

Key findings

1.1. Overall response

1.1.1. There was a good response to the online survey, with 652 responses overall, including:

- **95 group** responses (19.5% of all groups)
- **21 area** responses (36% of all areas)
- **536 individual** responses

1.1.2. We spoke in more detail to:

- **49** volunteers in **discussion groups**
- **28** volunteers in individual **phone interviews**
- **77** volunteers **overall**

1.1.3. Overall, we heard from at least one volunteer in every Ramblers area.

1.2. Respondents and their activities

1.2.1. Most respondents were deeply engaged and committed volunteers. 64% held more than one role, and the average number of roles held was 2.6. Two-thirds had been volunteering for over five years.

1.2.2. The most frequently reported activities reported by **areas** were:

1. = Governance (keeping the area running smoothly, 95%)
= Websites (95%)
3. Finance (90%)
4. Member communications (76%)
5. Campaigning and media work (71%)

1.2.3. For **groups**, the most frequently reported activities were:

1. Walk leading (100%)
2. Compiling walks programmes (97%)
3. = Finance (96%)
= Governance (96%)
= Membership recruitment (96%)

1.2.4. Among individual respondents, the most frequently reported activities were walk leading, governance and administration. Volunteers in England and Wales were more likely to be involved in paths and access-related activities than those in Scotland. The top five reported activities from individuals in each country were:

England

1. Walk leader (82%)
2. Governance (52%)
3. Administration (42%)
4. Paths/access guardian (32%)
5. Member communications (31%)

Scotland

1. Walk leader (92%)
2. Governance (68%)
3. Walks organising (46%)
4. Administration (34%)
5. Member communications (32%)

Wales

1. Walk leader (78%)
2. Governance (73%)
3. Path maintenance helper (48%)
4. Administration (45%)
5. Paths/access guardian (35%)

1.3. IT use

- 1.3.1. Windows equipment is ubiquitous among our respondents. Every group or area that responded used a Windows laptop or desktop, and 87% of individuals said they used them. The most popular item of Apple equipment was a tablet.
- 1.3.2. The main software applications used by volunteers are Microsoft Word and Excel. These two applications are used by over 95% of groups and areas. Other applications are a long way behind, though it's notable that 14% of groups and areas and 7.5% of individuals reported using free productivity software like Apache OpenOffice.
- 1.3.3. Over 80% of areas and groups are maintaining some sort of database, and the most frequently reported reason for doing this is to manage emails and other information related to members and other contacts.
- 1.3.4. Group and area spending on IT is very low. Only 35 of the groups and areas responding (30%) reported any spending at all, suggesting an annual spend overall of £35 per group or area.
- 1.3.5. Around half of groups and areas had a separate website hosted through Ramblers-Webs, and only 13% exclusively used their page on the main Ramblers site.
- 1.3.6. 75% of groups and areas always or sometimes used generic email addresses but these may be restricted to key officers, as over half of individual respondents said they never used them.
- 1.3.7. Respondents report high competence in using IT to support their volunteering, with over 40% of groups and almost three-quarters of individuals reporting the highest level of competence. But 30% of groups reported they depended on a single expert, and several respondents included cautions in the free text fields about perceived low levels of IT competency and access among the wider membership.
- 1.3.8. Three quarters of respondents didn't think it would be useful for Ramblers to supply computer equipment, though some suggested funded software would be more helpful.

1.4. Existing systems and resources

- 1.4.1. The Group Walks and Events Manager (GWEM), membership reports and volunteer development days/roadshows were identified as the most helpful resources provided centrally, with GWEM scoring almost 80% in terms of helpfulness among groups and areas and 60% among individuals.
- 1.4.2. Among the systems seen as least helpful were the various iterations of Pathwatch, which was seen as a good idea in principle but in need of more effective implementation. Even so, resources were much more likely to be identified as helpful than unhelpful: the highest negative ratings from groups and areas were for Pathwatch data reports (25% unhelpful/very unhelpful) and the Pathwatch app (20%), and from individuals, the Pathwatch app (12%).
- 1.4.3. The top five most helpful toolkits were:
 1. Area and group web pages (54%)
 2. Group Walks and Events Manager (GWEM, 44%)
 3. Walk leader (42%)
 4. Insurance (39%)
 5. = Volunteer roles (38%, 9% very helpful)
= Ramblers routes (38%, though only 7% very helpful)
- 1.4.4. Though few resources are viewed as especially unhelpful, the survey revealed there is a much bigger problem with the overall low level of awareness and lack of use of many of the resources provided by the Ramblers. Don't know scores exceeded 75% in some cases and over 85% when combined with Neither helpful nor unhelpful scores. Only six toolkits scored under 50% for Don't know. Several respondents commented that the survey had brought resources to their attention for the first time.
- 1.4.5. Aside from Facebook, which was found at least helpful by 46% of groups and areas and 32% of individuals, social networking systems don't yet appear to be in widespread use among Ramblers groups and areas. Respondents were more likely to find online route planning and council footpath systems of use than services like Twitter or Pinterest. Against this, there was a recognition that more widespread use of social networking might be of benefit, with 43% of individuals who responded to the relevant question saying they should probably make more use of Facebook, Twitter or social media in general.
- 1.4.6. Groups and areas currently draw on very little external training or support – the exception was first aid training, which 65% of responding groups and areas have used at least occasionally.
- 1.4.7. Groups and areas were most likely to name membership reports (29%) and GWEM (26%) as an indispensable resource, while individuals overwhelmingly favoured GWEM (22%), which scored almost double among them than membership reports. But a significant number considered nothing provided by the Ramblers was indispensable to their volunteering activities, including 11% of individuals who responded to this question.
- 1.4.8. Individual volunteers are most likely to contact other volunteers for help and advice, while groups and areas are most likely to contact staff. Both sets of

