



4.0 Volunteers

The Language of Volunteering Terms Explained

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Introduction

The language that we use about volunteering can be confusing. Sometimes different terms are used interchangeably.

Some terms have a very specific meaning, for example in the context of legislation.

This is an attempt to explain some terms which are relevant to volunteering. They are listed in alphabetical order.



Image: Group of volunteers joining hands

Volunteering Terms

Community Service

Is an activity carried out by a person or group for the benefit of a community. It may be voluntary but is not always. People may be required to do community service as a part of a sentence for committing a crime or it may be a part of the school curriculum. In other circumstances, people may have chosen to do community service, for example by joining a group or campaign. Community service is a broad term that can mean different things in different contexts.

See also [Community Work Placement](#) and [Community Participation](#).

Community Participation

This term applies to an element of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Pupils aged 14 -19 complete a placement of 15-30 hours that aims to benefit the community to gain credit for their Welsh Baccalaureate qualification. This may also be referred to as a **Community Challenge**.

Community Work Placement

As a part of the welfare benefits system **Community Work Placements (CWP)** are



“aimed at those claimants whose primary barrier to work is a lack of work experience or motivation, and who may have spent a great deal of time away from a structured work environment. CWP aims to equip jobseekers with a valuable period of experience in a work-based environment, enabling them to develop the disciplines and skills associated with sustained employment, as well as to move them into employment.”

The programme is aimed at **Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)** claimants who have completed the **Work Programme** and have been identified as potentially benefiting from this activity. Where this is agreed, it becomes a part of an individual’s claimant commitment and as such is a mandatory activity. As they are mandatory, **Community Work Placements** do not fit with the widely accepted definition of volunteering.

Formal Volunteering

Unpaid voluntary activity carried out with or under the auspices of an organisation.

Informal Volunteering

Unpaid voluntary activity carried out independently of a formal organisation, often at neighbourhood level but outside or in addition to the family.

Internship

There is no legal definition of internship. An internship is a structured, time bound opportunity with a defined start and end date. The aim of the is to develop the individual's skills and knowledge whilst providing a meaningful experience to improve employability.

Internships may be paid or unpaid. **Paid interns** are subject to minimum wage and employment legislation. **Unpaid interns** are regarded as voluntary interns if:

- They are placed within a Public or Third Sector organisation
- There are flexible arrangements in place, with activity defined in an internship description but no contractual obligations are in place
- There is no financial reward or benefit other than legitimate expenses incurred
- There is a support framework in place that is specific to the voluntary intern, including **for example, an Internship Policy, support and supervision structures and procedures for handling problems**
- Voluntary interns would be regarded generally as volunteers although intern-specific policies are recommended

Social Action

A definition of social action as agreed for the purpose of research relating to young people (Ockenden and Stuart 2014) is:



“(Young people) taking practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the (young) person themselves. It is a form of volunteering, with emphasis on social change.”

The #iwill campaign (Step Up To Serve) provide a definition with additional detail of what social action can look like in practice,



“Social action refers to activities that people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment. There are lots of ways in which people can take practical action to make a positive difference and it can take place in a range of contexts and can mean formal or informal activities. These include volunteering, fundraising, campaigning or supporting peers.”

Timebanking

Timebanking involves giving time to some activity within the community, in return for ‘credits’ which can be redeemed for a range of benefits or rewards. These rewards are defined by each timebanking scheme, each having an assigned credit value.

Timebanking schemes require administrative co-ordination, including maintaining individual credit records and promotion to include new members and partners. Some schemes receive external funding. Beyond this, Timebanking schemes vary greatly with regard to the type of activity which can be undertaken to earn credits. Timebanks tend to refer to ‘members’ rather than ‘volunteers’.

Timebanking activity may in some cases resemble volunteering activity, but since credits are ‘earned’ for time ‘donated’ it does not sit easily with the accepted definition of volunteering which involves activity for no financial gain.

Third Sector

The term is used by the Welsh Government as an inclusive and overarching description of a diverse range of organisations that share a set of values and characteristics. Third Sector organisations are:

- Independent, non-governmental bodies
- Established voluntarily by people who choose to organise themselves (i.e. governed by a voluntary Board of Trustees)
- 'Value driven' and motivated by social cultural or environmental objectives, rather than simply to make a profit
- For the benefit of people and communities in Wales

Trustee

Trustees are volunteers; they have overall control of a voluntary organisation and are responsible for making sure that it does what it was set up to do. Trustees may be known by other titles including, board members, governors, committee members. If the organisation they are running is a company, the trustees will also be Directors of the company. Whatever title they are given, trustees are the people who lead the organisation and decide how it is run.

