



Volunteering Policy

Last Review Date: October 2026

Next Review Date: October 2027





Volunteering Policy

Statement of Policy

The Harbour Project relies on volunteers to help deliver support through its Advice Centre and other Visitor activities, deliver classes, help at events to raise funds, and undertake administrative tasks for the charity. This policy sets out the charity's approach to volunteers.

Introduction

Volunteers are the lifeblood of The Harbour Project. They are a core and vital part of our Advice Centre, providing friendship and support to our Visitors. They deliver English language and other classes, help us with fundraising events and activities, and contribute to the charity in many other ways. Due to the nature of the work at The Harbour Project, the vulnerability of our Visitors and the large volume of people that we see each week, we require all volunteers to be over the age of 18.

We also recognise the value of this exchange to our volunteers, who tell us that they feel part of The Harbour Project family, and often form friendships with the Visitors, staff and other volunteers that they meet whilst volunteering. Whilst we want to avoid over-regulating volunteer roles so that these organic relationships can develop, we also recognise our responsibility to manage and oversee volunteers and to provide a safe environment in which to work.

We expect our volunteers to behave in accordance with our values, and to seek help from our staff when they need it. We are committed to providing effective induction, training and support to our volunteers.

It is important to acknowledge the differences between the roles of volunteers and staff members at The Harbour Project. Volunteers are not engaged under a contract of employment. They give their time freely, and The Harbour Project welcomes and appreciates this contribution, within the parameters of its values, the volunteer role description and this policy.

The Harbour Project encourages Visitors to volunteer with the organisation, valuing their lived experience as a significant asset. This opportunity also provides benefits for the Visitors themselves by supporting their wellbeing, personal growth and integration into life in the UK. Visitor volunteers are held to the same standards and must follow this Volunteering Policy like all other volunteers.

Recruitment

Volunteers may be recruited through internal or external actions. All prospective volunteers are asked to apply through the online form accessible from the website. This form allows the application to feed directly into a database and thus ensures that all applications are consistently managed and a waiting list is maintained. The Operations Manager is responsible for all volunteer recruitment.

When a need for a volunteer is identified, the first step will be to review the waiting list for likely applicants. When a specific role is needed that is not met by the existing waiting list, the role may be advertised on (any or all of) The Harbour Project's website, social media, through its regular newsletter, through Swindon VAS weekly newsletter or on the Charity Job website.



For specific roles, the role description and advert will cover the following headings:

- Title of role
- Hours required
- Commitment expected
- Location
- Purpose
- Description of the role
- Description of likely candidates
- Desirable skills/qualifications
- Information about The Harbour Project, including a copy of this Policy
- How to apply

As part of the online application process, prospective volunteers are required to confirm their acceptance of The Harbour Project Volunteer Agreement and Volunteering Values (Appendix 1).

Candidates are also asked to provide two references, and ideally (and if available) one of which should be professional. If the skills/experience of the applicant look appropriate to The Harbour Project, the Operations Manager will ask the candidate to come in for an informal interview. This conversation will include an overview of The Harbour Project, discussion around different volunteer roles, and an explanation of the type of work that people are likely to be involved in. Following the interview, references will be sought. Sometimes, successful applicants may be added to the waiting list if there is no capacity for their skills and interests at that point in time.

Visitor volunteers may or may not be required to complete an online application, depending on their level of English. As these individuals are already known to us, we do not typically conduct reference checks for Visitor volunteers.

Equal Opportunity & Diversity

The Harbour Project values and embraces equal opportunities and diversity. The charity is committed to ensuring fairness and recognises the importance of diversity and inclusion within its recruitment and management of volunteers.

The Harbour Project commits to making reasonable adjustments to ensure that all volunteers are recruited fairly and can participate fully.

Bullying or harassment of volunteers will not be tolerated.

Induction & Training

Upon appointment, a start date will be agreed. On the volunteer's first day, a member of staff will provide an induction and a copy of the Volunteer Information Pack. This includes the Volunteer Agreement and the Volunteering Values (see Appendix 1), and the Safeguarding Policy.

For Visitor volunteers, we communicate the Volunteering Policy's key points verbally during their induction. This is a more effective and practical approach than issuing written policies, which can be inaccessible to those still learning English.



