

# NHS Scotland Volunteering Impact Series: Experiences of volunteers

*NHS Fife  
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde  
NHS Lanarkshire  
NHS Lothian  
NHS Tayside  
The State Hospital*

January 2025

**© Healthcare Improvement Scotland 2018**  
**Published January 2025**

This document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence. This allows for the copy and redistribution of this document as long as Healthcare Improvement Scotland is fully acknowledged and given credit. The material must not be remixed, transformed or built upon in any way. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**[www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org](http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org)**

# Contents

Executive Summary..... 3

Objectives and Methodology..... 6

Results: Section 1..... 7

Results: Section 2..... 21

Recommendations..... 31

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Now in its second year, the Volunteering Experiences survey was refined for 2024 with input from colleagues across five NHS boards. The survey was distributed to volunteers by each participating health board and returns were received from seven NHS boards (one of which had to be omitted as a result of data collection errors).

Using recommendations from the 2023 survey, the questionnaire was adapted to gather data on volunteer roles and included questions relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

The data set was analysed against six [Volunteering for All: National Outcomes Framework](#) principles, which formed the basis of the survey questions in section 1. In time, this approach will help us to evidence the impact of volunteering, to identify improvements and to celebrate good practice.

A total of 1,918 volunteers were invited to take the survey and 19% of volunteers (n=360) responded. Completion rates were variable as a result of one NHS board omitting the first question on volunteering roles, however questions 2-20 were completed by all participants.

## Key results

The information below summarises the key findings of the survey and outlines how the responses align with the national volunteering framework outcomes.

### Principle 1: Flexible and responsive

91% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel able to adjust their level of commitment or change their role, 95% feel able to give their time on their own terms and 97% know how they can make changes to their volunteering.

### Principle 2: Enabled and supported

98% of volunteers reported that they enjoy and feel good about their contributions. 97.5% know who to speak with to clarify their role and get support if needed. 61% of volunteers agreed that they received help with expenses, access and training. This figure represents a drop from the 85% who agreed in 2023.

### Principle 3: Sociable and connected

97% of volunteers enjoyed the experience of volunteering with NHS Scotland and feel part of something. 92% of volunteers reported that they can meet and spend time with others as part of their role. 87% of volunteers responded that they volunteered with or for people with common objectives.

## Principle 4: Valued and appreciated

94% of volunteers agreed that they are valued for what they bring and 96% feel that their contributions are appreciated. 90% can see how their volunteering makes a difference to their NHS board and 98% of respondents feel that what they do is worthwhile.

## Principle 5: Recognises diversity

There has been some movement across the diversity outcomes since last year's survey, with slightly fewer volunteers reporting that they feel volunteering is something they can be involved in (88%) and they don't feel excluded from roles (86% vs 93% in 2023). 69% of volunteers feel like their knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised. This is a significant drop from 88% in 2023

## Principle 6: Meaningful and purposeful

99.4% of volunteers surveyed feel that they are contributing to something that is important to them. This is extremely positive and represents an 8% increase on 2023's findings, where 91% agreed with this statement. 98% of volunteers feel that what they do is worthwhile and 94.8% know how they make a difference.

## What has been your favourite moment from volunteering within the last year?

90% (n=323) of volunteers provided an answer to their favourite moment from volunteering. The most cited themes were "supporting and making a difference" (n=154) "Feeling valued" (n=90) and "Joy in Connection" (n=37)

## Improvements

54% (n=194) of volunteers who participated in the survey shared their thoughts on what they felt would improve their volunteer experience. The responses were themed into 10 categories

Theme	n	Theme	n	Theme	n
Environment and Resources	43	Staff Relations	30	Increased Involvement	23
Flexibility	22	Communication	20	Volunteer Connections	19
Learning and Development	16	Recruitment and Induction	12	No improvements	6
Other	3				

## Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of volunteering with us?

42% (n=152) volunteers commented generally on their experience of volunteering with NHS Scotland, with many saying they love what they do and wish they could do more. Over 10% of

volunteers praised their volunteering team or manager. Open text answers also pointed to the well being benefits derived from volunteering, such as the comment below;

*“It has done wonders for my well being.”*

## Conclusions and recommendations

The survey findings show that, for the sample surveyed, over 90% of volunteers are satisfied with their volunteer experience and NHS Scotland are performing well against the outcome indicators for volunteering. The NHS boards who took part continue to do well in creating flexible opportunities for volunteers, with figures mirroring those of the 2023 survey. Most respondents agreed that, as volunteers, they are enabled and supported in their role.

The open text responses evidenced volunteers who were proud of the roles they performed and also demonstrated a willingness to play an active role in supporting their paid colleagues. The feedback also highlighted the impact and importance of volunteer managers, with over 10% of volunteers specifically praising their volunteer managers.

Of the NHS boards taking part in the survey, the results show that they are doing well in recognising and valuing volunteer contributions. The report did note some areas for review and the recommendations are outlined below.

1. Engagement with staff at all levels across sites to foster greater awareness and understanding of the volunteers’ roles and responsibilities and support inclusion of volunteers.
2. Consideration of how volunteers can be brought together more frequently to share experiences, skills and to socialise.
3. Feedback for volunteers which demonstrates how they make a difference to the overall work of the board as well as their immediate area.
4. Explore opportunities to increase flexibility for volunteers such as shadowing, performing dual roles and working across sites, where practicable.
5. Review placements to ensure that volunteers are matched to roles that allow them to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience.
6. Explore ways to further diversify the volunteer base to ensure that a broad range of applicants and volunteers feel that they’re part of the NHS Scotland and are representative of the community served by the site(s).

*“When we get volunteer engagement right, volunteers are more likely to feel of use rather than used”<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> [To Feel of Use Instead of Feeling Used in Volunteerism - Volunteer Commons](#)

# Objectives and Methodology

In 2023, the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme supported a team of volunteer managers to pilot a national volunteer experience survey. Many NHS boards had previously sought the views of their volunteers but it was felt that a national approach might afford volunteer managers increased capacity to undertake an annual survey whilst allowing the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme to identify themes or trends that were affecting volunteers nationally. Following the successful pilot, the decision was taken to roll the survey out to all health boards in 2024 and reformat the survey slightly to enable the collation and analysis of diversity data to understand where attentions might be focused to better represent local communities and support volunteers.

The 2024 survey was designed by a small group of staff who lead volunteering within their NHS board area, supported by the NHS Scotland Volunteering Programme. All NHS boards were invited to participate in the distribution of the survey, with seven NHS boards participating and sending the survey to all their active volunteers between June and July 2024. Healthcare Improvement Scotland then collated the data from NHS boards in September.

The survey contained two parts; Section one comprised of 20 statements, volunteers were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each using the following scale:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Section two asked open questions encouraging volunteers to share their experiences and to suggest areas for improvement. We carried out a thematic analysis of these to identify key themes for volunteers.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for NHS boards to consider at a local level, as well as recommendations on future improvement to the survey design.

## Survey limitations

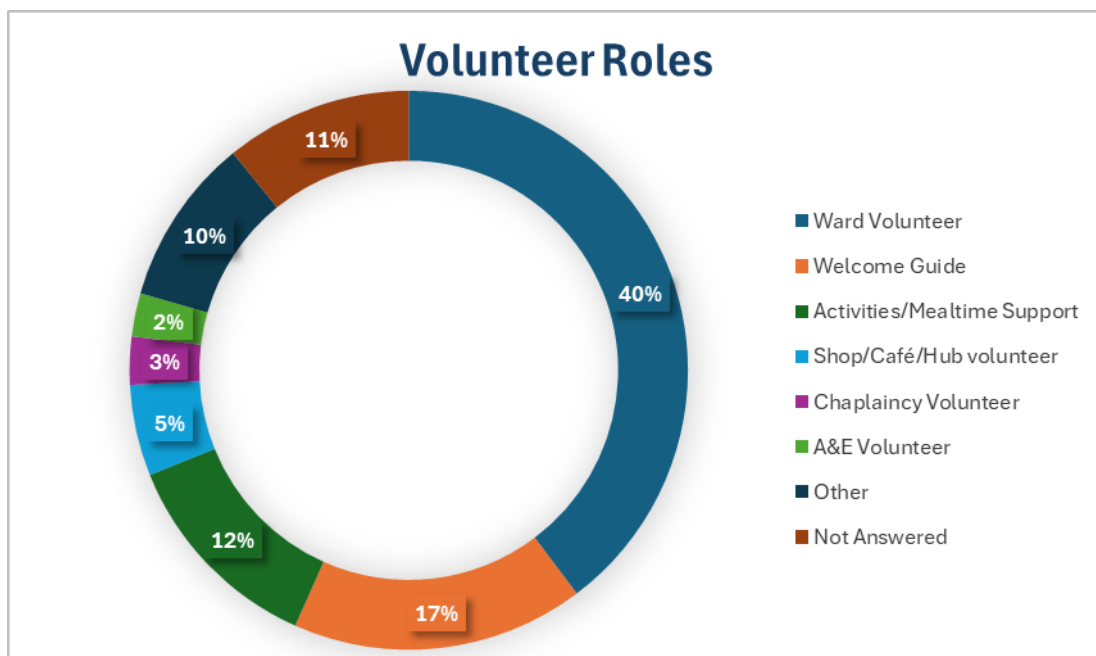
One NHS board's return had to be excluded from analysis because of data collection errors and another NHS board submitted partially completed datasets which omitted the volunteer role data. This has been accounted for in the analysis, which references responses from six NHS boards rather than seven, and recommendations follow at the end of the report to address this for future.

