



University of Plymouth Students' Union Volunteer Policy

1.0 Introduction

The University of Plymouth Students' Union (UPSU) is a student-led organisation with over 30,000 members, all of whom are students at the University of Plymouth. UPSU is an educational charity, whose charitable objectives are the advancement of education of all students by being the recognised representative channel between students and the University, providing advice, representation and support, and providing social, cultural and recreational activities, and forums for the personal development of its members.

UPSU is committed to providing opportunities for students to take on roles of responsibilities, providing the support in order to empower them to take on leadership roles and run activities, and to develop new skills and abilities that will help them in addition to their academic studies.

The mission statement of UPSU is 'transforming lives through experience' and part of that work through the providing of opportunities for all students and staff is to participate in their chosen community volunteering activities.

This Volunteer Policy is designed to ensure that the time and enthusiasm given by volunteers, is recognised, supported and valued, and that the UPSU volunteer and community engagement partnership benefits all parties. It outlines methods of recruitment, support procedures and the mechanisms in place to safeguard volunteers placed by UPSU.

The policy acts as a reference guide for both volunteers and community partners in order to clearly highlight the rights of volunteers and how they can be expected to be treated, as well as stating our responsibilities towards volunteers and the expectations we have.

In line with this commitment to providing volunteering opportunities, UPSU seeks to involve students and staff in community volunteering activities in order to:

- Ensure that all the volunteering opportunities facilitated and provided by UPSU meet the needs of the community in which they work in.

- Provide new skills, personal development opportunities and practical experience.
- Forge, maintain and develop our links and partnerships within the local community.

1.1 The Value of Volunteering at UPSU

Volunteering has been identified as an intrinsic part of the work of UPSU and states in the strategic objectives that it strives to provide and develop diverse activities by strengthening their volunteering and community based activities.

Volunteering gives students valuable skills, knowledge and practical experience that cannot be achieved from academic studies alone and therefore gives a more rounded student experience, valuable transferable skills and the opportunity to interact with the community in which they live.

Student volunteers also bring great benefit to their local community, through the projects they create and deliver, and by engaging in community volunteering opportunities. By the very nature of volunteering the students are helping to break down of barriers and assist with the student and community relationship.

2.0 Why Volunteer?

As a volunteer you will have the opportunity to make a real difference to your local community. During the course of your volunteering, you will also get:

- The chance to gain work experience within a supportive, empowering and positive environment.
- The opportunity to develop interests and skills through regular access to training, informal learning activities and supervision.
- Opportunities to learn new skills and to put them into practice.
- To meet new people, and expand your social and professional networks.
- The chance to find out more about the issues surrounding your chosen volunteering group/project/activity.
- To do something completely different and challenging!

2.1 What can you do as a volunteer?

UPSU will always endeavour, if possible, to match all volunteers that enrol with the Volunteer Department with their preferred area of activity.

Volunteers may have a very clear idea of the area that they wish to work in already, and if this is the case the enrolment form gives the opportunity to express this. However, not everyone is sure about the area in which they would like to volunteer as they do not know what is on offer in the local community for example, and others

may be interested in several different activities and want to gain experience in different areas.

If you are unsure about what you would like to do, don't worry. The Volunteer Department has information on a vast range of activities, projects and community contacts, ranging from one-off events, those that run twice a term, to the more time intensive opportunities that require a commitment of three hours a week. The Department is happy to discuss these as part of the enrolment process, and to arrange for you to try out/visit several projects in order to find the right opportunity.

Part of the Department's role is to help source volunteering activities and act a brokerage service so if they are not aware of a specific activity that you are interested in, they will use their contacts to research and assist you with the opportunity.

3.0 How to enrol as a volunteer through UPSU

We will use all appropriate means to advertise for volunteers with UPSU and the University of Plymouth in line with the principles of our Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policies.

All volunteers are asked to complete the Volunteer Enrolment form. This can be obtained from the Volunteer Department which is situated in the Hive in the Students' Union, or from the volunteering pages on www.upsu.com/volunteering. If you require assistance with the completing of the form please do not hesitate to contact the Volunteer Office.

Once the enrolment form is received you will be invited in to meet with a staff member in order to discuss your interests and to receive information on opportunities, activities and events available. Please do not hesitate to contact the Volunteer Department if you have any questions regarding enrolling with other community partners.

All information given on the form will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be passed onto any third party without your consent.

UPSU does not process Criminal Records Bureau checks for volunteers placed within charities, as the role of the Volunteer Department is to act as a brokerage service for volunteers, and the safeguarding procedures are the responsibility of the community group. The exception to this practice is when the activity is organised and managed by UPSU, as happens with the RELAYS (Regional Education Legacy in Arts and Youth Sports) project. In this instance CRB's are processed by Plymouth University and as such we follow their guidelines and procedures for the checks – details can be obtained via the Volunteer Department.

UPSU works with our community partners to ensure that all their policies and procedures regarding CRB checks and safeguarding policies are robust and

relevant. For further guidance and information on the requirements of CRB checks, please contact the Volunteer Department.

