



# 4.0 Volunteers

## Volunteers and Welfare Benefits

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### Introduction

The **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** recognises the value of volunteering for reasons of health, community benefit and as a way of developing skills and experience.

This guidance aims to give an overview of what you may need to know and provides answers to some of the questions that organisations and volunteers may have.

It doesn't, however, cover every circumstance – if you or a volunteer are unsure then please contact your local Volunteer Centre, Citizens Advice or the volunteer can discuss their questions with their Work Coach or Benefits Adviser in DWP.

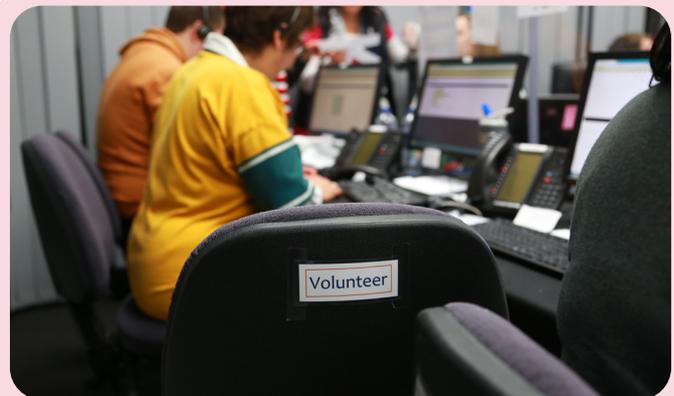


Image: Group of volunteers working

### Benefits and the Rules

The rules vary depending on the type of benefit someone is receiving, but there are some key principles that need to be considered.

**The volunteering must comply with the government's own definition:**



The definition states that volunteering is 'when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it'.

It is possible to volunteer with any kind of organisation including:

- Charities
- Voluntary organisation or community groups
- Public-sector organisations, e.g. the NHS, police and other public services
- Social enterprises
- Local businesses

It doesn't count as volunteering if an individual is:

- Helping out a family member
- Given money other than being paid out-of-pocket expenses
- Under contract to do the work (this does not include any 'volunteer agreement' you may have).

**Volunteers must notify their Work Coach or Benefits Adviser if they intend to start volunteering** - Benefits claimants are required to notify their benefits adviser of their intention to start volunteering.

### Expenses

Expenses received, as part of the volunteering, **must be out of pocket expenses only** i.e. expenses incurred in order to volunteer, for example the cost of travel, meals while out volunteering, care costs etc.



For more information on volunteer expenses, see Information Sheet:  
**4.13 Volunteer Expenses**

The organisation should collect receipts from the volunteer and reimburse exactly what has been spent. This means that, if needed, they could show the benefits adviser that any money they are getting was a reimbursement and not a payment.

If they are receiving financial rewards beyond out-of-pocket expenses, this can be classed as income and will be liable for tax, and it can affect the benefits they receive. If they live with parents or a partner, their benefits could be affected if they get money, or anything else on top of expenses that could be seen as payment.

It can be useful for volunteers to have a letter from their volunteer-involving 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. It is acceptable for volunteers to be paid 'up front' for anticipated expenditure.



### External Link

Read government guidance on volunteering, rights and expenses

[UK Government - Volunteering Expenses Guidance](#)

## Specific Benefits

### Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)

Volunteers should inform their **Work Coach or Benefits Adviser** and be upfront about the intention to start volunteering. Volunteers may have agreed an individual plan; **for example, if on JSA the volunteer may then have a claimant commitment that has been agreed with their work coach which may identify specific tasks and activities to complete.**

By informing the **Work Coach** before volunteering starts, the volunteering could be part of this plan. By not following an agreed plan, the volunteer may face penalties for failing to meet their commitments.

### Universal Credit

Volunteers can still volunteer if on universal credit as long as they also undertake any activities, such as job searching, training or other requirements, identified by the adviser. This is likely to be part of a claimant commitment.

### What Are These Requirements?

When an individual first attends Jobcentre Plus, the adviser will decide which of four groups they will be put into, depending on their needs and circumstances. For example:

- If they are unable to work because of illness or disability, or have a child under one year old, they will have no work-related requirements
- If they are the sole or main carer of a child aged between one and five years, they will be expected to attend a work-focused interview to help keep in touch with the world of work and improve their opportunities for work
- If they have a limited capacity to work, perhaps because of an illness or disability, they may be asked to undertake activities in preparation for work, such as training or work experience ('work preparation requirements')
- Everyone else will be expected to take 'all reasonable action' to find a job or increase their hours or pay ('all work-related requirements')

The adviser will draw up a claimant commitment in consultation with the individual. This will set out which group they are in and what actions, if any, they will be expected to take to find work, find better-paid work or increase hours. It will also say what will happen if they don't comply with this (the adviser may impose sanctions).

### What Are These Requirements?

Yes, it can count towards up to 50% of the time you are expected to be looking for a job e.g. if a volunteer is required to spend 35 hours per week looking for a job, half of this time can be spent volunteering i.e. 17.5 hours. If a volunteer does five hours per week then they will be required to spend 30 hours looking for work. If the volunteer is looking for part time work e.g. 16 hours per week then 8 hours can be spent volunteering.

**NB:** There are no restriction on how many hours a volunteer can volunteer for, but they will be required to spent at least 17.5 hours per week seeking work for full time positions.

### Can the Adviser Require Someone to Volunteer?

No. Volunteering is something that an individual chooses to do because they want to freely give their time and energy to benefit others. No one can force them to volunteer or direct them into a particular type of volunteering.

### Can the Adviser Approach the Organisation to Check up on the Volunteer?

No, this is separate relationship and as an organisation you must not give out any details about the volunteer without their permission.

### What About Job Interviews?

Volunteers have 48 hours to attend an interview and one week to take up a job offer.

### Other Considerations

As described above, 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



#### External Link

For information on volunteering and other specific benefits, see the [DWP/Volunteering Wales Guide to Volunteering](#)

### 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.

### In Summary

- Develop a good relationship with the local Jobcentre Plus so they understand the nature of the volunteering activity.
- 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](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

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### **Volunteering Resources**

**Wales Council of Voluntary Action**

<https://wcva.cymru/i-work-with-volunteers/>

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### **HM Revenue and Customs**

**HM Revenue and Customs**

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)

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### **Volunteering and benefits**

**NCVO**

[www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/volunteering-and-benefits](http://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/volunteering-and-benefits)



Cefnogi Trydydd  
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector  
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact  
<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

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### 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.