

Dorset History Centre Volunteer Policy

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Service Description

The Joint Archives Service (JAS), based at Dorset History Centre (DHC) is operated on behalf of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) and Dorset Council (DC). Partnership between the two authorities as delivered through the joint service, sits at the heart of JAS activities and underwrites the protocols and processes by which DHC preserves material. Archives are documents (hand-written, printed items, maps, plans, slides, postcards, photographs, audio-visual material, digital records and comparable items in diverse physical formats) from the tenth century to the present day. They are items that have been selected through a process of appraisal as being worthy of permanent preservation. DHC is the sole local authority archive within the county with Approved Repository status as designated by The National Archives.

Vision and Mission

The Dorset History Centre is the home of the Joint Archives Service, the body funded to preserve Dorset's recorded heritage. DHC is the physical and virtual hub for the archival heritage of wider Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch in both hard copy and digital formats. The JAS acquires, preserves and makes accessible the archives the county and so promotes cultural, economic, educational and social well-being.

1. Introduction

1.1. A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation, or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement of expenses incurred in the course of volunteer duties, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the JAS. This includes H.E. students undertaking work experience placements.

1.2. The JAS has hosted volunteers for many years in a number of different roles. They have added huge value to the service and contributed to the success of the outcomes it seeks to achieve. They enable us to do work that would not otherwise be possible, and often contribute specialist skills and knowledge.

1.3. The JAS recognises the value of volunteering and aspires to widen the range of activities undertaken by volunteers. Supervision of volunteers, along with capitalising on their outputs, requires staff time and capacity and is not a 'free' resource.

1.4. The JAS recognises its responsibility to increase diversity in the volunteering cohort and works to widen participation and to monitor progress.

1.5. Volunteer opportunities are offered to support JAS's core work or to work on specific time-limited externally funded projects.

1.6. In so far as the JAS benefits from the time, skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers, we believe that volunteers should gain personal or employment related benefits from the experience. We are committed to managing volunteers in a way that ensures that the needs of both parties are met.

1.7. Volunteering encourages social interaction, reduces isolation and promotes community cohesion. It also supports the learning of new skills and provides a real 'hands on' opportunity for people to interact with their heritage. In order to support the related corporate priorities of the two funding councils, the JAS will ensure that potential volunteers with additional needs receive appropriate assistance in order to take up opportunities with the JAS.

1.8. The County Archivist is responsible for the overall management of volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of this policy and dealing with any complaint or dispute relating to volunteer activity not resolved by the relevant volunteer supervisor. The volunteers' designated supervisors provide project briefs, support and supervision; maintain records; identify training requirements and countersign expense claims. All staff required to undertake such duties are provided with training in the management, supervision, support and training of volunteers.

2. Aim and Purpose of Volunteer Policy

2.1 The Service is committed to managing volunteers according to current best practice and aims to provide a satisfying and supportive environment for our volunteers. This policy outlines the nature of the partnership relationship that we have with our volunteers.

3. Scope

3.1. This policy applies to all volunteers who work for the JAS, recruited and supervised by JAS staff whether volunteering onsite, remotely or in the community.

3.2. This policy operates in conjunction with the Dorset History Centre Access Policy (2015) and in line with the Equalities Impact Assessment and other relevant JAS policies.

4. The relationship between the Joint Archives Service and volunteers

4.1 The relationship of a volunteer to the JAS is one of trust, mutual understanding and benefit; it is a 'gift' relationship, with time given freely and willingly without expectation of financial reward by the volunteer. Neither we nor the volunteer regard the relationship as a contract of employment.

4.2 No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on the volunteer to attend, give or be set a minimum amount of time or to carry out the tasks provided. Likewise, the JAS cannot be compelled to provide regular tasks or opportunities.

4.3 The relationship is based on the principle that volunteers add value to our work by performing a wide range of roles.

4.4 Although volunteers offer time freely and without binding obligation, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability.

4.5 The JAS recognises volunteers as a core part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff. The maintenance of professional standards for work undertaken remains the responsibility of paid staff.

5. Principles for volunteer management

5.1 This policy sets out the broad principles of volunteering with JAS and forms the foundation for good-practice volunteer management across the organisation. Fundamentally:

- We will always aim for fair and equal treatment for all volunteers.
- We aim to match volunteers with suitable projects so that we gain from the activities of the volunteers and the volunteers gain from volunteering with us.
- Each volunteer (or volunteer group) will be appointed a volunteer supervisor to guide and advise them in their tasks.
 - The volunteer supervisor will be responsible for providing the necessary induction, training and ongoing development, so that volunteers can be effective in their role. In return, we expect that volunteers will provide their time and help us to keep our projects on track.

5.2 Volunteers will not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

5.3 This policy is relevant for all current and potential volunteers, as well as every member of staff concerned with selecting, supporting, developing volunteers, managing volunteer projects or promoting voluntary activity within the JAS.

