

Development of a  
National Volunteering Strategy

**Call for Input**  
on Key Aspects to be included in a  
**National Volunteering Strategy**

Department of Rural and Community Development

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## 1. Purpose of this Call for Input

This document is a 'Call for Input' (CFI) by the Department of Rural and Community Development (the Department) to inform and seek views from stakeholders on key topics under consideration to develop a National Strategy on Volunteering (the Strategy).

The purpose of this document is to:

- Inform stakeholders of the proposed volunteering strategy;
- Seek views from stakeholders on what constitutes volunteering; and
- Invite comments and proposals on the CFI including additional and emerging considerations which may further inform the Strategy.

The outcome of this CFI and potentially the input from a proposed National Advisory Group will inform the Department's development of this volunteering strategy.

## 2. Government Commitment

The Programme for Partnership Government (2016) affirms the contribution of the community and voluntary sector (CVS) to building a more just and prosperous society and underlines the strong focus on urban and rural regeneration within the sector. The Programme also pledges increased supports to the sector, a more coherent policy framework and the development of a supportive strategy to help encourage a cooperative approach between the sector and public bodies.

The commitment to developing a national strategy on volunteering is included as an action under Strategic Goal 4 of the Department of Rural and Community Development's Statement of Strategy 2017-2020. The Department sees a national strategy on volunteering as one element of achieving our objective of recognising, expanding and supporting the role of volunteers in civil society.

The call for a national strategy on volunteering reflects international best practice, as advocated by the European Union (EU), neighbouring jurisdictions such as Northern Ireland and England, as well as reports produced by voluntary bodies and state agencies in jurisdictions such as Australia and Canada.

The first step in the process of developing a national volunteering strategy is publishing this CFI in order to seek input from stakeholders to establish in broad terms the current position of Irish volunteering and our future aspirations for volunteering.

### 3. Scope of this Call for Input

The 2002 report of the National Committee on Volunteering ‘Tipping the Balance’ reminds us that the diversity of organisational forms adds considerable complexity to the task of defining volunteering. Formal volunteering takes place in organisational settings, particularly through voluntary organisations, non-profit organisations, or the social economy, but also under the aegis of employers, political and social activism or in conjunction with statutory schemes. It is necessary, therefore, that the national volunteering strategy has a clear focus on Volunteering and that it is not perceived as a strategy for the community and voluntary sector (CVS). Volunteering can be said to be a part of but also broader than the CVS.

The ‘White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector’ (the ‘White Paper’) published by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in 2000 suggested that the community and voluntary sector was a continuum, and that many organisations contained both community and voluntary elements. Although typically the community sector operates outside ‘for-profit’ considerations and involves volunteers, this is not always the case. Some community organisations involve no volunteers while some social enterprise start-ups could be described as community based activities which are ‘for profit.’ Many community groups are issue-based rather than area-based. At a very broad level, some consider the community and voluntary sector to comprise of all organisations that are non-Government and non-private sector; forming a ‘third sector.’

In that context, broader issues that affect the CVS will not be addressed in the National Volunteering Strategy, or in this CFI. These include issues relating to governance of CVS organisations, regulatory and compliance requirements, funding mechanisms and general developmental supports. The Department recognises these as crucial factors for the CVS but are best considered outside of the scope of the National Volunteering Strategy.

These issues are being considered by the Department in line with the Programme for Government and its commitment to “produce a coherent policy framework and develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector.” Consequently these elements will be addressed as part of the process to develop a *National Social Enterprise Strategy and an implementation plan for the Framework Policy on Local and Community Development, including a strategy to support the Community and Voluntary Sector* (working title).

The development of the National Policy on Social Enterprise was underpinned by a research exercise conducted by the Department in partnership with the Social Finance Foundation. The aim of this research was to better understand the social enterprise sector in Ireland and to identify the issues that needed to be addressed for the sector to develop and grow. The policy is now being finalised, informed by the joint research, the consultative aspects of that work, and other recent papers on the sector. To ensure engagement with all stakeholders, and that their views inform the policy, a public consultation on the policy will commence shortly, with a view to a final policy document emerging in early 2019.

The Implementation Plan for the Framework Policy seeks to support the Local Development, Community Development and Community and Voluntary Sectors through a range of actions focusing *inter alia* on building the capacity of the sectors, supporting communities to participate and engage with decision making structures and supporting local governance arrangements including LCDCs and PPNs. The implementation plan is underpinned by extensive consultation including a national forum in 2016 and a cross sectoral advisory group established for this purpose. It is expected that the implementation plan will be submitted for Government approval in Q1 2019.

## 4. Definition of Volunteering

It is necessary to have a clear idea of what is meant when we use the term “volunteering.” This CFI provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what volunteering is and what we would like to see volunteering become: our shared vision for volunteering.

According to the White Paper volunteering can be defined as: “the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, and individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person’s own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out - of- pocket expenses).”

The European definition of volunteering is set out in a European Council Decision (2009) and the European Commission’s ‘Communication on European Union (EU) Policies and Volunteering’ (2011) as involving:

- All forms of voluntary activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal;
- Undertaken of a person’s own free will, choice and motivation;
- Without seeking financial gain, that is, financial gain being neither the objective, nor the way to recognise the contribution or the achievement;
- Is a journey of solidarity and provides a way to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns; and
- Is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative.

### Question 1:

**Should we adopt the White Paper definition or the European Union definition of volunteering? Is there a more appropriate definition which could be considered for the purpose of the strategy?**

## 5. Background on Irish Volunteering

### 5.1 The White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity and “Tipping the Balance”

In response to the United Nations’ Year of Volunteers in 2000, the Irish Government published a White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity. The aim of the White Paper was to underline the importance of government enabling the CVS to work more effectively.

The White Paper sought to lay the foundations for the formulation of a coherent strategy and to identify the policy responses at national, regional and local levels.

