

Volunteering Policy

1. Purpose

1.1. This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement in the society. It is of relevance to all within the society

1.2. This policy is endorsed by the society and will be reviewed yearly to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of the society and its volunteers.

1.3. Although volunteers offer time freely and willingly without binding obligation, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged – both what the society expects of volunteers and what volunteers expect of the society.

1.4. The society is committed to involving volunteers directly within the society to:

- Contribute to the delivery of our services.
- Form our board of directors.
- Make sure we are responsive to the needs of our users.
- Provide different skills and perspectives.
- Offer opportunities for participation by people who might otherwise be excluded.

1.5. This volunteer policy sets out the principles and practice by which we involve volunteers.

2. Principles

2.1. The society recognises the value of volunteering and realises that it is a commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community. The society seeks to involve volunteers in ways that further its work and enhances its services. In turn, it expects its volunteers to uphold its values and objectives.

2.2. Volunteering should be a fulfilling experience. Through adequate support and supervision, volunteers should be able to develop, expand and change their area of volunteering where appropriate. Volunteers can therefore expect to be given support, access to appropriate training and to have their rights as individuals upheld.

2.3. The society will aim to:

- match the time, skills and experience of volunteers to a suitable volunteering opportunity
- ensure each volunteer receives appropriate training and support
- resolve any complaints raised by a volunteer in a timely fashion
- ensure that each volunteer is supported by a contact in the society to provide advice and guidance
- foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere for volunteers and make volunteering a positive experience
- reimburse reasonable expenses incurred. These expenses must be agreed up front with the contact person and are payable against a valid receipt.
- recognises that the benefits that voluntary work brings to volunteers themselves, to service users and to the society.
- ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the societal structure and that mechanisms are in place for them to contribute to the society's work
- endeavour to involve volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities and ensure its volunteering opportunities are as accessible as possible.

2.4. In return, the society asks the following of volunteers to:

- maintain and uphold the good name and reputation of the society
- treat all members, officers, service users and members of the public with respect and dignity
- adhere to the society policies and procedures.

3. Recruitment

3.1. Recruitment of volunteers will generally be from all sections of the community, and will be in line with all other policies. Positive action in recruitment may be used where appropriate.

3.2. Editors and editor and/or coordinators will prepare volunteer task roles which outline the nature of the activity, skills required and opportunities. These will be used to advertise roles. Anyone who wishes to become a volunteer will need to complete a standard volunteer registration form. The information asked for is on a 'need to know' basis, is regarded as confidential and is used to find out more about the potential volunteer and their volunteering preferences, and adapting them when appropriate to accommodate peoples needs.

3.3. Volunteers will also be invited to attend an informal interview to discuss opportunities, find out more and outline their aspirations for a role.

3.4. Depending on the nature of the volunteering opportunity, a volunteer may be required to provide the names of two referees who have agreed to provide a reference on behalf of the volunteer.

3.5. Volunteers working with children, directly with the public or vulnerable adults will always be requested to provide referees.

3.6. Depending on the nature of the volunteering opportunity, the society may need to understand specific health issues in order to assess whether reasonable adjustments can be made.

3.7. Providing good support and supervision, appropriate training and maintaining regular contact are always important especially if volunteers work with vulnerable people. Any issues of suitability that cause concern will be referred to the editor and/or coordinator for additional support and guidance.

3.8. Decisions about a volunteer's suitability for a placement will be taken by the society and the only information remaining on file should relate to the outcome and not the details of the check. Volunteers who are considered unsuitable for a particular task will, where possible, be offered alternative voluntary involvement with the society, or will be signposted to other volunteering opportunities.

3.9. The acceptance of volunteer assistance for a particular role is made on merit, the sole selection criterion being the individual's suitability to carry out agreed tasks.

3.10. Sometimes it is not possible to accept every offer of volunteering help. This can be for a number of reasons e.g. lack of space or accommodation, sufficient volunteers doing that activity or no opportunity available for the type of activity he or she wishes to do. In some cases, the volunteer may not be suitable for the activity.

