

Can I volunteer while receiving benefits?

Volunteering can be a great way to develop skills, increase confidence, try out something new, give up your time to help an issue you care about or to gain experience. You can volunteer while receiving benefits as long as you are still able to satisfy all the conditions of your benefit.

Am I allowed to claim expenses for volunteering?

Yes, you should not be out of pocket for volunteering and should always claim out of pocket expenses where these are available – please check with the organisation you volunteer with. Out of pocket expenses often cover items such as travel and some organisations can provide expenses for 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. What expenses are available depends on the volunteer involving organisation you volunteer with.

What support can I get from my Third Sector Interface?

Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) are local organisations which are responsible for helping people find out about what volunteering opportunities are available in their local area.

They can help you with your volunteering

You can find your local TSI here <http://www.vascotland.org/tsis/find-your-tsi>

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the giving of your own time and energy for the good of the community, society at large or an individual other than yourself, who isn't a member of your family. You chose to do it of your own free will - no one should force you to volunteer and it's something that you shouldn't gain financially from.

For your volunteering to be recognised by DWP you must be volunteering in association with an organisation or group.

Volunteering and DWP Welfare Benefits

Why do I have to tell DWP about my volunteering?

You have to tell your benefits office about volunteering to make sure that what you are doing still means that you can meet all the conditions set out in relation to your welfare benefit.

If you volunteer but haven't told your benefits office DWP about this you should talk to them to ensure that your volunteering does not affect the conditions related to your welfare benefit.

How do I inform my benefit office about volunteering and what information do I need to provide?

You must get in touch with your benefit office contact and let them know how often you are volunteering or planning to volunteer and what you plan to do in your volunteer role and if the volunteering is flexible or happens at the same day and time on a regular basis.

You will be required to provide evidence of your volunteering: this might include completion of a DWP form (reference VOLW1). This is the case for any volunteering that you are doing (whether it is in your own time or as activity you have agreed to do as part of your work search requirement) and for any type of benefit.

If you stop volunteering or your hours change you must let your benefits office know about any changes in your circumstances.

How could volunteering affect my entitlement to benefits?

If your volunteering prevents you from being able to meet the conditions set out in relation to your benefit this could affect your entitlement to benefits.

Volunteering and DWP Welfare Benefits

How many hours can I volunteer for?

As long as you are able to meet the conditions of your benefit for the number of hours you are required to engage in activity to help you find work, you can volunteer as many hours as you like outside of these.

If you are actively looking for work it is also possible for up to 50% of your Universal Credit claimant commitment hours to include time you are volunteering, you can discuss this with your benefit office contact.

Who can I contact if I'm having issues with volunteering and claiming benefits?

Talk to your benefit office contact or your local TSI for support about volunteering and welfare benefits. Find your local TSI here <http://www.vascotland.org/tsis/find-your-tsi>

TSI staff are not welfare advisers, however they are able to support you to understand what is meant by the guidance in this document

I don't have work-related commitments because I am ill/have a disability

- **will getting involved in volunteering be viewed as a change in my capacity to work?**
- **will volunteering make me 'fit for work' even if I'm on a health related benefit/conditionality?**

If you are claiming health related benefits this volunteering will not trigger a Work Capability Assessment. The benefits office will not require a doctor's letter about volunteering.

Can the Jobcentre Plus require me to volunteer?

No one can make you volunteer - when you volunteer it should always be undertaken of your own free will.

Volunteering and DWP Welfare Benefits

If I am volunteering and I'm offered a job interview or a job, what should I do?

You must be willing and able to:

- attend a job interview on being given 48 hours notice
- start work on being given a week's notice
- rearrange or give up your volunteering to start a job if it overlaps with your pattern of availability
- attend an interview connected with your job search

How can you help me if I need assistance with communication and/or access?

DWP will:

- Provide alternative formats, such as braille, large print or audio CD; you can request these from Jobcentre Plus
- Publish information about benefits and services online at gov.uk
- Make more of our services available online, to use at a time that suits you

This guidance applies to welfare benefits that will remain the responsibility of DWP.

Further information on programmes recently devolved to the Scottish Government will be provided in due course.