



UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX STUDENTS* UNION

DIGITAL VOLUNTEERING POLICY

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1. General

The Students' Union actively encourages students to undertake volunteering. The Students' Union offers many exciting volunteering opportunities from both its established VTeam program and throughout its operations including, but not limited to: Volunteer Drivers; Club and Society Executive Positions and SU Advice Roles. This policy IS NOT a volunteering policy; however, it acts as an important document to cover a new way of volunteering which is through digital means. Thus, this policy is an additional document to support the main SU VOLUNTEERING POLICY.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we have changed our way of operations decreasing the number of face-to-face volunteering activities. However, to enable students to fully complete their schemes or courses where volunteering is needed, SU VTeam has launched an online volunteering website.

Digital Volunteering is important for not only supporting students to obtain required hours of volunteering, but also it provides a positive experience, tackling isolation and loneliness.

1.1 Meanings:

SU VTeam / VTeam – The University of Essex Students' Union Student Activities Department - Volunteering Team

The University – The University of Essex

The SU – The University of Essex Students' Union

GDPR – General Data Protection Act and the SU Privacy Policy

2. Aims of the Policy

This policy aims to set out good volunteering practice throughout digital volunteering activities offered via or directly by the SU VTeam.

It enables volunteers and outside bodies to access, understand and accept values and ethos in which volunteers are encouraged to be engaged in digital volunteering projects advertised or created by the University of Essex Students' Union.

It aims to ensure fairness and consistency across digital projects and implement procedures to keep everyone safe.

3. Types of Digital Projects

SU VTeam provides 3 different types of digital volunteering: Signposting to existing projects via the VTeam website or newsletter; Supporting students ideas of digital volunteering projects that benefits society and are not intended to make profit; and digital volunteering projects created and run directly by VTeam which include but not limited to: telephone service; webchats; emails or digital workshops.

3.1 Signposting

SU VTeam is committed to ensuring that all online volunteering activities advertised by VTeam are acceptable, do not humiliate or disadvantage anyone, complies with the University and Students' Union main policies and aims.

VTeam is not responsible for any content that is displayed on third party websites. It is the users' responsibility to read the Terms and Conditions of external opportunity providers. Where possible, the VTeam will check all opportunities at least once a month to ensure they have not changed their original content.

If there is a concern of an activity's legitimacy, the VTeam will remove the provider immediately and contact anyone that may have been affected.

Online/ Digital Volunteering Opportunities are treated the same way as physical activities. Students are encouraged to: log their volunteering hours; claim rewards; apply for recognition schemes or any other related structures where volunteering hours are needed. VTeam reserves the right to request proof of volunteering, accept or reject any proposal of completed hours by providing a valid reason.

3.2 Students project:

VTeam supports and encourages students to create their own digital volunteering projects. VTeam will arrange a meeting once a student expresses an interest of delivering their own projects. The aim of the meeting is to ensure that the project is safe to run, and the student has enough support to implement it. Resources are discussed in the meeting. Any related expenses may be reimbursed according to the SU Volunteering Expense Policy.

3.3 SU VTeam Digital Volunteering Projects

VTeam organises and supervises many volunteering projects. As a response to Covid 19, we are committed to provide remote volunteering opportunities. Digital Volunteering can take place via various digital means such as: PCs, tablets, phones, webchats, emails and others. Every volunteer that expresses an interest in participating in digital activities organised by SU VTeam will need to sign volunteering agreement that is relevant to their role(s). The Volunteering

agreement outlines expectations, good practice and any relevant policy but is not legally binding.

General **rules** of digital volunteering that **must be kept** all times:

- Keeping all data secure and treat other people's information in the same way you would want yours to be treated
- If there has been a mistake or breach of data protection tell the SU VTeam about it as soon as possible
- Think about how you safely store people's contact details. If you can lock these away in a safe place, please do so. If you need to destroy this information, please ensure it is shredded in a confidential manner
- Treat others the same way you would want to be treated
- Respect everyone regardless of who they are, their backgrounds and the communities in which they live
- Use screen sharing function if this helps with the training process
- Recognise your own personal boundaries
- Make sure you are comfortable and call from a quiet area
- Remember that the main focus of the relationship is the needs and progress of the beneficiary
- Return any equipment supplied by the SU VTeam back after the end of the project

Digital Volunteers should **never**:

