

# Information, Advice & Support Services Network

## IASS – a role for volunteers?

### Workshop report and outcomes

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on behalf of the IASS Network

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# Introduction

Parent Partnership Services (PPS) always made some use of volunteers. The majority of these volunteers acted as Independent Parental Supporters (IPS) providing casework support for parents. Some fulfilled other roles, such as assisting with the development of resources, liaising with schools or helping with administrative tasks.

Despite the history of the use of volunteers by almost half of all PPS there has never been any systematic analysis of the benefits involved in using them to support parents or perform other roles.

In 2014 the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 introduced new and wide ranging duties on Local Authorities to provide impartial information, advice and support to parents, children and young people. This happened at a time of severe financial constraints on the financing of public services, making it less likely that Information, Advice and Support Services would see any significant increase in budget or staffing.

Alongside the new SEND Code the IASS Network has developed a set of Quality Standards (<http://www.iassnetwork.org.uk/resources/documents/ias-services/quality-standards-for-services-providing-information,-advice-and-support>) to underpin the delivery of high quality and impartial information, advice and support to parents, children and young people who may need it. These Quality Standards apply to all those work with IASS, whether as paid staff or as volunteers.

**The use of volunteers by IASS is not an alternative to having a properly established service with staff employed on a full and/or part-time basis with a clear remit to deliver what the Code of Practice statutorily requires.** However volunteers have always been a significant additional resource who have brought added value to PPS and may have the potential to do the same for IASS.

## Purpose of the workshop

The purposes of the workshop were

- to draw on the knowledge of those PPS/IASS with experience of using volunteers
- to provide evidence to inform a national debate about the use of volunteers in IASS.

Invitations to the workshop were sent to one IASS in each of the 9 regions, with the selection based on a history of having trained and made use of volunteers over a number of years – as evidenced by previous national data collection.

The workshop took place at Conference Aston, Birmingham on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The IASS Network met the costs of the event.

## Issues covered

The workshop provided opportunities to share information on:

- the roles that volunteers may undertake
- recruitment and training
- monitoring and supervision
- retention
- costs and benefits
- available resources
- lessons to share

## Representation

Sue Brealey	Devon IASS	South West and IASS Staff Association
Wendy Cliffe	SENDIASS Oxfordshire	South East
Edwina Cosgrove	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire PPS	East Midlands
Nasreen Hussain	Birmingham SENDIASS	West Midlands
Nick Knapman*	Volunteer with Devon IASS	Workshop facilitator
Bridget Mork	Leeds SENDIASS	Yorkshire and Humberside
Daisy Russell	Project Manager	IASS Network
Angela Steadman	Cheshire West and Chester IASS	North West
Sara Steven	Gateshead SENDIAS	North East
Netty Yasin	Tower Hamlets SENDIASS	London
Rebecca Youlden	Volunteer with Birmingham SENDIASS	

(The representative from the East region was not able to take part due to illness).

\* Nick Knapman is an independent consultant with extensive experience of working with PPS and IASS. He is also a volunteer with the Devon IASS and has trained as an Independent Supporter.

# The number of volunteers

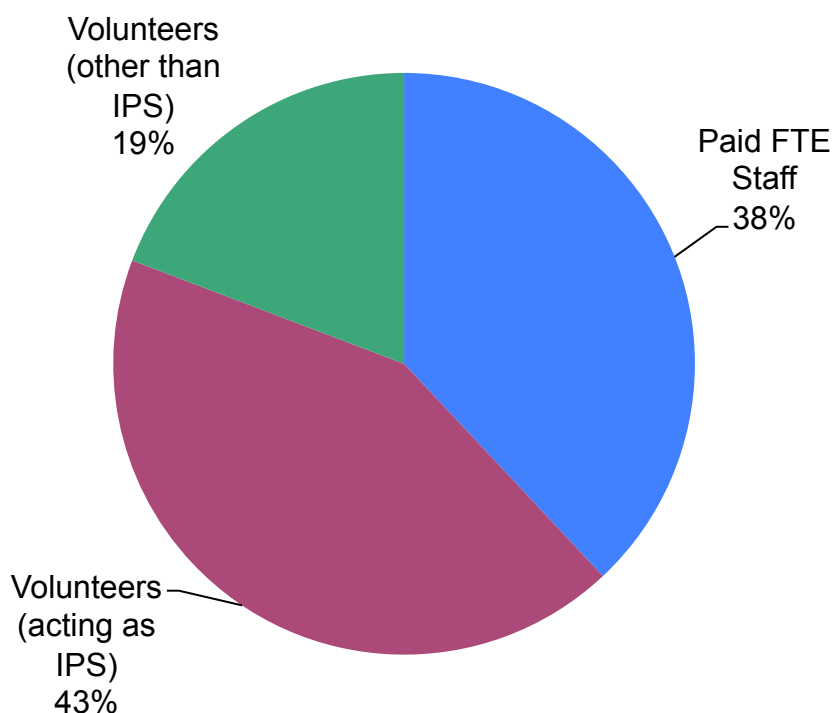
Evidence from data collection between 2011 and 2013 shows that approximately 36% of PPS used volunteers in a non-casework capacity. Nationally there was an average of 175 volunteers fulfilling a variety of roles, including tasks such as:

