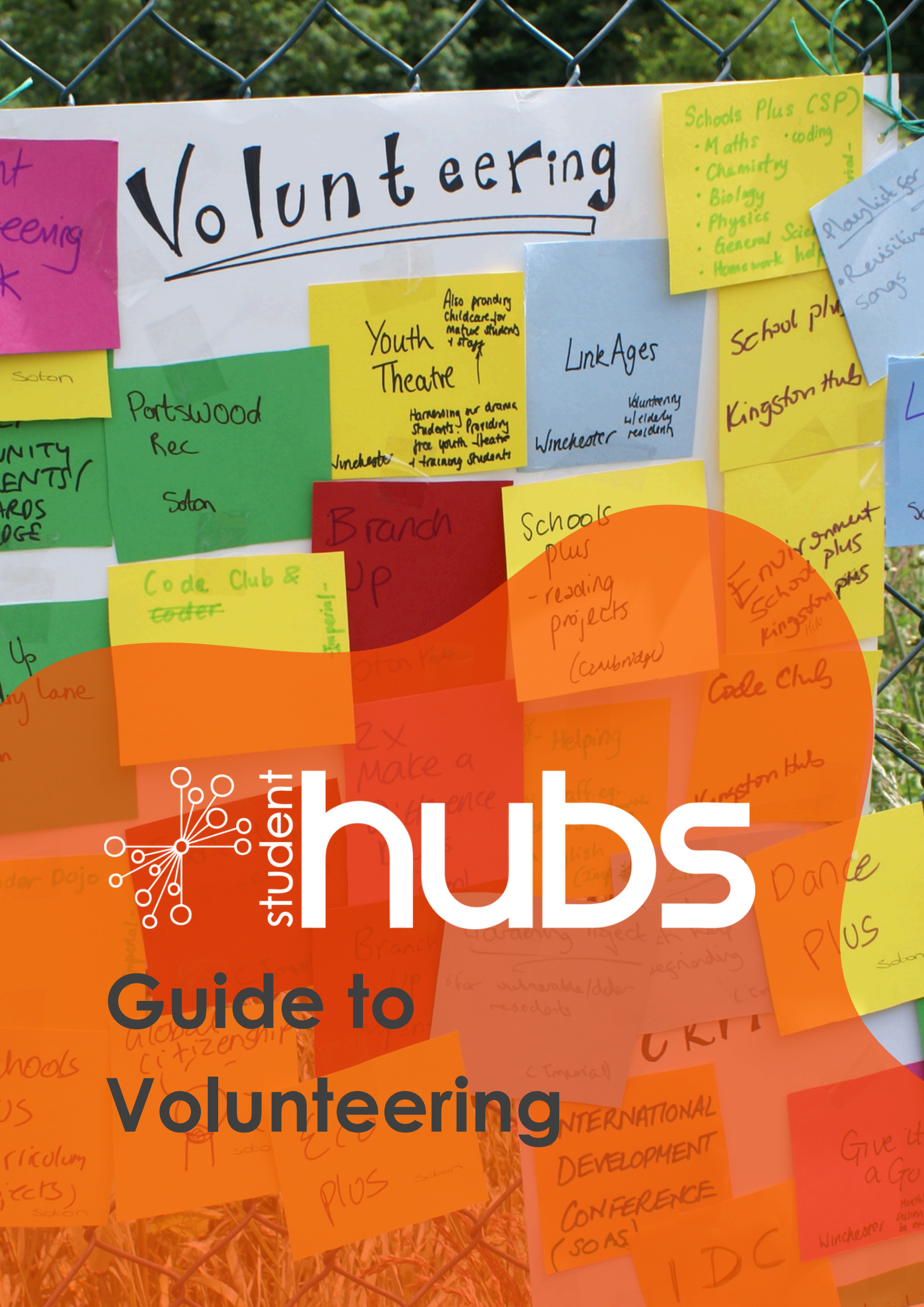

student hubs

Guide to Volunteering

Welcome

We are Student Hubs, a charity who worked in partnership with UK universities to deliver in-curricular and extracurricular activities championing student social action. We were founded in 2007 by students who wanted to provide a space to increase collaboration and conversation around social action at their university and find their place within the community.

Our work has been driven by our mission and vision statement. We strongly believe that when students are **supported to tackle social challenges, connect with each other, and learn about issues**, communities benefit, students develop skills and insights, and students leave university on the path to becoming **active citizens for life**.

As an organisation, our speciality was in facilitating youth social action and supporting young people to engage in social issues. We supported university students to engage in the issues most important to them, with a focus on accessibility of opportunities, skill development, and community cohesion.

Facilitating activities which help to develop students' skills for life exposes them to charitable organisations and others working within the voluntary sector. Our activities allowed them to learn about these organisations, the challenges they face, and provide a clear way to meaningfully impact and support these groups. By building students' knowledge and experience, they are more likely to engage with their community in the long-term and become what we would describe as an active citizen.

In the 16 years since, our work has developed and grown significantly. We have worked with...

20,000+ students across 10 Hub locations

100,000+ students attending training, events and conferences

1,200 community organisations, reaching 16,000 community members

Foreward

When I was at university, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life. I had followed all the steps I thought I had to take and was studying for a degree I found mostly interesting. However during my second year I really struggled to feel like I had a purpose - though I had friends and did social activities I enjoyed, I felt like I wasn't really developing the skills I needed to thrive once I graduated.

During freshers week of my final year, a friend was talking about the volunteering she had been doing over the summer and offered me a chance to get involved. Looking back now I'm not sure what came over me, but I dived in head first. I started volunteering with my local branch of Student Hubs. In Southampton that year I worked alongside some lovely people to set up a new programme called Branch Up. Branch Up connected student volunteers with young people across the city, and organised activity days to help broaden horizons and provide a safe space for young people. Within weeks, as the Children's Officer I was doing things I never thought I had the skills to do - I was calling schools, liaising with social services, and delivering training. The support provided by the Student Hubs staff team and the other student committee members helped me realise that I did have a lot of skills already, and that I could identify and improve other skills too, now knowing what to ask for and having someone to ask! I became familiar with charity funding, successfully applying for grants for our activities, I learned more about safeguarding and behaviour management, and I developed lots of public speaking skills. All of these skills had previously felt unattainable to me.

Alongside the skill development, participating in the committee and supporting volunteers helped me feel connected to others. Working together on a shared vision really brings people together. Even though we were different ages, doing different degrees, and had come from different backgrounds, we all felt united in our mission. It introduced me to so many people I wouldn't have otherwise met, including people who ten years later, remain my friends.

