



# Volunteer Policy

Approved: September-25 | Review: Sept-27



## 1. Executive overview

All prospective volunteers need to be fully informed about all aspects of volunteering before deciding to apply for a role with Open SU.

The most fundamental aspect of volunteering with Open SU is to work in the best interests of students and Open SU. All volunteers should be able to carry out their volunteering role with confidence and in the knowledge, they have the full support of Open SU, while at the same time recognising that they are part of a large team that operates at all levels of responsibility.

As well as enabling Open SU to act in the best interests of all students, each volunteer is responsible for ensuring that Open SU is seen to be acting in the best interests of all students.

Teamwork is about getting on with one another, regardless of differing opinions, to the benefit both of colleagues and Open SU, and ultimately to the benefit of all students. Every volunteer may rely on getting the necessary help when needed to resolve any difficulties. We stand by our Values and Behaviour Policy, and assume a positive intent in all actions from every member of Open SU.

## 2. Introduction

This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement with The Open University (OU) Student Union (Open SU).

It is of relevance to all within the organisation, including volunteers, staff, members and those elected, co-opted, selected or appointed to positions of responsibility. It includes guidance on what volunteers can expect of Open SU as well as what is expected of them.

This policy is endorsed by the Board of Trustees of Open SU, and will be reviewed every year and revised every two years to ensure that it is fit for purpose for the needs of Open SU and its volunteers.

### 3. Purpose of the Volunteer Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Formally acknowledge the importance of the role volunteers play within
- Open SU. Ensure we are working within best practice for volunteer organisations so that all volunteers, staff and partner organisations fully understand our mission, vision, values and ethos around engaging in voluntary work.
- Define the responsibilities of Open SU, its staff and volunteers.
- Highlight the importance of adhering to our [Values and Behaviour Policy](#) so that all volunteers are aware of what is expected of them while they are representing Open SU.
- Ensure that decisions are made fairly and that there is consistency across all areas of Open SU's work involving volunteers.

### 4. The Open SU vision

Your Open SU will:

- Empower a student voice that is strong and effective in representing the diversity of our members.
- Work collaboratively with the University to ensure that students are at the centre of decision making.
- Build an inclusive community which nurtures a sense of pride and
- belonging. Provide relevant, quality services which enhance the student experience.

### 5. Our Values



## 6. Principles of volunteering

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society, the community, the environment or individuals outside one's immediate family.

The principles for volunteering with Open SU are:

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer.
- Volunteer work is unpaid.
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice.
- Volunteering is a legitimate way for students to participate in the activities of their community.
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only. Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work.
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers or constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others.
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality.

## 1. The Value of Volunteering with Open SU

Volunteering is an intrinsic part of Open SU and many of the services we deliver would be unable to function without the support of a dedicated team of student volunteers. Student volunteers are at the centre of creating a thriving, supportive community and a sense of belonging, and representing the student voice throughout The Open University. Without volunteers, we would be unable to achieve our mission, so we recognise and thank our student volunteers for their commitment and support.

In creating a vibrant and active student community, Open SU offers a range of opportunities for students to meet their peers while gaining experience and skills through volunteering for causes that are important to them. Open SU believes in ensuring these opportunities are open to all and works hard to find and create accessible roles wherever our members may be. We are committed to exploring ways that students can volunteer in ways that suit their own circumstances.

For this document, a volunteer is someone who, without compensation other than reimbursement of reasonable expenses accrued while carrying out a volunteering role, engages in tasks approved by Open SU to the benefit of the OU student community, and hence to the mission and ethos of Open SU and to the OU itself. A volunteer may be elected, co-opted, selected or appointed.

Open SU recognises the benefit of volunteering to the individual volunteer and where possible aims to respond to its volunteers' needs by providing the opportunity to gain employability and transferable skills, as well as the opportunity to meet new people while volunteering.

Open SU does not and will not introduce volunteer roles to replace paid staff.

## 2. Volunteering with Open SU

This policy is underpinned by our responsibilities to our volunteers:

- Open SU will endeavour to ensure that all roles are of real benefit to the student community.
- Our volunteers will be appreciated and recognised for the value they each bring to the student community.
- Open SU will inform volunteers of any training or development opportunities offered via the quarterly e-newsletter, email and in the dedicated Volunteer Zone (available to active volunteers on Open SU's website once they have logged in).
- Open SU will give volunteers the necessary information and training required to confidently carry out their role.
- Open SU is non-discriminatory, strives for equality and celebrates differences. Open SU does not tolerate bullying and seeks to protect all volunteers from abuse (see [Values and Behaviour Policy](#)).
- Volunteers do not have to carry out any tasks that they consider inappropriate or unrealistic.
- Open SU aim to be flexible and accommodating, while ensuring adjustments are fair and sustainable (See [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#)).
- Volunteers are free to withdraw or to take a temporary break or holiday from their volunteer role at any time.
- Open SU will provide appropriate support, clarification and assistance to volunteers and will support those who wish to resume volunteering after a break.