As a result of the White Paper, the National Committee on Volunteering was launched on 5 December 2000, International Volunteers Day. The National Committee had 38 members drawn from a broad cross-section of organisations and individuals with an interest in volunteering nationwide.

In 2002 the National Committee was asked to examine and make recommendations on:

- the possibilities for recognition and accreditation for voluntary work and for training undertaken as a volunteer; and
- measures to widen the pool of volunteers and the range of supports needed in order to promote, sustain and develop volunteering.

The Committee’s report, titled “Tipping the Balance”, was informed by five pieces of commissioned research on:

- Volunteering in Ireland;
- Young People and Volunteering;
- The Volunteer and the Organisation;
- International Approaches to Volunteering; and
- Case Studies of the Experiences of Voluntary Groups of Developing Accredited Training for Volunteers.

The report was also based on a public consultation process, which received 67 submissions from organisations and individuals with an interest in volunteering and on discussions within the National Committee itself.

The Committee made two core recommendations which it regarded as being crucial to the Government’s commitment to social capital and fostering volunteering:

- that a national policy on volunteering be developed; and
- that a volunteering support and development infrastructure be established and funded on a nation-wide basis.

## 5.2 Volunteers in Irish Society

Volunteers make an enormous contribution to Irish society, developing communities as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable places where people want to live. The very real economic, cultural and social benefits of volunteering permeate through an incredibly diverse range of activities.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) data gathered in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in 2013 indicated that the overall rate of volunteering for the country stood at 28.4%, or over a million people. This figure included all types of activity outside the volunteer's household as long as it was unpaid and non-compulsory.

Considerable variety in focus exists among different voluntary organisations, which are involved in causes including health care, sport, human rights and the environment, among others. It includes formal volunteering through organisations, as well as informal volunteering such as helping a neighbour. According to the 2013 CSO National Quarterly Household Survey, 54.7% of volunteer hours were carried out directly by individuals, and 45.3% was carried out through an organisation. Volunteering in Ireland ranges from the highly formal, with a long time commitment and extensive training and support, to the highly informal, such as one-off, micro and virtual (online) volunteering.

Research produced by Sport Ireland in 2010 indicated that volunteering was helping to sustain approximately 12,000 sports clubs serving 1.7 million members. Further research published in Sport Ireland's annual report in 2015 estimated that over 450,000 adult volunteers gave on average 3.5 hours per week to sport.

A research document recently produced by Wicklow Volunteer Centre highlighted the negative impact a 'strike' by volunteers would have on "the delivery of services to older people, peoples with disabilities, people with mental health issues, single parents, children, young people and people living in isolation." This is worth considering: we cannot take for granted the contribution of volunteers and should always show our appreciation and respect for the work of volunteers.

Volunteering benefits wider society by:

- Providing skilled and enthusiastic individuals to support the valuable contributions of non-profit organisations;
- Bringing a unique and irreplaceable passion and commitment;
- Adding local and personal knowledge and perspective into the work of non-profit organisations;
- Ensuring the ongoing delivery of a range of important services to the community;
- Helping to build social networks, connectivity and community resilience; and
- Contributing to active citizenship, inclusion and social capital.

### 5.3 Economic Impacts of Volunteering in Ireland

In economic terms, the 2013 QNHS survey conducted by the CSO outlined that the value of volunteer work (after annualising the hours and applying the national minimum wage applying at that time) amounted to over €2 billion annually.

Moreover, research produced by Indecon (2018) has estimated that the economic value of volunteering in registered Irish charities is €649 million and that the charity sector supports 289,197 employees. In interpreting the data, it would be important to note that these figures relate to registered Irish charities only and so represent only a part of the impact of volunteering in wider Irish society.

The economic value of volunteering in sport has been estimated to be between €322 million and €582 million per annum, according to Sport Ireland figures produced in 2010.

In order to get a clear picture of the economic value of volunteering, Volunteer Ireland are engaging with the CSO to include questions about volunteering in future iterations of the census and the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS).

It should be noted that the economic figures above describe only the monetary value of volunteering hours. It doesn't take into account additional economic value of volunteering, such as savings to the HSE through the improved physical and mental health. Research conducted by Volunteer Ireland and NUI Galway in 2018 ('Rural Volunteerism: Impacting Development and Sustainability') showed that volunteering can improve local economies, for example by organising festivals that bring more customers into shops.

### 5.4 Benefits to the Volunteer

Volunteering supports individuals' empowerment, by providing them with an influential role in the community and the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of others. The social inclusion and community cohesion benefits of volunteering are referred to in the National Sports Policy, as are the development of life and work-related skills for the volunteer. This is especially important in a social inclusion context when formal work and education opportunities might be limited.

The 2013 CSO data indicated that volunteers were more likely to rate their sense of wellbeing at a higher level than those who did not volunteer. More recent research conducted by Volunteer Ireland on the topic, 'The Impact of Volunteering on the Health and Well-Being of the Volunteer' (2017), found in their research that among the commonly reported benefits of volunteering were feeling valued and good about doing something practical that makes a significant difference in society. Volunteering was also found to have positive impacts in terms of giving individuals the chance to meet people and make new friends. Respondents also reported feelings of enjoyment, happiness, fulfilment and contentment and positive energy.

A survey of 1,735 volunteers, conducted by Volunteer Ireland in 2018, included these findings about the volunteering experience:

- 71% felt their confidence in their own abilities increased;
- 82% felt they were making a useful contribution;
- 59% felt their employability and skills had increased;
- 62% felt their mental health had improved; and
- 67% felt their sense of belonging to their local community had increased.

## 5.5 Role of Department of Rural and Community Development

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19 July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland. Our mission is to “promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.” As part of this, we have drawn up strategic goals, one of which is to support the community, voluntary and charity sector and to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society.

The Department supports Volunteer Centres (VCs) in 21 counties, eight Volunteering Information Services (VISs) as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland and Young Social Innovators. The funding of these organisations is designed to strengthen and foster volunteering in Ireland, building a support structure that will develop volunteering locally from the bottom-up.

