

Volunteer policy

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1. Introduction

The University has an ongoing commitment to public and community engagement. Volunteering programmes can promote public engagement and widen access, increase depth of participation, promote diversity and equality, and promote social outcomes such as well-being.

Volunteers make a significant contribution to the University. We recognise that it is important for volunteers to feel supported and appreciated, that their time is well spent, and that they work in a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff in a mutually beneficial way.

2. Definition

The [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#) (NCVO) defines volunteers in this way:

Volunteers give time, carrying out activities that aim to benefit community or society. Volunteers are unpaid and choose how they wish to give their time.

NB Helping close friends or relatives does not count as volunteering.

The University uses volunteers to add value to its core activities and promote public engagement and **not** as a replacement for paid staff.

3. Volunteer status

Volunteers are not employees, casual workers, interns, or consultants. Nor are they “workers” entitled to receive statutory benefits. They do not have a contract of employment, contract for services, or letter of engagement and are not paid a salary or fee. They may receive money for actual receipted expenses incurred during the undertaking of their voluntary role (see section 9 below) and they may receive training to improve their ability to carry out their voluntary role, but they receive no other benefits.

Trainees and participants in work experience schemes do not count as volunteers.

Volunteer arrangements are by their nature flexible, the time the volunteer offers is flexible and subject to change. Volunteers have the ability to refuse tasks and to choose when to work. The University does not intend to create legally binding relations with its volunteers, who should be treated in accordance with the terms of this policy and the volunteer letter (see section 7 below).

Volunteers should be managed differently to employees and failure to treat volunteers in accordance with their volunteer status may create tax and legal complications. You should take advice from your HR Business Partner if you have any questions on this issue.

4. Equality and diversity

The University is committed to ensuring equality of access to volunteering opportunities and equality of treatment for its volunteers in all of its relevant policies and practices. No volunteer will be treated less favourably than another because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, or sexual orientation.

The University seeks to recruit volunteers from all areas of the community in order to develop a diverse volunteer-base. It is committed to developing an environment in which different ideas, abilities, and cultures are valued and where people of various backgrounds are able to participate.

Because of health and safety and insurance considerations the University does not recruit volunteers below the age of 16 years.

5. Recruitment

Draw up role descriptions before starting to recruit volunteers, and make sure that volunteer roles are clearly differentiated from the roles that paid staff undertake. The role description should explain informally the knowledge and skills needed for the role, its main tasks, and the experience it will offer the volunteer.

Volunteers may be recruited through advertisements on departmental websites or in newsletters, or by outreach events or volunteer fairs.

Anyone wishing to apply for a volunteer role should be asked to:

- complete an expression of interest form with the name and contact details of two referees who are not family members and who have known them for at least one year;
- attend a structured discussion;
- provide proof of their identity and address (there is no need to undertake a formal right to work check for volunteers).

References should be taken up and documents should be checked **before** the volunteer starts any activities.

Sometimes members of paid staff wish to volunteer for their department or another one within the University. Care must be taken to avoid problems arising from any confusion of the two roles, or in managing any consequences of misconduct. The volunteer role should be substantially different to the paid role and departments should consult their HR Business Partner before taking an employee as a volunteer. The [NCVO website](#) has useful guidance on this issue.

In order to comply with Data Protection requirements, departments are asked to ensure that they retain volunteer records for the time periods indicated for staff, but for no longer.

6. Additional checks

If a volunteer will be working with children (under 18s) and/or “at risk “ adults, the department and the volunteer must make sure that they fully comply with the University’s [Safeguarding Code of Practice](#). For regulated activity with children or adults at risk Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be made through the [University’s Security Services](#) (OUSS).

Some potential volunteers may have been barred from working with children or adults at risk. It would be a criminal offence for the University to allow a barred individual to work with such a group in a regulated activity.

Volunteers should not be left unsupervised when they are conducting activities with children or adults at risk, unless they have been DBS checked. If volunteers have ongoing supervision by a member of staff who is in regulated activity and who has been DBS checked, and the supervision is reasonable in all circumstances to ensure the protection of children or adults at risk, then the volunteers are not in regulated activity.

7. Volunteer letter

Once a volunteer has been recruited they should be issued with the role description and a volunteer letter. The volunteer letter outlines the nature and purpose of the voluntary work, once the days

and the hours when the volunteer is available have been agreed. It should indicate the start date and if there is to be a settling-in or review period.

The volunteer will need to know:

- if there is an induction and if any training will be provided for the volunteer role;
- the name of the person to whom the volunteer is responsible and who will provide support;
- if they will be provided with any reimbursable expenses (incurred as part of their volunteer role) upon proof of expenditure;
- that they will be covered by the University's insurance (drivers using their cars in connection with their voluntary work must inform their own insurance company to ensure adequate and continued cover);
- that they will be treated with respect and in line with the University's policies on e.g. equal opportunities, and health and safety;
- that the department will provide appropriate facilities, equipment, and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles;
- the remedy if they have a problem or complaint.

