

# Community Day: A new public holiday celebrating and promoting voluntary community activity

joint statement by:

- The Trades Union Congress
- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Community Service Volunteers
- Volunteering England
- The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action



## **Introduction**

The Trades Union Congress, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Community Service Volunteers, Volunteering England and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action strongly agree that there should be a new public holiday in the autumn with a focus on celebrating and promoting voluntary community activity.

We share 'the vision of a society where voluntary activity flourishes and where all individuals and communities are enabled to play a full part in civil society'<sup>1</sup>.

We believe that our proposal reflects and reinforces all that is best about our shared values as a nation and will have concrete, positive effects for local communities and the economy.

We will be making a joint approach to the Government to further this campaign. Our voices have come together to make a very powerful plea in favour of a special day for encouraging voluntary work and community activity. We urge the Government to adopt this proposal

## **Why are we making this proposal?**

- We believe that the focus of a new public holiday on encouraging people to do something positive in their communities would make a very major contribution to formal volunteering and broader involvement in the day-to-day life of our communities and their institutions. This will help to make our communities more cohesive and will benefit those who become involved in terms of health and well-being.
- We believe in the power of voluntary community action to transform the lives of people and communities for the better. Such activity brings us together in the spirit of shared goals, promotes a culture of selflessness and helping others and provides the mortar that builds cohesive communities. Where such activity flourishes, people and their communities play a full part in civil society.
- Those who become involved in community activity and volunteering usually do so for altruistic reasons. However, they often report that they gain from their involvement with improvements to their health and, for employed volunteers, new skills that they find useful in their careers.
- We fully recognise the value of long standing voluntary sector events including Volunteers' Week in June, Make A Difference Day in October and the United Nations International Volunteers' Day for Economic and Social Development in December. Our proposal will complement the existing events and will contribute to the UN's goals on health, education, environment, global partnership and ending poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office of the Third Sector Values Statement.

- We believe Community Day will encourage ongoing voluntary community activity beyond the day itself. For example, 63 per cent of new volunteers who take part in CSV's Make a Difference Day are still involved 6 months later. Making the most of this opportunity will involve judicious project planning by community and volunteering organisations to maintain contact with new recruits
- The measure would be affordable. The voluntary sector is already worth more than £40 billion per year<sup>2</sup>, yet there is still room for it to continue to develop. If Community Day were to increase the value of volunteering and community activity by just 5 per cent, this would offset the cost to the economy of a new holiday.
- Such a measure would certainly not be out of line with our European partners. With eight public holidays a year, Great Britain has fewer holidays than the average for EU member states. In fact, only Romania has fewer days than we do. Public holidays are an immensely popular part of life in the UK. These national days of celebration also play a vital part in ensuring that we have a proper balance between our working lives and the rest of our lives. We need time to pursue our hobbies, to exercise, to learn, to get involved in our local communities and to have fun. One real strength of public holidays is that because so many people are away from work at the same time on public holidays it makes it easier to get together with our families and friends.
- We believe that Community Day would promote the diversity and variety which is such a great strength of the UK's civil society. We envisage that Community Day would have the celebratory feel of the current Children in Need and Red Nose Day campaigns. We would expect to see a wide range of different activities taking place in villages, towns and cities across the UK. This would include civic gala days and street-parties, community and voluntary sector gala days and fairs, events that celebrate and promote diversity, fundraising, sport and learning. Most of all Community Day will be as much about having fun as a community as doing something worthwhile to improve that community. The only real limit will be the imagination of those taking part.

**We believe that it is now time to create something new that will help to meet the needs of modern society, both in terms of improving work-life balance and encouraging active citizenship and greater participation in our communities.**

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<sup>2</sup> Early Findings From the 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey:  
[Hhttp://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4905.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4905.pdf)H.

## Community Day - an idea whose time has come?

- The fact that five major organisations have come together to promote Community Day makes it a timely demand given that these organisations will themselves have to play a significant role in making the day a success.
- In addition, the change of Prime Minister provides the opportunity for a bold, new policy initiative that is both intrinsically good for the UK and also guaranteed to be popular.
- There is now clear support for a new public holiday. A TUC poll conducted in 2004 found that over 90% supported the idea of a new bank holiday and the most popular date for that holiday was the Autumn half term.<sup>3</sup>
- Gordon Brown has said on a number of occasions<sup>4</sup> that he would like to see a day that brings the people of this country together. This proposal could help fulfil his aim. We believe that the willingness to volunteer and support one's local community is one of the best things about Britain. As the figures quoted below show, voluntary activity is widespread and popular with half the adult population volunteering at least once a month. This should be recognised as a central feature of British identity and values and should be celebrated and encouraged.

## The economic costs and benefits of the proposal

There is little doubt that the UK is a wealthy society that can afford an extra holiday. The economy has enjoyed over a decade of continuous growth and is sustaining both record levels of profitability and record levels of employment.

In addition, the real value of the average worker's output has doubled in the 29 years since the last public holiday was declared in England and Wales.