I continued to volunteer with Southampton Hub during my Masters as well, and there was a magic to the feeling we all felt, and I knew I wanted to keep it going. So I applied for a job with Student Hubs, where I've worked ever since. For the past eight years, it's been a joy to watch and support new cohorts of student leaders get involved with our activities. It's been a privilege to provide practical support and watch those leaders grow and develop, achieving things they didn't think they had in them.

Volunteering can be a magical experience; don't let your fears stop you from trying out something new - you never know what you could achieve or where it will lead you.

Simran Dhanjal-Field
CEO, Student Hubs

Our legacy

After delivering student social action with university students and communities across England for 16 years, the Student Hubs Trustee Board and Management Team took the difficult decision to cease operations of the charity by January 2025. The reasons for the closure are complex and reflective of the current landscape for charities and the challenges facing the higher education sector over recent years.

The decision to close was also made in order to support our people, from our staff to all our wonderful volunteers, and to take a new approach to sharing our magic. By closing down thoughtfully, we can share what's worked for us, and create space for others to further our mission.

The higher education sector has made lots of progress over the past decade towards internalising our mission. Our aim is that our legacy work will continue to add to this, even amidst the challenging times and contexts faced by the sector.

This Toolkit

This toolkit was written for students acting as an introduction to social action. It aims to support individuals to understand the benefits participation will have on them and their community. It also provides frameworks and resources to support individuals to engage meaningfully with the activities they choose to undertake, making best use of their time and skills. You don't need to work through it in order - use the contents page to find the sections most relevant to you!

You might also be someone who supports others to participate in voluntary activities - this toolkit will show you the type of support students may require to ensure a deep level of engagement in their chosen activities. Also if you deliver voluntary activities, this toolkit will show you what potential volunteers may be considering when they're applying to your activities.

The information provided in this guide has been cultivated from feedback, delivery experience, roundtable discussions, and other reports from the sector over the past decade.

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Chapter One

On the value of social action

Social action is described as 'people coming together to help improve their lives and solve problems that are important in their communities'. This definition, provided by the Government, is very broad and as such includes many different activities, some of which many people wouldn't consider 'volunteering' but all of which contribute to the health and strength of their communities. In this section of the toolkit, we'll be exploring Student Hubs' mission, why active citizenship is important, and what makes an activity 'high quality'.

Social action is a broad term that can be applied to any activity or action an individual undertakes in order to improve their lives and the conditions of their communities. Often when we think about social action or volunteering, we think of actions which improve the lives of others, such as volunteering in a community kitchen. However it can take many forms including, but not limited to, donating money, volunteering in a structured programme (like the Scouts), participating in mutual aid, or taking out an older neighbour's bins to the curb each week. The possibilities for how you support your community is endless.

These actions also exist in a variety of formats, for example, participating in a structured programme could mean you take one of many roles, in the Scouts you might lead activities, or are in charge of food prep, or coordinate all the admin such as calendars and contacting parents. These activities can also be formal, such as participating in a structured activity organised by an authorised group, or informal, such as neighbours in a group chat deciding to do a litter pick. The actions you take could be big, world changing statements, like participating in demonstrations and protests, but they can also be small steps you take to improve the daily life of your community.

There are many benefits to participating in social action throughout our lives. The obvious conclusion is that participating improves our communities, but that only scratches the surface of benefits:

For the individual	For the community

• Improves skills;
  ◦ Leadership
  ◦ Teamwork
  ◦ Resilience
• Improves confidence
• Improves our sense of belonging and purpose
• Makes us feel connected to other people
 	
All contributing to increased wellbeing
	• Adds new skills to tackle challenges
	• Volunteers bring enthusiasm and energy
	• Improves activities and services, by enhancing capacity and reach
	• Improves community cohesion - connecting individuals to each other

Student Hubs' approach

At Student Hubs, our vision was of a society in which every student, no matter their background or previous experiences, participates in social and environmental challenges during their education, supporting them to become active citizens for life (our mission is to mainstream student social action - to learn more about vision and mission statements, go to page 35). Whilst our vision outlines the world we're trying to create, our theory of change explains what we tried to do to create this future.

Our theory of change explains our belief that when students are supported to **learn** about social issues, are able to **connect** with like-minded individuals, and are provided the opportunity to **do** something meaningful, several wonderful things happen. In the immediate, students benefit from the insight and skill development these opportunities provide, and communities benefit from the enthusiasm, fresh approach, and expertise students bring. The long term impact is that students leave university as active citizens.

What does it mean to be an active citizen?

Active citizenship is the main outcome we at Student Hubs were trying to cultivate. Being an active citizen means you actively engage in the world around you and try to make it a better place. We find it helpful to consider the research undertaken by education professors Westheimer and Kahne in 2004, in which they outline three categories of what it means to be a 'good' citizen. They looked at programmes supporting the development of active citizenship within education in the United States, and their work detailed a spectrum of 'citizenship'.

Personally Responsible citizen	**Participatory** citizen	**Justice Oriented** citizen
Someone who acts responsibly in their community, for example they might volunteer, vote, and recycle. They're the type of person who would lend a hand and give time or money.	Someone who actively seeks to be a part of the social life of the community. They're more likely to have an organising role in activities and engage more in policies and processes, with a focus on building relationships and collective vision.	Someone who is engaged in critically understanding and interrogating the structures which uphold social issues and injustices.
E.g. this person would donate food to a food bank.	E.g. this person would help to organise a food bank.	E.g. this person would seek to understand why people needed to use the food bank and then act to address the root cause.

These definitions are really helpful in recognising that there are many different ways to be an active citizen, and that our involvement is on a spectrum rather than a set, defined role we can't move from. It's important to recognise that there are a wide range of factors which may limit or support us to be at different levels of the spectrum during different parts of our life. At Student Hubs, it's important to us that we recognise where we are on our citizenship journey, knowing that it can grow and change as we grow and change.

High Quality Activities

In this section, we are going to explore different types of activities you may want to participate in. Before we do that, it's important for us to have an understanding of what makes an activity high quality.

In 2012, Step Up to Serve and the #iwill campaign undertook research with the support of external bodies (including Student Hubs) to consider what made an activity high quality. The purpose of this research was to support a wider societal push by the coalition government to invest in youth social action, supporting more socially engaged young people. Though this work was aimed at 10-20 year olds, we believe that the principles identified are important to activities, no matter the target demographic. Six key principles were identified:

Challenging

Activities should be stretching and ambitious, as well as enjoyable and enabling

Youth-led

Activities are led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas, and decision making

Socially impactful

Activities should have a clear intended benefit to a community, cause, or social problem

Progressive

Activities should be sustained and provide links to other activities and opportunities

Embedded

Activities should be accessible to all, and well integrated into existing pathways to becoming habits for life

Reflective

Activities should have an element to recognise the contributions of volunteers as well as holding space for critical reflection and learning

Underlining all of these principles is the knowledge that good activities will have a double benefit - it should benefit the individual volunteering as well as the community they are volunteering in.