The induction will include (some of which may have covered in the initial meeting between the Operations Manager and new volunteer):

- Aims of organisation
- Why volunteers are involved
- Tour of the building
- Meeting staff and volunteers
- Role description, including training
- Health and Safety awareness
- Safeguarding
- Understanding Equal Opportunities
- Fire Procedures
- First Aid/Accident Book
- Importance of confidentiality
- Record keeping (paper & electronic) and access rights
- Any other appropriate policies and their location
- How to complain

In the case of Advice Centre volunteers, the Advice Coordinator will also brief the volunteer on processes (paper-based and electronic), forms and sources of information and also provide other general information and advice. The volunteer will then shadow an existing volunteer for the first two to three sessions until they are confident in the role. Advice Centre volunteers are encouraged to liaise closely with the Advice Coordinator, and to ask questions or seek advice whenever needed.

Volunteers sometimes undertake fundraising activities for The Harbour Project, for example completing a challenge event (e.g. a sponsored run or sky dive). In most cases, they fundraise 'in aid of' rather than 'on behalf of' The Harbour Project. We provide training as necessary to any volunteer fundraisers as per the Fundraising Regulator's requirements.

Supervision & Management

The Harbour Project is committed to supporting volunteers effectively and providing them with any help and guidance they need to feel confident and competent during their time with us.

At the start of each day, Advice Centre volunteers will receive a quick briefing from the Advice Coordinator. All volunteers will be able to access advice and support from a member of the staff team as and when required.

The Harbour Project understands that a volunteer's personal situation may change, or the volunteer may no longer feel able to manage the challenges of supporting The Harbour Project's Visitors. Volunteers are encouraged to talk to any member of staff about any concerns or barriers that may limit their ability to continue to volunteer with us.

We ask that volunteers inform a member of staff if they are no longer able to continue to volunteer with us, so that plans can be put in place to manage any backfill, if required.



Removal Procedures

In exceptional circumstances, volunteers may be removed from their role at The Harbour Project. Volunteers are not covered by the staff grievance and disciplinary procedures, due to their different status as volunteers. In such cases, the following procedures will be followed:

- Initial concerns about a volunteer are likely to be identified by a member of the staff team, and should be addressed immediately and in accordance with usual practices. Very often, such concerns can be resolved with a simple conversation and may well arise as a result of misunderstandings relating to The Harbour Project's work, role or boundaries.
- Minor concerns about any volunteer should be reported to the Operations Manager by any staff member, trustee, volunteer, Visitor, or other person. The Operations Manager will initially discuss these concerns with the Advice Coordinator (or other staff member as relevant), to see if they are able to manage and resolve the problem directly with the volunteer.
- If the issue cannot be resolved in this way, the Operations Manager and the Advice Coordinator (or other staff member as relevant) will meet with the volunteer to discuss the situation and seek to resolve it. This may involve, for example, reminding the volunteer about The Harbour Project's procedures and values, or supporting the volunteer in developing their skills in a particular area. If, for example, the volunteer has not been attending their agreed volunteering commitments, the discussion may focus on how the volunteer could contribute to The Harbour Project in ways other than during specific time periods.
- If the situation cannot be resolved at this meeting, the Operations Manager will inform the volunteer that they will no longer be able to act as a volunteer for the charity.
- In the case of a major concern, such as abusive or threatening behaviour to a staff member, Visitor or other volunteer; suspected theft; significant breach of health and safety or safeguarding policies; or other similar behaviour; the volunteer will be asked to leave the premises immediately, by any staff member present, but ideally by the Operations Manager if present. The CEO will be informed immediately, and they will carry out an investigation to determine what happened. The CEO will make a decision as to whether the volunteer should be removed from their position, and will ask the volunteer to meet with them to explain the reasons behind this. Where possible, the Chair of Trustees (or another trustee) will also attend this meeting.
- Where the behaviour constitutes a significant incident for the charity, the CEO will report the matter to the Charity Commission and/or the police.

Expenses

Volunteers are entitled to out-of-pocket expenses only. These expenses must be agreed in advance with The Harbour Project but may include, for example, public transport costs to reach The Harbour Project, and expenses for refreshments for volunteering activities that last for six hours or more.

Volunteers should contact the Operations Manager if they have expenses to claim, and must provide all appropriate receipts in order to seek reimbursement.

Attendance

Volunteers working in the Advice Centre are asked to add their name to a rota, managed through The Harbour Project's online database, Airtable. In the event that someone is not able to attend, we also ask that they inform a member of staff as soon as practicable. To allow people to stay connected to The Harbour Project and the fast-moving environment of asylum and refugee issues, we expect volunteers to attend at least two Advice Centre sessions per month.



Volunteers who lead on, or take part in other groups or activities are also asked to make a minimum commitment of two sessions per month and to advise the Operations Manager if they are not able to attend.

