Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

Your local county voluntary council

4. Volunteers

4.24 Involving volunteers from overseas

Why involve volunteers from overseas?

Many organisations in Wales actively seek to engage both international volunteers living in Wales and those based overseas. The reasons why they do this include:

- Creating opportunities for people within an organisations to learn about another country and/or culture;
- Widening the volunteer profile within your organisation to create greater diversity and opportunities for learning;
- Promoting international exchange and understanding;
- Promoting Welsh culture and providing opportunities for learning and/ or integration;
- Gaining new perspectives from volunteers who approach tasks with a fresh point of view;
- Making work/volunteer teams more reflective of diversity at home in Wales.

Volunteers will also have a range of reasons for wanting to volunteer in Wales, such as:

- To develop language skills/ skills relating to a certain field;
- To gain a different perspective about an area that interests them;
- To travel and experience life in a different country;
- To learn more about Wales and Welsh culture.

Creating successful placements for volunteers from overseas

Exactly the same principles of good practice apply to volunteers from overseas as those which apply to local volunteers. Refer to other information sheets in this series for general advice on the successful management of volunteers.

There are some additional points that may be relevant to volunteers from overseas, depending on their circumstances:

- Make sure that the person is legally entitled to volunteer with your organisation. It is the volunteer's responsibility to obtain the correct visa. It would be prudent for you to take a photocopy of the relevant documentation. See below for more information on this.

- You may need to consider additional factors, including additional risk assessment measures. Eg. If you are hosting a residential volunteer they may need extra support for the times when they are not volunteering. Check that your insurance covers volunteers from overseas. You may need to adapt your emergency procedures, to consider repatriation arrangements in case of an emergency;
- There may be additional information that you need to obtain to support a volunteer from overseas e.g. clarification about unfamiliar qualifications, additional information about health issues (especially for residential volunteers), travel arrangements and language ability.
- You may need to take insurance into account, especially health insurance. If they come from a EU/EEA country they should be covered by reciprocal health agreements but from outside Europe probably not.
- Make it clear whether volunteers need to arrange their own travel and accommodation, or whether these are provided (especially in the case of volunteers coming to the UK for the purpose of volunteering with your organisation)
- It will be difficult to obtain a DBS check. It may in any case be best to create a role for which a DBS check is unnecessary. Some organisations have made use of a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' as part of their recruitment screening.
- Volunteers from overseas may need support beyond task-related support, especially if they are new to the area. Some organisations appoint a 'mentor' for volunteers.
- Volunteers from overseas may have different expectations of a placement; due to cultural differences or to personal outlook. Communication is important here.
- Induction/training is always important when working with volunteers but may be more so with international volunteers. This is a good way of clarifying roles & responsibilities, expectations, etc.
- Make sure your volunteer feels part of the team and be aware that a volunteer from overseas may find it harder to integrate, especially if there are language barriers or cultural differences. They may take a while to acclimatise to a new place and new role.
- Avoid making cultural assumptions – don't assume that things are the same, or that things are different! Be aware of cultural variations in body language, behavioural norms, attitudes to work and social expectations. Remember, these are what make contact with people from different cultures so interesting, so keep communication open and take a positive perspective to differences.
- Encourage volunteers to share something of their experience and their country – for example teaching songs, games or giving talks or presentations

The right to volunteer?

Regardless of a volunteer's motivation or background, care needs to be taken to ensure that individuals entering the UK have the right to volunteer in this country. Rules concerning immigration and visa requirements are complex. This information is for general guidance only. If there is any doubt about someone's right to volunteer, contact UK Visas and Immigration (formerly UK Border Agency – now part of the Home Office).

Recruiting volunteers directly from overseas

International volunteering is popular with students and young people, but older adults often also look for ways of travelling, gaining new experiences and using their existing skills to volunteer.

For citizens of the European Union[1] and the European Economic Area[2] there should be no legal barriers to volunteering in Wales.

If your organisation wants to engage a volunteer or voluntary worker[3] from outside of the EU/EEA you will need to register to become a sponsoring organisation. This means that you will be licensed to issue certificates of sponsorship to volunteers in order that they can apply for visas. For further guidance on how to do this, consult the UK Visas and Immigration website.

Recruiting volunteers from overseas who are already in the UK

This may include international students, those who have come to work but also wish to volunteer, relatives of overseas students or employees, or asylum seekers who have applied for the right to remain in the UK.