- Discuss any information or data with anyone outside of the SU VTeam or with anyone who doesn't need to know
- Leave any messages on answerphones with any personal information if you are not sure who is going to be able to hear them. Ensure others cannot hear you and avoid calls on loudspeaker if you live with others
- Leave any information of people's personal details (including their contact information) in a place that other people can access or see
- Be judgmental, agitated, stressed, depreciating, belittling or discouraging
- Treat anyone less favourably or exclude anyone who we are supporting in our communities
- Ignore any unacceptable behaviours towards anyone, and ensure that you report it to the SU VTeam immediately when it is safe to do so
- Request a remote access to a PC or other device
- Ask to disclose passwords or know what password the person chose to use
- Ask any personal information such as address, medical information, bank and card details, passwords
- Give out your personal home telephone number, address, bank details or passwords
- Continue the video call if you do not feel comfortable
- Become emotionally over-involved

SU VTeam commits to a digital volunteer:

- Provide you with a volunteering agreement
- Support professional development and create an environment allowing to do so
- Provide you with required resources for a project such as prepaid mobile phone, access to available resources on campus or community partners
- Provide you with clear guidance and expectations
- Ensure that procedures outlined in the SU Volunteering Policy and University of Essex Student Conduct are followed
- Reimburse volunteering out of pocket expenses* including transportation. *Any expense needs to be agreed beforehand with a Volunteering Coordinator or Volunteering Manager. Expenses that have not been discussed with VTeam will not be reimbursed
- Ensure that volunteering conditions are safe
- Be transparent and provide as much information as possible complying with GDPR and internal policy
- All volunteers involved with the VTeam are covered by the Students' Union's public liability insurance. All staff at the Students' Union are covered by employer liability insurance
- VTeam reserves its right to cancel any digital volunteering project if there is a concern of anyone's safety

Please see Appendix A of the 'Do's and Don'ts' Guide of Tech Champions project and Appendix B of Tech Champions volunteering agreement form

4. SU VTeam responsibility

VTeam supports all University's student-volunteer and ensures the safety of volunteers, volunteering projects beneficiaries, clients and their partners.

VTeam is a part of the Student Activities Department, where each staff have responsibility for different areas of the Charity.

5. Procedures and Policies

SU Digital Volunteering Policy is an additional policy to cover a new range of projects. Thus, all volunteers need to read and agree on the main SU Volunteering Policy before engaging with SU VTeam digital volunteering activities. It is a volunteer's responsibly to read and familiarise themselves with any policy.

Some projects might have volunteering agreements that need to be signed by a volunteer and a member of Student Activities Department binding in honour only

and are not intended to make a contract. If this is needed, it will be said in a project description or/and when contacting potential volunteers.

There may be projects where volunteers will be supporting children or vulnerable adults and get engaged in a 'regulated activity'. Therefore, some digital opportunities may require a DBS check. At this stage, individuals will be required to disclose of any criminal convictions, which will be treated in the strictest of confidence. More information regarding DBS checks can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

All information supplied to the VTeam through the application process will be kept in line with the SU GDPR policy.

All volunteers are covered by the SU Employers Liability and Public Liability Insurance.

The majority of SU VTeam projects work with vulnerable members of the community. While volunteering, volunteers might be privy to information that is confidential to the people they are volunteering with. This information must remain confidential to the volunteer and appropriate others. Please refer to the SU Data Protection Policy for further information.

6. Induction, Training and support for Digital Volunteers

Section 3 covers the main digital volunteering projects that students at the University of Essex can get engaged with via SU VTeam. Depending on individual projects as outlined in the above section, induction, training and support could be summarised, but not limited to:

- Digital volunteers might have a meeting with a Student Activities staff member, to discussed details about the project they have engaged with and how it operates
- Where appropriate, digital volunteers might be given guidelines about the do's and don'ts of their project
- Volunteers might receive a volunteering agreement to be signed before participation
- Volunteers might receive a regular support by email/ phone call or video calls, to monitor their digital volunteering experience
- Projects that are directly run and supported by the SU VTeam will have a digital induction and/or digital training specific to chosen project(s), this may include Child Protection, Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA), and Learning Disability Awareness, being a few. Any mandatory training will be outlined in the project description and communicated to students that

- want to take a part
- Digital Volunteers might also be encouraged to attend some optional training courses which would be beneficial for their chosen activity
 - Volunteers may receive a Welcome Pack, Project Guidelines outlining the appropriate forms of behaviour, conversation topics and instructions of how to use various digital platforms as well as access to Moodle Training
 - Some projects may form a project committee where every member from the committee is required to attend 2 (one in each term not including Summer -Exam term) full day training courses. If this is required, it will be specified, and calendar invites will be sent to all digital volunteers that are required to attend. In cases of an absence, a valid reason should be provided and training re-scheduled as otherwise it could lead to a withdrawal from the project

7. Volunteer Expenses

We acknowledge that out of pockets expenses may occur. SU VTeam is committed to provide all volunteering opportunities cost-free. Thus, any expense associated with the volunteering project could be reimbursed. Digital Volunteering Project expenses could include resources for projects such as arts & crafts, stationary items, cost of postage, cost of telephone calls, subscription fee etc.

