

The British Museum Policy on Volunteering

1. Purpose

1.1 This policy gives guidance and direction to British Museum staff and volunteers supervising or engaged in voluntary activities at the Museum. It applies to all volunteers in all programmes and projects undertaken by or on behalf of the Museum at all sites of operation.

1.2 A volunteer is anyone who without compensation or expectation of compensation (other than reimbursement of expenses) performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the Museum.

1.3 This policy does not apply to work placements from schools which shall be coordinated by the Human Resources Department. Nor does it apply to international scholarly and academic internships which shall be undertaken in collaboration with Keepers.

2. Principles

2.1 The achievement of the Museum's Aim¹ and the realisation of its universal vision² may be assured by the widest possible public consent to, participation in and engagement with the work of the Museum. Through volunteering the wider community is able to:

- demonstrate its support for the Museum's objectives by the contribution of time and expertise;
- have a deeper appreciation of the Museum's Collection; and
- develop new skills and knowledge in rewarding and educative ways;

2.2 Therefore, the involvement of volunteers in the work of the Museum is encouraged and the recruitment of volunteers from the diverse communities in London, the regions and further afield regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, nationality, religious/political belief or disability is actively promoted.

2.3 The relationship between volunteers and the Museum is one of trust and mutual understanding. It does not create a legally binding contract either expressly or by implication. The Museum reserves the exclusive right to change any aspect of this policy at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy. The Museum accepts the services of volunteers on the understanding that their services are received at its sole discretion and that any volunteer's relationship with the Museum may be terminated by it at any time for whatever reason.

¹ The Aim of the British Museum is to hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of world cultures ("the Collection"), and ensure that the Collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited.

² *i.e.* a place where, under one roof, visitors may explore individual cultures and the connections between them, and appreciate a vision of culture, heritage and identity that extends beyond national borders.

2.4 British Museum Trustees in office are not accepted as direct service volunteers within the Museum.

2.5 Volunteers are not a substitute for paid employees and the Museum does not recruit volunteers to displace paid staff. Any volunteer who accepts full or part time paid employment in the Museum in any capacity shall not be expected to continue their voluntary work. The Museum accepts the services of its own staff as volunteers. Such services are accepted only if the voluntary tasks are undertaken wholly without coercion and involve assignments entirely outside the scope of the normal employment duties of the staff concerned and are provided outside their usual working hours.

2.6 Volunteers act wholly at the direction of the Museum staff supervising them. They do not have the authority to represent the Museum in any official capacity, nor are they authorised to bind it to any third party or make any commitment on the Museum's behalf. Letters and other communications written by volunteers in the course of their voluntary work must be signed by and in the name of Museum staff of appropriate seniority and authority.

2.7 Volunteers who have not reached the age of majority must have written consent from their parents or guardians prior to volunteering. Assignments must not be given to volunteers who are minors unless the tasks assigned and the supervision available are appropriate to their age and understanding.

2.8 The Museum asks that volunteers be willing to:

- help the Museum achieve its Aim and objectives and share its universal vision;
- submit to any health screening or physical assessments necessary to assess their suitability to undertake particular activities;
- submit to criminal record checks (and additional checks if tasks involving children or other vulnerable visitor groups are to be undertaken);
- attend any support, training or supervision sessions useful for the tasks to be undertaken, their personal development or to meet health and safety requirements;
- work as team members with other volunteers and staff under the overall control of a designated task manager;
- tell their task manager if they believe the performance of any task may be a problem to themselves or others;
- carry out agreed tasks and commit the time and the energy required;
- dress appropriately for the conditions and performance of assigned tasks;
- be courteous and helpful to Museum visitors;
- follow notified volunteer guidelines, grievance procedures and other Museum rules and procedures;
- maintain the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information of the Museum to which they are exposed while carrying out assignments³;
- uphold the name of the British Museum;

³ Volunteers will be requested to sign an appropriate undertaking before commencing voluntary activities.

- assign all copyright to the Museum in any original work created by them on behalf of the Museum³.
- confirm that they have no interest in or connection with any activity or programme of the Museum whether personal, philosophical or financial that does or that may appear to conflict with the interests or Ethics Policy of the Museum³; and
- accept a probationary period and, where possible, a set term of duration subject to notice of intention to stop volunteering.

2.9 In return, volunteers may expect from the Museum:

- the equal opportunity to undertake meaningful and enjoyable assignments of real value to the Museum and its visitors within clear and appropriate programmes of activities;
- appropriate and safe working conditions with the right training and tools for the tasks assigned;
- tasks that match the needs of the Museum with the skills, knowledge, experience and interests of the volunteers;
- personal development through training and guidance and greater knowledge, skills and contact networks;
- reimbursement of authorised expenses incurred in carrying out assigned tasks for the Museum;
- one to one meetings with their task managers to discuss/review their assignments after an agreed probationary period (and periodically thereafter);
- involvement and participation in the work of the Museum and recognition for assignments undertaken;

2.10 The Museum will indemnify volunteers and hold them free from liability for civil liability to any person as the result of personal injury loss or damage arising from the execution or purported execution of tasks assigned to them on any Museum premises. This indemnity will not apply where a volunteer acts recklessly or in bad faith.

3. Review

This Policy shall be reviewed not less than once every five years.

Adopted by the Director on 29 September 2003

Neil MacGregor