If you are looking into an activity, you can use the following table to help you review how well it meets the six principles:

Principles	Questions to ask	Evidence you will see
Embedded	Is the activity well integrated into the volunteer's journey? Is it integrated into local communities, services, and environments?	The activity will provide clear incentives to service users (the individual's benefiting from the activities) and the volunteers to participate and sustain commitment.
Progressive	Is the activity sustained and developed over time to create lasting impact? Is there space to recognise and reward achievements to encourage others?	
Youth-led	Does the activity give volunteers the opportunity to take team roles they have not experienced before to organise, lead, and represent? Is the activity driven by the needs, passions, motivations, ideas, and goals of volunteers?	The activity enables volunteers to direct activities with support appropriate to their competencies.
Challenging	Does the opportunity have a suitable starting point for volunteers by offering an appropriate level of challenge? Is the activity ambitious, exciting, innovative, adventurous, and fun?	
Socially Impactful	Are the organisers of the activity convincingly able to describe how activities will lead to intended social benefits? Does the activity enable direct contact with service users?	The activity and volunteers can articulate a theory of change that relates outputs to outcomes, and communicates the outcomes of the project.
Reflective	Does the activity build awareness, knowledge and understanding? Does the opportunity ensure that volunteers are able to articulate the outcomes of their social action project?	

Now we can take a look at the different ways you might participate in social action. This isn't a comprehensive list, but looks at some of the most common opportunities you might come across;

Structured Volunteering

This is Student Hubs terminology for activities which follow a formalised structure. These activities put volunteers into the community, working closely alongside community leaders, and the service users who will benefit from a volunteer's participation. The thing that makes this opportunity 'structured' is that there is a framework around it - a clear programme to follow. We would expect this to include having set role descriptions (so the volunteer knows what is expected of them), set timings for volunteering (weekly/fortnightly, with a clear pattern of timings), and it's likely that they will follow a set pattern of delivery/actions.

A Student Hubs example: Schools Plus

Schools Plus worked to address the impacts of educational inequality by placing student volunteers into schools that need the most support. Volunteers act as in-classroom support, helping to run reading groups, or to lead after-school activities. All of these roles have set role descriptions outlining the extent of a volunteer's role, volunteers commit to a particular slot (time and day of the week) for each term, and there is a set structure in place to provide support for the volunteer (school teachers, safeguarding leads).

Other examples: volunteering with the Scouts, participating in a local community kitchen, SU Give it a Go opportunities

Skilled Placements

This includes activities which put volunteers into roles which could be counted as professional work. Often this looks like acting in some capacity as a consultant for another organisation because the support a volunteer provides tends to focus on a core skill or solving a specific problem. Skilled placements tend to be time limited, with an end date in mind, as this is when the problem/project needs to be solved by. These activities can be conducted independently or in small teams, working in partnership with an organisation on a defined challenge and then coming up with a solution and sometimes even implementing it. The core benefit of skilled placements is that it is an opportunity for volunteers to put into practice skills they are learning in the classroom in the real world. Community organisations benefit from new skills and creative ideas they otherwise may not have been able to access.

A Student Hubs example: Climate Action Bristol
Climate Action Bristol is a student consultancy programme through which teams of students are paired with local organisations to create and implement a Climate Action Plan across the course of an academic year. The programme was delivered in partnership with NETpositive Futures.

Other examples: many universities run similar schemes which put students into roles supporting the operational delivery of activities, this includes activities like 'a one-day charity challenges' and student consultancy programmes.

Trusteeships

A trustee board plays a big role in the management of a charity. Board members are made up of individuals who do not work for the charity, but hold independent control and legal responsibility for the management of it. It is normally a voluntary role with significant responsibility, and is a unique way of sharing your skills and knowledge, providing vital support to a charity.

A trustee's main responsibilities are to ensure that good governance is taking place which will allow the charity to succeed. This includes ensuring compliance with laws and regulations. A trustee must; act in the charity's best interests, manage the charity's resources responsibly, and act with reasonable skill and care. They share knowledge and shape the strategic direction of organisations.

A big assumption is that you need to have lots of experience or have worked in senior leadership positions in order to contribute meaningfully to a trustee board. This isn't true - we all have skills and experiences that will be helpful to a charity. It's about finding the right charity for the skills you have and want to develop. Participating in a trustee board can support you to develop leadership skills, learn about the sector, and grow your network in either a particular location or on a specific theme. If you are unsure about diving straight into a trustee position, it's becoming increasingly common for charities to have advisory boards or sub-committees made up of non-trustee members who can advise the board and the organisation on particular topics and act as a sounding board. This is a great way to learn about charity governance without the legal responsibility.

Check out the Young Trustees Movement to learn more about being a young trustee (under the age of 30) and The Essential Trustee guide for more details on what's involved.

Volunteering Abroad

When we think about volunteering, the location we volunteer in can be just as varied as the opportunities themselves. Many activities are focused within our local communities, but we can also participate in national, international, and global activities as well. As part of our offering over the years, Student Hubs supported the delivery of a programme called Impact International. Impact International was aimed at fostering more sustainable, responsive, and critically engaged international volunteering among students. The programme was set up in response to the widespread lack of awareness around the complexities of volunteering abroad, and aimed to equip students with the resources and knowledge to better understand international volunteering and development.

International development is a wide concept concerning the level of development on an international scale. It is the basis for international classifications such as developed or developing countries. It is a continuous process that empowers people and communities and aims to make a change for the better. It can have different focuses (economic, participatory, human, or sustainable). It could include a single project, or a series of projects targeted at a particular part of society.

International volunteering is when volunteers work for organisations or causes outside their respective home countries. In most cases, volunteers work in countries on international development programmes with local volunteer organisations. International volunteering is a broad term which is used to capture multi-year, skilled placements as well as short term roles, and a range of activities in between, conducted by governments, charities, and travel agents.