The partners in this proposal believe that the Treasury's estimate that a new public holiday *without any additional voluntary or community activity* would cost about £2 billion is broadly correct, although the calculation is not a simple matter.

However, what we are proposing is a new kind of holiday that will encourage a significant amount of additional voluntary and community activity. The value of this activity will, of course, have a major effect on offsetting the cost of a new holiday.

As was mentioned above, the Home Office estimates that activity generated by the voluntary sector is worth £40 billion to the economy. If Community Day were to

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<sup>3</sup> In the online poll of 20,000 people, 40% of respondents preferred an autumn half term holiday. Those taking part were asked to choose from a list of 6 options which also included the national saint's days for England, Scotland and Wales (37% support), New Years Eve (11%), a different date every year to mark an anniversary (7%), International Women's Day (3%), and 'other' days (1%).

<sup>4</sup> Most notably at the Fabian Society seminar on 'The Concept of Britishness' on 14 January 2006.

increase this value by only 5% through new regular volunteers being created or current volunteers being encouraged to play an increased role in their community, it would have made the day cost neutral in terms of wealth generation. As the research cited above suggests that over 60% of those who take part in CSV's Make A Difference Day remain involved for at least six months, this does not seem an unachievable aim.

However, the ongoing and less easily quantifiable economic benefits from the social and individual effects of Community Day should not be overlooked.

- Community Day is also likely to include some improvement in the health of the volunteers. A CSV survey<sup>5</sup> found that nearly half of those responding said that volunteering combated stress and depression, whilst a similar number said that volunteering has improved their physical health and fitness, whilst 1 in 5 also said that volunteering had helped them lose weight. The beneficial health effects for young volunteers under the age of 25 were even more pronounced, and this age group also said that volunteering helped them to cut down on alcohol and tobacco. These health effects are likely to be quite valuable. The UK Government plans to spend £96.6 billion on health this year<sup>6</sup> whilst 1 in 5 people in the UK are obese - the second highest incidence of obesity amongst the EU states<sup>7</sup>.
- The skills and discipline developed through volunteering and community activity can often help people to return to paid employment, a fact that was recognised by the Government when it established the Environmental Task Force and Voluntary Sector options in the New Deal. It has also been reported that employed volunteers develop new skills that they can use at work, such as teamwork, communications, leadership and project management<sup>8</sup>. In addition, almost 1 in 3, of those who are involved in community and voluntary activity cite potential career benefits, such as forming new networks, as a motivation<sup>9</sup>. Clearly there are great benefits to the UK economy of improved skills and networks in terms of competitiveness, productivity and money saved that might otherwise be spent on formal training or networking.
- Maybe most importantly, voluntary community activity is a central tool in the creation of the social capital and networks which play such a vital role in preventing and reversing social degradation. An ongoing public holiday like Community Day could over time play a fundamental role in reducing crime, social division and distrust. Both the public and private sectors clearly suffer

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<sup>5</sup> Make Difference Day Survey, (ICM Research for CSV, 2004)

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health Departmental Report 2006, p32

<sup>7</sup> ONS report on OECD study: ukhs2\_tables\_10\_rel1.xls

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the Institute of Volunteering Research study of employee volunteering at Barclay's Bank, <http://www.ivr.org.uk/barclays.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the 2004 survey by Do-it.org.uk, the volunteers' vacancy website

as a result of the existence of these factors in terms of money lost as a result of crime and social divisions and the money spent trying to ameliorate and respond to them. Any successful effort which can tackle these intransigent problems would clearly have very great economic benefits.

Thus, the ongoing benefits to the UK economy and to public spending of Community Day in terms of voluntary labour, improved health, skills development and social cohesion should more than compensate for an on the day loss to UK business. And, of course, these benefits will be repeated, enhanced and built upon year after year as Community Day is repeated.

### **The potential for increasing voluntary activity and social inclusion**

Volunteering and community activity is widespread and popular in the UK.

The Home Office Citizenship Survey records that 20.4 million people in England - about 1 in 2 - had taken part in formal or informal voluntary activity during the previous month<sup>10</sup>. This is consistent with the Institute for Volunteering Research report, which reports that the average volunteer gives 4 hours per week, which suggests a total of 4.4 billion hours in the UK<sup>11</sup>.

- However, there are also about 10 million people in England (26% of the population) who have been engaged in voluntary activity during the last year but not during the last month. This suggests that there is still significant scope to increase regular volunteering.
- Furthermore, statistics from Volunteer Development Scotland suggest that even though about half of the population are in work, only about a quarter (24.1%) of volunteers are in employment<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, a CSV survey<sup>13</sup> found that only 15% of their volunteers were in employment. One key challenge now is to build more support for volunteering and community activity amongst working people.
- The Home Office survey also suggests that white people are slightly more likely than people from ethnic minority backgrounds to be engaged in civic and volunteering activity (ratio 51%: 45%). Even more striking is the difference in participation between those with and without qualifications (ratio: 56%: 39%). Also notable is the gender imbalance, 55% of female adults had taken part in voluntary or civic activity in the last month compared

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<sup>10</sup> Early Findings From the 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey: [Hhttp://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4905.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4905.pdf)H.