- helping with the development or management of resources
- representing the service at events
- visiting schools and other settings to provide information about the service
- answering phones (but not providing casework support)
- contributing to the development or delivery of training.

In addition approximately 48% of PPS had 1 or more volunteers acting as IPS (though only 9% had 10 or more volunteers). Between 2011 and 2013, an average of 417 volunteers acted as IPS across the 150 PPS in England.

The total number of volunteers represent a significant addition to capacity, as is shown below. Of course the time given by an individual volunteer will normally be far less than a full-time equivalent post; however the time volunteers give can be targeted when and where the need arises.

## Analysis of paid and unpaid staff (based on 131 returns)



Workshop delegates described different models of using volunteers. Most volunteers involved with casework undertake specific interventions, e.g. supporting parents at a meeting, or helping a family to submit their views as part of a statutory assessment. Sometimes volunteers may work with the same parent on a second or third intervention, but each intervention is regarded as a separate piece of work that is allocated by the volunteer's supervisor. This means that the IASS retains the management of the work done by volunteers, and also protects volunteers from uncontrolled demand.

The experience of services that have recruited volunteers is that the range of backgrounds that volunteers have is wider than might be expected. Some will be parents of children with SEN who have direct experience of local 'systems', including previous users of the IASS. However other volunteers include teachers, teaching assistants, local authority officers, students, speech and language therapists, social workers and other professionals – especially those who work part-time or who have retired.

## Benefits, costs and risk

### Benefits

The representatives attending the workshop all have experience of having volunteers working alongside their service and are therefore likely to be in favour of the use of volunteers. However all delegates agreed that volunteers could enhance service delivery in a number of ways, but are **not** an alternative to a properly established service. A well trained and supervised volunteer force can help a good service to reach more service users, expand the skills base and support participation – provided that the volunteers are working within the framework of an effective, well managed and appropriately resourced IASS.

Workshop delegates considered the main beneficiaries of using volunteers are:

- service users (actual and potential)
- the IASS
- service commissioners
- volunteers themselves.

The most important of these should be service users. Indeed this must be the overriding consideration. If the use of volunteers does not directly or indirectly improve the service to potential or current users it is unlikely to be an appropriate investment of time and resources.

The experience of services that have used volunteers is that the benefits fall into 8 main categories – which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each of these potential benefits has a direct or indirect impact for service users.

## Potential benefit

## How?

### **Increase in capacity**

- more parents/children/young people can be given information and advice and support
- more parents/children/young people can receive direct support, e.g. at meetings
- faster response times
- releases time for employed staff to focus on the more complex cases
- can enable IASS to take on work that might not otherwise be a high priority (e.g. helping to make the service more widely known to potential service users)

### **Greater diversity**

- bring new experience and skills
- increase the scope to match support to service users' needs (e.g. when English is a second language)
- IASS better reflects the community it serves

### **Increased knowledge and skills base for IASS**

- volunteers may have particular knowledge, e.g. of publishing, local groups, particular areas of SEN, etc.
- volunteers may have specialist skills, e.g. website development, delivering training, translation or interpretation, etc.
- through their contacts with service users, schools, etc. they increase the range of 'intelligence' available to the IASS on local SEND practice
- parents who volunteer have direct knowledge of how SEND systems work locally
- young people who volunteer can bring new perspectives

### **Flexibility in service delivery**

- increased chance of being able to match service support to the identified need
- reduced travel time for paid staff, especially in rural areas
- some volunteers may have greater flexibility over when home visits, meeting support or attendance at events are possible (i.e. may be less constrained by 'office hours')
- ability to respond to varying demand on the IASS (e.g. according to the time in the academic year, the introduction of new guidance etc.)