The Department sees its role in relation to volunteering as:

- developing policy;
- supporting the development and growth of volunteering; and
- providing funding and other supports to enable the development of volunteering infrastructure.

### **Question 2:**

**Do you agree with the outline of the Department’s role in volunteering? What additions or amendments would you suggest?**

## 6. A Vision for the Future of Irish Volunteering

Agreeing on a shared vision for the future of Irish volunteering is essential to the formation of a volunteering strategy. If the emerging volunteering strategy represents our road map, our vision is our destination; where we want to arrive at in the long term and the steps that we need to take to get there.

Before we discuss the details of a volunteering strategy, we should consider what we want volunteering to achieve. Provisionally, our vision is of:

“A society where volunteering contributes meaningfully to supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.”

### **Question 3:**

**Do you agree with this vision for the purposes of this strategy? If not, what should our vision be?**

## 7. Objectives of a Volunteering Strategy

Having considered our vision for the future of Irish volunteering, the next step is to examine how it might be achieved. Setting agreed strategic goals and objectives will inform the way forward from which critical success factors and measurable progress indicators should emerge. Recognising that formation of The Strategy is at an early stage, at this point we would like to discuss goals and objectives in broad strokes. For instance, Volunteer Ireland's strategic priorities contained in their Strategic Plan 2018-2022 include:

- Advance volunteering;
- Support the volunteering infrastructure;
- Support volunteering and volunteers; and
- Celebrate volunteering.

While a National Strategy for Volunteering will have a broader remit the priorities above can serve as a useful starting point in the discussion.

### Question 4:

**What objectives for Irish volunteering should be set for the purposes of this strategy?**

## 8. The Volunteering Community

Listed below are stakeholders the Department has identified as potential partners in the development of a successful volunteering strategy.

### 8.1 The Public

The public are the cornerstone of Irish volunteering. Individuals generously fund the operation of voluntary groups and in many cases are the beneficiaries of services provided by voluntary organisations. Most significantly, the public provides services locally and nationally on a voluntary basis. May 2018 research from NUI Galway and Volunteer Ireland, *'Rural Volunteerism: Impacting Development and Sustainability'*, noted that 62% of rural volunteers in their sample had a weekly commitment.

The Department sees the role of the public in relation to volunteering as:

- Being volunteers;
- Benefiting from volunteer services;
- Providing services to the community; and
- Funding volunteer organisations.

#### Question 5:

**What is the role of the public in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?**

### 8.2 Volunteer Involving Organisations

Volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) have an enormous current and potential impact on development of volunteering in Ireland. It is VIOs who engage directly with volunteers on a daily basis; who recruit, manage, train and support volunteers. Volunteer managers and coordinators within VIOs have huge influence in the growth and development of volunteering. Recognising the significance of VIOs and engaging them in the development and delivery of this National Volunteering Strategy will be critical to its success.

#### Question 6:

**What is the role of the VIOs in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?**

## 8.3 Volunteer Supporting Infrastructure

'Tipping the Balance' (2002) called for the development of volunteer supporting infrastructure at a local level as one of two core recommendations. Developing adequate infrastructure to support volunteering is a challenge in jurisdictions across the world, as documented in the findings of a range of academic studies, from the United Kingdom (UK) to Australia.

Currently, Ireland enjoys a good level of infrastructural coverage. This is largely owing to the activity of volunteers in communities over many years and, more recently, increased levels of direct financial support from the State. Volunteer-supporting infrastructure now exists in each county in the Republic of Ireland in the form of 21 Volunteer Centres (VCs) and eight Volunteering Information Services (VISs), and this represents a considerable achievement. The VCs are funded directly by the Department, and are directly responsible to them in terms of annual financial and programmatic reporting. Their funding is subject to compliance with the Quality Standards Framework and affiliation with Volunteer Ireland.

### 8.3.1 Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services

Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services are information points that seek to match potential volunteers to volunteering opportunities. They provide an important local service that facilitates volunteering by helping volunteer involving organisations develop volunteer roles. They also help individuals who want to volunteer find a suitable role. Additionally, they provide training, Garda vetting and act as trusted local hubs.

Volunteering Information Services work similarly to VCs, but on a reduced budget and therefore provide a more limited range of services to the public. However, the work of developing volunteering infrastructure continues and the Department is currently developing a plan to upgrade the VISs to full VCs in consultation with the VIS network.

On-going efforts to improve coordination between the volunteering infrastructure and volunteer involving organisations is in line with the practices of other national volunteering organisations, such as Volunteering Australia, Volunteer Canada and (in England) the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

### 8.3.2 Volunteer Ireland

Volunteer Ireland (VI) is the national volunteer development agency and a support body for all local Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services in Ireland. Their goal is to make sure that everyone who wants to volunteer can volunteer. Volunteer Centres are independent of Volunteer Ireland but are affiliated with them.

VI conducts joint projects with VCs and VISs and liaises with the Department together with the VCs and VIS. It delivers research, organises National Volunteering Week and the

Volunteer Ireland Awards and delivers training and consultancy to volunteer-involving organisations. VI manages the national volunteering database I-VOL; liaises with international volunteering organisations and oversees the Quality Standards Framework for VCs and assesses their compliance and continued quality improvement; and manages the “Investing in Volunteers” quality standard for VIOs.

**Question 7:**

**Should the role of volunteer supporting infrastructure be expanded for the purposes of this strategy?**

**Question 8:**

**Is the current model adequate? If not, what volunteering infrastructure and funding model would best support the development of volunteering?**

## 8.4 Public Participation Networks

The ‘Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government’ (2013) made recommendations on encouraging more extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making processes of local government. That report outlined the ways in which structures and processes for securing the engagement of organised civil society with local government could be strengthened. To do this, the report recommended that a Public Participation Network (PPN) be established in each local authority area to enable the public to take an active formal role in relevant policy making and oversight committees of the local authority.