## 3. Who can Volunteer?

All Open University students are automatic members of the Open SU. Volunteering opportunities are designed to enrich and complement the student experience alongside study. To ensure these opportunities remain student-centred, students will be asked to complete a declaration in their application, and we may contact students to clarify their study status where it is not clear.

## 10. Your commitment to Open SU

As student volunteers, it is important to conduct all Open SU business to the highest standard. Expectations may vary depending on each role; however, it is anticipated that:

- All volunteers will 'live our values', acting within our [Values and Behaviour Policy](#).
- A volunteer will respect confidentiality in all information shared with them in confidence.
- All volunteers should aim to complete the Volunteering Core Training within 30 days of accepting their role.
- Under Open SU's statutory Safeguarding duty, all Open SU staff, Trustees and volunteers must report any safeguarding concerns to the Open University's Safeguarding Referrals Team, [SafeguardingReferrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:SafeguardingReferrals@open.ac.uk). Please refer to the [OU Students Safeguarding Policy](#) If you have any concerns or further questions around safeguarding or would like to seek further training please you may also wish to contact with Open SU's Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging team [oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk).
- In the event of a volunteer being unable to attend any meeting or event at which they are expected; they should tender their apologies as soon as possible to the staff team supporting them.
- Where appropriate, a volunteer will engage with OU students in any context, e.g., in forums, on social media platforms and in person to gain insight into their fellow students' experiences and reflect our values by helping to create a sense of community, belonging and support.
- A volunteer will share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and is expected to challenge and report discriminatory behaviour, harassment or online abuse (see our [Values and Behaviour Policy](#) and [Resolving and Settling Differences Procedure](#)).



- All volunteers will follow Open SU's [Volunteer Agreement](#) shared on taking up a role with Open SU. Failure to do so may result in a volunteer being removed from their role.
- For Student Trustees, whose responsibilities are also governed by the Trustee Act 2000, the legislation will take priority in the event of any conflict with Open SU policy.

Elected student leader volunteers (members of the Student Leadership Team and student members of the Board of Trustees, excluding the President and Deputy President) shall not accept remuneration for volunteering services provided, including to The Open University, as this will constitute a conflict of interest.

## **11. Fitness to volunteer**

Fitness to volunteer relates to a student volunteer's ability to meet the performance requirements as stated above for any of the volunteer roles with Open SU — whether elected, co-opted or selected— and with the reasonable social and behavioural requirements expected from volunteers as representatives of Open SU.

Fitness to volunteer also relies upon a volunteer's adherence to this document, the Volunteer Policy of Open SU. The list below outlines basic requirements that relate specifically to the fitness to volunteer of all volunteers with Open SU:

- Volunteers must be able to carry out the minimum hours' participation or activity that their role requires as set out in the role description.
- Volunteers must also be able to commit to any onboarding, induction and training relevant to their role.
- Volunteers represent Open SU and the University, so all volunteers need to deliver a service that is of an appropriately high standard.



- Where a volunteer has a disability or long-term mental or physical health condition, this is disclosed to your staff support team or staff link — in confidence if requested — ensuring that, where possible and within reason, appropriate support is available, and adjustments are made.
- Open SU will make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that students who have mental or physical health conditions can engage with volunteering. If we believe this is not possible or it may not be safe or practical for students to engage in a particular volunteering role, we will endeavour to work with the student to find a suitable and satisfying role for them.

When volunteers are accepted into a role with Open SU, we assess their general fitness to volunteer through a structured process of recruitment, selection, and training. In some cases, this fitness may be supported by reasonable adjustments made by Student Leaders and staff, along with appropriate boundaries and support to ensure the volunteer can participate effectively and safely in their role.

A student's fitness to volunteer may be affected because:

- The student fails to engage with the role and the expected requirements set out in the role description, giving health challenges as a reason.
- Adjustments and support are not offered because the volunteer has, for whatever reason, not disclosed any mental or physical challenges that have an impact on their fitness and ability to volunteer.
- Adjustments and support offered cannot be sufficient or appropriate and/or the volunteer chooses not to/is unable to engage with them,

and/or:

- The volunteer's presentation is disruptive in a way that impacts significantly on their ability to volunteer or the volunteering of others in the role.

