



THE JOY OF VOLUNTEERING

Gerald Russell, ICAEW president and retired Ernst & Young partner, has in his time dug gardens for old people and painted family centres. Now a trustee of Action for Children, dealing with supply chains, contract margins and pensions, he says: 'This is meat and drink to an ACA but a nightmare for many others in a complex financial world.'

It's about to get more complex. Squeezed by government cuts (23,000 voluntary organisations in the UK rely on local government funding for more than half their income) and recessionary effects on giving, charities also face increased demand for their services. Volunteers will be more essential than ever.

Currently, some 17,000 ICAEW members have indicated they volunteer their time and expertise. While the figure may be conservative, for Andrew Hind, head of the Charity Commission and an ICAEW member, that still leaves an awful lot of untapped expertise. His vision is that 'every member of the ICAEW will volunteer in charity work', ideally on a board as a trustee since they drive a charity's strategic direction. Russell concurs: 'As a profession, what we do comes out of the wheels of trade and the economy. You have to look after those who fall by the wayside as a result of those wheels.'

BROAD ROLES

There is a good fit, Hind points out, between the 134,000 membership and the 180,000 registered charities in England and Wales, more than half of which have incomes under £10,000 a year. 'Chartered accountants will find they can make a contribution in how meetings are run, how decisions are shaped, how you match priorities to a strategic framework. These are all things that ACAs are used to doing.'

The majority of voluntary positions held by ICAEW members are as treasurers, trustees, non-executives and school governors. But as Anne Davis, acting ICAEW head of charities and the voluntary sector, is keen to highlight, the

opportunities are not only limited to financial roles.

'There is a vast range of voluntary opportunities out there,' she says. 'The sector doesn't just need bookkeeping, auditing and internal control, but also leadership, fund raising and service provision expertise. Traditionally, chartered accountants may have thought they would have to take up treasurer roles, but they are well-placed to meet many of these other needs.'

Magistrates, local councillors, scout leaders, coastguards, sports coaches and church elders are examples of alternative volunteer positions. And as the profile of Leanne Christmas – captain in the Territorial Army in Afghanistan – shows (see p98), the range is broader still.

WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF IT?

'People who are not afraid of numbers and budgets are highly sought-after and valued by charities,' says Sarah King, chief executive of Reach, a charity that promotes volunteer senior and skilled roles, including online through the ICAEW jobs portal.

The rewards are twofold: career development and personal satisfaction.

'A charity board role is more significant and often far more exciting than many people imagine,' says King. 'By being part of a great organisation and an effective board, trustees can help bring about significant change, improve people's lives and see their time and skills make that difference we all love to see.' And, as Hind points out: 'Even finance or other directors may not have a lot of experience in a non-executive setting.'

In the satisfaction stakes, for Russell, it's been all about families: 'As a volunteer dealing with finances, you don't always see the coalface. But when you do eventually see kids and their mentors and parents together about something you've been part of, then you realise the effect: it makes you proud to have contributed.'

MANY
CHARTERED
ACCOUNTANTS
VOLUNTEER TO
SUPPORT LOCAL
COMMUNITIES
AND CHARITIES.
BUT LOTS MORE
ARE NEEDED

HELP RAISE PERSONAL FINANCE KNOW-HOW

With the nation's personal debt at record levels (£1,460bn according to money education charity Credit Action), one of the most obvious and, arguably, urgent areas where members can pass on their skills and experience is in personal financial management.

Rebecca Hewitt, manager of the ICAEW financial capability programme, says this initiative has worked since 2008 to encourage members to act as mentors to school children on financial issues and, more recently, has turned its attention to reaching our most vulnerable low-income groups.

For the past year, volunteers from Grant Thornton have been working in partnership with the institute and with the Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association to identify the most pressing financial issues and the individuals in most need of support on debt and other money matters. Volunteers and the Poplar community leaders recruited local young people to go out into community groups and work with residents to pinpoint the greatest problem areas. The idea is that they will then liaise with the volunteers to develop an online learning tool that will help people with debt management problems and other financial challenges.

Harriet Morris-Sloane, an executive in financial management and effectiveness at Grant Thornton and a volunteer on the programme, says the initiative



has helped her use her skills in a much broader context. 'It's early days, but this is a great opportunity to be able to do something that makes a difference to the everyday lives of people outside work. It has been a chance to meet people I wouldn't otherwise meet in a work context.'

For details, or to volunteer, visit www.icaew.com/financialcapability

VOLUNTEER FOR AN ACTIVE RETIREMENT



'Our members are highly qualified and respected professionals,' says Nikki Campbell-Gumb, ICAEW development manager in member services. 'Changing from this to full retirement can sometimes be a massive culture shock.'

Campbell-Gumb develops support programmes for members planning or already in retirement. Around 41,000 institute members are 55 years or over and are likely to be considering sowing the seeds for an active retirement. This may entail scaling back on work activities, investigating a portfolio career or introducing voluntary work.

The ICAEW 'rethinking retirement' initiative helps members with the transition into retirement from a financial, professional and lifestyle perspective – and

volunteering provides retired or semi-retired members with opportunities to continue to utilise their professional skills. Few of them seem to relish the prospect of an inactive retirement. In a poll of 100 members at a recent event, only 25% answered 'no' to the question 'do you plan to continue working in your retirement?', with 40% planning a retirement with some paid work and 35% with mainly voluntary work.

Volunteering is also worth considering by those who have taken a career break and want to gain broader experience to re-enter the world of work. Rhonda Martin, development manager for the

institute's Narrowing the Gap programme, says: 'When we put on our events for career-breakers and those preparing to return to work, we encourage delegates to consider the benefits of volunteering as a way to grow their confidence, create new contacts and networks, develop new skills and also keep up to date on IT and technical skills.'

'We also advise that volunteering demonstrates a proactive and positive attitude, which all goes towards securing interviews and new employment.'

In support of the Charity Commission's Trustees' Week, the ICAEW will host a 'Volunteering in Retirement' event in Chartered Accountants' Hall on 26 October 2010.

For details, visit www.icaew.com/retirement

Charity jobs and volunteer positions are available at www.icaewjobs.com

Details of the Narrowing the Gap programme are at www.icaew.com/narrowingthegap

Details of the ICAEW Charity and Voluntary Sector Group are at www.icaew.com/charity. The group's annual conference will be on 16 November (London) and 23 November (Manchester). Industry experts from the Charities Aid Foundation, CIPFA, the Charity Commission and the Charity Tribunal will provide essential updates. Register or find full details at www.icaew.com/charity2010