



Volunteer policy

Approved: Sept-23 | Review: Sept-25



 [/OUStudents](#)

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Review period

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

Special thanks

To all the current and past OU Students who shared photos to feature on the title page. 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

The Volunteering and Representation team: oustudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk

Executive overview

All prospective volunteers need to be fully informed about all aspects of volunteering before deciding to apply for a role with the Students Association. The most fundamental aspect of volunteering with the Association is to work in the best interests of students and the Students Association. All volunteers should be able to carry out their volunteering role with confidence and in the knowledge they have the full support of the Association, 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 the Association to act in the best interests of all students, each volunteer is responsible for ensuring that the Association 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 the Association, 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 the Association.

Introduction

This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement with The Open University (OU) Students Association (The Association).

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 the Association as well as what is expected of them.

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

Purpose of the Volunteer Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

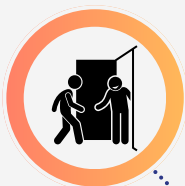
- Formally acknowledge the importance of the role volunteers play within the Association.
- Ensure we are working within best practice for volunteer organisations so that all volunteers, staff and partner organisations fully understand our mission, vision, values and ethos around engaging in voluntary work.
- Define the responsibilities of the Association, 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 the Association.
- Ensure that decisions are made fairly and that there is consistency across all areas of the Association's work involving volunteers.

The OU Students Association vision

Your Students Association 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.

Our Values



Welcoming

We ensure every student feels welcome and supported whilst celebrating diversity, embracing all backgrounds, and fostering a sense of belonging.



Accountable

We are accountable to our members and actively work toward their best interests.



Bold

Empowering people to be creative and ambitious in their actions, whilst striving to improve the experience of all our members.



Adaptable

We are dynamic in meeting the needs of our diverse members and reactive to changes that affect their experience.



Sustainable

Ensuring we are responsible in our activities, safeguarding the future of the Association and promoting a positive environmental impact.

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 the Association are that:

- 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.

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 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, the Association 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. The Association 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 suits 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 the Students Association to the benefit of the OU student community, and hence to the mission and ethos of the Association and to the OU itself. A volunteer may be elected, co-opted, selected or appointed.

The Students Association 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.

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

Volunteering with the Association

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.
- Our volunteers will be appreciated and recognised for the value they each bring to the student community.
- The Association will inform volunteers of any training or development opportunities offered via the dedicated monthly e-newsletter, the volunteer Slack platform and in the dedicated Volunteer Zone of the Association's website.
- The Association will give volunteers the necessary information and training required to confidently carry out their role.
- 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 (see [Values and Behaviour Policy](#)).
- 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 or holiday 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 after a break.

Your commitment to the Association

As student volunteers, it is important to conduct all Students Association 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.
- If a volunteer learns of information that relates to a safeguarding issue, this is to be reported immediately to the Head of Volunteering and Representation or the Head of EDI and Student Welfare.
- 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.
- 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 the Association’s [Volunteer Agreement](#) shared on taking up a role with the Association. 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 Association 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.

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 the Students Association – whether elected, co-opted, selected or appointed – and with the reasonable social and behavioural requirements expected from volunteers as representatives of the Association.

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

- 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 the Students Association 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 the Volunteer and Representation team – in confidence if requested – ensuring that, where possible and within reason, appropriate support is available, and adjustments are made.
- The Association will make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that students with mental or physical health impairments 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 we accept volunteers into a role with the Association, we have assessed via a process of recruitment, selection, and training that they are generally 'fit to volunteer'. In some cases, this fitness to volunteer will be achieved with reasonable adjustments made by Student Leaders and staff, and with any necessary boundaries and appropriate support in place for the volunteer.

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

- The volunteer fails to engage with the role and the expected requirements set out in the role description, giving health matters as a reason.
- Adjustments and support are not offered because the volunteer has, for whatever reason, not disclosed any mental or physical impairments 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,

and/or

- Continuation of volunteering is detrimental to the volunteer's mental and/or physical health, based on clinical judgement (clinical judgements can only be made by appropriately qualified healthcare professionals and therefore cannot be made by the OU, the Association or any other party in determining a volunteer's fitness to practise).

In cases such as these, the Volunteering and Representation team in consultation with the Appointments Committee (where a volunteer may be appointed) – or for other volunteers, the Safeguarding Panel – may decide that a student is not fit to volunteer and will meet with them to discuss taking a temporary break from volunteering, or as a last resort, ask that they discontinue volunteering with the Association.