5.4 This policy is available to download from Dorset History Centre website – printed copies are available on request

6. Selection of volunteers

6.1 The JAS will pursue a fair and consistent process for selecting volunteers.

6.2 DHC's communications about volunteering will use language that is easily understood, using various methods to attract a diverse range of applicants.

6.3 The JAS will select volunteers according to project needs and aim to match volunteers' skills, knowledge, experience, motivation and availability to suitable projects. Supervising staff will also discuss individual volunteer requirements to ensure that volunteers feel adequately supported in their role.

6.4 Anyone being considered for a volunteer role will be invited for an informal interview with the project supervisor, with the aim of setting up teams that are best suited for the project.

6.5 We will ensure that all potential volunteers have a clear understanding of any available roles to support them in selecting an appropriate placement. For individual volunteers, this will be in the form of a concise role description prepared by the volunteer supervisor within a recommended format and placed on our website and social media as well as with the local Volunteer Centre.

6.6 The DHC building is broadly compliant with the Equalities Act, 2010. It has wide level access doorways including through automatic doors at the main entrance, and audio loop systems at reception desks and in the Lecture Room, an accessible toilet and a lift to the first floor.

6.7 Reasonable adjustments may be made to the selection methods to suit the access requirements of applicants with disabilities.

7. Equality and Diversity

7.1 The JAS recognises the importance of encouraging diversity and achieving equality among volunteers, as well as employees and users. Volunteers are actively encouraged from a wide cross-section of backgrounds and experiences to help ensure that volunteering projects are accessible to an increasingly diverse range of people.

7.2 The JAS values and respects individuals by adapting projects and levels of support to provide equality of opportunity for active involvement within the scope of the organisation's needs and resources.

7.3 All staff, volunteers, contractors and partner organisations are expected to actively support the JAS's commitment to diversity and equality.

7.4 Acceptance of volunteer assistance for a particular role will be made on merit, the sole consideration being an individual's suitability to carry out the specified task(s) subject to the needs and restrictions of the location, along with their availability in line with the needs of the project. Adjustments will be considered for a volunteer with a disability or who faces additional challenges in contributing to our work.

7.5 The JAS welcomes volunteers aged 18 and over.

7.6 The JAS has no upper age limit for volunteers, recognising the contribution made by older volunteers in terms of valuable knowledge and experience.

7.7 Volunteers cannot continue in a role where volunteering is detrimental to their own or other people's health and safety.

7.8 The JAS will collect data to monitor progress towards a more diverse volunteer cohort

8. Recruitment

8.1 The JAS will recruit volunteers for specific roles when it has vacancies for those roles. Volunteers may be required to support the 'core' functions of the JAS – i.e. on-going tasks such as cataloguing and preservation activities, or they may be recruited for a specific project (often externally funded) which will have a completion date.

8.2 Volunteering tasks will be regularly reviewed and may cease or be altered.

8.3 Role descriptions, role skill requirements and task outlines will be created and vacancies for each role will be advertised.

8.4 Potential volunteers will be asked to apply for the vacant roles and suitable candidates will be invited for an informal visit to the building to discuss the role, or may meet with the project's supervisor online.

8.5 Where there are several applicants for a role it will be necessary to assess the skills of the applicants against the criteria to provide the role to the most suitable applicant. The other applicants will be informed, and their names will be retained for 6 months (with their permission) in the event that other suitable roles become available.

8.6 In appropriate circumstances, volunteers will be asked to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service check. The outcome of the check will be shared with the potential volunteer's supervisor, and any risks associated with their service will be evaluated.

9. Induction, training and development

9.1 New volunteers will be made to feel welcome and will be provided with an informal induction. As part of their induction to the Dorset History Centre, volunteers will receive a copy of the volunteer handbook, containing essential information for all volunteers, together with adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources relevant to the specific role, location or group.

9.2 Volunteers will be required to sign a volunteer agreement which defines the expectations on both parties; this is not a contract of employment.

9.3 Volunteers will be supported in their activities. Appropriate training and equipment will be provided to enable them to complete a particular task. The JAS will communicate clearly with volunteers in relation to both scheduled and flexible activities. Volunteers are expected to inform their supervisor if they are unable to attend a session.

9.4 New volunteers will be given time to settle in. This will allow them to learn about the organisation, their project and their role, as well as giving their volunteer supervisor the opportunity to assess how their involvement is contributing to our goals. At the end of a mutually suitable settling-in period, an informal discussion will be held between the volunteer and volunteer supervisor to record positive experiences, as well as discuss any areas of concern.

9.5 Volunteers will be asked to attend training as and when appropriate.

9.6 A volunteer may act as a team leader under the supervision of the project supervisor providing this is properly specified and it has been established that the volunteer has the necessary skills or potential.

10. Support and supervision

10.1 JAS respects volunteers by both listening to and learning from what they have to say, supporting a two-way dialogue between staff and volunteers.