Once again, it is important to check the individual's immigrations status, including any conditions attached to the type of visa or entry clearance conditions. In general, where there is freedom to work, there is also freedom to volunteer in the UK. If there are visa restrictions on the ability to work then you need to exercise extra caution. If there is a limit on the number of hours someone can work, any hours spent volunteering might count towards this.

It is the individual's responsibility to act within the permissions of their visa. Failure to do so could jeopardise their immigration status.

Organisations should be careful not to unwittingly create a 'contract of employment' with volunteers. To do so could jeopardise the immigration status of those whose visa does not permit them to work in this country. Take care to ensure that volunteers are placed in a bone fide volunteer schemes, with no contractual obligations, no expenses (bar travel and meal costs) and that volunteers understand any risks involved.

There are some particular categories of UK entrant who are expressly forbidden from volunteering:

- Anyone on a **visitor** or **student visitor visa**
- **Au pairs**

Those in possession of a **student visa** (as distinct from a student VISITOR visa) should be permitted to volunteer, although you should check as there may be certain restrictions.

Asylum seekers are allowed to volunteer with registered charities, voluntary organisations and for bodies that raise funds for either. After recent lobbying, it is understood that volunteering also within statutory sectors such as the National Health Service is acceptable, although changes to written government guidance on this has yet to be made. 'Failed' asylum seekers who are either awaiting appeal or awaiting deportation may also volunteer .[4]

Refugees, who have refugee status or exceptional leave to remain in the UK are allowed to volunteer.

References

1. ie Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. Since January 2014, freedom of movement and work has been extended to Bulgaria and Romania.
2. Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland
3. The Business Scene Resources website gives a helpful definition of a voluntary worker, as defined for national minimum wage purposes
4. See article in Third Sector magazine, October 2013

Further information

A number of established programmes exist to support the development of international volunteering opportunities in Wales. These usually focus on residential opportunities, lasting from a few weeks to a year.

European Voluntary Service is part of the EU Erasmus+ programme and co-funds volunteer placements lasting from 2 weeks to 12 months for 18-30 year olds. Organisations can apply to become accredited hosting organisations by completing an Expression of Interest form (EI); there is no deadline for completing a form but accreditation can take up to six weeks and will involve a telephone interview or visit. Once accredited, organisations can apply for funding to host volunteers.

Opportunities are periodically available through the Grundtvig programme, which supports adult learning projects across Europe. It may be worth checking out current funding opportunities

The Worldwide Volunteering website allows organisations to advertise volunteer opportunities free of charge.

UK Visas and Immigration - for Information on visas, including how to apply

Volunteering and International students: a practical guide (2008) UKCISA

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 A - Certificate of good conduct (CGC)

This documentation is used by UNA Exchange, and is reproduced here with permission. It attempts to assess criminal record information from volunteers from overseas, by asking a partner organisation to give a verification of the potential volunteer's police record.

Basics:

- The CGC is a print out of the volunteer's criminal record and can usually be obtained from their local police station at a small cost.
- The CGC should be sent by a covered fax or as an email attachment to [email address] with a notice that it is confidential material.
- All international partner organisations will be asked to check the CGCs and complete a verification form to confirm that the CGC is genuine and shows no reason why the volunteer is not suitable to work on the project for which they have applied.
- Volunteers should bring the original certificate to the project so that we can check it against the scanned or emailed copy.
- We will only ask to see the applicant's CGC if the project requires the information. It will not be required from volunteers working on environmental projects where they will not come in to contact with children or vulnerable adults.
- Providing the CGC is an absolutely necessary condition for participating in a project of this nature. If we have not received the CGC three weeks before the project start date, the volunteer will lose his/her place on the project and will not be allowed to participate. It is also essential that the original certificate is brought to the project. Again, if this does not happen, the volunteer may not be able to participate in the project.

Refusals:

- If a volunteer has a record of sexual or physical abuse towards others then they will automatically be refused.
- Volunteers with a criminal record that does not affect their ability to work with children should not be put off applying.

Confidentiality of CGCS: The CGCs will only be seen by people who need to see them. Everyone who sees the CGCs will be aware that they are confidential documents.

Cancellations: It is important that we know as soon as possible if you are unable to attend a project. Once you have received confirmation of your place we do not normally refund your fee. However, if the cancellation is due to circumstances beyond your control, a refund may be offered.

[your organisation logo]

Certificate of Good Conduct Verification for Partner Organisations

I can confirm that the enclosed document states that _____
has no previous criminal convictions and is suitable to work with children.

Signed:

Name:

Organisation:

Position:

Certificate of good conduct document number:

Please stamp this verification with the official stamp of your organisation.

For further information contact

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