4.0 UPSU's responsibilities to you

UPSU's Volunteer Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- UPSU does not and will not introduce volunteers to replace paid staff.
- Your chosen volunteering activity to be of real benefit to the community and will make a difference to those you engage with.
- Your volunteering will be appreciated and recognised and will be encouraged to develop your volunteering role.
- You will be provided with all the necessary information and guidance that you require in order to carry out your volunteering.
- You will be kept informed of any training and accreditation opportunities offered by UPSU, the University of Plymouth or partner organisations.
- You will volunteer with an organisation that is non-discriminatory, and is working to be more diverse.
- You do not have to carry out any task you believe to be inappropriate or unrealistic.
- You are free to stop volunteering at any time.
- You will be provided with a reference, if requested, for up to 12 months after you either finish your volunteering activities, or graduate.

4.1 Induction

All volunteers will receive an informal introduction into the role and work of the Volunteer Department, as well as the support that is available via UPSU during your volunteering experience. As part of the induction the Volunteer Department will arrange a convenient time for you to visit your chosen volunteering project/s in order to meet with the co-ordinator/s to find out more information.

When you have decided on a project/activity, a meeting will be arranged where you will receive a full induction.

The induction should include:

- Induction training including a tour of the premises and all aspects of Health and Safety regarding your volunteering activity
- The details of your volunteer role
- Essential procedure information such as timekeeping, rota etc
- A list of staff members and volunteers and relevant contact details
- Details of ongoing training opportunities
- Details of where copies of all the relevant policies are held - including the Volunteer policy, Confidentiality, Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and Diversity, Codes of Practice, and Conflict Management.
- Other information as appropriate.

UPSU actively encourages all students to try out volunteering opportunities and projects in order to find out more about the activities before committing to it. UPSU also provides support in order to set up 'taster sessions' and 'introductory periods' with our community partners. In this way we can assist students to gain the most from their experience and provide our community partners with enthusiastic and committed volunteers.

4.2 Student-Led Projects and the ViP Society

By providing a range of student-led projects, UPSU offers the opportunity to 'try-out' several different volunteering activities, and the nature of the projects means that students can take part in them as a 'one-off', termly, or on a more regular basis. They provide a commitment free activity so many students engage with them due to the flexible, relaxed and friendly nature of the activity. The projects also offer a range of opportunities within them such as a visit that focuses on an environmental activity may also offer administrative work as well. All projects meet a very important community need and are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure opportunities are still current, relevant and of direct value to the community.

UPSU has a student volunteer society called Volunteer in Plymouth (ViP), and they actively promote volunteering to the student body, as well as running their own student-led projects. These projects are funded by the Volunteer Department, and are supported by our community partners and the Volunteer Project Co-ordinator, but they are delivered and managed by the student project leaders.

As a committee, ViP feed into the work of the Volunteer Department by reporting on their work at committee meetings and on an informal basis through visits to the office, and they assist with guiding the work of UPSU through their activities and the interests of the society members. Being part of the committee provides students with the opportunity to develop skills such as leadership, project planning, teamwork skills and the Volunteer Project Co-ordinator works with them to enable the appropriate training to be available and assist with their developments.

4.3 Training

After you have started volunteering, further training, informal learning opportunities and personal developments activities will be provided, as appropriate. The Training Department at UPSU manages, promotes and delivers a range of training which is accessible to all students, throughout the academic year.

An annual programme of skills training is provided throughout the academic year for any volunteer who wishes to access it. The programme ranges from the skill specific, such as First Aid, Safe use of Tools and Sign Language, to those that reflect on the skills learnt during the time spent volunteering such as the extra 5 credit Learning through Volunteering Module and the Plymouth Award.

The Training Department and all the details can be found on www.upsu.com or via the Volunteer Department.

4.4 Ongoing support

All volunteers will have the UPSU Volunteer Department as their main contact, in addition to the particular co-ordinator or project leader for the area in which you volunteer. The co-ordinators/project leaders will support all volunteers and will have regular meetings with volunteers to discuss any problems or issues that may arise.

UPSU has an 'open-door' ethos that encompasses all of the Departments. The Volunteer Department is open for the support for all volunteers, and aims to have a member of staff in the office everyday from Monday to Friday from 10am until 4pm. Volunteers can ask for a meeting with a member of the Volunteer Department at anytime throughout the academic year and can make the arrangements in person, via email or by phone. All volunteers can expect to be contacted at least twice a year to enquire about how you they finding the volunteer experience.

5.0 Your responsibilities to UPSU

- Act as an ambassador for UPSU and as such behave in an appropriate manner.
- Agree to abide by the Students' Union's Equal Opportunities Policy and follow policy and procedure when on projects.
- Make UPSU aware of any changes in circumstances that may affect your volunteering and to keep in regular contact with the Volunteer Department.
- To respect confidences.
- To be reliable and maintain agreed levels of commitment.
- To attend training where appropriate.
- To provide UPSU with details of the number of volunteering hours undertaken, in order to assist with reference provision and for UPSU's reporting purposes.
- To be committed to furthering UPSU's vision, mission and values.

