

# **Volunteering**

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Volunteering is a great way to gain experience and skills that impress employers. This publication will help you to make the most out of volunteering.

## **What is Volunteering?**

Volunteering is any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims primarily to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than close relatives. It can describe hundreds of different activities that people choose to do to benefit or support others in the community.

## **How is volunteering different to work experience?**

Volunteering and work experience are similar in some ways. They both give you the opportunity to develop skills, network, increase your employability and potentially gain an insight into your desired career path. However there are some clear differences in the experience you could have as a volunteer. The main motivation for seeking work experience is to gain skills and experience for you. However, while with volunteering this is often a secondary added bonus, the main aim is to use your time to give back to the community and support an organisation.

## **Why Volunteer?**

Volunteering can give you an insight into different professions and sectors, and also provide you with valuable experience, such as:

- educational (schools, youth groups)
- environmental (conservation projects, regeneration initiatives)
- heritage & cultural (museums, galleries)
- media (hospital & community radio, students newspaper & TV)

- social care and health (mentoring, counselling & befriending schemes)
- charities (fundraising, marketing, volunteer support)

It can also help you become more aware of what motivates you and which direction you want your career to take after University.

Volunteering can also

- bring you substantial responsibility
- give you the chance to make a positive difference
- boost your social and cultural awareness
- provide you with the opportunity to make new friends
- introduce you to useful contacts and new opportunities
- enhance your academic study by providing practical experience to back up your subject area
- provide real life experience of the sector and role you are interested in
- prove your commitment to a cause.

### Questions to ask

- **What skills do you want to develop?**

As a volunteer you are in a great position. You can choose what sort of volunteer work you would like to do and so you can match the role you choose to the skills you want to gain.

Consider carefully which skills you would like to develop and then you can talk to community organisations or charities about which roles would suit you best.

- **Who do you want to benefit?**

Volunteering is not like work experience in that the benefit of your work is often far reaching. Your work is contributing to the main causes of the charity you are volunteering with, whether it is administration, mentoring or gardening. It is important therefore to think about which causes inspire and interest you.

- **Will you learn something new?**

Yes – you will get out of your volunteering as much as you put in. If you push your boundaries and challenge yourself to do something you've never tried before you will gain more knowledge and skills which will prepare you well for the start of your career. You could also choose an opportunity that allows you to enhance and develop your existing skills. Working with different parts of the community will give you experience of engaging and communicating with different types of people.

- **How much time can you spare?**

It is important that you don't take on a role that requires a larger commitment that you are in a position to provide. Make sure you work out how much time you can spare and that you make this clear to the organisation you want to volunteer for. Some opportunities are flexible or allow you to work from home. Others require regular monthly or weekly shifts. They may also ask for a minimum length of commitment, for example twelve months.

- **How far can you travel?**

Some organisations will pay your travel expenses (within reason) but others won't be able to do so. It is therefore wise to consider how much it will cost you to get to and from the venue where you will volunteer and also how long it will take as this may decrease the amount of time you have to actually volunteer.

## **Things to consider when volunteering in the UK**

### **Safety**

You have a responsibility for your own safety and it is therefore important that you consider the safety of any activities you undertake relating to your volunteering.

Please refer to the Volunteering & Community Engagement webpages for more information on safety.

<http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/advice-and-help-to-volunteer/safety-while-volunteering/>

If you have concerns about your safety stop doing the activity. You should talk to your organisation about your concerns. If you are unable to do this you can contact the Volunteering and Community Engagement Team for advice. You can contact The Volunteering & Community Engagement Team on: 0161 275 2851

### **Overseas Students**

All students from European Economic Area (EEA) countries are able to volunteer without restriction within the UK. If you are a student from a country outside the EEA there may be restrictions, depending on the type of visa and endorsements in your passport or biometric permit. The Student Immigration Team can help you identify what you are able to do. They can be contacted on 0161 275 5000 or [visa@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:visa@manchester.ac.uk). Please note that if you are allowed to volunteer this MUST be with a registered charity. You can check whether an organisation is a registered charity on their website, or any organisations advertising volunteering on CareersLink have a tick box to show whether they are a registered charity or not.

### **Safeguarding**

If you're thinking about volunteering with children or vulnerable adults you may need to have a **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)** check. This is a check undertaken in association with the police and other organisations which reports to the volunteering organisation on whether someone has any criminal convictions which would make them unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults. Having a criminal conviction however will not necessarily stop you being able to volunteer. If you need a DBS check the organisation you are volunteering with will tell you and they should sort this out for you. As a volunteer there would not normally be any charge for this.

However it does take time and you will have to wait a few weeks so you need to plan ahead. To find out more about DBS go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

## **Volunteering Abroad**

The Volunteering & Community Engagement webpages have information on what you need to consider and how to find opportunities overseas: -

<http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/find-opportunities/international-volunteering/>

On these pages you can also find out more about the University's own overseas project and its list of preferred partners, which have been checked out by the Volunteering and Community Engagement Team.

Overseas volunteering is an area that has grown massively over the last decade with not just charities but also profit-making companies now set up with the exclusive role of organising trips abroad.

“Voluntourism” can be negative in that it creates a climate of the rich west feeling that they are the only people who can sort out the issues of a perceived helpless developing world.

The vast majority of potential volunteers want to make a genuine difference in the world. It is important therefore to ensure that volunteering overseas does bring real benefit to all parties involved and is a true partnership based on respect and mutual gain.

This means it is really important to do your research carefully and find out what you get for your time and (often significant amounts of) money, especially as the projects will not only dictate the sort of volunteering you do but where you will be living.

Long term volunteering usually involves a commitment for at least 1-2 years. This is about provision of specific skills into a community with a view of training, passing on knowledge or providing something which the community would not have otherwise. It is less likely to be a place to gain skills at the beginning of your career.

Important questions to ask when considering volunteering abroad:

<http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/advice-and-help-to-volunteer/volunteering-training/>

## **Making the most of your volunteering experience when applying for jobs**

Certain sectors particularly value volunteering. This includes work in sectors such as teaching, youth work, charities, health and social care and the environment. For other possible future careers volunteering can give you experience of roles, albeit in a different sector. For example, volunteering opportunities exist in marketing, IT and administration.

It is worth thinking through what practical skills you have developed during your volunteering experience. When writing a CV, don't underestimate the value of what you've gained from your "unpaid" experience. When preparing for interviews, think of particular examples of when you have demonstrated the skills the job requires.

Volunteering gives you a range of transferable key skills. These may include:

- Communication
- Team work
- Event planning
- Problem solving

- Experience of working with a variety of different people, communities and cultures
- Project management
- Use of initiative
- Time management
- People management

As well as enhancing your CV in this way volunteering demonstrates to potential employers that you are a socially responsible person who can show commitment (even without financial motivation). It also gives you something to talk about with confidence in an interview.

The Volunteering and Community Engagement Team have an online toolkit to help you think about your volunteering and how to best describe your experience in CVs, applications and at interviews.

<http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/advice-and-help-to-volunteer/volunteering-training/>

## **Finding Opportunities in Manchester**

You can browse hundreds of volunteering opportunities on the volunteering pages of the University website. These are all with organisations that have been checked out by the Volunteering and Community Engagement Team:

[www.manchester.ac.uk/volunteers](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/volunteers)

Manchester Community Central is great for accessing a wider set of volunteering opportunities:

[www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/whats-happening-manchester/directory](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/whats-happening-manchester/directory)

## **Opportunities exclusive to University of Manchester students Volunteering drop-in**

The volunteering team are available for general drop in sessions, to answer your queries

<http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/contact-us/>

### **Volunteering Fair**

An annual fair held on campus, giving you the opportunity to meet with a wide range of volunteer organisations that are advertising opportunities <http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/news-&-events/volunteering-fair/>

### **Volunteering Week**

Working in partnership with the Students' Union, the Volunteering and Community Engagement Team organise lots of different volunteer initiatives for you to get involved in.

[www.volunthero.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.volunthero.manchester.ac.uk)

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sector Club**

You are invited to attend regular club nights to connect with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations who may have volunteering opportunities and are happy to talk about establishing a career in this sector. Join the Facebook group for information and updates

<http://tinyurl.com/3rdsectorclub>

If you can't find an ideal opportunity or want to work with a specific community or not-for-profit group that is not registered with the University, you can source your own placement. Think about the organisations that you are interested in, look at their websites and see whether they have volunteering opportunities.

Manchester has a Volunteer Centre which helps potential volunteers find their ideal role. For more information go to

[www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/volunteering](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/volunteering)

A directory of voluntary and community groups in Manchester can also be found at Manchester Community Central:  
[www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/directory](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/directory)

### **Organisations affiliated with the University of Manchester:**

1. Manchester Leadership Programme (MLP)  
Volunteering is a key element of the Manchester Leadership Programme. To achieve the prestigious Manchester Leadership Award, you must complete a number of hours volunteering alongside the completion of an academic module on 'Leadership in Action'. Full details about the programme can be found on the MLP website:  
[www.mlp.manchester.ac.uk/volunteering](http://www.mlp.manchester.ac.uk/volunteering)
2. Sports Volunteer Scheme enables you to engage with the local Manchester community through volunteering in sports.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/study/experience/student-life/university/sport-and-well-being/volunteer-scheme](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/experience/student-life/university/sport-and-well-being/volunteer-scheme)
3. The Manchester Museum provides you with a range of cultural and educational volunteering roles.  
[www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/community/volunteer](http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/community/volunteer)
4. Widening Participation offers a wide variety of different opportunities working with primary and secondary school pupils. Contact [Stephanie.lee@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Stephanie.lee@manchester.ac.uk)
5. (RAG) Raising and Giving is the fundraising arm of the Student's Union, raising hundreds of thousands of pounds every year. There are opportunities to volunteer on a range of fundraising events.  
<http://www.manchesterrag.com/>
6. Student Action runs a range of student-led projects with different communities in Manchester.  
<http://manchesterstudentsunion.com/studentaction>
7. Access all Areas supports student-led volunteering projects which all share the aim of tackling barriers to University access and

participation. <http://manchesterstudentsunion.com/top-navigation/student-activities/volunteering/opportunities>

8. As a Student Sustainability Enthusiast, you will be making a commitment to think sustainability. It will also give you the opportunity develop skills, meet like-minded people and improve your confidence. <http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/find-opportunities/support-sustainability-initiatives/>

## **Finding opportunities in the UK**

If you would like to volunteer in your home town then there are some great places to find out what opportunities are available.

Two websites which offer a database of opportunities, searchable by postcode, are:

[www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org)

<http://timebank.org.uk/>

You can also find your local volunteer centre by googling 'volunteer centre' and the name of your town.

### **Gap Year**

A good website full of information to help you plan your gap year.

[www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)

### **Ethical Volunteering**

A website that builds information on how to make international volunteering an ethical and valuable experience for volunteers and hosts alike.

[www.ethicalvolunteering.org](http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org)

The Charity Commission has a searchable database of charities in the UK and information about setting up your own charity.

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

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