

WEA volunteer policy

Approach to developing and sustaining volunteers

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Related documents

WEA governing document
WEA vision, mission and values
WEA financial regulations
WEA branch handbook

1. Background

The WEA has a proud tradition of voluntary and democratic practice and has been a membership organisation for over 100 years. Individuals, local communities and the Association all benefit from the networking and influence that arises out of volunteering. Volunteers contribute to the WEA charitable mission by giving their time freely and making a difference in their communities. Volunteers support the WEA in a range of roles, including organising courses through branches / Scottish local associations, acting as learning champions and classroom support and contributing to the governance of the Association. Regardless of role it is important that we protect volunteers by ensuring that volunteers are well looked after and that they are treated with respect and dignity. The hopes and expectations of volunteers must also be clear and understood by all staff and volunteers.

2. Purpose

The aim of this policy is to produce a clear framework for the deployment of volunteers in the context of the strategic aims and needs of the Association. This policy is intended to help promote a constructive partnership between volunteers and staff, tutors and students. The WEA is committed to making volunteering an enjoyable and worthwhile activity which meets both the individual's as well as the organisation's needs. This will include:-

- Celebrating the diversity of volunteers and their contributions to the work of the WEA
- Identifying routes and support to enable volunteers to move into governance roles at local, regional and Association level
- Ensuring that priorities and actions relating to volunteering are cross-referenced in all relevant strategic, operational and development plans

WEA asks that volunteers abide by the vision, mission and values, principles and policies which form the framework of the Association.

3. Values

- Volunteers are valued equally with students, tutors, staff and all other stakeholders
- The range and diversity of volunteers involved in the WEA should reflect our students and the communities in which we work
- Volunteering is welcomed and facilitated with minimal bureaucracy whilst protecting and supporting people and complying with relevant legislation and regulations

4. Scope

Anyone who is actively involved in the work of the Association, and gives their time freely is regarded as a volunteer. This policy outlines the expectations that will apply generally, however each role or function may also have additional procedures or regulations, such as the requirement for a DBS check. Further supporting information is available in the Branch Handbook. The trustees of the Association and anyone in a governance role, all of whom are volunteers, will have to comply with additional legal requirements which are detailed in the WEA governing documents. This policy covers the WEA's work across England and Scotland.

5. Equality and diversity

The WEA is firmly committed to diversity in all areas of its work and believes that opportunities should be open to all regardless of social class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, religion, colour, race or ethnic or national origin. We believe that we have much to learn from diverse cultures and perspectives and that teamwork promotes mutual interests, harmony,

respect, co-operation and understanding between people from diverse backgrounds. We will regularly evaluate and monitor our progress towards improving diversity.

6. Procedures

6.1 Recruitment and selection

We will not seek to limit the range of voluntary activities that may be undertaken across the Association, locally and regionally. However, we will identify the more common voluntary activities and provide related information as an annexe to this policy. Volunteers may be recruited and selected by a range of methods according to their suitability in helping meet the needs of planned activities. Some roles may need a structured process of recruitment and selection, including references and criminal record checks, and others will be more informal.

6.2 Training and support

We will provide development and training for staff to enable them to support volunteers consistently throughout the WEA. Volunteers can expect to be made to feel welcome and provided with an induction pack, role-specific guidelines and appropriate resources to feel confident in carrying out their planned activity. The safety and welfare of volunteers is paramount and there is a joint responsibility to risk assess any activity undertaken.

Volunteers can expect to have a named person, who may be another volunteer, who will be able to regularly discuss their volunteering successes and problems with them and give feedback on their volunteering activity. Any problems they may have will be dealt with sympathetically, fairly and transparently. WEA will aim to involve volunteers in discussions that may affect their role and when volunteers leave the WEA, we will seek to ascertain the reason and whether they want to be kept informed of WEA activities.

6.3 Expenses and insurance

It is the WEA's policy as set out in the Association's financial regulations to reimburse reasonable out of pocket expenses properly incurred whilst undertaking voluntary tasks, subject to the production of receipts, see WEA volunteer expenses policy (appendix 1). These may include:-

- Travelling expenses
- Miscellaneous expenses e.g. telephone calls, postage, refreshments (which must have been previously agreed)

Claim forms are available through regional / Scottish and Association offices and staff working with volunteers or on the WEA intranet - <https://intranet.wea.org.uk/volunteers/volunteer-policies>. Significant items, such as train travel to meetings, can be purchased in advance on behalf of the volunteer.