A student may be defined as unfit to volunteer when their health, or behaviours related to their health, mean it is either not in the interests of the volunteer and/or not in the interests of the Association that the student should continue volunteering, until such a time as their health or health-related behaviour improves.

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 your time away, we ask that you complete either the short:

[Taking a break from volunteering form](#)

or the:

[Stepping down from volunteering form](#)

Absence and availability for volunteer-related tasks

We request that volunteers give as much notice as possible of absence or unavailability. This allows the Association 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. This decision will be made on a case-by-case basis by the Head of Volunteer and Representation and the Deputy President. Such incidents may be taken into consideration should further opportunities be sought by the volunteer involved.

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 are recruiting 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 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 the Association's volunteering community, or whose participation with the Association 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'](#).

Equality, diversity, inclusion and inclusivity

The Association 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. The Association will help any student wishing to apply and who may require support to do so.

The Association staff team will work to ensure that all documents, application forms, training content 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.

Onboarding, induction, training and support

On becoming a volunteer, everyone receives the Association'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 the Association, as well as providing links to a range of supporting documents and 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 support and training resources.

Volunteers will receive an induction and/or training appropriate to their role; this may be delivered in person or online. For some volunteer roles, induction and training may be mandatory and must be completed before the volunteer can undertake the role.

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 will be mandatory.

All volunteers can access support from the Volunteer and Representation team and are also able to access the [TalkCampus](#) platform and the [Shout 85258](#) text support service, both of which are monitored 24 hours.

Some roles have the support of dedicated student leaders and/or staff, and details will be in the role description.

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.

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 disclose any unspent criminal convictions at the time of application. Disclosures are shared with the Associate Director of Projects and Services 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 Volunteering and Representation in the first instance.

Insurance

The Association has Public Liability Insurance, which covers all normal activities undertaken by volunteers. Volunteers are required to advise the Volunteering and Representation team 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. The Association will do this on the behalf of volunteers should this be required.

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 with 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 volunteers are given adequate training and supervision to perform their roles competently and safely.

Members of the volunteer team and volunteers 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 Volunteering and Representation 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](#).

Personal safety

At the Students Association, we want to ensure that our volunteers feel safe and secure in their roles. As a volunteer you will be provided with any information or training you need to stay safe whilst volunteering. We encourage all volunteers to consider and make efforts to protect their own personal safety when volunteering with the Association.

Each role is risk assessed, and members of the staff team will be on hand to offer support and guidance throughout your time volunteering.

Individuals should take time to think about risk when undertaking activities which are linked to, but not directly relating to volunteering. This might include for example, accepting lifts, meeting up with fellow volunteers or students outside of volunteering and online engagement through social media.

If you are worried or concerned about another person's behaviour, remove yourself from the situation and tell a member of the staff team as soon as possible through oustudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk in the first instance, if you do not have a direct staff contact.

Make sure you consider the safety of others as well as yourself so that you don't endanger the people you volunteer with, whether students, other volunteers, or staff.

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 Association staff who work with volunteers, and it is held on secure servers, as well as being password protected.

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 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 UK GDPR training as part of their induction.

Some roles require volunteers to handle sensitive material under 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.

When individuals stop volunteering with the Association, data will be kept under our data retention policy. To request that data be removed or anonymised sooner, please contact the Volunteer and Representation team directly.

References

Whilst volunteering for the Association, 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.

The Association can recognise individual volunteering contributions by endorsing a volunteer for 'Non-profit volunteering' on LinkedIn and encourages volunteers to showcase their volunteering experience on networking platforms.

For references related to volunteer activities, volunteers should contact the Head of Volunteering and Representation. 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.

Expenses and loan of equipment

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).

We are only able to reimburse actual expenses, so receipts must be provided with all completed forms.

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

This is because HMRC (HM Revenue and Customs) regard 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 the Association.

Volunteer status

This policy and the Volunteer Agreement are 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.

Other related policies and guidance documents

- [Our Volunteer Agreement](#) – Association 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 [By-laws](#) and [Articles of Association](#) are our governing principles.
- [The Health and Safety](#), [Data Protection](#), [Data Sharing Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policies](#) set out our duty to protect everyone, including our volunteers, as required by law.
- [Social Media Policy](#)