

Volunteering Policy and Handbook



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Introduction

This volunteer policy sets out the principles and practice by which we involve volunteers and is relevant to volunteers and trustees within the Society. It aims to create a common understanding and clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure high standards are maintained in the management of volunteers.

Society policies, procedures and codes of conduct also exist to provide guidance and support to all members and as a member you must be aware of these policies. Your volunteer supervisor can assist you in accessing and understanding the policies.

Our commitments

We are an organisation predominantly led by volunteers. The contribution made by all volunteers enables the delivery of our charitable purposes, and is essential to the functioning of the Society and observatory. We aim to encourage and support volunteer involvement to ensure that volunteering benefits the Society, its beneficiaries and that it is a positive experience for the volunteers themselves.

We are committed to offering a flexible range of opportunities and to encouraging a diverse mix of people to volunteer with us, including those from groups traditionally underrepresented in astronomy such as youth, people with a disability, women and people from black and minority ethnic communities.

We recognise that people have a right to participate in the life of their communities through volunteering and can contribute in many ways. We recognise our responsibility to organise volunteering efficiently and sensitively so that the valuable gift of the volunteer's time is best used to the mutual advantage of all concerned.

Who is a volunteer?

Volunteers are individuals who undertake activity on behalf of our Society, unpaid and of their own free choice.

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We define volunteering as an activity which is:

- is undertaken freely, by choice
- is undertaken to be of public or community benefit
- is not undertaken for financial gain

Work experience placements and internships are not the same as volunteering; the Society may, from time to time and subject to either committee or managerial approval, be able to offer internships if suitable projects arise. We can also offer work experience placements, but the availability, scope and hours will be subject to prior approval by the operations manager. Trustees are volunteers with responsibility for governance of the Society. Volunteers may be involved on a one – off, short term or on a longer term, regular basis. They may be involved:

- in supporting the membership and public to develop their knowledge, interest and skills in astronomy
- as trustees
- in community engagement to further our charitable aims
- in one off events and promotional or educational activities
- at the observatory maintaining equipment, the grounds or premises
- a range of administrative tasks carried out from the observatory or home where suitable

Volunteers are valued for:

- bringing additional skills and new perspectives to the Society
- enabling us to be more responsive and flexible in our approach
- championing our purposes and work within the wider community
- enhancing what the Society offers and people's experience of what we do
- **And, BECAUSE WE WOULDN'T EXIST WITHOUT YOU!**

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Standards of good practice

Our management practice is informed by guidance from agencies such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, national volunteering councils within the UK, government guidance and legislation, the Health and Safety executive, local safeguarding boards, the Disclosure and Barring Service and governed by the Charity Commission.

Roles and responsibilities

Trustees have responsibility for the development and co-ordination of voluntary activity within the Society, including volunteering policies and procedures and the welfare of volunteers.

All Volunteers will receive guidance and support from experienced team members, who may be either employed personal, trustees or even members with operational support responsibilities.

The volunteer role is based on trust and mutual understanding. There is no enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, for the volunteer to attend or to undertake particular tasks or for the Society to provide continuing opportunities for voluntary involvement or provision of volunteer training.

However, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged – both of what the Society expects of volunteers and what volunteers expect of the Society.

The Society expects volunteers:

- to be reliable and honest
- to support the Society's purposes and comply with the Society's policies and procedures
- to make the most of opportunities given, e.g. for training
- to contribute positively to the purpose of the Society and avoid bringing the Society into disrepute
- to carry out tasks within agreed parameters

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Volunteers can expect:

- to have clear information about what is and is not expected of them
- to receive adequate support and training
- to be insured and to volunteer in a safe environment
- to be treated with respect and in a non-discriminatory manner
- to receive out of pocket expenses for travel to external events
- to have opportunities for personal development
- to be recognised and appreciated
- to be able to say 'no' to anything which they consider to be unrealistic or unreasonable
- to know what to do if something goes wrong

Recruitment and selection

Equality and diversity principles will be adhered to in recruiting volunteers. Opportunities will be widely promoted. Positive action to target recruitment may be used where appropriate.

Information will be made available to those enquiring about volunteering, including written role descriptions, where applicable which set out the nature and purpose of the volunteering role, key tasks, skills required and benefits. Where deemed necessary a risk assessment will be undertaken and reviewed regularly on volunteer roles positions.

Volunteer recruitment will usually involve an informal discussion and the offer to ease the individual into the role. The process will be defined and consistent for any given role - for example the recruitment process for trustees, maintenance volunteers and volunteers for one off events will be tailored in each case and may differ from one another.

Where applicants are not able to be placed in their preferred role, they will be provided with feedback and given the opportunity to discuss alternative volunteering roles.

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Disclosure and Barring Service checks will be made for any volunteers working with primarily vulnerable groups.

Induction and training

Volunteers will be given an induction and training appropriate to the specific tasks to be undertaken, but we expect every volunteer and Society member to be aware of their responsibilities when in contact with children and vulnerable adults in the course of Society activities:

- always working in an open environment, where possible, avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication
- treating everyone equally with respect and dignity
- always putting the welfare of each child or vulnerable adult first.
- maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with service users (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or vulnerable adult, unless they have a pre-existing relationship e.g. family or carer)
- building balanced relationships based on mutual trust and empowering children or vulnerable adults to share in decision making
- involving children/vulnerable adults/ parents/carers wherever possible.
- recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people, including any special educational needs or learning disabilities
- keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given

Support and supervision

Volunteers will be offered support and supervision as appropriate and this is discussed during induction. Arrangements vary according to the volunteer and the role undertaken, and may include telephone support, group meetings or one to one reviews.

Recognition

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Volunteers will be given the opportunity, where relevant, to share their views and opinions with other volunteers through volunteer meetings, informal discussions and other membership meetings etc.

Formal recognition of the contribution of volunteers is expressed through annual and funding reports, website articles, in house publications, social media, and volunteer celebrations.

Dealing with problems

The Society aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. It seeks to ensure that volunteers' views are heard and responded to appropriately.

We will attempt to deal with any problems informally and at the earliest opportunity. All volunteers should have the confidence to approach any committee member and or operational member of staff to whom they can turn in the case of any difficulty. Where informal resolution is not possible, the Society's 'Settling Differences and Member Conduct' policy and 'Compliments, Comments and Complaints' will be adhered to.

Volunteers will be made aware of the Society's complaints policy and how to use it. They will also be made aware of how inappropriate behaviour by volunteers will be addressed by the Society.

Expenses

We offer volunteers travelling to volunteer at external, off site events mileage at HMRC rates, if the journey is agreed with the MSAS committee in advance. We are, however, a small charity and encourage all to help reduce costs where possible by car sharing, claiming only for fuel expenses or donating expenses back to the Society if they feel able, and expect that anyone claiming mileage ensures they use a reasonable route to attend. Mileage is measured from the volunteer's home address to the event postcode and back plus any mileage to the observatory that has been requested as part of their volunteering duties at that event.

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Moving on

When volunteers move on from volunteering with us they will be asked to provide feedback on the volunteering experience by way of an exit questionnaire. They will also be given the opportunity to discuss their responses to the questionnaire more fully. Volunteers who have volunteered on a regular basis (at least more than once a month, every month for a minimum of 6 months) will have the right to request a reference.

Other relevant documents

- Health and Safety policy
- Equality, Dignity and Diversity policy
- Codes of Conduct
- Safeguarding policy
- Complaints
- Settling Differences and Member Conduct policy
- Role descriptions
- Volunteering Agreement