# Results: Section 1

A total of 1918 volunteers were invited to participate in the survey. 19% of volunteers (n=360) chose to participate in the survey and 100% of participants provided responses to questions 2-20. One NHS board omitted the first question on volunteer roles.

The chart below shows the role type of the volunteers who responded to the survey. The question was omitted from one NHS board's survey, so these have been categorised as "Not answered."

57% of respondents give their time as either ward volunteers or welcome guides and have direct patient contact on a regular basis.



## Principle 1: Flexible and responsive

Volunteers are increasingly seeking out greater flexibility in their volunteering, whether that be the flexibility in how they give their time, or flexibility in the roles they perform. The ability of NHS Scotland to offer roles that are flexible and responsive to the needs of patients, volunteers and services could be key to successfully engaging and retaining more volunteers. Furthermore, as the profile of volunteers changes, so too does their requirements, so it is worth considering this when planning volunteering strategies.

91% of volunteers who responded to the survey feel able to adjust their level of commitment or change their role, 95% feel able to give their time on their own terms and 97% know how they can make changes to their volunteering. The findings show that the NHS boards who

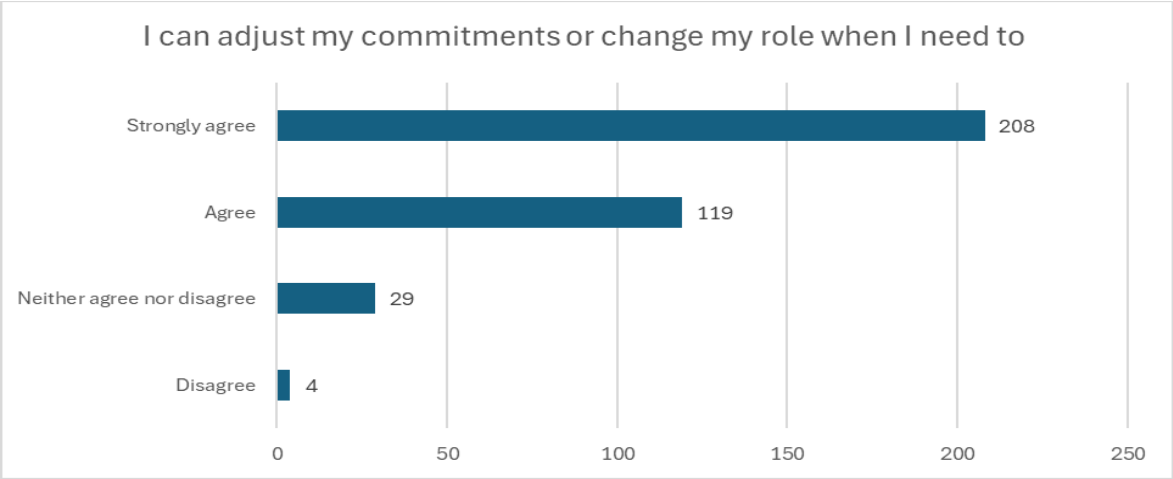


took part continue to do well in creating flexible opportunities for volunteers, as these figures mirror those of the 2023 survey.

9.7% of respondents overall cited greater flexibility as an area for improvement and this is consistent with the number of respondents to this question who neither agreed or disagreed that they could change their commitment or role. It would therefore be worth exploring volunteers' suggestions of shadowing, dual roles and working across sites/wards to offer more choice and flexibility, but which also offers real benefits to staff and patients.

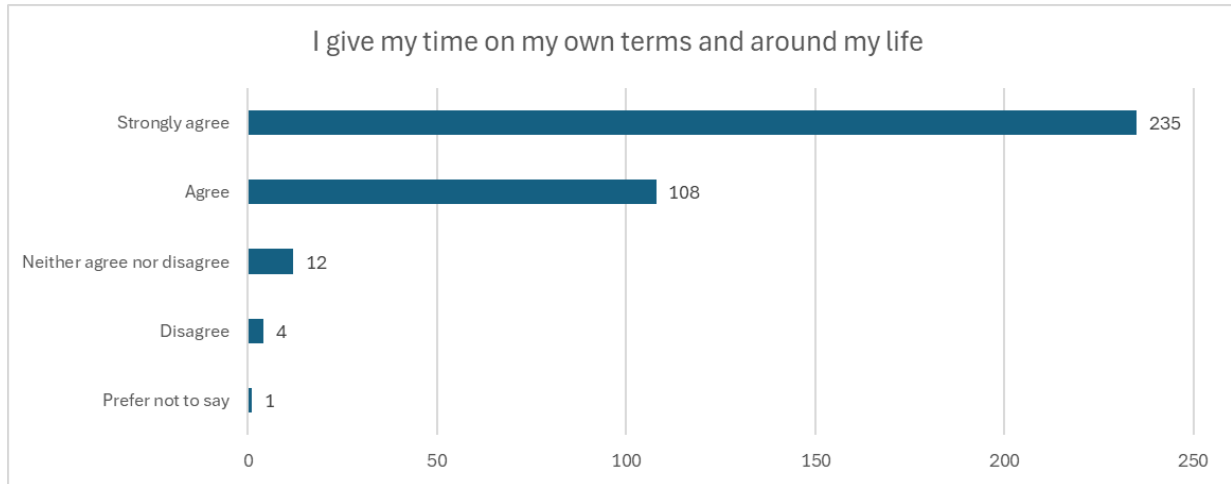
### I can adjust my commitment or change my role when I need to

- 91% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 8% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
- 1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



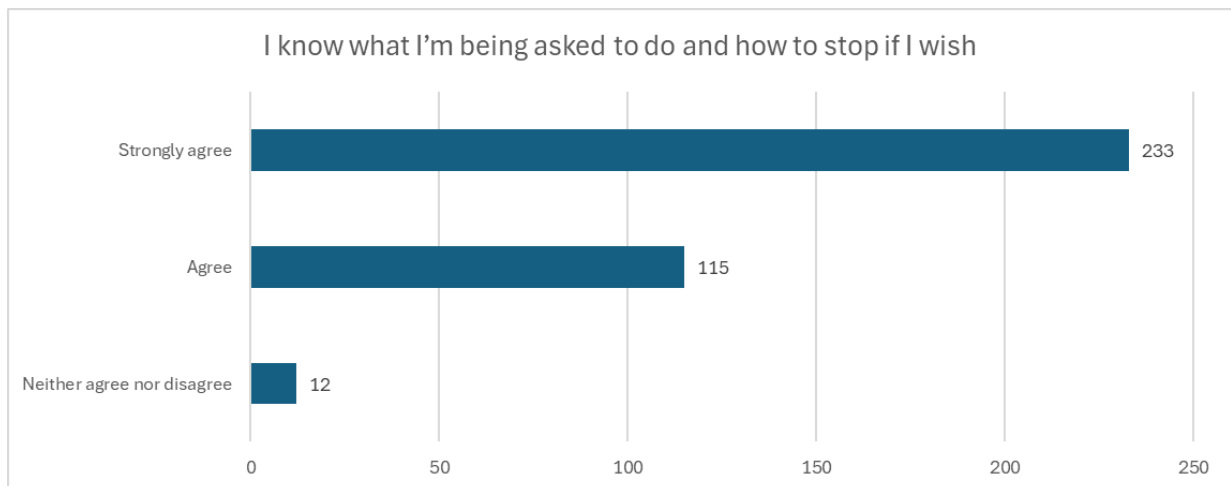
## I give my time on my own terms and around my life

