Volunteering pack

Volunteering in the NHS
Volunteer and user involvement in healthcare pre-dates the NHS and many well-known NHS organisations were founded and funded by volunteers. Today, volunteering still plays a vital role in health and social care provision.

The Department of Health (DH) has launched a *Strategic Vision for Volunteering*, developed in partnership with the third sector, unions, local government and NHS Employers.

Volunteers contribute to the NHS and social care sector through a huge range of roles, supporting patients and staff and helping to improve services. They often provide assistance to people at very vulnerable stages of their lives. Examples of their work include:

- provision of information, advice and advocacy
- mentoring, befriending, peer support and self-help groups
- provision of complementary support working alongside staff in hospitals in areas as diverse as A&E, spinal injuries and gender reassignment.

With the emphasis on better quality and more personalised health and social care services in the future, along with an increasing role for user-led organisations, new opportunities are emerging for volunteers. Roles that complement the services provided by the paid workforce and engage the expertise of service users are particularly valued.

There are thousands of volunteers working in the NHS. Some large trusts are supported by as many as 900 or 1,000 volunteers, who provide assistance right across the organisation. The strategic vision aims to build on this, supporting NHS and social care employers to motivate and engage the as yet untapped resource in their local communities.

In some cases, trusts will work in partnership with third sector organisations that will provide and manage volunteers on their behalf. In other cases, trusts themselves will recruit and manage volunteers and will provide their own infrastructure for doing so. There may also be a mix of third sector provision and local recruitment.
About this guide

This set of documents, developed in partnership with volunteering organisations, the Department of Health (DH), NHS trade unions and NHS organisations, provides employers with the practical information to help them respond to the strategic vision.

It contains:

- information on recruitment and management specific to those who choose to recruit volunteers through their own programmes
- useful tips on working in partnership with third sector organisations who, in many cases, carry out legal duties on behalf of the host organisation
- encouragement for NHS organisations to enter into a dialogue with third sector organisations to identify the best way for them to bring the added benefits of volunteers and volunteering to patients, staff and the local community.

Defining volunteering

It is important to be clear that volunteering is distinct from paid work. Roles that volunteers undertake should complement those performed by paid staff and the paid workforce should be involved in decisions about, and supportive of, volunteering in organisational settings. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Volunteering England have agreed a charter that clarifies the distinction between paid work and volunteering and how to foster good relationships between staff and volunteers. The charter is available to download from the TUC website: www.tuc.org.uk

Partnership working

Partnerships are often a critical ingredient for developing services that both service users and health professionals value highly.

Feedback from the DH’s 2008 consultation on the strategy identified three key areas for a strategic approach to promoting and supporting volunteering:

- engaging third sector and volunteering organisations in local strategic partnerships (LSP) and the processes of joint strategic needs assessments (JSNA)
- partnerships between organisations with shared and complementary interests in promoting and supporting volunteering, including public sector organisations (such as local authorities, schools and colleges, Jobcentre Plus, primary care trusts, NHS trusts and GP practices), the private sector and local third sector organisations
- partnerships between NHS trusts and independent third sector organisations operating either on their premises or in complementary roles in the community.
NHS partnerships with independent third sector groups

NHS trusts have many potential reasons for promoting volunteering within their organisation and the local community. In a large number of cases this takes place as part of a partnership with an independent third sector organisation.

To promote effective, fulfilling and safe volunteering within an NHS environment, the relationship between the trust and independent third sector organisations needs to be founded on mutual respect. A clear understanding of the respective responsibilities and liabilities of both parties is also essential. Partners need to respect the legal and policy obligations placed on the other, for example under charity law.

The partners should agree on responsibilities and legal obligations as part of negotiating the initial agreement and set these out in documented form.

Key benefits

Volunteering in the NHS offers benefits to the organisation, the volunteer, patients and service users.

Volunteers:

- enhance the service provided by paid staff and help to improve service delivery
- provide complementary services such as library services, visiting patients, shopping or fundraising
- support self-help groups and initiatives such as the Expert Patients Programme (EPP) ([www.expertpatients.co.uk](http://www.expertpatients.co.uk))
- dispense information prescriptions ([www.informationprescription.info](http://www.informationprescription.info))
- enable staff to focus on their main role, by providing practical help.

Volunteering:

- provides a pathway into work, where the volunteer gains skills and confidence, grows and develops
- empowers individuals who have a health or social care need themselves through helping others
- gives a sense of personal pride and fulfilment – feelings of being valued, giving something back to the NHS and making a positive difference to other people’s lives
- enables a new understanding of the organisation’s dynamics.
Volunteering directly in the NHS

Recruiting volunteers to trust-led schemes, working in partnership with other organisations to deliver services on a regular basis, or working with partners to undertake a one-off project, are just some of the ways NHS organisations can engage volunteer support.

Trusts recruiting directly should have a clear volunteer policy that demonstrates a consistent approach to volunteering across the organisation. For advice about developing a policy and what to include, click here.

Policies should recognise and address the following issues:

- NHS staff who work alongside, support or manage volunteers in their role need to have a clear understanding of the remit of their relationship with and to the volunteer. Both parties should understand what the volunteer’s role is and the extent and/or limitations of their involvement.

- Volunteers operating on NHS premises need to have a clear understanding of their role, how their voluntary work fits into the NHS organisation and what is expected from them.

- All volunteers should be afforded the same respect and care as employees and organisations have a duty of care towards them, equally they have a duty of care towards those around them; as outlined in the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

NHS organisations looking to commission volunteering services with an independent third sector organisation should see Section 6 of the Strategic Vision for Volunteering for further information.
Volunteers in the NHS are individuals who choose to freely commit their time and energy to support the work of the service, without receiving any financial benefit beyond reimbursement of expenses. They bring tremendous value to the NHS in a variety of roles that enhance services to patients and service users provided by paid staff, while also assisting the NHS in improving and developing services. NHS staff who choose to volunteer in the local community, nationally or globally make a similar commitment to the projects in which they participate.

Volunteering is defined in An introduction to the Compact, published in December 2009 as: “an activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups (other than, or in addition to, close relatives).”

**Four fundamental principles of volunteering are set out as:**

- choice
- diversity
- mutual benefit
- recognition.

The Compact itself is an agreement between the Government and the third sector in England. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets how both parties should work together. For more information, visit [www.thecompact.org.uk](http://www.thecompact.org.uk)

**People are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons. In the NHS these reasons may include:**

- to give something back after the individual or their family have benefited from services
- to support a particular cause
- to explore a career in healthcare
- to fill spare time
- to gain some work experience
- to meet new people and make new friends
- to develop or maintain skills and experience
- to help develop or improve specific services
- for spiritual fulfilment
- to maintain or improve their health and well-being
- as part of their care/recovery pathway.
NHS staff who choose to participate in volunteering – in the community locally, nationally or globally, or even in their own trust – freely commit their time and energy to support the work of an organisation. Without receiving any financial benefit beyond reimbursement of expenses, they can bring tremendous value to the projects in which they participate.

**Employer-supported volunteering**

Many employers support their staff to volunteer, recognising the benefits to the individual and the NHS, as well as to the host organisation.

Volunteering England research shows that employers with successful volunteer programmes for their staff found that it gave them a positive profile not only in the local community but with other businesses, their customers and staff. Staff were more likely to stay with the company and felt more motivated and positive about their organisation. Several research studies (for example by the Institute of Psychiatry and University of Wales Lampeter) have demonstrated the positive impact of volunteering on the mental and general health of the volunteers.

Volunteering England provides a comprehensive guide for employers who wish to support their employees with volunteering, or who wish to actively engage with a community partner to develop or support a volunteering project. For details, visit the Volunteering England website at: www.volunteering.org.uk

**Investing in Volunteers standard**

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations that involve volunteers in their work. The standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management and also publicly demonstrate their commitment to volunteering. The standard is managed locally by the lead volunteer development agency of each individual country of the UK. Achieving Investing in Volunteers does have some cost implications for trusts. Find out more at: http://iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk/