



# Engage MAT Volunteer Policy

**Date of ratification: Nov 2016.....**

**Date of review: Nov 2018.....**



## Volunteer Policy

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### Contents

1. Introduction and scope .....	3
2. School's responsibility to manage volunteer activities.....	4
3. Determining the number of volunteers needed .....	6
4. Ensuring volunteers are competent.....	8
5. Risk assessments of volunteer activities .....	9
6. Providing a safe environment in which to volunteer .....	10
7. Providing equipment including personal protective equipment (PPE) .....	10
8. Monitoring/reviewing the health and safety performance of volunteers.....	11

## Volunteer Policy

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### 1. Introduction and scope

The Engage Trust recognises the significant and valuable role that volunteers have in creating and implementing our services.

Volunteering should also be a worthwhile and rewarding experience for volunteers, who are an important community resource. Volunteers' experience of working with us will shape their overall view of our Trust

This document defines the term 'volunteer' and sets out our principles and objectives with regard to the use of volunteers. It provides a framework of best practice and procedures which we will follow when appointing, managing and supporting our volunteers. This document provides guidance on the health and safety considerations necessary when using volunteers to ensure their health and safety and so that their actions do not impact adversely on Trust staff and pupils.

We will hold a copy of this document at all premises where volunteers are based and will let volunteers know where it is held.

The Engage Trust expects employees to adhere to this policy in line with Engage Trust's obligations under equality legislation. Managers must ensure that all reasonable adjustments or supportive measures are considered to allow equality of access and opportunity regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, faith or religion, gender identity, pregnancy or marital status.

**Volunteers** are typically 'recruited' directly from the local community. Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer us their time, experience, knowledge and skills without financial gain, helping us to achieve our service objectives, or with the aim of providing a benefit to the local community.

The role of volunteers is very different from that of employees, consultants, students on work placements and secondees (staff doing a different job for a set amount of time).

- There is no contract of employment or services between the school and its volunteers.
- Volunteers do not have to commit to a given number of hours. If we ask volunteers to work a given number of hours [this will be at their discretion] we will not penalise them if they are unable to do so.

## **Volunteer Policy**

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Infrequently, volunteers may be supplied to our schools by an external organisation/agency. Rarer still, the Trust may commission a charitable/volunteer organisation to provide a service wholly on a school's behalf.

This guidance primarily covers the first scenario where volunteers are engaged and managed by our schools but it can also be used for the second if volunteers are supplied by an external agency/organisation.

If utilising an external, charitable organisation to provide a school service, the attending members of the organisation should adhere to this policy also.

### **2. School's responsibility to manage volunteer activities**

The Engage Trust has a duty to both employees and non-employees, where these people might be affected by the school's undertakings. This would include a duty towards:

- Volunteers acting on a school's behalf who are overseen/managed by school staff. It is good practice to treat volunteers in the same way as employees with respect to safeguarding their health and safety
  
- Those who might be affected by the way volunteers undertake/perform services on the school's behalf i.e. pupils, other 3<sup>rd</sup> parties and school staff.

#### **2.1. Roles and responsibilities**

A number of different parties have roles and responsibilities for ensuring volunteers are safe at work and work safely. These include:

##### **2.1.1. Head teachers and school management teams:**

- Ensure school staff engaging volunteers are taking appropriate steps to implement this guidance

##### **2.1.2. School staff engaging volunteers:**

- Ensure health and safety roles and responsibilities are identified and explained to volunteers
- Identify any health and safety training required and ensure this is provided

## **Volunteer Policy**

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- Ensure volunteers carrying out maintenance/repair works are vetted for their competence (as a contractor would be) e.g. for their asbestos awareness, membership of any relevant professional organisations etc
- Ensure risk assessments are carried out and take account of volunteers
- Identify and provide any necessary controls including procedural (safe systems of work, buddy systems etc) and physical (Personal Protective Equipment, lone working monitoring devices etc) measures
- Undertake an appropriate level of monitoring to ensure volunteers safely perform their role and do not put themselves or others at risk
- Ensuring any safeguarding requirements are met