### **Increased awareness of IASS**

- service users who benefit from IASS often 'spread the word'. The more service users the IASS is able to support the better known the service becomes
- volunteers often have other links, e.g. with schools, parent groups, other organisations and local networks. This can enhance contact between the IASS and voluntary and community sector organisations.

- word of mouth recommendation is a powerful (and cheap) way of making the service known to those who may benefit from it
- volunteers can visit schools and other settings to distribute leaflets and information resources, represent the IASS at events and seek feedback
- young people who volunteer may promote engagement with young people's groups and networks

### **Impartiality**

- the training and supervision of volunteers consistently reinforces the importance of impartiality
- service users often perceive volunteers as being less likely to 'tow the LA line'

### **Energy and enthusiasm**

- can be powerful advocates for the service
- bring a fresh approach to issues and can challenge existing practice
- are volunteering because they want to do this work
- can help make the service more outward looking

### **Workforce development**

- gives employed staff additional opportunities to develop their own skills, e.g. training and managing others, building a team
- can increase the sense of professionalism for paid staff
- reduces isolation for employed staff working in a small service or a large geographical area
- volunteers acquire new knowledge and skills – which they can take back into the community and/or use for their own personal development. This can include volunteers becoming employed IASS officers as a direct result of the experience they have gained
- could provide opportunities for young people who volunteer to gain useful life skills
- potential to develop new roles using volunteers (e.g. peer mentors) and for volunteers to support each other.

## **Costs and risk**

Workshop delegates agreed that there are costs in using volunteers and that these have to be acknowledged and managed appropriately. Volunteers are not a way of saving money, nor are they 'cost neutral'. The 2 inevitable costs are time and money.

To make effective use of volunteers an IASS needs to give a significant amount of time to recruiting, training, managing, and supervising and to ongoing workforce development, especially if volunteers are to provide casework support.

In addition there are usually direct financial costs involved in delivering training (e.g. venue hire, refreshments, etc.) and supporting the work of volunteers (e.g. travel expenses, reimbursement for phone calls).

If these two costs are not appropriately planned for there are increased risks including:

- lower quality (and/or) greater variability in the support provided to service users
- potential reputational damage to the IASS if support does not meet service standards
- unrealistic raising of expectations about what the service can offer
- a perception, especially by service commissioners, that more can be done for less
- employed staff feeling 'de-professionalised'
- overspending of the budget.

However workshop delegates concluded that these risks were not uniquely associated with volunteers – they were also risks associated with managing any established service.

## Balancing benefits and costs

An effective service that meets or exceeds the requirements of the SEND Code and the Quality Standards for IASS will already have policies and practices in place to manage time and money and to mitigate risk. Such policies and practices may need to be expanded to encompass the work of volunteers but should not be significantly different.

**Volunteers can enhance a good service but will not improve a weak service.**

In the experience of workshop delegates the benefits of using volunteers usually outweighed the costs and risks involved. The primary concern was time – particularly as recruitment and training tend to require the most intensive investment of staff time.

Once volunteers are trained, time still needs to be given to supervision and workforce development – with one service suggesting that a 0.5 member of staff could realistically manage no more than 5 volunteers. However time given to this by paid staff is more than repaid by the increase in capacity to provide support.

While there is no objective evidence that a certain 'critical mass' (size and quality of service) is needed, the view of delegates was that recruiting and managing an effective volunteer force depends on being able to balance the time required against other demands. Larger services may have more scope to do this on their own. Smaller services may need to collaborate (e.g. to recruit and train volunteers) in order to maximise benefits and minimise costs.



# Issues IASS using volunteers should consider

Workshop delegates were able to draw on their experience of recruiting, training and deploying volunteers to develop a series of questions and prompts that IASS might use to consider, plan, implement or review the use of volunteers. This framework is not a set of instructions that must be followed. Nor is it a set of standards to be achieved. It is intended to support services that are considering whether volunteers could (or do) enhance the service available to parents, children and young people.

The framework is organised as a set of major questions and related prompts. The issues can be considered in any order and the questions and prompts are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily exhaustive. However any service that has considered the listed issues will be well prepared to answer the overriding question – is there a role for volunteers in our service?