## **12. Taking a break and stepping back from volunteering**

We appreciate that volunteers may need to take a break from their role or to step away. To ensure our records are correct regarding volunteers taking extended breaks from their roles, and to fill any areas that may be required during time away, we ask that you complete the short stepping away from volunteering form available in the Volunteer Zone.

## **13. Absence and availability for volunteer-related tasks**

We request that volunteers give as much notice as possible of absence or unavailability. This allows Open SU to plan for alternative cover and to avoid the unnecessary expense of unused travel and accommodation, where this has been included.

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.

Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis by our Volunteer Manager, the Deputy President, and for roles within Student Voice Team, by the Head of Student Voice.

Volunteers should be aware that such incidents may be taken into consideration should further opportunities be sought by the volunteer involved.

## 14, Recruitment

We recruit volunteers through a range of online platforms, OU channels and in person events, and occasionally contact defined groups of OU students to make them aware of roles that may be relevant to them using the University's mailing system.

When we recruit a limited number of volunteers for specific opportunities, we will state this clearly in advance. Open SU will contact all volunteers who are unsuccessful, and applicants are entitled to ask us for feedback to aid their personal development. At times we may also suggest other roles that may be appropriate should an applicant be unsuccessful for a specific role.

Regarding equality, diversity and inclusion/inclusivity, we may take what the law — the Equality Act 2010 — terms 'positive action' if any groups are under-represented in Open SU's volunteering community, or whose participation with Open SU is disproportionately low, because of a protected characteristic.

For more information, please see the Government Equalities Office's ['Equality Act 2010: a quick start guide to positive action in service provision for voluntary and community organisations.'](#)

## 15. Equality, diversity, inclusion and inclusivity

Open SU is committed to creating an open and diverse environment that celebrates difference. We recognise that everyone has diverse 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.

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

- race
- class
- age
- gender or sex
- gender reassignment or identity
- religion or belief
- disability
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership
- caring or dependency responsibilities.
- political opinion
- socio-economic background
- pregnancy and maternity
- being asylum seekers
- being care experienced
- being students with criminal convictions.

The University has taken a broader view of the characteristics to include caring for dependants, membership of the Traveller community, trades union membership status, and socio-economic background, and for OU employees only, type of employment contract e.g., part-time or full-time.

We will recruit and select volunteers without reference to any distinction that may be perceived as discriminatory. Open SU will help any student wishing to apply and who may require support to do so and will clearly state the eligibility requirements for the role in the role description.

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

## **16. Onboarding, induction, training and support**

On becoming a volunteer, everyone receives Open SU's online Volunteer Handbook and Core Training. We review these regularly and update at least every two years. The handbook provides an overview of volunteering with Open SU, as well as providing links to a range of supporting documents, training information, support and key contact details.

The online volunteer handbook also includes our core training in:

- Safeguarding.
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation, UK GDPR.
- Our Prevent duty that prevents the risk of people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
- And our Equality duty that seeks to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment.

All volunteers registered on our website will have access to the online volunteer training portal the 'Volunteer Zone', which provides access to important documents; volunteer policies, support and training resources.

Volunteers will complete an onboarding process; which includes a welcome checklist, onboarding information form and for some

role an Accessibility and Support Form. Each checklist is tailored to the volunteering role, and it includes key information and steps involved to onboard successfully. All volunteers receive a welcome session which must be attended before a volunteer can undertake the role; this may be delivered in person or online.

In roles where volunteers are supporting fellow students or teams of volunteers, access to supervision can be provided upon request and, likely, further safeguarding (welfare of children and vulnerable adults), Prevent and UK GDPR training could be made mandatory.

All volunteers can access support from Open SU team and are also able to access the OU Wellbeing App Service.

All roles have the support of dedicated student leaders and/or staff, and details will be in the onboarding information.

## **17. Volunteering with a criminal record**

We are an open organisation that strives for inclusion and equality, and volunteers with a criminal conviction will not automatically be barred from volunteering.

Open SU 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 disclose any unspent criminal convictions at the time of application. Disclosures are shared with the Head of EDI and Belonging Team and discussed with the Safeguarding Panel.

There is more information about how personal data is shared in our [OU Data Sharing Agreement](#) and the University's [Terms and Conditions](#).

There are a small number of convictions that could make volunteer involvement inappropriate because of the nature of the offence and the duties of roles.

For roles of a fiduciary or semi-fiduciary nature (those with an elevated 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, Student Leadership Team members and Group Chairs.

