Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Item 13

Finance and Resources Committee

20 May 2025

Volunteer Resources Annual Report

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide information on Dales Volunteers (DVs): volunteers who are directly recruited, trained and supervised by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority during 2024/25.

Recommendation

2. That the report be noted.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

    - Corporate Plan Objective 11
      Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to the National Park by providing at least 7,000 volunteer days per year, with 15% coming from under-represented groups.

Background

4. Every year YDNPA work with DVs across many areas of our work. In the majority of cases DV activities and roles contribute directly to management plan objectives.

Diversity of our applicants

5. The monitoring of applications for the purpose of equal opportunities is a practice recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This monitoring provides evidence as to whether current recruitment practices (and role offers) are reaching a diverse range of candidates and helps us to mitigate the risk of potential allegations of discriminatory practices. We have recently added the following statement in our role adverts, 'We aspire to have a diverse and inclusive programme and strongly

encourage applicants from all backgrounds to apply and join us' to outline our commitment to improve the diversity of volunteers.

6. Completion of monitoring forms is not compulsory, and non-completion does not invalidate an application. Therefore, not all applicants complete the form fully, or at all. From the information we have concerning successful applications in 2024/25:

    0% of applicants were under 18 years old (excepting 'Young Rangers')

    37% in the age group 18-25

    18% in the age group 26-35

    8% in the age group 36-45

    16% in the age group 46-55

    8% in the age group 56-65

    12% over 65 years of age

7. In relation to disability, 16% of DV applicants disclosed that they have a disability in 2024/25, this is an increase from 2% in 2023/24. With regard to ethnicity, 65% of applicants stated they were of 'White' ethnicity, ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', 'White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White - other'), 4% preferred not to say. 31% were from minority ethnic groups, which is an 8% increase from 2023/24 and is likely due, in part, to the Championing National Parks for Everyone project.

Diversity of our volunteers

8. We use data provided by the current volunteers to understand the diversity within our teams and to progress towards our targets of having 15% of our volunteer days completed by those who are in under-represented groups. Under-represented groups means the following:
    - young people (those aged 5 to 24 years inclusive)
    - minority ethnic groups (all ethnic groups other than 'White – British')
    - people who consider themselves to have a limiting long-term illness or disability.

The current profile across our 364 volunteers is:

- 12% are under 18 years old (these are our Young Rangers)
- 11% in the age group 18-25
- 7% in the age group 26-35
- 2% in the age group 36-45
- 6% in the age group 46-55
- 20% in the age group 56-65
- 17% are over 65 years of age
- 5% of DVs disclosed that they have a disability.
- 91.2% stated they were of 'White' ethnicity, ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White – other')

- 1.3% preferred not to say and 7.5% of our volunteers are from minority ethnic groups.

9. The Youth Volunteering Officer's post was vacant for much of this year and so work directly focussed on activity which contributes to this under-represented group's target was limited. However, we did still continue the Up Skill Down Dale (USDD) programme and the National Citizens Service 'Green Routes' project focussed on young people volunteering. Despite this, the trend seems to be towards an increasing number of our volunteer days being completed by those from under-represented groups. We hope this is in part a result of the cumulative effect of elements in the volunteer strategy which focuses on this target.

Recruitment activity

10. Each year recruitment decisions are based on need. We review volunteer numbers against Volunteer Supervisors future plans and our objectives, to determine if we need more to cover retirees who are leaving and/or expand the team.

11. For the period 2024/25, the Authority recruited 49 new volunteers, this compares to 37 in 2023/24. They were recruited in the following areas:

15 Up Skill Down Dale	5 Other
15 Community Champions (CNPfE project)	3 Learning and Engagement Team
9 Young Drafters	2 DCM

Training and development

12. All new volunteers complete the Authority's 'National Park Awareness' Core training. This is typically provided through face-to-face sessions, though we also offer a shorter online version of the course for those volunteers who will just be doing a small number of days volunteering with us (and for whom the full training would be disproportionate). All volunteers also attend online 'Admin Induction' sessions as early as possible so that they have all the basic information they need on things like using our 'Better Impact' online system, basic health and safety, claiming expenses etc.

13. It is the Volunteer Supervisors' responsibility to determine any additional training needed for each role, beyond the core training all receive. The Volunteer team work with the supervisors to deliver this via courses (both in house and with external providers), shadowing, briefings and information packs.