Many VCs and VISs work very closely with Public Participation Networks (PPNs), for example, hosting joint events and training. The Department believes VCs and VISs have a role to play in proactive community development that will complement the PPNs’ mission of developing citizen engagement and better representation of marginalised groups in the community. The Department is keen to encourage VC/VIS participation in the work of PPNs to give a voice to volunteers in participative democracy and local community initiatives.

**Question 9:**

**How can Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and PPNs work together to develop volunteering, active citizenship and participation in the community?**

**Question 10:**

**How can the Department facilitate co-operation between Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and the PPNs?**

## 8.5 The Charities Regulatory Authority

Volunteers working in Irish charities fall under the remit of the Charities Regulatory Authority (the 'Charities Regulator'). The Charities Regulator is an independent authority and was established in October 2014 under the Charities Act 2009. The key functions of the Regulator are to establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland and ensure their compliance with the Charities Act.

As charities are frequently supported by volunteers (300,000 people volunteering in registered Irish charities at the time of the Indecon Report 2018) and the trustees of charitable bodies serve on an unpaid, voluntary basis, the Charities Regulator has a role in the governance and regulation of many volunteer involving organisations.

## 8.6 Academics and Research Organisations

Other significant stakeholders in the volunteering community are academics and professional research producing organisations. Targeted research such as that as 'Rural Volunteerism: Impacting Development and Sustainability', undertaken by Volunteer Ireland and NUI Galway, and 'Registered Irish Charities: Social and Economic Impact Report', produced by the Charities Regulator and Indecon, play an important role in driving forward evidence-based policy on volunteering.

As outlined by a variety of international studies, data collection and research is vital to producing informed policy. A recent paper produced by Wicklow Volunteer Centre detailing the role of volunteering across each government department, outlined a number of areas that could potentially be explored in the future, including the cost of funding volunteering and auditing volunteering in terms of public expenditure and resource management.

The Department looks forward to future collaboration between the volunteering infrastructure and academic and research organisations. Potential areas for further research include:

- How volunteering activity is funded by Government departments and their agencies;
- The cost of funding volunteering in terms of finance, human resources, future impacts and return on investment;
- Expertise and support of volunteer trustees and steering committee members (for example, professional skills, governance experience);
- How can volunteering contribute to social inclusion goals for groups like migrants, the unemployed or young people;
- The social return on investment of volunteering;
- What are the main challenges facing volunteer-involving organisations in terms of volunteering, and how can these be overcome?
- How can VIOs be supported to develop short-term, flexible volunteering to help engage individuals who have never volunteered before; and
- Changing demographic trends in Irish volunteering and what can be learned from this to support volunteering.

**Question 11:**

**Are there other areas of research that could be included?**

## 8.7 Local Government

Local authorities have been supportive of emerging volunteer infrastructure. The Department is particularly interested in exploring synergies with local government in the development of the volunteering infrastructure generally and in liaising with other forums, such as PPNs.

Local government bodies stand to benefit in practical terms from the continued expansion of volunteer infrastructure and capacity, for example, the work of the Civil Defence in emergency situations and volunteers involved in national civic initiatives like the Tidy Towns competition.

**Question 12:**

**What is the role of local authorities in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?**

## 8.8 Central Government

While the Department of Rural and Community Development has lead responsibility for volunteering and community issues, central Government is the single largest source of funding for non-profit organisations.

Due to the diversity of volunteer involving organisations and the variety of Government departments with a stake in Irish volunteering (for example, D/Health, D/Transport, Tourism and Sport, D/Children and Youth Affairs,), the Department believes that a National Advisory Group would be well positioned to provide feedback and input to other policy areas impacting on volunteering. (See Section 12 for more details on proposed National Advisory Group on Volunteering).

**Question 13:**

**What is the role of central Government (outside the Department of Rural and Community Development) in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?**

## 8.9 Private Sector

Private sector firms (small, medium and large) contribute significantly to volunteering through financial backing and encouraging staff to participate in volunteering. A simple example of this is a small local business who sponsors the activities of a local sports team run by volunteers. In recent years, this concept has evolved owing to multi-national companies recognising how engaging with good works at local, national and international levels can have huge positive outcomes. This can be described as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), defined by the European Commission as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society.” The economic value of CSR in Irish society is considerable and growing. As part of their CSR, the private sector is also increasingly interested in and engaged with the United Nation’s (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, and contributing toward these through their employee volunteering programme.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) operate a forum that aims to develop the place of CSR in Irish society, and includes (amongst others) several Government departments and agencies, representative bodies (for example, ICTU, IBEC and ISME), Volunteer Ireland and private sector firms including Vodafone, Deloitte and Lidl. Given the

existence of this forum and DBEI's 'Towards Responsible Business: Ireland's National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility 2017-2020', as well as the complexity of the issue at stake, the Department proposes to liaise closely with DBEI's CSR Forum on volunteering issues arising out of the developing volunteering strategy.

Volunteer Ireland delivers a corporate volunteering programme. This includes delivering practical "team impacts days" for teams of volunteers, with a focus on quality and impact, as well as skilled volunteering where employees' professional skills are shared with CVS organisations. Interest in this programme is growing, indicating an enthusiasm from the private sector to engage with volunteering.

The Department is supportive of the development of the CSR aspect in volunteering. This could be achieved through:

- Encouraging private sector firms to consider the benefits of supporting staff to participate in volunteering activities of their own choice;
- Encouraging private sector firms to consider the benefits to the organisation of engaging in volunteering activities as part of staff team building/away days;
- Liaising with Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (responsible for CSR policy) and consulting with members of the CSR Stakeholders Forum to develop corporate volunteering; and
- Developing the role of Volunteer Ireland in supporting corporate volunteering activity.

**Question 14:**

**How could the Department further facilitate engagement between the business sector and volunteering?**

## 8.10 International Partners

The international dimension of volunteering represents another overarching and cross cutting issue. International volunteering organisations represent a network of colleagues, potential sources of funding, sources of research, partners in awareness raising, potential exemplars of innovation and often models of high quality practice for Irish volunteer organisations.