3.11. The society will inform the volunteer of its decision within a reasonable period of time and in an honest, but sensitive manner and state how their offer of help is appreciated. Any reason(s) why they may not be involved should be explained clearly, but tactfully and if possible, the reasons given.

3.12. The issue of turning down a volunteer should not just be avoided. A volunteer who has been turned down may be signposted to the local volunteer centre where alternative options and opportunities can be explored.

4. Volunteer expectations and work outlines

4.1. Volunteers will have a clear and concise role description, which will be subsequently reviewed every year and at regular contact meetings with their editor and/or coordinator. The task description will be prepared in conjunction with the volunteer. It might be a volunteering placement is established in agreement as a trial period.

4.2. The society expects volunteers to:

- be reliable and honest
- work within agreed guidelines
- have adequate support in their volunteering
- make the most of training and support opportunities
- carry out tasks in a professional way that reflects the aims and values of the society
- respect the work of the society
- comply with the society's policies such as equal opportunities, smoking and health and safety
- make supervisors aware of any potentially dangerous or hazardous conditions
- respect confidential information
- not undertake actions that bring the society into disrepute.

5. Induction and training

5.1. New volunteers will be properly inducted into the society. This includes being properly briefed about the activities to be undertaken and given all the necessary information and skills to enable them to perform with confidence. Volunteers will also be introduced to all key contacts they will see on site.

5.2. All volunteers will be made aware of and have access to all the society's relevant policies, including those relating to volunteering, health and safety, safeguarding and equality and diversity.

5.3. The development of training and support for volunteers is a high priority for the society in order to equip them with the necessary information and skills to carry out their tasks.

6. Support

6.1. Volunteers will have the editor and/or coordinator as the named contact person who will provide regular support. This support will provide the opportunity for ongoing dialogue about the development of the volunteering role and any advice and guidance as needed.

6.2. The volunteer should be clear about the tasks associated with their voluntary role and be willing to undertake them. This written role or volunteer task description will clarify the role the volunteer has agreed to do, the hours that they will be volunteering and what training, support and supervision will be provided. It should also give details about their named contact person and editor and/or coordinator and location of the activity. All volunteers will be introduced to the editor and/or coordinator to whom they can take their volunteering concerns and seek guidance and support.

6.3. Risk assessments should be undertaken for any tasks undertaken by a volunteer and the volunteers should sign to say they have seen this. Furthermore, all volunteers should be given a health and safety induction before they start. It is good practice to keep a record of safety checks that are undertaken and the actions taken to reduce risks and make hazards safe.

6.4. A record should be kept of training (both formal and informal) undertaken by the volunteer.

6.5. Volunteers will have access to regular support and supervision from the editor and/or coordinator. This will enable both the volunteer and the named contact person to identify, monitor and evaluate the volunteer's involvement, recognise achievements and identify individual training needs, including that relevant to their particular volunteering role and to their wider personal development. The frequency, duration and format of these support sessions will vary and should be negotiated between the volunteer and the named contact person.

7. The volunteer's voice

7.1. Volunteers will be consulted in decisions which affect them. The society is committed to developing consultation and representational procedures for volunteers.

8. Records and confidentiality

8.1. Everybody can be affected by confidentiality issues and it is important that volunteers should realise that it is not only society users and society user

information that this applies to but also to volunteer issues.

8.2. Information that volunteers have access to whilst volunteering is confidential. Volunteers must not give away any information about society users, volunteers, society finances or any other Great Central Gazette Limited business either directly or by talking to someone. It is especially important that volunteers keep sensitive information to themselves. However, if volunteers find something out that might be a risk to others then they need to report this to the editor and/or coordinator or the management committee.

8.3. The holding, processing or disclosure of information on individuals which volunteers may handle in the course of their role is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998. The Data Protection Act covers personal information held in any medium.

8.4. It is the responsibility of all volunteers and members the management committee to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to prevent personal information (in whatever format) from being accidentally divulged to unauthorised persons, and that appropriate care is taken in disposing of printed information containing personal information.