14. This year we have introduced 2 new universal courses:

a) 'Navigation Basics' this is an online course we ask all volunteers to complete to give us a baseline understanding of their capabilities.

b) 'The Yorkshire Dales for Everyone' currently this is a standalone in-person course which we are asking existing DVs to compete - in the future it will become part of the National Park Awareness Training so as volunteers join us we will cover EDI

principles and our approach from the start, it will also directly refer to our newly created code of conduct for volunteers.

Volunteer turnover

15. Some degree of volunteer turnover is inevitable as people move away, find new interests or some will retire, or the role becomes too physically challenging for them. Historically, we have seen a high degree of loyalty from our volunteers and that has continued: 9% of our current volunteers have been with us for over 20 years and a further 20% for between 10 and 20 years. This means a quarter of our current volunteers have been with us for over 10 years. This number has been relatively consistent year on year.

16. During the period 2024/25, 25 volunteers resigned, 1 passed away and 4 moved away from the area. This was less than in 2023/24 (where we had a focussed effort in removing record of non-active volunteers – but that work continues and so a further 20 volunteer records were removed from our books as they didn't start or were inactive for a sustained period).

17. The length of service of the 50 people who stopped volunteering in 2024/2025 is shown below:

Length of Service	Number of leavers	% of leavers
<1 year	2	4%
>1 year but < 2 years	7	14%
>2 years but < 3 years	9	18%
>3 years but < 4 years	12	24%
>4 years but < 5 years	0	0%
>5 years but < 10 years	14	28%
>10 years but < 20 years	4	8%
>20 years	2	4%

18. As stated in previous reports, we believe we are beginning to see a reflection of the wider societal changes affecting volunteering. Despite taking on new volunteers to replace those who are retiring our volunteering day numbers are remaining relatively stable and, in some areas, declining. This is likely to be attributed to the fact that many of our older volunteers have tended to contribute a high number and consistent level of volunteering days for many years and some of those who are replacing them don't view volunteering in the same way. Our new recruits are, mainly younger and our roles now more flexible, designed to fit the lifestyle of those who have other responsibilities e.g. work or family commitments. This means that whilst our volunteer numbers are generally expanding, the number of days they do is not increasingly proportionally and so this may present a challenge in future years reaching the volunteering days target.

19. The Volunteer Team are continuing to monitor societal and YDNPA patterns and in the meantime are developing a few things to try and address this, for example the recently trialled partnership volunteering model has the potential to achieve more volunteering tasks with less direct YDNPA staff supervision and the new annual volunteer survey

should provide data on what works well for volunteers so we can increase satisfaction and hopefully day numbers.

20. As is normal some of the volunteer roles we offer have changed this year. The replacement activities planned by the Trees and Woodland Team did not come to fruition due to staffing and capacity in the Historic Environment Team has resulted in this being a much-reduced area of activity for volunteering from previous years. The work by the Young Drafting Group also came to an end as the Management Plan process drew to a close, and the NCS (Green Routes Programme) finished. Additionally, whilst still a mainstay of volunteering, the way some of the Ranger Teams work with volunteers has changed - with some now finding it more practical to go out with individuals rather than larger groups, and projects like the Coast to Coast have meant some typical volunteering tasks have not taken place in the same way.

21. Finally, this year we have also trialled a partnership volunteering model, where DVs support the tasks of other organisations, particularly where these contribute to management plan targets, and we hope to continue this in future where opportunities arise. As new projects are being developed, we are seeking to be involved at the project planning stage, so volunteering needs are considered early (and costed) to allow us to plan accordingly. The Championing National Parks for Everyone project was a good example of this working well.

Feedback from leavers

22. We send an online survey to volunteers when they leave; it is not compulsory that they complete it. 12 leavers provided feedback this year, this was largely positive and stated their reasons for leaving were circumstantial.

Financial Implications

23. None. Continuation of the standard Volunteers Budget (F400) which covers expenses, training and materials associated with volunteering.

Legal Implications

24. No specific ones beyond those generally associated with working with volunteers.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

25. Please see paragraphs 5 to 9.

Climate Change Implications

26. In an attempt to reduce the carbon emissions associated with volunteering we have been encouraging more car share amongst volunteers and supervisors to be more

targeted in their use of volunteers geographically. This appears to be working as the carbon emissions from volunteer mileage are slightly lower in 2024/25 than the previous year and we will continue to take this approach.

Conclusion

27. The Authority actively manages its Volunteer service to ensure it is effective. It also ensures equality of opportunity, with volunteering roles covering a variety of work programmes and contributing directly to achieving management plan objectives.

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