Volunteer Ireland is represented on the board of the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), an umbrella body for volunteering infrastructure bodies across Europe, and is also a member of IAVE, the International Associate for Volunteer Effort.

The Wheel's most recent strategic plan also reflects the international element, with Action 18 committing to working with "UK, European and other international partners and coalitions to support the sector's public-opinion and public policy priorities in Ireland."

There are certainly clear benefits of volunteer organisations collaborating with international partners, for example, in Dublin City Volunteer Centre’s interaction with the European Union on a “Europe for Citizens” project and Volunteer Ireland’s participation in a cross-European Erasmus-funded project that looks at the impact of volunteering on young people.

**Question 15:**

**What steps can the Department and other stakeholders take to enhance engagement with European and international partners in volunteering?**

**Question 16:**

**What other relevant stakeholders, if any, should be considered in developing a volunteering strategy to support volunteering in Ireland?**

## 9. Governance and Funding

The issues of governance and funding are necessarily intertwined and cannot be treated in isolation while discussing the future of volunteering. Those entrusted with public money are duty bound to spend it responsibly and transparently. Accountability, transparency and financial safeguarding should be inbuilt to the disbursement of all public monies.

### 9.1 State Support of Volunteering

Attracting funding sufficient to maintain and develop existing services is a major challenge internationally in the volunteering community. This has been highlighted as recently as May 2018 in “Rural Volunteerism: Impacting Development and Sustainability.” While the State aims to support volunteering to the fullest extent possible, it is important to frame this aim in the context of meeting all the demands that are put on the State’s finances.

In this way, the Department views that Government continuing to work in partnership with the sector and facilitating the disbursement of existing Government monetary supports in the most effective manner, along with creating linkages and enabling further cohesion amongst stakeholders are significant objectives for the Department in relation to State support for the voluntary sector.

The Department provided €3.5 million in 2018 in order to directly fund volunteering supporting organisations, such as Volunteer Centres nationwide and Volunteer Ireland. More broadly, many of the Department’s programmes in the Rural and Community divisions support voluntary organisations, in some form. In parallel with this, the funding provided by several Government departments indirectly supports voluntary organisations within different fields, including the health sector, sport, children and youth affairs and culture.

#### 9.1.1 Single Line Funding and Single Line Reporting Mechanisms

It has been highlighted that single line funding and single line reporting may result in transparency and efficiency gains for both funding bodies and volunteer organisations. However, the fact remains that volunteering is a cross sectoral issue and different Government departments and agencies may grant funds for different purposes on both a programme and non-programme basis. In this way, the immense scale of the challenge of devising a system whereby funding for volunteering comes from one source and reporting obligations are directed to one body, becomes clear.

With this said, it may be possible to liaise with other departments to investigate ways in which reporting requirements may be streamlined. This will be expanded further as part of the funding model under the draft *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development.*

**Question 17:**

**Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons.**

### 9.1.2 Multi-Annual Funding

At present, the Department funds volunteering supporting infrastructure such as Volunteer Ireland, the Volunteer Centres (VCs) and Volunteering Information Services (VISs) out of its annual budget allocation provided by the Government. In this way, funding for volunteering is provided on a year by year basis, and does not commit to longer periods. Some other funding streams are multi-annual; for example, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (2018-2022).

Multi-annual funding provides stability for voluntary organisations, allowing them the breathing space to divert resources from fund raising and concentrate on longer term concerns. Action 10 of The Wheel's Strategic Plan 2017-2020 refers to building awareness of the value of multi-annual funding, and this is an ongoing issue.

One of the action points of the draft *Framework Policy on Local and Community Development* is to develop a multi-annual funding approach as the standard for all independent local development, community development, community and voluntary programmes and public-funded projects and programmes generally. This work is being progressed as part of the Framework Policy and it is not our intention to address it as part of this Strategy.

**Question 18:**

**Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons.**

## 9.2 Proportionate Regulation

While proper governance and regulation is essential to developing a robust volunteer sector, this must be applied in a proportionate manner. A common issue in many different jurisdictions all over the world is the perception that volunteer organisations are burdened with excessive levels of bureaucratic checks and reporting requirements. The Wheel's report, 'Commissioning for Communities: Valuing the Community and Voluntary Approach to Human, Social and Community Services' (2016), stated that:

“Regulation should be credible, proportionate, supportive and adequately resourced. Public funders and regulators should work together to rationalise reporting and regulatory compliance requirements; eliminate multiple-reporting; reduce the administrative load and ensure that volunteers continue to be willing to serve on boards.”

The Department is committed to supporting the healthy development of Irish volunteering, including putting in place supports and removing unnecessary workloads where possible. One example of a support provided to assist volunteering recently is the ‘TrustIE’ initiative, a project funded by the Department and run by six Volunteer Centres that seeks to support smaller community organisations in recruiting trustees, as well as supporting volunteers to find trustee opportunities.

The Department also provides funding to Boardmatch, who focus primarily on the recruitment of high quality, professional volunteers to join the boards of Irish charities.

The issue of investigating ways in which regulation may be streamlined while maintaining appropriate governance controls and accountability impacts on volunteering. However, it is a broader issue for the community and voluntary sector, and therefore is best addressed as part of fora involving Government and the community and voluntary sector.

## 10. Challenges to Volunteering

### 10.1 Overview

A key objective of the volunteering strategy will be to acknowledge and enhance the role of the volunteer and to encourage volunteerism as a means of developing vibrant communities. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to view volunteering as an evolving concept influenced by the challenges the sector faces and changing socio-economic conditions.

The challenges and barriers to volunteering vary to one degree or another from country to country, and from rural areas to urban areas. However, when comparing national volunteering strategies from many countries around the world, it is evident that many challenges are universal.

Across the European Union (EU), Australia and Canada, the key challenges to individuals volunteering include not having enough spare time, discouraged by bureaucracy, anxiety about personal risk/liability, a lack of information or knowledge on how to get involved and not having the right skills or experience to volunteer.