8.5. It is suggested that certain information, for example health information in the case of conditions like heart problems, epilepsy and diabetes, should be revealed to the editor and/or coordinator so that should any problem occur can be dealt with promptly.

8.6. All volunteers will share emergency contacts, so that the editor and/or coordinator has a record of who to contact. Volunteers will also be asked to notify staff of any changes to personal details, such as address, telephone number and email. This information is also kept confidential and is not accessed until needed.

9. Expenses

9.1. The society will ensure that there is a clear and accessible system to enable volunteers to claim out of pocket expenses which is in the expenses policy.

9.2. The society believes volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of undertaking volunteering activity. It is acknowledged that some volunteers feel that they do not wish to claim reimbursement - but it is important for volunteers to be able to claim expenses. In addition, claiming expenses can, in some cases, mask the true costs of involving volunteers within a project.

9.3. What can be reclaimed from the society and the calculation of expenses will be explained to the volunteer before they start any activity likely to give rise to expenses. All claims must be agreed in advance with the editor and/or coordinator.

9.4. It is the responsibility of the editor and/or coordinator or named contact to make volunteers aware of the procedure for the reimbursement of expenses.

10. Insurance

10.1. Volunteers will be covered by insurance while carrying out agreed duties.

10.2. Volunteers must behave responsibly, but beyond any acts, omissions or negligence on their part, their activities are insured. Volunteers have a responsibility to follow guidance and not act in a negligent manner.

10.3. The society's liability insurance policies include the activities of volunteers and liability towards them. However, it is the volunteer's responsibility to make their own insurance arrangements for their travel to the site of volunteering and between volunteering sites.

11. Health and Safety

11.1. The society will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the volunteers' health, safety and welfare while at work in accordance with the society's Health and Safety policy.

11.2. The society will carry out a risk assessment for each different voluntary role. This should include the level and type of risks to the society, the volunteer and other people the volunteer will be in contact with. It should also include the action for mitigation of the risks.

12. Equal Opportunities

12.1. The society is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, ability, religion and political beliefs.

12.2. Volunteers and staff will work in accordance with the society's equality and diversity policy and will prevent discrimination on any grounds.

13. Problems

13.1. The society has a policy to help deal with any problems arising with volunteers, both in terms of concerns raised by the volunteer and any concerns the society may have with the performance of the volunteer. In line with this policy volunteers have the right to discuss any concerns they may have with the editor and/or coordinator.

13.2. The society aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. The society seeks to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly and aim for a positive and amicable solution based on the society's guidelines for settling differences.

13.3. The editor and/or coordinator supporting a volunteer will be responsible for handling problems should they arise. If there is a dispute between the volunteer and their supporting manager, then the Management Committee will assign someone to mediate and seek a resolution.

13.4. This could cover a volunteer's complaints about their experience, or complaints about a volunteer's conduct. In the event of a problem, all relevant facts should be obtained as quickly as possible.

14.5. The society will provide support to the volunteer while it endeavours to resolve the problem in an informal manner. Initially, if a volunteer finds that they have a grievance, a complaint or that there is a problem with the volunteer work placement for whatever reason, then they should ask for help or guidance from the editor and/or coordinator. By discussing it openly with people directly involved, then it may be resolved quickly and a small change may prevent the problem from escalating.

15. Endings

15.1. When volunteers move on from their role at the society they will be asked to provide feedback on their volunteering experience by way of an exit questionnaire. They will also be given the opportunity to discuss their responses to the questionnaire more fully with their editor and/or coordinator or a member of the Management Committee.

15.2. On the basis of their voluntary work, volunteers will have the right to request a reference.

16. Monitoring and Evaluation

16.1. The society will systematically monitor and evaluate its use of volunteers with reference to this Volunteer Policy. This policy will be reviewed annually.

This policy was edited by Rhys Everquill (Managing Editor) and reviewed by Emma Guy (Commissioning Editor).

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