

Voluntary work

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Introduction

DWP recognises the value of voluntary activity for developing skills which can be transferred into the world of paid work and the benefits this brings for local communities and the wider society.

Volunteering can offer a range of benefits to an individual and can help that person to:

- feel they have purpose and are contributing to help others or their community
- gain experience and to share their skills
- feel valued for their individual contribution and to understand the impact they are having
- feel supported to undertake their role, or to take on new roles and training
- enjoy what they do and have a sense of belonging

Volunteering is particularly useful for someone who has been out of the labour market for some time and is looking to build up their confidence and their CV at the same time. For claimants with health conditions, research has shown that volunteering can also improve both physical and mental health.

Volunteer organisations can also support claimants to move closer to employment through several different employability support schemes. Offers vary between organisations but can include:

- access to e-learning portals
- certificates for completion of course work / training
- one to one support and annual assessments to check on training needs, wellbeing, new roles / activities

- access to Employee Assistance Programmes offering financial, legal and mental health support
- other wellbeing support through mindfulness training and general self-care support

Therefore, claimants who are expected to look for work can have their weekly work search hours reduced by up to 50% to accommodate voluntary activity.

Claimants are not prevented from spending more time volunteering, but similar to those who are working, they need to manage combining voluntary activity with other work-related activities. This will give claimants the best chance of moving into sustainable employment more quickly.

Volunteers

A volunteer is engaged to support the services of a charity, voluntary organisation or someone who is not a relative and any payment due or received is for reasonable expenses incurred.

When the work is remunerative and the claimant declares no payment, or a payment that is less than would normally be paid for the work, a decision maker will consider notional earnings.

Volunteering

There are several organisations that can help people find volunteering opportunities in their area:

- including [Volunteering England](#), [Volunteer Scotland](#), [Volunteering Wales](#) and [Volunteering Matters](#)
- for third party sector organisations in Scotland, see [Third sector interfaces contact details](#)
- young people in England aged 15 to 17 can take part in the [National Citizen Service](#)

Claimants can volunteer but need to manage combining voluntary activity with any work-related activities which are agreed in their Claimant Commitment. See Voluntary work or activity.

If a claimant has a health or disability condition, volunteering should not trigger a Work Capability Assessment.

Voluntary work or activity

Voluntary work or activity agreed in the claimant's commitments can count towards the claimant's work search requirements. The time agreed for the voluntary work or activity must not exceed 50% of the claimant's expected number of hours per week for work search.

Example:

If the claimant volunteers for a charity organisation for 20 hours a week and their commitments are to undertake 30 hours per week for work search and work preparation, 15 hours (50% of 30) will count towards their work search requirement.

Notional earnings

Notional earnings are earnings that a claimant is treated as receiving for the work they have provided. The decision maker determines if:

- the claimant has deprived themselves of earnings, or
- an employer has arranged for them to be deprived of earned income
- for the purpose of receiving Universal Credit or increasing the amount of Universal Credit

The decision maker determines the amount taken into account as earned income.

Example:

If the claimant works as a cleaner voluntarily, but someone else is doing the same job for the same employer and receiving the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, notional earnings may be applicable.