

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

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 organisation 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;
- Developing new networks and opportunities for collaborative projects;
- 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 and intercultural competencies;;
- To increase employability by developing skills in a specific 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. To demonstrate that due diligence checks have been completed, it would be prudent to take a copy of the relevant documentation for secure storage with other HR data. 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: peer support from other international volunteers is especially beneficial in this respect. 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 and maintain a watching brief over [travel advice from the FCO](#);
- 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 (at least until Brexit in 2019) 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)
- For roles working directly with young people and vulnerable adults, incoming volunteers are able to undergo DBS checks. As this can take longer to complete for non-UK citizens it is advisable to start the process at the earliest opportunity. Some organisations make use of a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' as part of their recruitment screening. (see Appendix A)
- Volunteers from overseas may need support beyond task-related support, especially if they are new to the area. Where possible it is always beneficial to 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 and that records are maintained to demonstrate completion of due diligence checks. 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.

Citizens of the European Union¹ do not currently require a visa to volunteer in Wales. From April 2019 it is anticipated that the UK will be part of a Visa Waiver Program with the EU.

If your organisation wants to directly engage a volunteer or voluntary worker from outside of the EU/EEA you can apply to become a sponsoring organisation (with a fee of between c. £500-£1,500, depending on organisation size). 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.

Alternatively, smaller organisations with less capacity to become a sponsoring organisation may find it more appropriate to receive international volunteers through a coordinating organisation (e.g. UNA Exchange).

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 immigration 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 scheme, with no contractual obligations, no expenses (except for 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.³

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. See article in [Third Sector magazine](#), October 2013, which affirms that asylum seekers, including 'failed' asylum seekers, can volunteer for charitable or public sector organisations.

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.

Opportunities for involving volunteers from overseas may arise through the European programmes of EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency).

[International Voluntary Service](#) welcomes 20 – 30 volunteers per year of all ages on placements up to 12 months with partners in Great Britain, and recruits volunteer mentors to support them.

[UK Visas and Immigration](#) - for information on visas, including how to apply

[Guidance on criminal records checks for overseas applicants](#)

[UKCISA \(UK Council for International Student Affairs\)](#) gives advice to international students and those who work with them

[UNA Exchange](#) is an international volunteering charity based in Cardiff and operating across Wales, coordinating opportunities for non-for-profit organisations to host volunteers from all around the world. This ranges from two-week residential volunteering camps up to 12-month placements, facilitated by funding from Welsh Government and the European Commission. As a member of the UNESCO-affiliated Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service, UNA Exchange also supports individuals from Wales to volunteer around the world and bring their experiences back home.

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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