Like all activities, there are many potential benefits and challenges to international volunteering, however there are also some more unique risks we need to consider:

Benefits	Potential Risks

• It can be transformative for the individual
  ◦ Develop new friendships
  ◦ Accomplishments
  ◦ Cultural awareness
  ◦ Unique experience
  ◦ Employability specific skills
• It can be transformative for the host
  ◦ Added capacity to local development goals
  ◦ Exchange of knowledge, ideas, skills
  ◦ Cross-cultural exchange, challenges prejudices and misconceptions
	• Dependency on foreign volunteers
	• Projects may not be sustainable after volunteers have left
	• Local capacity and skills are undermined
	• Can be a burden on local community
	• Pushes a colonial and imperialistic viewpoint (acting as if communities in the global south have easily identifiable needs which are solvable by western, unskilled volunteers)

Volunteering abroad successfully

Volunteering abroad can be done in a way that is respectful to the host communities. Use the following list to help you reflect on and check an opportunity is right for you:

Community ownership	Who asked for the project? Who is in charge? Is it responding to locally defined needs?
Sustainability	You don't want to participate in a project that creates a long term dependency on volunteers. Ask about what happens when you go home
Assess the impact of the organisation	What's their vision and mission statement? Do they have a good record? What has been achieved in the past? (check out page 31 for more support on understanding impact)
Displacement	Is an international volunteer the best person for the role or could it be done locally? Who is covering the costs of you being there?
Finances	Organisations should be transparent with their finances. Avoid customer-centric attitudes
Accountability	Who is defining the success of the project? How is the project being monitored and evaluated?
Role of the volunteer	Will you get a role description? Will you receive training? What support is there in the country? Will you get a debrief on return?
Hear from others	Learn from what other people say - seek out reviews from others currently on the project or alumni
Find the right project for you	Think specifically and build on the skills you have (check out page 21 for more support on this). Learn about local issues through talks, workshops and following charities on social media

Chapter Two
Getting started

Now we understand what we might be getting involved with, it's time to get going. It can feel overwhelming to identify what you want to do and get started. In this section we're going to think about self-reflection to help us identify what we are looking for in a voluntary activity.

Self-awareness

It's helpful to have an understanding about why you want to volunteer and what you are aiming to get out of the activity. This will help you better pick the right activity for you.

Pre-engagement reflection

Here we've outlined a short pre-engagement form to help you better understand yourself. It's okay if you don't know the answer to every question; these should help you narrow your options and leave you feeling more confident.

About You	
Why do you want to volunteer?	It's helpful to consider what your motivations are so that you can ensure you pick an activity that best meets it. Is it about building connections in your neighbourhood, is it about developing a specific skill for your CV, is it about contributing to a specific social issue?
What social issues are you passionate about?	You may have answered this in Q1, but it's useful to pull out if there are particular issues you want to contribute to, such as educational inequality, supporting refugees, climate justice, food poverty, etc. This could help you identify where you might want to volunteer.
Skill Development: 1. **What skills do you currently feel confident in?** 2. **What skills would you like to develop?**	You can do a deeper dive into thinking about skills in the next section on Student Hubs' Student Leadership Framework.

Practical considerations	
What is your availability for this activity?	You should consider both the amount of time you have to give per week/fortnight/month, as well as your general availability. For example, are you completely flexible and have a free calendar, can you only do afternoons, can you only volunteer outside of term time and other commitments?
Do you want to work with others or independently?	There's no right or wrong answer here, but it's good to reflect on whether you'd like to participate in a group or to work on activities alone, this will steer which types of activities you might look for.
What location are you looking for?	Online or in-person, what physical location - can you get to it, what will it cost you to travel.
Do you have any accessibility requirements?	This might include, but isn't limited to, asking for materials in presentations in advance or to be printed and shared, information about activities, or support to map a travel plan. Take this time to think about what will help you fully engage and participate in an opportunity.

Student Leadership Framework

At Student Hubs, one of our core outcomes for our students was the development of skills for life. We recognised that as well as all of the warm feelings participating in social action provides, it also provides tangible opportunities for you to develop, grow, and polish the skills that will be helpful for you in the future.

Throughout this work, we refer to supporting 'Student Leadership' - don't be put off by the term leadership/leader. To us, anyone and everyone can be a leader. Leadership isn't about a specific role or title you have. Instead it's about how you use your skills, connections, and voice to make change with others.

Here you can see our Student Leadership framework which outlines the skills we feel are necessary to support socially active individuals to succeed.

Leadership: a commitment to being a social action leader			
Collaboration: how effectively students can work with others to tackle social issues.	Communication: how effectively students can communicate (both verbal and written) with others to tackle social issues.	Self awareness: how effectively students can understand their strengths, weaknesses, limitations and how others might support them to develop.	Problem solving: how effectively can students tackle challenging problems involved in the programme and approaching social issues.
Curiosity: an interest in the world around you, others, and learning about social issues.			

The Student Skills Audit

To support you to reflect on your skills, we have created a self-directed skills audit which you can work through. It's outlined in this section or you can access the full printable student skills audit online.

The audit is designed to support you to step back, reflect, and take action to improve your skills as a leader.

Before you begin
Start by picking an activity, role, or responsibility you would like to reflect on. Remember your reflection, skills, and actions may look different for each activity you engage with.

Motivation	This is your passion and purpose. All motivations are valid, but it's important to be connected to yours.	Why do you want to be involved in this activity? How does what motivates you in other areas of your life relate to this activity?
A Growth Mindset	Your growth mindset is your openness to try new things, and your willingness to fail. It's about seeing situations as learning opportunities.	What is something new you would like to try through this activity? How does trying new things make you feel?
Curiosity	You need curiosity to learn about others and yourself. This includes a willingness to reflect on where you are and what you're looking for.	What is one question you have about this activity? And how can you find your answer?

How to complete this audit
This skills audit can be completed at the start, during, and after your experience. For each skill area review the questions and reflect on your confidence level, using the evidence to back up your self assessment where possible.

Rating:
Hot - you know you have this skill and you're confident in your ability to apply it in a wide range of situations
Warm - this is something you do sometimes, or would be willing to do
Cold - this might be something you've never tried before, or you have tried and don't feel like you have the skills, energy, or motivation to do again.

As you complete the audit, be sure to pull out actions to support you to build skills in the areas you currently feel less confident in. Why not share these actions with a friend to hold you accountable?

Skill 1: Collaboration

Do you support others when challenges arise?	Support can be personal or practical, but it looks like understanding and meeting an individual's needs within the scope of your own boundaries, needs and responsibilities.
Do you make an effort to make others feel included?	Feeling included may mean feeling able to bring your whole self to a space, and knowing that your uniqueness is appreciated.
Are you a positive role model to other people?	Role models demonstrate the approach and skills expected of others. They do this naturally and without judgement.
Are you able to effectively delegate tasks to others?	Effectively delegating means you communicate the task clearly; team members are motivated to complete the task; and a positive outcome is achieved!

Skill 2: Communication

Do you motivate others to get involved and take action?	Motivation requires clear, concise communication and listening skills. You need to understand someone's perspective, celebrate their achievements and encourage action.
Do you find it easy to connect with other people?	To connect you need excellent listening skills. When talking to others you demonstrate you are listening, ask meaningful questions and share your own experience when appropriate.
Are you an influential negotiator?	An influential negotiator has the skills to support others to learn about their point of view. They are able to stand their ground, whilst compassionately understanding others' perspectives.
Are you confident presenting information?	Confident presenters have the verbal communication skills to adapt and deliver a message to different audience groups, in a way that really resonates with them.

