

A guide to Volunteering while claiming Benefits

Is there any maximum number of hours I can volunteer under the 'old' benefits?

No. Jobcentre Plus (JCP) recognises that volunteering improves skills and community engagement, and as a result, employability.

There is no maximum number of hours that can be spent volunteering while claiming any established state benefit, provided that you:

- Inform Jobcentre Plus of any volunteering you are doing
- Are available for interview at 48 hours' notice
- (If on Jobseekers Allowance) Carry out all job search activity every week, as agreed with JCP, as well as volunteering.
- Can start paid work within one week of any offer.

Where do I stand on being paid expenses?

Expenses are legitimate costs that you incur as a direct result of volunteering. This could include costs of transport, overnight accommodation where needed, meals while volunteering, specialist clothes needed to carry out volunteering, and care expenses in certain cases. These may be paid to you upfront or after volunteering, and do not affect benefits.

You should always keep receipts for these, and produce these for JCP if requested.

When does money not count as expenses?

You must not be paid any money other than for the things in the above list. If, for example, you receive a 'thank you' type one off payment for your volunteering, this may be illegal and must be declared immediately to JCP. This would technically count as earnings and may affect your benefits. The safest method is not to accept any payment other than expenses.



What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a single benefit for people who are unemployed or on a low income, to be phased in from 2014-2017 to replace all other work related benefits and tax credits.

How does Universal Credit affect volunteering?

The main change affects claimants of Universal Credit in the 'all work activities' category (those thought to be work ready). These claimants will be assessed as being capable of doing **either** 35 hours work per week or a **specified lower amount**. Such claimants are obliged to spend **either 35 or** the above specified number of hours per week carrying out work search related actions.

- **Volunteering does count as a 'work search' activity**
- **BUT: A maximum of half the specified work search hours may be spent on volunteering**, e.g. a person deemed fit to work 20 hours per week may volunteer for 10 hours, and must carry out other work search activity for the remaining 10 hours.

Is there any way I can volunteer for more hours than half of my work search hours?

Yes; there is no upper limit on volunteering as long as you can prove that half of your work search hours have been spent on activities other than volunteering.

How can I find out more?

1. The Department of Work and Pensions' *Guide to Volunteering while getting benefits*, found at www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1023.pdf
2. Universal Credit information can be found on gov.uk via tinyurl.com/blhhvri
3. The Welfare Reform Act (2012) is at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/contents

How should I keep records?

It is best to maintain a very simple log of hours spent volunteering, and expenses received, as JCP can, by law, request this.