



Bookmark

Volunteer Policy

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Statement of volunteer involvement

Bookmark has an incredibly simple vision: we want every child to read. We're a literacy charity giving children the reading skills and confidence they need for a fair chance in life, through our flexible volunteer-led programme, and supplementary programmes, events and activities.

For the children who need us, we're changing their story.

Our core principles for involving volunteers

Bookmark:

- recognises that volunteers are vital in leading and delivering our work – without their time and effort, we simply could not deliver our mission
- is committed to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing and welfare of children, and expects all volunteers to share this commitment
- recognises that those who donate time want to know it is well spent and structured, and that their contribution is valued
- recognises that voluntary work brings benefits to volunteers themselves, to Bookmark employees, to schools and to children supported
- will ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the organisational structure and that mechanisms are in place for them to contribute to our work
- expects that employees at all levels will work positively with volunteers and, where appropriate, will actively seek to involve them in their work
- recognises that volunteers require satisfying work and personal development and will seek to help volunteers meet these needs, as well as providing the effective training for them to support children
- will reimburse volunteers for out-of-pocket travel expenses, when requested and in line with our Expenses Policy
- recognises that the management of volunteers requires designated responsibilities within specific employee roles
- will endeavour to involve volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities and ensure our volunteering opportunities are as accessible as possible, and
- wants volunteers to feel – and be – supported and to have a positive and rewarding experience at Bookmark.

Defining our volunteers

Bookmark defines a volunteer as someone who is willing to give their time and service of their own free will for no financial gain. This Volunteer Policy sets out the principles and practice by which Bookmark involves volunteers.

Volunteering is a two-way partnership, from which both parties can benefit. By volunteering with Bookmark, volunteers can:

- positively affect the trajectory of a child's education and love of reading, with a potentially huge impact on the rest of their life
- get the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the local community
- develop valuable new skills, training and experience to enhance professional and personal development
- be truly valued and receive ongoing support from the Bookmark team



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- experience a positive impact on confidence and wellbeing
- get a chance to do something new, separate from day-to-day commitments
- meet new, like-minded people in the Bookmark community, and
- experience the wonderful feeling you get from giving.

Volunteer roles

Volunteer roles are clearly defined. Bookmark's primary role for volunteers is the Bookmark Reading Volunteer. The Bookmark Reading Volunteer role description is publicly available on [the Bookmark website](#) and is reviewed annually by our trustees. All other roles are made available through our community and details will be provided at the time.

Bookmark has a Volunteer Advisory Board (VAB) that volunteers can apply to join. The VAB act as a critical friend and provide independent advice, feedback, inspiration and scrutiny to the Charity on a wide variety of topics. The VAB also supports with a range of other activities, including but not limited to supporting with volunteer community building events, reviewing and testing new processes and technical systems, and acting as ambassadors for the Charity.

We have the occasional need for skilled volunteer support for our team (e.g. corporate fundraising research), which also offers the opportunity for volunteers to gain experience working with the Bookmark team. This are managed on an individual basis.

The volunteer journey

The volunteer relationship is binding only in trust and mutual understanding. It is not intended to be legally binding. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on volunteers to give their time. Likewise, Bookmark does not provide payment or other such benefit in return for any volunteering activity. Bookmark does not guarantee to provide regular volunteering opportunities, nor does it set any obligation about how often or for how long volunteers must carry out their roles – or apply sanctions if volunteers don't attend.

Equality and diversity

As a matter of respect and dignity, we believe volunteers should be treated fairly and inclusively wherever reasonable. Our policies and procedures are designed to ensure that no volunteer receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of race (ethnic origin, skin colour, nationality, national origin), gender, pregnancy and maternity, marital or civil partnership status, gender reassignment, disability (including past disabilities), religion or beliefs (including philosophical beliefs), age or sexual orientation. Everyone at Bookmark has a responsibility not to discriminate on these grounds, or encourage others to do so, and to report discrimination so that appropriate action may be taken.

We recognise that people often have different needs and requirements. Volunteers are encouraged to tell us anything they need to know to ensure we can make the best of their volunteering contribution.

Further details may be found in Bookmark's [Equality & Diversity Policy](#).

Safer recruitment

Further information on each of the below sections can be found in Bookmark's [Safer Recruitment Policy](#).

Advertising

Bookmark runs targeted recruitment campaigns to ensure we match the supply of volunteers with demand in schools. Examples of channels that may be used are:



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- Social media: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Tik Tok
- Word of mouth referrals
- Partner schools, universities, libraries and other clubs or organisations
- Corporate partners
- Leaflets and other printed media
- Online – on our own website, through volunteer recruitment websites, such as Google advertising.

Application

People who are interested in becoming Reading Volunteers with Bookmark are required to submit an online application form. We may require separate application forms for other volunteering roles within the charity.

Following a successful review of the application, the applicant is asked to declare, as appropriate for the position, that they have no convictions, cautions or bind-overs, or if they have, to provide details (which are reviewed on a case by case basis and in line with our [Safer Recruitment Policy](#)).

Applicants have the opportunity to speak with a member of the Bookmark team for an informal discussion about the role and to ask any questions they may have.