If a digital volunteering role requires any travel, travel costs will be covered - mileage must be recorded, or receipts retained.

Please note that all expenses must be approved before occurring. Please refer to the main SU Volunteering Policy for a reference.

8. Health & Safety

All projects that are directly managed by SU VTeam, will have a risk assessment completed before taking place. Risk assessment could be complemented by a disclaimer form, agreement, or any other relevant documentation. A risk assessment for each project is undertaken by a Student Activities staff member and not necessarily by the VTeam.

Volunteering in a digital world comes with many potential risks and concerns. As a result, VTeam has implemented all necessary procedures to comply with best practise volunteering guidance and relevant policies. Volunteers are informed about any specific or potential risks associated with their digital project(s).

Please note that every volunteer has agreed to general and much broader the University of Essex Health and Safety Policy that is available in Student Conduct Paper as well as to the SU Policies that are available online.

Safety and wellbeing is core to every activity delivered and run by the SU; thus, Health & Safety is brought to the attention of all volunteers. Anyone engaged in the SU VTeam events, activities, or/and projects, including those where volunteers were signposted via VTeam webpage or social media, are expected to work in accordance with information, guidance, policies, best practise and training provided.

In the event of an accident, digital volunteers might be witnessed by phone or video call, an ambulance must be called immediately.

Any accidents, incidents or near misses need to be reported to the VTeam staff immediately. An accident report form must be completed promptly; these forms will be emailed to the volunteer if required.

If an accident occurred outside norms within a project or beneficiaries' behaviour, but digital volunteers are concerned about anything disclosed by a beneficiary, or any events that occur whilst volunteering, they should report their concerns to a VTeam staff member. This is considered as Duty of Care.

The Complaint procedure is the same as outlined in the main SU Volunteering Policy and the SU Complaints Procedure.

9. Harassment

The VTeam operates zero-tolerance approach to any form of harassment or bullying. Working together with the University, we celebrate diversity, challenges inequality and commit to establishing an environment that is free from any form of harassment or bullying. Everyone engaged in the VTeam activities including staff members, students, volunteers, contractors, visitors and all employees of the University and the SU are expected to be treated, and to treat each other, with dignity and respect regardless of: age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances or other irrelevant distinction.

We do not put harassment and bullying into categories such as big or small cases. ANY form of harassment that affects working, learning and social

conditions for employees, workers, contractors, students and visitors and are unacceptable and be challenged immediately.

Anyone engaged with the Student Activities Department including VTeam members should not feel they are being harassed. If this situation occurs, it will not be tolerated or accepted, it should be made clear from the outset that this behaviour is not appropriate informing the VTeam staff immediately or report it via University established platform that is available online at: <https://www.essex.ac.uk/information/emergencies-security-and-safety/report-harassment>

The volunteer may elect to have the complaint investigated, in the full knowledge that the matter will be dealt with seriously, promptly, sensitively and with the strictest of confidence.

10. Equal Opportunities and Diversity

SU VTeam has a responsibility to oppose any form of discrimination. SU VTeam treats all people equally including volunteers, staff, trustees, beneficiaries and partners. VTeam expects all its members to respect each other and will not tolerate discrimination or abuse in any form. The full Equal Opportunities Policy is accessible via the SU webpage or can be sent by request.

VTeam is also firmly and strongly committed to diversity in all areas of its work. SU VTeam recognises there is much to gain from diverse cultures and perspectives, and that diversity will make the organisation more effective in meeting the needs of the community. VTeam aims to develop and maintain an organisation in which differing ideas, abilities, backgrounds and needs are fostered and valued, and where those with diverse backgrounds and experiences can participate and contribute. VTeam pledges to regularly evaluate and monitor its progress towards diversity as per the University guidance.

11. What is not considered as a Digital Volunteering Project

VTeam understands that recent changes to how projects, events, meetings and other parts of volunteering being delivered, has changed. VTeam successfully adapted to changes and moved some of those to a digital mean; e.g. committee meetings may take place online instead of being in a meeting room, training is being delivered via Zoom or provided on Moodle instead of a paper version. Although some of these changes may lead to some parts of a project's management and engagement being available in a digital format, they are not

considered as digital volunteering projects.

A Volunteering Project is not considered as being a digital volunteering project if its main purpose is to be delivered physically. Only training to volunteer in a project will take place online with the actual delivery, beneficiary and benefits of engagement in person (for instance, teaching coding in local schools does not constitute as a digital project if those volunteers that deliver sessions are physically present in a classroom; however, having the same project in a school being delivered online would mean this project now became a digital volunteering project).

Thus, some non-digital volunteering projects may become digital or be both. If the latter becomes the case, this policy needs to be read in line with the main volunteering policy.