

## Volunteering

### What is volunteering

A volunteer is someone who offers to work for free for someone other than a close relative. Volunteers do not get paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses. These are intended to make sure that they are not worse off financially by being a volunteer. They may get training needed to do, or to improve their volunteer work.

Examples of out-of-pocket expenses include:

- travel
- phone calls made from home whilst volunteering
- meals
- childcare or care of other dependants.

Voluntary work is often done for charities and not-for-profit organisations.

It does not count as voluntary work if you could be paid for your work, but have chosen not to be.

Examples of voluntary work include:

- helping residents in a homeless hostel
- visiting hospital patients
- helping to clean up a local conservation area
- giving advice in a citizens advice bureau.

Unpaid volunteers do not have a contract of employment with the organisation they volunteer for. This means that you cannot be sued by the organisation if you fail to do your work.

There is no limit on the number of hours a week you can be a volunteer. This also applies to most people who are getting benefits. However, if you are getting certain benefits, there may be conditions that you have to meet in order to continue getting benefit whilst you are a volunteer.

### Volunteering and benefits

If you are getting some benefits, such as State Retirement Pension or Pension Credit, you do not need to tell anyone when you take up voluntary work. However, if you are getting other benefits, you may be expected to tell your local benefit office.

## Volunteering and Jobseeker's Allowance

If you are unemployed and getting Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), there is no limit to the number of hours you can volunteer. It must be reasonable for the person or organisation you're volunteering with not to pay you and you must meet the following conditions. You must:

- tell your local Jobcentre Plus that you are volunteering
- not get paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses, which do not count towards the JSA earnings disregard
- continue to actively look for work (volunteering may count towards this, if it improves your chances of finding a job)
- continue to be available for work for up to 40 hours a week
- be able to be contacted if a job opportunity becomes available
- be available to attend an interview within 48 hours and take up work within one week
- tell your local Jobcentre Plus about any payments you get, including any expenses you are claiming back. You may have to show Jobcentre Plus receipts for these payments, so you should make sure you hold onto them.

If you are unemployed, you may be given the opportunity to do voluntary work as part of the **New Deal** scheme. You should ask about this at your local benefit office.

## Volunteering and sickness benefits

If you are unable to work because you are sick or disabled and are claiming one of the following benefits, volunteering should not affect your benefit:

- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance

You must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses.

Before starting voluntary work, you should tell the DWP what you are intending to do.

If you are getting Incapacity Benefit, you must be available to go to work-focussed interviews. You must tell the DWP about any payments that you get.

## **Volunteering and Income Support**

Volunteering should not affect your Income Support as long as you are only being paid out-of-pocket expenses.

You must let your benefit office know when you start volunteering, and tell them about any payments you get. You must be able to go to work-focussed interviews.

## **Volunteering and Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit**

If you are getting Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, you must tell your local council when you start volunteering. You should also tell them about any payments you get.

## **Volunteering and Carer's Allowance**

If you are caring for someone who is severely disabled and you are getting Carer's Allowance, your benefit will not be affected by volunteering unless it prevents you from providing care for at least 35 hours each week. You must not be working for a close relative, and must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses. You should tell your benefit office before you start voluntary work.

## **Volunteering if you are a lone parent on Income Support**

If you are a lone parent getting Income Support, there is no limit to the number of hours a week you can volunteer. You must not be working for a close relative, and must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses. You should tell the DWP, before you start your voluntary work.

## **Volunteering and asylum seekers**

If you are an asylum seeker (someone who is applying for refugee status in the UK), you are allowed to do voluntary work. This includes whilst you are appealing against a decision to refuse you asylum. However, the voluntary work that you do must meet certain conditions. It must be for a not-for-profit organisation, and it must not be work which can be seen either as employment, or which would normally be done by a paid employee.

Asylum seekers doing voluntary work can get paid out-of-pocket expenses such as meal and travel costs, but may not be paid a flat-rate allowance.

## Voluntary workers from overseas

The general rule is that people who are nationals of non European Union (EU) countries need a work permit, or some other form of official permission to take up either paid or unpaid employment in the UK. This includes volunteering. However, the Home Office may allow some people to come to the UK to take up voluntary work. Each case is decided on its own merits. You must be able to provide evidence of the work you are coming to do.

A voluntary worker from a non-EU country must work for a charitable organisation and receive no pay other than out-of-pocket expenses, meals, board and accommodation. The work should not be clerical, administrative or maintenance work.

A voluntary worker from a non-EU country is allowed to stay in the UK for a maximum period of twelve months, which cannot be extended. If you were initially given leave to enter for less than twelve months, you can apply for an extension, but only up to the maximum twelve months.

## Further help

### CSV (Community Service Volunteers)

[www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)

### Citizens Advice

The Citizens Advice service helps people solve their legal, consumer and other problems by providing free advice, and by influencing policymakers. To find out more about volunteering opportunities for Citizens Advice, in England and Wales, go to: [www.citizensadvice.org](http://www.citizensadvice.org). For volunteering opportunities in Scotland, see [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk).

### DWP

The DWP has produced a Guide to Volunteering While on Benefits. You can view the guide on the DWP's website at: [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk). Go into 'Resource Centre', 'Leaflets and guides to benefits and services' and then 'General guides to benefits, services and the Social Fund'.

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