- 95% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 3% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree
- 1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree
- 1% of volunteers prefer not to say



## I know what I'm being asked to do and how to pause/change/stop volunteering if I wish

- 97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed
- 3% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree



## Principle 2: Enabled and supported

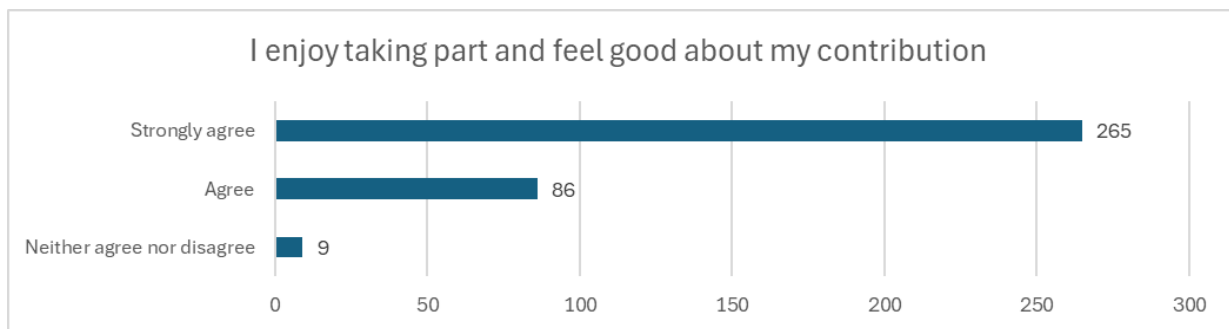
The majority of respondents agreed that, as volunteers, they are enabled and supported in their role.

98% of volunteers reported that they enjoy and feel good about their contributions. 97.5% know who to speak with to clarify their role and get support if needed. 61% of volunteers agreed that they received help with expenses, access and training. This figure represents a drop from the 85% who agreed in 2023.

The survey did not offer a “Not Applicable” option, so it is possible that those who answered “neither agree nor disagree” did so because they either did not receive help or did not require such assistance and therefore the question wasn’t relevant to them at that time.

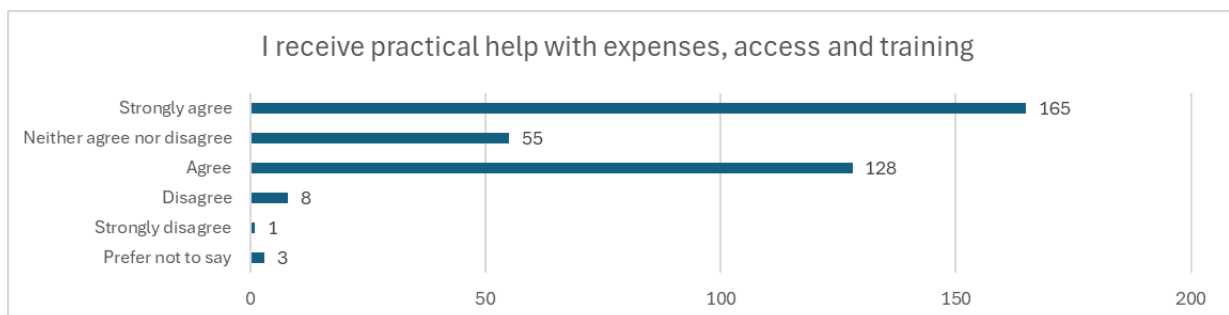
### I enjoy taking part and feel good about my contribution

98% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed  
2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree



### I receive practical help with access, training and expenses

81% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed  
15% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree  
3% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree  
1% of volunteers prefer not to say

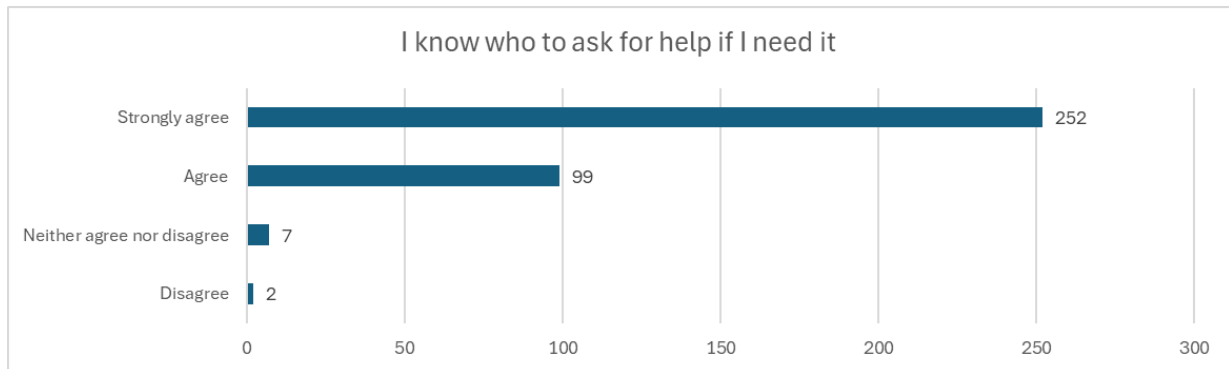


## I know who to ask for help if I need it

97.5% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.5% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

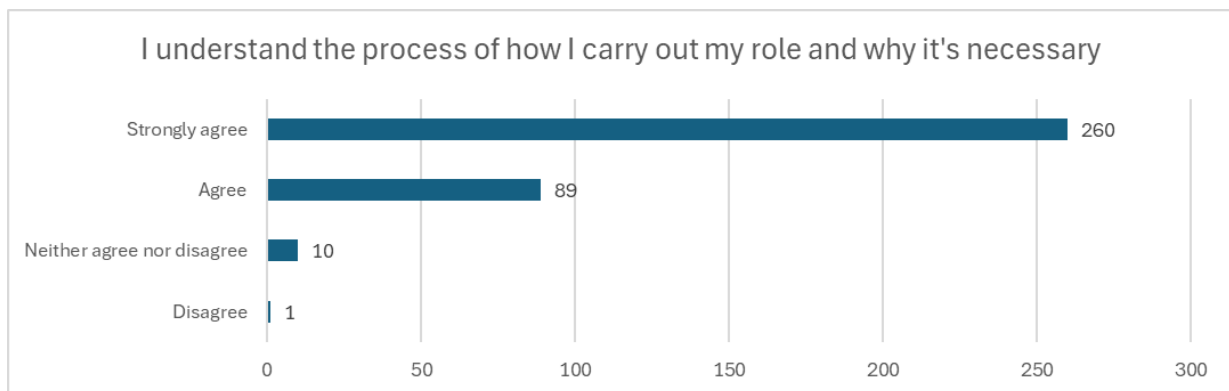


## I understand the process of how I carry out my role and why it's necessary

97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2.7% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.3% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



### Principle 3: Sociable and connected

The third outcome in Volunteering For All’s framework is concerned with the extent to which volunteering allows for socialising and connection.

Volunteers were asked about their enjoyment of volunteering; their ability to meet and spend time with others and whether or not they volunteer alongside people who share the same objectives.

97% of volunteers enjoyed the experience of volunteering with NHS Scotland and feel part of something. 92% of volunteers reported that they can meet and spend time with others as part of their role. This finding is particularly encouraging and represents a six percent increase on the 2023 survey.

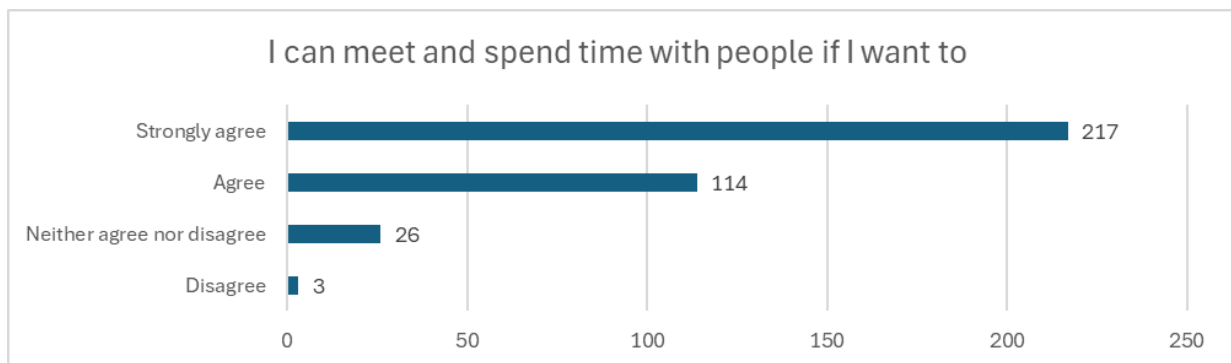
87% of volunteers responded that they volunteered with or for people with common objectives. This finding could benefit from further exploration to identify ways that NHS boards can further strengthen connections between volunteers and staff who are ultimately working to support patients

#### I can meet and spend time with people if I want to

92% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed (*increase on 88% from 2023*)

7% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



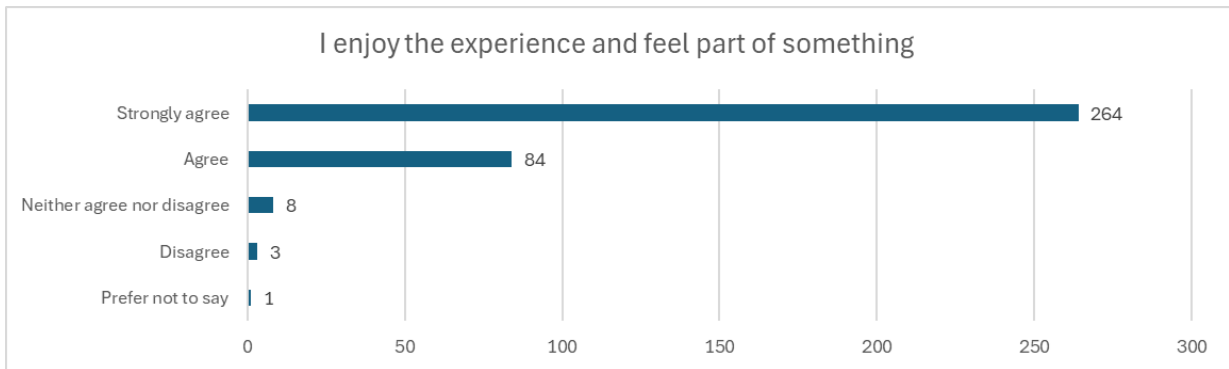
#### I enjoy the experience and feel part of something

97% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

0.8% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.2% of volunteers prefer not to say

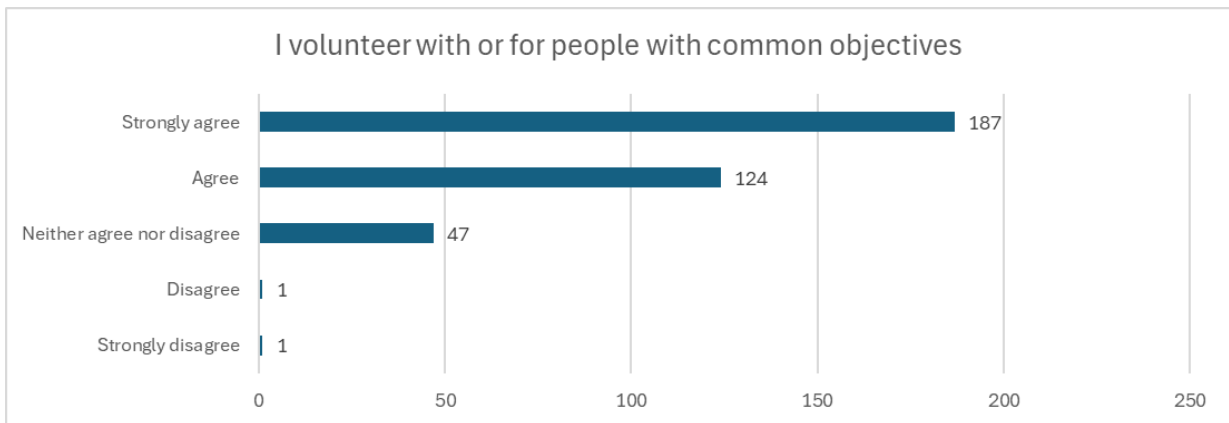


### I volunteer with or for people with common objectives

86% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

13% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



## Principle 4: Valued and appreciated

Of the NHS boards taking part in the survey, the results show that they are doing well in recognising and valuing volunteer contributions, but there is still some room for improvement, particularly with regard to demonstrating the impact that volunteers have and how that impacts the work of their NHS board overall.

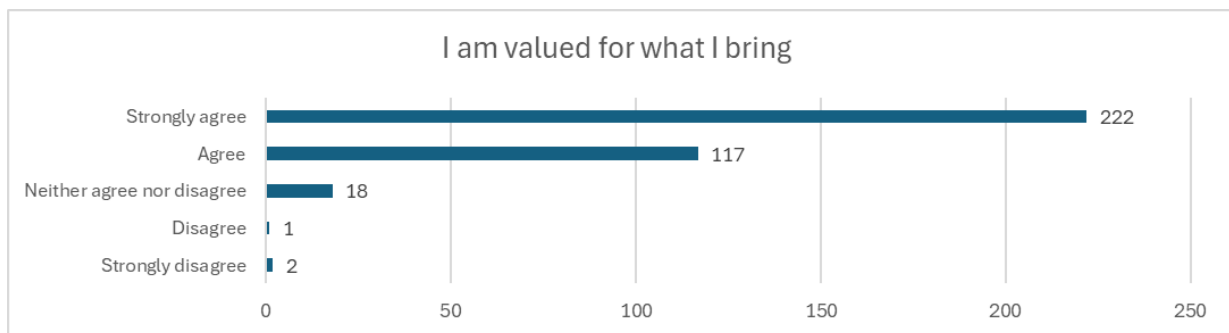
94% of volunteers agreed that they are valued for what they bring and 96% feel that their contributions are appreciated. A slightly lower percentage (90%) can see how their volunteering makes a difference to their NHS board but this doesn't seem to detract from their overall sense of purpose, where 98% of respondents feel that what they do is worthwhile.

### I am valued for what I bring

94% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

5% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

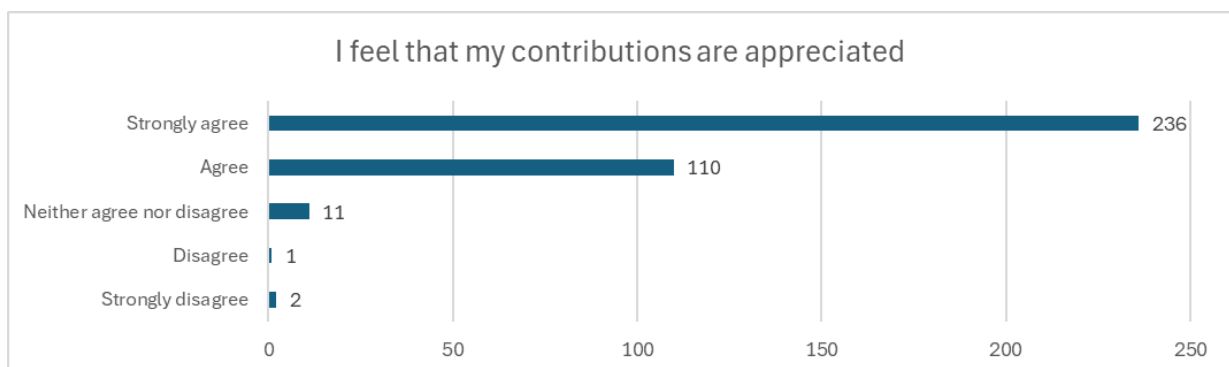


### I feel that my contributions are appreciated

96% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

3% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



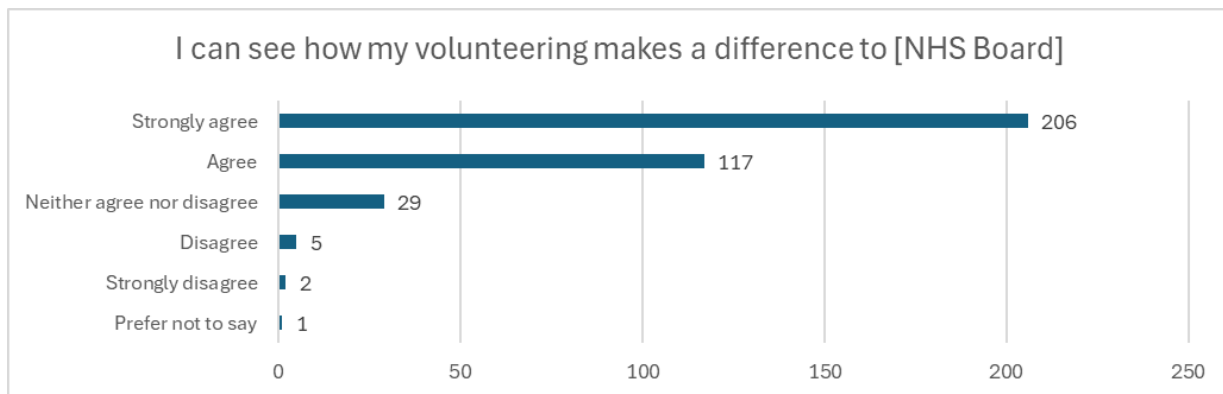
### I can see how my volunteering makes a difference to my NHS board

90% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

8% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

1.7% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

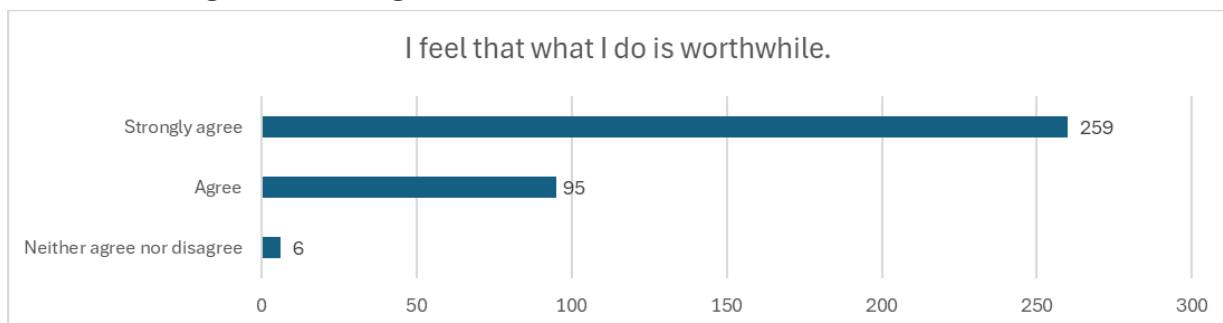
0.3% of volunteers prefer not to say



### I feel that what I do is worthwhile

98% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of neither agreed nor disagreed



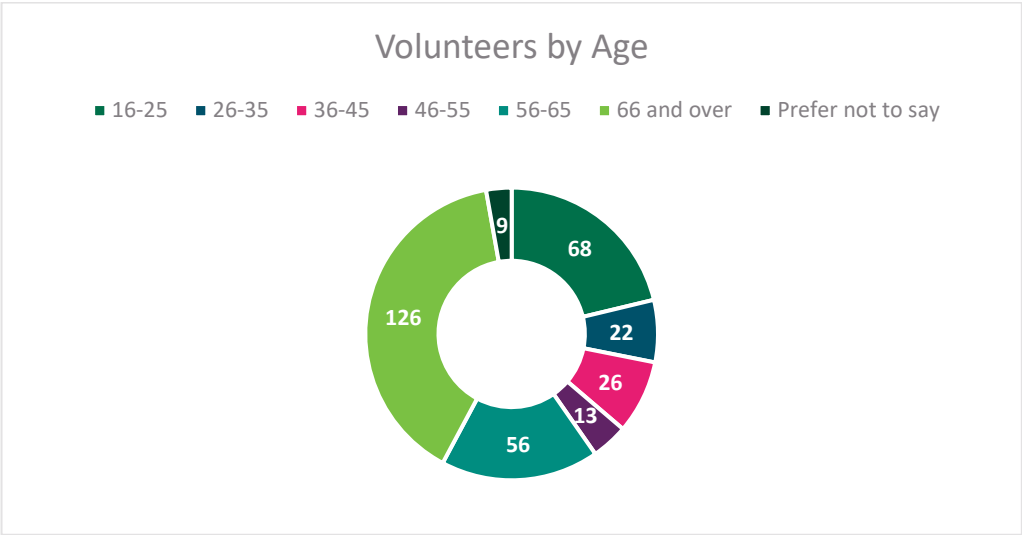


# Principle 5: Recognises diversity

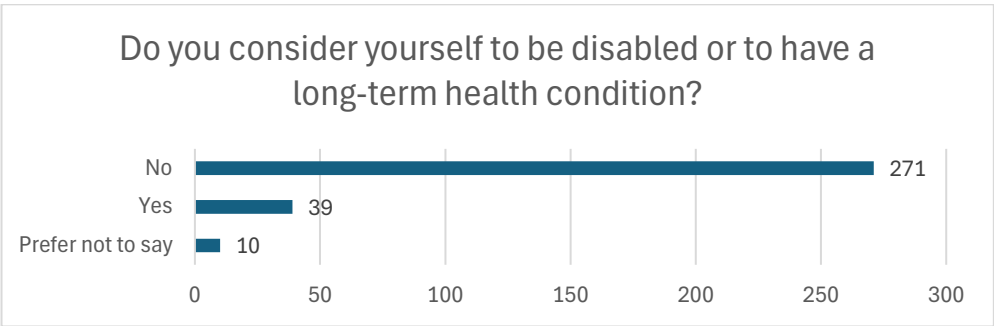
This principle seeks to ensure that organisations engage with and involve a wide range of people to volunteer and respect and reflect that diversity in their everyday practice. This year we also collected equalities monitoring data to provide depth of understanding about the diversity of volunteers.

The equalities questions were optional and not answered by some respondents. While the information below reflects a small cohort of volunteers and may not be wholly representative, it does suggest that volunteering with NHS Scotland is still largely favoured by a particular demographic, where 39% of NHS volunteers are white, straight, retired females, with no disclosed health conditions.

## Age



## Health



12.2% of respondents have a long-term health condition. Volunteering with NHS Scotland can present a way for volunteers with health conditions to support their well being while supporting others, as is evidenced by respondents' comments.

## Care Experience



2% of respondents are care experienced. By understanding if volunteers are care experienced we can work with them to offer any additional support that may be required to help them at any stage of their volunteering journey, thus removing any barriers

With regard to the statements around diversity, there has been some movement in responses since last year's survey, with slightly fewer volunteers reporting that they feel volunteering is something they can be involved in (88%) and they don't feel excluded from roles (86% vs 91% in 2023). It should also be noted that the question around involvement was reworded from the 2023 version of "As a volunteer I always feel involved."

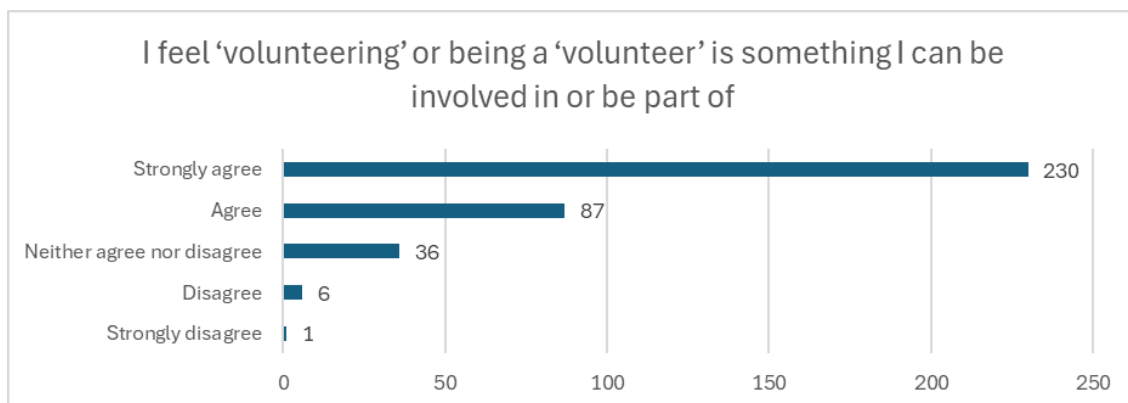
69% of volunteers feel like their knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised. This is a significant drop from 93% in 2023, and NHS boards may wish to explore this further with volunteers at a local level, in conjunction with qualitative data, as part of their improvement plans.

