



Guidelines for

Relations between Volunteers and Paid Workers

in the Health and
Personal Social
Services

These guidelines have been drawn up by a working party representing statutory authorities, trades unions and organizations which involve volunteers in the health and personal social services. They update and replace the earlier 'Drain Guidelines' produced by The Volunteer Centre UK in 1975.

The Guidelines are not hard and fast rules. Variations in local practice make a single binding agreement between organizations which involve volunteers and trades unions impracticable. Rather they are a guide to good practice which, if adhered to by the parties concerned, should help avoid some of the misunderstandings and difficulties which have soured relations between volunteers and paid workers on occasions in the past.

The Guidelines are in two parts. Section 1, *General Guidelines*, sets out general principles governing relations between volunteers and paid workers. Section 2, *Local Agreements*, shows how the general guidelines might be applied in a particular setting.

The Guidelines are directed at trades unions and organizations which involve volunteers in the health and personal social services. They are of relevance to the voluntary sector, the statutory sector and to the private sector.

Introduction

The group recognizes the value of voluntary activity in giving help directly or indirectly to others and in providing opportunities for volunteers to participate and find self-fulfilment.

Voluntary activity can be effective in many fields and is not limited to health and personal social services. The group is aware of the contributions of volunteers in many other settings, including schools and adult education, the environment, sport, politics, trade unionism and religion. Volunteers are involved in direct service provision and on committees of management of voluntary organizations and statutory bodies. Volunteers are active in the statutory and private sectors as well as in the voluntary sector. In addition, much voluntary activity takes place within the community on an informal basis, with assistance being given to friends and neighbours. The group has noted recent developments in voluntary activity, such as the rapid spread of mutual aid and self help groups and the development of advocacy, where volunteers represent, or take up the cause of someone else, such as an individual with learning difficulties or an elderly confused person.

The group is aware of the effect of economic and social trends over the last decade on volunteering. For example, high levels of unemployment have increased the scope for volunteering in meeting the needs of individuals and communities faced with long periods without paid work. As against this, unemployment has led to increased concern that volunteers will be substituted for paid workers. Government initiatives to deal with high unemployment, such as special employment measures and training schemes, have also affected the context of volunteering by contributing to a blurring of the boundaries between paid and voluntary work. However, it is the opinion of the group that a distinction can and must be drawn between people on unemployment and training schemes and volunteers.

Other trends in society are also set to have an effect on volunteering: some working in favour of an expansion of voluntary activity, some against. Changes in the structure of work and free time, such as the shift towards a shorter working week, an increase in temporary and less than full employment (including job sharing schemes) and moves towards earlier retirement may open up new opportunities for an expansion of volunteering. Nevertheless, in the case of earlier retirement there are already indications that the tightening labour market is reversing this trend. Other trends, such as falling birth rates and the entry of more women into the labour market may work against volunteer involvement. The group is aware that many traditional voluntary organizations which rely heavily on women and young people as volunteers are already experiencing a decline in levels of participation.

The group has noted the implications for relations between paid workers and volunteers of recent changes in local and central government policy, such as the contracting out of local authority-run services.

In many settings relations between paid workers and volunteers are harmonious and mutually rewarding. They will be enhanced by good procedures, clarity of respective roles, mutual trust and support. The group draws attention to the fact that many paid staff in voluntary organizations are members of trades unions and some unions are recruiting volunteers into membership.

Nevertheless problems do sometimes occur between volunteers and paid staff. The aim of these guidelines is to keep such problems to a minimum and to allow for the speedy resolution of any difficulties which do occur.

SECTION 1: GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. **Voluntary activity should complement the work of paid staff, not substitute for it.**

As a general principle volunteers should not substitute for paid employees, nor intentionally or unintentionally undermine their terms and conditions of service. However, it is not possible to make hard and fast rules about what work is suitable for paid employees and what is suitable for volunteers and the practical implications of this statement need to be worked out at local level.

The contracting out of services by local authorities may lead to organizations which involve volunteers taking a larger role in direct service provision. However, volunteers should not be used as a cheap source of labour to reduce tender costs and to secure contracts as this exploits both paid workers and volunteers.

2. **The action of volunteers should not threaten the livelihood of paid staff.**

On occasions, voluntary activity implemented without proper consultation has threatened the jobs of paid staff and/or has had repercussions on earning levels. Such activity, however well intentioned, can only lead to a deterioration in industrial relations and result in a poorer service. However, there will be situations in which organizational changes incorporating new notions of care might involve the use of volunteers in ways which could affect the interests of groups of paid employees. Also the contracting out of local authority run services to organizations involving volunteers might have a detrimental effect on some local authority paid staff. In all such cases negotiations should take place between the relevant organizations with a view to reaching agreement to safeguard the existing terms and conditions of trades union members as well as the interests of volunteers.

3. **Any change in the level of voluntary activity should be preceded by full consultation between interested parties.**

Because local situations vary enormously full consultation should take place between management, relevant trades unions and representatives of volunteers. Where possible, there should also be consultation with users and/or their representatives. In this way decisions on the nature and extent of voluntary activity can take account of the interests of all concerned and result in a better all round service.

4. **Agreements on the nature and extent of voluntary activity should be made widely known among intended parties.**

It is essential that any agreement made on the deployment of volunteers is communicated to all interested parties and at all levels of the various organizations. Thus trades unions should publicize any agreement among their membership and organizations which involve volunteers should notify both paid staff and volunteers.

5. **Volunteers should receive full out-of-pocket expenses.***

It is important that volunteers should be offered full out-of-pocket expenses so that they are not deterred from offering their services on financial grounds.

In some circumstances an additional payment is given, for example in the case of young people who may volunteer on a full-time basis for a period of up to twelve months and who receive a small 'pocket money' allowance.

In addition, in recent years, a number of schemes, particularly in the field of community care, have experimented with the idea of paying volunteers a small sum of money in an attempt to attract longer-term volunteers and to make voluntary activity more accessible to people from lower income groups. There was no agreement in the group over the merit of these additional payments. Some members felt that there will always be grey areas between voluntary and paid work and that some payment for voluntary activity is acceptable. Others felt that any element of payment colours the relationship in the mind of both giver and receiver and hence no argument can be made for financially rewarding voluntary activity. The group, however, was in agreement that payment of volunteers should not be used to undercut fixed wage rates.

6. There should be recognized machinery for the resolution of problems between staff and volunteers.

It is important to name an individual responsible for the co-ordination of voluntary activity within an organization to whom both paid staff and volunteers can refer in the first instance if difficulties arise. Similarly a representative of the paid workforce (such as the trades union shop steward or branch secretary) should be given responsibility for liaising with the volunteer co-ordinator and volunteers.

7. Volunteers not involved in industrial action should undertake no more voluntary activity than they would do in the normal situation.

In situations where volunteers are members of the trades union involved in the dispute, difficulties are less likely to arise. In other situations there may be a conflict of interests between paid staff and volunteers.

Volunteer co-ordinators, trades union officials and management should seek a meeting at the earliest opportunity to clarify the position of volunteers during the dispute.

Should a dispute occur at their place of work volunteers are advised to consult their volunteer co-ordinator or other appropriate person as soon as possible.

If volunteers continue to do only their normal work, no problems should arise. Any changes in the work they do should be agreed with the management and with those trades unions involved in the dispute.

If good channels of communication have been developed between the paid workforce and volunteers during normal working conditions then difficulties during industrial disputes will be more easily resolved.

8. If volunteers are faced with a picket line which is not prepared to agree that the volunteer workers should cross, the volunteers should not attempt to do so but discuss the situation with their organizer of the voluntary service, who should in turn discuss it with union and management officials.

Provided that information on the basis of agreement has been passed through to all levels of management, union members and volunteers, such conflicts can be avoided. In the event of a picket line it may be helpful for volunteers to be issued with a document, signed by management and a trades union and volunteer representative, indicating the basis on which the agreement to work has been secured.

SECTION 2: LOCAL AGREEMENTS

The above guidelines should be taken as the starting point for any agreement between trades unions and organizations involving volunteers, which may be negotiated at a local level.

In some settings all that may be required is a general understanding from the parties involved to keep one another informed of future developments and to set up a procedure to deal with any difficulties should they arise.

In other settings it may be necessary to draw up a detailed agreement on the involvement of volunteers.

A detailed local agreement might include the following elements:

- A statement of intent laying down general principles regarding the involvement of volunteers in the work of the agency or organization.
- Guidelines on avoiding substitution of volunteers for paid workers.
- Guidelines on identifying areas of work appropriate for paid staff and appropriate for volunteers.
- Guidelines on differentiating between regular volunteers, trainees, secondees and regular paid workers.
- Guidelines on the involvement of volunteers in tendering for and contracting out local government services.
- Agreement on the rights and responsibilities of volunteers, including reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses, provision of insurance, training opportunities, access to decision making, and access to a trades union.
- Guidelines on conduct in industrial disputes.
- Establishment of a local hotline or other mechanism for quickly resolving difficulties.

A local agreement might include all or some of these elements, or any others relevant to the particular local situation. Even if agreement is not possible on all counts, then the process of consultation will be of value in fostering closer understanding between organizations involving volunteers and trades unions.

The membership of the working group

Mr Geoffrey Drain (Chair)	Treasurer, The Volunteer Centre UK
Mr Clifford Blundell	Association of Directors of Social Services
Ms Vera Burns	National Association of Voluntary Help Organisers
Mr Bob Dickson	National Association of Volunteer Bureaux
Ms Ann Gibson	Manufacturing Science Finance Union
Ms Romaine Hutchison	Advance
Ms Kathryn Johnson	Transport and General Workers' Union
Mr Allan Kerr	National Union of Public Employees
Mr Gordon Lishman	Age Concern England
Mr Hugh Robertson	National and Local Government Officers' Association
Mr Justin Davis Smith (Secretary)	The Volunteer Centre UK
Ms Margaret Wheeler	Confederation of Health Service Employees
Ms Elaine Willis	The Volunteer Centre UK

*** For more detailed information on the payment of out-of-pocket expenses to volunteers, including guidance on the relationship between expenses and social security benefits, see The Volunteer Centre UK, *All Expenses Paid?*, 1987. For information on the provision of insurance and health and safety cover for volunteers, see The Volunteer Centre UK, *Protecting Volunteers*, 1984. For a full list of publications on issues relating to the involvement of volunteers, including the recruitment, training, management and support of volunteers and matters relating to equal opportunities, contact The Advisory Team at The Volunteer Centre UK, 29 Lower King's Road, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 2AB.**