While these challenges may seem straightforward, reports on volunteering from the EU, United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Northern Ireland and Australia, offer few clear solutions. It seems that many governments around the world have identified the same key challenges but have been less successful in developing working solutions to counteract these barriers.

Maintaining a balance between legislation to safeguard volunteers while trying not to overload voluntary organisations and volunteers with excessive administration, is a shared concern across many countries.

In Ireland, we can be proud to have one of the highest rates of volunteering in the world. In fact, in the 2018 World Giving Index, Ireland is up to 7<sup>th</sup> place in the world in terms of volunteering (number 1 in Europe) and 5<sup>th</sup> in the world overall when you include the other two categories measured, 'helping a stranger' and 'giving money to a charity'. However, we cannot be complacent about our volunteering culture. Changing demographic trends and other pressures mean that we need to work hard to remain an international leader in volunteering. The section below outlines the key challenges we face, and suggests associated objectives and actions to address these as part of a volunteering strategy.

### 10.2 Raising Awareness of Volunteering

Increasing awareness of the benefits of volunteering is critical to continued growth in volunteering. Awareness raising complements work already underway to increase participation generally, as well as work developing CSR involvement, attracting private

funding, generating interest in undertaking research and expanding collaboration between volunteer organisations and community groups.

### **10.2.1 Raising Awareness - Volunteering Benefits**

Volunteering plays a critical role in empowering individuals, in fostering active citizenship and in building inclusive and resilient communities in which we can all flourish. We know that volunteering has many benefits for individuals who volunteer, the organisations to which they contribute and to society generally.

One of the four key outcomes of the Scottish Government’s Volunteer Support Fund (2017-2018) involves improving opportunities for “skills and personal development through volunteering,” which underlines how skills development is considered a key aspect of volunteering in other jurisdictions. Meanwhile, a study initiated by NUI Galway and Volunteer Ireland in October 2017 highlighted the essential contribution volunteers make to rural infrastructure, the rural economy, rural inhabitants, the social links in rural communities and rural people’s sense of belonging and culture.

These kinds of benefits should be widely acknowledged and publicised through:

- Publishing this policy/ strategy;
- Supporting the production of further relevant research into volunteering;
- Making more information on the benefits of volunteering available through social media pages, websites and the I-VOL database;
- Continuing to promote volunteering through national events/awards; and
- Recognising the contribution of volunteers on websites of all organisations supported by volunteers.

**Question 19:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering?**

### **10.2.2 Raising Awareness - Volunteering Opportunities**

The importance of maintaining a high profile of volunteering and producing information on volunteering opportunities becomes clear in the light of ‘Lending a Hand: A Report on Young People and volunteering in Ireland’, produced by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in 2011, which cited never having “thought about volunteering” and “lack of information” as two key barriers to volunteering.

Reaching out to inform people about volunteering opportunities on a national basis has become significantly easier in recent years due to innovations like I-VOL and the growth of social media. I-VOL is the national database of Irish volunteering opportunities and listings, and can be accessed on <https://volunteering.secure.force.com/>

Opportunities to volunteer should be widely acknowledged and publicised, through:

- Publishing this strategy;
- Making more information on volunteering opportunities available, for example, through social media pages, Boardmatch Ireland, websites like [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie) and the I-VOL database;
- Continuing to promote volunteering through national events/awards;
- Recognising the contribution of volunteers on websites of all organisations supported by volunteers; and
- Continuing to promote volunteering through national events/awards.

**Question 20:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities?**

## 10.3 Increasing Participation in Volunteering

### 10.3.1 Increase General Participation in Volunteering

According to the World Giving Index compiled each year by the Charities Aid Foundation in the UK, Ireland, in 2018, ranks number 1 in Europe and number 5 in the world in terms of volunteering. This is an increase from our place at number 11 in the world in 2017. However, there is a risk that participation decreases if we do not actively promote and facilitate participation. According to the CSO's 2013 QNHS, annual levels of participation in volunteering are currently around 28%, or 1 million people. This represents a good base line position to develop.

The Department suggests that the following actions should be included in a potential volunteering strategy:

- Reconstituting the National Advisory Group to act as a focal point and driver of the Strategy;
- Continuing support for the broader Community and Voluntary sector through all its community development and social inclusion programmes;
- Engaging key Departments in their community development and social inclusion policies; and
- Continuing support for Volunteer Ireland, Public Participation Networks and other relevant national organisations enabling support structures to develop volunteering locally.

**Question 21:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage general participation in volunteering?**

**10.3.2 Increase Participation of Young People in Volunteering**

International studies frequently point to the difficulty in attracting young people to and retaining them in volunteering roles. It is also a distinct objective of the Department to encourage young people's participation in volunteering as a means of developing vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities, as outlined in our Statement of Strategy.

Research, including studies conducted by the CSO in 2013 and Indecon in 2018, has shown that young people are statistically less likely to volunteer than older cohorts of the population. There are many reasons for this, including study commitments and difficulty accessing transport, while several international studies highlight negative peer pressure. Another challenge is a lack of short-term, flexible volunteering roles that suit the demands of young people. In order to secure high levels of volunteering in the future, it is important to maximise participation of young people in volunteering.

Actions that could be taken to encourage the participation of young people in volunteering include:

- General awareness raising;
- Targeted programmes in schools and third level educational facilities;
- Targeted outreach by individual VCs via interest groups and social media;
- Engagement with key Departments in fora discussing volunteering, young people, community development and social inclusion policy;
- Awareness raising of the social, professional, well-being benefits of volunteering; and
- Capacity building of VIOs to develop roles specifically for young people.

CSO research (2013) has revealed that people aged between 15 and 24 who volunteered tended more than other age groups to volunteer through an organisation (68.8% of hours). This may suggest the onus lies on individual volunteering involving organisations to appeal to the interests of individual young people.