Skill 3: Self-awareness

Do you regularly take time to reflect?	You create space to regularly reflect on progress against goals, your strengths and more. You collect feedback from others to feed into this reflection practice.
Do you consistently take time to support your needs?	You always make time to practice the habits and routines that make you feel good. You understand your conditions for success, and the things that make you feel well.
Are you courageous in the face of uncertainty?	Courage doesn't mean acting without worry, but it means understanding your concerns and overcoming them to still take risks and make progress.
Are you confident sharing your point of view?	Confidence in your point of view looks like feeling calm, secure and stable when it comes to sharing thoughts with others. This includes giving others the space to share too.

Skill 4: Problem solving

Do you think creatively in the face of challenges?	Creative thinkers are able to generate new ideas, individually and as part of a team. You view challenges as an opportunity and you are excited to innovate and try new things.
Are you able to step back and think strategically?	Strategic thinkers are able to step away from the day-to-day and think about all of the information available to them. They seek to understand the systems they are operating within.
Do you take an organised approach to projects?	You love creating plans, collaboratively and independently, and using them to achieve success. You meet deadlines, adapt when needed and have a high attention to detail.
Are you a confident decision maker?	You are able to weigh up options and make decisions in a timely, confident manner.

Actions

Now you have completed your audit, it's time to set some goals.
Ask yourself:

- [ ] Which three areas do you want to develop in?
- [ ] What actions can you take this week, this month, and this year to move towards your goal?
- [ ] How can you make your actions and goals SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound?

You may also find it helpful to work through our 'Building my skills as a student leader workbook' which includes summaries of some of our training sessions to help you build these skills.

Getting going

At this stage, you've done a lot of reflecting and work to understand what type of activity you want to participate in. In this section, we're going to cover a few different points for you to keep in mind as you find the right opportunity for you.

Finding opportunities

Programmes and activities are taking place all around you, it's all about finding the right one for you. If you are at a university, speaking to your volunteering department or getting in touch with your Students Union is a great place to start. There will be many activities that they run directly, or are aware of in the wider community.

Many cities have a 'Voluntary Service' organisation who support lots of smaller charities and maintain a network of organisations and opportunities. They may have a website, a newsletter, or a physical location you can go to and scope opportunities.

You can also research and reach directly out to organisations in your area. Have a think about the social issues you are passionate about and see what search results you get.

You should look through the role descriptions available for some roles you find interesting. You'll learn more about role descriptions on the next page, but it's important to remember you don't need to be able to do everything on it. Often a role description will make clear what is an essential and desirable skill or experience. There is also an opportunity here for you to identify any areas you think you might find challenging, and what support you might need from the organisation. If that support isn't available it might not be the right opportunity for you.

For example: Sal is looking for a volunteering opportunity, they looked on their SU website at volunteering societies at their university but didn't find anything working with young people. They Googled "volunteering in Bristol with young people" and VOSCUR popped up - the city's VCSE network. On the VOSCUR website there was a list of local opportunities and they have earmarked three different organisations they are interested in. They have emailed the organisations to find out more about current opportunities, and have downloaded the role descriptions to review what the responsibilities might include.

Expectations

Once you've found the activity you want to be involved with and have applied successfully there are a few things you should expect in order to succeed in your role. You should expect;

An onboarding process:
The onboarding process is a core element of starting a new role, paid or voluntary, as it is the first step in getting you going in your role, and helps to understand the organisation. A good onboarding process should include the following:

A role description:
A clear role description should give you an understanding of the activities you will understand and the responsibilities you will have. When you applied for the role, there may have been a role description document shared, but it's good to make sure that you are given one when you start as well. It should outline all the expectations the organisation has of you, so it's important you understand each item on the list, and ask for clarity on anything you are unsure of doing.

Appropriate training:
Depending on the role you are taking on, there will be training you need to do before you get started. The training will likely include an induction and a tour of any physical locations you may be based in. You will likely also receive training on health and safety, risk, safeguarding depending on your role - these sessions tend to be mandatory as they are a necessary part of an organisation's insurance. You may then receive more bespoke training depending on your specific role - for example, if your role requires you to use a specific piece of equipment or software, or if a particular skill will be necessary to meet your responsibilities. If there's anything you think you will need support on, this is a great chance to ask for support.

Volunteer agreement:

A volunteer agreement will outline the organisation's expectations of you, but will also outline what they will provide in order to support you to meet those expectations. You might be asked to sign it, though it's not a legal contract, it's important for them to get confirmation from you that you understand the expectations. If you fail to meet these expectations they'll likely ask you to leave your role. An example can be found in the appendices.

Policies

All organisations working with the public will need to have public liability insurance as a legal requirement for their activities to take place. At Student Hubs, we also worked with our community partners to ensure they either had or were in the process of developing other policies and processes that would ensure the safety of volunteers and service users, as well as show a commitment to good practice and engagement with the wider world. They included;

Health and Safety	This policy outlines the organisation's approach to keeping everyone safe on their activities. Aside from having insurance, this policy will include details about any activities which might cause harm and the actions the organisation takes in order to mitigate these impacts.
Safeguarding	This policy outlines an organisation's commitment to safeguarding. This is vital if an organisation works with young people or adults at risk. Safeguarding is the process of keeping people in our communities safe from harm, especially those who are more unable to protect themselves. A safeguarding policy should also outline the process for reporting disclosures and identify the Designated Safeguarding Officer within the organisation who you should be able to contact if you have a concern.
Whistleblowing	This policy outlines an organisation's commitment and process to supporting staff and volunteers to raise genuine concerns about acts of wrongdoing or malpractice within the organisation. It should include a framework for how concerns are dealt with and what the timeframe and disciplinary action would be.

Complaints	This policy makes clear that individuals who engage with the organisation have the right to make a complaint about services and delivery if they need to, and sets out the steps that they should take and how an organisation deals with complaints in a fair and consistent way
Diversity and Inclusion	It is becoming increasingly common for organisations to have a Diversity and Inclusion policy which outlines their commitment to cultivating an environment where everyone involved with the organisation is treated with dignity and respect. These policies often outline how an organisation is working to put diversity and inclusion into practice within their processes and activities, and outlines how they are ensuring the provision of equal opportunities.
Sustainability	Many organisations are starting to have sustainability policies which outlines their commitment to sustainability. This will often include details on how they are putting sustainability into practice, such as how they support volunteers and staff to travel or make purchases with sustainability and the environment in focus.