The department will need assurance:

- that the volunteer will usually attend at the times agreed or inform the organisation if this is not possible; and
- that the volunteer will abide by the University's objectives and its equal opportunities, health and safety, confidentiality, conflict of interest, intellectual property, information security and other relevant policies.

The volunteer letter will record what information they will receive, e.g. role description, relevant policies and procedures, and a volunteer information sheet which provides guidelines for their volunteering. The volunteer letter should indicate that no contract of employment is intended, and the expectations are binding in honour only. A copy of the volunteer letter will be kept in the volunteer's file. The volunteer role should be reviewed at least once a year with the volunteer's supervisor.

In order that the University will have ownership of any material produced by the volunteer, the volunteer, if appropriate, should be asked to sign a separate document containing an IP clause or copyright assignment. A template form of undertaking is provided.

8. Supervision

A supervisor should be appointed who will be responsible for providing regular support and supervision to the volunteer.

A review meeting between the volunteer and their appointed supervisor should be held at the end of any settling-in period to ensure that both parties are satisfied with the arrangement. It is the University's responsibility to ensure the competency of all its volunteers and the frequency, duration

and format of this support, supervision, and review will be agreed between the volunteer and their supervisor.

The volunteer's supervisor will also deal with complaints about the volunteers or their work, or complaints made by volunteers. Unfortunately, some circumstances may arise where it will not be possible to continue with the volunteering arrangement. In this case the supervisor will end the volunteering placement.

9. Induction and role-related training

Every volunteer should receive an induction when they start their role. The induction should provide background information on the department and the University; explain any relevant procedures; describe the volunteer role in relation to the work team and outline how the volunteer will be supported. It should outline the health and safety policy, and any other policies that will relate to the volunteer, e.g. data protection, security, information security or payment of expenses, etc. NB The University is jointly responsible with volunteers for their health and safety. The University is committed to improving the effectiveness of volunteers, and they may choose to attend any in-house training course relevant to their voluntary work, subject to the approval of their supervisor.

10. University cards

At the discretion of the department and according to operational requirements, the University Card Office may issue volunteers with 'Cardholder' University cards. This will determine their access to limited IT resources via Single Sign On; provide identification; and allow access to designated buildings. Cardholder cards do not give entitlement to a mailbox on the nexus system, but they entitle volunteers to have mail delivered to their home email address. The supervisor should advise the registration team at IT Services of the volunteer's home email address so that they can set up the routing. Cardholder cards do not entitle volunteers to discount at University retail outlets, or subsidised access to sports facilities or to make use of the University Club. In the interest of security, it is recommended that the University card should remain within the department's premises at all times.

11. Expenses

Volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of volunteering, but they must only receive reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses that have been incurred as part of the volunteer role and these must be evidenced by receipts. Volunteers should never receive payments of any nature which are in reality payment for work. Typical expenses that the department may choose to reimburse upon production of receipts include:

- travel to and from the department (or wherever the voluntary work is taking place);
- travel costs incurred while volunteering;
- the cost to a volunteer of using their own vehicle for volunteer duties (mileage rates are set centrally);

- meals taken while volunteering; or
- post and telephone costs involved while volunteering.

NB If volunteers were to receive more than out-of-pocket expenses the University would need to review their status as volunteers and complete annual notifications to HM Revenue and Customs of reimbursement payments for expenses and any other benefits. Any payments or benefits other than genuine expenses would be subject to tax and national insurance. These volunteers would also be liable for tax on any expenses given to cover travel to and from home, meals taken while volunteering, etc.

For advice on tax matters relating to volunteers please contact the [Payroll team](#).

12. Insurance

Public liability insurance provides the University and its volunteers with a degree of financial protection in respect of claims made against them by third parties for compensation following negligent acts by volunteers arising in the course of their voluntary assistance.

A volunteer is deemed to be someone who is not an employee and not receiving remuneration for their work with the University (either from the University or any other organization) and who is assisting the University in connection with its usual activities.

To minimise the risk of claims arising and to protect the individuals concerned, and their colleagues, the University should provide direction and training to volunteers appropriate to and commensurate with the activities undertaken by each. Where necessary references and police /DBS checks should also be taken up prior to voluntary assistance commencing. It is the University's responsibility to ensure the competency of all volunteers. Regular performance reviews and risk assessments should be undertaken, paying particular care to match duties with the individual's ability to perform the tasks with appropriate action being taken to refresh volunteers' skills and competencies where this is deemed necessary.

Volunteers must be under the complete direction and control of the University at all times. Levels of supervision will depend on the competency of the volunteer and the activity involved.

13. Data protection

The University has the same data protection obligation to volunteers that we have to employees and information about volunteers will be stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and associated legislation and the University's [data protection policy](#).

14. Giving references for volunteers

Records should be kept of the work done by volunteers, to enable their involvement to be

monitored effectively. The supervisor may write references for volunteers, detailing the department, the role, and number of voluntary hours undertaken. More [detailed advice on giving references](#) is also available.