Volunteer Policy

Of

Open University Students Association

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Due for Renewal: 14 February 2020

Review

The Volunteer Policy will be reviewed every two years by the Head of Volunteering, Deputy President and VP Administration. Any Major revisions to this policy will then be approved by the Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees.

Contacts

The Volunteering team: oustudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk
The OU Students Association mission

To encourage a vibrant and active student community with open access and equal opportunity, to which all OU students feel a sense of belonging and where they are able to positively influence the student experience and engage and support each other.

In creating a vibrant and active student community, the Volunteer team offers a range of opportunities for students to meet fellow students whilst gaining experience and skills volunteering for causes that are important to them. The Association believes in ensuring these opportunities are open to all, and therefore works hard to find and create accessible roles across the UK. We commit to explore ways that students can volunteer from home and participate in micro-volunteering and one off opportunities.

For the purposes of this document, a volunteer is someone who, without compensation (other than reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses), engages in tasks approved by the Association, to the benefit of their local community, including the University and Association community itself.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

- Formally acknowledge the importance of the role volunteers play within the Association.
- Lay out a policy to ensure we are working within best practise for volunteer organisations so that all volunteers, staff and partner organisations are able to fully understand our ethos around engaging in voluntary work.
- Define the responsibilities and expectations of the Students Association, it’s staff and volunteers.
- To set out guidelines for behaviour and make all volunteers aware of the expectations of them whilst they are representing the Students Association.
- To ensure decisions are made fairly and that there is consistency across all areas of the Association’s work which involves volunteers.

The value of volunteering

Volunteering is an intrinsic part of the Association, and many of the services we deliver would be unable to function without the support of a dedicated team of volunteers. Student volunteers are at the centre of creating a thriving, supportive community and in representing the student voice to the University. Without volunteers, we would be unable to achieve our mission.

Volunteering with the Association

This policy is underpinned by our responsibilities to our volunteers:

- The Association does not and will not introduce volunteer roles to replace paid staff.
• We will endeavour that all roles will be of real benefit to the student community and will make a difference to all those you engage with.
• Your volunteering will be appreciated and recognised for the value it brings.
• You will be kept informed of any training or accreditation opportunities offered by the Association, either by a dedicated monthly e-newsletter or via the volunteering section of the website.
• We aim to give you all the necessary information and training that you require to complete your role. If you feel you need additional support in your role please let us know and we will be happy to help.
• You will be volunteering for a non-discriminatory organisation that strives for equality and celebrates difference.
• You do not have to carry out any tasks you deem to be inappropriate or unrealistic, please speak to a staff member if this is the case.
• You are free to stop volunteering at any time. We simply ask that you let us know so that we can tell the appropriate people, we are happy for you to return to volunteering should your circumstances change.
• We will give you any information related to your role in a timely manner.
• The Association does not tolerate bullying and as such we aim to protect all volunteers from online abuse from fellow members.

Your commitment to the Association

As student volunteers it is important to conduct OU Students Association business to the highest standard.

Expectations may vary depending on each role, however as part of your role it is anticipated that you will:
• Act in the interests of the wider community of OU Students Association members, showing appropriate respect and consideration when communicating with fellow students and others, both inside and outside of meetings.
• Act with moral integrity and honesty, and in an ethical and honourable manner.
• Act in an open and responsible manner and be prepared to be accountable for your actions.
• Conduct yourself with objectivity, and in a calm and professional manner, not allowing yourself to be influenced by personal prejudices.
• Respect confidentiality in any information which has been imparted to you in confidence, recognising the importance of this. If this information relates to a safeguarding matter, it is important that you do not keep it to yourself. Speak to a member of the Volunteering team should you have concerns.
• If you are unable to attend a meeting to which you are expected, you are expected to inform the Chair as soon as possible. It is particularly important to ensure that students are in meetings where important
decisions are being made. If this is not possible please send your apologies to the Chair.

- When appropriate to your role, engage with students wherever possible, e.g. forums, social media and face to face, to gain an insight to your fellow students' experiences. It is important that volunteers reflect our values by helping to create a sense of community and support wherever possible.

- Share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

- Discriminatory behaviour, harassment or online abuse directed towards others will not be tolerated.

- Trustees are also governed by the Trustees Act 2000 and so where any conflict arises between this policy and the Trustees Act 2000, the latter will be applied.

- All volunteers are expected to follow the volunteer agreement given to them upon taking on a role with the Association.

**Absence and availability for volunteer related tasks**

Volunteers are requested to give as much notice as possible of absence or unavailability. This allows the Association to find cover and can help to prevent the expense of unused resources and accommodation to the charity.

Unless in exceptional circumstances, volunteers who do not attend events or fulfil roles without giving notice may be asked to step down from their volunteer position. Such incidents will be taken into consideration should further opportunities be applied for.

**Recruitment**

Volunteers are recruited through a number of channels at the Association, often supported by the Digital Communications team.

We use our website, magazine, social media, forums, word of mouth and liaise with the University to recruit student volunteers. We will also at times, target specific groups of students for roles based on the nature of the role, for example based on location.

In cases where we are recruiting for a limited number of volunteers for specific opportunities we will state this clearly in advance. The Association will contact all volunteers who are unsuccessful and applicants are entitled to ask us to provide feedback in order to aid their personal development. At times we may also suggest other roles which may be appropriate, should an applicant be unsuccessful for a specific role.

When recruiting volunteers on behalf of other organisations, we carry out checks to ensure organisations have the correct insurance in place and that they have a sufficient volunteer policy, however, individuals are to undertake these roles at their own risk. The Association cannot be held responsible for any activities or roles
undertaken with external organisations and it is important that we be informed if you feel there are issues with an organisation we are advertising for, so that we can investigate this.