<sup>11</sup> 1997 National Survey of Volunteering in the UK, [Hhttp://inr.org.uk/nationalsurvey.htm](http://inr.org.uk/nationalsurvey.htm)

<sup>12</sup> See 'The Annual Digest on Volunteering in Scotland 2005', Volunteer Development Scotland Website, p9

<sup>13</sup> 'Shortcut to making difference through volunteering no.3 - volunteers', CSV web-report: [Hhttp://www.csv.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7B94D859-9403-4B2E-9E96-07238F167034/47083/shortcut3links.pdf](http://www.csv.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7B94D859-9403-4B2E-9E96-07238F167034/47083/shortcut3links.pdf)

with 45% of males<sup>14</sup>. (See appendix 1 for the full figures.) An earlier survey suggested that people in higher income households were more likely than others to volunteer<sup>15</sup>. Those with incomes of £75,000 or more were twice as likely as those with incomes of £10,000 or less to undertake formal volunteering. This suggests that more can be done to encourage diversity in volunteering and to expand voluntary and community activity amongst various under-represented groups.

- The Home Office also reports that 16-19 year olds are highly likely to be involved in voluntary activity (63%). The creation of the youth volunteering charity V is thus very timely. One of the challenges therefore is to keep young adults interested in voluntary activity as they grow older.

These figures suggest that despite the widespread involvement in volunteering and community activity that already exists, there is room to do more and encourage greater diversity, of all types, amongst volunteers. In particular, reaching out to some of the underrepresented groups would bring new skills to the sector whilst making a significant contribution to building greater social inclusion and cohesion.

We believe that a high profile, annual event that displays the importance of voluntary community activity to the population and provides the time for people to make the first step into such activity would play an absolutely central role in allowing the UK to meet its full potential as a nation committed to voluntary community activity.

### **What are the next steps in establishing Community Day?**

The partner organisations have come together today to launch the campaign for the new holiday promoting community activity and volunteering. We believe that this proposal would benefit the UK in a significant way, by improving the cohesiveness of our society and the quality of our lives. We will lobby government and campaign publicly in the coming months to get this proposal adopted.

We have also come together to make a commitment to promote community activity and volunteering on the new holiday if and when it is held.

Our sincere hope is that the Government will adopt this proposal and start to plan for its implementation as soon as possible. Once the proposal is adopted we will work with the Government to develop the infrastructure to make this day a success.

Policy proposals as simple as this and as unequivocally good as this rarely come before government. It really is too good an opportunity to miss.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, table 9.

<sup>15</sup> ONS Website: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1008&Pos=5&ColRankH>

### Appendix 1: Participation in community and voluntary activities during the pervious month (percentages)

	Minority ethnic groups	White	Qualifications	No qualifications	Limiting long term illness	None	At risk of social exclusion
Civic participation	2	2	2	2	3	2	3
Informal volunteering	34	37	40	29	35	38	34
Formal volunteering	24	29	33	16	23	30	22
All volunteering	44	50	55	38	44	51	43
All activities	45	51	56	39	45	52	44

Source: 'Early Findings From the 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey':  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr4905.pdf> - table 7.

### Appendix 2: UK Public holidays in 2009 showing new proposal

	England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
New Year's Day	<b>1 Jan</b>	1 Jan	<b>1 Jan</b>
2nd January	-	2 Jan	-
St Patrick's Day	-	-	17 Mar
Good Friday	10 Apr	10 Apr	10 Apr
Easter Monday	13 Apr	-	13 Apr
Early May Bank Holiday	<b>4 May</b>	4 May	<b>4 May</b>
Spring Bank Holiday	25 May	<b>25 May</b>	25 May
Battle of the Boyne (Orangemen's Day)	-	-	<b>13 July</b>
Summer Bank Holiday	31 Aug	3 Aug	31 Aug
<i>Proposed Community Day</i>	<i>29 October</i>	<i>29 October</i>	<i>29 October</i>
Christmas Day	25 Dec	25 Dec	25 Dec
Boxing Day	28 Dec	<b>28 Dec</b>	28 Dec

Sources: DTI, Scottish Executive. Note: dates in bold are proclaimed each year. Proposed new day in italics



### Appendix 3: Public holidays in EU member states 2007

Country	Days	Country	Days	Country	Days
Austria	15	Greece	11	Portugal	13
Belgium	10	Hungary	9	Romania	5
Bulgaria	8	Ireland	10	Slovakia	13
Cyprus	12	Italy	10	Slovenia	14
Czech Republic	8	Latvia	9	Spain	16
Denmark	10	Lithuania	9	Sweden	13
Estonia	9	Luxembourg	12	Great Britain	8
Finland	15	Malta	13	Northern Ireland	10
France	11	Netherlands	10		
Germany	13	Poland	9	<i>Average</i>	<i>10.9</i>

Sources: European Trade Union Confederations, [www.startinbusiness.co.uk](http://www.startinbusiness.co.uk). Note that average is unweighted. In this calculation the UK entitlement has been counted as 8.5 days to allow for the NI arrangements.