Volunteer Policy

Of

Open University Students Association

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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
1 The OU Students Association vision:

1.1 “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.”

2 The value of volunteering

2.1 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 and so we recognise and thank our student volunteers for their commitment and support.

2.2 In creating a vibrant and active student community, the Association 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 exploring ways that students can volunteer from home and participate in one-off opportunities.

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

2.4 The Association does not and will not introduce volunteer roles to replace paid staff.

3 Purpose

3.1 The purpose of this document is to:

- formally acknowledge the importance of the role volunteers play within the Association
- ensure we are working within best practise for volunteer organisations so that all volunteers, staff and partner organisations fully understand our ethos around engaging in voluntary work
- define the responsibilities of the Students Association, its staff and volunteers
- set out guidelines for behaviour so that all volunteers are aware of what is expected of them whilst they are representing the Students Association
- ensure that decisions are made fairly and that there is consistency across all areas of the Association’s work involving volunteers.

4 Volunteering with the Association

4.1 This policy is underpinned by our responsibilities to our volunteers:

- the Association will endeavour to ensure that all roles are of real benefit to the student community
- volunteering will be appreciated and recognised for the value it brings
• the Association will inform volunteers of any training or development opportunities offered, either by a dedicated monthly e-newsletter or via the volunteering section of the website
• the Association will give volunteers the necessary information and training required for their roles
• the Association is non-discriminatory, strives for equality and celebrates difference
• the Association does not tolerate bullying and seeks to protect all volunteers from abuse
• volunteers do not have to carry out any tasks that they consider inappropriate or unrealistic
• volunteers are free to withdraw or to take a temporary break from their volunteer role at any time
• the Association will provide appropriate support, clarification and assistance to volunteers who request additional information or wish to resume volunteering.

5 Your commitment to the Association

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

5.2 Expectations may vary depending on each role, however, it is anticipated that:

• volunteers 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
• volunteers will conduct themselves with moral integrity, in an ethical and honourable manner
• volunteers will act in good faith, and be prepared to be accountable for their actions
• volunteers will conduct themselves with objectivity, and in a calm and professional manner, not allowing personal prejudices to influence them
• volunteers will respect confidentiality in any information which has been shared in confidence
• if a volunteer learns of information which relates to a safeguarding issue, this is to be reported immediately to the Head of Volunteering or Head of Student Support.
• in the event of a volunteer being unable to attend a meeting at which they are expected, they should tender their apologies as soon as possible
• where appropriate, volunteers will engage with students, e.g. forums, social media and face to face, to gain an insight to their fellow students’ experiences and reflect our values by helping to create a sense of community and support
• volunteers will share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and are expected to challenge and report discriminatory behaviour, harassment or online abuse
• all volunteers are expected to follow the volunteer agreement given to them upon taking on a role with the Association and failure to do so could result in a volunteer being removed from their role. In elected positions, the decision to remove can only be made following referral to the grievance and complaints procedure
• in relation to trustees, whose responsibilities are also governed by the Trustee Act 2000, the legislation will take priority in the event of any conflict with Association policy.

6 Absence and availability for volunteer-related tasks

6.1 Volunteers are requested to give as much notice as possible of absence or unavailability. This allows the Association to make arrangements for alternative cover, and to avoid the unnecessary expense of unused accommodation.

6.2 Unless there are exceptional circumstances, volunteers who do not attend events or fulfil roles without giving prior notice may be asked to step down from their volunteer position. This decision will be made on a case by case basis by the volunteer team with support from relevant student representatives. Such incidents may be taken into consideration should further opportunities be applied for.

7 Recruitment

7.1 Volunteers are recruited through several channels at the Association. We use our website, magazine, social media, forums, word of mouth and also liaise with the University to recruit student volunteers. We also occasionally contact defined groups of students, to make them aware of particular roles which may be relevant to them, using the University’s mailing system.

7.2 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.

8 Equal opportunities

8.1 The Association is committed to creating an open and diverse environment which celebrates difference. We recognise that everyone has different needs and circumstances and that these are likely to influence and shape their experiences. We encourage volunteers to tell us about their individual needs so that we can provide effective support and ensure that our policies and practices are working to advance equality for all.

8.2 We work hard to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to:

• race
• class
• age
• gender (sex)
• gender reassignment or identity
• religion or belief
• disability
• sexual orientation
• marriage and civil partnership
• caring or dependency responsibilities
• political opinion
8.3 Volunteers will be recruited and selected without reference to any distinction that may be seen as discriminatory. The Association will help any student wishing to apply but who requires support to do so.

8.4 The staff team will work to ensure that documents, forms and communications are accessible and will provide alternative formats on request. Individual needs and accessibility will be a consideration in all training and event planning.

9 Induction/training and support

9.1 On becoming a volunteer, everyone receives the volunteer handbook. This is reviewed regularly and will be updated at least every two years. This provides an overview of volunteering with the Association, as well as providing links to a range of supporting documents and contact details.