### **2.1.3. Volunteers:**

- Take all reasonable care to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions
- Perform the health and safety roles and responsibilities agreed with their supervisor
- Notify their supervisor if they are no longer willing or able to perform these
- Make use of any control measures provided by their supervisor for the purpose of safeguarding their own or anyone else's health and safety
- Report any health and safety concerns they might have
- Not carry out any works at or on the school for which they are not competent

### **2.2. Volunteers' health and safety responsibilities**

Volunteers cannot be considered as employees as they are not subject to a contract of employment though they do – under common law - still have a duty of care to those who might be adversely affected by their acts or omissions. Schools have a duty to make sure volunteers are performing their role safely and so by extension, ensure the school's obligations to ensure the health and safety of those affected by its undertakings, are met.

It is appropriate therefore that they are clear on the service/duties they are needed to perform but also the expectations on the volunteer e.g. to attend relevant training, not bring the school into disrepute, adhere to the instructions provided (e.g. on working safely, using control measures etc) etc.

### **2.3. External agencies/organisations providing volunteers**

On those rare occasions when volunteers are sourced from external bodies/organisations, this body will have a duty of care to those they are recruiting and nominating for service. The precise nature of this will depend on the terms/conditions agreed with the school.

## **Volunteer Policy**

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For example; it may be that the organisation/agency is required to provide the volunteers with particular training (e.g. manual handling), personal protective equipment (where needed) or eye sight tests (where the volunteer would make significant use of computers etc) as is currently the case when engaging paid agency staff.

The expectation of who will retain what responsibilities for the volunteers needs to be clear from the outset. Any ambiguity may cause delays in the volunteer receiving appropriate training and/or equipment that might hinder their ability to begin their volunteering role.

### **3. Determining the number of volunteers needed**

This will require consideration of a number of practical areas including:

#### **3.1. Number of staff needed to perform the required function/tasks**

This is a basic consideration of how many people it will take to perform the required volunteer service. The number may be higher to begin with when they are not so familiar with how services or the school operates, the demands likely to be placed on them or the key contacts they might need to communicate and build relationships with in getting up to speed.

#### **3.2. Ratios of paid to volunteer staff**

What the ratio ('mix') of school staff to volunteers will be is an important consideration e.g. how many experienced/competent school staff will need to be available to mentor, manage volunteers, manage premises, undertake any prohibited volunteering duties etc.

#### **3.3. Proximity of volunteers to school management**

For example, will volunteer activities be directly overseen by a school staff member or will they work at arms length? If at arms length, you may decide more volunteers are needed e.g. to reduce lone working risks, offer mutual support, share complex tasks etc.

#### **3.4. Volunteer time/hours needing to be filled**

## **Volunteer Policy**

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This will require consideration being given to how many volunteer hours will need to be filled and how this will be organised. For example, you might decide it is preferable to recruit more volunteers working fewer hours rather than fewer volunteers working more hours. Note though; if volunteers are asked to work a set number of hours, it is for the volunteer to decide whether they agree to this.

### **3.5. Minimum staffing levels needed at any time**

The minimum levels of cover needed to ensure the volunteer service can continue to operate (including instigating any safety protocols such as the fire evacuation plan) needs to be established. Although most volunteers are likely to be reliable and attend when needed/agreed (they are volunteering because they want to), they are not contractually required to turn up.

Therefore, it may be that you decide there is a need to:

- Recruit additional volunteers as standby/back up cover
- Have a pool of temporary paid staff available who could cover at short notice
- Agree the conditions (e.g. minimum staff numbers) under which the service would not be expected/allowed to operate

### **3.6. Any limitations placed on the volunteering role**

You may determine certain safety critical roles/activities (e.g. operation of evac chairs, use of hazardous equipment or substances, serving as a lone worker's buddy etc) or core functions (e.g. opening and closing up) should only be performed by school staff and that a minimum number of school staff need to be present on site at all times

Similarly, there may be certain tasks you decide it would be unreasonable for volunteers to perform e.g. attending alarm call outs or acting as lone working buddies out of hours.

