

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS FINAL REPORT



The University of Stirling Students' Union

13 November, 4 & 6 December 2018

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ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

IIV HOST ORGANISATION:	Volunteering Scotland
ASSESSOR:	Ruth Martin
NAME OF LEAD ASSESSOR:	Zoe MacGregor
1ST ASSESSMENT/RENEWAL:	2nd Renewal
ASSESSMENT OUTCOME:	Met
CONDITIONS IF ANY:	
DATE CONDITIONS MET:	
FINAL ASSESSMENT DECISION:	

ORGANISATION SUMMARY

The University of Stirling Students' Union, thereafter referred to as the Students' Union is based within the University of Stirling campus, but is a separate organisation of the University itself. The Students' Union is there to "Make Students' Lives Better".

Through consultation, active campaigning and lobbying decision-makers, the Students' Union fights to improve students' experiences and opportunities whilst at University, after graduation and for those students still to come. The Students' Union operates day to day to provide support, advice and facilities with students in mind. This is done through the collaborative work of a team of elected officers and Union staff.

As well as elected student representatives, the Students' Union also employs a number of key staff who provide continuity and experience in operational management and administration of the Union.

The Students' Union offers a wide variety of volunteering opportunities across key areas including sports committees, sports coaching, clubs and societies, committees and class representative. These roles are not directly managed by staff in the Students' Union; the clubs and societies remain autonomous and are therefore not included with this liV assessment.

The substantive roles within the Students' Union that have been considered within the liV renewal process fall into four teams: Freshers Team (F Team - supporting new students), STEER Team (Mentor scheme for new students), Environmental Project (this includes a garden, Fair Share and second hand shop) and the volunteer Executive Officers.

Since the last assessment the post-holder of the Activities & Volunteer Coordinator has changed. The previous post-holder moved to another post within the organisation. A previous volunteer has been appointed to Environmental Projects Assistant within the Students' Union.

The current and previous Activities & Volunteer Coordinator have held a strong presence within the Third Sector and have attended courses and conferences organised by Volunteer Scotland, the local Third Sector Interface and other organisations which has kept them up to date with changing and evolving volunteer practices and policies.

SAMPLING

SAMPLING RATIONALE:

The Students' Union have a total of 76 volunteers, based at one location. Due to the nature of the student population, the majority of volunteers fall into the 18-25 year old category, and have volunteered for under five years. A mix of gender was selected along with a mix of roles.

Three members of staff were selected, one with responsibility for managing the volunteer programme, one who has responsibilities for volunteers and one who has worked with the organisation for approximately 25 years. Two Trustees were also selected at assessment stage.

NUMBER OF SITES, BRANCHES, LOCATIONS:	1
NUMBER INCLUDED IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE:	1

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS:	76
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	20
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	26.3%

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER ROLES:	4
NUMBER OF ROLES SAMPLED BY INTERVIEW:	4
NUMBER AS % OF TOTAL:	100%

NUMBER OF STAFF:	17
NUMBER INTERVIEWED:	3
WERE TRUSTEES INTERVIEWED?	Yes

WRITTEN EVIDENCE:

Provided with the self-assessment were:

The Big Plan 2018 - 21, Volunteer Policy and Discipline Code.

Reviewed as part of the assessment:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (E,D & I Policy), STEER role description, F Team role description, Complaints Procedure, Students' Union Webpage, Impact Reports 2016-17 and 2017-18, Strategic Plan 2018 - 21.



SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

INDICATOR 1

There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.

The organisation has a Volunteer Policy, and this is widely known by the volunteers interviewed. Each volunteer will receive a copy of the volunteer policy when recruited. The Volunteer Policy was last reviewed 3 years ago. The Assessor suggests creating a programme of policy reviews to ensure there is a clear cycle. The Volunteer Policy outlines volunteers' rights and responsibilities and those of the Students' Union, including reference to the organisation's equal opportunities policy and expectations for the volunteer experience such as personal development, support, recognition and reimbursement of expenses. The Students' Union website includes copies of the organisation's policies, including the Volunteer Policy. Volunteers were able to confirm that information was accessible on the website and they were able to access this information.

Many of the volunteers stated that they were "volunteering to enhance their CV". The Students' Union is very much aware of this motivation and underpins some of the work the organisation does to "Make Students' Lives Better". One volunteer really values her volunteering opportunity as she "wouldn't leave the house at times if she wasn't doing it".

Policies are not generally volunteer specific, but they are included in the wider policies, but this is due to the organisation of the Students' Union and all volunteers are members of the Students' Union. A number of policies are available on the Students' Union website.

