

# Volunteering

while receiving benefits

**jobcentreplus**

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions





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### Subsistence allowance

– an allowance given to volunteers on some full-time volunteering programmes.

The allowance usually covers food, travel and basic living costs.

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## What is volunteering?

This is when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it. You may be given expenses and, in some cases (for example, if you are volunteering full-time), you may also be given a small **subsistence allowance** for food and travel (or both). In the UK, more and more people are volunteering every year.

As a volunteer, you could:

- volunteer with a charity or other voluntary organisation
- volunteer with a public-sector organisation, or
- help your community.

It is not volunteering if you:

- do something for a family member
- are given money apart from your expenses, or
- are under contract to do it (this does not include any ‘volunteer agreement’ you may have).

If you are on benefits, you can be a volunteer and, in nearly all cases, your benefits will not be affected. However, there are some cases where your benefits can be affected – for example, if you receive a subsistence allowance.

You must always talk to Jobcentre Plus before you start any volunteering, if you are receiving benefits.

## Why do it?

Volunteering helps other people and can also help you in many ways.

It can give you a better chance of getting paid work, by helping you to:

- learn new skills
- practise the skills you have
- become more confident
- put some volunteering experience on your CV
- pick up good ideas from other people
- show employers you can keep regular hours and handle commitment
- meet people who can help you find paid work
- have things to talk about in a job interview, and
- get references.

Volunteering is also a great way for you to:

- do something you enjoy
- find new interests
- stay active and healthy
- pass on your skills to other people
- keep to a daily routine
- get out and meet people
- give something back to your community
- increase your confidence, and
- thank people who have cared for a family member or friend.

## **What if I am on benefits?**

We know that volunteering can give you a much better chance of finding paid work. So, you can volunteer as many hours as you like while you are on benefits as long as you still meet the terms for getting them.

If you are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, this will mean you still need to look for paid work. You must be free to go to an interview if we give you 48 hours' notice. You must be able to start work within one week of us giving you notice.

You must not be paid money or anything else for your volunteering. It is ok to be paid your expenses but you must tell us what you get, so make sure you keep all receipts.

You must contact Jobcentre Plus if you want to do any volunteering. We will ask you to fill in a simple form telling us about the volunteering you want to do.

To contact Jobcentre Plus, visit [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) or get our details from the phone book.

## **What are expenses?**

Expenses are costs you have to pay as a direct result of volunteering. Expenses can be things like:

- a bus or train fare for you to get to or from your volunteering
- the cost of somewhere to stay if you have to be away from home overnight because of your volunteering
- the cost of your meals while you are volunteering, or
- the cost of any special clothing or equipment you need to carry out your volunteering.

It is ok to get your expenses paid upfront.

If Jobcentre Plus pays your benefit, you must tell us about:

- all your expenses (remember to keep your receipts)
- any money you get on top of expenses (this counts as earnings), and
- anything else you are given (this may not be money).

Always talk to your personal adviser before you start volunteering. They can tell you if volunteering will change the amount of benefits you receive.

If you live with your parents or partner, their benefits could be affected if you get money or anything else on top of expenses.

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## Partner

We will treat you as a couple if you live with your husband, wife or civil partner, or if you live with someone as if they were your husband, wife or civil partner. We call this other person your partner.

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## **What if I choose not to get paid for my work?**

Choosing not to be paid is not the same as volunteering. If you are doing something that someone would normally be paid for – for example, if you are working in business or for a member of your family where they would usually pay someone to do the work – we will class this as unpaid work and not volunteering.

If you get Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, we might decide that what you would have been paid are 'notional earnings'.

If we decide this, it may affect your benefits and tax credits.

We decide by looking at whether:

- someone would normally be paid to do the same kind of work
- your work helps society or your community in some way, and
- you work for a charity or similar group.

## How will part-time volunteering affect my benefit?

### Carer's Allowance

You still can get Carer's Allowance if you do volunteering in the UK and:

- care for a disabled person for at least 35 hours a week, and
- they get the right disability benefit.

If your volunteering takes you abroad for over 4 weeks, it could affect your Carer's Allowance.

### Child Tax Credit

The amount of Child Tax Credit you get is based on your income. You may get it, whether or not you work, if you or your partner is responsible for a child or young person who normally lives with you.

Being a volunteer will not change how much Child Tax Credit you get.

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Tax credits helpline

Phone:

0845 300 3900

Textphone:

0845 300 3909

Open 8am to 8pm  
every day.

You can also visit

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

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## **Council Tax Benefit**

You normally get Council Tax Benefit if you get Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support or Pension Credit, or you have a low income.

You can still get Council Tax Benefit if you follow the basic rules for volunteering.

You must tell your local council about any volunteering you do, and any expenses you get.

## **Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance**

Volunteering in the UK will not affect your Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.

Volunteering abroad for less than 6 months will not affect your Disability Living Allowance or your Attendance Allowance.

If you want to volunteer abroad tell the Disability and Carers Service. You should also tell the Disability and Carers Service if your care needs or walking difficulties change.

To find out more, talk to the Benefit Enquiry Line on page 23

## Housing Benefit

You normally get Housing Benefit if you are getting Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support or Pension Credit, or you have a low income.

You can still get Housing Benefit if you follow the basic rules for volunteering.

You must tell your local council about any volunteering you do, and any expenses you get.

## Incapacity Benefit and Income Support

You can still be a volunteer and get Incapacity Benefit or Income Support as long as you:

- follow the basic rules
- can still go to a work focused interview when we ask you to, and
- let Jobcentre Plus know before you start, and tell them about any expenses you may get.

To find out how to contact Jobcentre Plus, visit [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) or get our details from the phone book.

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To contact your local council visit:  
[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)  
or see their entry in the phone book.

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## **Jobseeker's Allowance**

You can still be a volunteer and get Jobseeker's Allowance as long as you:

- follow the basic rules
- are still actively looking for a full-time paid job
- are available for work or treated as being available for work
- are still able to go to an interview at 48 hours' notice
- are still able to start a job at one week's notice, and
- let Jobcentre Plus know before you start, and tell them about any expenses you may get.

For more information about volunteering, ask for our leaflet about Jobseeker's Allowance.

## **National Insurance credits and Home Responsibilities Protection**

You will usually get National Insurance credits if you are getting a benefit like Incapacity Benefit or Carer's Allowance.

You should carry on getting them as a volunteer.

You won't get National Insurance credits just because you are a volunteer. But you may get National Insurance credits even if you don't get benefits. This could be if you are listed as actively looking for, and being free to, work, or if you can't work because of an illness or disability.

Home Responsibilities Protection for looking after a child or a disabled person or for being a foster carer will not be affected if you volunteer.

## **Pension Credit**

Being a volunteer in the United Kingdom should not affect your Pension Credit. But if you go abroad as a volunteer for more than 4 weeks at a time, your Pension Credit could be stopped.

## **Working Tax Credit**

You have to be in paid work for at least a set number of hours a week to claim Working Tax Credit. The hours you volunteer do not count towards your weekly working hours.

If you or your partner are responsible for a child or young person, or a disability makes it harder for you to get a job, you must be working at least 16 hours a week.

Otherwise, you must be 25 or over and working at least 30 hours a week.

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Tax credits helpline

Phone:

0845 300 3900

Textphone:

0845 300 3909

Open 8am to 8pm  
every day.

You can also visit

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

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## Full-time volunteering

If you become a full-time volunteer, you may be given:

- a full-time volunteering allowance of around £50 to £60 a week to cover food, travel and basic living costs
- somewhere to live, if you have to live away from home
- a chance to link the volunteering you do to a qualification, and
- help with childcare costs, if you need your children looked after while you are volunteering.

## Common questions about full-time volunteering

**Q Can I get a full-time volunteering allowance as well as my benefits?**

A Not normally. However, a volunteer allowance will not affect your Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.

It also won't affect Carer's Allowance, but you would still need to care for a disabled person for at least 35 hours a week.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit may be paid depending on the level of income and the amount of rent and council tax you pay.

**Q Can I do full-time volunteering if I'm getting Jobseeker's Allowance?**

A If you do full-time volunteering, you cannot normally get Jobseeker's Allowance.

This is because you may not be able to meet the conditions for claiming Jobseeker's Allowance such as being available for and actively looking for work. If you want to receive a full-time volunteering allowance, you will have to stop claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

Always talk to your Jobcentre Plus adviser before you start volunteer work.

**Q** If I have to stop claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, what happens to my other benefits, like Housing Benefit?

**A** If you were getting Housing Benefit before Jobseeker's Allowance, you may still be able to claim it. Talk to your personal adviser for more details.

**Q** Can I do full-time volunteering if I'm on Incapacity Benefit or Income Support?

**A** Yes. Your benefit will not change, but you won't be able to get the extra allowance.

If you are on Incapacity Benefit, always ask your personal adviser for more information about permitted work.

**Q** Will volunteering away from home affect my benefit?

**A** If you are on Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit or get Income Support for your housing costs, you may be able to live away from home for up to 13 weeks and still be paid benefit. An adviser will be able to explain the rules about this.

If you are away from home for more than 13 weeks, these benefits will usually stop. However, they can continue for up to 52 weeks in some exceptional circumstances.

If you get Carer's Allowance, you can be paid benefit but you still have to be caring for a disabled person for at least 35 hours a week.

Q Do I have to pay tax or National Insurance on the full-time volunteering allowance?

A Not if it's your only source of income.

Q If I get a full-time volunteering allowance, would I be able to get tax credits?

A You don't have to work to claim Child Tax Credit.

But, for Working Tax Credit, you have to be doing paid work. Volunteering does not count.

Q What if I get a full-time volunteering allowance and do paid work?

A If the allowance and your wages take you above the limit, you will have to pay tax.

## How do I find out what I could do?

- 1 A Volunteer Centre will have details of places that need volunteers. You can find your nearest Volunteer Centre by using the contact details on page 22.

You can go for an informal chat, or set up a more detailed interview with one of the staff to talk about what you want to do.

- 2 If you know who you want to volunteer for, you can contact them direct. Many organisations have a volunteer co-ordinator who will work with you to find a volunteering opportunity. Talking to someone who is already involved can help you to make the best use of your abilities.

- 3 Other ways to find out about what you can do are to:

- ask friends and family
- look in your local library or community centre
- look on the internet, or
- check local newspapers and radio for organisations that may want volunteers.

There are lots of different opportunities out there, so it's worth searching around to find something that's right for you. By having a chat with friends or the Volunteer Centre, you might find out about something you had not thought of.

## How do I get started?

To find out more about being a volunteer in your area, contact your local Volunteer Centre or Volunteer Development Agency.

### **Volunteering England:**

Phone: 0845 305 6979

Website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

### **Volunteer Development Scotland:**

Phone: 01786 479 593

Website: [www.volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk)

### **Wales Council for Voluntary Action:**

Phone: 0800 2888 329

Website: [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net)

## Contact details

### Jobcentre Plus

To contact Jobcentre Plus, visit [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) or get our phone number from the phone book.

### Benefit Enquiry Line

This is a confidential telephone service for disabled people and carers.

Phone: 0800 88 22 00

Textphone: 0800 24 33 55

Open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.30pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm.

The person taking your call will not have your personal information but will be able to give you general advice. You must not take this advice as a decision on any matter you are calling about.

### Directgov

Directgov provides information from UK government departments on topics ranging from travel safety to special educational needs and local NHS services.

Visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) for more information.

## **Tax credits helpline**

For advice about Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

- Phone 0845 300 3900
- Textphone: 0845 300 3909

If you prefer to speak Welsh, phone 0845 302 1489.

Open from 8am to 8pm.

Or visit:

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits)

## **The Pension Service**

For general enquiries about pensions, contact

- Phone: 0845 60 60 265
- Textphone: 0845 60 60 285

Welsh

- Phone: 0845 60 60 275
- Textphone: 0845 60 60 295

Open from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday.

Or visit: [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk)

The Pension Service record phone calls to help them provide an accurate and consistent service and for training and security purposes.

## Call charges

Calls to 0800 numbers are free from BT land lines but you may have to pay if you use another phone company, a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

From 1 April 2008, calls to 0845 numbers from BT land lines should cost no more than 4p per minute with a 6p call set up charge. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p per minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.

## Textphones

Where textphone numbers are provided, these are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly.

If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaus may have one.

Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

## **Important information about this leaflet**

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct as of June 2008.

It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.



[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Jobcentre Plus is committed to applying the principles of equal opportunities in its programmes and services.

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