The WEA's public and employer's liability insurance policies cover the activities of volunteers but insurers will not cover personal belongings against loss or theft. Volunteers who use their own cars for WEA business are responsible for making sure they are adequately insured for the tasks they are undertaking.

6.4 Recording impact of volunteering

We will promote volunteering with the WEA through our marketing and by informing relevant local and regional organisations of volunteer opportunities, with the aim of promoting understanding, recognition and celebration of the work of volunteers. Volunteers who are members or students

are able to shape the work and direction of the Association, within its mission, through participation in its structures and consultations.

We will seek the views of active volunteers through various methods including surveys, WEA Connect calls and the member/volunteer newsletter to support the One WEA strategy. We will record appropriate information on volunteers, their characteristics and main activities on our management information systems and use standard monitoring reports to support this strategy and provide evidence to management and trustees. We will endeavour to identify appropriate, reasonable and objective measures of the impact and additional value of voluntary activity to the WEA and its work.

6.5 General expectations

Volunteers can expect to:-

- Be made welcome and to feel involved and valued
- Receive induction to the WEA and their role within it
- Have the name and contact details of the person responsible for their induction, whether this is a member of staff or another volunteer
- Receive adequate training and supervision to carry out their role
- Be able to withdraw volunteering services without notice¹
- Act in accordance with the WEA volunteer code of conduct (Appendix 2)
- Have any concern treated fairly and confidentially

6.6 Problem-solving

WEA believes that it is important to have procedures in place to ensure volunteers are treated fairly, without discrimination. The procedures laid out below provide consistency and demonstrates WEA's commitment to volunteering good practice.

Problems may arise in a number of ways. A volunteer may make a complaint about another volunteer, a member of staff or the WEA itself, or there may be concern about a volunteer's performance, attitude or conduct.

We would hope for most issues to be resolved locally, however the Head of Fundraising, Membership & Volunteering (and Head of Corporate Governance & Company Secretary where appropriate) can be consulted on and advise on complaints and concerns about volunteers as necessary.

Volunteer complaints

Should a volunteer need to make a complaint, this can be done through the WEA complaints procedure, which can be found at www.wea.org.uk/feedback.

Upholding the volunteer code of conduct

The need to hold a volunteer to account in relation to the WEA volunteer code of conduct (see appendix 2), can arise through either:-

¹ In the event of the closure of a WEA branch or Scottish local association (SLA), WEA reserves the right to contact and make requests of branch / SLA officers to enable the formal closure process to be completed, and until such time as the branch / SLA is notified that the closure process is complete.

- A complaint received about a volunteer via the WEA complaints procedure as detailed above
- An allegation of misconduct in relation to performance, attitude or behaviour, or uncovered as part of routine checks and balances in relation to the implementation of WEA policy or procedure

The general procedure for handling such cases is laid out below.

General procedure

- On notice of a complaint about or allegation of misconduct by a Regional Education Manager, Scottish Director, Feedback Manager, other member of staff or another volunteer, the relevant Area Education Manager or Senior Area Education Manager will conduct an investigation as appropriate
- If deemed necessary and, on approval of the relevant Regional Education Manager, the volunteer may be suspended from their role while the investigation takes place
- The volunteer will have the option to be accompanied and supported by a person of their choice to any meeting as part of the investigation
- The Area Education Manager or Senior Area Education Manager will decide to uphold or otherwise the complaint / allegation and advise the volunteer of their decision in writing within 20 working days
- If the complaint / allegation is upheld, the volunteer may be asked to stop volunteering for the WEA for good
- The volunteer may appeal the decision by writing to the Head of Fundraising, Membership & Volunteering who will investigate further and respond in writing within 10 working days

Governance volunteers (branch / Scottish local association officers, regional committees and non-trustee members of WEA council) have additional constitutional and legal responsibilities within their roles, therefore there is a separate procedure for those volunteer groups, available from the volunteering & membership team.



Adult Learning Within Reach

Appendix 1

WEA volunteer code of conduct

Introduction - The WEA welcomes and values the contribution of members and volunteers who enhance the learning experience of our students. The WEA wants volunteers to have a positive experience in a supportive environment. This volunteer code of conduct is intended to establish such an environment and to help prevent or deal speedily with issues should they arise. Please be assured, we have your best interests at heart!

Guidance - WEA members and volunteers are subject to the WEA governing documents, which are the WEA articles of association and WEA regulations including financial regulations. As with staff, the WEA expects a certain level of conduct from volunteers as laid out in the guidance below:-

1. Please be reliable, honest and mindful, upholding the WEA's values and safeguarding its reputation and assets at all times (Regulation 2.3) by acting in the WEA's best interests inside and outside the organisation:-

- Avoid inflammatory or offensive comments about individuals or organisations including the WEA – this especially applies when using social media and websites whether for the WEA or privately
- Ensure you are aware of your responsibilities within WEA regulations, particularly around finance - if in doubt seek advice from WEA staff
- Please avoid participation in activities which could damage WEA's reputation and public standing, for example:-
 - Political activities when 'acting' on behalf of the WEA, including communicating opinions to MPs/MSPs or other organisations and when using the WEA logo or resources – adhere to guidance provided by the WEA nationally
 - Activities which may be against the law, resulting in conviction or caution
 - Membership of organisations whose ethos is considered contrary to that of the WEA
 - Visiting inappropriate websites and/or sharing offensive material or personal images

2. Carry out your volunteer role to the best of your ability, aiming to meet mutually agreed time commitments and standards as determined by your designated member of staff:-

- Co-operate with and follow all reasonable instructions which apply to you
- Keep in contact as agreed with your designated member of WEA staff, letting them know in good time (at least 24 hours) if you are unable to carry out your volunteer role
- Keep your designated member of WEA staff informed of any changes in address / next of kin or other personal details
- Disruption of the work of WEA staff or other WEA members and volunteers should not occur
- Reporting for, or carrying out your volunteer role under the influence of alcohol, or other recreational drugs or substances is not acceptable

3. Have respect for others, treating everyone you meet with courtesy and respect at all times. WEA has a zero tolerance policy where instances of unacceptable behaviour occurs:-

- So that we can all work together for the benefit of the organisation, respect the roles of WEA staff, as they respect your role and duties
- Express your views openly, but courteously and respectfully in all your dealings, including within and outside of meetings
- It is never acceptable to take part in any form of physical violence, bullying or harassment
- Avoid the use of abusive and offensive language, verbal or written
- The WEA has an equality & diversity policy please ensure your behaviour accords with this

4. At all times respect confidentiality, by protecting WEA information, records or data you use in your volunteer role, even after your volunteering role has come to an end:-

- Please do not disclose information that is confidential about the WEA, its staff, students or other members and volunteers except where there is a safeguarding or 'Prevent' issue, or where there is an issue provided for in the WEA whistle-blowers' policy or the Public Interest Disclosure Act. If in doubt seek advice and guidance
- Remember the WEA is governed by the principles enshrined in the 2018 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

5. Comply with all arrangements to ensure the health, safety, welfare and security of WEA staff, students, members and volunteers, premises and property:-

- Report any loss or damage to WEA property to your designated member of WEA staff
- Please don't remove or attempt to remove any items of WEA property, without permission from your designated member of WEA staff
- Don't wilfully commit or attempt to commit an act which may endanger people or property or which breaches safety rules, WEA policy or legislation

6. Seek to understand and comply with WEA regulations and policies in all aspects when carrying out your volunteer role (whether in WEA premises or other places), in relation to WEA staff, students and other members and volunteers - seek advice from your designated member of WEA staff:-

Relevant WEA policies to be aware of are – volunteer policy; volunteer expenses policy; financial regulations; branch financial regulations; health & safety policy; safeguarding policy and the Prevent Duty; sexual harassment policy; general data protection regulation (GDPR) policies; equality and diversity policy; computer use policy; fraud, bribery and corruption policy.

7. Protect yourself from conflict of interest by not taking part in activities which may result in a conflict of interest, seek advice from your designated member of WEA staff:-

- Understand and comply with the WEA Earnings Limit for Volunteers
- It is essential you declare any interests outside of the WEA that may conflict with those of the WEA
- The use of WEA equipment or materials, or other resources on WEA premises, is for stated purposes, please do not use for any purpose other than that intended and authorised by the WEA
- Do not enter into any contract on behalf of the WEA without permission
- It breaches your involvement with the WEA to falsify documents, contracts, records, or expenses or defraud or attempt to defraud the WEA

- Your position is privileged, so please do not engage with the WEA for any kind of private benefit (including financial) to you or others, this includes soliciting or accepting gifts which might be considered a bribe
- Make sure you pass on all donations given for the WEA, to your designated member of WEA staff for recording purposes
- You must not accept money or gifts for your personal use
- Seek permission if you want to use the WEA's name for events (including fundraising events)
- You should not use the WEA name or logo to start companies, unless this has been authorised by a designated member of the WEA Staff

Date

Volunteer Signature

Full Name (printed)

Counter signed

Full Name (printed)