Staff were aware of the impact that volunteers have on the increased capacity that the Students' Union can provide. Without volunteer input during Freshers' Week, the programme would be much smaller, as they "would not survive without them, ready to go each morning". One staff member sees volunteers a part of a "collaborative staff team". One staff member confirmed that the Students' Union does continually review their volunteer programme as it "helps us to look and what we are doing...are we doing it the best way?"

INDICATOR 2

The organisation commits appropriate resources to working with all volunteers, such as money, management, staff time and materials.

There is a Volunteer and Activities post, although the current post-holder has been in post less than a year, they have undertaken appropriate training and participate in local networking activities, two members of the Students' Union staff have completed



ILM Level 3 course in Volunteer Management. The previous post-holder moved to another post in the organisation and is therefore still available to advise and offer informal support. The staff interviewed were able to confirm that other staff who have direct involvement with volunteers have experience of supporting volunteers as well as experience of the field in which their volunteers are working in.

A member of staff confirmed that staff job descriptions outline volunteer management responsibilities as required. Volunteers take on leadership roles as Executive Officers and as team captains providing peer support for volunteers and supporting strategic decision making.

Staff were able to confirm that time is given in staff meetings to discuss volunteer issues, especially "discussing volunteer projects that are coming up". Volunteer issues features heavily in Union meetings at all levels and all staff are invested in the issues, and the ongoing support and recruitment of volunteers. The Students' Union has a Strategic Plan, and this was viewed by the Assessor, with volunteering underpinning many of the goals within the plan.

The Students' Union invests in its volunteers by having an allocated volunteering budget. Staff were able to confirm that each year, an appropriate amount is allocated from the main budget, to support the volunteer programme.

INDICATOR 3

The organisation is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.

The Students' Union adheres to an E, D & I policy to ensure that volunteering opportunities are available to everyone. Suitable adjustments will be put in place to cater for the needs of the individual. Volunteering sign-up sheets seek information around accessibility needs so that suitable adjustments can be made. The student population includes a high proportion of overseas students, and there are volunteers from differing backgrounds. Staff within the Students' Union acknowledge while there is a diversity amongst volunteers in terms of LGBTQ or ethnicity there are a lack of mature and part-time students volunteering. Staff are aware of some of the barriers faced by these group of students which prevents them from volunteering with one trustee saying that the Students' Union "is looking to set up a Mature Student Society to start to tackle some of the inclusion issues". They are exploring ways of supporting these categories of individuals to volunteer.

Images on the Students' Union website, strategic plan and impact reports display the diversity of the student population at Stirling. A member of staff was able to reflect to the Assessor that although the visual images reflect a diverse range of the volunteers, it would be helpful to include more mature students and post-graduate students who are under-represented in the volunteering population. One volunteer did state that "there is room for improvement in terms of diversity". The Students' Union uses social media to communicate with potential volunteers, however given the target audience this does seem appropriate. Information about volunteering is also available on the organisation's website and noticeboards. As one volunteer confirmed, they felt that the Students' Union was a very diverse organisation and said that it was "aggressively liberal" ensuring opportunities were open to all.



Several volunteers said they had started volunteering with the Freshers Team after valuing the support of volunteers as new students themselves the previous year. Staff also support one another to promote various volunteering roles which are of high priority to their colleagues and will support and improve the running of various projects or Union activities.

Volunteer teams such as F Team and STEER Captains are monitored to ensure that they represent and include a diverse range of students.

At the assessment visit, the Assessor noted the diversity of the volunteers, however it is suggested that the diversity of all volunteers in recorded and monitored and therefore the Students' Union implement procedures to monitor the information gathered re diversity of volunteers.

INDICATOR 4

The organisation develops appropriate roles for volunteers in line with its aims and objectives, which are of value to the volunteers.

The Students' Union has a clear Strategic Plan and outlines the contribution that volunteers can make to this. STEER Team and Freshers Team have clear role descriptions and recruitment processes. These roles have necessary skills outlined in the recruitment process.

Other roles in the Environmental Project include that of helping in the Second-hand shop. Volunteers commit to roles when they can. Volunteers explained that staff are good at developing roles and tasks in line with the individual's skills and interests. Staff recognise that volunteers' availability can vary throughout the academic year depending on the commitments to course work and appreciate that the priority for students is their studying. Volunteers welcome the flexibility offered. Volunteers value the "flexible approach and we can come in and volunteer, chill or study". Another volunteer said that the Students' Union is clear that "your mental health and studies are more important. It is OK if you can't do something."

One volunteer was able to describe that her role during Freshers' Week was adapted to suit her interests, as she took on the "role of photographer in the Students' Union in the evening". This was appreciated by the volunteer.

INDICATOR 5

The organisation is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.

Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken for new volunteering opportunities as well as reviewing existing ones. Risk assessments are also undertaken for "specific events such as litter picks". A volunteer did say that they felt that risk assessments are there to cover a wide range of situations including those in the STEER Team who mentor new students. The volunteer was able to describe how the risk assessment for that role outlines how, "initially they should meet in public places".



A member of staff confirmed that the Students' Union has appropriate insurance cover for general volunteer duties. This information was previously available on the organisation's website although most volunteers only presumed that they were covered by insurance cover. The Assessor would suggest that information outlining details of volunteers' insurance cover is included on the organisation's website and that this is communicated to active volunteers.

Volunteers generally said that they knew they could claim for volunteer expenses, although most of them didn't incur expenses while volunteering. Several volunteers explained to the assessor, that during Freshers' Week, they are fed and watered by the Students' Union while undertaking their volunteering. Those volunteers who are eligible to claim believe it would be relatively easy to do so. One staff member was able to confirm that "not a lot of volunteers claim expenses, but it is good to have the safety net there for those that need it".

Volunteers' personal details are stored electronically on staff computers, on the shared drive rather than personal files, and are password protected. A staff member explained that any paperwork related to individual volunteers is stored in the HR office in a locked filing cabinet, with access restricted to those staff who need access. Files are deleted after three years.

INDICATOR 6

The organisation is committed to using fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.

Staff were able to give an overview, in the interview, of the volunteer recruitment process. Individuals come into volunteering through two different routes, depending on the type of opportunity. There is the more traditional volunteer application form and recruitment process for most roles, however the Executive Officers are elected to the post, so there is a different process of nomination and then election. The Students' Union website is used to inform potential volunteers if there are particular dates in relation to the application process such as when applications are open for a particular role and when the closing date is.

Specific projects such as the F Team will be consulted on their availability and are given shifts which respond to this, but also ensuring that their shifts are not too long.

STEER Captains are matched based on their course of study, if at all possible, as this helps them to mentor the new student with a knowledge of the course material, staff and location of lectures/tutorials. Training times are adjusted to suit different timetabling needs.

Staff explained that the Students' Union only asks for information which is required to match the student to specific volunteering opportunities or to improve the volunteering experience.

An individual's motivation for volunteering is considered throughout the volunteering process. Sign-up sheets include the question - "what do you hope to get out of being part of... programme". This will then enable the opportunity and training to be adjusted to suit volunteers' expectations. Once a volunteer starts to volunteer, a staff member will often ask them if "there is anything they want experience of".



If an individual was unsuccessful in their volunteer application, staff explained that they would be offered further support from the Activities and Volunteer co-ordinator, although this is rare.

A volunteer said, "it is very easy to volunteer, but if there isn't a role to suit you, the staff will find you something, even if it is outside the University".

Volunteers have several opportunities to find out about a volunteer role and the Activities and Volunteer co-ordinator confirmed that they are generally on hand to answer any questions or provide more information, however if they are not available, any member of the Students' Union staff will assist them. Volunteers confirmed that, they were provided with adequate information about the volunteer roles.

The Students' Union does follow a consistent approach regarding the use of references - at present, references are not requested, however as all volunteers are also University of Stirling Students, there is a data sharing agreement with the University on back ground information they hold on potential volunteers.

Any volunteers who would be in contact with vulnerable groups will undergo Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) checks before they are placed. The Activities and Volunteer co-ordinator has attended PVG training and is aware of the types of roles which require PVG checks and will be able to provide some advice on completing the form.

The Activities and Volunteer co-ordinator confirmed that they have undergone training in relation to convictions that may be relevant to volunteering opportunities.

INDICATOR 7

Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the organisation, its work, policies, practices and relevant personnel.

Both staff and volunteers were able to explain that volunteer training is set up, involving key staff members and includes information on staff roles and how they can support the volunteers.

Initially, volunteers will be introduced informally to other volunteers when they start to volunteer. Volunteers are encouraged to get to know their fellow volunteers through a variety of methods - socials, social media, group meetings. A volunteer confirmed that volunteering is "helping their studies, as they feel involved and part of the student community and have met a lot more people".

Several volunteers explained that they were provided with the role description and volunteer policy, through a link to the relevant section of the Students' Union website.

Volunteers are made aware of the expectations of their role and which parts of the organisation that they are directly involved with. F Team are given clear guidance as part of their training on appropriate boundaries. Boundaries are acknowledged between staff and voluntary roles, particularly within the executive team where staff and volunteer roles are clearly defined. "Staff are clear on what not to do as a volunteer", according to a volunteer. The volunteer policy gives clear guidance on what is expected of the volunteer and what they, in turn, can expect of the Students' Union.