The 8 main questions are:

**Are the roles played by volunteers clear?**

**Are expectations realistic?**

**What is the recruitment strategy?**

**What training does the IASS provide for volunteers?**

**How are volunteers managed?**

**How is the contribution of volunteers recorded?**

**How is the work of volunteers quality assured?**

**How is the contribution of volunteers resourced?**

While the list of questions and prompts may seem dauntingly lengthy, most would equally apply to employed staff. In other words an effective IASS would extend its existing policies and practices to include volunteers, rather than start from scratch.

The issues that an IASS should consider are included as Appendix A to this report.

In addition discussion took place about standards in the management of volunteers. The Quality Standards for IASS encompass the work done by volunteers but do not cover their management. However there is an existing national scheme called *Investing in Volunteers* that does offer a comprehensive set of standards that are likely to be relevant, and which includes the option of accreditation. This scheme could provide a route for recognition of good practice in managing volunteers for IASS that wished to seek external accreditation. More information is available at <http://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk>

# A future for volunteers in IASS

Delegates were invited to this workshop because of their experience of using volunteers. It therefore comes as no surprise that they would advocate more extensive use of volunteers by other services. An effective volunteer force requires a significant investment of time and resources, but once established offers significant advantages to service users and the IASS itself.

A service that is considering making use of volunteers can start by recruiting them for those roles that require less initial training and supervision. The framework set out in Appendix A illustrates a wide range of roles that volunteers may undertake.

Children and young people now have a right to seek impartial information, advice and support for themselves. IASS therefore need to increase awareness of the services available to them and will need to develop their offer to respond to demand. There is potential to recruit young people as volunteers, for example from the further and higher education sectors.

Perhaps the most complex task that volunteers may take on is direct casework support. An IASS that is seeking to enhance its casework service by using volunteers will need to make a greater initial investment of time and resources and commit to making appropriate arrangements for supervision and continuing workforce development. However there are existing resources available from other IASS to help with recruitment, training and supervision. There is also potential for collaboration with other IASS, for example over recruitment and training of new volunteers.

In the past many PPS have reported that casework demand has exceeded the capacity of the service to meet it – and that cases have become increasingly complex. The SEND Code of Practice 0-25 introduces new and more extensive duties on local authorities to provide information, advice and support to parents, children and young people and it seems likely that the demand on IASS will continue to grow. IASS will be challenged to find ways to ensure that parents, children and young people have access to impartial, high quality services. In the current financial climate it seems very unlikely that there will be any significant increase in funding for the majority of IASS. While volunteers are not an alternative to a properly established service they do offer a way of enhancing what an IASS can offer. Furthermore they can help to provide a more responsive approach to casework, with, for example, more time being available in term times when demand may be at its highest.

In summary, the benefits of a well-run volunteer force working in support of IASS should be considerably greater than the costs and risks involved.

# A way forward

The starting point for this workshop was that there had been relatively little discussion of the pros and cons of using volunteers in PPS or IASS, or sharing of information on the ways in which IASS were using them.

This report has drawn on the experience of a number of IASS that have used volunteers over a period of time and proposes a framework (see Appendix A) that services considering the use of volunteers might use.

In the final workshop session delegates agreed a number of proposals:

1. The workshop report should inform wider discussion of the use of volunteers.
2. Delegates would suggest that the use of volunteers should be on the agenda at a regional network meeting.
3. Existing resources regarding volunteers would be made available via the IASS Network.
4. Feedback from discussion at regional meetings should be used to inform whether further action is needed at a national level to support the greater use of volunteers.
5. The possibility of establishing a network of 'volunteer champions' (i.e. services that have experience of using volunteers and might support services wishing to do so) is explored.
6. *Investing in Volunteers* ( <http://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk> ) is considered as a possible route for IASS that wished to gain accreditation for their practice in using volunteers.

In addition it was agreed that a successful initiative to increase access to volunteers would have the following outcomes:

1. The contribution made by volunteers is recognised and understood.
2. More IASS deliver high quality information, advice and support with assistance from volunteers.
3. The 'reach' of IASS using volunteers is increased.
4. Further evidence is available of investment in volunteers enhancing the service available to parents, children and young people.

# Resources available

Resources relevant to volunteers will be posted on the IASS Network website as they become available.