## I feel 'volunteering' or being a 'volunteer' is something I can be involved in or part of

88% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed (down from 93% in 2023)

10% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree (increase on 2023)



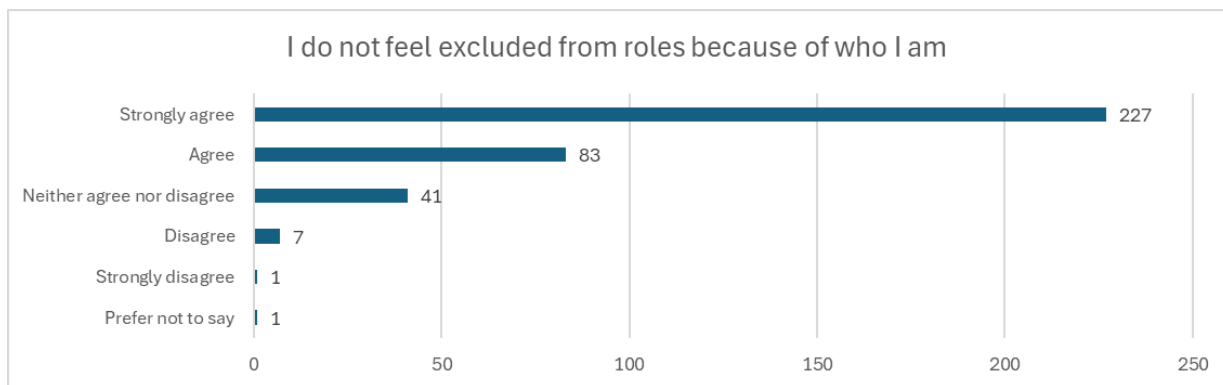
### I do not feel excluded from roles because of who I am

86% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed (down from 91%)

11.4% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

2.2% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree

0.4% of volunteers prefer not to say

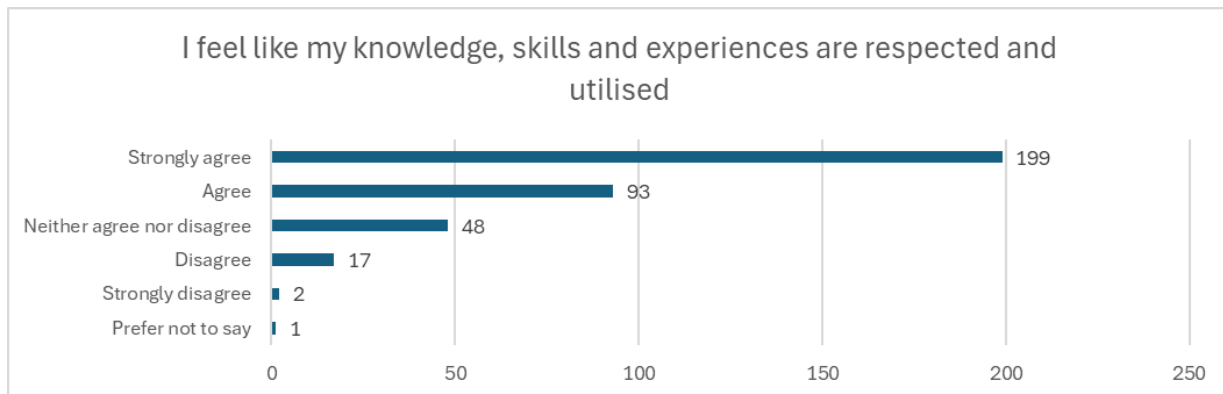


### I feel like my knowledge, skills and experiences are respected and utilised

68.7% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed (down from 93%)

25% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree (up from 5% in 2023)

5.3% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



## Principle 6: Meaningful and purposeful

At a time when organisations are finding it more difficult to recruit volunteers, the need for roles to have meaning and purpose for volunteers has never been greater.

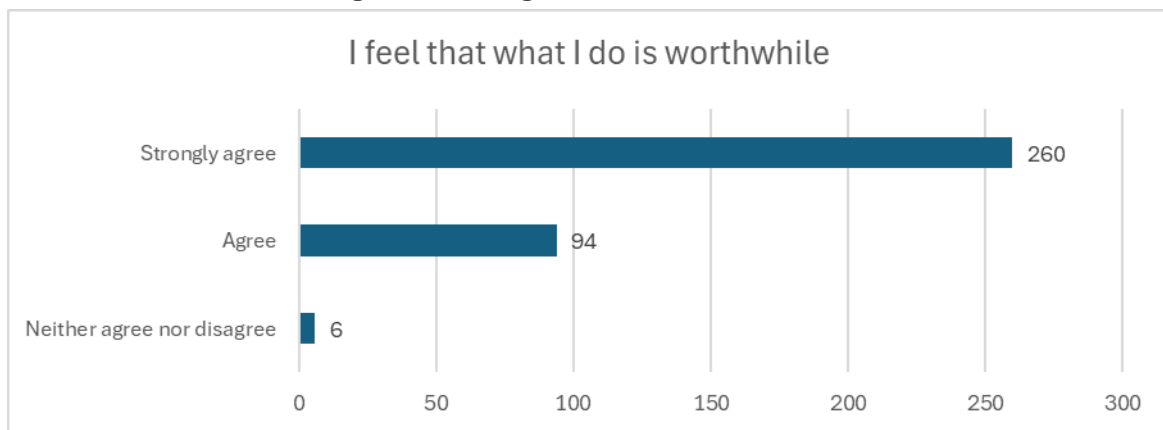
99.4% of volunteers surveyed feel that they are contributing to something that is important to them. This is extremely positive and represents an 8-point increase on 2023's findings, where 91% agreed with this statement.

98% of volunteers feel that what they do is worthwhile and 94.8% know how they make a difference. It should be highlighted that this question is almost duplication of the question relating to the difference volunteers make to their NHS board and there is some variance in the answers. Attention should be paid to this when the survey is next run, while ensuring that the overall survey remains largely the same to support year-on-year comparison.

### I feel that what I do is worthwhile

98% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

2% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

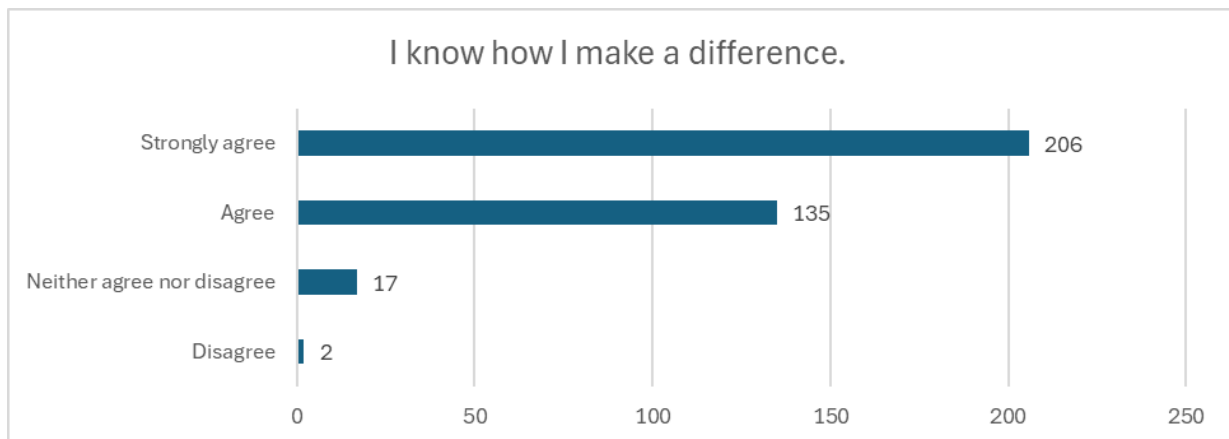


### I know how I make a difference

94.8% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

4.7% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree

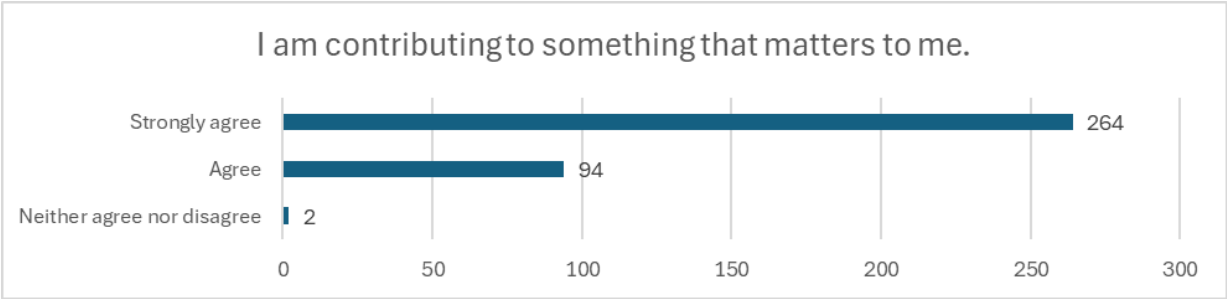
0.5% of volunteers disagree or strongly disagree



### I am contributing to something that matters to me

99.4% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed

0.6% of volunteers neither agree nor disagree



## Results: Section 2

Questions in section 2 of the survey were open ended to give volunteers the opportunity to provide feedback in their own words. The feedback provided was themed into categories.