respondents would do this before looking at the Volunteer zone on the website.

1.5. Future support

- 1.5.1. The ability to communicate with members by email was widely emphasised as the most pressing need for future development, followed by improvements to systems for managing member information. 74% of groups and areas and 60% of individuals said improved member communications would be at least helpful. This was emphasised too in free text comments and in other interactions.
- 1.5.2. Among other helpful future developments were improved support for publicity and social media (68% of groups and areas), and a system for managing path problems (64% of groups and areas, 58% of individuals).
- 1.5.3. By far the greatest demand for training is around practical skills related to group walks: leadership, navigation and first aid. These three decisively topped the ratings in slightly varying order for both groups and areas and individuals, across all three countries. Other popular training topics were volunteer recruitment and paths/access

1.6. Other emerging themes

- 1.6.1. The research revealed a great diversity of ways of working across the Ramblers, with numerous local systems devised to accomplish various tasks or to overcome problems where nationally-resourced solutions aren't available.
- 1.6.2. Considerable concern was expressed by volunteers around communications within the Ramblers, at all levels and in all directions. This includes the effective cascading of information locally, the need to feed information back up the chain, and the need to communicate sideways, exchanging information and best practice between volunteers in different locations. There is a widely-reported perception that many groups, volunteers and individual members don't understand the wider mission of the Ramblers, that groups in particular don't understand the purpose of areas, and that staff and central decision-makers don't understand sufficiently how local volunteers work.
- 1.6.3. Path maintenance work was seen as a positive development, deserving of more support, though with a recognition that the conditions under which it takes place vary considerably from one local authority to another.
- 1.6.4. There were several comments about staff focus and location, with suggestions that staff should be regionally based with a brief to support local volunteers across a range of activities as a 'one stop shop', or at least should be assigned to specific named areas.
- 1.6.5. Treasurers seemed generally happy with the resources and support they received, although there were suggestions for improving the annual return, for example by introducing the ability to produce periodic management accounting reports.

1.7. England, Scotland and Wales

- 1.7.1. Volunteers across Great Britain made their views known through the course of this research. Although the number of survey responses from Scotland and Wales was lower than from England, and with very few groups and areas responding from Scotland, we received a representative response from individuals. 51 of the 536 individual responses were from Scotland and 40 from Wales, a good reflection of the distribution of Ramblers membership and sufficient to allow a meaningful analysis by country. We also ensured that we talked to volunteers from across Great Britain during the face-to-face work, including discussion groups in Cardiff and Edinburgh.
- 1.7.2. Analysis showed there were no dramatic differences between the responses from England, Scotland and Wales. IT use seemed relatively uniform throughout all three countries. The different legal and institutional context around walking infrastructure in Scotland emerged in the lower priority given by volunteers there to specific Public Rights of Way-related resources, as can be seen in some of the figures above.
- 1.7.3. There was also some additional enthusiasm in Scotland for group walk-related training, as can be seen by comparing the most popular overall choices of topic for future training to the responses from Scotland only.

Great Britain

1. First aid (12%)
2. Navigation (10.5%)
3. Walk leading (10%)
4. Paths/access (9%)
5. Volunteer recruitment (7%)

Scotland

1. = Navigation (18%)
= Walk leading (18%)
3. First aid (13%)
4. Path maintenance (6%)
5. = Routes (5%)
= Volunteer recruitment (5%)
= Volunteer support (5%)

If you would like any further information about the findings, please contact Leila, development manager via volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com.