6.0 Policies and guidelines

The following guidelines deal with practical aspects of involving volunteers with community activities. Detailed information, including copies of the documents referred to in this Policy, are available from the Volunteer Department and from www.upsu.com

Absence and Availability

Volunteers are requested to give 24 hours notice of absence or availability if at all possible.

Complaints and Volunteer Conduct Procedures

UPSU aims to identify and assist with solving problems at the earliest possible stage and will help to resolve any issues that may arise as a result of your volunteering or with the organisation you are assisting.

We encourage any student, staff, or community partner to contact us if they have any complaints or concerns by phone, email, and letter or in person, and we will endeavour to work with you to resolve the issue. If you would like to speak to an independent member of UPSU staff, details can be obtained from www.upsu.com

In order to help with this process as smoothly and easily as possible, UPSU has drawn up a procedure for dealing with complaints/problems either by or about volunteers, and all other staff of UPSU. A copy of the Complaints Procedure is available from the Volunteer Department and www.upsu.com.

Confidentiality

All volunteers are to handle confidential material in accordance with the confidentiality procedures set in place by UPSU and your chosen community project/activity. These procedures will include, if appropriate, Child Safeguarding Policies. In order to fully support volunteers UPSU needs to collect personal data so that the Volunteer Department can keep in contact – this information is restricted to staff working in the Volunteer Department and will not be passed to a third party without the volunteer's express, written permission.

Equal Opportunities

UPSU operates an Equal Opportunities policy in respect of paid staff, students, staff volunteers and student volunteers. The Equal Opportunities Policy is available from the Volunteer Office and on the Policy pages on www.upsu.com/volunteering.

Expenses

Voluntary organisations have a certain obligation to reimburse voluntary workers' expenses, such as travel expenses to and from the place of volunteering. UPSU values all our volunteers and wants to ensure that there are no barriers to volunteer involvement and work with community partners to organise the expenses arrangements. Specific expenses details relevant to each of our community partners is held in the Volunteer Department and will be passed on as required.

For UPSU and RELAYS managed volunteering projects all out-of-pocket expenses, if required, will be reimbursed, including expenses for travel, meals and childcare. If you require any special assistance in order to fully engage in your chosen activity, UPSU will do all it can to arrange and help with your requirements. This could

include alternative means of transport, adaptive tools, a 'buddy' or befriender to accompany you, or caring responsibilities.

In order to claim expenses, an expenses form must be completed and returned to the Volunteer Department, along with any receipts such as bus tickets or petrol receipts.

Feedback

All volunteers are actively encouraged to express their views about all volunteering matters at UPSU, and the community groups worked with. This can be done in person in the Volunteer Department, via email, by speaking with one of the Sabbatical Officers, or anonymously through UPSU's Feedback processes. The Volunteer Department also carries out yearly evaluations and this provides another opportunity to voice opinions, thoughts and comments. Processes for feedback and contact details can be found at www.upsu.com

Health and Safety

All volunteers are covered by UPSU's Health and Safety Policy, and UPSU will ensure that you will volunteer in conditions that are safe and healthy. UPSU reviews all community placements on an annual basis and works with community groups to check that all policies are up to date and valid. UPSU reviews all community placements on an annual basis, and works with community partners to check that all policies are up to date and valid. A copy of which can be obtained from the Volunteer Department, or by downloading from the volunteer pages on www.upsu.com

Insurance

All volunteers are covered by UPSU's insurance policy whilst they engaged in any volunteering activities facilitated by UPSU. In addition to this, all the community groups that UPSU work with to offer volunteering opportunities will have a valid insurance policy, which you are encouraged to read. UPSU reviews and checks all community placements' insurance policies on an annual basis.

Recruitment

UPSU aims to make accessing volunteering to students and staff as easy as possible by promoting volunteering through the various methods of advertising available, by encouraging new ideas for projects and activities, and by promoting a wide range of opportunities and activities.

UPSU are committed to making the enrolment process as accessible as possible and will assist any student or staff member with this. We are also committed to promoting diversity and inclusion, and to remove barriers that may restrict students

and staff fully engaging with volunteering, with the aim that our volunteers reflect the student and staff community. The UPSU Equal Opportunities policy is available from the Volunteer Department or from the pages of www.upsu.com

References

UPSU will provide you with a reference if you require one, or will act as a referee, for a period of 12 months after you either finish your volunteering activities, or graduate. In order to help us provide a comprehensive reference we ask that all volunteers keep us informed of the number of volunteering hours undertaken and any relevant training provided by UPSU.

Volunteer Role Descriptions

Each volunteer role will have a description that outlines the specific work to be undertaken. This description will depend on the project or activity, and may range from in-depth full outlines and require the volunteer to sign a volunteer agreement, to a general overview and description of the project (such as in the case of a beach clean activity). The Volunteer Department holds role descriptions for their projects and those of community partners, and can advise and assist with guiding volunteers through them.

The UPSU Volunteer Policy is accessible to all. It will be reviewed on an annual basis in order for any adaptations or improvements to be made.

The UPSU Volunteer Policy is due for review in June 2012.