### What has been your favourite moment from volunteering within the last year?

90% (n=323) of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question, the responses were themed into six categories. A selection of comments from each category are included to illustrate the range of comments received.

#### **Supporting and Making a Difference**

Just under 50% of Volunteers reported that their favourite moments related to times when they were supporting and making a difference for patients (n=154).

*“Meeting with Teddy, the therapeut and accompanying him and his owner around the ward. The effect he has on both patients and staff is amazing and uplifting.”*

*“There are some patients that have stayed in my ward for quite some time now so I enjoy going in to see them every week. I also assisted a patient with feeding he was non-verbal but the sweetest man to exist.”*

*“A lot of my patients are at end of life and we have some amazing, special, poignant conversations where I get them to reflect on the happiest memories they have rather than the impending death that they often know isn't far away—although I am equally happy and capable of talking about this if they bring the subject up themselves and want to talk to someone about how they are feeling etc”*

*“When the person I have been listening to asked if she could give me a hug for enabling her to feel empowered to manage her multiple and complex issues simply by listening without judgement... and encouraging her to think about her own self care.”*

*“I've enjoyed spending time with the patients and hearing about them or just making them feel more comfortable.”*

*“My favourite moment was when there were a group of patients who would meet in the social area. I would join them to either watch television or we would play dominoes. It was great to see how well they got along, and that they were able to befriend each other. I also loved how despite our ages, our abilities, etc we were all able to enjoy the simple pleasure of playing dominoes!”*

*“Seeing the smile on a face—especially patients who get no visitors. I love when their faces light up because I’m making them feel special with offering my time...I know this little bit [of] time can mean the world to someone ill, lonely and scared. I leave knowing I’ve made a difference in someone’s day.”*

*“Helping a gentleman with no English to find his clinic. We phoned his sister who could explain to me where he might be going and with patience I worked it out. He was so relieved and grateful that I didn’t give up I think”*

### **Feeling Valued**

Many volunteers cited comments relating to feeling valued and added that their favourite moment included being seen as part of the team and receiving positive feedback or thanks (n=90).

*“When a patient says with a smile ‘thank you so much for spending time chatting to me . I really appreciate it.’ And you can tell they mean it!”*

*“I have a few favourite moments; however, one sticks in my mind that a patient was getting to go home after a long recovery, she gave me a huge hug and and thank[ed] me for my help. She [said she] was crying happy tears and she would miss her cuppa and me”*

*“Feeling that the staff appreciate my contribution and see me as part of their team”*

*“On a few occasions, patients have said that by chatting to them and giving them time to listen to them has "made their day" which is all you can ask for!”*

*“Meeting people, knowing my role is appreciated. I have been accepted as one of the staff. I just love what I do”*

### **Joy In Connection**

Several volunteers noted their favourite moment involved connecting with others through their role. (n=37)

*“The 'Murmuration Walk' last summer. It brought everyone together and really made use of the Artlink gardens for the picnic.”*

*“Meeting my new volunteer colleague... who I would never have met otherwise”*

*“Just seeing smiling faces and hearing laughter in the hub.”*

*“Winning a game of Scrabble with the patient I visit! (He's very good at Scrabble)”*

### **Learning and Development**

Some volunteers noted that their favourite moment was one that taught them something or supported their own development (n=7).

*“I can feel the close interaction between nurses and patients. Although I have only been a volunteer for less than a month, it is also a good learning experience to know the scope of what I can and cannot do.”*

*“Learning new things”*

*“Knowing I had learned something new”*

*“I met and become friends with another girl with the same backgrounds as me, and the same goals for future. It gave me more self-confidence.”*

### **Relationship building with staff**

Some volunteers noted that their favourite moment was when they felt they were accepted and welcomed by paid staff (n=6)

*“Being allowed to do additional hours in the transplant ward. Working alongside the staff whom I admire greatly not just for their professionalism but also the way they go out of their way to should that they truly care for their patients.”*

*“Working collaboratively with full time staff members.”*

*“Being part of a good team”*

*“Meeting with the hospital staff and having conversations with them”*

*“Being invited to the staff's Christmas event.”*

### **The Whole Experience**

Some volunteers were unable to pinpoint a specific moment, but instead stated that they enjoyed the whole experience of volunteering (n=13)

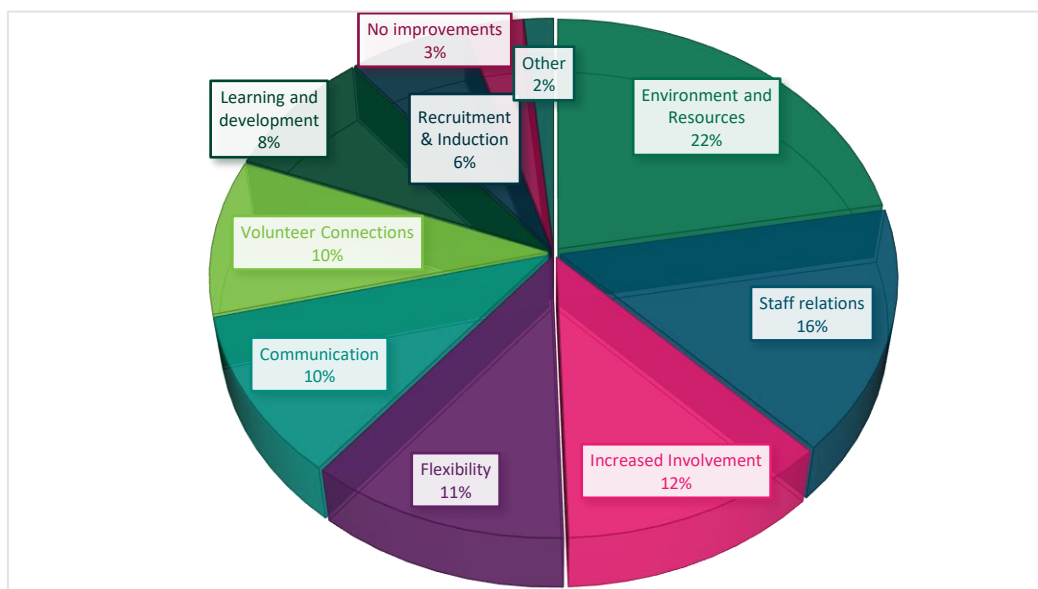
*“Enjoy every moment don't have a favourite”*

*“All good”*



## If you could improve one thing about your volunteering experience with your NHS board, what would it be?

54% of volunteers who participated in the survey responded to this question (n=194). The responses were themed into 10 categories.



A selection of comments from each category are included below:

### Environment and Resources

A number of respondents felt that changes to the hospital environment or access to resources would improve their experience of volunteering. It is worth noting that some of the improvements suggested, were previously raised in the 2023 survey (car parking, temperature and wheelchair provision) (n=43). It is important to note that these issues are not necessarily within the control of the volunteering team, and might be addressed instead by facilities and estates teams, as the issues mentioned also impact the patient and visitor experience.

*“Cups/Beakers/Jugs/Bowls/Disposable Cutlery needs to be managed better as we can run out of these items which affects the volunteer performing their role.”*

*“Being able to use a spare key for the rooms I need access to without having to constantly ask staff to borrow theirs”*

*“Not having to search for wheelchairs!”*

*“Parking at the hospital! (Though that affects patients and families more than me)”*

### Staff Relations

Just as a number of volunteers cited relationships with staff as a high point, some volunteers suggested that more could be done to build and foster connections between ward staff and volunteers. (n=30)

*“Staff are generally lovely, but sometimes don’t feel very approachable. They are very busy, but it’s nice when someone says hi or introduces themselves”*

*“Feel more integrated with clinical staff”*

*“I wish more people were aware of service we can provide”*

*“More interact from the staff at the start of the shift, just five mins to pass on any changes for the day.”*

*“More visits from Management at least 3/4 per year”*

## **Increased Involvement**

12% of volunteers reported that they'd like to make more use of their time and take on more tasks or be more involved than currently. (n=23).