**Resources will be organised under the following headings:**

**Recruitment of volunteers**

**Information on the use of volunteers for service users**

**Training of volunteers**

**Information resources for volunteers**

**Supervision of volunteers**

# Issues IASS should consider

## Are the roles played by volunteers clear?

Where does the IASS fit within the local framework of services for parents, children and young people?

What part(s) will volunteers play within the overall structure of the IASS?

How will volunteers help the IASS to deliver impartial information, advice and support?

Who will volunteers work with?

How will service standards apply to volunteers?

**The range of roles that volunteers can play includes:**

- assisting with general office administration
- carrying out research (e.g. looking for good information resources or websites)
- collating feedback/evaluation data
- sharing specialist knowledge or skills with IASS staff
- help with the development or review of information resources or training materials
- staffing stands at conferences, parent groups etc.
- representing the IASS at local groups and networks
- attending drop-in sessions
- visiting schools and other settings, e.g. to deliver information packs or leaflets
- make contact with young people's groups to raise awareness of the IASS
- provide input at conferences, SENCo training etc.
- assist service users with complex paperwork, including helping service users compile and contribute their own views
- support service users at meetings

- assist with helplines or surgeries
- provide a range of casework support
- support service users at appeals and Tribunals

Items shown in BLUE do not necessarily require extensive knowledge of the IASS or particular knowledge and skills related to SEND or providing support.

Items shown in GREEN require a good knowledge of the IASS and the SEND framework.

Items shown in RED require a high level of knowledge and skills and should only be undertaken by volunteers who have been trained and approved by the IASS.

## Are expectations realistic?

Does the Local Authority understand what volunteers can and cannot do – and what costs (time and financial) are involved?

Do all IASS staff understand what part volunteers play in the service – and what the impact(s) are on their own roles?

Are volunteers clear about what they are expected to do?

Are service users clear about what volunteers can and cannot do?

Do schools and other settings understand the role(s) that volunteers play and what they can and cannot do?

### Factors that may help to clarify or manage expectations include:

- a service mission statement/policy that includes reference to volunteers in all sections that are relevant
- specific published policy statement on the use of volunteers
- lone working policy
- written guidance/policy on what can and cannot be claimed for
- published policy on accountability and supervision arrangements (by whom, how often, how recorded etc)
- information resources/leaflets/ web-based articles etc on the role of volunteers
- information given to service users when a volunteer is allocated to a specific intervention
- written agreements/'job descriptions'

- handbook or manual for volunteers
- initial agreement with volunteers about availability and willingness to undertake different roles – regularly reviewed through supervision.
- clear mechanism for engaging a volunteer to be involved with a specific piece of work or intervention (no open ended commitment)
- clarity on what volunteers may and may not agree to do, especially in relation to casework
- clarity about the amount of time employed staff spend working with volunteers , i.e. what proportion of their time this accounts for/how many volunteers they might be allocated/work with/supervise.

## What is the recruitment strategy?

*Who do you want to recruit?*

*What processes will you use?*

*How often will you recruit?*

*How will you measure success?*

### **Think about diversity**

- actively recruit from a variety of backgrounds – make no assumptions about all volunteers being parents
- seek to reflect your community's diversity
- broaden your net (offer a variety of roles, tap into local voluntary organisations, target under represented groups)

### **Where you may find volunteers**

- through the local paper
- job clubs
- voluntary groups
- schools
- Parish newsletters
- Council newsletters

- universities
- the retired community (especially local government staff, teachers, etc)
- previous service users
- local notice boards
- word of mouth (especially service users and existing volunteers)
- the WI
- by collaborating with neighbouring services

### **Turning interest into commitment**

- demonstrate the benefits, e.g. joining a team, access to the IPSEA training, meeting with other volunteers, getting good feedback
- if a delay before the next training course find appropriate interim tasks (e.g. from the blue or orange lists under ***The range of roles that volunteers can play***)
- decide on the minimum number you need to run training
- invite to existing information sharing meetings and/or to 'meet the team'
- be prepared to train as individuals if appropriate

### **Determining the success of your strategy**

- how many turn interest into commitment?
- get feedback on how volunteers became interested
- look at the roles that volunteers take on
- analyse what happens to volunteers who 'move on'. Has their experience with IASS helped them do this?
- see all engagement with the service as a potential positive. Even if training does not increase volunteer capacity more people will know about the IASS and be better informed about SEND policies and practice. If volunteers leave, is it because they have gained new skills they can use elsewhere?