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 EDI and Belonging Team in the first instance.

## **18. Insurance**

Open SU has Public Liability Insurance, which covers all normal activities undertaken by volunteers. Volunteers are required to advise the Volunteering Manager when planning a new volunteering activity that may not be currently provided to students, as there may be times when projects must be relayed to the insurance provider to ensure full coverage. Open SU will do this on behalf of volunteers should this be required.

Volunteers travelling to volunteer events by car should ensure their insurance policy covers this use. Open SU's insurance policy will not cover any students volunteering for external organisations, including those affiliated with Open SU.

## **19. 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 volunteers are given adequate training and supervision to perform their roles competently and safely.



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

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

Further information is available in our [Health and Safety Policy](#).

## **20 Personal safety**

At Open SU, we are committed to ensuring that all volunteers feel safe, supported, and confident in their roles. Your wellbeing is a priority, and you will be provided with the information, guidance, and training necessary to help you stay safe while volunteering. We also encourage all volunteers to take an active role in protecting their own personal safety.

Every volunteering role is subject to a risk assessment, and members of the staff team are available to provide advice, support, and guidance throughout your time with us.

We also ask volunteers to carefully consider personal safety in situations connected to, but outside of, their volunteering activities. This may include, for example, accepting lifts, meeting with fellow volunteers or students socially, or engaging with others online and through social media.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or concerned about another person's behaviour, you should remove yourself from the situation immediately. Please follow the OU Safeguarding Policy in the first instance, you should also contact a member of staff at

Open SU as soon as possible. If you do not have a direct staff contact, email [oustudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk).

Finally, remember that keeping safe is a shared responsibility. Be mindful of the wellbeing of others as well as your own, and take care not to place students, other volunteers, or staff at risk through your actions.

## **21. Confidentiality and data protection**

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 Open SU staff who work with volunteers, and it is held on secure servers, as is password protected.

If volunteer data needs to be shared outside the organisation, this will be clearly stated on the application form. For example, a Graduation Coordinator may access contact details to communicate with their team. Any volunteer role involving access to personal data requires UK GDPR training within 30 days of starting their role.

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

When individuals stop volunteering with Open SU, data will be kept under our data retention policy. To request that data be removed or anonymised sooner, please make a direct request in writing to [oustudent-volunteer@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudent-volunteer@open.ac.uk).

## 22. References

Whilst volunteering for Open SU, we encourage volunteers to recognise and develop transferable skills as these can enhance employability and role satisfaction. We encourage volunteers to access the [OU Careers and Employability Service](#) for support and advice on how to demonstrate these skills when writing applications and attending interviews.

For references related to volunteer activities, volunteers should contact Open SU's Volunteering Manager. 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.

## 23. Expenses

We will reimburse reasonable expenses related to carrying out your volunteering role as specified by our [Travel and Subsistence Policy](#). The policy asks that volunteers check eligibility for expenses reimbursement in advance (section 1.9) and where appropriate refer to the [Reasonable Adjustments for Volunteers Policy](#). Reimbursement will only be made for actual expenses incurred relating to the volunteering activity carried out. All claims must be submitted with valid receipts as supporting evidence.

While we can reimburse out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers, wholly, exclusively and necessarily in carrying out their Open SU role(s), we are unable to fund or part-fund equipment, such as laptops.

This is because HMRC (HM Revenue and Customs) regards anything that has wider benefits to the volunteer and/or their household as a benefit in kind and this could lead to a tax liability for the volunteer and Open SU.

## 24. Volunteer status

This policy and the Volunteer Agreement are binding in honor 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.

## 25. Other related policies and guidance documents

- [Our Volunteer Agreement](#) – Open SU volunteers should take note of the Volunteer Agreement that sets out what is expected regarding actions and behaviour while carrying out a volunteering role.
- [Values and Behaviour Policy](#)
- [Resolving and Settling Differences Procedure](#)
- Our [Bye-laws](#) and [Articles of Association](#) are our governing principles. The [Health and Safety](#), [Data Protection](#), [Data Sharing Agreement](#), [Privacy Policies](#), set out our duty to protect everyone, including our volunteers, as required by law.
- [Social Media Policy](#)

## 26. Review period

This Policy will be reviewed at least every two years, and changes will be approved by the Board of Trustees.

The next review is September 2027.


### Special thanks

To all the OU student volunteers who feature on the title page photo. This celebrates what it is to be a student at the Open University: we all come from different backgrounds and have different barriers to overcome but with one shared goal, to learn.

### Contacts

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 [/OUStudents](#)

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