

Good Practice Guides: Building Foundations

No. 4 - Volunteering and State Benefits

Key Points

Many volunteers have concerns about the effect that volunteering will have on their benefits. Luckily, the rules around volunteering and benefits are actually simple and clear. Anyone who is in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance etc can volunteer without it affecting their benefits. However, the following guidance will outline what rules potential volunteers should follow.

What is the Definition of Voluntary Work and How Much Can you do if You are Receiving Benefits?

Voluntary work should be undertaken without payment and be by choice. This could include helping out a neighbour or volunteering with a not-for-profit organisation. It would NOT be deemed to be volunteering if the work should be something that an organisation should have paid the volunteer to do. Nor can it be called volunteering if the support work is for a close relative. There is no restriction on the amount of volunteering you can do, however if you are claiming Job Seekers Allowance you still need to be actively seeking work and be available for work.

The Difference Between Being Paid and Claiming Expenses

A volunteer should not be out of pocket for any volunteering that they do. Expenses normally cover items such as travel and where possible childcare costs, it can also include overnight stays and cover the cost of any specialist equipment needed to complete the voluntary work. Volunteers that are in receipt of benefits can also claim for lunch/food expenses whilst volunteering. For all expenses:

- If your benefits are paid by Jobcentre Plus, you must declare all your expenses to them
- Keep all your receipts for any expenses including travel tickets.

If it is found that the organisation you volunteer for should have been paying you for your work, then your benefits could be reduced by the amount that you should have been paid.

Notifying the Benefits Office

It is vital that if you are on benefits and you are volunteering you must let your benefits office know. This should be done before you plan to begin volunteering. Job Centre Plus has the power to stop benefits if they find that a volunteer has started volunteering without prior and proper notification.

Please see the form at the end of this guidance sheet that can be sent to a benefits office. Also note that if you receive multiple benefits from different offices, you must send each of them a copy.

If a volunteer is claiming Incapacity Benefit/Disability Living Allowance this should **not** trigger an extraordinary fitness for work test. The benefits office should also **not** require a doctor's letter about volunteering.

Final Checklist - if you are claiming state benefits and you want to volunteer

- Tell the office/s where you make your claim that you are about to begin volunteering
- If you claim Job Seekers Allowance, continue to actively seek work and remain contactable for any job opportunities.
- If receiving Job Seekers Allowance, be available for work within one week and be available to attend interviews within 48 hours.
- Only claim expenses you are entitled to claim for e.g. travel, lunch, specialist equipment, and reimbursement for agreed expenses, e.g. Stationery, phone calls etc.. Remember to inform Job Centre Plus and keep hold of any receipts.

More help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this Guide please contact the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh on the following details:

Tel: 0131 225 0630

Email: admin@volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

Or you can drop in and see us:

Volunteer Centre Edinburgh

45 Queensferry Street Lane

Edinburgh

EH2 4PF

0131 225 0630

www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk

Notification of Voluntary Work

Please complete this form and send it the Job Centre Plus Office(s) where you make your benefits claim. If there is a problem you will be contacted by a Job Centre Plus member of staff. Assuming proper notification of voluntary work by you was given, your benefits should not be affected.

Title	
Surname	
Forename	
Dates of Birth	
National Insurance Number	
Address	
1. Please give the name of the body or person you intend to volunteer for.	
2. Is the work being done for a close relative.	
3. What date does the voluntary work begin?	
4. Please describe briefly the work being undertaken	
5. How many hours/days will be volunteered?	
6. Please give details of expenses incurred whilst volunteering (e.g. travel)	
7. Please give details of any other work being undertaken (either paid or unpaid)	
Please sign	Date

This form was prepared by the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh on advice from Job Centre Plus