Chapter Three

Making the most of opportunities

Now you are on your way to getting started, or maybe you've already begun. It's useful to spend some time to consider how you are getting the most out of your opportunity. In this section we'll explore understanding an organisation's impact, thinking about how you can understand the impact your activities are having on the world, and how you can reflect on and embed your learning. We'll also consider how to get help if things aren't going well or aren't meeting your expectations.

Understanding Impact

A big question we might grapple with is 'are the activities I'm participating in actually impactful?' In deciding where and how you want to volunteer, understanding the intended impact charities and organisations are having can be really helpful. In this section, we'll be discussing what impact and impact measurement is. We'll take a look at theory of change frameworks, and how to understand the information you might find in impact or annual reports. We'll also share more about how to find information about an organisation.

What is impact?

Social impact is the effect of an activity on the social fabric of the community and well-being of individuals and families - Social Enterprise UK

When we think about the impact of a charity or socially focused organisation, we're thinking about the change that is taking place over time due to the activities that organisation delivers. Impact tends to be quite high-level; the activities an organisation delivers will help achieve it, but it is rarely solely responsible for it.

What is impact measurement?

Impact measurement assesses the changes that can be attributed to a particular intervention - World Bank

The aim is to measure an organisation's contributions to the overall impact, rather than attribute the entire impact back to their activities. We measure what effects a project, programme, or initiative is having, or has had, on an individual, community, or environment.

Charities need to measure the genuine impact of their work to prove their value and improve future delivery. Financial support and buy-in for charities come from a wide range of groups, each group demanding accountability and results.

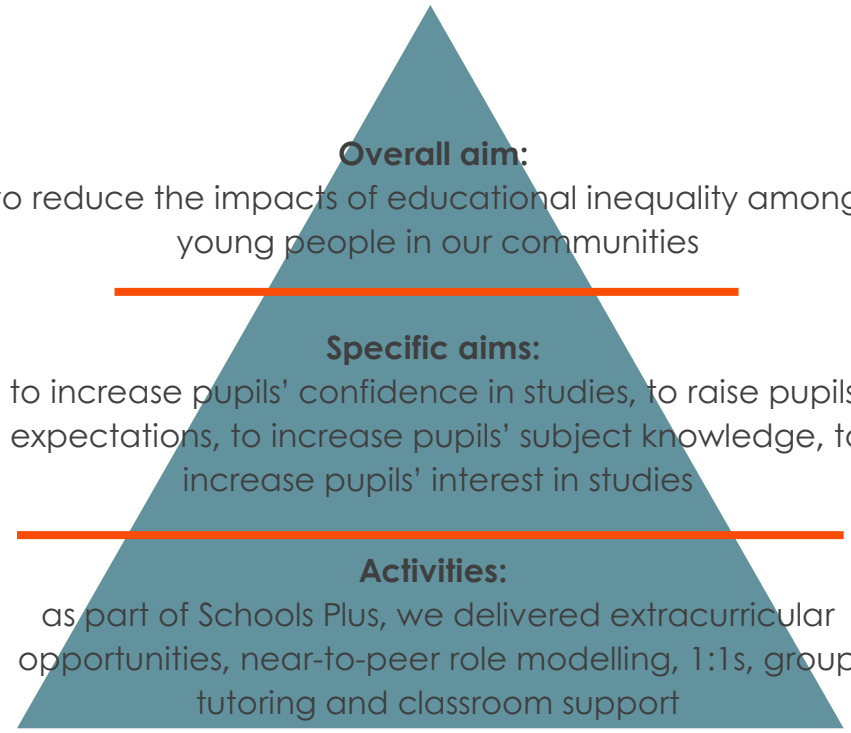
Proving Impact	Improving Impact
• To current partners, stakeholders, students, funders, and participants • To future partners, stakeholders, students, funders, and participants • Using impact reports, your website, social media posts, one pages • To motivate staff and volunteers • To share learning and resources with the sector	• To better understand the need you are fulfilling • To better understand and compare your performance • To better understand the unintended impacts, both positive and negative • To develop and improve programmes based on evidence • To make better, well-informed decisions

The Charity Commission

The Charity Commission is the government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. They outline charity law and ensure that organisations are following them. They also house a register of all charities - you'll find information about their trustees, the number of staff they have, and their financial turnover. In the documents section, you can download their annual accounts. This is a legal requirement of all charities to complete every year. It outlines how the organisation is set up, their aims and objectives, their impact for the previous year, and explains in detail their financial position, including where they get their income from. Not all of it will be helpful for you, but if you are interested in learning more about how the organisation operates, their annual accounts is a good place to start.

Understanding how we go from the big picture to our activities, we can visualise it as a triangle:

A Student Hubs example: We can apply this to our programme **Schools Plus**:



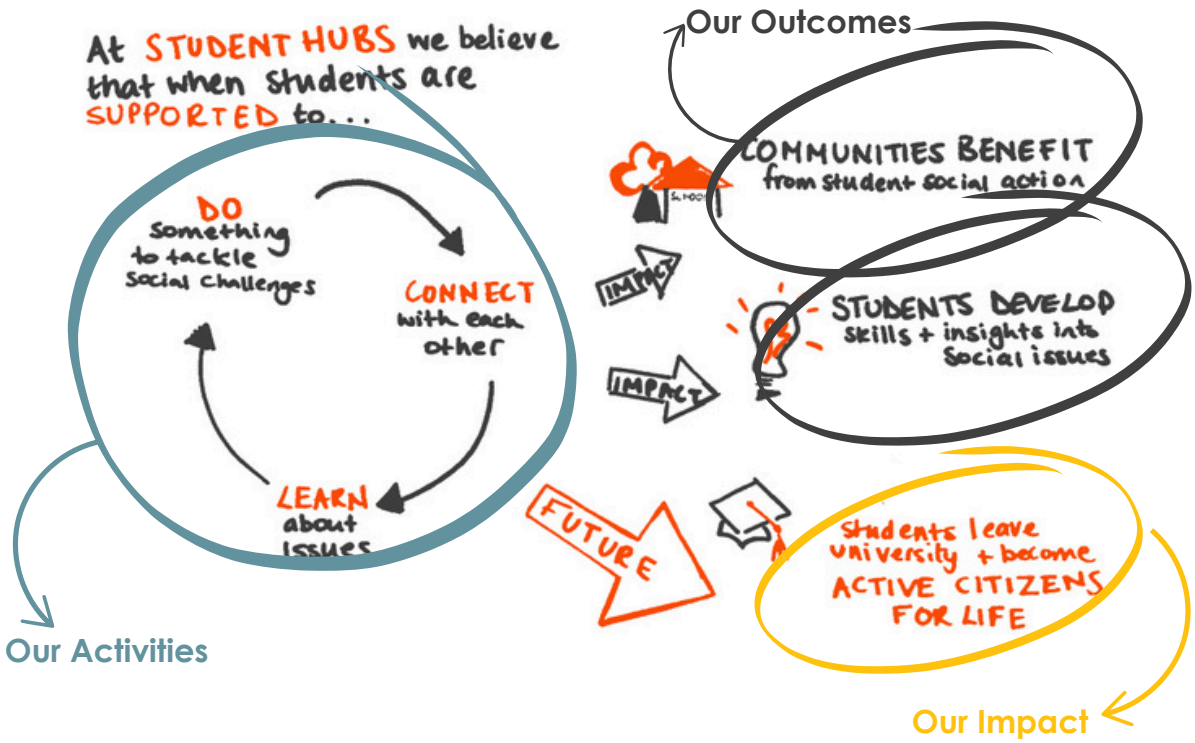
If you can find it, a **theory of change** is a useful resource for understanding what an organisation is intending to achieve. It's a way for them to map what they do and are hoping to achieve. It should also be the basis of assessing and monitoring whether an organisation is achieving what it set out to do.