**Equal opportunities**

At the Association we are committed to creating an open and diverse environment which celebrates difference. We work hard to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to race, class, age, gender, gender reassignment, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, or pregnancy and maternity.

Volunteers will be recruited and selected without reference to any distinction that may be seen as discriminatory. We can also provide assistance to any students wishing to apply but who require support to do so.

The staff team will work to ensure that documents, forms and communications are accessible and will provide alternative formats on request. All training will take into account individual needs and the team will be happy to discuss any particular requirements which a volunteer may have that will make their involvement easier.

**Induction/training and support**

Upon becoming a volunteer, you will receive the all-important volunteer handbook. This is reviewed regularly and will be updated at least every two years. This will give you an overview of what you can expect as a volunteer with the Association, as well as providing links to a range of supporting documents and contact details.

All volunteers who sign up via our website will have access to the online volunteer training portal. Here there are resources to support you in your role and to enhance your skills.

You will be given training appropriate to your role, this varies according to the role, and can be face to face or online. If you complete your training and feel you would benefit from more support, please speak to the staff team who will be able to help. Sometimes this is done by ‘buddying up’ new volunteers with an experienced volunteer. Some roles also offer the benefit of a mentor to guide you in your new position.

Whilst volunteering, you will be supported by the Volunteer team and can access Nightline (a charity who supports all students 24/7, which you can also access as a student volunteer). Some roles have the support of dedicated student co-ordinators or staff teams, and details of this will be provided within role descriptions.

In roles where volunteers are supporting fellow students, access to supervision can be provided upon request.

**Volunteering with a criminal record**

A volunteer with a criminal conviction does not automatically become barred from volunteering. There are some volunteer roles which require background checks to be made on individuals and there are a small number of convictions which could prevent volunteer involvement due to the nature of the role.
The decision to take on a student volunteer with a criminal record will be made on an individual case basis with the support of the Trustees.

In the case of external organisations, this decision will be managed by their own HR department.

**Insurance**

The Association has Public Liability Insurance which covers all normal activities undertaken by volunteers. There may be times when particular projects must be relayed to the insurance provider to ensure full coverage, but we will do this on the behalf of students and volunteers need not take action other than to advise the Volunteering Team should they be planning a new activity which we do not presently provide to students.

Please ensure if you are travelling to events by car, that your insurance policy covers this use.

The Association’s insurance policy will not cover any students volunteering for external organisations, including those affiliated to the Association.

**Health and Safety**

We are committed to ensuring the health and safety of staff, volunteers and anyone affected by our business activities, and to providing a safe and suitable environment for all those attending our premises.

We will ensure that you are given adequate training and supervision to perform your role competently and safely.

All members of the volunteer team and volunteers share responsibility for achieving safe working conditions. You must take care of your own health and safety and that of others, observe applicable safety rules and follow instructions for the safe use of equipment.

You should report any health and safety concerns immediately to a member of the volunteering team.

You must co-operate with us on health and safety matters, including the investigation of any incident.

For further information please refer to our Health and Safety Policy.

**Complaints and volunteer conduct procedures**

It is important that volunteers are representatives and ambassadors for the organisation, in incidences where it is deemed that volunteers have acted in way that is inappropriate to the position they hold, we will follow disciplinary procedure according to our [Bye-laws](#).
During your time as a volunteer, if you experience any form of abuse or harassment please refer to our anti-bullying policy. If this occurs outside of the Association platforms, you may follow the procedure as laid out by the OU dignity and respect policy.

Confidentiality

In supporting volunteers, we often need to collect personal data so that we can contact you throughout the year. Access to the data is restricted to the Volunteering team and managers at the Association and will be password protected. Where a designated team is specified within the role description, they will also have access to your data. For example, Student Voice team will have access to data for Central Committee Representatives.

We are committed to keeping your information safe and so where personal details need to be shared, the consent of volunteers will be sought in writing.

Within your role, you may also need to handle confidential material in accordance to the confidentiality procedures set in place by the Association. In this instance you will be asked to sign and abide by a confidentiality agreement.

References

Whilst volunteering for the Association, we encourage that you recognise and develop your transferable skills as these enhance employability should you want to use your volunteering experience to apply for jobs. Volunteers are encouraged to access the OU Careers and Employability Service for a range of support and advice on how to show these skills when writing applications and attending interviews.

Should you require a reference for your volunteer activities, please contact Head of Student Volunteering.

References will be given based on the role description of the role you held with us, and will be confirmation of your involvement. References should be requested within 12 months of completing your role.

Expenses

Reasonable expenses related to volunteer roles will be reimbursed as specified in our Expenses Policy. We are only able to reimburse actual expenses and so receipts must be provided with all completed forms.

You will find more information on what expenses are covered and how to make a claim in our Expenses Policy.

Volunteer status

This policy and the volunteer agreement is binding in honour only, nothing contained in this policy is intended to be a legally binding contract between us. We do not intend that your volunteering will result in any employment relationship being created either now or at any time in the future.
Other related policies

Bye-laws
Constitution
Volunteer Agreement
Use of forums
Health and Safety Policy
Expenses Policy

Volunteering with external organisations

From time to time we may advertise a volunteer role with other charities and voluntary organisations. The Association is committed to ensuring all organisations we support are ethically sound with a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Any roles you find on our site have had their volunteer policy and public liability insurance checked, however, external volunteering is undertaken at your own risk.

If you choose to volunteer with an external organisation not advertised through the Association, we will not be able to support you with any issues you may encounter, however we would be interested to hear about your experiences, good or bad.