10.2 Volunteer supervisors are encouraged to discuss progress with their volunteers on a regular basis. This provides an opportunity to:

- monitor their contribution
- establish whether the volunteer would like to change their current contribution

- ensure that they feel valued and satisfied with their volunteering.

We may also ask volunteers to complete an anonymous survey from time to time.

10.3 Volunteers will have a written role description relevant to their task.

10.4 The JAS recognises the role that volunteers fulfil at every level of the organisation. It endeavours to communicate with volunteers in appropriate ways, including email, telephone calls and online meetings.

10.5 The JAS will listen positively to ideas and suggestions from volunteers about how their tasks may be better accomplished, and all such feedback will be given consideration.

10.6 Volunteers are free to end their involvement at any time. Wherever possible, an end date should be agreed between volunteer and volunteer supervisor. Supervisors are encouraged to hold an exit interview to find out why a volunteer is leaving, share any learning points and establish whether the volunteer may want to be involved again in the future. Volunteers can request a written reference concerning their performance.

10.7 Volunteers will be consulted regarding any decisions that would substantially affect the performance of their duties.

11 Health and Safety

11.1 The wellbeing of volunteers is of paramount importance. We are committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of our volunteers. We want to make sure that volunteers are aware of and understand the health and safety risks associated with their role. We aim to provide volunteers with the appropriate information, instruction, supervision and training required to provide a safe environment while volunteering with JAS.

11.2 The policy of the JAS is to provide and maintain a safe and healthy environment for its volunteers and to supply appropriate, equipment and systems to assist with tasks. The JAS undertakes risk assessments as appropriate.

11.3 All personnel at DHC, including volunteers, wear identity badges. Volunteers will not undertake activities in the strongroom areas of DHC due to the confidential nature of some of the information kept there. Archives will always be produced from the repositories for the use of volunteers.

11.5 Any volunteers who undertake tasks alone and offsite will be expected to comply with DC's Lone Worker Policy.

12 Expenses

12.1 The JAS has a limited budget to fund expenses for volunteers coming to DHC. We recognise that this widens the pool of potential volunteers and removes barriers for those on low incomes.

12.2 Free parking is available on-site within DHC's pay and display car park and refreshments are offered to volunteers whilst volunteering when this can be done safely.

12.3 If volunteers are asked and are willing to undertake work for the JAS away from DHC, then travel expenses will be reimbursed (ticket or mileage) upon the presentation of appropriate receipts.

12.4 We will reimburse travel costs to DHC for a volunteering session up to a cap of £15 per visit and whilst DHC's expenses budget is adequate.

12.5 Expenses claims are submitted on a standard DC Non-Employee's Expenses Claim Form and accompanied by proof of expenditure. Volunteer supervisors are responsible for arranging expenses payments.

13 Insurance

13.1 All volunteers engaged in JAS activities are indemnified under Dorset History Centre public liability insurance. However, drivers using their cars in connection with their voluntary work must inform their own insurance company to ensure adequate and continued cover.

13.2 We will ensure that volunteers are covered for insurance purposes in respect of personal injury. The insurance will not cover unauthorised actions or actions outside the volunteering agreement.

14. Confidentiality, copyright and data protection

14.1 Volunteers must maintain the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information pertaining to the JAS, whether this pertains to a member of staff, another volunteer, a person named in restricted records or any other person involved in the business activities of the JAS. They are expected to maintain this confidentiality after ceasing to act as a volunteer. Volunteers will be asked to sign a data handling agreement.

14.2 Volunteers will assign any original copyright works they may produce while volunteering to The Dorset History Centre and will be asked to sign a copyright agreement where necessary.

14.3 Personal information recorded about volunteers will be stored and maintained with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality and in accordance with the Data Protection Act will not be disclosed to any unauthorised person.

15 Resolving problems

15.1 The JAS aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. Volunteer supervisors are responsible for handling any problems regarding volunteer conduct or complaints and the JAS actively supports volunteer supervisors by providing relevant training. They will seek to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon when appropriate, and will aim for positive and amicable solutions. The volunteer's supervisor will deal with minor complaints about or by volunteers or their contribution through the usual support and supervision procedures. However, we recognise our duty to protect the wellbeing and interests of all our stakeholders and therefore operate a formal complaints procedure in the case of more serious issues. In the case of particularly serious complaints, this process may be bypassed and /or the subject of the complaint asked to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the police.

15.2 If a problem cannot be resolved by the volunteer supervisor, the County Archivist will make any decisions as appropriate.

16. Review of the Policy

16.1 The policy will be reviewed in consultation with interested organisations, stakeholders and individuals every three years to take into account any new legislation, regulations, guidance, or business practices

This policy is available via the DHC website and in hard copy or large print on request.

To comment on this policy or for further information about it, contact the County Archivist at: Dorset History Centre, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RP Telephone: 01305 250550 E-mail: archives@dorsetcc.gov.uk