

Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship and fundamental to democracy. It is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, and can take many forms.

Generally, volunteering is described as an unpaid activity where someone gives their time to help an organisation or an individual who they are not related to.

The UK does not actually have one common national definition of volunteering, although you can find definitions set out in government legislation and reports, as well in research on volunteering.

The DBS definition of a volunteer is defined in the Police Act 1997 (criminal records) Regulations 2002 as:

“Any person engaged in an activity which involves spending unpaid time (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party and not a close relative.”

To qualify for a free-of-charge criminal record check, the applicant must not:

- benefit directly from the position for which the DBS application is being submitted
- receive any payment (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses)
- be on a work placement
- be on a course that requires them to do this job role
- be in a trainee position that will lead to a full time role/qualification

Safer recruitment does not start and finish with applying for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Remember that a Disclosure will only provide you with information that is known to the police or other authorities. Relying on disclosures may also lead you to discriminate against people who would be suitable to volunteer even if they have previous convictions. Instead Schools need to look thoroughly at their working and volunteer involvement practices, to create a safer environment for all.

Recruitment

When working with volunteers, it is important to have a thorough recruitment procedure in place. Face to face interviews and the taking up of references help give a feel for the prospective volunteer. An introductory period can be useful for the same reason. It also allows volunteers to gain a taste of the role, and an opportunity to leave without embarrassment if they do not enjoy it or are not suited to it.

Induction and training

A thorough induction program and adequate training are equally important for ensuring a good start to volunteering. Induction sessions should help to make volunteers aware of their roles and understand what they are and aren't expected to do. Training should also address where volunteers' boundaries lie and what to do in any unexpected or difficult situations.

Day to day practice

More protection comes through day to day good practice. Avoiding one to one contact between volunteers and children obviously reduces risk. Adequate supervision meetings are also important. As with any form of volunteering, small problems can become large ones if they aren't noticed and addressed early on. People in supervisory positions should be properly trained to ensure they can recognise when there is a problem.

Channels for members of staff and volunteers to raise concerns should be clear, transparent and easy to access. There should also be very clear guidelines on dealing with allegations of abuse.

Culture and attitudes

While it may seem contrary to the intention of your policies and practices, try to develop an "it could happen here" attitude. That will help to ensure that any suspicions or uncertainty are addressed quickly and confidently.

Your aim should be to create a culture in which everyone involved with the School knows that protection of your children and / or volunteers is taken seriously, and that you have taken clear steps to ensure that you are doing as much as you can to prevent abuse of trust.

Under no circumstances should a volunteer in respect of whom no checks have been obtained be left unsupervised or allowed to work in regulated activity

- For new volunteers in regulated activity who will regularly teach or look after children or adults at risk on an unsupervised basis or provide personal care on a one-off basis, schools must obtain an enhanced DBS certificate with barred list check.
- For new volunteers not in regulated activity schools should obtain an enhanced DBS certificate.
- For existing volunteers who provide personal care, the school should consider obtaining an enhanced DBS certificate with barred list check.
- For other existing volunteers who are unsupervised and continuing with their current duties, unless there is cause for concern the school should not request a DBS check with barred list check because the volunteer should already have been checked.
- For existing volunteers not in regulated activity there is **no requirement** to request an enhanced DBS check. However the school may choose to request one as they judge necessary **but may not** request a check of the barred list.

If a volunteer is not engaging in regulated activity, the school should undertake a risk assessment and use their professional judgement and experience when deciding whether to seek an enhanced DBS check. They should consider:

- the nature of the work with children;
- what the establishment knows about the volunteer, including formal or informal information offered by staff, parents and other volunteers;
- whether the volunteer has other employment or undertakes voluntary activities where referees can advise on suitability; and
- whether the role is eligible for an enhanced DBS check.