Volunteers were able to explain that they would know to go to a staff member if they have an issue, and it will then get resolved, following the Organisational Complaints procedure. Due to the nature of volunteers also being members of the Students' Union, staff said that there is a Discipline Code for members, which covers behaviour that would be considered 'gross misconduct'. The assessor felt that this was a very formal procedure for volunteers and could be off putting. As a result, the assessor suggests that the language used in the Discipline Code should be reviewed to be more appropriate for volunteers. The Complaints Procedure should also include how the Union would support a volunteer should a complaint be made about them. Due to this, the Volunteer Policy will need to be reviewed to clarify how these changes apply to volunteers.

INDICATOR 8

The organisation takes account of the varying support and supervision needs of volunteers.

All volunteers knew who to contact with any queries related to their role or for other issues related to their volunteering, however if they were not available, in general, volunteers felt they "could speak to anyone in the Student Union and they would try to help". For some roles, it may be that some volunteers have a more senior co-ordinating role and they may be the initial point of contact for less experienced volunteers.

Volunteers are aware that they can refuse demands if they consider them unrealistic. Some volunteers stated that "I don't feel confident enough to work the till yet and there is no pressure for me to do it".

Staff explained that they often ask volunteers informally how they are doing and if everything is OK. Many staff and some specific volunteers have undertaken Mental Health First Aid Training. One volunteer was able to explain that "Google feedback forms are often used to gather feedback from us about how we found our volunteering and is there anything we could change". A suggestion would be to consider seeking feedback from volunteers on a programmed basis, and thereby receiving feedback from all volunteers, not just those undertaking specific projects.

Volunteers were able to confirm that they are kept up to date through various social media channels and emails. If volunteers are looking for more specific information updates they can "pop into the Students' Union and speak to someone there". More general information will be posted on the organisation's website.

INDICATOR 9

The whole organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.

The Volunteer and Activities Coordinator explained that the Students' Union recognises volunteers' contributions through STAR Awards (Student Achievement Record). STAR is a volunteer focussed awards ceremony run by the University's



Careers and Employability service. The Students' Union are involved in nominating and handing out these awards to students.

Staff also thank volunteers through many channels: verbally at the end of a session, on social media or on the Students' Union website as well as in the impact report. Volunteers were able to confirm that they feel valued in a variety of ways "free pizza at the end of Freshers' Week...nominated for an Award...email messages of thanks".

Volunteers' contribution is recognised in a variety of ways. This does depend on the role undertaken by volunteers. For example, the volunteers involved in Freshers' Week have a very intensive short-term volunteer project, which results in an end of Freshers' Week Awards Night with thanks and fun certificates. The annual Sports Union Awards Ball has a dedicated Volunteer of the Year award.

The volunteer Executive Officers (these volunteers are elected to their volunteering role each year by their student peers) are highly influential in shaping the policies and procedures of the Union as many of these decisions are passed at Communities Zone (C Zec) meetings. This was confirmed by a volunteer who said that "C Zec meetings are good at giving everyone a chance to have a say".

F Team volunteers explained that they were a general volunteer initially, but if they decided to volunteer again the following year, there is the opportunity to apply for a Team Captain role. This gave volunteers the opportunity to develop their skills and experience.

All students who volunteer can have transcripts added to their degree providing evidence of extra-curricular activities including their contribution through volunteering. Many students stated that they "were volunteering to enhance their CV....and help them stand out from the crowd". Volunteers are also aware that they are able to request a reference from the Students' Union.

A staff member explained that volunteers do not complete an exit form, however informal feedback is gathered from volunteers who wish to give it on an informal basis. Volunteer Executive Officers have a formal ending to their volunteer role and they will hand over to the new officer by passing on information and sharing their learning. Due to the nature of student life, and with exams there is a natural drop-off from volunteering, however a suggestion from the Assessor is to create an e-survey for volunteers to complete when they stop volunteering.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Summary of suggestions for development

1.4 The Volunteer Policy was last reviewed 3 years ago. The Assessor suggests creating a programme of policy reviews to ensure there is a clear cycle.

3.5 It is suggested that the diversity of all volunteers is recorded and monitored and therefore the Students' Union implement procedures to monitor the information gathered re diversity of volunteers.

5.2 The Assessor would suggest that information outlining details of volunteers'



insurance cover is included on the organisation's website and that this is communicated to active volunteers.

7.4 The assessor suggests that the language used in the Discipline Code should be reviewed to be more appropriate for volunteers. The Complaints Procedure should also include how the Union would support a volunteer should a complaint be made about them. Due to this, the Volunteer Policy will need to be reviewed to clarify how these changes apply to volunteers.

8.4 A suggestion would be to consider seeking feedback from volunteers on a programmed basis, and thereby receiving feedback from all volunteers, not just those undertaking specific projects.

9.5 A suggestion from the Assessor is to create an e-survey for volunteers to complete when they stop volunteering.

CONDITIONS (IF APPLICABLE)

Summary of how conditions were met:

OR

Summary of why organisation has not met the standard: