

Scope: All Staff	Effective Date: February 2023	Responsible Dept: HROD	Equality Impact Assessment:
Last updated by/date: HROD / Feb 2023	Next review date: Apr 2026	Associated links & web pages: Available on HROD intranet pages	

# Volunteering Policy

## 1. Policy Statement

York St John University recognises that volunteering offers an opportunity to actively contribute to the communities in which employees work and live. Volunteering is an important part of YSJ social justice ethos and building a strong community. It can actively support the University's strategic objectives.

The policy is intended to support, encourage, and develop employees by facilitating their involvement in a wide range of local community organisations.

Employees who volunteer work can use their knowledge, skills and experiences to support the community. They can also learn new skills including, for example, leadership qualities and improve their morale, health and wellbeing and work-life balance.

YSJ supports volunteering by enabling University employees to volunteer during worktime.

Opportunities are wide-ranging from individual placements drawing upon an individual's professional experience to departmental team challenges undertaking practical tasks.

This policy does not cover volunteering for public duties such as a magistrate, local councillor or school governor which are covered by the existing [Special Leave Policy](#).

The [Engaging a Volunteer Policy](#) sets out the procedure for engaging an individual to volunteer for the university.

## 2. Aim and Scope

The policy applies to university employees who are on permanent or fixed term contracts, full-time or part-time. Two days (pro rata) paid time leave is provided per calendar year.

The purpose of this policy is to enable and support employees to be proactive in identifying suitable voluntary activities that mutually benefit the University, individuals, groups/teams and the community. The policy provides a framework in which employees and managers can agree volunteering activities, sometimes which may be directed by the University (e.g. supporting school-age children within the area).

This policy is non-contractual and can be amended at any time.

The University defines volunteering as a commitment of time and energy for the benefit of the community, environment, individuals, or groups which can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and not for financial gain.

### 3. Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering can benefit both the University and the individual employee. Benefits include:

- Contribute to delivery of strategic objectives
- Improved recruitment and retention
- Enhanced teamworking
- Improved morale, health, and work life balance
- Training and development opportunities for colleagues that supplement those available within the University
- Help staff to meet people with different backgrounds and lived experiences
- An exchange of ideas and knowledge
- Be fun and interesting
- Increased awareness and engagement with community issues

### 4. Types of Volunteering

YSJ Teams, groups of employees or individual employees can apply to undertake a volunteering activity.

York St John will support staff undertaking community or charitable activities including community projects, charities, and administration of public events. The types of volunteering are entirely at the discretion of the University.

The activity would normally be undertaken outside of an employee's main job at the University, and not be linked to their University role.

The following are some examples of activities that can be undertaken but is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

- Team projects e.g., gardening, or decorating a community area. For example, there might be opportunities for repairs and maintenance in parks and open spaces, coppicing, or planting.
- Community support e.g., youth clubs, conservation work.
- Visiting a care home undertaking crafting activities.
- Fundraising for community projects or charities.
- Editing/publishing a community newspaper/newsletter.

YSJ is a member of York Cares which is a partnership of York's leading employers committed to making York a better place through employee volunteering. Activities that can be undertaken via [York Cares](#) include Team Challenges, inspiring children and young people to link life and learning together. York Cares partners with over 200 local charities with volunteering programmes that address community needs, particularly in areas of disadvantage. Activities are either a one-off activity (for one day) or a time-limited activity for an hour that could be spread out over a period of 6 to 8 weeks. For example, the Right to Read initiative involves staff supporting a child with reading for an hour a week over a few weeks. Volunteering opportunities are not limited to activities organised via York Cares.

Managers and staff need to understand the roles and responsibilities of undertaking a volunteer activity and follow the guidelines outlined within this policy when considering a volunteer activity.

YSJ supports and endorses members of staff who serve as members of Governing Bodies of a school, college or university. The YSJ Special Leave Policy is separate to the Volunteering Policy. It outlines that in exceptional circumstances, paid leave of absence may be granted for training days up to a maximum of two days per year taking part in being a member of a governing body, provided that evidence of the appointment to the role is received.

## **5. Roles and Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of managers to review any requests for volunteering and balance these against operational requirements when determining if requests can be approved.

It is the responsibility of employees to request time off to undertake a volunteering activity in accordance with this policy and ensure that volunteering does not impact upon their other duties and responsibilities within the University.

## **6. Key Conditions**

Staff are supported to take two days paid leave for volunteering per calendar year, and this can be split into a full day or into hours. Volunteering days can be taken consecutively or as a series of full, half days or hourly sessions. This is pro-rata for part time staff or staff who are on fixed term contracts of less than 12 months.

The days selected and the activities that can be undertaken must be discussed and agreed with line managers first. If for reasons beyond the employee's control the volunteering activity does not go ahead as planned, a request can be made for an alternative date.

There will be no impact on pensions for any periods of volunteering leave for which staff are in receipt of normal pay.

Approval for volunteering could be withdrawn if the needs of the service change or to allow other members of staff to participate in volunteering activities.

YSJ is not responsible for any travelling expenses incurred but many organisations do reimburse travelling expenses.

## **7. Key Considerations for Staff and Managers**

When applying for, or authorising, a particular volunteering activity employees and managers should take the following considerations into account:

- When organising team volunteering activities managers should ensure that any proposed activity is inclusive and accessible to all team members, e.g., by considering access needs, parental responsibilities, cultural backgrounds. Additionally, they should consider if any reasonable adjustments are needed for disabled staff.

- Activities should be inclusive for all for example avoiding significant dates for religious worship and consider arrangements like opportunities for worship.
- Any volunteering activity must not bring the YSJU into disrepute.
- There is no conflict of interest with the University or its activities.
- The activity does not conflict with the staff member's role or responsibilities.
- The activity is appropriate for the employee(s) concerned.
- The activity is non-party political.
- The environment will be a safe one for the employee(s) (see guidance on risk assessment in section 9 of this policy).
- The potential for improved communication and understanding within and between groups of staff from different areas and levels of seniority.
- If an enhanced DBS check is necessary, it is the responsibility of the individual(s) and/or the volunteering organisation to ensure it takes place.
- If the activity is arranged with a voluntary group/organisation appropriate employer liability insurance needs to be in place.
- Staff undertaking volunteering activities approved by the University are reminded that they will be representing the University and are therefore bound by our policies and procedures in relation to their conduct and behaviour for the duration of the volunteering.
- Volunteer or host organisations and York Cares are expected to ensure YSJ volunteers are treated with respect and dignity and not be subjected to discrimination or harassment.
- Team activities should only be within reasonable office hours.

# Appendix 1 – Practical and Process Information

## 1. Process for Applying for Volunteer Leave

Staff interested in staff volunteering should complete the **Volunteering Application form** (please see the 'Forms' section in OneUni) and a Risk Assessment and submit to their line manager ideally and normally at least 8 weeks before the volunteering activity is due to take place. The line manager will normally reply to the request for leave within seven days of the request being made.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that the granting of volunteering leave does not adversely impact other colleagues and that time requested for volunteering is reflected in the staff member's workload.

Line managers have discretion over whether the volunteering can be supported. Where the volunteering cannot be supported for operational reasons, the member of staff may make a further request after 3 months. There can be some management discretion regarding the timing of when a further request for volunteering can be made.

The Volunteering Application Form will need to be approved by the line manager in OneUni. This will then be submitted to the HROD team so that the leave can be recorded in One Uni.

If an activity is being arranged with [York Cares](#), please also let the HROD team know by emailing [HROD@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:HROD@yorks.ac.uk), so that this can be further promoted to other staff in the university if appropriate.

Staff can request to undertake volunteer activities that are not co-ordinated by the University or are not linked with York Cares. Such requests will be considered by line managers, if the request compiles with all relevant Risk Assessments, DBS, and Health and Safety requirements.

## 2. Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are required to ensure the organisations running the volunteering activities are fulfilling their duty to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the volunteers. The University requires that a risk assessment be completed and attached to all volunteering application forms. It is the responsibility of the volunteering organisation named on the application form to undertake the risk assessment. No leave will be granted unless this form has been completed.

A separate [Health and Safety Code of Practice for Volunteering](#) is available.

## 3. Insurance and Public liability insurance

Organisations providing volunteering opportunities must demonstrate they have the legally required minimum of £5million Employers Liability Insurance in place to indemnify staff whilst volunteering.

## 4. DBS Check

In certain situations where the volunteer is required to have substantial contact with children or vulnerable adults (e.g., adults with learning disabilities or older people), it is likely they will require a current enhanced DBS check. It is the responsibility of the volunteering organisation to identify when this check would be necessary and ensure that this has been undertaken before they commence any volunteering activity. The cost of the DBS check should be met by the volunteering/host organisation.

## **5. Evaluation**

On completion of the volunteering activity the member of staff will be asked to complete an Evaluation form and return in order that the University can review the benefits of volunteering, for example as part of the annual PDR discussion.

## Appendix 2 - Important information for Volunteers

Staff who undertake volunteering activities are ambassadors for York St John and as such have a responsibility to:

- Recognise that they represent the University and act accordingly.
- Give the University and the host organisation appropriate and reasonable notice if they wish to cancel a volunteering activity.
- Declare to the University and the voluntary organisation if there is any conflict of interest.
- Be committed to the volunteering activity they undertake.
- Be reliable and arrive on time.
- Let the organisation know if they are going to be late for a volunteering activity.
- Do what is requested (within reason).
- Adhere to all Health and Safety Guidance and be aware of anything that is likely to be a risk to the individual or others.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment if necessary and report any issues with that equipment to the organisation. Where the activity is organised internally within YSJ then staff should adhere to all Health and Safety Guidance in the normal way.
- Offer a good quality of service to the volunteering organisation.
- Act within any guidelines or policies laid down by the volunteering organisation.
- Make every effort to attend any training required to enable them to undertake a particular activity.
- Treat as confidential any sensitive/personal information obtained through volunteering work. Volunteers are expected to abide by any confidentiality guidance issued by the organisation where the volunteering activity is taking place.
- Volunteers should abide by any safeguarding requirements of the organisation where the volunteering activity is taking place. This can extend to for example not taking pictures in certain settings of the activity or sharing aspects of that volunteering on personal social media accounts. Volunteers should use common sense and consideration for others in deciding whether an activity should be promoted via personal social media. Volunteers should check with the organisation they are volunteering for before posting any pictures on social media to ensure compliance with all relevant guidelines provided by the organisation.
- Only provide advice when volunteering on a management committee or in professional advisory capacity, recognising that the final decision and use of any advice offered will lie with the Volunteering host organisation.
- Volunteers have the right to have what is expected of them and say 'no' if they have been asked to do something that isn't part of their role or that is inappropriate for other reasons.