## **What training does the IASS provide for volunteers?**

***What is the balance of knowledge and skills required?***

***What are the core elements of the training?***



***How will you structure the training of volunteers?***

***What can you learn from others?***

**Skills likely to be important**

- listening
- confidentiality
- self awareness, especially in relation to impartiality
- recording, e.g. if supporting a service user at a meeting
- ability to empower others

**Knowledge likely to be needed**

- the ethos and role of IASS
- SEND Code
- Equality legislation
- data protection
- safeguarding policy and practice
- person centred approaches
- local SEND arrangements
- IASS guidance for volunteers

**Organisation**

- determine the costs
- identify who can help with delivery
- look at training packages that others have developed – do not reinvent wheels!
- tailor to your cohort of volunteers
- see it has initial training – which can be followed up by more learning later

**Other IASS staff**

- consider what support and training they may need to work with or supervise volunteers

- provide opportunities for top up training with staff and volunteers together

## How are volunteers managed?

*Who is responsible for the work volunteers do?*

*How is work allocated?*

*What additional coordination may be needed?*

### **Staff roles**

- which staff will manage volunteers and for what proportion of their time?
- what skills may supervising staff have/need?
- what is a realistic number of volunteers for any one member of staff to supervise?

### **Allocation of casework**

- time or task limited 'intervention' enhances protection for volunteers and service users, i.e. volunteers do not take on open ended cases
- for each intervention the IASS clarifies with the volunteer, the service user, and the relevant parties (e.g. school, other professionals) what role the volunteer will play
- volunteers are matched to service users so far as resources allow, but IASS retains responsibility for allocation of volunteers
- potential conflicts of interest are anticipated and avoided

### **Additional coordination**

- more volunteers may increase the need for additional coordination
- coordination may promote good communications, enhance peer to peer support and help secure workforce development
- coordination may be shared by all staff or identified as specific responsibility

## How is the contribution of volunteers recorded?

*How will volunteers record the work they do?*

*What access to existing IASS records will they have and how will this be managed?*

***How will records made by volunteers be monitored and quality assured?***

***How will confidentiality and data protection be managed?***

***How will volunteers' privacy be protected?***

### **Records made by volunteers**

- best to build on the systems for recording already in use by IASS
- clarity about what records volunteers are expected to keep (e.g. notes of key points rather than minutes of meetings)
- assume that records made by volunteers will be made available to the relevant service user (NB possible safeguarding exceptions)
- importance of accuracy, impartiality and being non-judgemental
- provide written guidance in handbook

### **Records made about the work of volunteers**

- IASS needs to maintain up to date records of what work is allocated to whom
- need for quality assurance of records made by volunteers - as would be the case for employed staff
- feedback on record keeping included as part of supervision

### **Confidentiality and data protection**

- clear protocols covering data protection and information sharing of volunteers' and service users' telephone numbers and email addresses

## **How is the work of volunteers quality assured?**

***How do the IASS quality assurance procedures apply to volunteers?***

### **Preparation**

- IASS ethos, policies and procedures emphasised in initial training of volunteers
- IASS quality assurance policies and procedures include volunteers
- similar duties of care apply to volunteers and employed staff

### **Monitoring and supervision**

- supervision is routine and regular
- supervision takes account of service users' feedback
- supervision records are maintained
- processes are in place to deal with any problems that may arise, e.g. supervision arrangements, complaints procedures

## How is the contribution of volunteers resourced?

***What time, skills and money does the IASS need to provide an effective volunteer force?***

***Will longer-term benefits outweigh shorter-term costs?***

### **Time and skills costs**

- which IASS staff can deliver training and supervision of volunteers?
- what model of volunteer coordination will work best (e.g. a responsibility shared by all employed staff, or a specific role for a volunteer coordinator)?
- can links with other IASS and other services that support volunteers (e.g. CVS) help?

### **Financial costs**

- costs associated with training
- cost of ongoing workforce development (e.g. top up training, meetings for volunteers, refreshments, newsletters, etc)
- expenses (phone and travel costs for volunteers)
- possible implications for some volunteers of expenses when they themselves are claiming benefits

### **Long term benefits v short term costs**

- need for recognition that benefits (e.g. increased capacity and diversity) are only likely to be realised after a period of initial investment (recruitment and training)
- benefits should apply primarily to service users, but also to the IASS itself

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