**Question 22:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of young people in volunteering?**

### 10.3.3 Increase Participation of Marginalised Groups in Volunteering

It is also an objective of the Department to encourage people within marginalised groups to volunteer as a means of developing vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities.

Although cultural and languages differences pose challenges, the Department believes that increased participation of marginalised groups in volunteering can be achieved through:

- General awareness raising;
- Targeted outreach by individual VCs via interest groups and social media;
- Engagement with key Departments in fora discussing and social inclusion policy;
- Raising awareness of social, professional, well-being benefits of volunteering;
- Encourage participation through the representative strands of the PPNs;
- Capacity building of VIOs to help them reach marginalised groups; and
- Engagement with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to encourage/facilitate unemployed persons to volunteer.

#### **Question 23:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in volunteering?**

#### **Question 24:**

**Should the strategy seek to focus on or identify particular marginalised group(s) to encourage their participation in volunteering?**

### 10.3.4 Trends in Participation in Volunteering

A range of studies conducted over the last number of years have indicated similar general trends. The rates of volunteering among men and women tend to be approximately equal, although the areas in which men and women volunteer in tend to be different (CSO, 2013).

Older people tend to volunteer more than younger people, with CSO figures from 2013 showing that 9% of those aged 55 – 64 volunteered over 700 hours a year. The study also showed that the majority of people indicated that they volunteered for just one type of voluntary activity (82.7%) with 14.5% volunteering for two types of activity, but nearly one in every four people aged over 65 volunteered for at least two different types of volunteering activity. Internationally, the same pattern of older people contributing disproportionately to volunteer activities and organisations emerges frequently.

While it is encouraging to see older people continue to contribute to their communities into their later years, it is obvious that this trend needs to be monitored so that we do not become overly reliant on the efforts of the much older people in society.

**Question 25:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to mitigate the risks posed by the changing demographic of volunteers?**

**Question 26:**

**What specific audiences should the national volunteering strategy focus on?**

## 10.4 Training and Development

### 10.4.1 Volunteers Training and Development

A report published in May 2018 by NUI Galway and Volunteer Ireland highlighted the need for training and education for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations to ensure the continuity of a high standard of volunteerism. One of the four key outcomes of the Scottish Government’s Volunteer Support Fund (2017-2018) involves improving “the third sector’s capacity to support, train and deploy volunteers,” highlighting that NUI and Volunteer Ireland’s recommendation is in line with thinking in neighbouring jurisdictions.

The Department indirectly supports the training of volunteers and the development of volunteer performance levels through providing funding for the operations of Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres and directly funds training in the volunteering infrastructure in technical skills such as the use of the I-VOL database.

**Question 27:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteers?**

**Question 28:**

**In what other ways can the Department support enhanced volunteer performance in Irish volunteering?**

## 10.4.2 Volunteer Managers Training and Development

Leadership in the volunteering infrastructure and volunteer involving organisations is crucial to the success of any proposed volunteering strategy, and performance management has a critical role to play. Learning and development is important so that volunteer managers have the skills necessary to attract, retain and maximise the impact of volunteers under their care. A report produced by Crowe Horwath and The Wheel (2014) stated that:

“More than half of Irish non-profits have no formal process to assess training needs, and only 40% have a written training and development plan with an accompanying budget. Almost half of organisations report that they will require training in fundraising, with one-third requiring training in strategic planning, in committee / board skills and in financial management.”

This issue becomes particularly acute in the light of frequently cited management challenges in volunteering internationally, including a disconnect between the skillset of the volunteer and the role; gaps in management skills; health and safety issues; unclear role expectations; planning issues; and appropriate support and recognition of volunteers.

### Question 29:

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteer managers?**

### Question 30:

**What steps may be taken by the Department to support enhanced management performance in Irish volunteering?**

## 10.5 Time to Volunteer

Many people interested in volunteering have difficulty finding the time to do so, this is regularly flagged as an issue. In its Strategic Plan 2018-2022, Volunteer Ireland states that “volunteering is changing and the way people seek to volunteer and the way that organisations engage and value the contribution of volunteers is shifting. For example, volunteers are seeking more flexible, short-term and one-off volunteering opportunities and volunteer involving organisations are calling for support to engage volunteers.” Not having enough time to volunteer was cited as one of nine key barriers to volunteering in ‘Lending a Hand: A Report on Young People and volunteering in Ireland’, produced by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in 2011.

The Department believes that raising the profile of volunteering, increasing awareness of volunteering opportunities and providing more information on short term volunteering opportunities such as ‘micro-volunteering’ may help to foster an appreciation that volunteering is not necessarily too time consuming. Micro-volunteering can be defined as bite-sized, on-demand, no commitment actions that benefit a cause. They can be done in a short time and are usually web-based.

With this said, Irish volunteers contribute huge amounts of their time. The CSO’s QNHS (2013) found that Irish people spent over 232.8 million hours volunteering annually and that more than four in 10 people who volunteered gave up to 100 hours a year.

**Question 31:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to address the perception of volunteering involving too large a commitment of time?**

## 10.6 Codes of Conduct

Some stakeholders are of the view that encouraging the development of voluntary codes of conduct for volunteers may assist volunteering, while others see mandatory codes of conduct as being appropriate.

An international precedent for encouraging codes of conduct exists in Canada with the revised ‘Canadian Code for Volunteering Involvement’ (2017). In Ireland, there are no legally defined rights for volunteers, but Volunteer Ireland has developed some guidance on what volunteers should expect from a volunteer involving organisation. Introducing a code of conduct or charter of rights for volunteers may instil clarity and confidence in volunteering, but may be seen by others as another layer of ‘red tape’ or indeed bringing volunteerism closer to a quasi-contract basis.

Volunteer Canada who describe themselves as an organisation which “provides national leadership and expertise on volunteerism,” lists the benefits of the code as:

- Acknowledging the value of volunteer involvement;
- providing guiding principles to frame the relationship with the volunteer and the non-profit organisation; and
- Establishing standards of practice for involving and integrating volunteers into organisations.

**Question 32:**

**Should a volunteering code of conduct for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) be developed and implemented? What should this code include?**

**Question 33:**

**Should a potential Irish code of conduct for volunteers and VIOs be mandatory or optional? Who would regulate it?**

## 10.7 Issues facing smaller organisations

Many small community and voluntary organisations face difficulties such as finding resources to pay for adequate levels of insurance for volunteers. The Department may be limited in its power to influence these issues but is interested in learning what actions it may take to assist.

**Question 34:**

**What challenges are facing smaller volunteer involving organisations and how can the Department assist?**

## 10.8 Accreditation

The concept of gaining incremental credit towards a formal qualification recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) through volunteer activity has been current for some time. The Department is open to exploring this idea with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

**Question 35:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to facilitate QQI assessment of volunteers for the purposes of accrediting skills?**

## 10.9 Opportunities to Volunteer

The Department considers that the impetus for creating opportunities to volunteer lies with individual volunteer involving organisations, supported by Volunteer Ireland, Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services. The Department believes that our role in regard to opportunities to volunteer lies at a macro level in assisting the development of the volunteering infrastructure.

### **Question 36:**

**What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the creation of volunteering opportunities?**

## 10.10 General Questions on Volunteering Challenges

### **Question 37:**

**What other significant challenges to volunteering should be considered as part of this strategy? How can they be addressed?**

### **Question 38:**

**Are there any further challenges, strategic objectives and actions that you feel should be included in a national volunteering strategy?**

## 11. Monitoring, Measuring and Evaluating the Impact of Volunteering

Monitoring, measuring and evaluating the impacts of volunteering is difficult. Volunteering takes place in a vast and multi-faceted community sector that includes several different stakeholders. While larger organisations are interested in and may record numbers of volunteers and related matters, this information does not reflect the whole picture. Volunteering takes place informally on a daily basis for example neighbours helping vulnerable neighbours in the community. These particulars are not recorded or even widely noticed. In this sense estimates of volunteering can be fragmentary and need to be considered in context.

Despite the difficulty in evaluating figures, some fact basis is necessary to understand the dimensions, requirements and direction of volunteering in Ireland. In 2016, over 14,000 volunteers registered with Volunteer Ireland's I-VOL database, contributing over 490,000 volunteer hours. On a broader level, the CSO in 2013 was able to throw light on how people volunteered, noting that more volunteering work was carried out directly by individuals (54.7% of hours worked) rather than through organisations (45.3%).

This information has important policy implications. What constitutes success when we are evaluating our volunteering strategy?

- More people volunteering?
- More target groups volunteering? If so, which groups?
- More volunteering hours being logged?
- More high demand skills being targeted by volunteer organisations?
- More diversity in volunteering opportunities available?

The Department believes that gauging the success of volunteering on a purely quantitative basis would not fully capture the full picture given the importance of the quality of volunteer and volunteering experience. However, some quantitative element is probably necessary to demonstrate progress. The use of agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be considered in this context.

### Question 39:

**What criteria should be used to assess our progress in assessing the impacts of volunteering?**

### Question 40:

**What criteria should be used to gauge success in delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy?**

## 12. Proposed National Advisory Group on Volunteering

The Department of Rural and Community Development has responsibility for volunteering policy. However, developing a strategy in this area will require input from all stakeholders so that the policy that eventually emerges will inspire the commitment of both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations who will be delivering the policy at grass roots level. Key to this will be the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including Government.

The Department believes that responsibility for developing and implementing this strategy should reside with a National Advisory Group, chaired by a nominee of the Department. This Advisory Group may have terms of reference similar to the now dormant National Committee on Volunteering that produced Tipping the Balance, or may have expanded terms of reference.

### **Question 41:**

**Do you agree that a National Advisory Group is the most suitable vehicle to drive this strategy forward?**

### **Question 42:**

**Who should participate in a National Advisory Group?**

### **Question 43:**

**How broad should the terms of reference (TOR) be for the proposed Advisory Group or other mechanism found suitable to drive this strategy forward?**

### **Question 44:**

**Does any better mechanism exist to drive this strategy forward?**

## 13. Next Steps

### 13.1 Proposed Work Programme

- CFI paper to be circulated in Q4 2018
- Feedback from CFI considered Q1 2019
- Development of draft strategy on volunteering 2019
- Public consultation on draft strategy
- Government decision on draft strategy
- Implementing, monitoring and reviewing strategy

## 14. How to Make a Submission

### 1. How do I make a submission?

To return a submission electronically, please download the Submission Form from the Department's website: [www.drcd.gov.ie](http://www.drcd.gov.ie) and send your completed submission to [volunteer@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:volunteer@drcd.gov.ie) in Word.doc format. Please note that returning the submissions in this format is required to facilitate the collation of information. If you wish, you may also return your submission in PDF format **and** Word.doc format. The subject line of your submission should read 'Volunteering CFI Submission.'

### 2. What address should I send hardcopy applications to?

To return a submission in hard copy, please download the Submission Form and send your completed submission to the address below:

Ben Richardson

**An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail**

Department of Rural and Community Development

**Trinity Point, 10-11 Sráid Laighean Theas, Baile Atha Cliath 2, D02 EF85**

Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

### 3. Will my submission be subject to the Freedom of Information?

Yes, all materials received by the Department will be subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. This means that all materials submitted during the CFI could be released to a wider audience on request. **If you wish to claim exemption from the Act please state this case in your submission along with the justification for so doing.**

### 4. What will happen to my submission?

Submissions will be assessed and key themes identified. The feedback received in this CFI will inform the development of a draft strategy on volunteering which will then go for full formal public consultation. The Department intends to publish all submissions on the Department website.

### 5. Other queries on submissions

If you require a Submission Form in another format (for example, big print), or have any other query, please contact [volunteer@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:volunteer@drcd.gov.ie) or (076) 100 6950 or:

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### 6. The closing date for submissions is 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

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