*"Opportunity to be more involved"*

*"Have more responsibilities"*

*"Sometimes there isn't anything to do if all the patients are asleep or have visitors and teas and coffees have been handed out. If being a volunteer involved more roles I think that would allow me to stay busy during my shift."*

*"To be involved with more aspects of my department, which would fully utilise my previous experiences."*

*"I understand all the health and safety issues but it's frustrating that we're not allowed to touch wheelchairs or indeed offer an arm to a solitary elderly person."*

## **Flexibility**

In addition to taking on additional responsibility, 11% of volunteers felt that having more flexibility would improve their experience of volunteering: (n=22)

*"Sometimes you can run out of things to do, so maybe we could spend less time volunteering per week but do it over a longer time period."*

*"As well as having my own slot- I would be willing to be a 'supply' volunteer if a volunteer was off or on holiday. This would save the staff having to fill in for the absent volunteer."*

*"I'm getting to a stage where work commitments might change my pattern so something evening based would be cool"*

*"being able to function in more than one ward"*

*"It will be ability to pick your availability"*

## **Communication**

Improvements in communication were suggested by some volunteers across a number of topics such as changes which affect how they carry out their role, and other volunteering opportunities available within the NHS board (n=20).

*“To enhance my volunteering experience, I would suggest improving the clarity of volunteer roles, streamlining communication channels and introducing electronic onboarding processes. This could include using pictures and written objectives for each volunteer, which would help staff members become familiar with volunteers' roles and backgrounds before their shifts, facilitating smoother integration and more meaningful interactions.”*

*“Receiving any more tangible feedback that my role overall is making a difference—though appreciate this is probably impossible to quantify.”*

*“Have a list of jobs that would help a ward, rather than having to constantly seek out someone to ask them what they want done next”*

*“[staff member] used to have occasional meetings with us telling us what is happening in the hospital, helping us understand the changes and the pressures on staff and on patients ... However, I realise at the moment that there is shortage of staff and such meetings would put extra pressure on an already overworked staff. I have no desire to add to the tasks already needing to be covered by staff.”*

## **Volunteer Connections**

Connections among volunteers was flagged in the previous survey and again this year (n=19). The comments highlight a desire for volunteers to be more socially connected in their roles and to have opportunities to engage with and meet fellow volunteers.

*“It would be nice to have a little drop in area where volunteers could go on an ad hoc basis to engage with other volunteers either before or after volunteering role.”*

*“More weekly volunteers in the Artlink gardens would be welcome as there is plenty of work available.”*

*“The connections between volunteers—whilst there are socials that are organised (and the effort to organise these is greatly appreciated), perhaps there could be a WhatsApp group / teams channel for volunteers we could join? Then we could plan events there as well. I only ever really get to see other volunteers when they are shadowing me, and as some are similar ages to me I would love to be able to meet them more often and discuss our*

*experiences volunteering. It would be amazing to meet volunteers from other hospitals as well."*

*"I think it might be nice to shadow volunteers in different areas without pressure of having to commit to changing volunteer role—perhaps this is something that might be possible currently but it doesn't feel that things could be that flexible."*

*"Having volunteered for a while now, I am very happy in my role but do sometimes wonder if a change might be positive—support to take the next step would be welcomed."*

*"I do think it would be nice to work alongside other volunteers, I sometimes feel like it would be nice for the job to be more sociable."*

*"More volunteers needed ...i would do more if there was a bigger team."*

### **Learning and Development**

A proportion of volunteers responded that additional learning and development opportunities would improve their experience, either through providing more clarity or enhancing the role they already perform (n=16);

*"Have more confidence in myself, because I know I do a good job."*

*"More training at the start for communication with patients that are confused or have dementia"*

*"It is sometimes a bit difficult to understand what needs to be done, the folder is something I check every week but I find it difficult to maintain writing in the boxes as I'm not entirely sure what to write."*

*"Improve my ability to re tube hearing aids."*

*"I would like more training to help out in the ward."*

*"Maybe a bit of first aid training"*

### **Recruitment and Induction**

A few volunteers mentioned the recruitment and onboarding process would benefit from improvement, particularly in relation to the time taken to get involved (n=12).

*“A more structured set up with helping out at specific activities taking place”*

*“I think it would have been a bit more helpful to have had a buddy from the ward staff if time for them had allowed”*

*“I felt the length of time it took to complete the available training sessions and get PVG clearance, then shadowing, before starting in the volunteering experience was rather too long”*

*“Maybe, especially in the beginning, to give a sort of check in person/station to report just to get the feeling of being part of it. To take the slight awkwardness away when u start at the ward (I understand staff has enough to do)”*

### **Other comments**

A few other comments shared included those relating to sustainability, expenses and practical suggestions:

*“The reimbursement scheme. I feel that taxis taken should also be reimbursed.”*

*“Control the amount of food waste.”*

*“Slightly less emphasis by [NHS board] in frequent commendation of volunteers, in the form of Thank You letters, cards, pins, badges or similar, the provision of which at unnecessary financial outlay to [board]”*

## Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of volunteering with us?

42% (n=152) volunteers commented generally on their experience of volunteering with NHS Scotland, with many saying they love what they do and wish they could do more. Over 10% of volunteers praised their volunteering team or manager. A number of volunteers also pointed to the well-being benefits of volunteering.

*“Very rewarding, time goes by very quickly—staff are all very appreciative.”*

*“I’m really glad that there is a place for volunteers within the hospital-I think we work well within the staff structure in place. I intend to continue with my volunteer for the time being-I’m really enjoying it.”*

*“It enhances my life and good to give something back.”*

*“It’s been really eye opening, something I really enjoyed and learned a lot from.”*

*“I enjoy my role as a volunteer, I get to meet different people. I also see how hard the staff work and I am glad I can lighten the load a little for them.”*

*“I am just so grateful because it was always my dream to work for the NHS but through having my own health conditions it makes it impossible so this way I feel like I am able to give back to the NHS with my time as a way of thanking them for taking care of me when I need it. Some people would not like to work with people who are as unwell as the patients I often come into contact with but even if when I go in the next week they have passed away, I hope that the encounters we have had has made them pass away a little more peacefully and with the memories of what an amazing life they have actually led.”*

*“It has changed me as a person and I value the experience as a volunteer very much.”*

*“One of the best parts is meeting other volunteers and making new friends”*

0.6% (n=8) of volunteers who responded to this question commented on a poor experience or used the comments box to suggest further improvements. Two volunteers reported that they felt ignored by ward staff, while others referenced process changes that had impacted their role.

# Recommendations

There are six recommendations for NHS boards in areas where improvements could be made to volunteer experience:

1. Engagement with staff at all levels across sites to foster greater awareness and understanding of the volunteers' roles and responsibilities and support inclusion of volunteers.
2. Consideration of how volunteers can be brought together more frequently to share experiences, skills and to socialise.
3. Feedback for volunteers which demonstrates how they make a difference to the overall work of the board as well as their immediate area.
4. Explore opportunities to increase flexibility for volunteers such as shadowing, performing dual roles and working across sites, where practicable.
5. Review placements to ensure that volunteers are matched to roles that allow them to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience.
6. Explore ways to further diversify the volunteer base to ensure that a broad range of applicants and volunteers feel that they're part of the NHS Scotland and are representative of the community served by the site(s).

The following recommendations have also been identified which would improve the survey in its next iteration:

1. Roll out the survey slightly earlier in 2025-26 and encourage all NHS boards who involve volunteers in their work to participate.
2. Revise answer options on training, access and expenses question to include "Not Applicable" option for greater clarity.
3. Review duplicate question to identify whether the question can be removed without causing material change to survey.
4. Encourage NHS boards to distribute the same version of the survey to assist with data collection. Create a template and standard operating procedure (SOP) to support boards to edit the survey if they wish to gather local data.



Published January 2025

You can read and download this document from our website.  
We are happy to consider requests for other languages or  
formats.

Please contact our Equality and Diversity Advisor on 0141 225  
6999

or email [his.contactpublicinvolvement@nhs.scot](mailto:his.contactpublicinvolvement@nhs.scot)

## Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Edinburgh Office

Gyle Square

1 South Gyle Crescent

Edinburgh

EH12 9EB

0131 623 4300

Glasgow Office

Delta House

50 West Nile Street

Glasgow

G1 2NP

0141 225 6999

[www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org](http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org)