



Volunteering Policy 2014

An evaluation of the volunteer programme will be undertaken annually. This policy will be reviewed annually with input from staff and volunteers.

Statement of purpose

The Research and Cultural Collections exist to care for, to conserve, to display, to interpret and to augment the historic and contemporary collections at the University of Birmingham (UoB) for the purposes of teaching, enjoyment and enlightenment.

Research and Cultural Collections (RCC) has a vibrant programme of student projects for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Participants work alongside the curatorial team to undertake projects that are beneficial to both parties, taking into account the student's areas of interest. These activities support and add value to RCC's core operations: volunteers are appointed to enhance the work of paid employees, not as a substitute for them.

Providing work experience opportunities for UoB students is one of the key ways in which RCC engages with its student body. These opportunities focus on the importance of developing employability skills and enhancing the student experience and this relates to the UoB Cultural Engagement strategy¹. Current UoB students are given preference for all volunteering opportunities, though this does not exclude the involvement of other volunteers. For the purpose of clarity, the term volunteer also covers international placements and short term full-time work experience placements.

Why do we have volunteering opportunities?

Working with undergraduate students from a diverse range of academic backgrounds means that students will bring subject specific knowledge to their RCC role and also allows the opportunity to analyse and research areas outside of their experience e.g. an art historian's eye on physics collection. By nature, one of RCC's core purposes is to encourage interdisciplinary working – involvement in this way of working enables students to both use analytical and research skills in an area outside their own academic background but also introduces them to new ways of thinking and methods of professional collaboration.

Volunteer benefits

- Gain valuable experience of the museum and heritage sector and understand the range of work available
- Learn a suite of new skills, useful for future employment in a range of sectors
- Expand knowledge of the museums and collections on campus
- Meet new people from across the University and other cultural organisations
- Opportunities for professional development and a reference for future employment

¹ Section B: xxx



Volunteer motivation

The majority of our volunteers are current UoB students, looking for work experience in the sector before moving on to postgraduate study or employment. As such, targeted roles related to distinct areas of museum activity have been identified: Documentation and Digital Access; Collections Care; and Curatorial.

Alongside these we have project-based volunteer roles, *Focus on Curating* and *Cultural Champions*. The *Focus on Curating* opportunity has a focus on museum photography as well as teaching core museum skills. *Cultural Champions* consists of a larger pool of students who meet at RCC and are mentored, but this project relies on student self-motivation and does not follow the pattern of the regular programme, e.g. minimum time commitment.

What is expected of volunteers?

We ask that all volunteers commit to at least a half day session per week. We are understanding and flexible but ask for a commitment of at least one term and we ask students to bear in mind that we have limited capacity for volunteering opportunities. They will be asked to step down if they can no longer commit due to academic deadlines or other commitments.

Expenses

Given that we are situated on the main campus, RCC does not reimburse volunteers for out of pocket travel expenses for general attendance. If volunteers have to undertake travel for museum business, this will be reimbursed.

Diversity and equal opportunities

The Museums Association's (2007) 'Tomorrow People' workforce development report has shown that one of the most important factors in being accepted on to post-graduate professional programmes, and future employment prospects is relevant experience. The report suggests that this requirement might be partly responsible for excluding people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, men, and those from BME backgrounds from the workforce. Providing volunteer opportunities at undergraduate level can therefore help to attract under-represented groups to the workforce, by offering experience without the need for unpaid work after graduation. The University's full policy on diversity and equality for 2011- 2015 is available [here](#).

Recruitment

Recruitment for volunteer roles involves an open application and selection process at the beginning of each academic year. Informal interviews take place but volunteers may withdraw from the recruitment process at any time. The museum and all volunteers will sign and acknowledge the 'Volunteer Agreement' – this is in honour only, it is not a legally binding contract of employment and can be withdrawn from by either party at any time.



Induction and Training

The induction for all new volunteers will cover areas such as object handling, an introduction to basic preventative conservation issues, writing in a museum context, and the institutional role of RCC and its aims. Tailored training such as MIMSY XG, paper cleaning, label mounting or object marking is given depending upon the role and on-the-job training is given accordingly.

Support and supervision

Volunteers will require differing levels of supervision, dependent upon the particular role they take. For example, given the hands-on nature of collections care tasks, this will involve structured supervision and training. The core staff members responsible for this are the Assistant Curator and Curatorial Assistant.

Recognising Student Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities with RCC are accredited within the University's Personal Skills Award on the activity pathway, with a sliding scale for hours volunteered. The Personal Skills Award (PSA) is the University's award winning employability programme for undergraduate students. Celebrated by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) and supported by a range of employers, the PSA can enable students to develop, recognise and articulate skills effectively in preparation for the graduate job market. Employment references are another key way in which volunteering experience is recognised – either by an exit reference or an understanding that a reference will be provided with adequate notice in advance of being contacted by employers.

Health and Safety and Insurance Coverage

Volunteers are treated for insurance purposes as employees and hence have the benefit of the Employer's Liability policy. We have a legal responsibility to provide a safe environment for all staff, students and visitors to the University.

Copyright

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