

Volunteering and state benefits

Summary

Although there can be confusion over whether volunteering affects an individual's benefits or not - including amongst some Jobcentre Plus staff - the rules are actually quite simple.

In most cases, there's no limit to the amount of volunteering that someone can do whilst claiming benefits, as long as they continue to meet the conditions of those benefits.

This Information Sheet is designed to help people who support volunteers with questions about state benefits. It covers:

- Are you allowed to volunteer if you're claiming state benefits?
- The Jobcentre Plus definition of volunteering
- General guidance
- Benefit specific guidance
- Further information

Are you allowed to volunteer if you're claiming state benefits?

The short answer is 'yes'. The Jobcentre Plus leaflet [Volunteering while getting benefits \[PDF\]](#) (February 2010) says

"you can volunteer as many hours as you like while you're getting benefits as long as you keep to the rules for getting them."

However, you should be aware that some benefits advisers aren't themselves clear on the rules about volunteering. If a volunteer is told, for example, that they can only volunteer for 16 hours a week, you should tell the volunteer and/or the adviser about *Volunteering while getting benefits*.

If this doesn't resolve the problem, you could write a letter to the adviser explaining the situation, or speak to them directly. If you can't find the contact details of the specific adviser, try contacting the manager of the branch. If you still don't have any success, contact the relevant External Relations Manager, whose contact details can be found at www.dwp.gov.uk/about-dwp/customer-

[delivery/jobcentre-plus/stakeholders-and-partnerships/partnerships/business-community](#).

Jobcentre Plus definition of volunteering

Volunteering while getting benefits defines volunteering as

“when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it”.

It goes on to say that voluntary work can be done with any kind of organisation, including a

- charity, voluntary organisation or community group;
- public-sector organisation;
- social enterprise; or
- local business.

It isn't volunteering if someone

- helps out a family member;
- is given money other than their expenses; or
- is under contract to do the work (not including any 'volunteer agreement' they may have).

If someone chooses not to be paid for the work they do this isn't the same as volunteering. The wage they would normally receive could be counted as 'notional earnings'. If someone receives an income-related benefit, such as Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing or Council Tax benefit, it could affect the benefits they receive.

Full-time volunteers

If someone volunteers full-time and receives an allowance from the volunteering organisation they won't usually be eligible to receive benefits.

A full-time volunteer is often referred to as a 'voluntary worker', and is defined in the 1998 National Minimum Wage Act as a type of unpaid worker employed by charities, voluntary organisations, associated fund-raising bodies and statutory bodies.

In addition to expenses, voluntary workers can claim a subsistence allowance from the organisation they are working with to cover basic living costs - such

as a contribution towards utilities - but not the cost of accommodation. They can, however, be provided with accommodation free of charge.

General guidance

The following applies to everyone receiving any benefit.

- 1. If someone is receiving benefits they must keep to the rules for receiving them.**
- 2. If someone is receiving benefits they must speak to Jobcentre Plus, their local council or whoever pays the benefit before starting volunteering.**

Although this is the responsibility of the person claiming the benefit, you'll want to make sure volunteers feel confident about explaining their role to a benefits advisor. Help could include providing them with information about the organisation's work and a simple volunteer role description to clarify what the volunteer usually does.

If more information is required, you could send a letter to whoever pays the benefit. [Sample letters](#) are available in the [Expenses and State Benefits](#) section of the Volunteering England Good Practice Bank.

- 3. Volunteers must only be reimbursed for actual out-of-pocket expenses. Volunteers must tell whoever pays their benefits if they receive expenses payments.**

It's a general rule that volunteers should only be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, but it's particularly important in the case of volunteers who are receiving benefits. Any kind of profit could result in their benefits being reduced or suspended.

Keeping records of expenses that have been reimbursed is always a good idea, but it's of particular help to someone in receipt of benefits as they may have to provide details. You should ask volunteers to provide proof of all expenses, such as receipts and travel tickets. And it's fine to provide volunteers with money upfront; just collect receipts as usual, and any unspent money!

Something to bear in mind is that most people in receipt of benefits are on low incomes. If possible, find ways to reimburse volunteers on the same day as the money was spent and avoid reimbursement by cheque. If you aren't sure which approach is most suitable, simply ask the volunteer.

Further information on reimbursing expenses can be found in the Volunteering England Information Sheet [Volunteer expenses](#). A template expenses claim form is available in the [Expenses and State Benefits](#) section of the Volunteering England Good Practice Bank.

Benefit specific guidance

All the information below assumes that the volunteer is following the general guidance above.

Carer's Allowance

Someone can receive Carer's Allowance if they do volunteering in the UK and

- care for a disabled person for at least 35 hours a week; and
- that person receives the right disability benefit.

If their volunteering takes them abroad for over four weeks, it could affect their Carer's Allowance.

Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance

Volunteering in the UK or abroad for less than six months won't affect Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, but if someone in receipt of either of these benefits wants to volunteer abroad they must tell the Disability and Carers Service.

Employment and Support Allowance

Volunteering doesn't affect Employment and Support Allowance as long as the person claiming the benefit can still go to a work-focused interview when asked to.

Housing or Council Tax Benefit

Volunteering doesn't affect Housing or Council Tax Benefit as long as the person in receipt of the benefit keeps to the rules of their Jobseeker's Allowance (see below).

Jobseeker's Allowance

Someone can volunteer and claim Jobseeker's Allowance as long as they're

- actively looking for full-time paid work;
- available for work;
- able to attend an interview at 48 hours' notice; and
- able to start a job at one week's notice.

National Insurance Credits

Someone who receives National Insurance Credits due to them claiming another benefit should carry on receiving them as a volunteer.

Pension Credit

Volunteering doesn't affect Pension Credit unless the person claiming the benefit goes abroad as a volunteer for more than 13 weeks, in which case it could be stopped.

Tax Credits

Volunteering hours don't count towards Working Tax Credit, and volunteering doesn't affect Child Tax Credit.

Further information

www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/Gettinginvolvedinyourcommunity/Volunteering/index.htm

Government web page with information and links to further resources.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1023.pdf> [PDF] (February 2010)

This Jobcentre Plus leaflet *Volunteering while getting benefits* explains what volunteering is and what the rules are for any volunteers claiming state benefits, or anyone who wants to begin volunteering.

www.dwp.gov.uk/about-dwp/customer-delivery/jobcentre-plus/stakeholders-and-partnerships/partnerships/business-community

Contact details for Jobcentre Plus External Relations Managers can be found on this web page. Their role is to build relationships with partners across all sectors.

www.volunteering.org.uk/information sheets

Volunteer Expenses
Volunteer Travel Expenses
Reimbursing Care Expenses to Volunteers
Saying 'thank you' to Volunteers
National Minimum Wage Act and Volunteers

www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice

Includes the [Expenses and State Benefits](#) section which includes template letters to Jobcentre Plus offices and a sample expenses claim form.

www.volunteering.org.uk/law

A readable guide to legal issues on volunteering. Chapter 2 covers 'Benefits and Tax. This publication is free to download.

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