Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

Your local county voluntary council

4. Volunteers

4.12 Volunteers and welfare benefits

The Department for Work and Pensions recognises the value of volunteering for reasons of health, community benefit and as a way of developing skills and experience. In many cases volunteering can be a valuable step along a pathway towards paid employment.

What is recognised as volunteering?

Volunteering is recognised by Jobcentre Plus if a volunteer is placed with:

- a charity, voluntary organisation or community group
- a public-sector organisation, such as local council or hospital
- a social enterprise supporting your local community.

It's not volunteering if someone:

- helps out a family member
- is given money apart from out of pocket expenses*, or
- is under contract to do it (this does not include any 'volunteer agreement' in place).

Are benefits affected by volunteering?

In most cases benefits will not be affected by volunteering, unless:

- a volunteer receives a subsistence allowance
- a volunteer is doing what someone else would normally be paid for
- a volunteer is paid anything other than reimbursed for out of pocket expenses (this will count as income)
- a volunteer is unable to keep to the 'basic rules' for receipt of their particular benefit

Otherwise an individual can volunteer for as many hours as they like so long as they can meet the job search requirements as agreed with their JCP Work Coach.

The basic rules

Jobseeker's Allowance

In order to receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) an individual needs to be

- actively looking for paid work.
- must be free to go to an interview with 48 hours' notice

Volunteers must tell their JCP Work Coach if they do any volunteering. They must also inform them of any payments made, including honoraria, expenses or payments in kind such as meal vouchers. It can be useful for volunteers to have a letter from their volunteer organisation outlining the expenses or any other payments they receive, the nature of the volunteering and how they can be contacted whilst they are volunteering A model letter is attached.

Universal Credit

Claimants who are assessed as being 'work ready' will agree with their work coach a 'claimant commitment'.

The claimant commitment, overseen by a JCP Work Coach, sets out daily, weekly and monthly tasks the claimant will be expected to carry out in order to find work, or in order to work towards employment. It is intended that the claimant works with their Work Coach to agree achievable goals, which are set out in a Personal Work Plan. If the claimant does not provide adequate evidence of achieving agreed goals, they may face benefit sanctions.

Volunteering may be accepted as part of a claimant's work search activity, as agreed with the Work Coach. What is deemed to be appropriate volunteering activity will be considered on a case by case basis as part of the conversation between the claimant and their Work Coach. It will also be important for a volunteer to discuss with their Work coach what, if any, evidence of their volunteering is required.

Other Benefits

For information on volunteering and other specific benefits, see the DWP/Volunteering Wales Guide to Volunteering.

Volunteer expenses and welfare benefits

It is recognised good practice to reimburse volunteers for their out of pocket expenses. If this is the only payment made to volunteers, and if receipts are kept as evidence, then expenses payments should not affect benefit payments.

It is acceptable for volunteers to be paid 'up front' for anticipated expenditure. See Information sheet 4.13 for more on Volunteer expenses.

Getting new volunteers started

Volunteers who are on benefits, who wish to volunteer with your organisations, should be encouraged to contact their JCP Work Coach to discuss this. It will be helpful if they take with them a letter from you, such as the one below.

Problems

If you think that a volunteer's case has not been dealt with fairly or they are experiencing problems with benefits, please contact your local volunteer centre or WCVA Helpdesk on 0800 2888 329.

In summary:

- Develop a good relationship with your local Jobcentre Plus so they understand the nature of your volunteering.
- Raise the issue of benefits with current and new volunteers.
- Encourage volunteers to discuss their volunteering with their Work Coach.
- Be aware of the possible effects of expenses payments on benefits.

Further information

The Department for Work and Pensions
Tel: 020 7712 2171
www.dwp.gov.uk

DWP/Volunteering Wales Guide to Volunteering
http://www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering/working-with-volunteers/resources

HM Revenue and Customs
www.hmrc.gov.uk

Disclaimer
The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

Appendix Referral forms

These forms were developed by DWP in conjunction with Volunteering Wales in order to help volunteer centres and JCP Work Coaches in Wales to work together most effectively to help individuals who are on benefits and who wish to volunteer.

These forms may be photocopied and used with your local Volunteer Centre or with a volunteer's JCP Work Coach, as appropriate.

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

Gwirfoddoli Cymru
Volunteering Wales

Enquiry Form - Volunteering Opportunities

Please complete this form with your Work Coach in the Jobcentre Plus office where you make your benefits claim. It will be used by your local Volunteer Centre to contact you to discuss volunteering and current opportunities within your area.

Name	
Date of Birth	
Email	
Phone	
Address	
Preferred Method of Contact	Email ☐ Phone ☐ Letter ☐
Does Volunteering form part of your Claimant Commitment?	
Have you Volunteered before? If so, give details	
Have you been given a copy of the 'Guide to Volunteering'	
What skills/knowledge/ qualifications do you expect to gain from volunteering if any?	
Are there any obstacles, we need to be aware of e.g. health issues, criminal record?	
Do you have any ideas as to what kind of volunteering you would like to do?	
Are there any days or times unable to volunteer?	
Work Coach name and contact details e.g. phone, email	

Declaration: I confirm that the information in this form can be used in relation to my enquiry for volunteering including a copy being sent to my local Volunteer Centre and being retained & processed subject to all relevant aspects of Data Protection legislation.

Signed…….. **Date**……

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Department for Work and Pensions

Gwirfoddoli Cymru
Volunteering Wales

Notification of Volunteering

Please complete this form with your Volunteer Centre Adviser who will email it to the Jobcentre Plus office where you make your benefits claim. If there is an issue you will be contacted by your Job Centre Work Coach. Assuming proper notification of volunteering was given by you, your benefits should not be affected.

Name	
Date of Birth	
JCP Work Coach	
Address	
Please give the name of the body/organisation you intend to volunteer for.	
Please describe briefly your expected tasks whilst volunteering.	
Please give details of expenses that are likely to be incurred (e.g. travel)	
How many hours per week will you be volunteering? (if Known)	
What skills/knowledge/ qualifications do you expect to gain if any?	
Additional notes	
Volunteer Centre Adviser and their contact details e.g. phone, email	
Please sign & date	**Signed……...…….. Date…….**

For further information contact

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations
Unit 30, Ddole Road Enterprise Park, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 6DF
Registered Charity: *1069557*

Tel: 01597 822191 info@pavo.org.uk
Fax: 01597 828675 www.pavo.org.uk

Produced by WCVA, County Voluntary Councils and Volunteer Centres.
Last Updated:09/03/2017

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wcva
Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Tel: 0800 2888 329
www.wcva.org.uk