Unpaid Office Holder

HMRC describes unpaid office holders as officials elected under the constitution of bodies such as sports clubs and social clubs and people who undertake unpaid work within normal commercial organisations, or within areas such as the health service, governing bodies of Further Education Colleges, or the courts.

Such office holders are not remunerated for their services but may receive travelling and subsistence payments. In some cases, they may be eligible for a financial loss allowance (to replace earnings which would otherwise have been gained). Members of public bodies, magistrates and jury members are paid for loss of earnings, for example Unpaid Office Holders are generally regarded as volunteers and include office holders on governing bodies and Trustee Boards.

Unpaid Work

Rochester (2006) depicts volunteering as three overlapping circles labelled 'unpaid work or service', 'activism' and 'serious leisure'. On this model, most volunteering within organisations would be regarded as 'unpaid work'.

The Department of Work and Pensions, however, understands unpaid work to be activity for which you might expect to be paid, but are not. The DWP booklet on volunteering (2010) states:



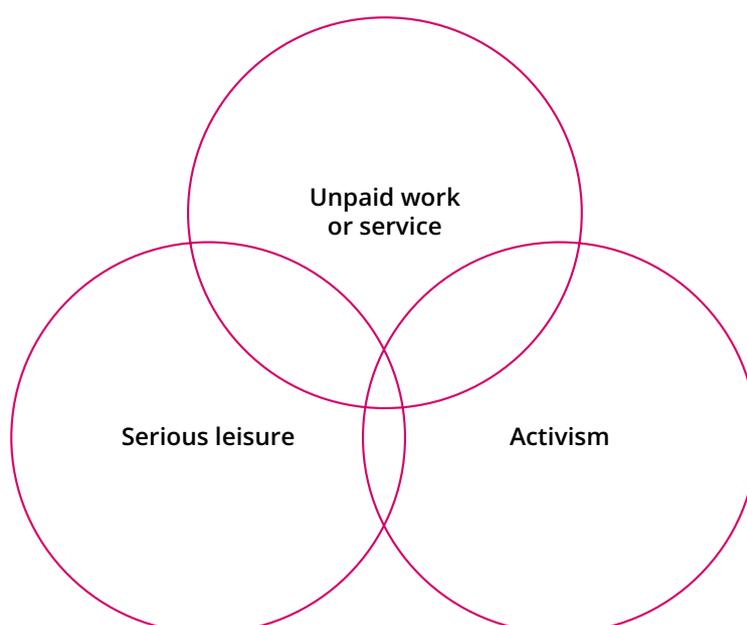
'Choosing not to be paid is not the same as volunteering. If you're doing what someone would normally be paid for (for example, if you're working in a business or for a member of your family where they would usually pay someone to do the work) we will class this as unpaid work, not volunteering.

If you get Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Universal Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, we might decide that what you would have been paid are 'notional earnings'. If we decide this, it may affect your benefits and tax credits.

We decide by looking at whether:

- Someone would normally be paid to do the same kind of work
- Your work helps society or your community in some way, and
- You work for a charity or similar group.

Care is needed to avoid possible misinterpretation, if using the term 'unpaid work'.



A three-perspective model of volunteering (Rochester, 2006)

Voluntary Experience

A general term, which usually places emphasis on the skills, personal development and other personal gains in the course of volunteering. This is valued for building a CV, or for personal benefits which will benefit one's career.

Voluntary Organisation/Sector

Originally the term was used to mean an organisation that was established independently of the state, to serve a public benefit. Nowadays we generally use it to refer to any organisation where people have come together voluntarily to make a difference, not for money or because the law tells them to.

Voluntary Work

HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs), identifies voluntary work as follows:



"You're classed as doing voluntary work if you can only get certain limited benefits (e.g. reasonable travel or lunch expenses) and you're volunteering for a: charity, voluntary organisation or statutory body."

Given the need to clearly to distinguish, in many circumstances, what is 'volunteering' and what is 'work', this term is generally an unhelpful one. 'Volunteering' or 'voluntary activity' may suffice. It could, however, be used in relation to 'voluntary worker'.

Voluntary Worker

This is a technical term that allows for exemption under the **National Minimum Wage Act 1998. (NMW)**. Full-time volunteers, such as those undertaking residential volunteering may fit into this category. The nature of the arrangements means that they work under a contract (**written or implied**), often being expected to fulfil prescribed hours and duties. According to government guidance on the minimum wage:

'Voluntary workers in your organisation are exempt from the NMW if both the following apply:

- You are a charity, voluntary organisation, associated fund-raising body
- Statutory body
- You give them no monetary payments and only limited and specified expenses and benefits'

Voluntary workers may commonly consider themselves to be volunteers but are technically '**workers**' under the law. They enjoy some rights which are denied to volunteers (**although not as many as are afforded to employees**). **For example, they are covered by the Working Time Regulations (1998), and by the worker provisions of anti-discriminatory legislation.**

Volunteer

A volunteer is someone who commits time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.

This is the definition recognised by Welsh Government, as in, **for example, the Third Sector Scheme (January 2014)**. A volunteer is not in a contractual position (**whether written or implied**). They can legitimately receive reimbursement for out of pocket expenses.

Volunteering (When on Welfare Benefits)

Individuals who receive welfare benefits can undertake volunteering by choice, providing that their JCP work coach is informed and that this activity does not jeopardise any of the pre-conditions which are associated with the benefit received – for example work search activities which have been agreed as part of a **Claimant Contract**.

In some cases, and if an individual chooses this, volunteering activity may be included as part of the **Claimant Contract**. In this case, specific volunteering activity has been recognised as playing a valuable part in developing the individual's employability, a failure to undertake volunteering as agreed in this contract may result in benefit sanctions.

Volunteer- Involving Organisation (VIO)

Any organisation that involves volunteers in its management and/or day to day work. If the only volunteers in an organisation are charity trustees, then (unless they are volunteering for the organisation in additional capacities) the organisation would not be described as a volunteer involving organisation.

Volunteering Opportunity

Specific vacancies for volunteers are described as volunteer (or volunteering) opportunities, as advertised on the volunteering opportunities website. There is usually a role description describing the expectations, although often this is a matter for negotiation and can be adapted to suit individual requirements and circumstances.



External Link

Find volunteering opportunities on the Volunteering Wales website.

[Volunteering Wales Website](#)

Volunteering placement

The term is used when a referral agency, such a volunteer centre or a job centre, introduces a volunteer to a volunteer opportunity within an organisation. Volunteer placements are sometimes monitored for performance monitoring purposes.

Volunteer-led organisation

For the purpose of research carried out in 2008, the Institute of Volunteering Research defined a volunteer-led organisation as:



'A volunteer-led group or organisation is a community group in which the 'leader' of the group is a volunteer who holds one of the 'formally elected or appointed offices'. This is commonly, but not always, the chair. They are the functional equivalent of a chief executive officer in a paid organisation. This does not include trustees in paid-staff organisations.'

In some cases, volunteer-led organisations employ paid staff, for example in administrative roles. The operational leadership of the organisation remains volunteer led.

Work experience

Work experience involves an opportunity for an individual to learn in the working environment; this may be by shadowing staff or trying out various tasks. It is generally a compulsory element of an educational course.

Schools students may undertake one or two weeks of work experience; students in tertiary education may undertake a longer period (**this may be referred to as a work placement, student placement, or practical experience**). Students on counselling courses, **for example, are required to fulfil a requisite number of hours' practical experience of counselling, alongside their academic studies.**

Crucially, any placement should provide a supported learning environment. Students doing work experience as part of a higher or further education course are not entitled to the national minimum wage if the work experience is less than a year long.

Work experience is not generally regarded as volunteering, although sometimes it can lead into volunteering, when individuals choose to carry out activity which is over and above the requirements of their course/ educational institution.

Youth-led Volunteering

Volunteering which is **'led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision making'** (Ockendon et al.,2013). This can take many different forms including entirely youth-led projects which are set up by young people but can also include supported youth-led activities where young people are supported by adults to take the lead.

Further Information

Checking Your Employment Rights

ACAS

<https://www.acas.org.uk/checking-your-employment-rights>

Apprenticeships, Internships and Work Placements

CIPD

https://gov.wales/apprenticeships-genius-decision?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=ApprenticeshipForEmployersGS

Guide on Internships

NCVO

<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/volunteers-and-your-organisation/volunteering-internships#guidance>

Youth Volunteering and Social Action Charter

WCVA

<https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Youth-volunteering-and-social-action-charter.pdf>

Timebanking

Timebanking

www.timebanking.org

Trustees

UK Government

www.gov.uk/charity-trustee-whats-involved

Employment Income Manual - Unpaid Office Holders

HMRC

www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/eimanual/eim71100.htm

Volunteering Whilst Getting Benefits

UK Government

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/volunteering-and-claiming-benefits>

Further Information

Time Well Spent Survey

NCVO

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent>

What is Social Action?

#iwill campaign

<https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/youth-social-action>

The Spectrum of Volunteer Participation, Eden Communities, 2021

Eden Project Communities

https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/sites/default/files/volunteer_report.pdf

Additional Information Sheets

Third Sector Support Wales

4.11 Volunteers and the Law



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/>

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.