



# STUDENT VOLUNTEERING

## Policy and Procedures

## **1.0 Introduction**

Queen's Students' Union is led by students, for students; we are here to represent students and their views and help them get the most out of their time at Queen's.

SU Volunteer believes that volunteering benefits students in a range of ways from boosting confidence and wellbeing to skills development and relationship building. Student volunteering also creates a positive impact on beneficiaries, whether that be other students, residents, non-profit organisations and/or the wider community.

SU Volunteer provides a brokerage service, matching students up to the many volunteering opportunities within Queen's and of external volunteer involving organisations. SU Volunteer also provides best practice guidance to students and staff who are already co-ordinating or wish to develop a voluntary/charitable project. Alongside ensuring student volunteering is rewarded and recognised through Prestige Volunteers and The Future Ready Award, SU Volunteer co-ordinates three flagship initiatives:

- Handy Helpers – flexible/one-off volunteering opportunities for students which support established volunteer involving organisations and meet the needs of smaller grassroots organisations such as residents' associations
- Homework Clubs – regular volunteering role for students to support children and young people living in areas of educational underachievement to improve their study skills, build their confidence and raise their educational aspirations
- Jump In – delivers volunteering fairs, taster sessions, workshops, and expert training to ensure students can build the networks, skills, and confidence they need to commence or progress in their voluntary role and enhance their future ready skills

This Volunteering Policy outlines methods of recruitment, support procedures and mechanisms in place to safeguard student volunteers. In addition, it highlights structures in place to ensure the effort and motivation of student volunteers is encouraged, recognised, and championed, and that the services of SU Volunteer positively impacts all stakeholders; students, residents, volunteer involving organisations, community members, Queen's Students' Union, and the University.

This policy should act as a guide for both student volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to clearly highlight expectations of and responsibilities to student volunteers, as well as best practice processes in student volunteering.

## **1.1 The Value of Volunteering at Queen's Students' Union**

SU Volunteer 'play a critical role in ensuring that every student at Queen's has a university experience which is enriching, rewarding and fun' (Queen's Students' Union, Strategic Plan 2020-2025) and strives to involve students in rewarding volunteering activities to support their wellbeing and skills development. SU Volunteer believes students can make a positive and powerful contribution to the world around them through volunteering!

Volunteering is beneficial to students in a number of ways. It:

- provides opportunities for skills development and work-related learning that cannot be achieved from academic studies alone

- enables students to interact with local residents and organisations, enhancing their sense of community, as well as aiding them to build their social and professional networks
- positively impacts the community, enhancing the reputation of students as community members
- supports students to participate in new experiences and/or contribute to a cause they are enthusiastic about
- provides students with an enjoyable pastime
- supports wellbeing. The feeling of reward from 'giving' increases resilience and promotes mental and physical health:

### **1.2 Who is a Student Volunteer?**

*'Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.'*

(Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future, Department for Social Development, 2012)

Where a student is committing time and effort for free to benefit others, animals, or the environment; they are a student volunteer. This activity can be carried out within Queen's, within the local community, or with an external volunteer involving organisation.

### **2.0 Finding the Perfect Volunteering Opportunity**

SU Volunteer will use a range of methods to promote student volunteering opportunities, including:

- Face to face engagement
- Fairs (students can connect with a range of volunteer involving organisations)
- Workshops (tailored content to attract those students with particular interests)
- Taster sessions (students can try a range of different opportunities)
- E-newsletters
- A digital brokerage platform (students can explore (and apply for) a range of opportunities at their own pace)
- Social media

Students are also able to contact SU Volunteer directly for tailored guidance around volunteering. SU Volunteer can be contacted via the following:

- Email: [su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk](mailto:su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk)
- [Online form](#)
- Office Visit: Students are welcome to drop into the SU Volunteer Office located on the first floor of the Students' Union
- 1to1 sessions can also be organised in person or on Teams

SU Volunteer acts as a brokerage service using their contacts to research and assist students in finding their perfect volunteering opportunity. Where requested, SU Volunteer will attempt to match potential student volunteers to their desired area of voluntary activity. Where a student is unsure about the area in which they would like to volunteer or are interested in several different activities, SU Volunteer will be able to suggest a range of

options. Students will be provided with the web links or relevant volunteer co-ordinator contact details for at least two options in each area of interest they have expressed. Using the information provided, the student can explore the opportunities further and initiate the volunteer recruitment process should they wish to pursue any of these opportunities. Should the volunteer involving organisation not reciprocate contact with the student within a reasonable amount of time, the student is encouraged to make SU Volunteer aware so they can support the student to access the opportunity.

### **3.0 SU Volunteer's Responsibilities to Students**

Queen's Students' Union Volunteering Policy is reinforced by volunteering best practice principles.

SU Volunteer will not introduce students to voluntary roles which:

- replace paid staff
- are 'voluntary work' or an 'unpaid internship;' consistently excessive hours/commitment constitutes work which individuals should be financially compensated for
- are hosted by unfamiliar, unlawful, or discriminatory organisations
- charge a fee to participate in
- equates to being a research participant
- are associated with a political party – this ensures a student does not feel excluded from a volunteering opportunity due to their political beliefs. Where a student has a particular political interest, opportunities exist to join an existing or create a new student-led society

SU Volunteer will only promote the roles of volunteer involving organisations which:

- are not for profit
- provide genuine benefit to the community/environment
- have volunteering, safeguarding, Health & Safety, and EDI policies in place
- have an online policy if the volunteering role is virtual
- risk assess their volunteering roles
- are appropriately insured to involve volunteers in their activity
- effectively train, support, and ensure a rewarding experience for student volunteers

SU Volunteer will strive to ensure that:

- promoted / recommended volunteering roles are suitable for students
- their own internal volunteering programmes are of a high quality
- mechanisms are in place to ensure volunteering is recognised e.g., Prestige Volunteers, Future Ready Award, and celebration events
- opportunities to develop skills alongside volunteering are offered e.g., training

### **3.1 Volunteer Involving Organisations / Queen's Directorates' Responsibilities to Student Volunteers**

Where a student has been successfully recruited for a voluntary role, they should receive the following:

- A role description

- An induction session – this may include an overview of the volunteering role and the logistics of it, a tour of the premises, and Health and Safety information and relevant policy/procedure information
- Where a volunteering role involves specialist support e.g., befriending individuals with poor mental health; specific training should be provided, and regular supervision given to ensure the student volunteer is confident and competent in the role
- A named supervisor who has the relevant knowledge and experience to support the student volunteer. Student volunteers should have their supervisor's contact details (in case of queries, problems or needing to pass information on)
- Recognition of their contributions, this may be communicated informally through feedback and conversation or formally, e.g., certificates or celebration events
- Ongoing access to applicable training and development opportunities
- Access to relevant policies e.g., Volunteering, GDPR, Health and Safety, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Safeguarding etc.
- Clear information around the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses (this is dependent on the organisation's financial situation and scale of volunteering)
- The necessary resources and materials to carry out their role
- Appropriate insurance cover from the organisation whilst they are volunteering e.g., employers/public liability
- Information around changes which would affect their volunteering
- The ability to ask for a reference where they have made a regular commitment to the organisation
- An invitation to share their feedback around their volunteering experience and the opportunity to contribute to the development of the organisation
- Honesty, if the volunteering role is not working out for the organisation, for whatever reason

### **3.2 Student Volunteers' Responsibilities to Volunteer Involving Organisations / Queen's Directorates**

- Where a student is considering a volunteering role, they should carefully consider their availability, skills, and location in relation to the role
- With regards a more specialist volunteering role e.g., mentoring, the beneficiary will require a regular commitment, potential volunteers should reflect on their ability to provide consistency
- Students should carry out the tasks of the volunteering role to the best of their ability and ask for guidance from their supervisor if required
- Where a volunteering role is not working, for whatever reason, student volunteers should inform their allocated supervisor. If the student volunteer feels they cannot speak to their supervisor, they should approach SU Volunteer for advice and support
- Where volunteers cannot make a volunteering session, they should let their supervisor know as soon as possible
- To adhere to all relevant policies e.g., Volunteering, GDPR, Health and Safety, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Safeguarding etc.
- Discuss with their supervisor, any relevant change in circumstances (e.g., health, disability), to ensure, where possible, that appropriate adjustments are made to support them in their role

### **3.3 Student Volunteers' Rights within Volunteer Involving Organisations / Queen's Directorates**

- Student volunteers should not carry out any voluntary task they feel is inappropriate (e.g., replacing paid staff, performing critical organisational duties)
- If a student volunteer feels unprepared or overwhelmed by a voluntary role, they should ask their supervisor for extra training or support
- Student volunteers are free to stop volunteering at any time; however, as volunteering relationships are based on honour, student volunteers should inform their supervisor about their decision, giving as much notice as possible
- Student volunteers have a right to make known their views about the organisation or projects they are involved in, including the organisation's policies and procedures

### **3.4 Student Volunteers' Responsibilities to Queen's Students' Union**

- Student volunteers should always act as an ambassador for Queen's University and the Students' Union
- Student volunteers should promote the benefits to other students
- Student volunteers are eligible for Prestige Volunteers which provides certificates evidencing 50, 100 and 200 hours of volunteering. Students should consider registering for the award upon commencing to gain official recognition of their voluntary efforts
- Student volunteers are eligible for the Future Ready Award and are encouraged to complete the pathway(s) which suits them
- Occasionally Queen's Students' Union will gather quotes, photos, and videos to support the promotion of volunteering; where student volunteers feel comfortable with this, they are encouraged to contribute
- If a student has a negative volunteering experience, they are encouraged to make SU Volunteer aware so support can be provided, and plans put in place to ensure other students do not encounter a similar experience

### **4.0 Student-Led Volunteering Initiatives**

Student-led volunteering projects provide students with the opportunity to develop core skills such as leadership, project planning, and relationship management. SU Volunteer supports student-led volunteering via:

- Recognition via Prestige Volunteers and The Future Ready Award
- Grants via Fund It
- Tailored training and guidance via Jump In

### **5.0 Training**

When a student starts volunteering, they should be given induction training or indeed specialised training if required. Throughout a student's volunteering experience, where possible, further training, informal learning and personal development opportunities should be provided. The volunteer involving organisation or the Queen's team who provide the volunteering opportunity are responsible for this.

SU Volunteer delivers the Jump In programme which supports students in every stage of their volunteering journey from volunteering fairs for those just starting out or looking for

something new to training sessions and expert Q&As for those more experienced in volunteering. Jump In ensures students can build the networks, skills, and confidence they need to progress in their voluntary role and enhance their future ready skills. Jump In sessions are open to all students – register to hear first here: <https://q-su.org/VolunteerSU/Training/JumpIN/>

### **5.1 Ongoing support**

The assigned supervisor at a specific volunteering role should provide structured support for the student volunteer in relation to their individual voluntary role e.g., group supervision, one to one meeting, goal setting etc. This enables student volunteers to share impact, problem solve, progress, and continue to contribute to organisational goals. If a student is experiencing issues within their volunteering, they should contact their assigned supervisor as soon as possible. Student volunteers can also contact SU Volunteer for volunteering advice and support.

### **6.0 Recognition**

Queen's Students' Union ensures student volunteers are recognised and celebrated.

All student volunteers are eligible for Prestige Volunteers (an award which provides certificates evidencing 50, 100 and 200 hours of volunteering).

Student volunteers can register here:

<https://q-su.org/VolunteerSU/GetRewarded/PrestigeAwards/> and they will then be given access to a record book. Students are responsible for recording their hours of volunteering in the record book and forwarding their record book to [su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk](mailto:su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk) to claim their certificates.

The Future Ready Award is open to all students via the Provider Verified routes with SU Volunteer co-ordinating three of these pathways:

#### **Provider Verified - Prestige Volunteers**

Students must complete 50 hours of Prestige Volunteers (these hours will be verified by a volunteering supervisor) over the course of their studies. Upon successfully verified completion of 50 hours, students must submit a 500 word essay to [su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk](mailto:su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk) detailing how volunteering has impacted on their personal and professional development, by 1st April (summer graduation) or 1st November (winter graduation) on the students' year of graduation.

#### **Provider Verified - Homework Clubs**

Students who volunteer with the Homework Clubs initiative must complete the following:

- Mandatory induction training session with Queen's Students' Union
- Specific Homework Club local induction
- Volunteer at a minimum of five homework club sessions
- Participate in at least two follow-up specialised workshops
- Write a 500-word reflective journal about their experience of participating in the Homework Clubs initiative

### **Provider Verified - Handy Helpers**

Students who volunteer with the Handy Helpers initiative must complete the following:

- Participate in a minimum of 7 Handy Helpers community volunteering activities
- Participate in at least two specialised training sessions
- Write a 500-word reflective blog post about their experience participating in the Handy Helpers initiative
- Submit a volunteering logbook as evidence of the hours they have contributed to volunteering as a Handy Helper

UG and PGT students can also achieve the Future Ready Award via the **Combined Experience (Self-Nomination)** pathway. Where students complete a minimum of two extra-curricular activities (volunteering can be one of these), they must:

- Complete the step-by-step induction
- Complete the Combined Experience Application Form and submit by 1st April (summer graduation) or 1st November (winter graduation) on the students' year of graduation

See here for more details:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/future-ready-award/CombinedExperienceSelf-Nomination/>

PGR and MPhil students can also achieve the Future Ready Award via the **Combined Experience (Self-Nomination)** pathway by completing an alternative different Combined Experience Application Form. See here for more details:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/graduate-school/development/researcher-plus/>

### **7.0 Global Volunteering**

There are many positives for an individual who chooses to volunteer globally.

Unfortunately, SU Volunteer are unable to endorse any global volunteering providers as the quality/ethics of the multiple providers who exist cannot be effectively assessed. Some guidance is available for those students who are seeking their own global volunteering opportunity – see here:

<https://q-su.org/VolunteerSU/Opportunities/GlobalOpportunities/>

SU Volunteer cannot provide financial assistance for global volunteering roles or consular advice for any problems encountered whilst a student is volunteering overseas.

### **8.0 Fundraising and Voting**

SU Volunteer are unable to promote the individual fundraisers of staff, students, the public or external organisations but will support the promotion of fundraisers by QUB RAG (the official student-led fundraising group whose charities are chosen by the student body).

Outside of current QUB RAG charities, SU Volunteer are unable to vote for or canvas on behalf of organisations who are trying to win funding/resources etc.



## 9.0 International Student Volunteers

Student Visa holders (formerly called Tier 4) can:

- Work a maximum of 20 hours per week during term time (if the course leads to a qualification at degree level or above)
- Work full time during official University holidays, and after the course until the end of the visa period (if the course leads to a qualification at degree level or above)

Those on a Student Visa should be aware that there is a distinct difference between unpaid employment (voluntary work) and volunteering. This is because time spent doing unpaid employment (voluntary work) counts towards a students' maximum number of hours of work per week. The difference between voluntary workers and volunteers is outlined below:

Voluntary workers:

- often have a contract with their employer (this means the employer must provide the work and the voluntary worker must attend at particular times and conduct specific tasks)
- are also usually remunerated in kind

Volunteers:

- do not have a contract of employment
- must not take the place of an employee
- must not receive payment in kind but reimbursement for reasonable travel and subsistence expenses is allowed
- usually help a charity or voluntary or public sector organisation

**Standard Visitor Visa** holders are not permitted to undertake paid or unpaid work; but may undertake volunteering provided it is for a registered charity and will be for no longer than 30 days in total. The 30 days do not have to be consecutive and can be split across the visitor's period of permission to be in the UK. Those on a Standard Visitor Visa may not undertake voluntary work. The difference between voluntary workers and volunteers is outlined above.

A breach of working conditions is treated very seriously by the Home Office and can result in a students' visa being cancelled and future applications being declined.

If in doubt, students can contact International Student Support at [iss@qub.ac.uk](mailto:iss@qub.ac.uk) for advice.

For clarity, SU Volunteer only promote volunteering opportunities and do not promote voluntary work.

## 10.0 References

SU Volunteer can only provide verification of a students' participation in SU Volunteer activity whilst they are still a student or for a period of 12 months after they graduate. Where a student volunteer requires a detailed reference, it is recommended that they seek this from their supervisor at their volunteering role.

### **11.0 AccessNI Checks (Criminal Background Checks)**

AccessNI is a branch in the Department of Justice. Its role is to process applications from members of the public who require a criminal record check for employment/volunteering purposes.

There are certain types of activities with children or vulnerable adults that fall under regulated activity as defined by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2007/1351/contents>

An Enhanced AccessNI check is a legal requirement for those volunteering in positions regarded as Regulated Activity:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/regulated-activity-vulnerable-groups>

SU Volunteer does not process AccessNI checks for volunteers placed within charities/community groups, as the role of SU Volunteer is to function as a brokerage service for volunteers, and safeguarding procedures are the responsibility of the volunteer involving organisations. If required, the organisation will ask for an Enhanced AccessNI Check, which involves the individual submitting an online application and presenting three forms of authorised ID to the volunteer involving organisation. The check will then be processed – this takes approx. 1-3 weeks, and a certificate of the outcome will be sent to the individual.

If there are no disclosures, this will be received as a digital certificate, and there is usually no problem in the student starting their volunteering role (pending suitable references, if required). If the certificate discloses a criminal record or other information, the individual will receive this by post. The volunteer involving organisation will assess the relevance of the conviction and risk issues in light of the duties and the responsibilities of the particular role. They may decide to talk this through with an individual before making a final decision on whether to accept them.

### **12.0 Confidentiality / GDPR**

All student volunteers must handle confidential information and associated materials in accordance with the confidentiality / GDPR procedures set in place by the relevant volunteer involving organisation or Queen's department.

SU Volunteer also collects the relevant personal data of student volunteers to stay connected with them and assist with the evaluation and continued development of SU Volunteer activity. In line with GDPR procedures, all personal information provided to SU Volunteer will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be passed onto any third party without explicit student consent.

The Students' Union Privacy Notice can be viewed here:

<https://www.qubsu.org/PrivacyNotice/>

### **13.0 Expenses**

Volunteer involving organisations / Queen's departments should have a clear policy on the reimbursement of volunteers' out of pocket expenses. This should also be rooted in their organisational ethos and take account of the organisation's financial situation and the scale of their volunteering activity. Organisations/Queen's departments are encouraged to

reimburse volunteer expenses, such as travel expenses to and from the place of volunteering to remove this barrier to volunteering. It should be noted that there are organisations/directorates who do not have the funds to reimburse out of pocket expenses. SU Volunteer will provide clear information re: location of such opportunities which are not local and may incur expense to travel to. Students should carefully consider signing up for any volunteering activity which does not reimburse out of pocket expenses.

#### **14.0 Special Assistance**

SU Volunteer are committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. If a student requires any special assistance to access a volunteering activity, SU Volunteer will do all it can to support with specific requirements, including looking at alternative means of transport, adaptive tools, or a 'buddy' to accompany the student to their chosen activity.

The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is available at the following link:  
<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/HumanResources/hr-filestore/Filetoupload,866894,en.pdf>

#### **15.0 Health and Safety & Insurance**

All volunteering activities co-ordinated by Queen's University and the Students' Union should:

- be risk assessed
- operate within the parameters of the University Health and Safety Policy:  
<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/EstatesDirectorate/UniversitySafetyService/HealthandSafetyPoliciesandGuidance/SafetyPolicy/>
- be covered by the University's Employers and Public Liability insurance
- provide relevant training and support for student volunteers

For SU Volunteer to promote their volunteering activities, all external organisations are required to go through a vetting process which ensures they:

- have appropriate insurance in place to cover the involvement of volunteers in their activity
- have volunteering, safeguarding, health & safety, and EDI policies in place
- have an online policy if the volunteering role is virtual
- risk assess their volunteering roles
- effectively train, support, and ensure a rewarding experience for student volunteers

#### **16.0 Complaints and Feedback**

SU Volunteer aims to identify problems at the earliest possible stage and will support students to resolve any issues that may arise because of their volunteering.

Any student, staff, or charity/community stakeholder can contact SU Volunteer on [su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk](mailto:su.volunteer@qub.ac.uk) if they have a relevant complaint or concern.

SU Volunteer will endeavour to collaborate with the complainant to resolve the issue.

Where a complaint is about SU Volunteer, the complainant may raise this through the Students' Union Complaint Procedure:

<https://qubsu.org/ComplaintsProcedure/>

All student volunteers are welcome and regularly invited to provide feedback on their volunteering experiences. Feedback supports SU Volunteer to continually develop their service and programmes.

**This policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis to ensure the continued development of SU Volunteer, and the next policy review will therefore take place in August 2026.**

## **References**

Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/join-in-get-involved-2012.pdf> (last accessed on 09/08/23)

Regulated Activity With Vulnerable Groups: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/regulated-activity-vulnerable-groups> (last accessed on 09/08/23)

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2007/1351/contents> (last accessed on 09/08/23)