Volunteer teachers are coordinated by the Operations Manager, who also organises the rota of classes. Teachers are responsible for preparing the content of their classes and deciding what topics to cover.

Health & Safety

All volunteers are expected to follow The Harbour Project's Health & Safety Policy.

Confidentiality & Safeguarding

All volunteers are expected to abide by The Harbour Project's Data Protection and Safeguarding Policies.

Volunteers' own personal information will also be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Policy, and in accordance with their consent.

Volunteers are reminded that they are not permitted to use or disclose any confidential information they have access to during the period of volunteering, either during that period or afterwards. However, if a volunteer has any safeguarding concerns regarding any individual, these must be shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or another member of staff.

Complaints

Where a volunteer wishes to make a complaint about any aspect of their experience, this should be managed in accordance with The Harbour Project's Complaints Policy.

Intellectual Property

Ordinarily, the intellectual property of anything created by an individual remains with the individual. Volunteering at The Harbour Project explicitly includes a transfer of these rights to The Harbour Project, so that any work created by a volunteer for The Harbour Project (such as photographs, posters, or other written materials), are vested in The Harbour Project.

Related Policies and Procedures

This Volunteering Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Harbour Project policies and procedures:

- Complaints Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Volunteering Agreement
- Volunteering Values



Appendix 1: Volunteer Agreement & Values

Volunteer Agreement

In applying to become a volunteer at The Harbour Project, we ask you to agree to abide by our volunteering principles and values, both in spirit and letter. This is not a legally-binding contract, but is intended to underline the mutual commitment between The Harbour Project and each volunteer.

We (The Harbour Project) agree:

- To provide support, information and, as practicable, training, to enable you to perform an effective and fulfilling role within The Harbour Project.
- To reimburse you for travel if need be; and other expenses (if agreed in advance) for any activities undertaken in The Harbour Project's name.
- To treat you as a member of The Harbour Project team, jointly responsible for achieving its aims.
- To keep you up to date about what's going on at The Harbour Project.
- To provide a daily brief at the start of each session as well as an opportunity to share any issues, concerns or feedback with a member of staff at the end of each session.
- To provide a safe place to work.
- To provide a reference for you, if requested.

You agree:

- To adhere to The Harbour Project's values – especially concerning confidentiality (see below).
- To perform tasks agreed with staff/other volunteers to the best of your ability.
- To meet time and attendance commitments, except in exceptional circumstances, or provide adequate notice so that alternative arrangements can be made.
- To attend training whenever reasonably practicable and do your best to keep up to date with Harbour Project processes and policies, especially those that keep you, our staff and Visitors safe.
- To recognise that you represent the organisation when advocating for a Harbour Project Visitor with the prior agreement of staff, but at other times, do so in a personal capacity.
- To give notice in writing when no longer able to continue volunteering.

Volunteering Values

We are committed to:

Preserving a 'safe space' for refugees and asylum seekers

Respecting our Visitors' privacy means not asking too many questions and letting Visitors decide when they are ready to talk about the situation from which they have come or any other personal matters.

Impartiality

Staff and volunteers should be working towards the inclusion of all who may benefit from The Harbour Project, irrespective of ethnic origin, language, culture, gender, religion or belief, age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, physical or mental health. In short, be welcoming to everyone.



User involvement

We cannot assume we know what our Visitors need or want; we must ask and listen. We encourage our Visitors to volunteer with us and seek their feedback in all we do.

Encouraging independence

Although providing new arrivals with essential help, ultimately we need to encourage Visitors to become independent of us. Our Visitors are making decisions about their own lives – we're here to help them to understand their choices. Volunteers should consider how this works in practice, case by case.

Confidentiality

Information is shared on a 'need to know' basis. We seek Visitors' signed consent for liaising with other agencies. Volunteers must respect the confidentiality of Visitors' information and only share it with the consent of the Visitor OR where there is a safeguarding risk. Visitors also decide whether they want to be photographed at The Harbour Project or while participating in any trips or events. We ask that you do not take photographs without the consent of the Visitor(s).

Boundaries and influence

Inclusion and integration develop through friendships – and part of what we do at The Harbour Project is to befriend our Visitors. Volunteers need to establish their own boundaries in the extent to which they share personal details and contact information. We also ask our volunteers to recognise that the balance of influence and dependency between individuals in different relationships (especially when this is a volunteer and a Visitor) is not always equal.

Teamwork

Working as a team needs good communication. This involves checking the notice board and emails regularly, updating records and *Airtable*, and attending volunteer meetings when possible. It also means giving your feedback and letting the staff hear your ideas about how we can collectively improve life at The Harbour Project.