

**November 2009**

Currently the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is supportive of benefit claimants volunteering. Volunteer managers should make sure that they are aware of any changes to DWP guidance and encourage volunteers to discuss their volunteering with Jobcentre Plus although the decision to inform their personal adviser is a matter for the volunteer.

Jobseeker's Allowance claimants can do as much voluntary work as they like. The "so called" '16-hour rule' was abolished for volunteering in 2001 as long as volunteers remain available for and actively seek work. Volunteer managers need to ensure that volunteers are able to attend interviews at 48 hours notice and leave volunteering to take up work with a week's notice. They should also ensure that the volunteer's involvement is flexible enough to accommodate them attending the jobcentre to meet with their personal adviser.

Income Support should not be affected by volunteering, as long as the claimant does not receive anything apart from reimbursement out of pocket expenses. There is no hour limit for volunteering.

Incapacity Benefit should not be affected by volunteering. There is no hour limit, although claimants are sometimes told that there is a 16-hour rule. This may arise from confusion with permitted work, which is a separate category from volunteering and for which there is currently a limit of 16 hours. Volunteering should not trigger an investigation into an individual's capacity for work, but care should be taken to reassure benefits staff of the flexible nature of volunteering and the contribution it can make towards someone being able to move back into work particularly if someone is volunteering in a role which could be seen as similar to previous paid work.