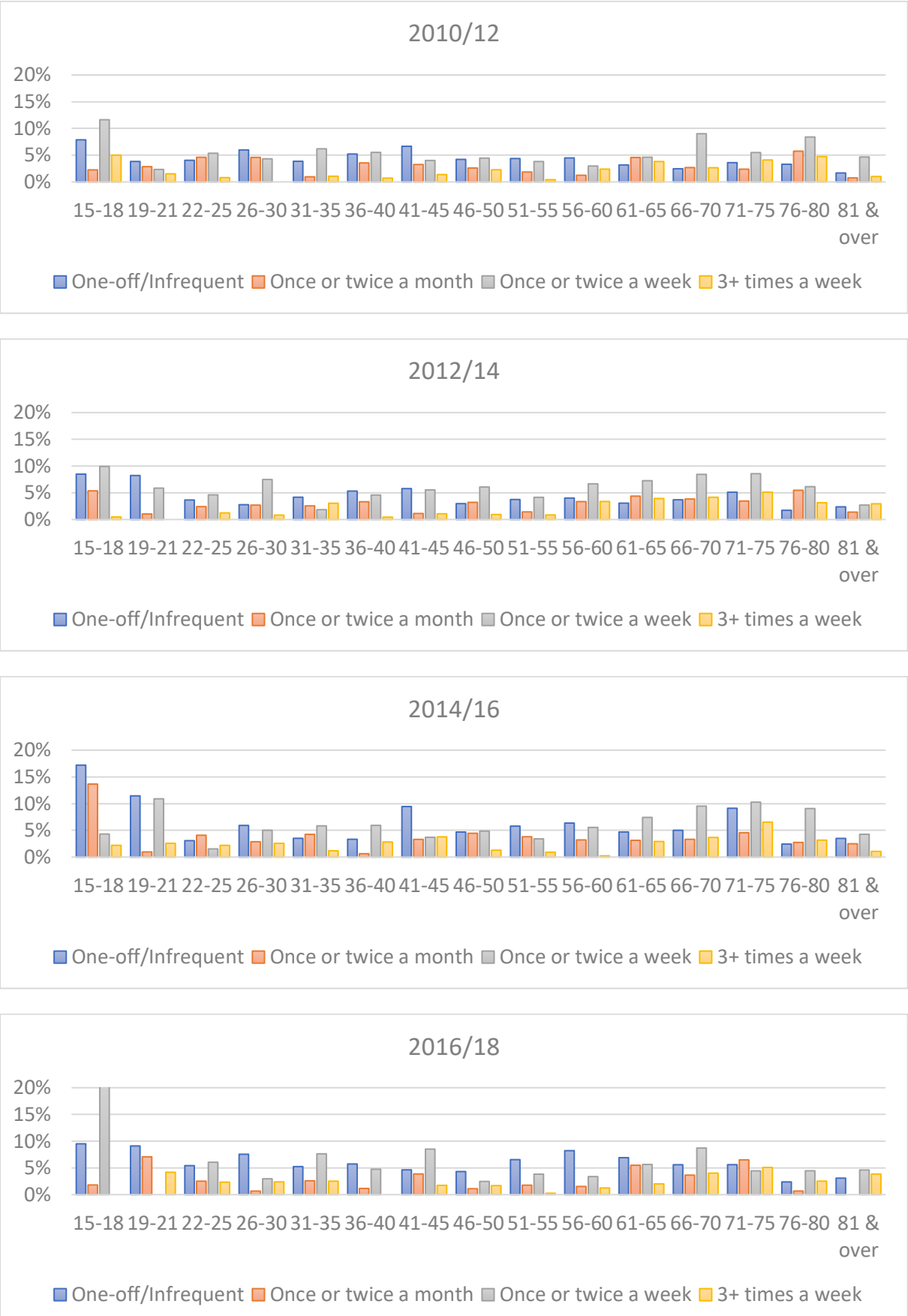


Figure Seven: Frequency of Volunteering by Age in Scotland, 2010 – 2018 (%)

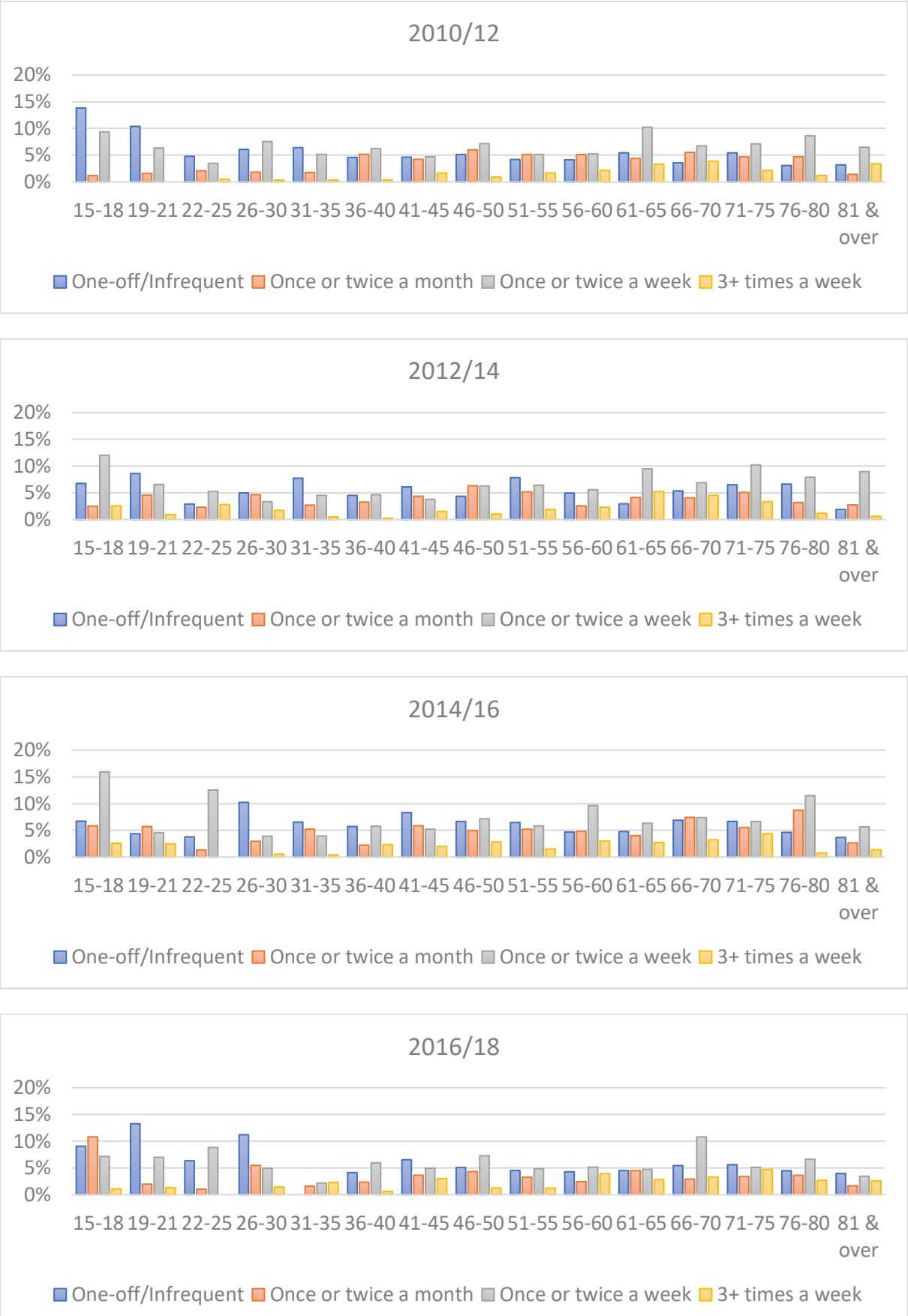
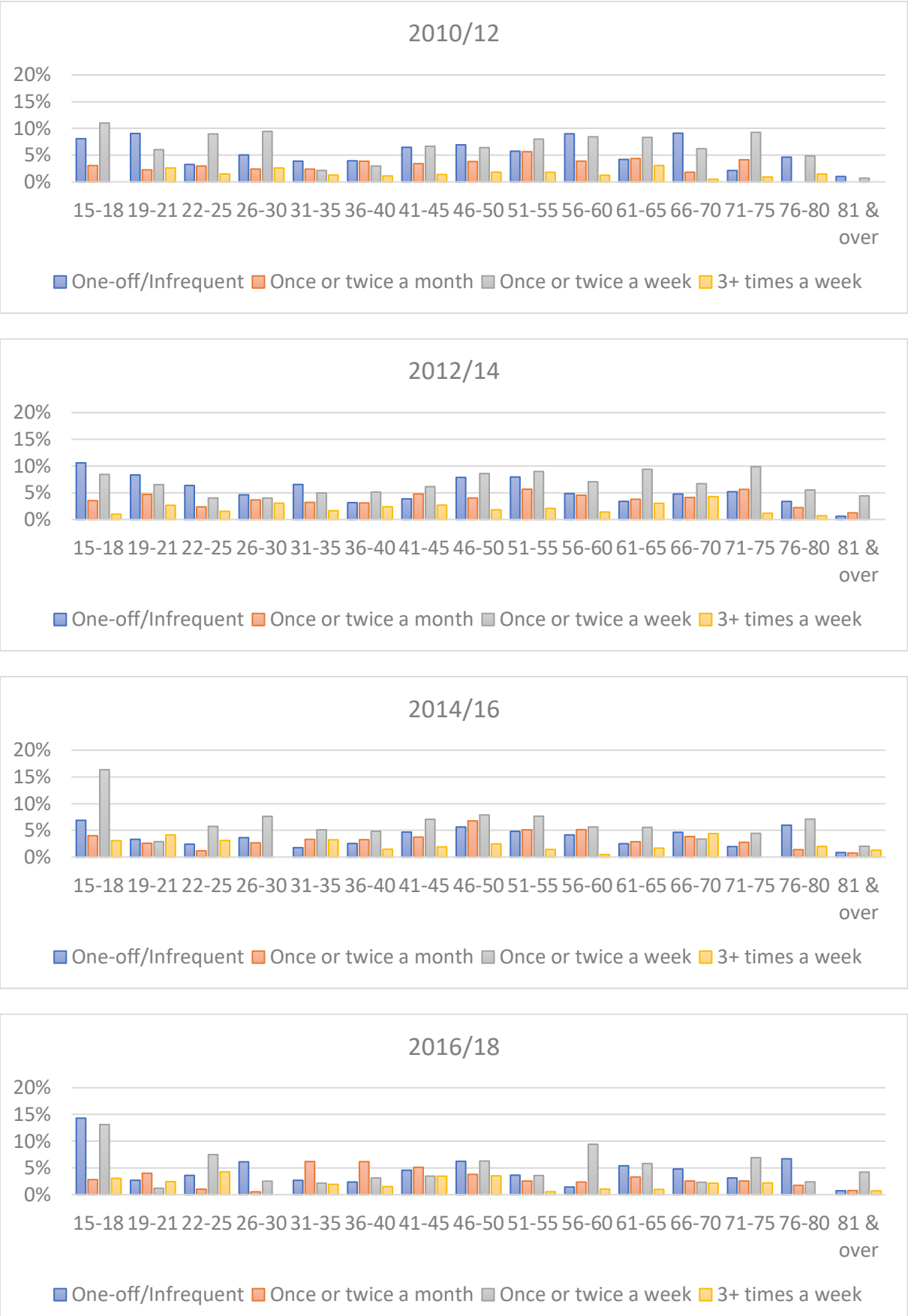


Figure Eight: Frequency of Volunteering by Age in N. Ireland, 2010 – 2018 (%)

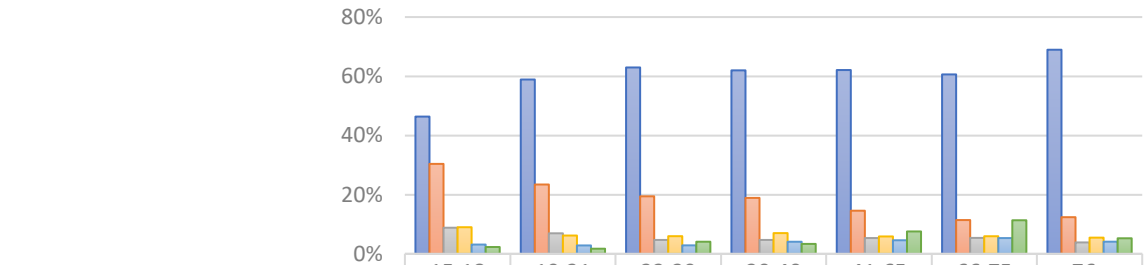


Volunteering Recurrence and Age

Studying the relationship between age and the recurrence of volunteering reveals somewhat different findings. Figure Nine shows the recurrence of volunteering across the UK for seven age groups, depending on how old the respondents were in the 2010/12 survey (i.e. when they were first asked about their volunteering). The pattern seen above – in which the youngest and recently retired are the most likely to volunteer – is still somewhat apparent. However, the propensity of young people to volunteer is shown to be substantially higher than that of older people once we take account of volunteering over an eight-year period. Moreover, the recently retired are shown not to be much more likely to volunteer than the wider population. Between 2010 and 2018, for example, the majority (54 per cent) of respondents aged 15-18 in 2010/12 volunteered to at least some extent, compared with around 40 per cent of those in the 19-75 age groups. As was seen above, the very oldest respondents (over 75 years old) are less likely to volunteer.

This does not mean that young people are more likely to volunteer on a sustained basis, however. Rather, they are more likely than their elders to volunteer for a limited period (i.e. within a single survey year). Primarily, those aged 15-18 who volunteered at some point between 2010 and 2018 did so in either one (around 30 per cent of 15-18-year olds) or two (18 per cent) surveys, consecutive or otherwise. They are marginally less likely to have volunteered in either three or four consecutive waves: around 5 per cent of 15-18 year olds did so (the same figure was found for 19-21 year olds), while for 30-40 year olds the equivalent figure was 7 per cent; for 41-65 year olds, it was 12 per cent; and for the recently retired (66-74), it was 16 per cent. While not any more likely to volunteer overall than most of the sample, the recently retired 66-74-year olds were the most likely to volunteer on a sustained basis, with 11 per cent volunteering in all four survey waves between 2010 and 2018. Overall, therefore, the broader recurrence of volunteering measure reveals that young people are more likely to volunteer than their elders while they are of school age (suggesting measures to increase youth volunteering at school may be having some success), but they are less likely to volunteer on a sustained basis after that. This could suggest that the policies and measures that appear to be driving up youth volunteering in schools, while successful in the short term, are not managing to instil a lasting propensity to volunteer in students. Alternatively, it could reflect the influence of the life cycle: while these young people are likely to volunteer while in school and likely to be living with their parents, once they leave school/the parental home and live in a more precarious and changeable context, volunteering becomes more difficult (as seen in the data above). It is possible, of course, that the propensity to volunteer they exhibited during youth will re-appear as they age and move into life circumstances that are more conducive to volunteering, but testing this theory is beyond the current capacities of this survey.

Figure Nine: Recurrence of Volunteering by Age in the UK, 2010-2018 (%)

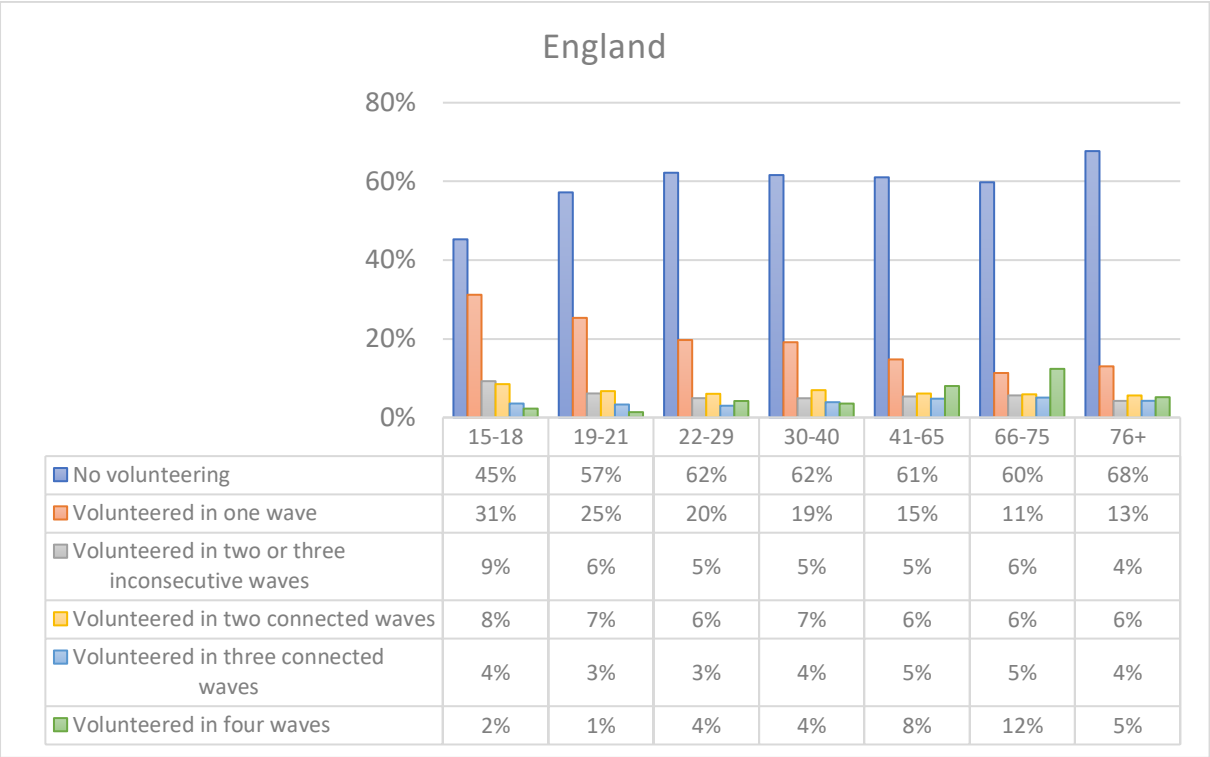


	15-18	19-21	22-29	30-40	41-65	66-75	76+
No volunteering	46%	59%	63%	62%	62%	61%	69%
Volunteered in one wave	30%	23%	19%	19%	15%	11%	12%
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	9%	7%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%
Volunteered in two connected waves	9%	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5%
Volunteered in three connected waves	3%	3%	3%	4%	5%	5%	4%
Volunteered in four waves	2%	2%	4%	3%	8%	11%	5%

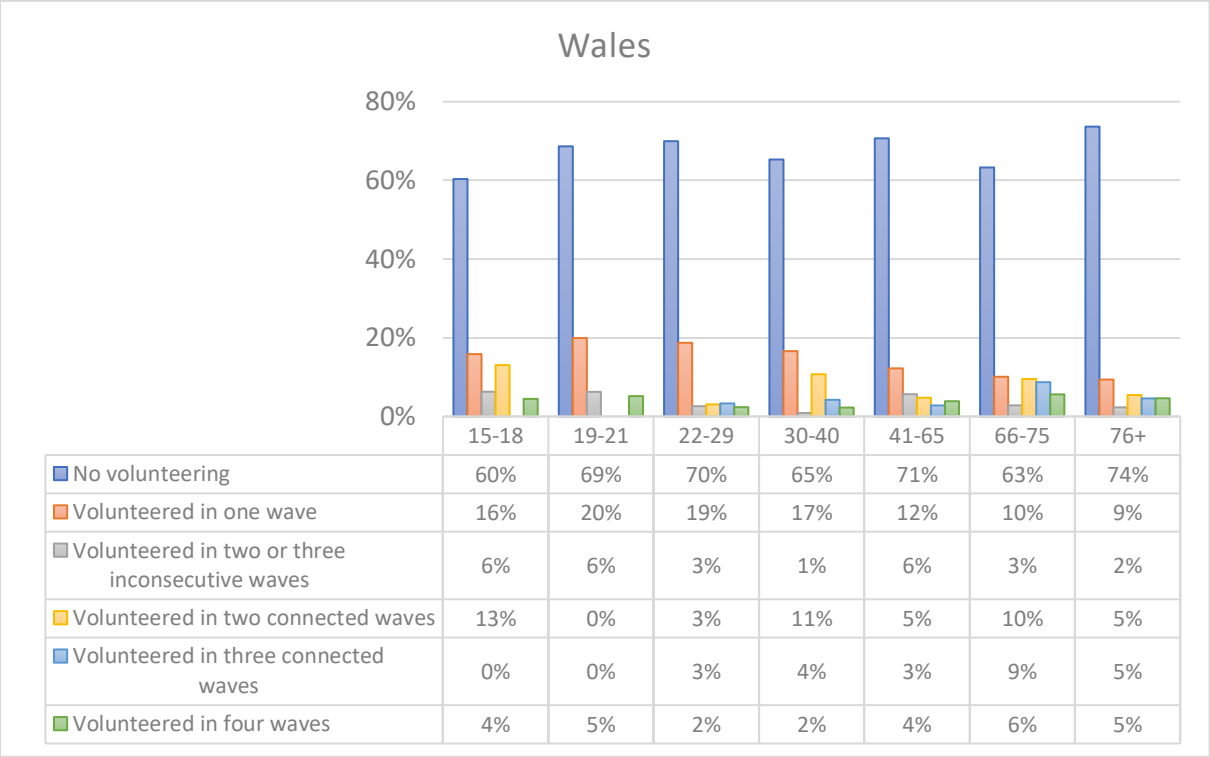
Figure Ten shows the recurrence of volunteering across the four nations, and that for the most part, the pattern identified for the whole of the UK is also apparent in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There are some notable exceptions, however. First, 15-18-year olds in Wales and Northern Ireland, while being more likely to volunteer at least once between 2010 and 2018 than their elders, are considerably less likely to do so than their counterparts in Scotland and England. Around 60 per cent of 15-18-year olds in Wales, for example, and 62 per cent in Northern Ireland, did not volunteer at all in the four survey waves. This compares with 42 per cent in Scotland, and 45 per cent in England. Primarily, this is the result of 15-18-year olds being more likely to volunteer in one survey in Scotland (35 per cent) and England (31 per cent) than Wales (16 per cent) and Northern Ireland (23 per cent). The proportions volunteering in more than one wave are similar in all four nations, though in Wales the proportion volunteering in two consecutive waves is higher (at 13 per cent) than in England (8 per cent) and Northern Ireland (6 per cent), and similar to that in Scotland (12 per cent). As already noted above, this pattern in part reflects the difference in the overall volunteering rates across the four nations, which are higher in England and Scotland than Wales and Northern Ireland (see Table One). A second (smaller) difference is in the volunteering of the recently retired 66-75-year olds, which is higher overall in England than elsewhere. Around 60 per cent of 66-75-year olds did not volunteer at all in England, compared with 63 per cent in Wales, 64 per cent in Scotland and 66 per cent in Northern Ireland. At the other end of the scale, the recently retired in England are more likely to have volunteered in all four surveys than their counterparts, with 12 per cent having done so compared with 6 per cent in Wales, 9 per cent in

Scotland and 3 per cent in Northern Ireland. The proportions volunteering less frequently are similar across all four nations.

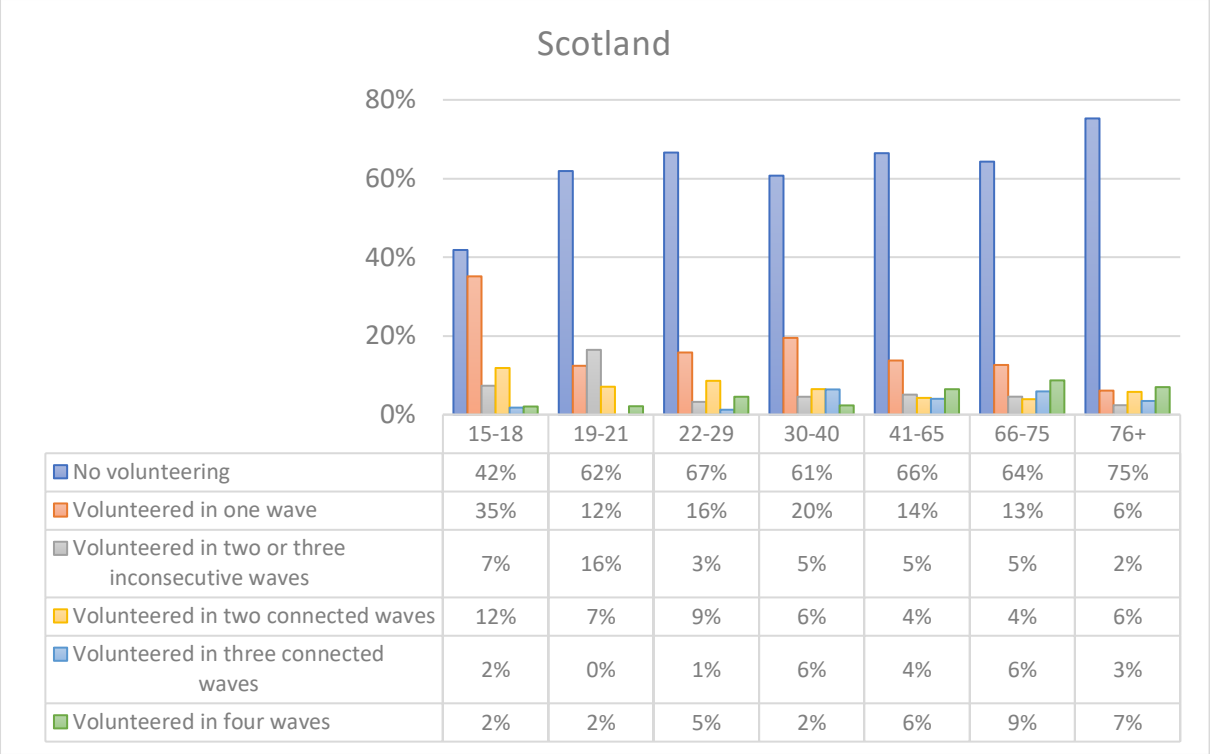
Figure Ten: Recurrence of Volunteering by Age in the Nations, 2010 – 2018 (%)



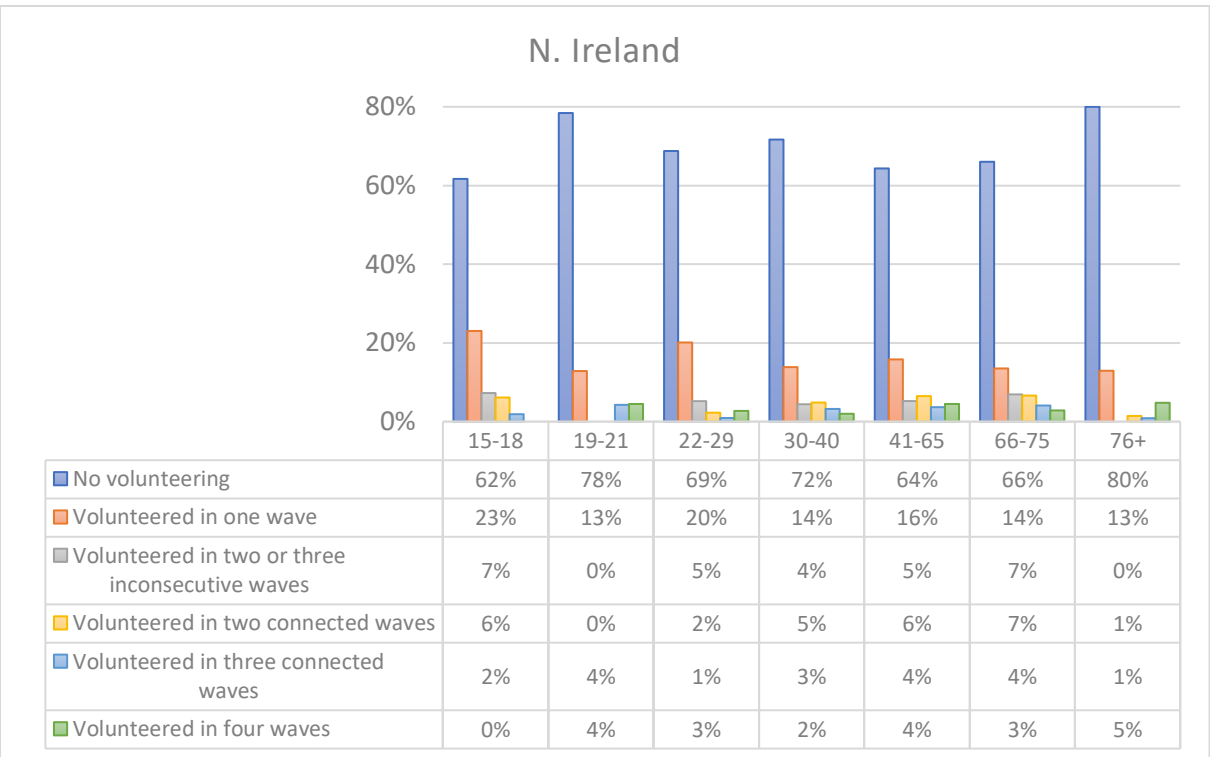
	15-18	19-21	22-29	30-40	41-65	66-75	76+
No volunteering	45%	57%	62%	62%	61%	60%	68%
Volunteered in one wave	31%	25%	20%	19%	15%	11%	13%
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	9%	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%	4%
Volunteered in two connected waves	8%	7%	6%	7%	6%	6%	6%
Volunteered in three connected waves	4%	3%	3%	4%	5%	5%	4%
Volunteered in four waves	2%	1%	4%	4%	8%	12%	5%



	15-18	19-21	22-29	30-40	41-65	66-75	76+
No volunteering	60%	69%	70%	65%	71%	63%	74%
Volunteered in one wave	16%	20%	19%	17%	12%	10%	9%
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	6%	6%	3%	1%	6%	3%	2%
Volunteered in two connected waves	13%	0%	3%	11%	5%	10%	5%
Volunteered in three connected waves	0%	0%	3%	4%	3%	9%	5%
Volunteered in four waves	4%	5%	2%	2%	4%	6%	5%



	15-18	19-21	22-29	30-40	41-65	66-75	76+
No volunteering	42%	62%	67%	61%	66%	64%	75%
Volunteered in one wave	35%	12%	16%	20%	14%	13%	6%
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	7%	16%	3%	5%	5%	5%	2%
Volunteered in two connected waves	12%	7%	9%	6%	4%	4%	6%
Volunteered in three connected waves	2%	0%	1%	6%	4%	6%	3%
Volunteered in four waves	2%	2%	5%	2%	6%	9%	7%



	15-18	19-21	22-29	30-40	41-65	66-75	76+
No volunteering	62%	78%	69%	72%	64%	66%	80%
Volunteered in one wave	23%	13%	20%	14%	16%	14%	13%
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	7%	0%	5%	4%	5%	7%	0%
Volunteered in two connected waves	6%	0%	2%	5%	6%	7%	1%
Volunteered in three connected waves	2%	4%	1%	3%	4%	4%	1%
Volunteered in four waves	0%	4%	3%	2%	4%	3%	5%

Explaining the Age and Volunteering Relationship

Overall, the relationship between age and volunteering presented here strongly supports the theory that volunteering is heavily influenced by our stage in the life cycle: people in full-time education are more likely to be encouraged (or forced) to volunteer while in school or university, while those who

have just left full-time education face a more precarious economic and social environment as they look for a secure place to live and work and start a family. The middle aged, while still in full-time employment, are more likely to have secure work and more money, to own their home, and to have children. All of this is associated with a greater propensity to participate in one's community in a variety of ways, including through volunteering (Smets 2016; Janoski et al 1998; WCVA 2016). The recently retired are likely to have strong community connections and own their homes, as well as children and/or grandchildren, all of which also encourage volunteering, but they face fewer demands on their time from work and so are even more likely to be active than the middle aged. The very oldest respondents, while possessing many of the resources and opportunities to volunteer, are likely to face more barriers to doing so from their health, and so they are less active than the recently retired. This life-cycle theory of volunteering offers the best explanation for the relationship between age and the occurrences of volunteering (i.e. volunteering regardless of frequency) identified above. It can also explain why younger people are less likely than their elders to volunteer over a sustained period (such as several years): because as they age and leave full-time education, their life circumstances become less conducive to volunteering and they lose the encouragement or coercion to volunteer from their school or university. The circumstances of older people, on the other hand, are less turbulent and so they are more likely to settle into a routine of volunteering for a sustained period, which is why volunteering for three or four surveys in the last decade is more common among the oldest respondents.

One trend for which the life cycle explanation is less convincing, however, is the preference of younger people for less frequent forms of volunteering relative to their elders. In all four nations and all four UKHLS surveys, for example, younger respondents were more likely to have volunteered for a limited period, and to have engaged in 'infrequent' volunteering, than their elders, who were more likely to engage in sustained and regular activities. It is possible that this does reflect the life cycle, and that the kind of volunteering young people are encouraged to do in full-time education is more episodic and temporary in nature, though at present there is little research to support this. There are two other explanations, however, that suggest this is part of a longer-running social evolution.

The first suggests that volunteering, like many other forms of civic and political activity, is evolving as social changes (to the economy, education and access to information and communication technology in particular) affect the way that (particularly younger) citizens interact with their communities (Sloam 2016; Norris 2002; 2011; Dalton 2013). While it is still a minority of younger people who volunteer, that minority is growing and is larger than the number of older volunteers. As younger people become more educated and politically engaged, they become less interested in traditional forms of political and civic activity that are dependent upon interaction with hierarchical

institutions and leave little room for individual agendas to be expressed (such as voting, joining political parties, or joining and working with community groups), and instead seek out new ways of promoting their values – such as volunteering. A related theory is that this transition is driven by young citizens' alienation from the political process resulting from the failure of politicians to articulate and represent their interests (Sloam 2016; Earl et al 2017; Marsh et al 2007). These arguments can be criticised, however, firstly on the basis that there is simply not enough data to conclude that young people today are more or less likely to volunteer – or volunteer in a certain way – than previous generations of young citizens. While questions on volunteering are common in today's social surveys, they were all but non-existent in surveys before the 2000s. We cannot be sure, therefore, whether there is a generational shift towards volunteering and other newer forms of civic and political activity occurring. Second, while there is little doubt that young people (like their elders) do not hold modern political processes and elites in high regard, studies that have examined political alienation over a long period show that today's young people are in fact *less* alienated from the political process than previous generations (Fox 2015). They are more likely to trust politicians, and to feel influential in the political process, than both previous young generations and their elders today (Dahl et al 2018).

Another theory, for which there is more reliable evidence (Hustinx et al 2010b; Wilson 2000) was discussed in Chapter Two. It suggests that the nature of volunteering itself is changing, with younger volunteers less interested in volunteering through membership or interaction with formalised institutions (such as Scouts). Instead, they prefer more varied and instrumental forms, in which citizens with a common interest or objective work together on a specific, limited volunteering project and then go their separate ways at the end. Sometimes known as 'episodic' or 'portfolio' volunteering, these theories suggest that younger people are more likely to volunteer than their elders, but that this is not always detectable through traditional survey questions (particularly those used in older surveys based around membership of volunteering institutions).

Effectively testing these theories is beyond the scope of the UKHLS data, however the data above and the existing research suggest that two processes are likely to be at work, including the life cycle and changes in the nature of volunteering over time, which is primarily manifested through the activities of young people. Young people's stage in the life cycle makes them more likely to volunteer to at least some extent than older people over the previous decade, but that volunteering is primarily short-term and infrequent, indicative of the rise of 'episodic' volunteering. It may also reflect a growing propensity among politically engaged young people to use volunteering as a way of promoting their political agenda, however the existing research suggests that this is far more likely

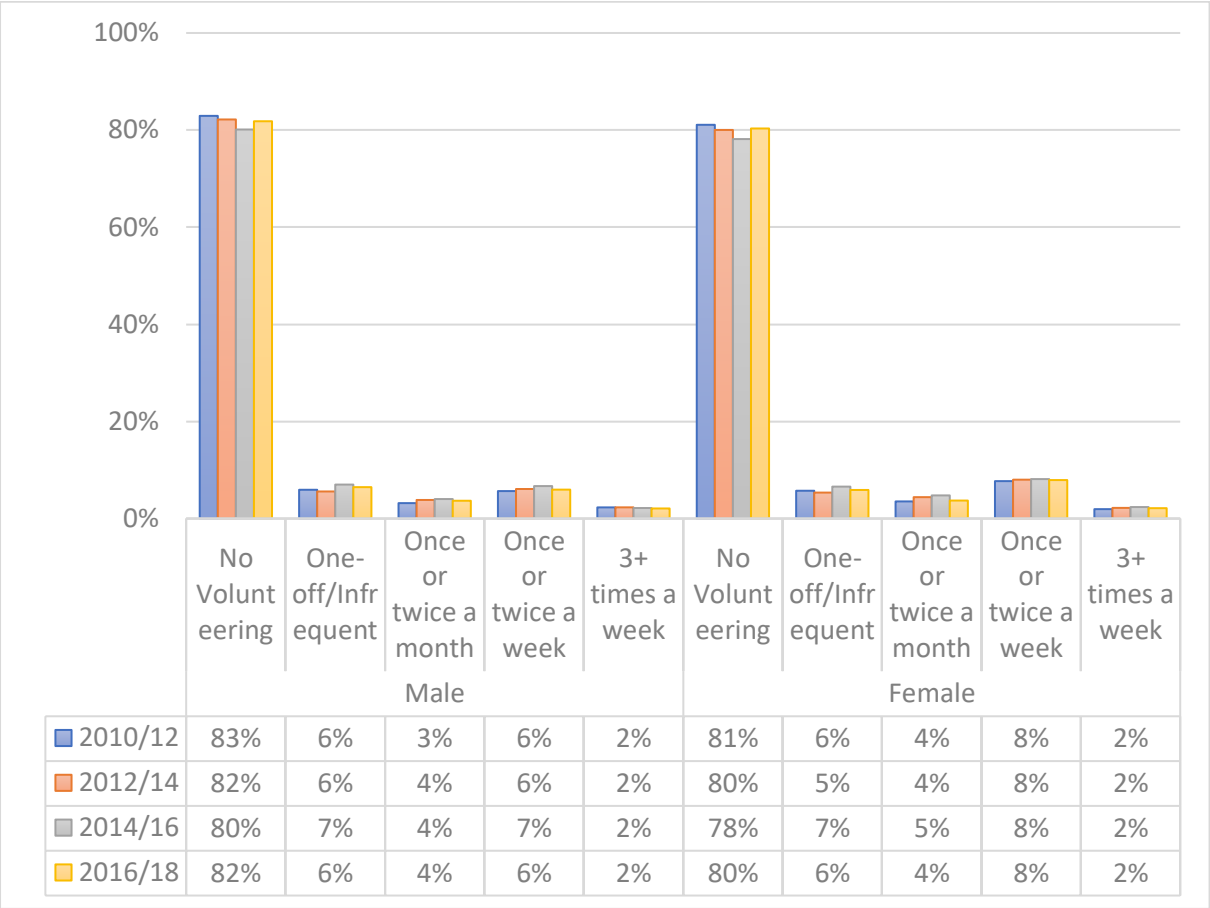
to reflect the gradual evolution in the way new citizens choose to promote their political agendas and make themselves hear in their communities than their alienation from the political process.

Volunteering and Gender

The existing research is more divided as to the relationship between gender and volunteering. Most of the academic literature argues that women are more likely to volunteer than men (Gaby 2017; Rooney et al 2004; Roker et al 1999; Rosenthal et al 1998), though some studies argue that there is little difference (WCVA 2016). Most of the research agrees, however, that there are more substantial gender differences in the nature of volunteering people are prepared to engage in, with men tending to prefer more formalised and/or political activity, while women are more likely to engage in either informal/non-institutional volunteering, or caring activities (Davis-Smith 1999). It is highly likely that at least some of the disagreement reflects measurement issues: measures of volunteering that do not differentiate between types or formal and informal activity (such as that used in UKHLS) are less likely to identify a gender effect than measures that are more fine-grained.

Figure Eleven shows the volunteering rate and frequency of males and females in the four UKHLS surveys for the UK. There is a tiny difference in which females are marginally more likely to volunteer than males: in every UKHLS survey, around 82 per cent of males and 80 per cent of females (a statistically significant difference in each survey) reported no volunteering at all. There are similarly small differences in the reported frequencies of volunteering: for all but ‘at least once a week’, the proportions are essentially the same, while the proportion of females volunteering at least once a week was around 2-points larger than that of males.

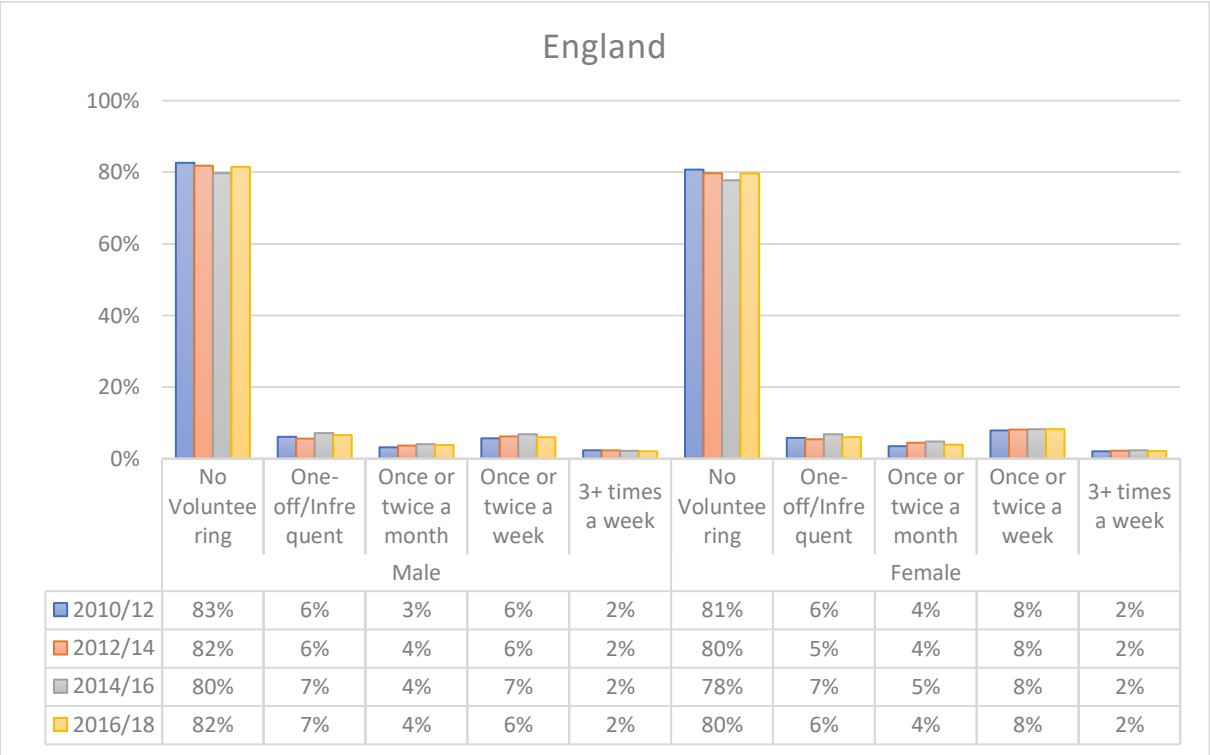
Figure Eleven: Volunteering by Gender in the UK, 2010/12 – 2016/18 (%)



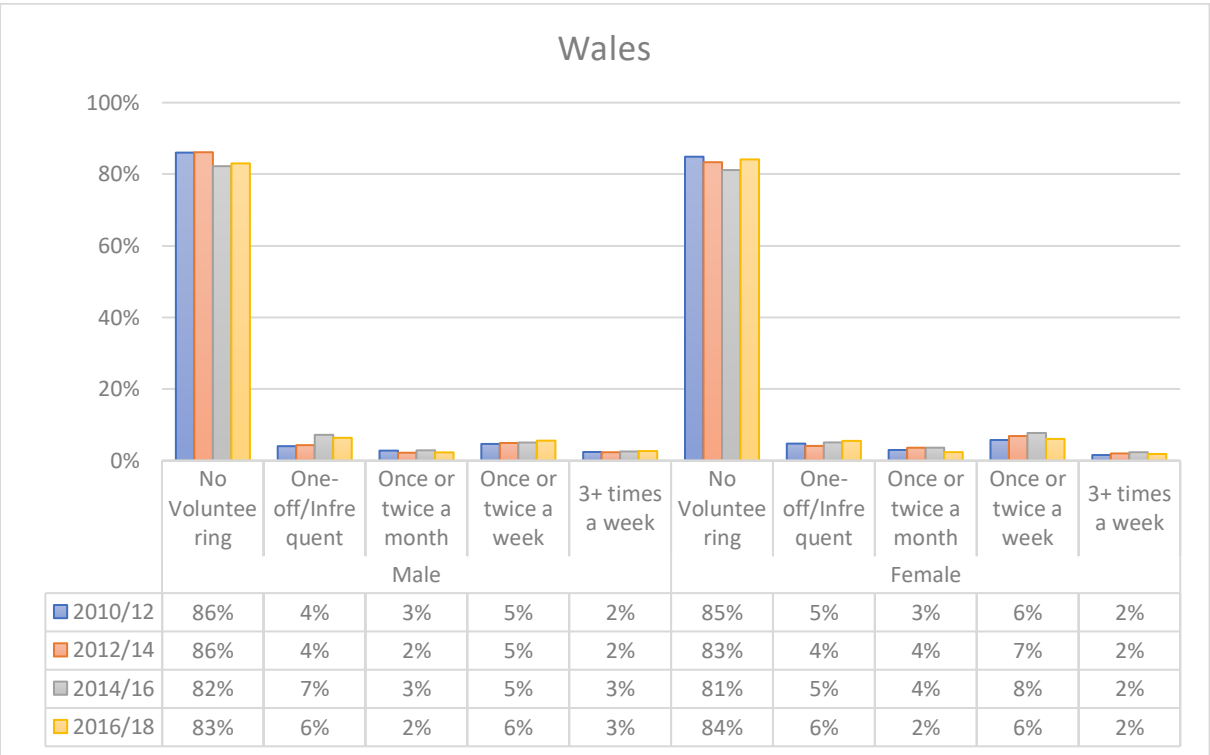
	Male					Female				
	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week
2010/12	83%	6%	3%	6%	2%	81%	6%	4%	8%	2%
2012/14	82%	6%	4%	6%	2%	80%	5%	4%	8%	2%
2014/16	80%	7%	4%	7%	2%	78%	7%	5%	8%	2%
2016/18	82%	6%	4%	6%	2%	80%	6%	4%	8%	2%

Figure Twelve presents this data for the four nations of the UK. There are no substantial differences between the nations. While the overall volunteering rates of both males and females are lower in Wales and Northern Ireland – reflecting the overall lower rates of volunteering in those countries as identified above – the difference between males and females in each country are the same as for the UK.

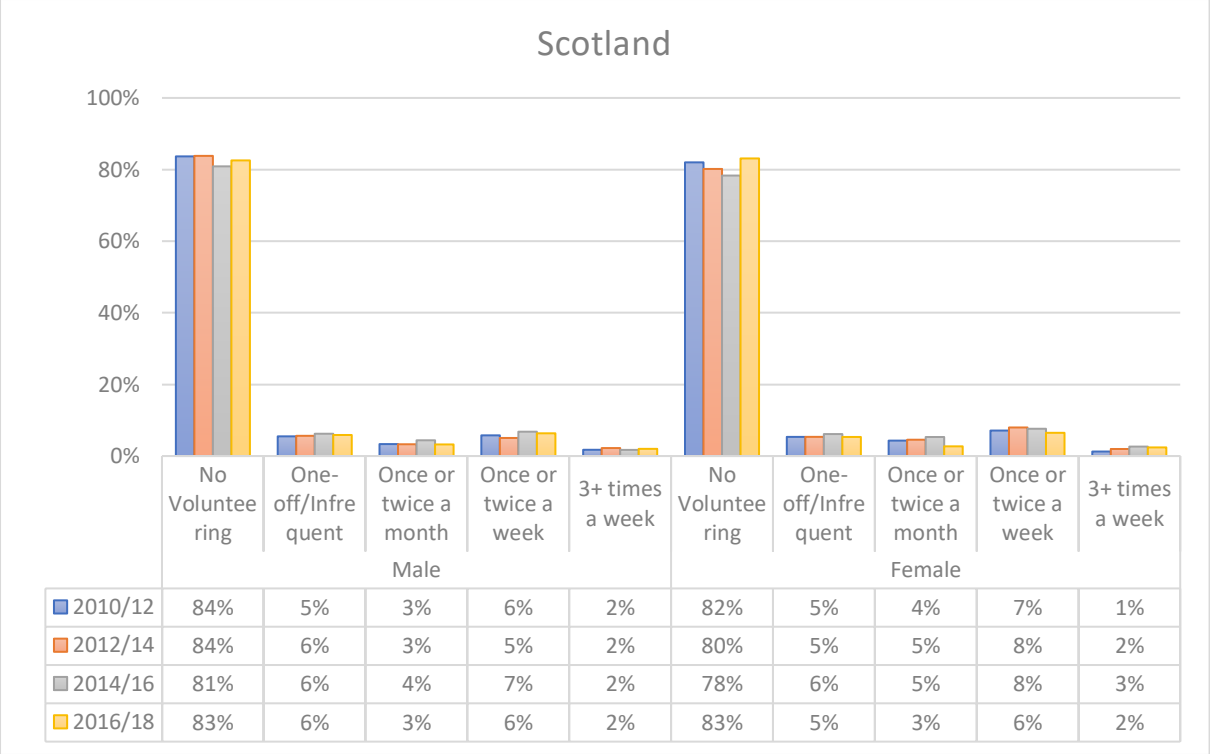
Figure Twelve: Volunteering by Gender in the Four Nations, 2010/12 – 2016/18 (%)



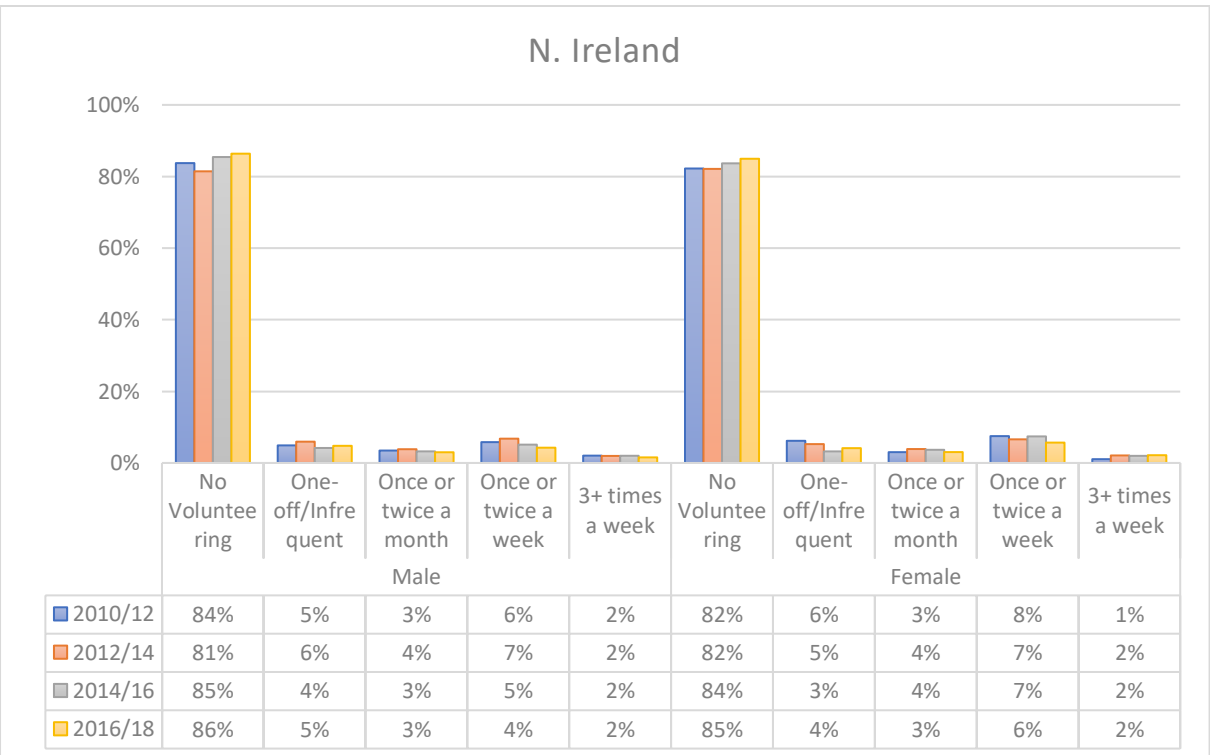
	Male					Female				
	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week
2010/12	83%	6%	3%	6%	2%	81%	6%	4%	8%	2%
2012/14	82%	6%	4%	6%	2%	80%	5%	4%	8%	2%
2014/16	80%	7%	4%	7%	2%	78%	7%	5%	8%	2%
2016/18	82%	7%	4%	6%	2%	80%	6%	4%	8%	2%



	Male					Female				
	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week	No Volunteering	One-off/Infrequent	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	3+ times a week
2010/12	86%	4%	3%	5%	2%	85%	5%	3%	6%	2%
2012/14	86%	4%	2%	5%	2%	83%	4%	4%	7%	2%
2014/16	82%	7%	3%	5%	3%	81%	5%	4%	8%	2%
2016/18	83%	6%	2%	6%	3%	84%	6%	2%	6%	2%



	Male					Female				
2010/12	84%	5%	3%	6%	2%	82%	5%	4%	7%	1%
2012/14	84%	6%	3%	5%	2%	80%	5%	5%	8%	2%
2014/16	81%	6%	4%	7%	2%	78%	6%	5%	8%	3%
2016/18	83%	6%	3%	6%	2%	83%	5%	3%	6%	2%

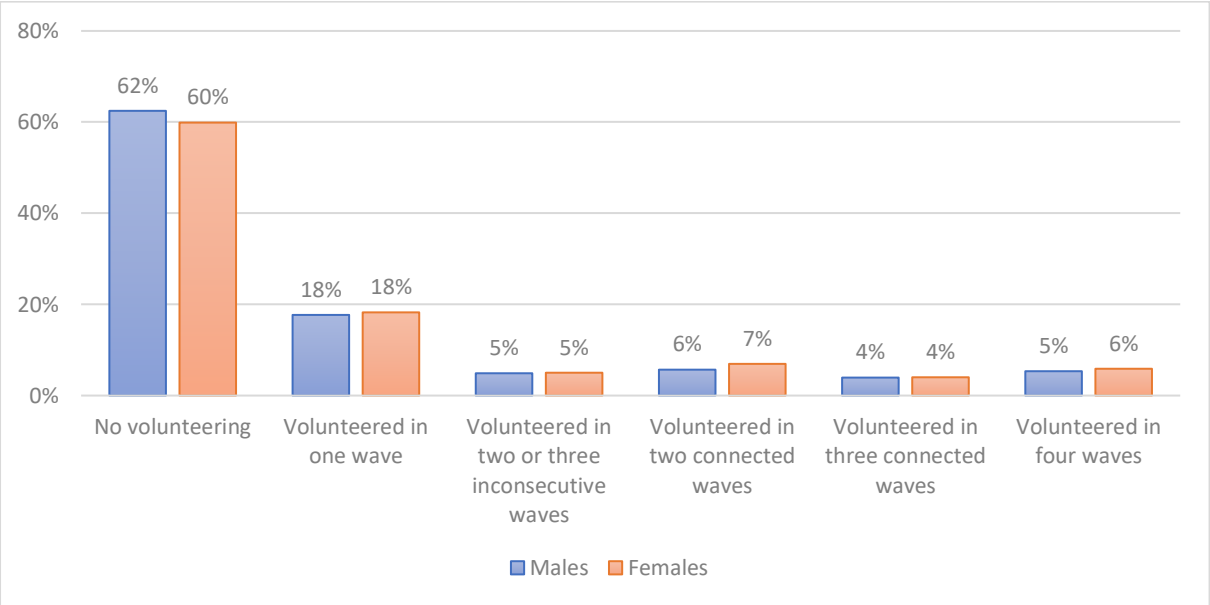


	Male					Female				
2010/12	84%	5%	3%	6%	2%	82%	6%	3%	8%	1%
2012/14	81%	6%	4%	7%	2%	82%	5%	4%	7%	2%
2014/16	85%	4%	3%	5%	2%	84%	3%	4%	7%	2%
2016/18	86%	5%	3%	4%	2%	85%	4%	3%	6%	2%

Figure Thirteen looks at the gender differences using the 'recurrence' of volunteering measure for the UK. As was found above, once this broader measure is used the overall volunteering rate is found to be higher, but there is no indication of this being different between males and females with the exception of females being marginally more likely to volunteer at all: around 62 per cent of

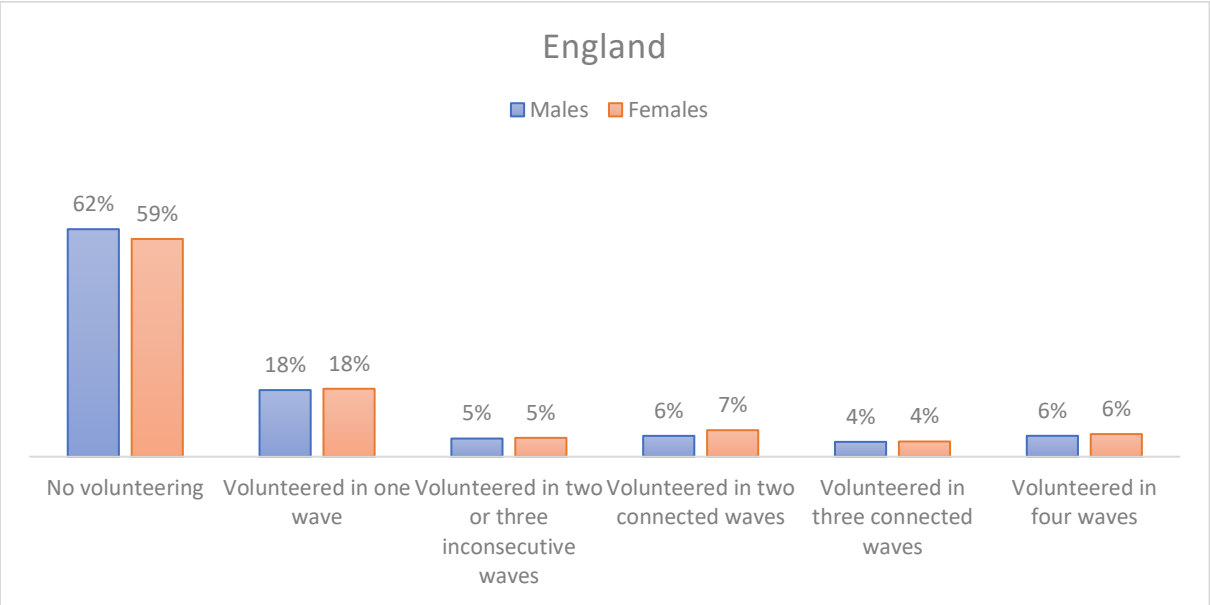
males and 60 per cent of females reported not volunteering at all in all four UKHLS surveys. Around 18 per cent of males and females volunteered in only one of the surveys, with around 5 per cent of each volunteering in two or three consecutive or inconsecutive waves, or all four waves.

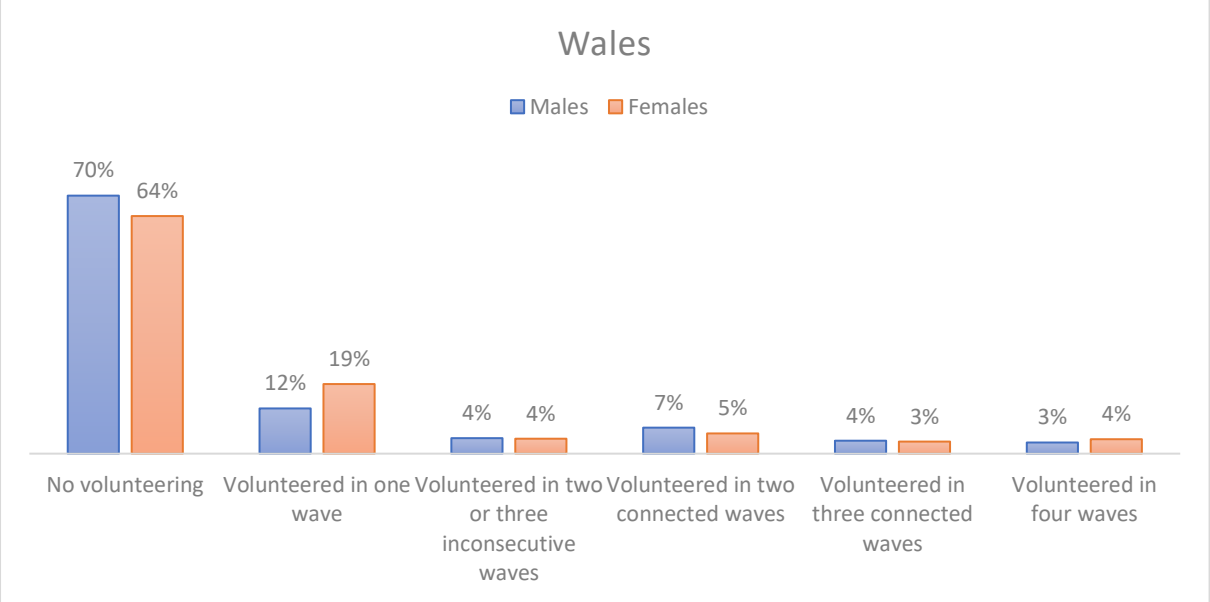
Figure Thirteen: Recurrence of Volunteering and Gender in the UK (%)

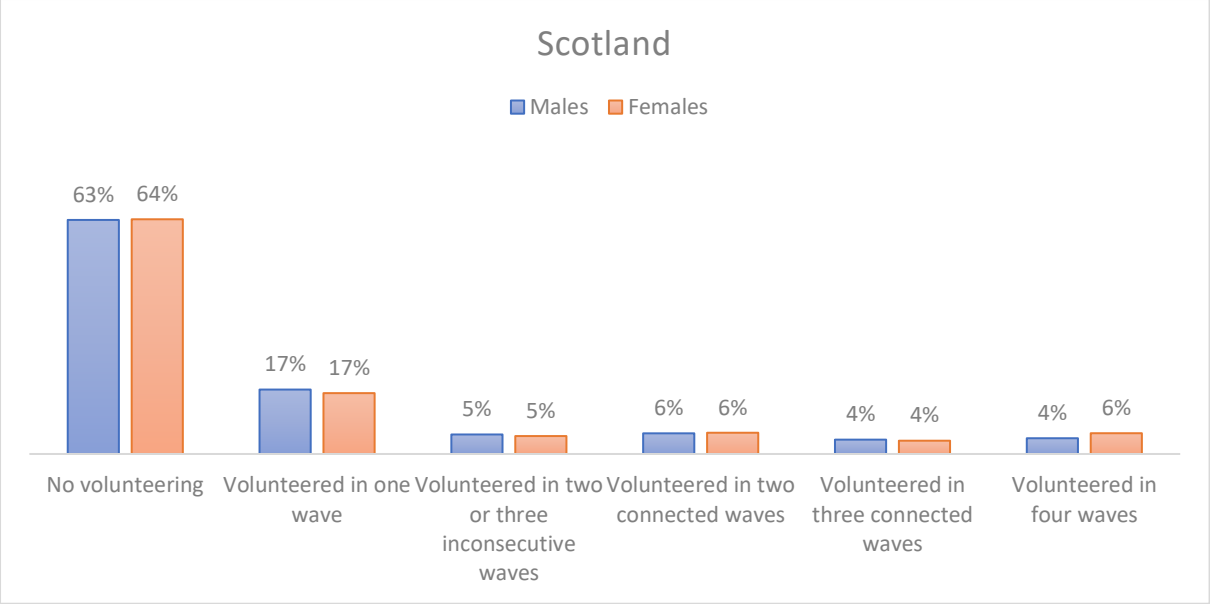


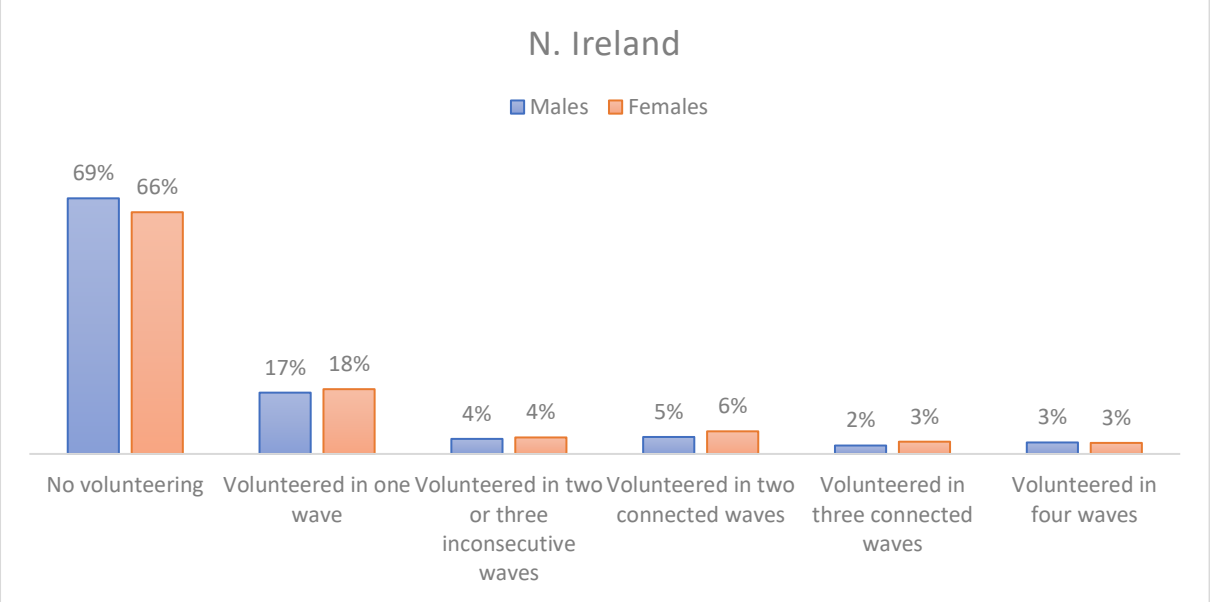
The data for the four nations are provided in Figure Fourteen, which once again shows few differences between the relationship between gender and volunteering across the four nations of the UK – with one exception. When using the 'recurrence of volunteering' measure the gender difference becomes larger in Wales than elsewhere. While 70 per cent of males in Wales reported not volunteering at all in the four surveys (compared with 62 in England, 63 per cent in Scotland and 69 per cent in Northern Ireland), only 64 per cent of females never volunteered (compared with 59 per cent in England, 64 per cent in Scotland and 66 per cent in Northern Ireland). Once we take account of the eight-year period between 2010 and 2018 rather than a single survey year, therefore, Welsh women are shown to be about as likely to volunteer as their counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland, while Welsh men stand out for being less active. The 6-point gender gap in Wales is larger than that in England (3 points), Scotland (1 point) and Northern Ireland (3 points).

Figure Fourteen: Recurrence of Volunteering and Gender in the Four Nations (%)









Volunteering and Socio-Economic Status

Research from academia and the third sector is unanimous in its assessment of how socio-economic status (SES) is related to volunteering. People of higher SES, whether measured by education, occupational social class, home ownership or income, are more likely to volunteer than those of lower SES (Adler and Goggin 2005; Wilson 2000; Wilson and Musick 1997; Rooney et al 2004; WCVA 2016; Dartington 2019; Hustinx et al 2010a). Except for being asked to volunteer, indications of SES consistently have the strongest impact in explaining why respondents to social surveys do or do not volunteer. This is usually explained in terms of what Hustinx et al (2010) call the 'dominant status model' and Wilson and Musick (1997) call a 'resource model'. Those with superior human, economic

and social status possess more of the resources that facilitate volunteering (such as time, money, skills and social capital) than those of lower status, and so they are more likely to volunteer. An alternative explanation is based on the importance of mobilisation, i.e. being asked to volunteer. Being asked to volunteer is often the most important determinant of whether someone actually volunteers (Wilson 2000; Hustinx et al 2010; Rehberg 2005), even more than SES. Some argue, however, that the two are related: people of superior SES are more likely to be asked to volunteer than those of low SES, either because they are perceived as more 'desirable' potential volunteers by recruiters, or because they superior social resources and networks make them more likely to come into contact with someone who will invite them to volunteer (Rehberg 2005; Carson 2000; Davis-Smith 1999). Rather than being more able to volunteer than those of lower SES, therefore, people of high SES are simply more likely to be given the opportunity to volunteer.

UKHLS does not, unfortunately, include sufficient data to test these competing theories, but it does allow us to take a detailed look at how SES is related to volunteering over time and across the UK's nations. For this analysis, SES is measured using two indicators: highest qualification and occupational social class. Starting with education, respondents were categorised into three groups: those with no qualifications at all, those with CSE/GCSE/O-Levels/Standard qualifications, and those with some higher education qualification (such as a degree or a diploma).[3] Figure Fifteen shows the proportion of each group who volunteered (to any frequency) in the UK and the four nations in the four UKHLS surveys.

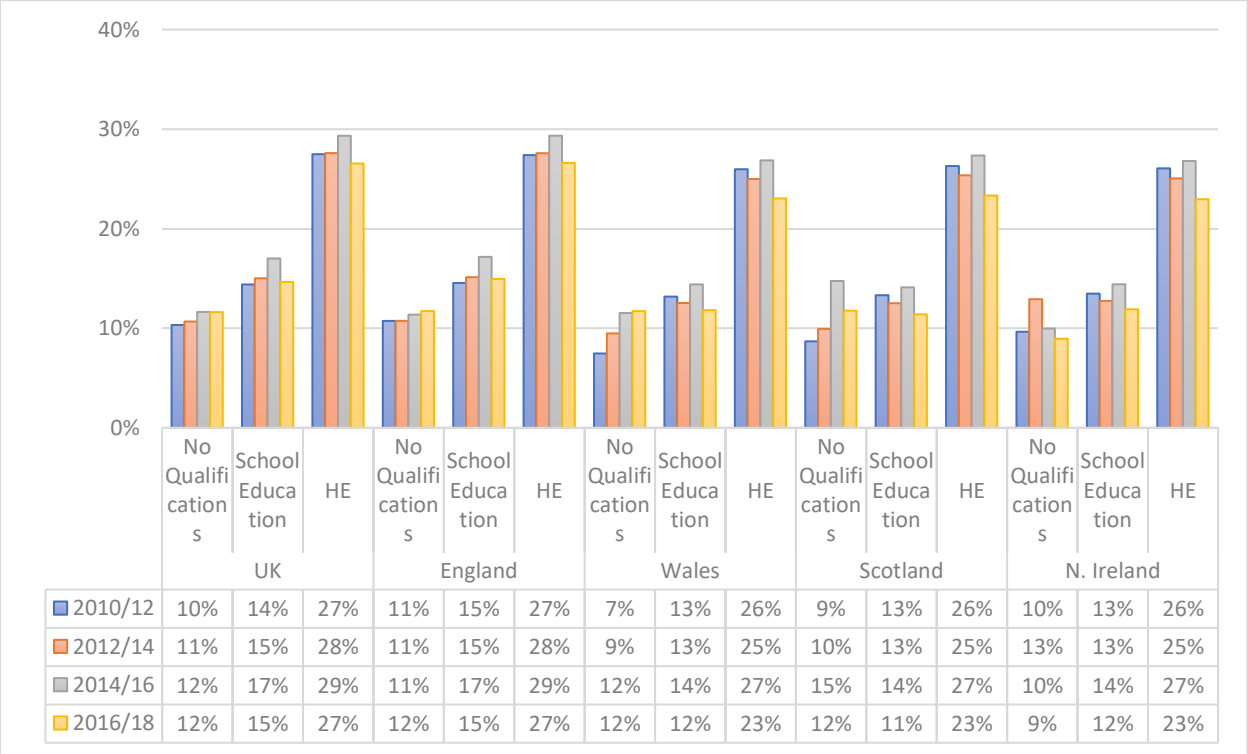
The relationship between education and volunteering is as expected and consistent across all surveys and nations: people without qualifications are the least likely to volunteer and those with higher education (HE) experience are the most likely to do so. On average, around one in ten respondents without qualifications volunteered in all four surveys and nations; compared with around 14 per cent with a school education and just over a quarter of those with HE experience. The differences in volunteering rates based on education are considerably larger than any of those based on age and gender explored above.

While the relationship between volunteering and education has remained unchanged over time, there are indications of changes in the volunteering rates of different groups. Specifically, those without qualifications became marginally more likely to volunteer (though the proportion doing so increased by no more than 2 percentage points) between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys in

[3] The education measures in UKHLS were simplified into these three categories for the sake of parsimony; a minority of respondents did not fit into these categories and were omitted, including those still in full-time education, those with AS-Levels/A-Levels of equivalent only, and those for whom no qualification data was provided.

England, Wales and Scotland, though there was no change in Northern Ireland. The graph also sheds a little light on where the difference in volunteering rates between the nations identified above is found: those without qualifications are equally likely (or unlikely) to volunteer in all four nations, however the proportion of those with a school education and HE experience volunteering is marginally higher (by 2 around points) in England than in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This highlights another very small difference between the nations, namely that the gap in volunteering between those with and without qualifications (whatever they are) is marginally greater in England than elsewhere.

Figure Fifteen: Volunteering by Highest Qualification in the UK, 2010/12-2016/18 (%)



	UK			England			Wales			Scotland			N. Ireland		
	No Qualifications	School Education	HE	No Qualifications	School Education	HE	No Qualifications	School Education	HE	No Qualifications	School Education	HE	No Qualifications	School Education	HE
2010/12	10%	14%	27%	11%	15%	27%	7%	13%	26%	9%	13%	26%	10%	13%	26%
2012/14	11%	15%	28%	11%	15%	28%	9%	13%	25%	10%	13%	25%	13%	13%	25%
2014/16	12%	17%	29%	11%	17%	29%	12%	14%	27%	15%	14%	27%	10%	14%	27%
2016/18	12%	15%	27%	12%	15%	27%	12%	12%	23%	12%	11%	23%	9%	12%	23%

Figure Sixteen looks at how the recurrence of volunteering varies by qualification in the UK (depending on the highest qualification of respondents in the 2010/12 survey) and shows that the differences in the propensity to volunteer at all based on education are greater than the data above suggests. Three quarters of respondents with no qualifications did not volunteer at all between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys, compared with two thirds of those with school qualifications and slightly less than half of those with a HE qualification. This shows that the under-estimation of volunteering that the single-survey measures produce is concentrated among those with HE experience. Table One above showed that any single UKHLS survey estimates that around one in five

adults in the UK volunteer in a given year, whereas if a broader range is considered this figure increases to around two in five. Even if we look only at those with HE experience (such as Figure Fifteen), single surveys estimate that three quarters do not volunteer. According to the recurrence measure, however, the majority of adults with HE experience volunteered between 2010 and 2018; a difference of around 25-percentage points from the single survey estimates. For those without qualifications, there is still a difference between the two estimates, but it is smaller, at 15-points. In other words, if we take a measure of volunteering that covers a longer time period (such as the eight years covered by UKHLS), we find that more people have volunteered in the UK than is estimated by single-year, cross-sectional estimates, but the latter approach under-estimates the volunteering of those with HE experience to a far greater extent than that of those with no qualifications or a school education. This point aside, the recurrence of volunteering measure does not lead to any substantively different conclusions from the data in Figure Fifteen: most people who volunteered between 2010 and 2018 did so in one wave of UKHLS only, with roughly equal proportions being more active in either two, three (consecutive or inconsecutive) or four waves.

Figure Sixteen: Recurrence of Volunteering by Qualification in the UK, 2010-2018 (%)

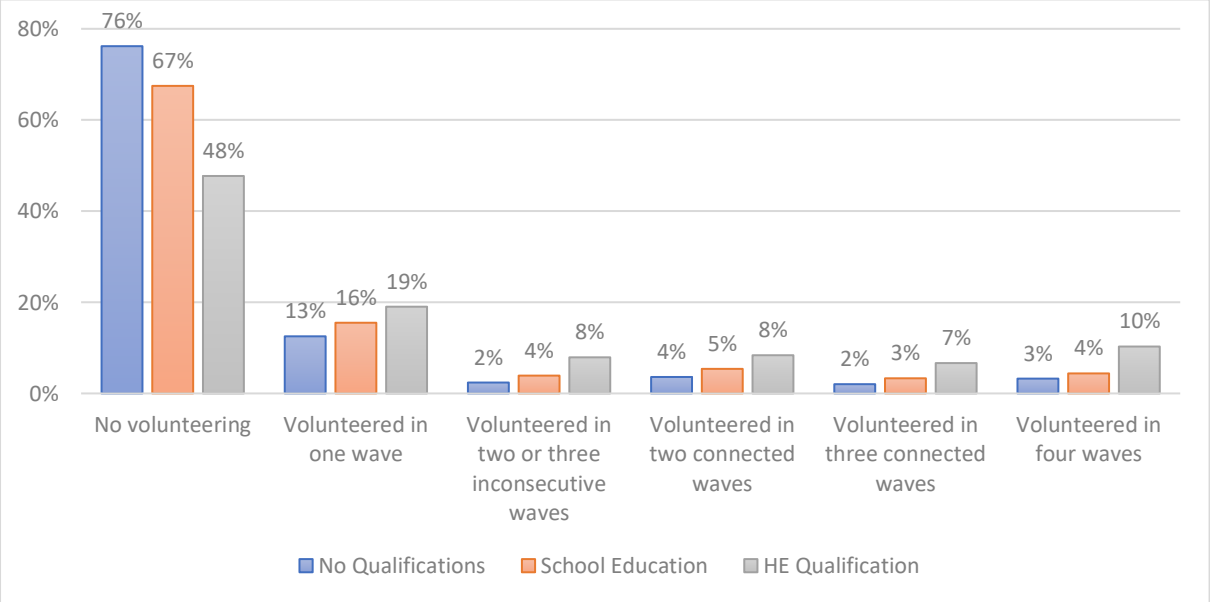
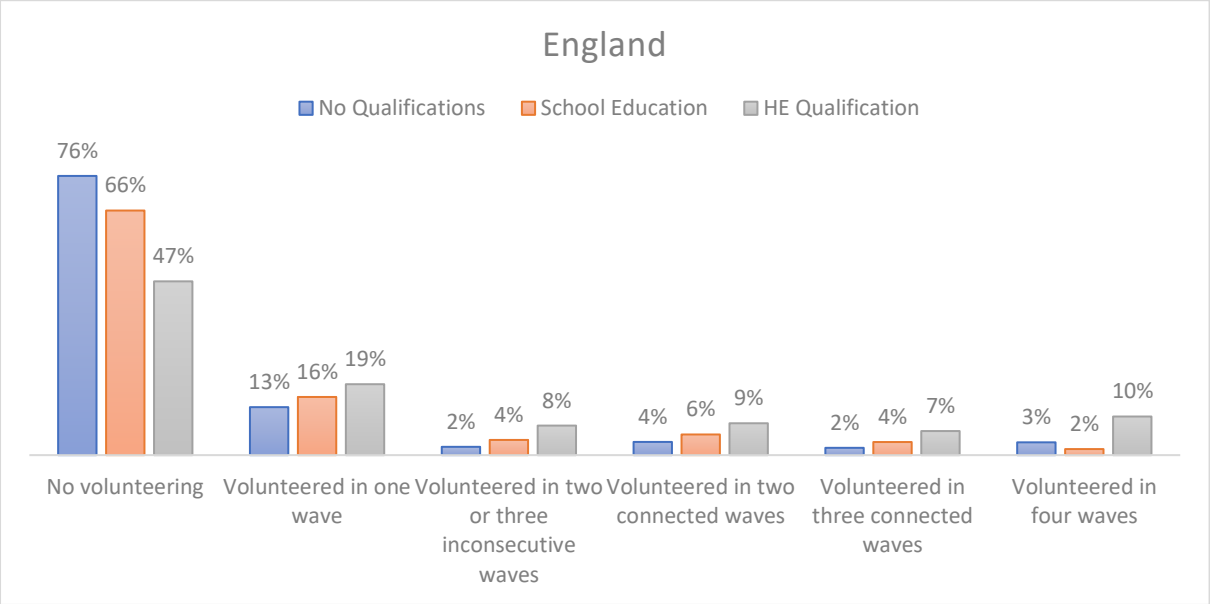
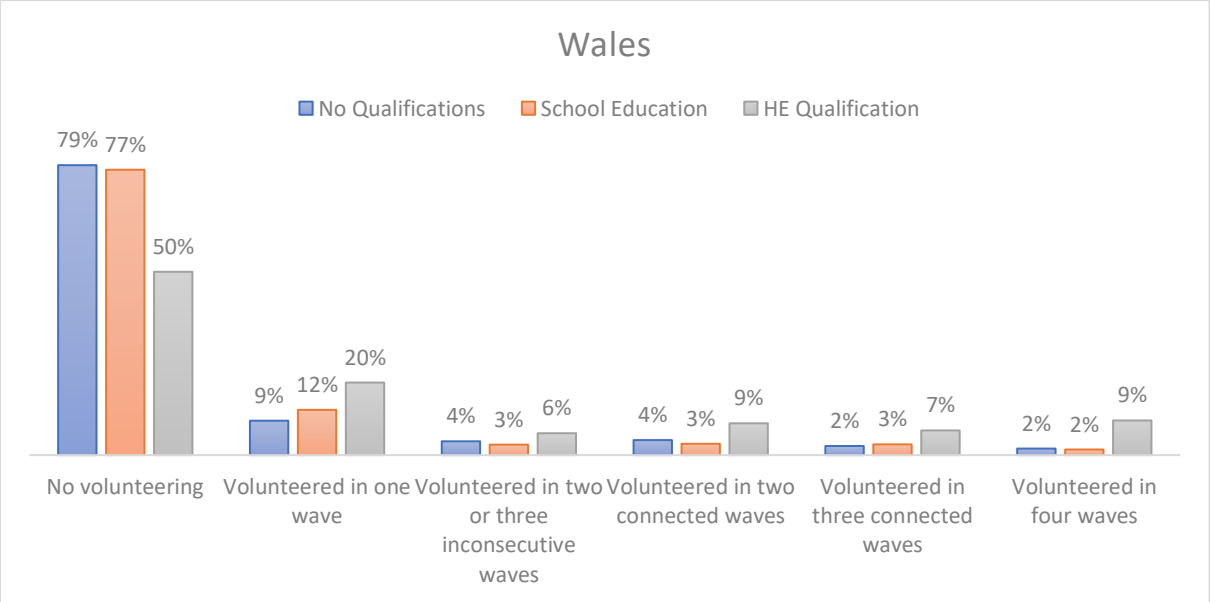


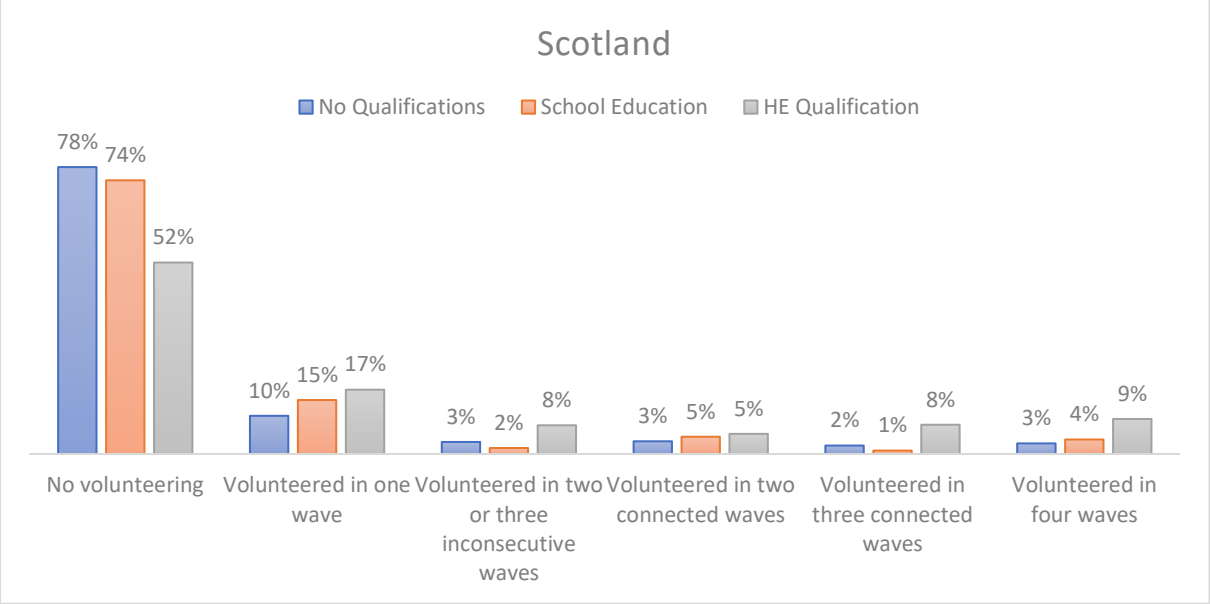
Figure Seventeen presents the same data for the four nations, once again showing that there are few substantial differences and that the education and volunteering relationship is the same. The one exception to this concerns the volunteering rate of those with a school education in England, which is higher on the recurrence of volunteering measure than that in the other three nations. Between 2010 and 2018, 66 per cent of respondents with a school education in England did no

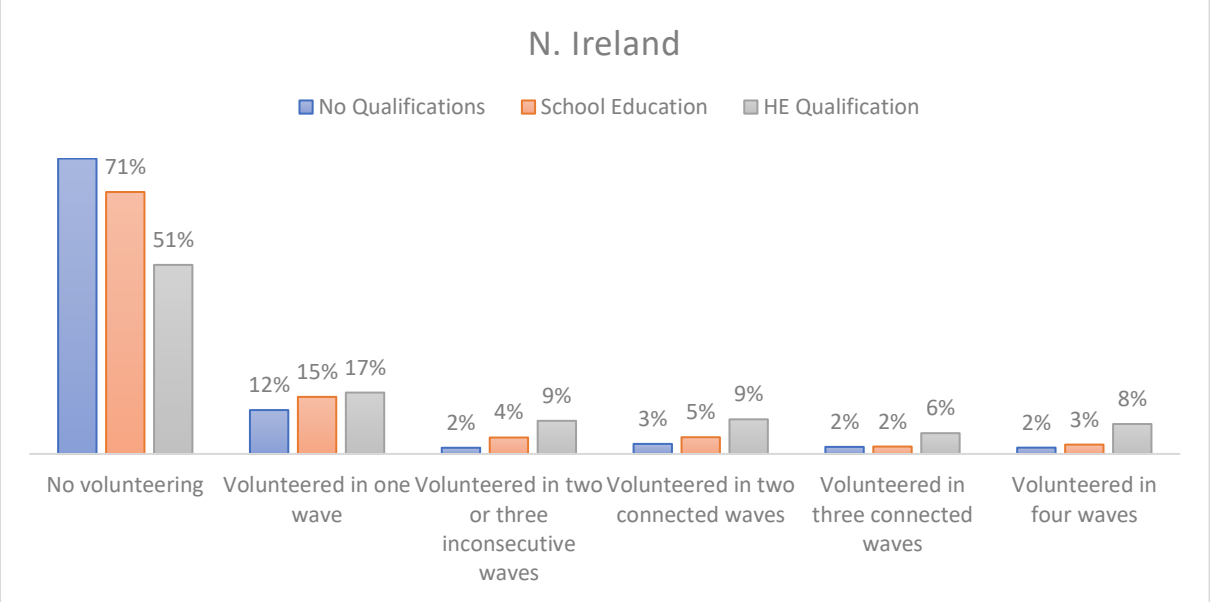
volunteering at all; in Wales, the figure was 77 per cent, in Scotland 74 per cent and in Northern Ireland 71 per cent. Given that the data for those with no qualifications and HE qualifications are basically the same in all four nations, it is not clear why this is the case. One possible explanation is that this reflects the influence of some of the policy initiatives associated with the 'Big Society' project pursued in England following the financial crisis and the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 (such as regarding the long-term unemployed or the encouragement of community groups to run public services) that were not pursued by the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, though further analysis is needed to confirm this.

Figure Seventeen: Recurrence of Volunteering by Qualification in the Four Nations, 2010-2018 (%)









Turning to the influence of occupational social class, Figure Eighteen shows the proportion of respondents who reported volunteering in the UK between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys depending on whether they were not in paid employment; in unskilled, partly skilled or semi-skilled work; in skilled manual work; in skilled non-manual work; or in professional, managerial or technical occupations. Unlike that relating to education, this data does not quite correspond to the expectations of the resources or dominant status theories. While overall rates of volunteering from one year to the next barely changed for each social class, and those in managerial, technical and professional occupations were the most likely to volunteer, there was virtually no difference in the volunteering rates of the other social classes. The average proportion of those in managerial,

technical or professional occupations that volunteered in all of the four surveys, for example, was just under a quarter (24 per cent), compared with 14 per cent of those in un/partly skilled work, 15 per cent of those in skilled manual work, and 16 per cent of those in skilled non-manual work. While we may not necessarily expect a difference between those in skilled manual and skilled non-manual work, we would typically expect those in skilled work to be more active than those in un-skilled work, something which a 1-point difference does not really support. Those not in paid employment were also more likely to volunteer than all of those in work except the managerial, technical and professional occupations. However, this is primarily the result of most of those not in paid employment being either in full-time education or retired, both circumstances of which are associated (as shown above) with higher volunteering rates.

Figure Eighteen: Volunteering by Occupational Social Class in the UK, 2010/12-2016/18 (%)

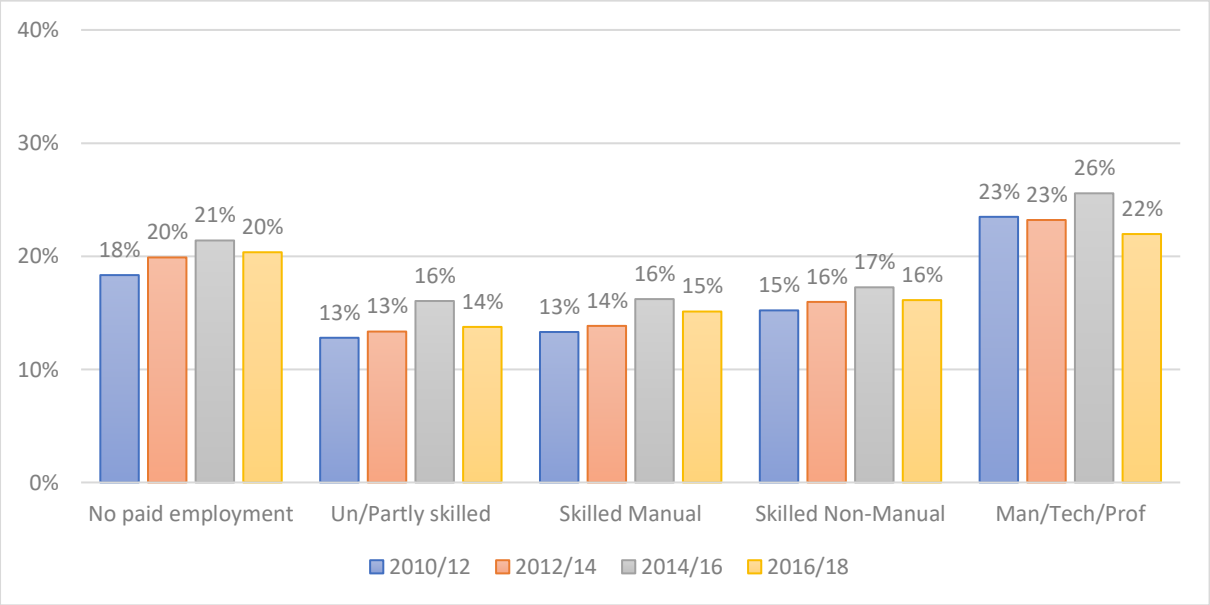
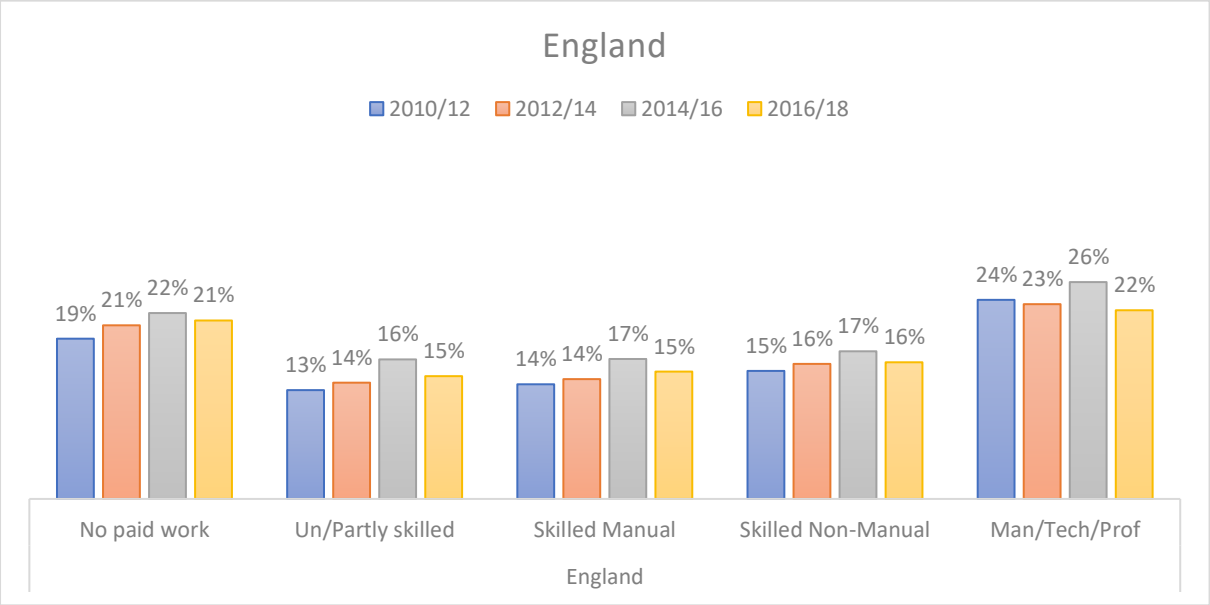
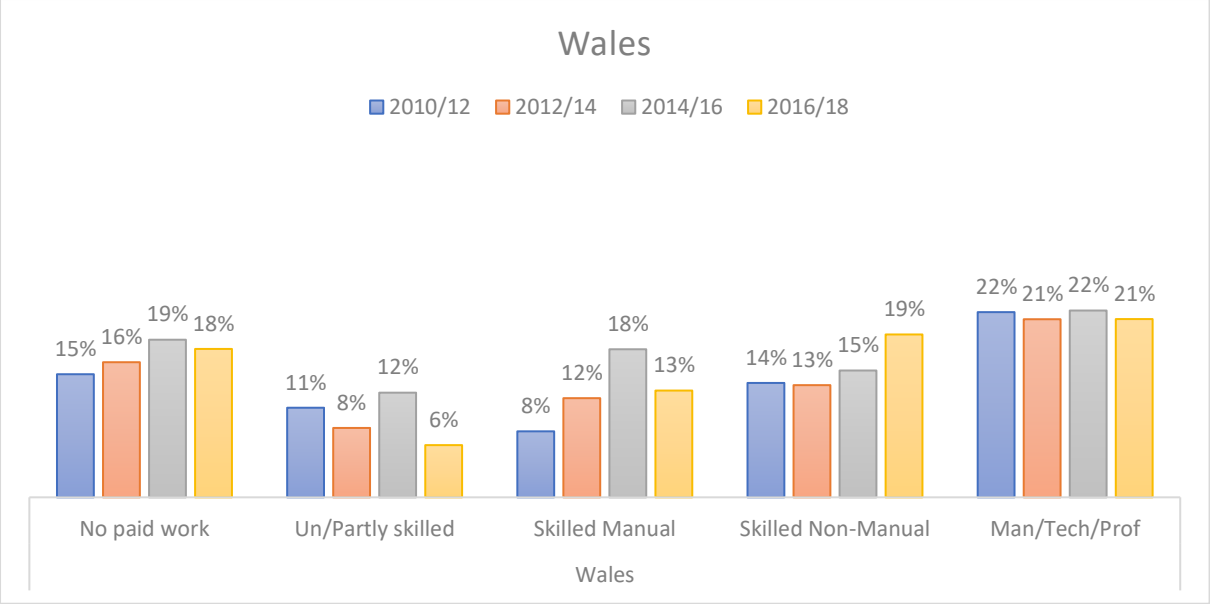


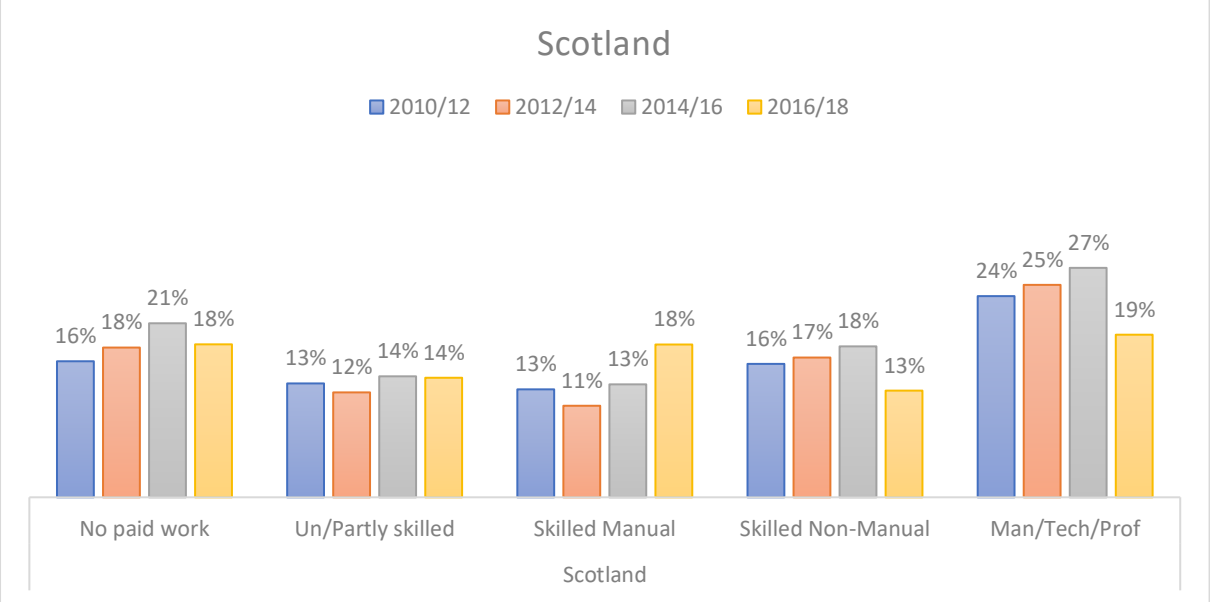
Figure Nineteen shows the data for the four nations, showing once again that they are more similar than different with one or two notable exceptions. These include those not in paid employment in Northern Ireland being less likely to have volunteered than those in the other nations. On average between the 2010/12 and 2016/18 surveys, for example, 14 per cent of those not in paid work in Northern Ireland volunteered, compared with 17 per cent in Wales, 18 per cent in Scotland and 21 per cent in England. This largely reflects the fact that older people in Northern Ireland are slightly less likely to volunteer than those in Britain, as shown in the age analyses above. Another stand out is that volunteering amongst low skilled workers is particularly low in Wales. Among those in un/partly skilled work, an average of 9 per cent volunteered between the 2010/12 and 2016/18

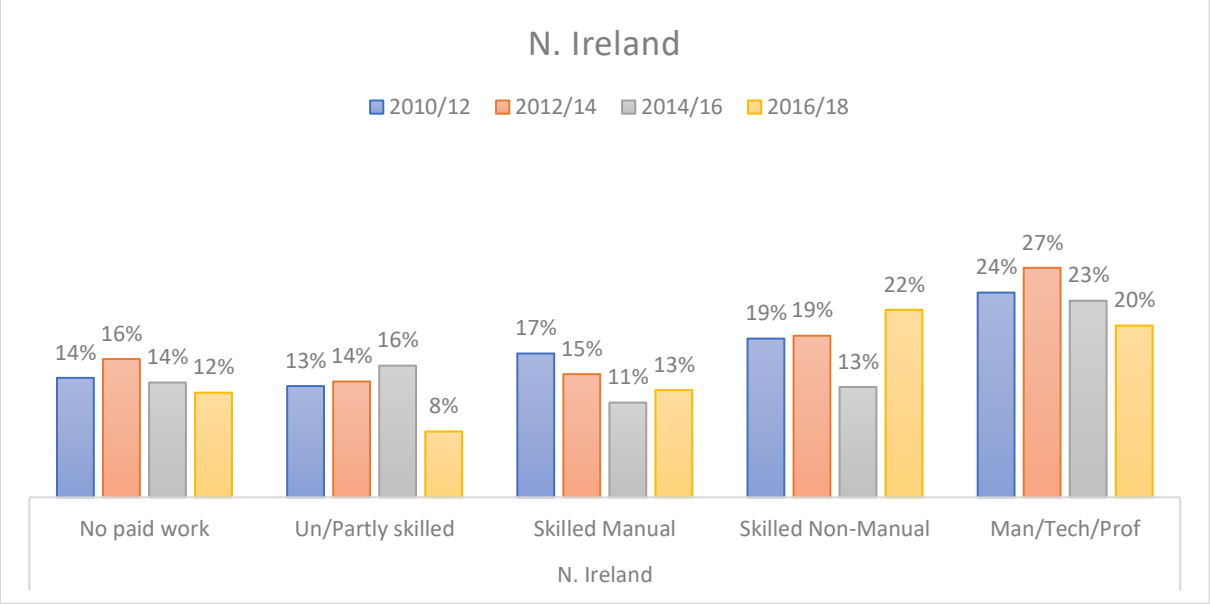
surveys in Wales, compared with 14 per cent in Scotland and England, and 13 per cent in Northern Ireland. Whereas this may in part reflect the slightly lower rates of overall volunteering in Wales than England and Scotland, the figure is low even compared with Northern Ireland (where overall rates are also lower), and the rates for those in other social classes in Wales are not as different from their counterparts in the other nations. This suggests there is something specific to low-skilled workers' volunteering in Wales. It is also noticeable that the volunteering rates of those in un/partly skilled, and skilled manual, work in Wales and – to a lesser extent – Northern Ireland are more volatile from one year to the next than those in England and Scotland. Caution should be taken in reading much into this, however, as it could easily reflect the relatively small sample sizes in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Figure Nineteen: Volunteering by Occupational Social Class in the Four Nations, 2010/12-2016/18




Wales
2010/12
2012/14
2014/16
2016/18
15%
16%
19%
18%
11%
8%
12%
6%
8%
12%
18%
13%
14%
13%
15%
19%
22%
21%
22%
21%
No paid work
Un/Partly skilled
Skilled Manual
Skilled Non-Manual
Man/Tech/Prof
Wales


Scotland
2010/12
2012/14
2014/16
2016/18
16%
18%
21%
18%
13%
12%
14%
14%
13%
11%
13%
18%
16%
17%
18%
13%
24%
25%
27%
19%
No paid work
Un/Partly skilled
Skilled Manual
Skilled Non-Manual
Man/Tech/Prof
Scotland



Finally, Figures Twenty and Twenty-One show the data on the recurrence of volunteering across the four survey waves depending on respondents' social class in the 2010/12 survey. The now familiar pattern in which overall rates of volunteering are found to be higher once the broader recurrence measure is used is clear. The relationship between social class and volunteering is slightly different in Figure Twenty, however, from that depicted in Figures Eighteen and Nineteen. Those in managerial, technical and professional jobs were still shown to be the most likely to volunteer, followed by those in no paid employment. While Figures Eighteen and Nineteen showed virtually no difference in the volunteering rates of those in un/partly skilled, skilled manual and skilled non-manual work, the recurrence measure shows that 72 per cent of those in un/partly skilled work did no volunteering between 2010/12 and 2016/18, compared with 69 per cent of those in skilled manual work and 65 per cent of those in skilled non-manual work. Taking a longer timeframe into account when measuring volunteering, therefore, shows that more people in higher status and income jobs volunteer than may be assumed in snap-shot surveys focussed on a shorter period, and brings the findings more into line with what is expected based on the resource and dominant status theories. Related to this, we also see that (as with the analysis of qualifications) the extent to which conventional estimates of volunteering under-state the rate of survey respondents varies depending on social group. Compared with the average rates identified in Figure Eighteen, for example, the recurrence measure identified non-volunteering among those in no paid employment as nineteen percentage points lower (80 per cent on conventional measures, 61 per cent on the recurrence measure). For those in un/partly skilled work, the gap is 14 points (86 per cent compared with 72 per cent); for those in skilled manual work, the gap is 16 points (85 per cent compared with 69 points);

for those in skilled non-manual work, the gap is 19 points (84 per cent compared with 65 per cent); and for those in managerial, technical or professional work, the gap is 24 points (76 per cent compared with 52 per cent). As with people with higher education experience, therefore, conventional measures of volunteering rates under-state whether people in the highest status and best paid jobs have volunteered at any point.

Figure Twenty: Recurrence of Volunteering by Occupational Social Class in the UK, 2010-2018 (%)

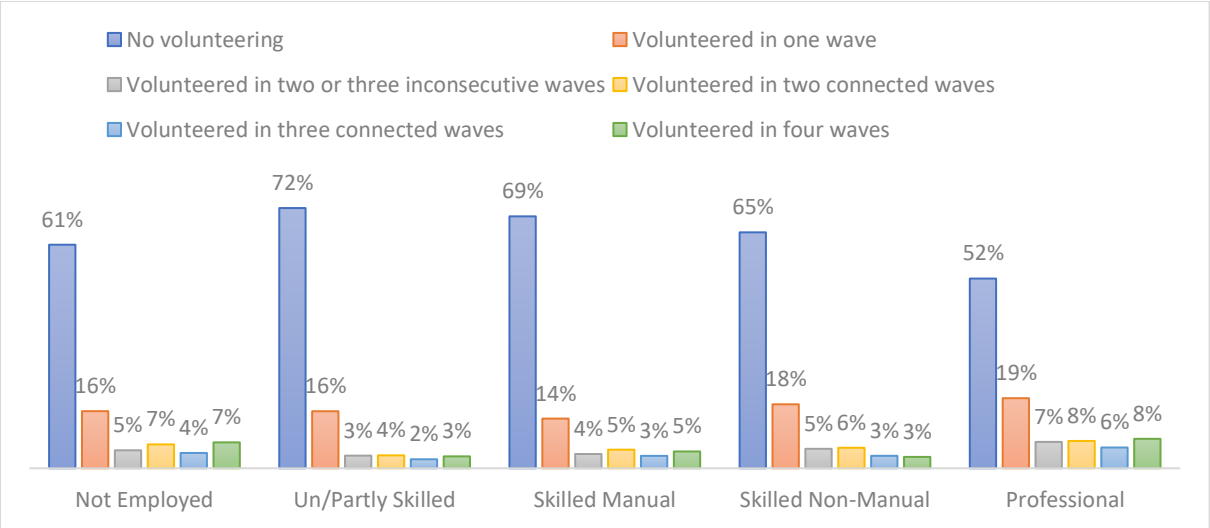
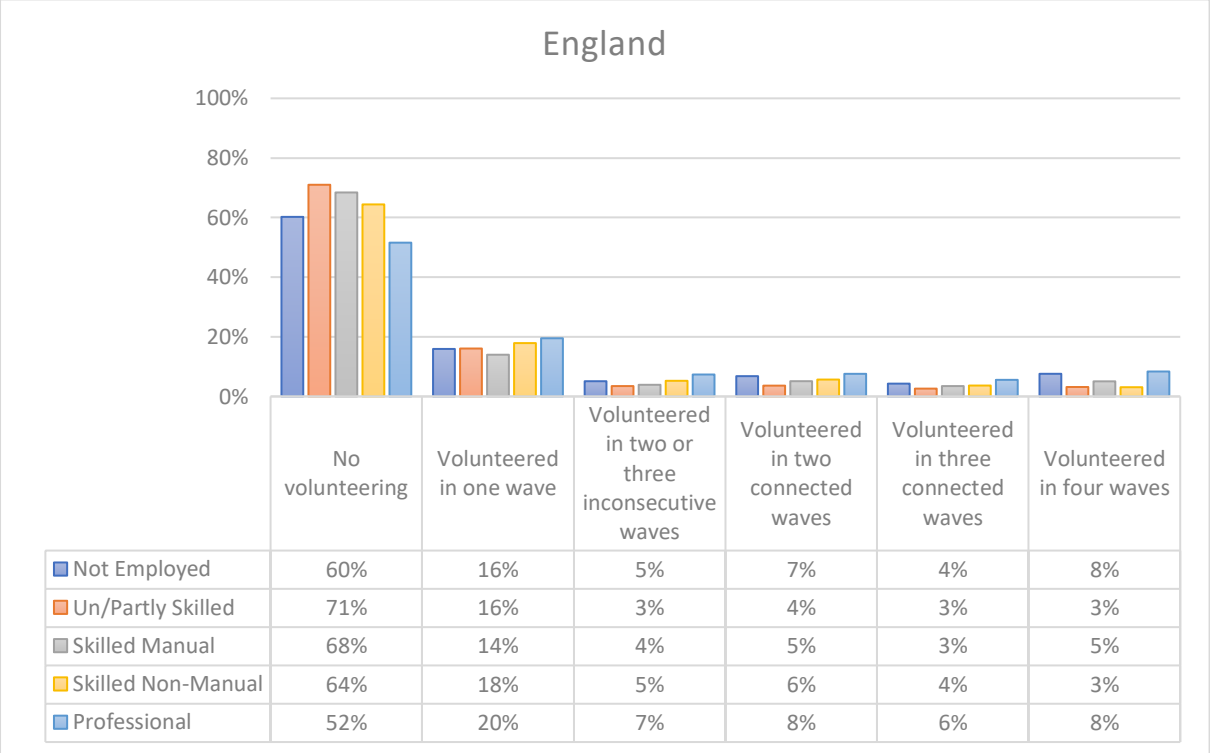
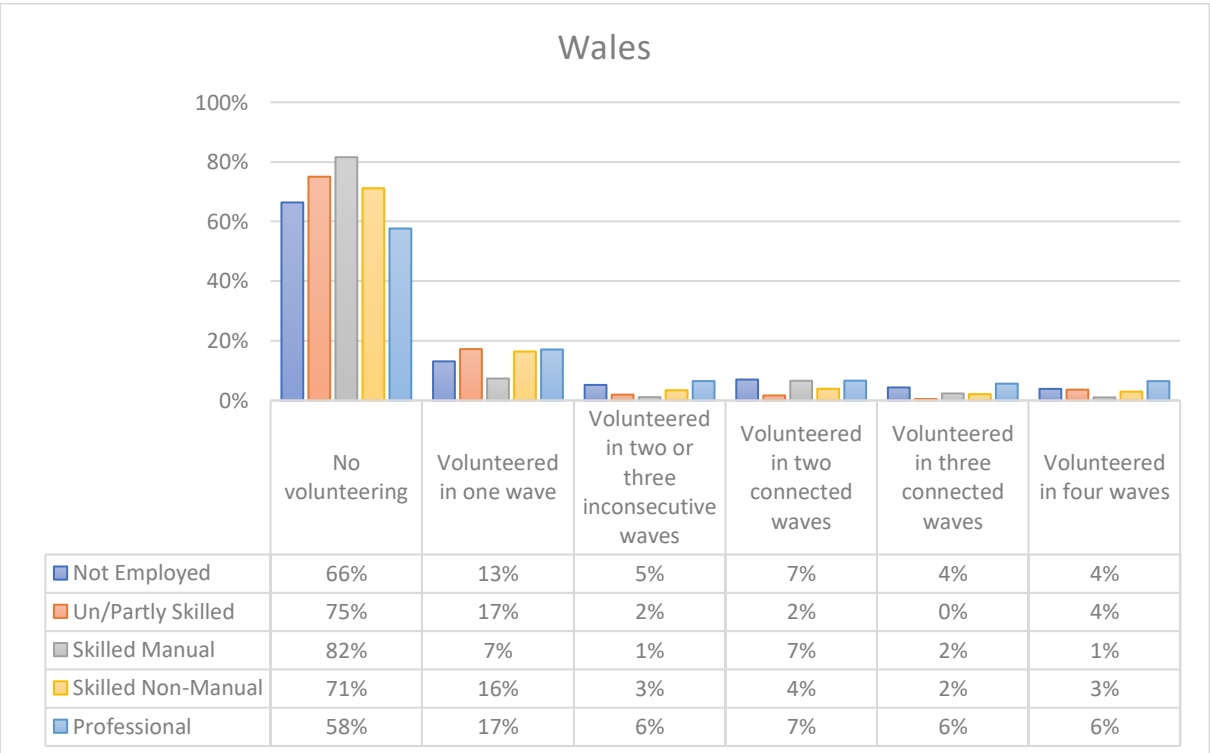


Figure Twenty-One shows that the patterns across the four nations are virtually identical with two exceptions. The first is, as identified above, that rates of volunteering among skilled manual workers in Wales were unusually low: 82 per cent of Welsh skilled manual workers never volunteered between 2010/12 and 2016/18, compared with 68 per cent in England and Scotland, and 72 per cent in Northern Ireland. The second relates to Northern Ireland, in which the difference between the proportion who volunteered at all (regardless of recurrence) between those in skilled non-manual work and those in professional work is smaller than in the other nations, primarily because of the greater propensity of those in skilled non-manual jobs to volunteer. The gap between the two in Northern Ireland, for example, is 8 points, compared with 13 points in Scotland and Wales, and 12 in England. In addition, the proportion of those in no paid work who did not volunteer in Northern Ireland is notably higher than elsewhere, at 75 per cent, compared with 66 per cent in Wales and Scotland, and 60 per cent in England. Apart from these, the proportions who volunteered at all in Northern Ireland are comparable to those in the other nations (within the repeatedly documented tendency of those in Northern Ireland – of any age, gender and SES) to volunteer less than in the rest of the UK.

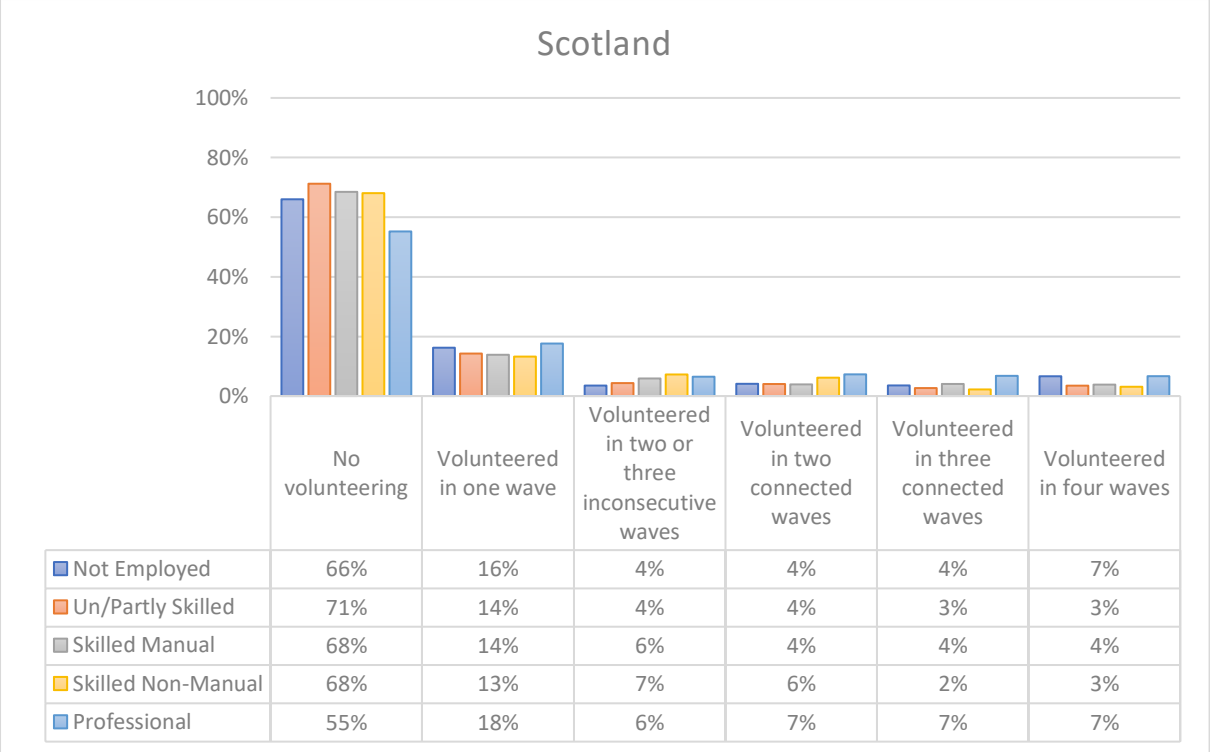
Figure Twenty-One: Recurrence of Volunteering by Occupational Social Class in the Four Nations, 2010-2018 (%)



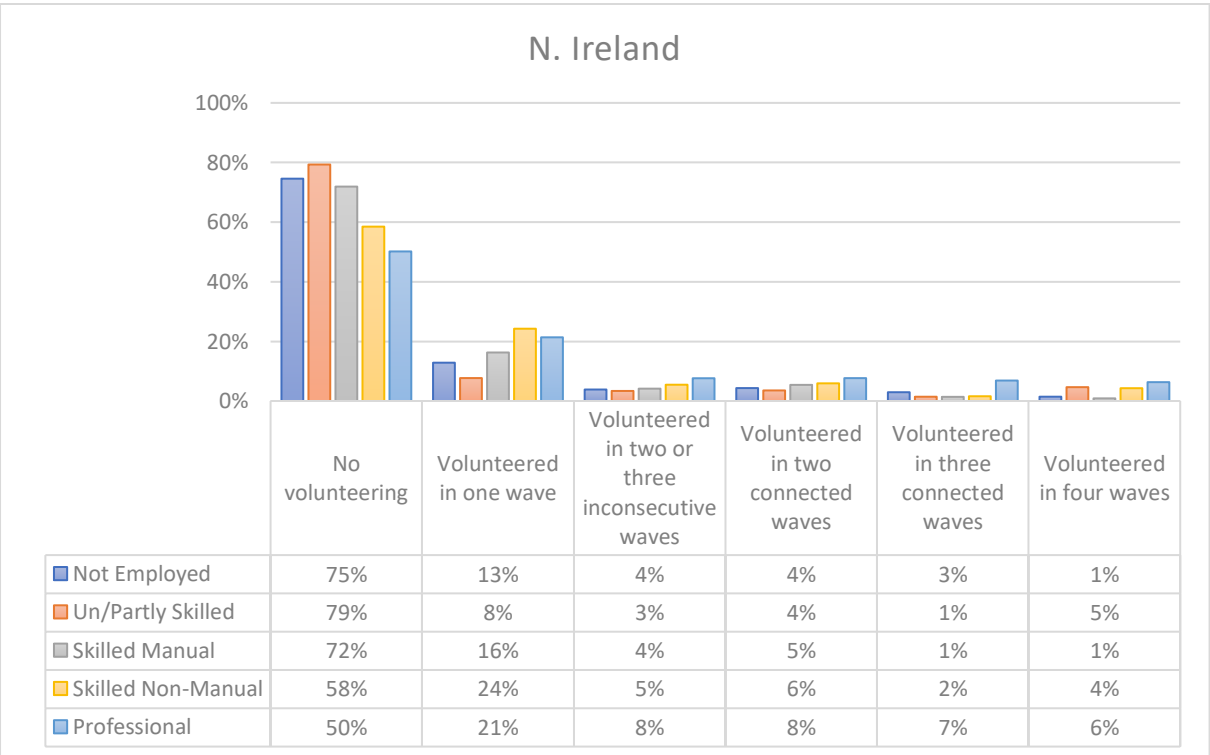
	No volunteering	Volunteered in one wave	Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	Volunteered in two connected waves	Volunteered in three connected waves	Volunteered in four waves
Not Employed	60%	16%	5%	7%	4%	8%
Un/Partly Skilled	71%	16%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Skilled Manual	68%	14%	4%	5%	3%	5%
Skilled Non-Manual	64%	18%	5%	6%	4%	3%
Professional	52%	20%	7%	8%	6%	8%



	No volunteering	Volunteered in one wave	Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	Volunteered in two connected waves	Volunteered in three connected waves	Volunteered in four waves
Not Employed	66%	13%	5%	7%	4%	4%
Un/Partly Skilled	75%	17%	2%	2%	0%	4%
Skilled Manual	82%	7%	1%	7%	2%	1%
Skilled Non-Manual	71%	16%	3%	4%	2%	3%
Professional	58%	17%	6%	7%	6%	6%



	No volunteering	Volunteered in one wave	Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	Volunteered in two connected waves	Volunteered in three connected waves	Volunteered in four waves
Not Employed	66%	16%	4%	4%	4%	7%
Un/Partly Skilled	71%	14%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Skilled Manual	68%	14%	6%	4%	4%	4%
Skilled Non-Manual	68%	13%	7%	6%	2%	3%
Professional	55%	18%	6%	7%	7%	7%



	No volunteering	Volunteered in one wave	Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves	Volunteered in two connected waves	Volunteered in three connected waves	Volunteered in four waves
Not Employed	75%	13%	4%	4%	3%	1%
Un/Partly Skilled	79%	8%	3%	4%	1%	5%
Skilled Manual	72%	16%	4%	5%	1%	1%
Skilled Non-Manual	58%	24%	5%	6%	2%	4%
Professional	50%	21%	8%	8%	7%	6%

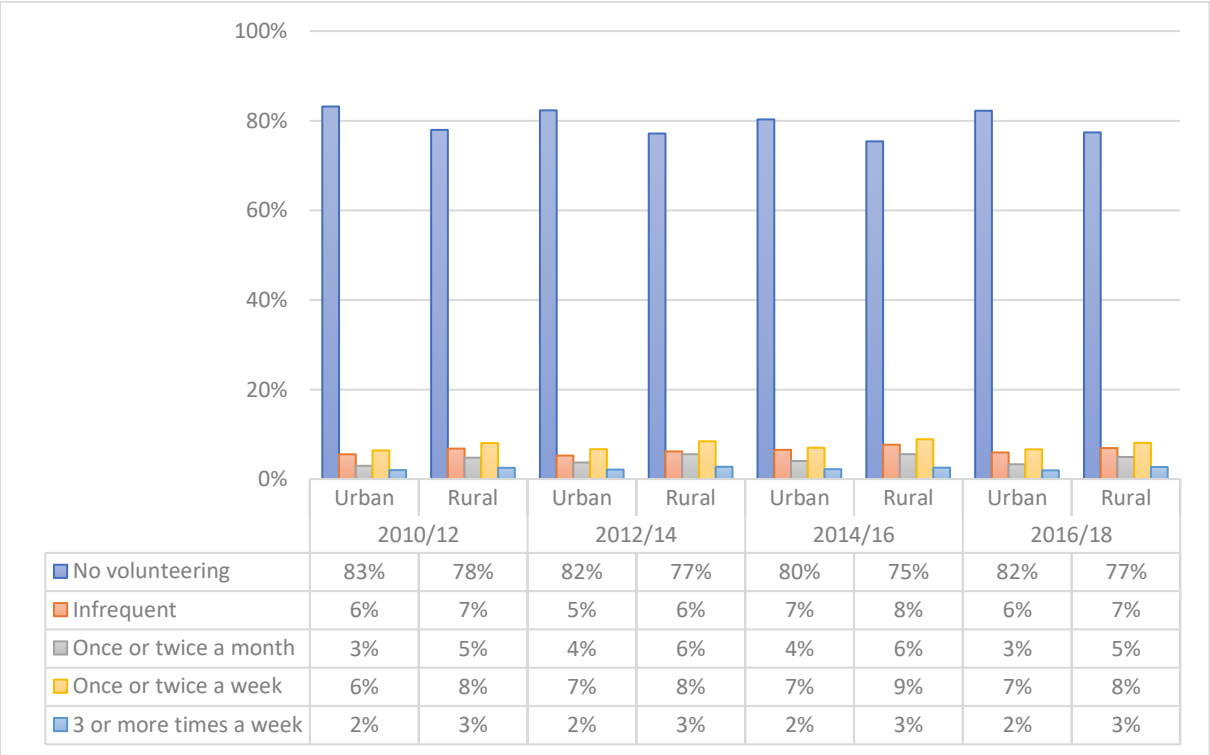
Volunteering and the Urban/Rural Divide

The final set of analyses in this chapter examine how volunteering is affected by whether respondents live in an urban or rural area. The difficulties in gathering reliable data on whether

respondents' live in urban or rural areas, and in getting sufficiently large samples of those in live in the latter, make this issue challenging to explore. There is also a disagreement in existing research about the relationship. Some argue that the context in which a potential volunteer lives is a far more powerful determinant of whether they actually volunteer than individual-level characteristics, such as their SES or motivation (Kang and Kwak 2003; Rosenthal et al 1998). This is, of course, disputed by research that emphasises the resource and dominant status theories. There is also no agreement about the nature of the contextual effect (regardless of how strong it is). Some research suggests that those living in urban areas are more likely to volunteer because they are more likely to be presented with the opportunity to do so through the activity of community organisations that tend to be more common and active in urban areas (Roker et al 1999). Other studies suggest that those in rural areas are more likely to volunteer because such communities tend to be more closely knit and have higher levels of social capital (Jones 2006; Kang and Kwak 2003; Doyle et al 2014).

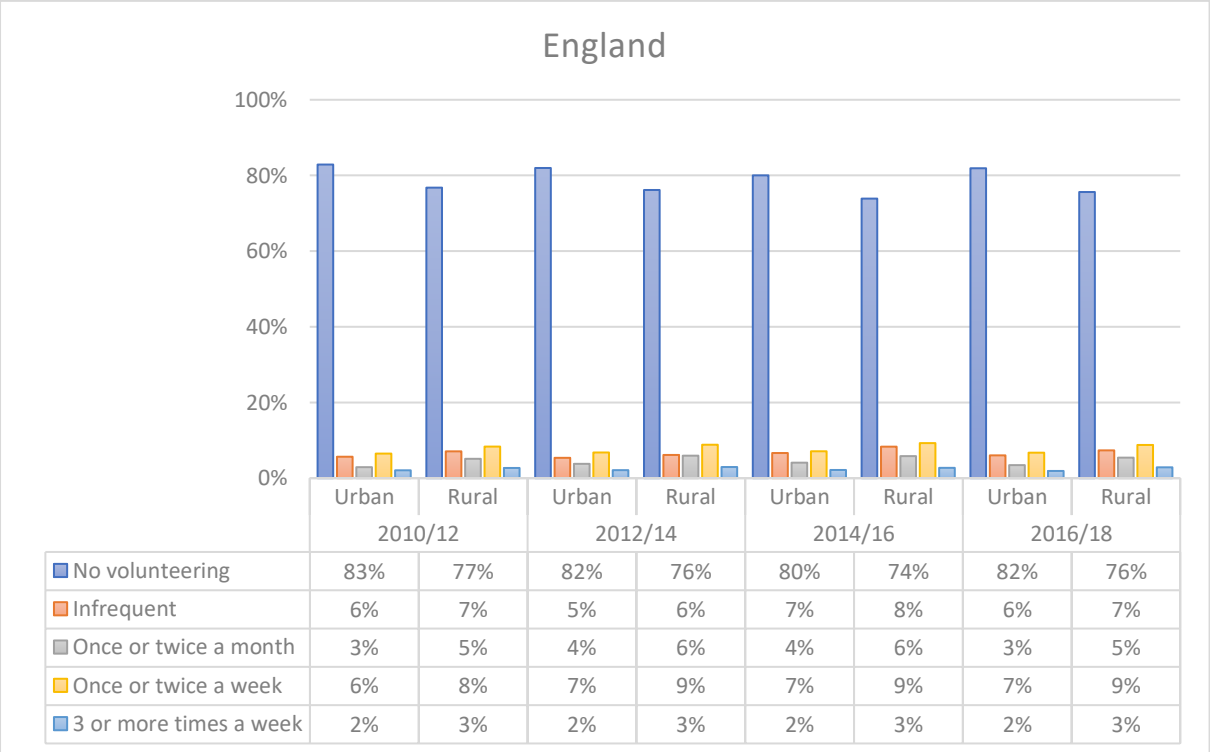
UKHLS has the potential to explore this issue in considerable detail because it can match survey respondents with various geographic identifiers, such as local authority or parliamentary constituency. Accessing such data requires special permission from UKHLS, however. The standard survey used for this research does allow respondents to be separated depending on whether their household is in an urban or rural area, and the analyses below show how this is related to volunteering. Figure Twenty-Two shows the volunteering rate and frequency of respondents living in urban and rural areas in the four UKHLS surveys for the UK, while Figure Twenty-Three presents the data for the four nations. Reflecting the patterns identified above, both figures show that overall levels of volunteering have remained stable since 2010 throughout the UK. The graphs also show a small but consistent difference in which those living in rural communities are more likely to have volunteered than those in urban areas. Across the UK, for example, an average of 82 per cent of respondents in urban areas did no volunteering across the four surveys, compared with 77 per cent of those in rural areas. While those in rural areas are more likely to have volunteered than those in urban areas in all four nations, the urban/rural gap is larger in England (where the difference in the average proportion that volunteered was 5 percentage points) and Scotland (also 5 points) than Wales (2 points) and Northern Ireland (1 point). This is the result of those in rural parts of Wales and Northern Ireland being less likely to volunteer than their counterparts in England and Scotland.

Figure Twenty-Two: Frequency of Volunteering by Urban/Rural divide in the UK, 2010-2018 (%)

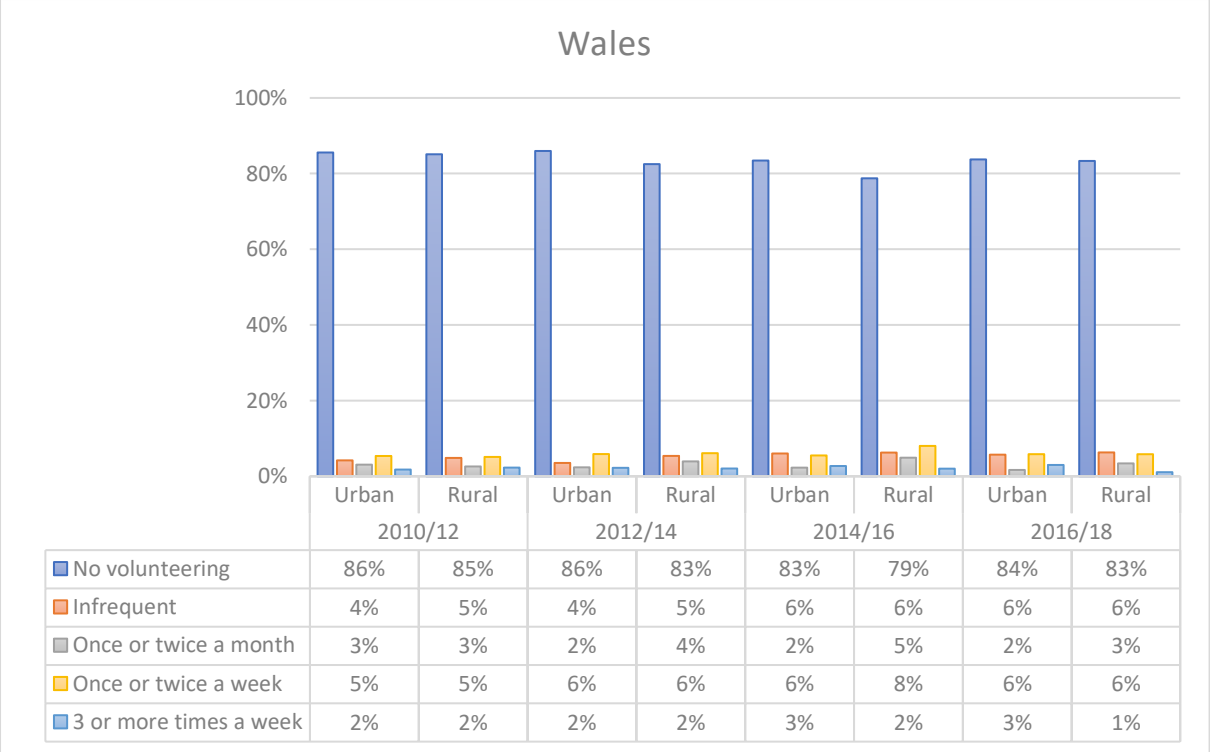


	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
	2010/12		2012/14		2014/16		2016/18	
No volunteering	83%	78%	82%	77%	80%	75%	82%	77%
Infrequent	6%	7%	5%	6%	7%	8%	6%	7%
Once or twice a month	3%	5%	4%	6%	4%	6%	3%	5%
Once or twice a week	6%	8%	7%	8%	7%	9%	7%	8%
3 or more times a week	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%

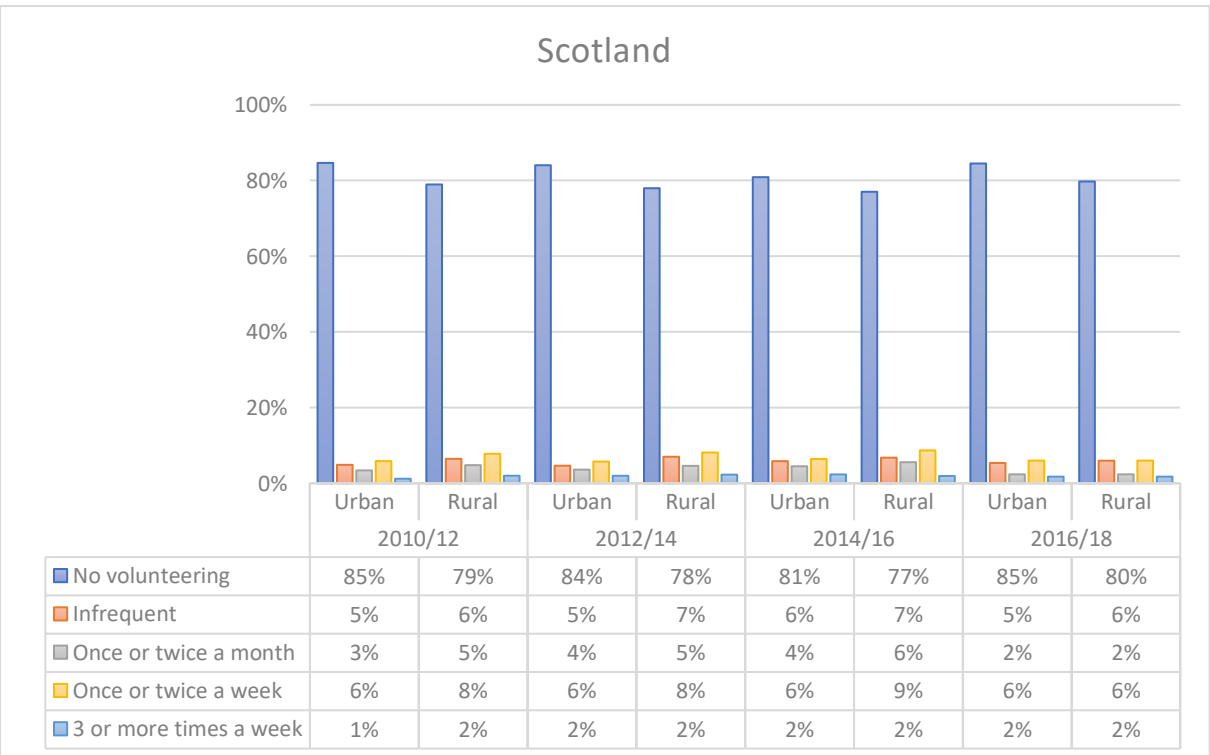
Figure Twenty-Three: Frequency of Volunteering by Urban/Rural divide in the Four Nations, 2010-2018 (%)



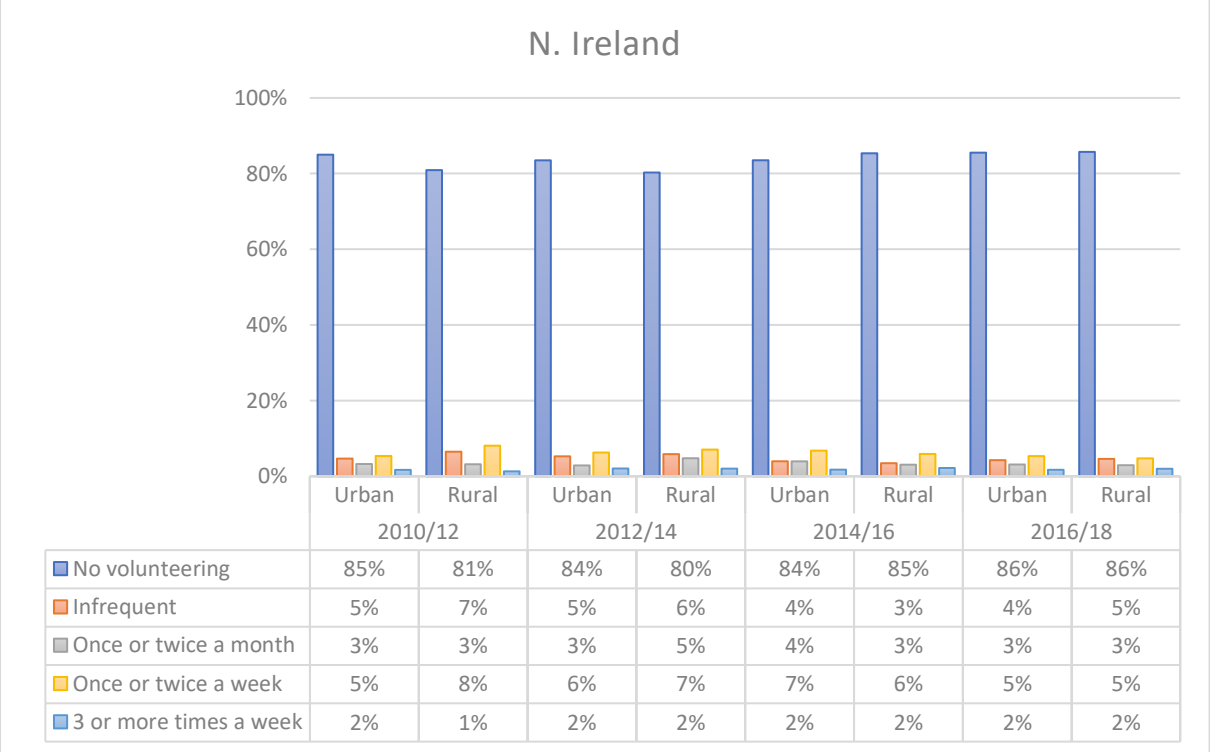
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
	2010/12		2012/14		2014/16		2016/18	
No volunteering	83%	77%	82%	76%	80%	74%	82%	76%
Infrequent	6%	7%	5%	6%	7%	8%	6%	7%
Once or twice a month	3%	5%	4%	6%	4%	6%	3%	5%
Once or twice a week	6%	8%	7%	9%	7%	9%	7%	9%
3 or more times a week	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%



	Urban 2010/12	Rural 2010/12	Urban 2012/14	Rural 2012/14	Urban 2014/16	Rural 2014/16	Urban 2016/18	Rural 2016/18
No volunteering	86%	85%	86%	83%	83%	79%	84%	83%
Infrequent	4%	5%	4%	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Once or twice a month	3%	3%	2%	4%	2%	5%	2%	3%
Once or twice a week	5%	5%	6%	6%	6%	8%	6%	6%
3 or more times a week	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	1%



	Urban 2010/12	Rural 2010/12	Urban 2012/14	Rural 2012/14	Urban 2014/16	Rural 2014/16	Urban 2016/18	Rural 2016/18
No volunteering	85%	79%	84%	78%	81%	77%	85%	80%
Infrequent	5%	6%	5%	7%	6%	7%	5%	6%
Once or twice a month	3%	5%	4%	5%	4%	6%	2%	2%
Once or twice a week	6%	8%	6%	8%	6%	9%	6%	6%
3 or more times a week	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%



	Urban 2010/12	Rural 2010/12	Urban 2012/14	Rural 2012/14	Urban 2014/16	Rural 2014/16	Urban 2016/18	Rural 2016/18
No volunteering	85%	81%	84%	80%	84%	85%	86%	86%
Infrequent	5%	7%	5%	6%	4%	3%	4%	5%
Once or twice a month	3%	3%	3%	5%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Once or twice a week	5%	8%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	5%
3 or more times a week	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%

Figure Twenty-Four explores the urban/rural divide using the recurrence of volunteering measure. This measure confirms that those living in rural areas are more likely to volunteer to at least some extent than those living in urban areas (though most in both urban and rural areas did not volunteer between 2010 and 2018). In the UK, 37 per cent of adults in urban areas volunteered in at least one survey (most of which did so in one survey only), while the figure for those in urban areas was 43 per cent. Figure Twenty-Five presents the data for the four nations, showing very little difference in the urban/rural divide between them. One notable observation from Figure Twenty-Five, however, is that when using the recurrence of volunteering measure the urban/rural volunteering divide is shown to be larger in England, Wales and Scotland than that identified using the conventional measure in Figure Twenty-Three. While with the conventional measure the average urban/rural gap in proportions volunteering at all was 6 points for England, 2 points for Wales and 5 points for Scotland, using the recurrence measure the difference was 8 points for England, 5 points for Wales and 7 points for Scotland. In other words, while conventional measures under-state the volunteering rate for both those living in urban and rural areas, the understatement is greater for the latter. The exception to this is Northern Ireland, where the recurrence measure reveals no difference in the propensity of those in urban and rural areas to volunteer at all, just as the conventional measure.

Figure Twenty-Four: Recurrence of Volunteering by Urban/Rural divide in the UK, 2010-2018 (%)

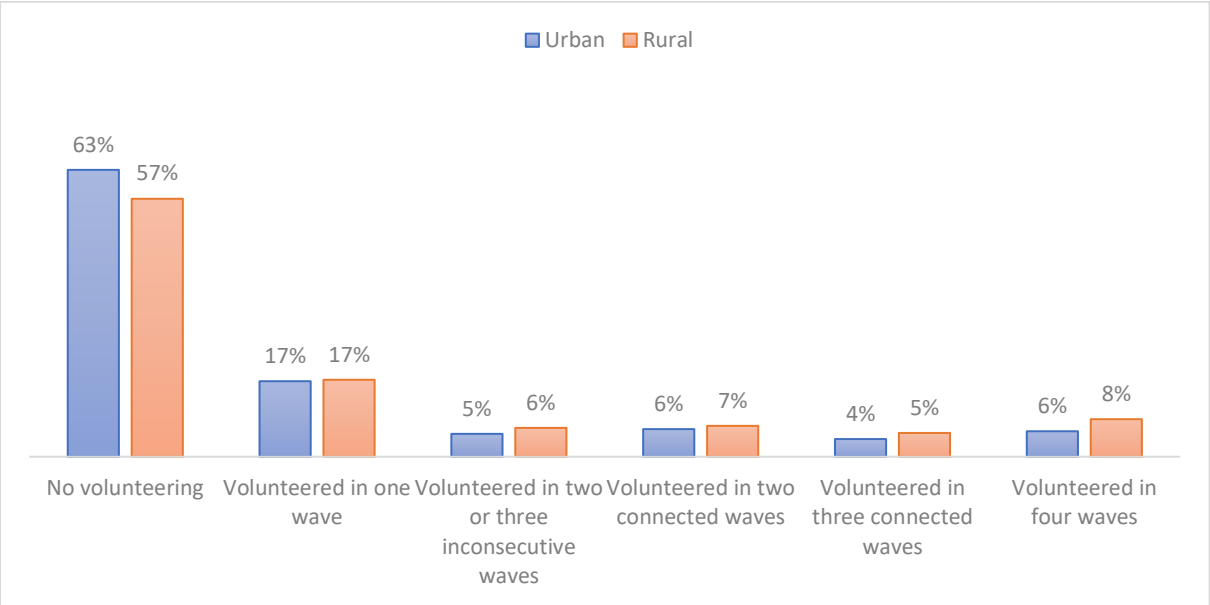
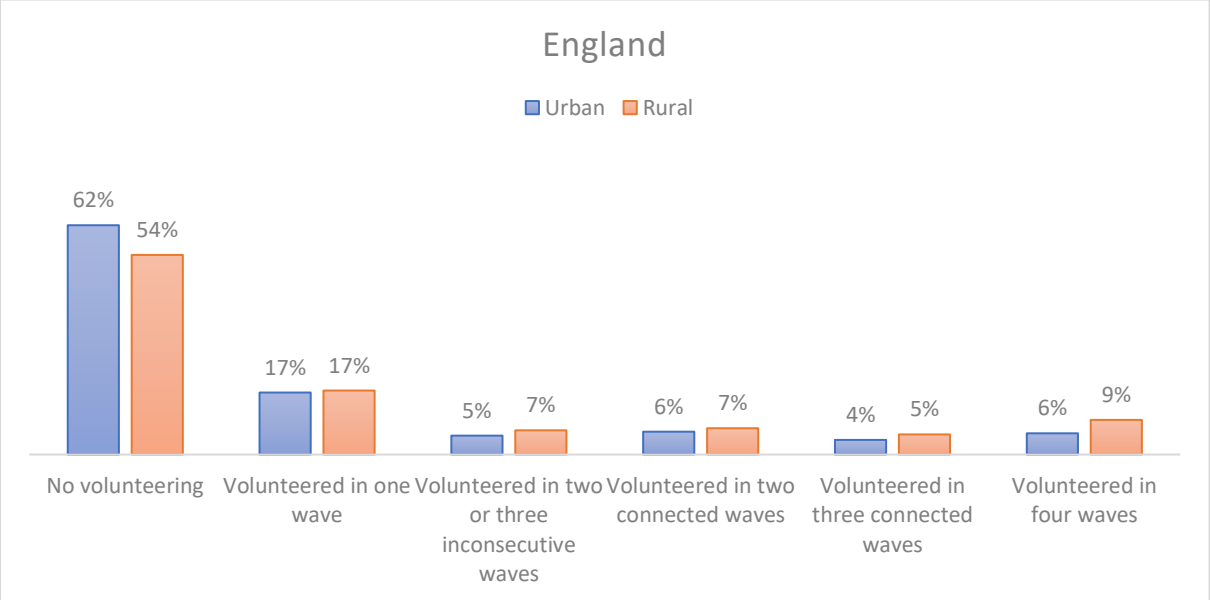
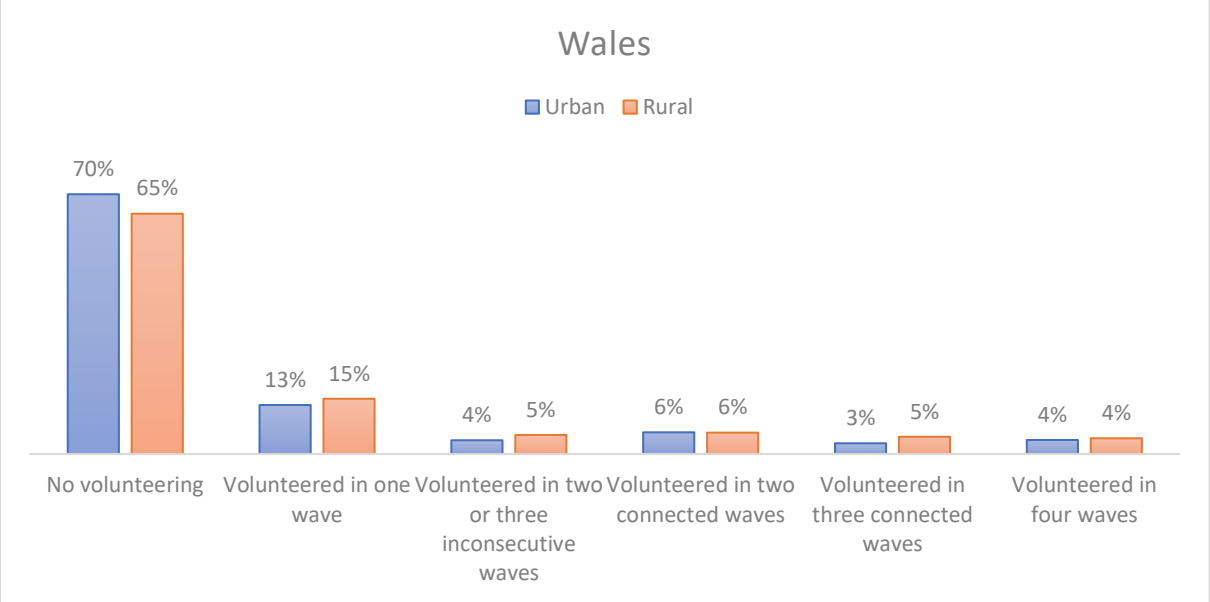
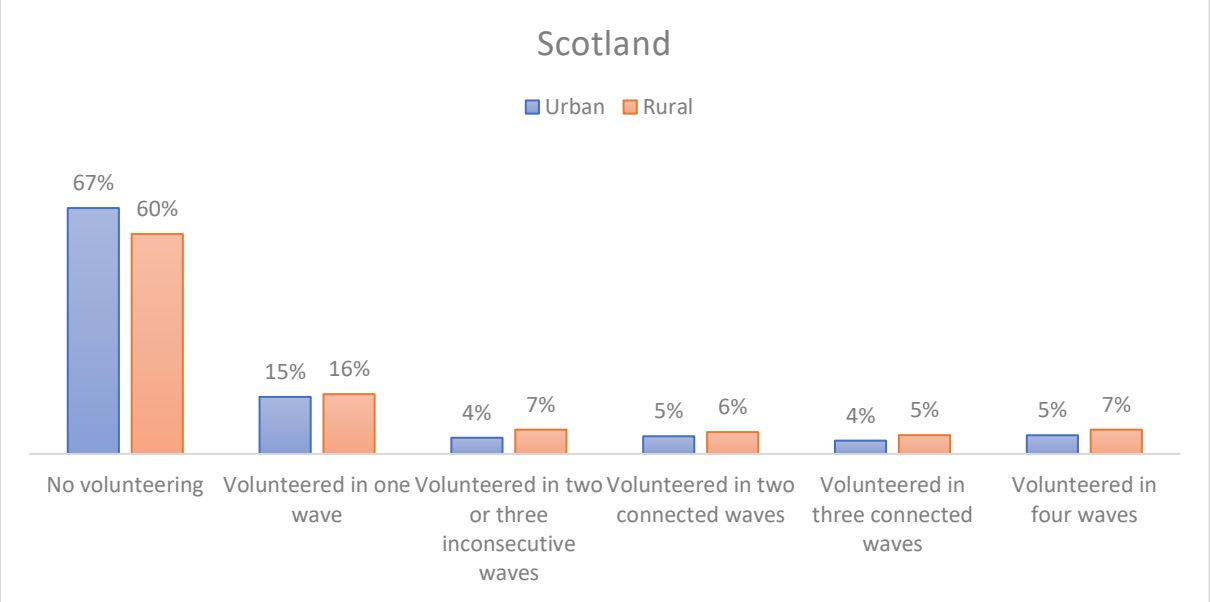
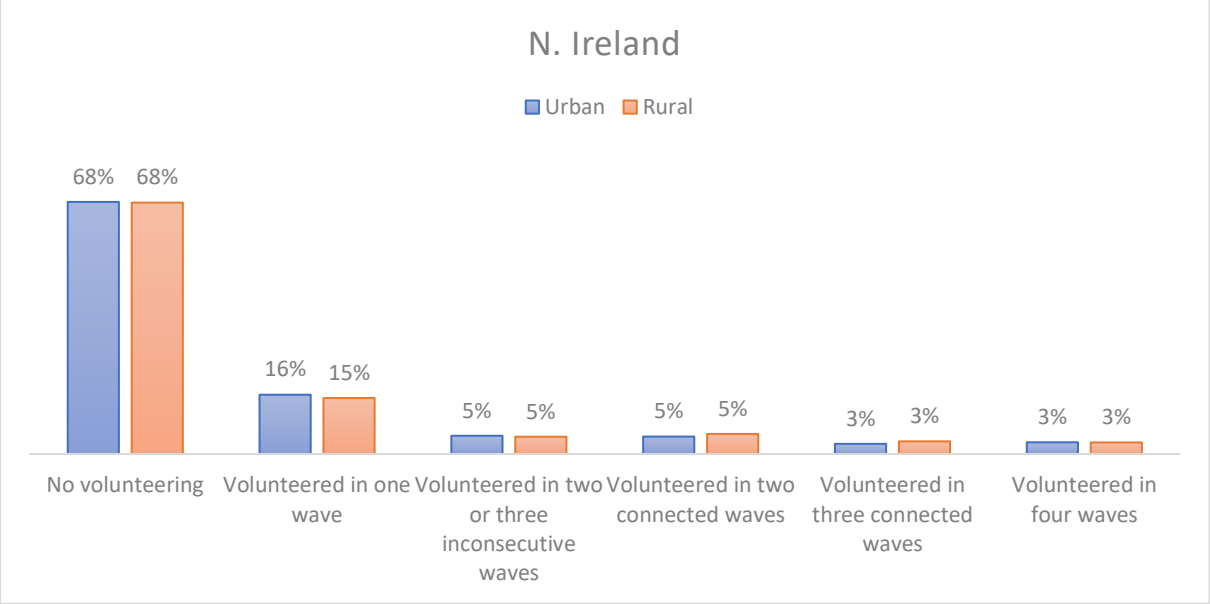


Figure Twenty-Five: Recurrence of Volunteering by Urban/Rural divide in the Four Nations, 2010-2018 (%)




Wales
Urban
Rural
70%
65%
13%
15%
4%
5%
6%
6%
3%
5%
4%
4%
No volunteering
Volunteered in one wave
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves
Volunteered in two connected waves
Volunteered in three connected waves
Volunteered in four waves


Scotland
Urban
Rural
67%
60%
15%
16%
4%
7%
5%
6%
4%
5%
5%
7%
No volunteering
Volunteered in one wave
Volunteered in two or three inconsecutive waves
Volunteered in two connected waves
Volunteered in three connected waves
Volunteered in four waves



Summary and Conclusions

1) An average adult does not volunteer in the UK in any given year.

The UKHLS data shows that, in any given year in which the survey was run and asked about volunteering, most adults (on average, around four fifths) do not volunteer. Volunteering is a relatively exclusive activity, carried out by around one in five adults for whom volunteering is a regular feature of their lives: most volunteers do so at least once a week. A sizeable minority, however, volunteer less commonly, on an irregular basis. That said, this conclusion must be set alongside the discussion in Chapter Two, which explained why UKHLS almost certainly produces an under-estimate of volunteering.

2) Volunteering is more widespread if a longer timeframe than a year is considered.

This report has introduced a measure of volunteering that is only possible with panel data, based around how often people volunteer over a much longer period that that typically asked about in surveys. This has shown that, in contrast with the above estimate, around 40 per cent of UK adults have volunteered at least once in the last decade, with much smaller groups being far more active and volunteering on a sustained basis for many years. A typical estimate of how many people volunteer in a particular survey is perfectly valid for estimating volunteering rates for a given year but is less appropriate than is often assumed for estimating how many people volunteer over a longer period, or are likely to volunteer in the future.

3) There are few substantial differences between the four nations of the UK with regards to volunteering.

For the most part, people in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are as likely (or unlikely) to volunteer as each other. The trends in volunteering over time have been the same in all four countries, and the relationships between volunteering and demographic or socio-economic characteristics are also more or less identical. There are some exceptions to this finding, and these are set out in more detail below. However, to the extent that this data is indicative of the success of different policies, funding approaches and views of the key value of volunteering in encouraging more people to engage in it between the governments of the four nations, there is little evidence that any have been more or less successful than the other. Differences between people in terms of their age, socio-economic background and whether they live in an urban or rural community are far more influential in determining their likelihood of volunteering, or how often they volunteer, than which country of the UK they live in.

4) Volunteering is heavily influenced by the life cycle.

The study of how age is related to volunteering showed that both the probability of volunteering at all and the type of volunteering engaged in are influenced by someone's stage in the life cycle. People who are in full-time education and the recently retired are the most likely to volunteer in some way, while those who have recently left full-time education and started new careers are the least likely to do so. At the same time, younger people are more likely than their elders to volunteer 'infrequently' or 'episodically', and particularly unlikely to volunteer on a regular basis (such as every week). Older people, and particularly the retired, on the other hand, are not particularly likely to volunteer infrequently, and are by far the most likely to volunteer on a weekly basis.

5) Younger people are the most likely to volunteer if we take a longer perspective.

The recurrence of volunteering measure showed that, while young people and the recently retired are pretty even in how likely they are to volunteer in a single survey, younger people are notably more likely to volunteer if a longer-time perspective, such as that covering the last decade, is taken. This greater likelihood is limited, however, to limited instances of volunteering, i.e. most people under the age of 21 who have volunteered have only done so for a single year and the activity was infrequent. There is little indication that young people who volunteered while at school around

2010/12, for example, continued to volunteer on a sustained basis over the following eight years. This may reflect life cycle circumstances, with young people being particularly likely to volunteer while in school but essentially stopping once that encouragement is removed. Alternatively, it could be indicative of a broader evolution in the nature of volunteering and civic participation, in which young people are becoming increasingly likely to express themselves through volunteering and choose to do so through more irregular, infrequent arrangements that do not require a long-standing attachment to or interaction with formalised organisations. There is a small national difference of note here, however. Young people in Wales and Northern Ireland are less likely to have volunteered than those in England or Scotland – a difference that is not apparent in any single UKHLS survey, but only when the longer perspective is taken.

6) Rates of volunteering in the UK have barely changed since 2010 – except for among young people in Wales and Scotland.

There are very few differences between the volunteering rates or frequencies in the UKHLS surveys since 2010, regardless of the age, gender or socio-economic status of the respondents in question. One notable exception – both to this and the finding that there are few national differences – is that the under-18s in Wales and Scotland have become notably more likely to have volunteered between 2010/12 and 2016/18. However, no such increase is apparent in England. More research is needed to identify why this has happened, but it is potential evidence of intervention from the Welsh and Scottish governments to get more school-age children volunteering.

7) Volunteering is virtually the same among men and women.

There are virtually no gender differences to speak of in terms of either the rates or frequency of volunteering in the UK. UKHLS shows that women are marginally more likely to volunteer than men, and marginally more likely to volunteer on a weekly basis. This may reflect the greater propensity of women to engage in certain forms of volunteering (such as those implying caring or social care) than men, as suggested in the existing research. Either way, however, gender is not a particularly important characteristic when it comes to determining how likely someone is to volunteer.

8) Volunteering is by far most common among those with more social and economic resources.

One of the most well-established findings in research on volunteering is that people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to volunteer, primarily because they have more resources and

status that facilitate them doing so. This is confirmed in the UKHLS data: by far the most likely to volunteer are people with higher education qualifications who work in professional or managerial, well-paid occupations. The least likely to volunteer are those with few or no qualifications and who are in unskilled, low-paid and generally insecure work.

9) Low-skilled men in Wales stand out for being particularly unlikely to volunteer.

Another rare national difference of note is apparent when the recurrence of volunteering was studied in Wales for both gender and occupational social class. Collectively, these two analyses showed that men in low-skilled jobs in Wales were unusually unlikely to have volunteered compared with their counterparts in England, Scotland and even Northern Ireland (where overall rates of volunteering are most like those in Wales).

10) People in rural communities are more likely to volunteer.

The existing research is somewhat divided as to whether living in an urban or rural community is better for volunteering. UKHLS data suggests that residents of rural communities are more likely to volunteer, and based on previous research, this is likely to reflect the higher levels of community cohesion and social trust found in rural communities than urban centres. Another small national difference was identified here, however, in which the urban/rural divide is smaller in Wales and Northern Ireland than in England or Scotland. This is because people living in rural communities in Wales and Northern Ireland are less likely to volunteer than those in England and Scotland.

11) Conventional measures of volunteering rates underestimate the activity of those most likely to volunteer.

The ‘recurrence of volunteering’ measure outlined in this chapter showed that more conventional measures of volunteering (usually based around activity in a single year) produce underestimates of how many people volunteer over a longer period (see point 2). The analyses above have also found, however, that this underestimation is greater for certain groups of the population, namely those with higher education qualifications, in professional occupations and in rural communities. In other words, focussing on the volunteering activities of survey respondents in a single year (as most surveys, including UKHLS, typically do) not only underestimates overall levels of volunteering over a longer period, but does so disproportionately for those who are the most likely to volunteer.

Chapter Four: Consequences of Volunteering for Wellbeing and Social Capital

Measuring the Consequences of Volunteering and the 'Causality Conundrum'

There is a universal view among politicians and policymakers, academics, the third sector and the public that volunteering brings substantial benefits to both the individual volunteer and the community, individuals or institutions that are the beneficiary. While there are some documented negative consequences of volunteering (such as its potential to entrench inequality by giving the already wealthy opportunities to further their career development), the academic research "leaves little doubt that there are individual benefits to be derived…that reach far beyond the volunteer act itself and may linger long after the volunteer role is relinquished" (Wilson and Musick 2000, p.167). The range of benefits associated with volunteering is extensive, including for political engagement and electoral turnout, life satisfaction and well-being, socio-economic status and employment prospects, educational attainment and social capital (e.g., Moore and Allen 1996; Wilson 2000; Wilson and Musick 2007; Meier and Stutzer 2008). There are also considerable community benefits, with areas in which more people volunteer having lower rates of crime, higher levels of political engagement and greater social cohesion (Rosenthal et al 1998).

Most research on volunteering, however, faces a substantial obstacle that makes identifying the consequences (particularly for individuals) extremely difficult: the fact that the benefits associated with volunteering are often associated with making people more likely to volunteer as well. Volunteering has repeatedly, for example, been associated with increasing the political engagement and participation of citizens, particularly young people, and this is typically based on data showing that people who volunteer tend to be more interested in politics and more likely to vote in elections than people who do not (Kang and Kwak 2003; Marta and Pozzi 2008; Flanagan et al 1998; Roker et al 1999; Cicognani et al 2015). Being politically interested and engaged, however, is something that makes people more likely to volunteer as well, because it shapes the development of habits and values of civic activity that can 'spill over' into political activity (Putnam 2000; Wattenberg 2012; Smets and van Ham 2013). Moreover, some characteristics identified as a consequence of volunteering are affected by other factors (known as 'confounders') that occur earlier in life that can also affect volunteering, meaning that there may be no causal relationship between volunteering and this other trait at all, but rather both are caused by the confounding factor. Returning to the example of political engagement, one of the most important influences on the development of our interest in politics is our parents: if we are raised by politically interested and active parents, we are more likely to be active as well (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Fox et al 2019). Being raised by politically

interested and active parents also makes people more likely to volunteer (Gaby 2017; Wilson and Musick 2000). Does volunteering, therefore, actually make people more interested in politics, is it being interested in politics that makes people more likely to volunteer, is there no causal link between the two and are they instead the result of being raised by politically active parents, or is the reality some combination of the three? This 'causality conundrum' applies to many of the characteristics that are associated with volunteering, such as social capital (does volunteering lead to more social capital or do people with more social capital volunteer?), economic success (does volunteering make people more employable or does the fact that they were raised in a middle class household and did well at school make them more likely to both volunteer and get a good job?) and improved health (does volunteering improve mental wellbeing or are people prepared to donate their time and volunteer if they have good mental health?).