A theory of change can range in detail, however they tend to include the following information:

At Student Hubs this looks like:

Outcomes are what could happen as a result of the activities. They are short and immediate changes which must happen for the intervention to work, and for your long-term goals to be achieved.	Our student outcomes are **skills, student experience, employability, wellbeing, critical engagement, and quality of experience.**
Impact is what you hope will happen as a result of your activities. This is about the long-term goal relating to the issues or what will result when the issue is removed.	Our impact for students is that they **become active citizens for life - continuing to contribute to their community after they graduate.**
Activities are designed to achieve your outputs and outcomes. The activities should follow outcomes.	Our activities for students included **structured volunteering, skilled placements, community engaged learning, and incubation support.**
Outputs are what happens as a result of your activities. These are the tangible results and deliverables of the activity.	Our outputs include but not limited to, numbers of **students engaged, hours, participants, projects, newsletter subscribers.**
Inputs include the tangible and intangible things that go into running activities successfully.	Tangible thing include: **staff, budget, venues** Intangible includes: **buy-in, subject knowledge, reputation, time.**

This is the Student Hubs theory of change:



Our theory of change is missing outputs and inputs! It also doesn't include our vision or mission statement. A vision statement outlines what the world would look like if everything was perfect, and a mission statement outlines the overarching work an organisation is doing to move towards that vision. The Student Hubs statements are:

OUR VISION a society in which **every student** participates in **social and environmental challenges** during their education, supporting them to become **active citizens for life**

OUR MISSION to **mainstream student social action** within higher education

So what next?

As we mentioned at the start of this section, understanding the impact of an organisation is really helpful to know whether they are creating positive impact which you feel compelled by. However, understanding these frameworks can also be helpful in supporting us to reflect on the part we play in the creation of this impact. Knowing what outputs we supported or what outcomes improved because of our involvement, allows to to evidence our volunteering and conceptualise our skills.

Reflection

Just as we encouraged a pre-engagement reflection, it's also important for you to reflect on the experiences you are having during and at the end of your engagement with opportunities.

You might want to work through the student skills audit again and compare how you feel about your skills now. You can also work through the following table which we would normally deliver as a guided reflection session. If you can, try to complete this reflection with another volunteer or peer so you can share your reflections and ideas.

Consider what your experience has been like so far	• What has gone well? • What are some of the challenges you have encountered? • What most influenced your attitude and behaviour?
Getting the most out of your experiences	• What skills have you developed/are you hoping to develop? • How can you work to achieve this? • What would you like to have done differently? • What have you found out?
Self-reflection	• Have there been any turning points or critical moments? • What are some of the feelings you experienced? • What were your personal highs and lows? • How did your feelings influence what you said and did? How might you adapt your actions to change the outcome?

The future	Take your findings and consider how to implement them in the future: • How do you imagine using what you have learnt? • What has already changed? • What plan can you make for the future?
Relating skills to CV	Work through the skills you've identified in your reflection and think about how these relate to actions you've taken. Try putting them into action verbs, e.g.: • Delivering, Planning, Conducting, Researching, Collaborating, Organising

Taking a growth mindset approach

Growth mindsets is an approach we can take when thinking about our experiences and actions. When adopting a growth mindset, failure or failing to reach a goal isn't the end of that goal. Instead, it is viewed as an opportunity to learn from that experience and apply it again, thus improving your ability to reach the goal. Often it's hard to apply a growth mindset when we think of a failure as something bad we have done and we internalise it. When we're able to separate our own self-worth from the success of an activity or skill, we're better able to learn from it and do better in the future.

Getting the right support

Feedback

Getting and giving feedback is an important part of the learning process for you, the people you are volunteering with, and the organisations who are leading activities. In this section we'll take a look at how we can ensure we're getting the right feedback at the right time to help us and improve activities.

Feedback for the individual

Feedback is the process of sharing observations and interpretations, with a view to making a constructive difference to a situation or relationship. It should always; be with the opportunity to discuss further, have clear actions, and be given and received with positivity and an intention to grow. Feedback can make us feel uncomfortable for many reasons, often it's because we feel like it attacks who we are at our core. It's important to remember that feedback should always be about behaviour rather than our personality.

If you are looking for feedback:

- [ ] Identify what you want feedback on - a request to someone else should start with your own reflection and a specific ask, this will make it easier for the other person to structure their feedback.

- [ ] Identify who is best placed to give this feedback to you - it's not helpful to ask someone who hasn't seen you demonstrate the skills or behaviours you are looking to improve.

- [ ] Share how you want to receive feedback - it's important to have space to discuss feedback so that you can best understand what someone is sharing, but you may wish to ask to receive it in a written format first with a meeting or call in after so you can ask some follow up questions. Alternatively you may prefer to receive your feedback in conversation so will want to set up a meeting.

- [ ] Give people time - if you want meaningful feedback, let the other person know in advance so they have time to think about it.

- Ask at the right time - the right time might look different for each person, but you should consider when the feedback might be the most appropriate and useful for you. Often we wait until the end of an activity to ask for feedback, but we can also ask in the middle as this will give us actions we can implement during the process. Just don't ask too soon, as there might not have been enough time for other people to work with you and witness your actions to make the feedback useful!

- Remember, ultimately feedback is inherently subjective - it's not the absolute truth. The person giving you feedback doesn't know your thought process or the experiences you've had to date, they may also have only seen a small part of your work. It might also be skewed by their own preferences, so make sure you take a step back and think of the bigger picture when reflecting on any feedback you receive. Ask them questions if the feedback isn't clear and to focus on actions.

Feedback for the individual

If you are giving feedback to someone:

- [ ] If they have asked for feedback, ask follow up questions to best understand what they are looking for and how they want to receive the feedback.

- [ ] You should aim to describe the effect of a person's behaviour and actions as objectively as possible:
  Describe the situation - how you felt - what it made you think - what you/they could have done differently.

- [ ] You should consider when and where you are giving the feedback, thinking about how it will be received by the other person - giving someone feedback can be a really personal experience and how they respond can be influenced by many things like how they are feeling. Setting a time in advance in a neutral and calm environment will help both of you get in the right headspace.

- [ ] Avoid being too personal when delivering the feedback, be objective but kind and use evidence to back up your feedback

Frameworks for feedback

There are lots of different frameworks for delivering feedback that may help you structure what you want to share.

- ABC When you did [A], I felt [B]. In the future I'd recommend [C]
- Like Wish What if? I liked that… I wish that… What if..?
- Like / More Something I liked is… Something I'd like to see more of is…

Feedback for organisations

Sharing feedback with an organisation is a helpful way of supporting them to improve their activities. Most organisations will have a process for collecting feedback at the end of your engagement with them, but sometimes we may want to share feedback earlier in order to improve the experience of the activity for all involved sooner. When doing so, you will need to consider who is the best person to share this feedback with and what examples you are sharing in order to bring the potential improvement to life.

Wellbeing Support

Outlined by the World Health Organisation, mental health is 'defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community'. One of the most common mental health impacts on an individual is stress. Stress is our body's response to pressure and is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected/unfamiliar, threatens our sense of self, or when we feel a lack of control over a situation.

Stress can be useful - it helps motivate us and push us through difficult or challenging situations. However, too much stress can cause us harm, leaving us feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope. Over the long-term, too much stress can impact our physical and mental health.

Wellbeing Warning Signs

Stress impacts us all in unique ways. It's important to understand what happens to you when you're feeling stressed - so that you, and those close to you, can understand how stress is impacting you. These are your wellbeing warning signs.

Wellbeing warning signs could include:

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Difficulty sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Changes in mood
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of focus on tasks
- Turning up late to, or cancelling, commitments
- Reduced interest in hobbies
- Feeling anxious

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, especially when you're engaged in multiple activities. However we can work to build up our personal resilience

Personal resilience toolkit

Cultivating your own resilience toolkit is a good way to make sure you have the tools to weather small challenges. Some tools you might want to consider exploring include;

Mindfulness	Mindfulness is about living in the present moment, not dwelling on the past or future. It's about noticing and articulating your emotions, and then allowing them to move through you. We can practice mindfulness by meditating to become more aware of our thoughts, our physical sensations, and of the world around us. You can find guided practices online as guides, videos, and podcasts to help you connect with the present.
Permission slips	Sometimes we limit ourself because we feel like we should or can't do something. Writing permission slips can help us verbalise what's holding us back and remove any guilt. For example: "I give myself permission to make mistakes and to be honest."
Self-compassion	Practice self-compassion by writing a letter to yourself from a place of acceptance and compassion. Think about how you would respond if a friend was telling you this.
Self-care	What things do you need to do regularly to keep you feeling well? This should include meeting your basic needs such as good nutrition, water, exercise, and sleep. You should also include other things which make you feel like your best self, for example, getting a haircut, having a bath, etc.
Gratitude	Keeping a daily list of the things you are grateful for has been proven to help us build our resilience in the face of challenge. Try writing down 1-3 things each day.
Connect	Connecting regularly to ourselves, nature, and our community can also bolster our resilience. Think about how you can connect to your values and purpose, fresh air and sunshine, and to the people and networks important to you.

If you are struggling to identify what support would be beneficial to you, you might find it helpful to work through a wellness wheel. The wheel supports you to think about the different facets of your life. Work through each section and write down what is going well and what you'd like to improve.

A resilience toolkit can help us ticking over, but sometimes we need to ask for support. **Don't be afraid to ask for help**, **there's lots of people who want to help you.**

- Your University Services - take a look at what your university offers.
- Student Space - provides lots of resources for supporting your mental health specifically for university related challenges.
- Mind - is a charity that provides a wide range of support for understanding mental health challenges and where to go for support.
- Mental Health Foundation - hosts comprehensive guides for managing different facets of your mental wellbeing.

If you feel like you need emergency support, contact 999 or 111
You can also get anonymous crisis support:

- Call Samaritans on 116 123 (UK wide)
- Text SHOUT to 85258 (UK wide)

Appendix

Example volunteer agreement: Volunteer Agreement

Introduction
This Volunteer Agreement describes the arrangement between Student Hubs and our Social Innovation Programme participants. It outlines what volunteers can expect from us, and what we expect from volunteers.

The purpose of the Social Innovation Programme for the student is to:

- Gain an insight and an understanding of a social impact career by undertaking a consultancy project with a host organisation.
- Develop relevant skills and gain meaningful experience.
- Undertake responsibility of a meaningful project (as outlined in the challenge brief).

The roles and responsibilities of the participant are outlined below:

- Acknowledge that the research, results and report is the intellectual property of the host organisation.
- Ensure that all information requested to be kept confidential by the host organisation pertaining to the work of the organisation is kept confidential.
- Agree research brief and project timelines with the rest of the team and host organisation.
- Communicate with your community partner at the host organisation as agreed in the first meeting on [date], and maintain proactive communications with other members of your team, especially your team leader.
- Contribute to the completion of the report and presentation to the best of your ability.
- Communicate with Isobel Sherlock, Cambridge Hub Programmes Manager, proactively, and raise any concerns about your project or your consultancy role in a timely manner.
- Complete Student Hubs training programme, attending all training sessions wherever possible, and notifying us where this is not possible.
- Complete the Student Hubs monitoring & evaluation survey/s, to help us continue to improve the work of Cambridge Hub.

Example volunteer agreement continued

The roles and responsibilities of Student Hubs are to:

- Provide a full induction and ongoing training to all committed volunteers.
- Explain clearly the standards we expect from volunteers in order to ensure we continue to provide and maintain a high level of service to our community partners.
- Help you to develop skills in your volunteering role.
- Reimburse appropriate expenses incurred through volunteering - keep all receipts.
- Keep all personal information confidential.

Placement Duration & Details
The duration of the Social Innovation Programme is [date]

I understand that this agreement serves as a memorandum of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both parties during the programme period and have provided accurate and up to date information to the best of my knowledge.

Name: Signed: Date:

Volunteer agreements may also include information regarding training, confirmation of adherence to policies (such as safeguarding), and other details relating to data protection and use of equipment.

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This report was designed by Simran Dhanjal-Field.

Visit www.studenthubs.org to learn more about our legacy work

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