9.2 All volunteers who sign up via our website will have access to the online volunteer training portal, the ‘Volunteer Zone’, which provides access to support and training resources.

9.3 Volunteers will be given training appropriate to their role; this can be face to face or online. In roles where volunteers are supporting fellow students or teams of volunteers, access to supervision can be provided upon request and it is likely that Safeguarding (welfare of children and vulnerable adults), Prevent (anti-radicalisation) and GDPR (data protection) training will be mandatory.

9.4 All volunteers are able to access support from the volunteer team and are also able to access Nightline (a student to student service that provides support by helpline through the night in term time and by email at all other times). Some roles have the support of dedicated student co-ordinators or staff, and details will be in the role description.

10 Volunteering with a criminal record

10.1 We are an open organisation that strives for inclusion and equality, and volunteers with a criminal conviction will not automatically be barred from volunteering. The Association works to ensure that there are opportunities for students of all backgrounds and circumstances, but we take seriously our duty of care to ensure that volunteers, staff and service users will not be put at risk. For this reason, we ask all students to declare any unspent criminal convictions at the time of application and disclosures are shared with the Open University 'students in secure environments' team. More information about how your data is shared can be found in our OU data sharing agreement and the University’s Terms and Conditions.

10.2 There are a small number of convictions which could make volunteer involvement inappropriate due to the nature of the offence and the duties of roles. For roles of a fiduciary or semi-fiduciary nature (those with a high level of trust and a legal or ethical obligation to do what is best for an organisation), we will apply the Charity Commission’s eligibility criteria. These roles include: Trustees, Directors, Central Executive Committee Members and Group chairs.
10.3 Where a volunteer position requires background checks from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to work with vulnerable adults or children this will be clearly stated in the role description. We would encourage anyone who would like further information to contact the Head of Volunteering.

11 Insurance

11.1 The Association has Public Liability Insurance which covers all normal activities undertaken by volunteers. Volunteers are required to advise the Volunteering Team when planning a new activity, which we do not presently provide to students, as there may be times when particular projects must be relayed to the insurance provider to ensure full coverage. The Association will do this on the behalf of volunteers should this be required.

11.2 Volunteers travelling to volunteer events by car should ensure their 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.

12 Health and Safety

12.1 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.

12.2 We will ensure that volunteers are given adequate training and supervision to perform their roles competently and safely.

12.3 Members of the volunteer team and volunteers all share responsibility for achieving safe working conditions. Volunteers must take care of their own health and safety and that of others, observing applicable safety rules and following instructions for the safe use of equipment.

12.4 Any health and safety concerns should be reported immediately to a member of the volunteering team and volunteers are expected to co-operate on health and safety matters, including in the investigation of any incident.

12.5 Further information is available in our Health and Safety Policy.

13 Complaints and volunteer conduct procedures

13.1 Volunteers are representatives and ambassadors for the Association and the University. In instances where it is deemed that volunteers have acted in a way that is inappropriate to the position they hold, we may suspend volunteers and refer the incident to our Grievance and Complaints Procedure: section 13 of the Association bylaws.

13.2 If volunteers experience any form of abuse or harassment during their time as a volunteer, this should be reported immediately to the Student Support Team at the Association. If any abuse or harassment takes place during student activity outside the Association platforms, the procedure laid out in the OU dignity and respect policy should be followed.
14 Confidentiality and data protection

14.1 In supporting volunteers, we often need to collect personal data to stay in contact throughout the year. We are committed to keeping personal data safe, so it is held on a central database connected to our website. Access to this information is limited to Association staff who work with volunteers and it is held on secure servers, as well as being password protected.

14.2 If anyone outside of the organisation will see volunteer data, this will be made clear on the application form. For example, a Graduation Coordinator will have access to data in order to select and contact their team of Graduation Volunteers. In any role where volunteers will have access to student or volunteer personal data, they will be required to complete GDPR training as part of their induction.

14.3 Some roles require volunteers to handle sensitive material in accordance with the confidentiality procedures set in place by the Association and University. In this instance, volunteers will be asked to sign and abide by a confidentiality agreement.

14.4 When individuals stop volunteering with the Association, data will be kept in accordance with our data retention policy. To request that data be removed or anonymised sooner, please contact the volunteer team directly.

15 References

15.1 Whilst volunteering for the Association, we encourage volunteers to recognise and develop transferable skills as these can enhance employability and role satisfaction. Volunteers are encouraged to access the OU Careers and Employability Service for support and advice on how to show these skills when writing applications and attending interviews.

15.2 For references related to volunteer activities, volunteers should contact the Head of Student Volunteering. References will be given based on the description of the role held with us, and will only be completed for those who have volunteered within the last 12 months.

16 Expenses

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

17 Volunteer status

17.1 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. Volunteering does not result in the creation of an employment relationship, either now or at any time in the future.

18 Other related policies

Bye-laws
Constitution
Volunteer Agreement
Health and Safety Policy
Expenses and Subsistence Policy
Anti-bullying Policy
Social Media Policy
Data Protection Agreement
Data Retention Policy.