### **3.7 Using volunteers to carry out repairs/maintenance works**

Volunteers often have trade/construction skills that are utilised by a school typically to save costs in appointing an approved contractor e.g. undertaking basic maintenance/repair works. While not always the case, it has been identified on a number of occasions that volunteers may not have up to date knowledge of legal requirements to carry out the work safely.

## Volunteer Policy

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This can mean that work isn't carried out in a safe manner and may mean the school's management team is found liable if an incident was to occur.

Using volunteers in this way is not prohibited but it is vital to ensure where there is a possibility the work might cause damage to asbestos containing materials (known or potentially hidden) or leave the building in an unsafe condition (e.g. structural deficiencies, unsafe electrical or gas supply etc); the volunteer's competency to undertake such tasks is verified, similarly to when appointing a contractor. Equally, where potentially dangerous equipment is being used e.g. a chainsaw, the person's competence to do so must be confirmed

It may also be necessary to seek evidence of membership of professional trade bodies e.g. if undertaking certain electrical works.

### **4. Ensuring volunteers are competent**

**4.1.** Once the required numbers of volunteers is established, it is important they receive the necessary information, instruction and training (IIT) to understand the risks associated with - and to safely perform - their role. Where volunteering duties are similar to those performed by school staff, the IIT requirements will likely also need to be similar. Volunteers should be able to access e-learning courses

Any training necessary for the role should be made clear from the outset and provided before expecting the volunteers to carry out the tasks for which the training is required. A basic induction may be all that is needed e.g. key findings of any risk assessments relevant to their role and basic site rules/requirements such as:

- Housekeeping arrangements e.g. for storage of combustible materials and disposal of waste etc
- Premises procedures (where appropriate to their role) e.g. opening/locking up, fire evacuation procedure, checking the fire alarm, carrying out legionella checks etc

Depending on the function/tasks being performed, required training might also include:

- The safe use of any equipment provided
- The safe use of any controls e.g. lone working measures, PPE etc
- Dealing with any incidents or emergencies

## **Volunteer Policy**

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4.2. Some volunteers may come to a school with significant experience or having received prior training from a previous role. It is important to assess whether this is sufficient by giving consideration to:

- The relevance of the training to the proposed volunteer role, functions and school proceedings/expectations
- How long ago this was received
- Whether their previous role/s enabled them to keep their skills well practiced and up to date
- The level of risk presented by the role and so the importance of being able to demonstrate that appropriate training was provided by the school

4.3. If the volunteer is being placed through an external agency, your agreement with the agency needs to be explicit about who will provide training.

To ensure the training is consistent and appropriate, you might decide it is best either to:

- Specify the training you expect the agency to provide, or otherwise to;
- Take responsibility for sourcing/developing and providing the training yourself

Regardless of their route into volunteering, they will still need information on the local arrangements and procedures

4.4 It is important to ensure school staff managing/overseeing volunteers are competent in this role e.g. they have the appropriate level of line management/supervisory skills, knowledge of health and safety and of the volunteer policy

### **5. Risk assessments of volunteer activities**

Risk assessments should be in place for volunteer activities as they would be for any school staff. In most cases where the activity being performed is the same, the findings (risks and controls) will be the same. Where no similar existing activities are carried out by paid staff, the need for a new risk assessment must be considered.

It is not sufficient to just add 'Volunteers' as a group to an existing risk assessment without considering first whether they do bring additional risks, or make existing risks more significant.

## **Volunteer Policy**

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Risk assessments should take account of any individual factors that might increase the risk to (or indeed from) volunteers over and above that to paid staff. For example:

- If using elderly volunteers or those indicating they have any health conditions; it might be that more consideration needs to be given to the risk posed by certain physical elements of the work
- Similarly, greater numbers of elderly volunteers or those requiring additional assistance may require a review of the fire risk assessment and/or a review of the existing evacuation measures
- Volunteers may not have the same level of experience/proficiency and so may be at greater risk when using certain pieces of equipment

### **6. Providing a safe environment in which to volunteer**

Where volunteers are carrying out their role in or on a school building or site, their health and safety is likely to be ensured by maintaining the general premises/site management arrangements in place to protect paid staff and any visitors. This will include arrangements for managing asbestos, fire, legionella and other general premises management issues such as trip hazards, electrical safety and work at height.