There is no perfect way of solving this 'causality conundrum' (at least without an incredibly expensive and unethical experiment), but some types of data can bring us closer to overcoming it than others. Unfortunately, most survey data on volunteering is very poorly suited to doing so. Most are cross-sectional, i.e. they collect data at a single point in time from a representative sample of a population (including the principle surveys for measuring volunteering in the UK, i.e. the Community Life Survey, Scottish Household Survey and National Survey for Wales). These can show that there is a positive association between, for example, volunteering and being politically engaged, but they cannot tell us whether higher levels of political engagement led to more volunteering or the other way around. Many conclusions about the beneficial consequences of volunteering are based either on such cross-sectional survey data, or on qualitative data collected from a small group of volunteers over time (which is a perfectly valid way of measuring the impact of volunteering on that group of people, but not for a wider population).

The use of panel data (such as UKHLS) allows us to go *some* of the way towards overcoming the causality conundrum, because it can at least give us greater confidence that changes in a given characteristic occurred in the same individual *after* they chose to volunteer. A small but growing number of academic studies have used such data to try and address the causality conundrum in volunteering research. For the most part, they have found that while the benefits of volunteering are virtually always exaggerated in cross-sectional data, people who volunteer usually *do* derive at least some benefit from their efforts. Janoski et al (1998), for example, found that the motivations and values that might predispose people to volunteer (such as maintaining a belief in the civic responsibility of contributing to one's community through voluntary activity) can be enhanced and developed further through volunteering. While there is a clear 'selection effect' in which those who hold such values are far more likely to volunteer in the first place, once they actually do volunteer

those values become more developed or entrenched; in other words, volunteering breeds volunteering. Smith (1999) found that activities that help foster social networks and capital in school children – including not only volunteering but membership of community or school associations – lead to more extensive social networks and community engagement (such as volunteering) in later life. At a broader level, McFarland and Thomas (2006) considered whether the various forms of capital that lead young people to volunteer (such as social capital and human capital) are increased through volunteering. They argued that volunteering does enhance social and human capital (even with the fact that people with higher levels of such capitals are more likely to volunteer to begin with accounted for), and so makes young people more likely to be civically and politically active in the future. Finally, the forthcoming *Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box?* study considered whether youth volunteering leads young adults to be more politically engaged and more likely to vote in their first elections. It showed that youth volunteering does bring a benefit to political engagement, but that benefit it limited to those who do not possess the characteristics normally associated with being politically active, and volunteering, in the first place (such as those raised by poorer, politically disengaged parents).

In this chapter, the capacity of UKHLS to help address some of the challenges associated with the causality conundrum is exploited to examine the effect of volunteering on two characteristics central to the policy justifications for volunteering in the UK (and particularly Wales and Scotland): mental wellbeing, and social capital. Like the analyses in Chapter Three, it is based around descriptive statistics only. There are considerably more sophisticated methods that can be used to explore causal relationships in panel data (such as fixed effect regression models, multi-level regression models or structural equation models), however such analyses are far more resource intensive, and require far more methodological and theoretical depth, than the scope of this report permits. It should be noted, therefore, that the analyses in this chapter, while shedding more light on the likely consequences of volunteering for wellbeing and social capital than is possible in much of the existing research, could and should be extended further to provide greater confidence in their validity.

The Consequences of Volunteering for Wellbeing

UKHLS includes a range of survey questions that can be used to measure wellbeing, including several that were specifically developed by leading academic experts in the field precisely for measuring wellbeing in surveys of large populations. The analyses in this chapter focus on two such measures, the first of which is the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWS). The scale is based on a series of questions designed explicitly to measure different facets of mental wellbeing on the basis

of previous academic research, focus group studies and psychometric testing, and which has been used extensively in academic health research (Tennant et al 2007; Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed 2008; Stewart-Brown et al 2009).[4] It is calculated using responses to 14 survey questions in which participants are invited to describe their experience in the previous two weeks in response to a series of statements (such as 'I've been feeling useful' or 'I've been feeling relaxed'). The scale has been validated for use in the UK on those aged 16 and above (corresponding to the UKHLS sample) (Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed 2008).

UKHLS uses a simplified version of the scale based around responses to seven statements. Respondents were asked to select the option that best described their experience in the previous two weeks: 'none of the time', 'rarely', 'some of the time', 'often' and 'all of the time':

- 'I've been feeling optimistic about the future'
- 'I've been feeling useful'
- 'I've been feeling relaxed'
- 'I've been dealing with problems well'
- 'I've been thinking clearly'
- 'I've been feeling close to other people'
- 'I've been able to make up my own mind about things'

The resulting scale has a range between 0 – meaning very poor mental well-being (e.g., someone who never feels optimistic about the future, or never feels relaxed etc.) – and 28 – meaning very good well-being.[5] Studies with the WEMWS have found that higher mental well-being is associated with being married, being in secure work and living in one's own home, and very slight (but non-significant) differences have been found based on gender (with men having marginally higher scores than women) and SES (with those in the most deprived groups having the lowest scores) (Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed 2008). Other studies have found that living in areas with greater neighbourhood cohesion also increases mental wellbeing (Gale et al 2011). To some extent, therefore, we would expect a correlation between volunteering and wellbeing on the grounds that there are several traits positively associated with both, including some covered in Chapter Three (such as SES or the life cycle). As noted above, however, there are several studies arguing that there is a causal relationship between the two as well, with volunteering theorised to improve people's

[4] Copyright notification: Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) © NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2006, all rights reserved.

[5] Originally the scale ranged from 7 to 35 but this has been recoded to aid with interpretation.

mental health and wellbeing by bringing them into contact with other people in their community, helping them develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and helping them to make a positive contribution to their community or other people's lives that they can take pride in (Meier and Stutzer 2008; Moore and Allen 1996; Hustinx et al 2010a; Wilson and Musick 2000).

Volunteering and WEMWS in UKHLS

The 2015/17 UKHLS survey was the most recent to include the WEMWS scale. It found that the average score for the whole of the UK was 18.2, meaning that the average UK adult scores just above halfway on the 0-28 scale. The scores varied little between the four nations but was marginally higher in Northern Ireland: in England it was 18.2, in Wales it was 18.1, in Scotland it was 18.3, and in Northern Ireland it was 18.6. A simple cross-tabulation (see Table Two) of the WEMWS score (in 2015/17) of people who volunteered (in the previous survey in 2014/16) shows that the score is higher for those who volunteered than those who did not, and that while there are differences in WEMWS score depending on the frequency of volunteering, these are generally smaller than the difference between those who volunteered and those who did not.

Table Two: Average WEMWS Score in 2015/17 Depending on Volunteering in 2014/16

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
No volunteering in 2014/16	18.1	18.0	18.0	18.1	18.3
Infrequent volunteering in 2014/16	18.6	18.6	18.7	18.0	19.8
Volunteered monthly in 2014/16	19.1	19.2	18.7	18.1	19.0
Volunteered weekly in 2014/16	18.7	18.6	18.9	18.7	19.6
Volunteered several times a week in 2014/16	18.6	18.5	18.6	19.7	18.0

On average, for example, those who volunteered in the UK (to any frequency) scored around 0.7 points higher on the WEMWS than those who did not volunteer, and all of the differences in score between those who volunteered (regardless of frequency) and those who did not were statistically significant. The equivalent figure for England was 0.7; for Wales was 0.8; for Scotland was 0.5; and for Northern Ireland was 0.8 (suggesting that the benefits of volunteering for wellbeing are the same across the four nations). The differences in score (for the UK) between different frequencies of

volunteering range from between less than 0.1 and 0.5, and while most are statistically significant, several (including that between volunteering 'several times a week' and all other frequencies) are not. In short, this data suggests that people who volunteered enjoyed improved mental wellbeing afterwards, and that it is whether someone volunteered at all – rather than the frequency of that volunteering – that was more important for their mental health.

While the fact that respondents' WEMWS was measured at least a year after they had volunteered gives us greater confidence that volunteering does lead to improved mental wellbeing later (rather than having to assume that effect from two characteristics – WEMWS and whether someone volunteered – that were measured at the same time in the same survey), it still cannot tell us anything about respondents' WEMWS scores *before* they chose to volunteer. While there is less research on how wellbeing is related to the decision to volunteer (as opposed to the other way around), such a relationship is theoretically plausible: people who have good mental wellbeing and generally feel optimistic about their lives are more likely to want to socialise with others, participate in their community and perhaps give up some of their time for others through volunteering, whereas those who have poor wellbeing are less likely to want to do so. It is entirely plausible, therefore, that the positive association between volunteering and WEMWS identified in Table Two reflects the fact that those who volunteered had higher WEMWS scores before they volunteered, rather than after.

Table Three presents the results of an analysis that goes some of the way to addressing this: it shows the average WEMWS score in the 2010/11, 2012/14 and 2015/17 surveys for respondents who never volunteered in the UKHLS series prior to the latest data on WEMWS being collected (i.e. the 2010/12, 2012/14 and 2014/16 surveys), the average score for those who ever volunteered in any of those surveys, and for those who volunteered in all three surveys. If volunteering had a beneficial impact on mental health, we would expect the WEMWS scores of those who volunteered to not only be higher than those who did not (and those who volunteered in all three surveys to be higher than those who volunteered less frequently), but also for the WEMWS scores of those who volunteered at all to increase over time. If, on the other hand, people who volunteer do so because they have good mental wellbeing, then we would expect the WEMWS scores of those who volunteered to be higher than those who did not, but for there to be little or no increase in WEMWS score over time.

Table Three: WEMWS and Volunteering

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
For non-volunteers in 2010/12, & 2012/14 & 2014/16					
2010/11	18.2	18.1	18.2	18.3	18.2
2012/14	17.5	17.5	17.3	17.7	17.7
2015/17	18.0	18.0	17.9	18.1	18.3
For one-off volunteers in 2010/12, or 2012/14 & 2014/16					
2010/11	18.5	18.4	18.4	18.6	19.0
2012/14	17.9	17.9	17.7	17.9	18.2
2015/17	18.2	18.2	18.1	18.3	18.4
For volunteers in 2010/12 & & 2012/14 & 2014/16					
2010/11	19.2	19.2	19.6	19.2	19.4
2012/14	18.8	18.8	19.0	18.7	19.0
2015/17	19.1	19.2	19.1	19.0	19.2

The table shows that there was a small, UK-wide fall in mental wellbeing between the 2010/11 and 2012/14 surveys (though it was larger in Wales than elsewhere). While WEMWS scores increased again by the 2015/17 surveys, they did not reach the levels seen at the beginning of the series. Despite this, it is possible to pick out a trend that suggests volunteering *was not* associated with a significant improvement in wellbeing between the 2010/12 and 2014/16 surveys. In accordance with the expectation that volunteering would be at least in part a result of better mental health, those respondents who volunteered at some point between the 2010/12 and 2014/16 surveys had higher WEMWS scores than those who did no volunteering at all (by 0.3 points, a statistically significant difference), and those who volunteered in all three surveys had higher scores still (by 1 point, also a significant difference). All three groups ended up worse off (on average) in terms of mental

wellbeing by the 2015/17 survey, and the decline was not substantially different for those who volunteered compared with those who did not. Among those who never volunteered (at the UK level), for example, their WEMWS score fell by an average of 0.1 points between the 2010/11 and 2015/17 surveys; among those who volunteered once in that time, the fall was slightly larger, at 0.2 points; and for those who volunteered in all three surveys, the fall was 0.1 points. As can be seen in the table, this pattern was largely replicated, and never reversed in a manner that suggest a different consequence of volunteering, in the four nations.

So far, therefore, the data does not suggest a positive effect from volunteering on wellbeing. Another possibility is that the effect of volunteering on wellbeing is not a constant, but instead varies depending on the wellbeing of the individual volunteer. Someone who volunteers and has low wellbeing, for example, may receive a benefit from their volunteering that someone with better wellbeing to start with does not. This is worth considering in light of a small but growing literature suggesting that the benefits of volunteering are more pronounced for those who are, in effect, the least likely to volunteer because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds (or, in this case, a context that leaves them with worse mental wellbeing). *Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box*, for example, found that the benefits of youth volunteering for political engagement were limited to young people from politically disengaged households, who are also those least likely to volunteer. For most young volunteers, however, there is little benefit (in terms of political engagement) because they are already politically engaged and likely to vote in elections. In the same vein, a possibility is that volunteering is beneficial to those who had lower mental wellbeing to begin with, while bringing little benefit to those who are better off.

This possibility is tested in Table Four, which shows the changes in WEMWS over time of four groups of respondents (for the UK only): respondents who never volunteered in the 2010/12, 2012/14 and 2014/16 surveys *and* who had a low WEMWS score in 2010/11 (i.e. scored below the halfway mark of the 0-28 scale); respondents who never volunteered and had a high WEMWS score in 2010/11 (i.e. above the halfway mark); respondents who volunteered in all three surveys and had a low WEMWS score in 2010/11; and respondents who volunteered in all three surveys and had a high WEMWS score in 2010/11.

Table Four: WEMWS and Volunteering for Different WEMWS Groups

	UK
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 & 2014/16 and WEMWS <50% in 2010/11	
2010/11	11.8
2012/14	14.1
2015/17	14.9
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 & 2014/16 and WEMWS >50% in 2010/11	
2010/11	19.8
2012/14	18.0
2015/17	18.5
For Volunteers in all surveys and WEMWS <50% in 2010/11	
2010/11	12.2
2012/14	14.7
2015/17	15.4
For Volunteers in all surveys and WEMWS >50% in 2010/11	
2010/11	20.2
2012/14	19.2
2015/17	19.5

Like Table Three, Table Four confirms that those who volunteer are likely to have better mental wellbeing to start with than those who do not. The trajectory of WEMWS scores, however, is different for some respondents. While Table Three showed a fall then slight increase in WEMWS scores across the UK, Table Four shows that pattern was limited to those who had *higher* WEMWS scores in 2010/11. For those with lower WEMWS scores in 2010/11, mental wellbeing increased steadily across all three surveys. The decline of mental wellbeing identified in Table Three, therefore, looks to have been driven by the deterioration of mental wellbeing among those who were better off in 2010/11, while those who were worse off (in wellbeing terms) in 2010/11 improved over time.

Turning to the effect of volunteering, this analysis suggests that volunteering does have a small impact on mental wellbeing (though it is very limited). Among respondents who never volunteered and had low WEMWS in 2010/11, for example, their average WEMWS score increased between 2010/11 and 2015/17 by 3.1 points; among those who volunteered, the increase was 3.2 points. Among those who started with higher WEMWS scores, those who never volunteered saw their scores fall by 1.3 points between 2010/11 and 2015/17, while those who volunteered saw their scores fall by 0.8. These numbers provide evidence of a potential, slight effect from volunteering, in which the improvements in mental wellbeing for those who started with poorer wellbeing was (just) increased by volunteering, while the deterioration in wellbeing for those who started with better wellbeing was reduced by volunteering.

Volunteering and Subjective Wellbeing in UKHLS

The second UKHLS measure of wellbeing in based on the General Health Questionnaire, which was developed in the 1970s for measuring mental health (Banks et al 1980; Jackson 2007). In UKHLS, the survey consists of twelve questions asking whether respondents have experienced a particular symptom or behaviour recently, and inviting them to answer 'less than usual', 'no more than usual', 'rather more than usual', or 'much more than usual'. The items can be assessed independently or as part of a 'Subjective Wellbeing Scale' (SWS) in which the responses to the individual items are scored and summed into a scale ranging from 0 to 36. Lower scores indicate better wellbeing (because the respondent has experienced fewer symptoms, or experienced symptoms less frequently). In the latest UKHLS survey, the average SWS score for the UK was 11.2 – as with the WEMWS above, suggesting that most people are above the half-war point of the scale for mental wellbeing. The data for the nations also showed marginally better mental wellbeing for Northern Ireland, with little difference elsewhere: the score for England was 11.2; for Wales was 11.5; for Scotland was 11.1; and for Northern Ireland was 10.8.

Table Five shows how the SWS scores for respondents in the 2015/17 UKHLS survey varied depending on their frequency of volunteering in the 2014/16 survey. As was found with the WEMWS measure, volunteering was associated with an improvement in wellbeing throughout the UK, with the difference between those who volunteered at all and those who did not more substantial than the differences between frequencies of volunteering. On average, those who volunteered (regardless of frequency) scored around 0.3 points lower on the SWS scale than those who did not volunteer (at the UK level), with all the differences between those who volunteered and those who did not statistically significant. The differences in score between those of various frequencies of

volunteering ranged between 0.3 and 0.4, but most (except for that between 'Infrequent volunteering' and 'Volunteered monthly') were not statistically significant. While there were some differences in the patterns for the four nations, the overall relationship was the same: volunteering was associated with a small but significant decrease in SWS score – indicating an improvement in mental wellbeing. The exception is for those who volunteered several times a week in Northern Ireland, which had a higher SWS score than those who never volunteered; however the difference was not significant.

Table Five: Average SWS Score in 2015/17 Depending on Volunteering in 2014/16

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
No volunteering	11.1	11.1	11.2	10.9	11.0
Infrequent volunteering	10.8	10.8	10.5	11.6	9.5
Volunteered monthly	10.5	10.5	11.3	10.4	10.3
Volunteered weekly	10.8	10.8	10.9	11.0	10.3
Volunteered several times a week	10.9	10.8	11.7	10.3	12.4

Following the steps followed above for WEMWS, Table Six shows how average SWS scores fluctuated over time depending on whether respondents didn't volunteer at all between the 2010/12 and 2014/16 surveys, volunteered in one of the 2010/12, 2012/14 and 2014/16 surveys, or volunteered in all those surveys. While the SWS measure does not show the same UK-wide decline in wellbeing after 2010/11 as the WEMWS data (though it does show such a decline for respondents who volunteered only once in the three surveys), it also suggests that volunteering has little beneficial impact on wellbeing. At the UK level, respondents who volunteered had, on average, better (i.e. lower) SWS scores than those who did not, with all the differences between non-volunteers, one-off volunteers and regular volunteers statistically significant. There was no significant change in SWS score over time for those who volunteered repeatedly, however; and while there was a significant difference in the score for those who volunteered as a one-off between the 2010/11 and 2012/14 surveys, it indicated a (small) deterioration in wellbeing. While there are some variations in this pattern across the four nations, the overall trend is the same and there were no significant improvements in wellbeing amongst those who volunteered most often.

Table Six: SWS and Volunteering

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 & 2014/16					
2010/11	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	10.9
2012/14	11.0	11.0	11.3	10.9	10.7
2015/17	11.0	11.0	11.2	10.8	11.1
For one-off volunteers in 2010/12, 2012/14 or 2014/16					
2010/11	10.9	10.9	11.5	10.8	10.6
2012/14	11.1	11.1	11.3	10.5	10.6
2015/17	11.2	11.2	11.3	11.2	11.0
For volunteers in 2010/12, 2012/14 & 2014/16					
2010/11	10.2	10.3	10.1	9.4	10.1
2014/16	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.7	10.3
2015/17	10.4	10.4	10.1	10.4	10.5

Finally, Table Seven presents similar data to that in Table Four for the SWS measure: it shows the average SWS score in the 2011/13, 2013/15 and 2015/17 surveys for those who never volunteered in the preceding surveys *and* had an SWS score greater than the halfway point of the scale (i.e. had relatively poor wellbeing); the average scores for those who never volunteered and had relatively good wellbeing (i.e. a score above the halfway point on the SWS scale); and the same data for those who did volunteer in all three of the 2010/12, 2012/14 and 2014/16 surveys. The table confirms that those who regularly volunteered typically had better wellbeing to start with than those who did not (though the differences were small). The data also shows different trajectories of SWS over time from that suggested in Tables Five and Six: those with the worst wellbeing at the beginning of the series (in 2010/11) saw their SWS scores improve by the 2015/17 survey, by more than 1 point, while those with better wellbeing saw some fluctuation but no substantial change.

Unlike the WEMWS data, the SWS data does not suggest a deterioration of wellbeing among those who were better off in 2010/11, but it does show an improvement in wellbeing among those who were worse off. Volunteering, however, appeared to make little difference to this trend. Among respondents who never volunteered and had low SWS in 2010/11, for example, their average SWS score fell by 1.2 points by 2015/17 (a statistically significant change); among those who volunteered, the fall was (a non-significant) 1.1 points. Among those who started with higher SWS scores, there was no change between 2010/11 and 2015/17 for those who never volunteered, and an increase of 0.3 for those who did (which was statistically significant). In other words, while there were improvements in the wellbeing of those with the worst wellbeing in 2010/11 over the following seven years, these were apparent whether respondents had volunteered or not, and those who did volunteer either saw no significant change in their wellbeing or a statistically significant (but very small) deterioration. Either way, there is no evidence that volunteering had a sustained, positive impact on the wellbeing of volunteers, regardless of their wellbeing before they decided to volunteer.

Table Seven: SWS and Volunteering for Different SWS Groups

	UK
For non-volunteers in 2010/12, 2012/14 & 2014/16 and SWS >50% in 2010/11	
2011/13	16.4
2013/15	16.0
2015/17	15.2
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 & 2014/16 AND wellbeing >50% in 2010/11	
2011/13	10.4
2013/15	10.6
2015/17	10.4
For Volunteers in all surveys AND wellbeing <50% in 2010/11	
2011/13	16.7
2013/15	14.6
2015/17	15.6
For Volunteers in all surveys AND wellbeing >50% in 2010/11	
2011/13	9.6
2013/15	10.0
2015/17	9.9

Summary and Conclusions

The analyses above have used two highly valid and reliable measures to assess the impact of volunteering on mental wellbeing in the UK. While there are slight differences in the results of the two measures, the overall conclusion from both sets of analyses is the same: volunteering has little impact on mental health. Rather, those with better wellbeing are more likely to choose to volunteer in the first place. The analysis based on WEMWS found evidence that those whose mental wellbeing had deteriorated between the 2010/12 and 2015/17 surveys were likely to see less of a deterioration if they had volunteered, but this effect is far smaller than the difference in wellbeing

between those who chose to volunteer and those who did not in the first place. The SWS data found no evidence of a positive impact at all.

This is not to say that there is no positive relationship at all between the two; it is possible that volunteers see an improvement in their mental wellbeing later if their activity sees their circumstances change in a way that has a more direct impact on their wellbeing. If volunteering helps someone secure a well-paid job, for instance, or gain entry to their preferred university, then their mental wellbeing would be likely to improve later in life and their volunteering would have made an indirect contribution to this outcome. There is also the possibility that more sophisticated statistical analyses, able to simultaneously account for a much wider range of factors that could be related to volunteering and/or mental wellbeing, may reach different conclusions. Based on this evidence, however, we can confidently conclude that there is little indication of a direct, immediate, positive impact on mental wellbeing for people who volunteer, regardless of where they live in the UK. The relationship between having good mental wellbeing and becoming more likely to volunteer as a result is far more substantial.

The Consequences of Volunteering for Social Capital and Neighbourhood Cohesion

Social capital is a tricky concept to define but nonetheless of increasing relevance in academia and policymaking because of its association with a host of beneficial outcomes for individuals and communities. Social capital can essentially be thought of as a resource derived from communal interaction that can be used for the realisation of individual or collective goals. Someone who uses their contacts to find out about a job vacancy, for example, or who recruits their friends to form a sports team, or works with neighbours to lobby the council to put speed bumps on a school road, are all using their social networks to achieve some individual or communal aim – this is the essence of social capital (Putnam 2000; Welzel et al 2006; Bourdieu 1985). Communities with higher levels of social capital – i.e. in which inhabitants have extensive social networks and who regularly interact with, and trust, each other – tend to have lower levels of crime, more economic prosperity, healthier populations, superior educational outcomes and higher levels of political participation (Putnam 2000; Welzel et al 2006; Coleman 1988; Flanagan et al 2012).

The existing research is almost unanimous in the view that volunteering is beneficial for social capital, because it helps people both develop new relationships (such as with others who are also volunteering, or the people they help by volunteering) and deepen their existing relationships with people they already know (Putnam 2000; Flanagan et al 1998; Kang and Kwak 2003; Roker et al

1999; Van Oorschot et al 2006). Research that studies social capital, however, is frequently criticised for its difficulties in a 'causality conundrum' of its own: it is all but impossible to directly measure social capital since it refers to something that is derived from the interactions and relationships between individuals. Researchers are instead forced to rely on proxy indicators of activities or perceptions that imply people are more likely to have relationships with others in their community from which social capital could be accessed, such as membership of community associations, trusting other people or, indeed, volunteering. The conundrum, therefore, arises when we try to assess the relationship *between* potential indicators of social capital – such as volunteering: do people develop more social capital because they volunteer, or did they volunteer because they had more social capital and were more likely to be asked and encouraged to do so? What makes this puzzle more challenging still is that both statements can be true. While we can clearly expect, therefore, that people who volunteer should exhibit higher levels of social capital than those who do not, we cannot be certain of the causal relationship that led to that association. The use of panel data such as UKHLS helps us unpick this conundrum to a limited extent. UKHLS includes a range of questions that can give an indication of respondents' social capital and perceived cohesiveness of the neighbourhood in which they live. These include respondents' membership of community associations and two scales measuring neighbourhood cohesion and neighbourhood connection.

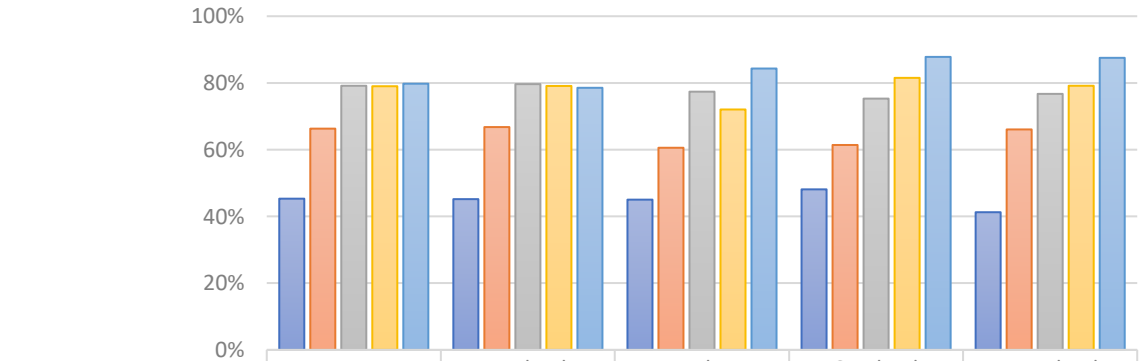
Volunteering and Associational Membership

Membership of community associations is one of the most widely used measures of social capital. While it has become less informative in recent years owing to the declining tendency of modern citizens (especially young people) to join formalised associations, membership of community associations is still nonetheless helpful for estimating the social capital of a given neighbourhood. This is because, even though many have fewer members today than forty years ago, community associations still provide valuable environments and common causes around which communal relationships can be based and develop, thereby strengthening the bonds between individuals.

UKHLS respondents were asked about their membership of a list of more than a dozen types of community association (including sports clubs, parents' associations, religious organisations, environmental organisations, trade unions and women's organisations) in the 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys. In both cases, just over half of respondents (51 per cent) were members of at least one organisation, with no significant variation across the UK (in England, the figure was 51 per cent; in Wales, 50 per cent; in Scotland, 52 per cent, and in Northern Ireland 49 per cent).

Figure Twenty-Six shows how membership of at least one association (in the 2014/16 survey) varied across the UK depending on the frequency of volunteering in 2012/14. In a pattern that was broadly replicated throughout the four nations, there was a clear difference between those who volunteered and those who did not: a substantial minority of those who did not volunteer (around 44 per cent) were members of at least one community association, while among those who volunteered the figure was above 60 per cent. Among those who volunteered infrequently, just short of two thirds were members; among those who volunteered more frequently, the figure was closer to four fifths, and higher still (around 86 per cent) for those who volunteered several times a week in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Figure Twenty-Six: Associational Membership in 2014/16 by Volunteering in 2012/14



	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
No volunteering	45.3%	45.2%	45.0%	48.1%	41.3%
Infrequent	66.3%	66.8%	60.6%	61.4%	66.1%
Once or twice a month	79.2%	79.7%	77.4%	75.3%	76.7%
Once or twice a week	79.0%	79.1%	72.1%	81.5%	79.2%
3 or more times a week	79.8%	78.6%	84.3%	87.8%	87.5%

The data in Figure Twenty-Six cannot, of course, tell us whether those who volunteered became more likely to join community associations as a result, or whether they volunteered because they were members of community associations. Data that can go some of the way to getting around the causality conundrum is presented in Table Eight, which suggests that volunteering could be associated with a greater propensity to join associations and so develop social capital. It shows the proportion of respondents who were members of any associations in the 2014/16 survey depending on whether they volunteered in 2012/14 *and* whether they were members of any associations in 2011/13. We expect people who were members of associations in 2011/13 to be more likely than those who were not to be members of an association in 2014/16, but if volunteering increases the

likelihood of joining associations we would expect those who volunteered to be more likely still to be members in 2014/16.

Table Eight: Associational Membership in 2014/16 by Volunteering in the UK

		Member of any associations in 2014/16
Not a member of any associations in 2011/13	No volunteering in 2012/14	23.5%
	Volunteered in 2012/14	41.2%
Member of any associations in 2011/13	No volunteering in 2012/14	71.1%
	Volunteered in 2012/14	84.5%

This is exactly what we find in Table Eight: of those who were not members of associations in 2011/13, 41 per cent who had volunteered in the intervening survey were members of associations in 2014/16, compared with 24 per cent who had not volunteered. Among those who were members of associations in 2011/13 and volunteered in 2012/14, 85 per cent were members of associations in 2014/16 compared with 71 per cent of those who had not volunteered. In both instances, therefore, those who volunteered were more likely to be members of associations in 2014/16 than those who did not. Of course, it is possible that the direction of causation runs the other way – that rather than joining associations because they volunteered, people volunteered because they had joined associations that promote such activity (such as religious groups or Scouts). Whereas this cannot be discounted, the fact that volunteering had a beneficial impact for those who were not members of associations in 2011/13 as well as those who were (in other words, regardless of membership of association in 2011/13 there was evidence of volunteering increasing individuals' propensity to join associations relative to non-volunteers) gives some confidence that there is a benefit to be had from volunteering for community interaction and social capital.

Volunteering and Neighbourhood Cohesion

UKHLS includes a 'neighbourhood cohesion scale' (NCS), which measures respondents' impressions of people in their neighbourhood. It is not a measure of the cohesion in a community so much as the respondents' perceptions of that cohesion, with the assumption being that people who perceive that their community is cohesive are more likely to come from communities in which people interact

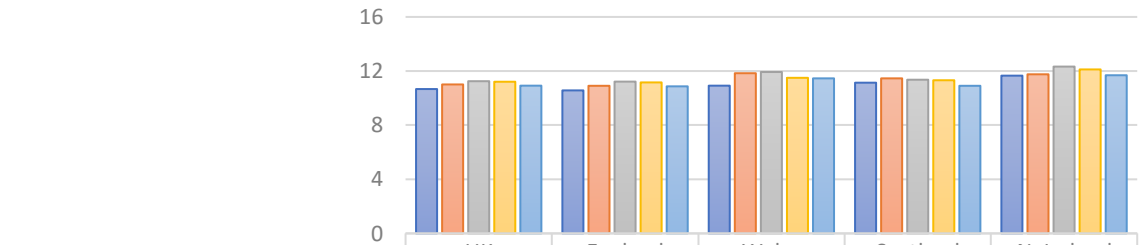
with and trust each other, and so have more social capital. The NCS is constructed from responses to four statements, in which respondents are asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale with the views that 'this is a close-knit neighbourhood', 'people around here are willing to help their neighbours', 'people in this neighbourhood can be trusted', and 'people in this neighbourhood do not get along with each other'. The responses to these questions are used to produce a scale ranging from 0 (implying the respondent perceives no neighbourhood cohesion at all) to 16 (implying they perceive very strong neighbourhood cohesion).[6] This scale was included in two of the UKHLS surveys: in 2011/13 and 2014/16.

UKHLS shows that most respondents tend to feel that their neighbourhoods are moderately cohesive: the average score in 2011/13 for the UK was 10.4, with just over half of respondents giving a score between 10 and 12, though the scores are slightly higher in Scotland (10.7), Wales (10.6) and Northern Ireland (11.0) than in England (10.3). The scores in 2014/16 were similar, though slightly higher for all nations: the UK average was 10.7; the score for England was 10.7, for Wales was 11.0, for Scotland was 11.1, and for Northern Ireland was 11.7. Figure Twenty-Seven shows how NCS scores were associated with volunteering in the UK and the nations. The data shows a positive relationship between volunteering and neighbourhood cohesion, though it is quite weak and, surprisingly, non-linear: those who never volunteered in 2012/14 tended to perceive the lowest levels of cohesion in their neighbourhoods, with a score of 10.7 at the UK level. The highest perceptions of cohesion are found among those who volunteered monthly, with a score of 11.3, followed by those who volunteered infrequently (11.0) and weekly (11.2). Those who volunteered several times a week still perceived higher cohesion than those who did not volunteer, but the gap was small, having a score of 10.9. While confirming, therefore, that people who volunteered were more likely to perceive their neighbourhoods as cohesive (or to come from cohesive neighbourhoods), the data shows that there is a more complicated relationship between volunteering and neighbourhood cohesion than may be expected. It is unlikely that different frequencies of volunteering have a substantial impact on neighbourhood cohesion and social capital; rather, this data likely reflects the link between the frequency of volunteering as measured in UKHLS and the different natures or types of volunteering that people are likely to engage in. As was discussed in Chapter Three, different types of volunteering imply differing frequencies of activity: someone who volunteers in a local church is more likely to report volunteering on a weekly basis than someone who volunteers with an environmental organisation or political party, for example.

[6] The measure produced by UKHLS actually ranges from 4 to 20, reflecting the values assigned to the variables upon which it is based. The measure has been recoded to a range of 0 to 16 here for the purposes of parsimony.

The pattern in Figure Twenty-Seven is probably reflecting the fact that some forms of volunteering – namely those that are typically engaged in on a monthly basis – are more conducive to cohesive relationships within neighbourhoods (and so social capital) than others.

Figure Twenty-Seven: Neighbourhood Cohesion in 2014/16 by Volunteering in 2012/14



	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
2014/16 - No volunteering in 2012/14	10.67	10.57	10.92	11.14	11.66
2014/16 - Infrequent volunteering in 2012/14	11.01	10.91	11.84	11.46	11.76
2014/16 - volunteered monthly 2012/14	11.25	11.22	11.93	11.36	12.33
2014/16 - volunteered weekly 2012/14	11.21	11.16	11.50	11.32	12.12
2014/16 - volunteered several times a week 2012/14	10.92	10.87	11.46	10.91	11.69

To try and get around the causality conundrum (which, in this case, makes it hard for us to tell whether volunteers develop better relationships with their neighbourhoods that makes them feel they are more cohesive, or whether people with such relationships become more likely to volunteer), Table Nine shows the average NCS scores in 2011/13 and 2014/16 for those who volunteered in the 2012/14 survey, and those who did not. The increase in NCS for all respondents identified above is apparent, but there is little difference in the rate of increase depending on whether the respondents volunteered. At the UK level, for example, the average NCS score for non-volunteers increased by 0.4 points between the 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys; for volunteers, the increase was 0.3 points. This pattern was largely replicated in all the four nations, expect Northern Ireland where a far bigger increase was seen (of 0.8 points among non-volunteers and 0.7 points among volunteers). There was still no substantial difference, however, between the rate of increase for volunteers and non-volunteers. Table Nine does not suggest any benefit for social capital from volunteering, therefore, as far as neighbourhood cohesion is concerned.

Table Nine: Average NCS by Volunteering

		UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
For non-volunteers in 2012/14	2011/13	10.3	10.3	10.6	10.7	10.9
	2014/16	10.7	10.6	10.9	11.1	11.7
For Volunteers in 2012/14	2011/13	10.8	10.7	11.2	11.2	11.3
	2014/16	11.1	11.1	11.5	11.3	12.0

Table Ten allows us to consider whether the benefits of volunteering might be different depending on previous neighbourhood cohesion scores of the respondents (at the UK level). Respondents were divided into quintiles on the NCS score range: those who scored between 0 and 4 were identified as 'very low cohesion'; those between 5 and 8 were 'low cohesion'; those between 9 and 12 were 'high cohesion'; and those between 13 and 16 were 'very high cohesion'. They were then further divided depending on whether they had volunteered in the 2012/14 survey; Table Ten shows the average NCS scores of these eight groups in 2011/13 and 2014/16. If volunteering has a beneficial impact on neighbourhood cohesion, we would expect to see a larger, positive change in NCS score for the volunteer groups (regardless of their starting NCS scores) than the non-volunteer groups.

The data suggests that volunteering *does* increase neighbourhood cohesion, but only by a small amount. Except for respondents who had 'very high cohesion' in 2011/13, there was an increase in NCS score between the 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys, and those increases were largest for those in the 'very low cohesion' groups. The scores for respondents in the 'very high cohesion' groups fell between 2011/13 and 2014/16. The rates of these changes, while similar, were slightly larger for those who had volunteered – or in the case of those from 'very high cohesion' groups, the decline was slightly smaller – than for those who had not. For those who did not volunteer and who had 'very low cohesion' in 2011/13, for example, their average NCS score increased by 3.4 points between 2011/13 and 2014/16; for those who volunteered, the increase was 3.6 points. For those with 'low cohesion', the increase was 1.8 points for non-volunteers and 1.9 points for volunteers. For those with 'high cohesion', the increase was 0.2 points for non-volunteers and 0.4 points for volunteers. Finally, for those with 'very high cohesion', their scores decreased by 1.5 points among non-volunteers and 1.2 points among volunteers. While small, there was a sustained positive (or less negative) effect on neighbourhood cohesion for those who volunteered relative to that for those

who had not between the 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys, suggesting that volunteering has a small but non-trivial impact on social capital.

Table Ten: Average NCS Score for Different Groups of NCS and Volunteers (2014/16)

Group	NCS Score
For non-volunteers in 2012/14 AND very low cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	3.1
2014/16	6.5
For non-volunteers in 2012/14 AND low cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	7.0
2014/16	8.8
For non-volunteers in 2012/14 AND high cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	10.8
2014/16	11.0
For non-volunteers in 2012/14 AND very high cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	14.1
2014/16	12.6
For volunteers in 2012/14 AND very low cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	3.2
2014/16	6.8
For volunteers in 2012/14 AND low cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	7.1
2014/16	9.0
For volunteers in 2012/14 AND high cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	10.9
2014/16	11.2
For volunteers in 2012/14 AND very high cohesion 2011/13	
2011/13	14.1
2014/16	12.9

Volunteering and Neighbourhood Connection

In addition to a Neighbourhood Cohesion Scale, UKHLS includes a battery of survey questions that measure respondents' connection to their neighbourhoods and the people within it. This Neighbourhood Connection Scale (NCONS) is based on responses to eight questions (in the 2010/11, 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys) about respondents' feelings towards their neighbourhood. It measures very similar perceptions as the NCS, but the questions are based more on how the respondent feels they are connected to their neighbourhood and the people within it rather than their perception of how cohesive the neighbourhood is. It gives another insight, therefore, into the relationships with people in their neighbourhood respondents maintain and from which they can derive social capital.

Respondents were invited to express their agreement or disagreement (on Likert scales) with the following eight statements:

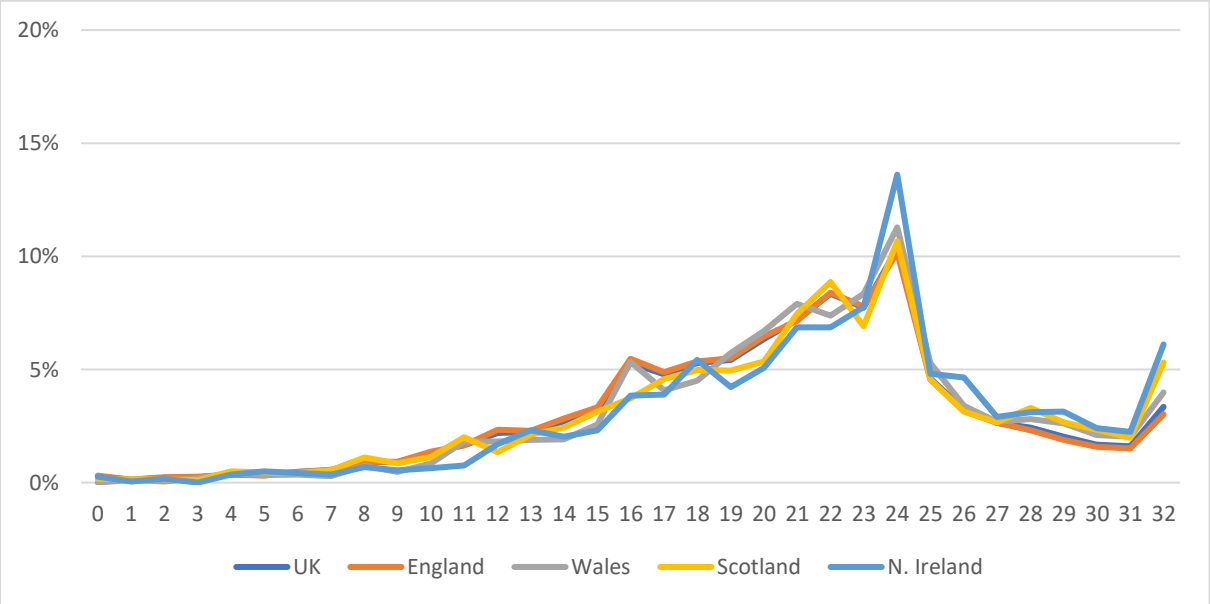
- I feel like I belong to this neighbourhood
- The friendships and associations I have with other people in my neighbourhood mean a lot to me
- If I needed advice about something I could go to someone in my neighbourhood
- I borrow things and exchange favours with my neighbours
- I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood
- I plan to remain a resident of this neighbourhood for a number of years
- I like to think of myself as similar to the people who live in this neighbourhood
- I regularly stop and talk with people in my neighbourhood

The answers were merged into a single scale measuring respondents' connection to their neighbourhood.[7] The scale ranged from 0 (implying no connection to one's neighbourhood, a form of community alienation) to 32 (implying a very strong connection). UKHLS shows that there is considerable variation in how connected respondents feel to their neighbourhoods (more than was found in the NCS measure above, although this could reflect the wider scale of the NCONS measure). The average score on the 0 to 32 scale for the UK in 2010/11 was 20.6; for 2011/13 was 20.3; and for 2014/16 was 20.5. However, these figures mask the extent to which respondents were spread out across the scale. Figure Twenty-Eight illustrates this, showing the 2014/16 scores for the UK and the

[7] Unlike the NCS, SWS and WEMWS scales used above, the NCONS scale was not produced in the dataset by UKHLS researchers. Instead, a latent structure analysis was conducted to determine whether the eight variables derived from these questions were representative of a common latent underlying construct, which is taken to be connection to one's neighbourhood. More details of this analysis can be obtained from the author upon request.

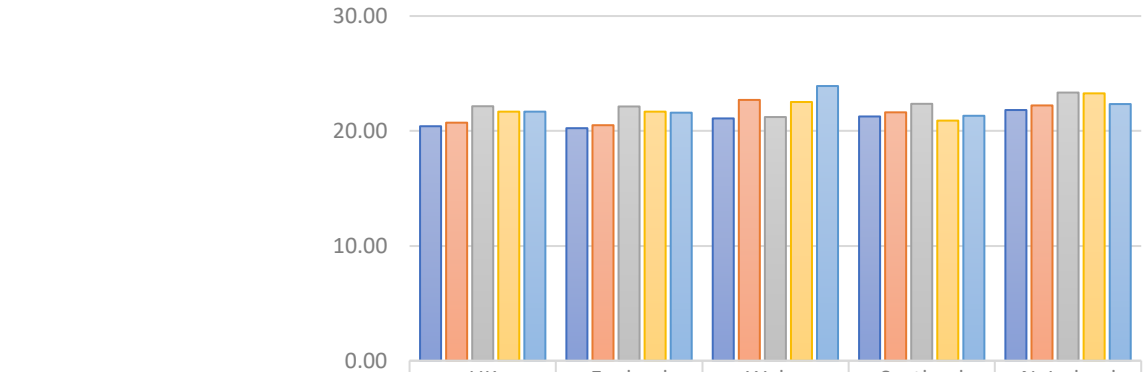
four nations. Most respondents (around 40 per cent) scored between the range of 20 and 25, suggesting that most people felt relatively well connected to their neighbourhood. Substantial minorities, however, felt little to no connection to their neighbourhood (with around 2 per cent scoring below 5) or a very strong connection (with around 6 per cent scoring 30 or above). There was little variation in this pattern across the four nations; rather, it was a UK-wide tendency for most people to feel somewhat connected to their neighbourhoods.

Figure Twenty-Eight: Average NCONS Score for UK and Four Nations



To show the relationship between neighbourhood connection and volunteering, Figure Twenty-Nine shows the average NCONS scores for respondents in the 2014/16 surveys depending on whether they had volunteered in 2012/14. As was found for NCS above, there was a small but sustained increase in NCONS scores for those who volunteered: in the UK, the average NCONS score for non-volunteers was 20.4, while for those who volunteered (to any frequency) it was 21.6. As was also found for NCS, the highest NCONS scores were for those who reported volunteering monthly – at the UK level, the score for these respondents was 22.2, with those who volunteered infrequently scoring 20.7, and those who volunteered weekly or several times a week scoring 21.7. This same pattern was replicated in all four nations except Wales, where those who volunteered several times a week scored the highest (with 23.9). Once again, this pattern is likely to reflect the link between the frequency of volunteering and the type of volunteering respondents had engaged in, suggesting that some forms of volunteering are more conducive to good neighbourhood connections and social capital than others.

Figure Twenty-Nine: NCONS scores by Volunteering, 2014/16



	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
2014/16 - No volunteering in 2012/14	20.41	20.24	21.09	21.26	21.82
2014/16 - Infrequent volunteering in 2012/14	20.72	20.50	22.70	21.62	22.22
2014/16 - volunteered monthly 2012/14	22.15	22.13	21.21	22.36	23.34
2014/16 - volunteered weekly 2012/14	21.68	21.68	22.52	20.90	23.27
2014/16 - volunteered several times a week 2012/14	21.68	21.59	23.91	21.32	22.34

Figure Twenty-Nine confirms that there is an association between feeling connected to one's neighbourhood and volunteering. Table Eleven takes the first look at evidence of a potential causal link between the two, showing the average NCONS scores in 2010/11, 2011/13 and 2014/16 of respondents who did not volunteer between the 2010/11 and 2014/16 surveys; those who volunteered only once in that time; and those who volunteered in both the 2010/12 and 2012/14 surveys. As with the similar analyses above, the emphasis is not only the absolute NCONS scores of the three groups (we would expect those who volunteer to have higher scores than those who do not regardless because volunteering is associated with higher social capital and is theorised to be both a cause and consequence of it), but on the rate of change over time, which should be greater for volunteers if volunteering has a positive impact on neighbourhood connection.

Like the headline figures cited above, the table shows that there was a small decline in neighbourhood connection across the UK between the 2010/11 and 2011/13 surveys, followed by a smaller increase between the 2011/13 and 2014/16 surveys. This is apparent for all three groups of respondents (and across all four nations) in Table Eleven. The table does not suggest that volunteering had much of an impact on this trend: among those who did not volunteer at all, their average NCONS score fell by 0.2 points between 2010/11 and 2014/16 (at the UK level); for those who volunteered once, the score fell by 0.6 points; and for those volunteered repeatedly, the score

fell by 0.4 points. There is little indication that volunteering did anything to mitigate or reverse the trend of falling then rising neighbourhood connection during this time.

Table Eleven: Average NCONS by Volunteering

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14					
2010/11	20.7	20.6	21.9	21.2	22.2
2011/13	20.2	20.0	21.1	21.0	20.9
2014/16	20.5	20.3	21.3	21.4	21.9
For volunteers in 2010/12 or 2012/14 only					
2010/11	21.4	21.2	22.0	21.5	23.3
2011/13	20.5	20.5	21.0	20.8	21.3
2014/16	20.8	20.7	21.5	20.9	23.0
For volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14					
2010/11	22.6	22.5	23.9	23.0	23.6
2011/13	22.0	21.9	23.7	22.5	22.0
2014/16	22.2	22.1	23.3	22.3	23.2

Finally, Table Twelve presents data for different sub-groups of respondents depending on their connection to their neighbourhoods at the start of the series (at the UK level only). As with the NCS scale above, respondents were categorised into four groups depending on whether their neighbourhood connection in 2010/11 was ‘very low’ (i.e. their NCONS score was between 0 and 7); ‘low’ (score between 8 and 15); ‘high’ (score between 16 and 24); or ‘very high’ (score between 25 and 32). Table Twelve shows the average NCONS scores for these groups depending on whether they never volunteered in the 2010/12 and 2012/14 surveys, or volunteered in both of those surveys, in 2010/11, 2012/14 and 2014/16. Once again, the emphasis is on the rate of change between those surveys for volunteers compared with non-volunteers, with the theory that

volunteering increases social capital supported if that rate is more positive for those who volunteered.

The data in the table suggests that volunteering does have a small, positive impact on social capital as measured by neighbourhood connection, but only for those who had 'high' or 'very high' neighbourhood connection in the 2010/11 survey. For those with 'very low' or 'low' connection, there is evidence of either no effect or even a negative effect. Among those who did not volunteer at all and had 'very low' connection in 2010/11, for example, there was an increase in their NCONS score of 9.2 points between 2010/11 and 2014/16, and for those who had 'low' connection in 2010/11, the increase was 3.6 points. For those same groups but who volunteered, however, the increase was 6.7 points and 3.4 points respectively. While the final NCONS averages for these groups were quite similar, these figures do not suggest that volunteering boosted neighbourhood connection. Among those with 'high' or 'very high' connections, however, the trend is different: for those with 'high' connection who never volunteered, there was a fall of 0.2 points between 2010/11 and 2014/16, while for those who volunteered there was an increase of 0.2 points. For those with 'very high' connections who never volunteered, there was a fall between 2010/11 and 2014/16 of 3.6 points, which fell to 2.5 points for those who volunteered.

This provides tentative evidence that volunteering increased the neighbourhood connections – or offset a deterioration in neighbourhood connection – of those respondents who had strong neighbourhood connections to begin with. It is unclear, however, why volunteering would benefit those with more social capital while offering no benefit – or even being detrimental – for those with less social capital. Other analyses in this report have shown that volunteering provided a greater benefit to individuals who were worse off at the start of the UKHLS survey series in terms of traits related to wellbeing. This is theoretically plausible in that while volunteering can bring benefits to traits such as wellbeing, the benefit is going to be limited for those who already have high wellbeing. In such cases, however, there was simply less of an effect, or no effect at all for those who were better off at the start of the data series. The finding here that volunteering is potentially detrimental to those with weak neighbourhood connections while being beneficial to those with good neighbourhood connections is of a different nature and suggests substantially different implications. Without further data, it is impossible to explain this; it may reflect, for example, the nature of the volunteering that people of different neighbourhood connections undertake being different and so having different consequences. Another possibility is that this reflects other characteristics not accounted for in the analyses; neighbourhood connection is, for example, mildly correlated with age, and as Chapter Three showed there are substantial differences between the recurrence and frequency of volunteering of people of different ages. It is possible that the changes in

neighbourhood connection identified in Table Twelve – particularly for those with 'low' or 'very low' connections – reflect the impact of life cycle events that have little to do with volunteering: young people who have just left school and volunteered, for example, are more likely to be attending, or planning to attend, university. This means that they are also likely to leave their home community, and when they eventually graduate to find themselves in an even more precarious social and economic environment as they try to find secure employment and homes. The negligible or negative effect of volunteering on those with lower neighbourhood connections could simply reflect the greater tendency of young people attending higher education – who live in conditions that are likely to weaken their neighbourhood connections – to volunteer, and the negative impact of their life circumstances may outweigh any benefit from volunteering. Further analysis and more extensive data will be required to effectively unpick this puzzle. Without more reliable information to explain the patterns in Table Twelve, however, it is unwise to conclude that volunteering is beneficial for social capital for those with good neighbourhood connections while having a completely different effect for those with weaker connections.

Table Twelve: Average NCONS Score for Different NCONS Groups

	UK
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND very low connection 2010/11	
2010/11	4.2
2012/14	10.9
2014/16	13.4
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND low connection 2010/11	
2010/11	12.6
2012/14	15.0
2014/16	16.2
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND high connection 2010/11	
2010/11	20.7
2012/14	20.3
2014/16	20.5
For non-volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND very high connection 2010/11	

2010/11	28.2
2012/14	24.6
2014/16	24.6
For volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND very low connection 2010/11	
2010/11	5.5
2012/14	12.0
2014/16	12.3
For volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND low connection 2010/11	
2010/11	12.8
2012/14	15.3
2014/16	16.3
For volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND high connection 2010/11	
2010/11	21.1
2012/14	21.0
2014/16	21.3
For volunteers in 2010/12 & 2012/14 AND very high connection 2010/11	
2010/11	28.4
2012/14	25.9
2014/16	25.9

Summary and Conclusions

This section has shown that while there is clear evidence that volunteering is more likely among those who have more social capital (as evidenced by their membership of community associations or living in more cohesive and connected neighbourhoods), there is also evidence that volunteering can increase social capital as well. People who volunteer are more likely to join community associations and to develop relationships with their neighbourhood that leads to them to perceive greater community cohesion, and possible a more connected neighbourhood as well. While (as discussed above) these conclusions are accompanied by the caveats that more detailed, sophisticated statistical analyses may lead to different findings, the descriptive data in UKHLS suggests that volunteering is a good way of increasing levels of social capital in communities. This means that it

can bring communal as well as individual benefits, given that communities with more social capital enjoy numerous advantages such as less crime, better health, more political engagement and superior economic activity. This suggests that governments looking to improve community life in the UK could do worse than continuing to devote resources to promoting volunteering.

There is, however, a downside to this conclusion. The analyses above showed that while volunteering does tend to lead to higher levels of social capital, the benefits of having volunteered (in terms of associational membership and neighbourhood cohesion in particular) are smaller than the original differences in those same indicators between those who did and did not volunteer. In other words, differences in levels of social capital are more important for explaining whether people volunteer than are differences in volunteering rates for explaining differences in levels of social capital. People with higher levels of social capital are more likely to volunteer, and the data above shows that they can generate (a little) more social capital as a result. People with little social capital are less likely to volunteer in the first place, however, meaning that volunteering is a means by which people who already have social capital generate more. Moreover, the benefits of volunteering are too small for it to be a means through which differences in social capital can be eliminated if some scheme that successfully encouraged those with low social capital to volunteer could be implemented. In short, volunteering is a means of widening inequalities in social capital (and all the beneficial consequences associated with it, such as lower crime or more political engagement) and promoting more volunteering – even among those with little social capital – is highly unlikely to change this.

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