In most situations, the premises/site manager role will continue to be performed by a school employee. However, if you intend to have the premises run at certain times or wholly by a volunteer; it is essential the premises management responsibilities are properly outlined and there are effective monitoring arrangements in place to ensure these are being properly undertaken.

### **7. Providing equipment including personal protective equipment (PPE)**

Work equipment (e.g. the tools, machinery etc required to perform the work) will likely be provided by the school but there may be occasions when the volunteer wants/needs to use their own. Though their equipment, it is still important to satisfy yourself it is safe and will be used safely. In the case of electrical equipment, this may involve confirming (by carrying out a user check) the cable, plug etc is in good condition or that any guards are in place. Regardless of who provides the equipment though, adhering to the risk assessment requirements outlined in section 5 should ensure proper consideration is given to the way it is used and any precautions needed. Separate guidance on managing work equipment is available.

## **Volunteer Policy**

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For some activities PPE may be required and this will also normally be provided by the school. Again though, it may be the volunteer has their own PPE that they use in the running of their own business for example.

If recruiting volunteers from an external agency, you will need to determine who will provide the PPE though and as with training, this will depend on the terms/agreement under which the volunteer is recruited. You may decide though it is simpler and affords you better control to provide the PPE directly. Separate guidance on managing PPE is available

### **8. Monitoring/reviewing the health and safety performance of volunteers**

#### **8.1. Deciding what level of monitoring is needed**

The investigation and reporting of work related incidents is a form of reactive health and safety monitoring and incidents occurring to volunteers should be included within this. However, it is also important that proactive monitoring arrangements are in place to help ensure incidents do not occur in the first place. Precisely how much and what type of monitoring is necessary will depend on a number of different factors. For example:

- How much day to day control is there over the volunteer's activities?  
If the volunteer is operating at arms length/remotely from direct supervision there will be less opportunity to oversee their performance and so monitoring/review may need to be more formally planned for or scheduled
  
- Does their volunteer role include higher risk activities and/or is it in a higher risk environment?  
If so, regular monitoring/checking to ensure they are properly performing – and continue to understand – the safety requirements of their role, is vital
  
- Has the volunteer proved reliable and committed to ensuring adequate health and safety standards are met?
  
- Have you received any negative feedback from other volunteers/staff/customers to suggest that the volunteer may be working in an unsafe manner?

## **Volunteer Policy**

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### **8.2. Examples of active health and safety monitoring**

Active health and safety monitoring might include:

- Observing them working to ensure they are adhering to safe working methods and using the controls outlined in the risk assessments governing their activities
- Discussions or 1-2-1s to check their continued knowledge/awareness of their roles/responsibilities
- Undertaking a workplace inspection to ensure appropriate condition of floors, cleanliness, storage etc is being maintained. Note though; as this guidance primarily relates to buildings/sites managed by a core number of school staff, workplace inspections would ordinarily be undertaken by the premises manager

### **8.3. Addressing poor health and safety performance**

If through your monitoring it becomes evident a volunteer's performance is not satisfactory, action should be taken. The reasons for poor performance could be many and varied and so will require discussions with the volunteer and consideration of any underlying reasons and how these could be addressed.

For example:

- Are more volunteers needed as the existing pool/resource of volunteers is over stretched?
- Do the volunteers have a sufficient competency level or is additional information, instruction and/or training needed?
- Are the responsibilities being placed on the volunteer reasonable?

If the underlying reasons cannot be addressed and you have concerns about the volunteer's ability and/or commitment to perform the health and safety requirements of their role, you will need either to amend their duties (and ensure these are adequately covered by other means) or consider taking steps to ending the volunteer's involvement at your school.

### **8.4. Monitoring services commissioned out to external volunteer agencies**

As outlined earlier, this guidance does not consider services wholly commissioned and undertaken by external agencies. In these instances, adequate monitoring will be similar to that needed for any commissioned service.

## **Volunteer Policy**

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## Volunteer Policy

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