Interviews

Once an application has been reviewed, successful applicants are invited to interview. They are also required to initiate the DBS application process with our trusted DBS partner. Interviews are always with two people – one of which will have received Safer Recruitment training and will be an employee. The second person may be one of our volunteer community.

Applicants are able to book an interview slot at a time that suits them, through an online booking system. The interview takes no more than 20 minutes and includes questions to support our safeguarding processes. It is also an opportunity for applicants to ask any questions they have about volunteering with Bookmark.

Applicants are also required to show the Identification documents they used in their DBS application for verification with a trusted ID verifier. This forms part of our safeguarding checks. The guide [here](#) provides details of acceptable documents. In most cases, this will need to be provided at the point of completing their DBS application, through one of our trusted partners.

Safeguarding checks and training

Volunteers must complete safeguarding checks, as appropriate, which are set out within the [Safer Recruitment Policy](#). These checks are summarised below.

The Designated Safeguarding Leads will risk assess any information that has been provided to Bookmark regarding past disciplinary sanctions; or allegations, or concerns which relate to the safety or welfare of children, or about an applicant's behaviour towards children; or cautions or convictions.

References

On confirmation of a successful application, applicants will be advised that their 2 nominated referees will be contacted to obtain references. The guide [here](#) provides details of who may be used as a referee. To summarise:

- If the applicant has worked with children in any role, we will need one of the references to be from this time.



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- If the applicant has supplied references from the same organisation, we will need to ask for an additional reference.
- If the applicant has supplied a reference who is a family member, we will need to ask for an additional reference.

DBS checks

Safeguarding and promoting the well-being and welfare of children is of paramount importance to Bookmark. An enhanced DBS check is required in order to volunteer at Bookmark for any role, as it may involve unsupervised one-to-one interaction with children. Bookmark funds the applicant's first enhanced DBS check. Applicants are requested to sign up to the free DBS Update Service for subsequent checks.

Once issued, the DBS check will be sent directly to the applicant. Volunteers are required to keep this safe and have it available to show to schools, for both face-to-face and online reading sessions.

Overseas checks

All applicants who have lived abroad in any one country for more than three consecutive months in the last five years will be required to obtain an overseas criminal record check from that country. Further country specific information may be found [here](#). There are certain cases where this may not be possible, and in these cases, Bookmark will complete a risk assessment.

Applicants are requested to cover the costs of these checks in order to keep down our administrative costs and focus our resources on helping children to read. Should this be a barrier to them joining our community, we review individual cases and may be able to fund up to £50 towards overseas checks.

Training

All applicants are given access to our online training system, the Bookmark Library. They are required to complete the mandatory training modules that cover a wide range of topics, from how to run a reading session and engage with a child, through to safeguarding training. This includes an introduction to the Charity's safeguarding policies and procedures, including the [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#), and the [Code of Conduct](#). It will also explain the identity and specific responsibilities of individuals with designated safeguarding responsibilities.

The core, mandatory training takes approximately 3 hours to complete online. Our volunteers are required to complete the safeguarding training every two years, but we encourage them to revisit it regularly to refresh their knowledge. In the event of considerable changes being made to Bookmark's Safeguarding Policy, or new legislation being passed, we may require all volunteers to complete their training again or to complete updates. We reserve the right to temporarily stop volunteering activity for individuals who do not complete this training when requested.

Support

Volunteers are actively encouraged to engage with Bookmark and each other, through our volunteer community. To find an answer to a question or obtain support, volunteers can:

- Review FAQs in the Bookmark Library
- Attend a drop-in session facilitated by the Volunteers Team
- Get advice and support from other volunteers on our community messaging platform (Guild)
- Direct message Volunteer Services on Guild, for general queries
- Call us on 0203 995 7960



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During a reading programme, if a volunteer has a specific query about the school they are volunteering at, it is best to direct your question to the Volunteers Team. There may be occasions when the School Relationship Manager (who is linked to that particular school) responds to your inquiry. Relevant details are available on the Bookmark app.

Further information is provided through 'My Community' section of the Library and the [Volunteer Handbook](#) also provides a useful overview of volunteering at Bookmark and the support available.

If volunteers would like to share a compliment or complaint, please get in touch with one of the team directly.

Recognition

Bookmark recognises the valuable contribution made by its volunteers in tackling the UK's literacy problems. Bookmark recognises that although volunteers do not seek financial reward, they do appreciate and value recognition in other ways. This could range from a simple 'thank you' to a social event. All individuals responsible for managing volunteers will be encouraged to ensure appropriate acknowledgement is given.

Health and safety

Bookmark will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the volunteers' health, safety and wellbeing while carrying out their volunteering role, in accordance with the Charity's [Health and Safety Policy](#). All volunteers will receive health and safety information as part of their training.

Expenses

It is Bookmark's policy that volunteers will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket travel expenses up to a limit of £8 per reading session per day. Bookmark ensures that there is a clear and accessible system to enable volunteers to claim out-of-pocket travel expenses. Further information is provided within the [Volunteer Expenses Policy](#).

Insurance

Volunteers will be covered by Bookmark's insurance while carrying out agreed duties. Bookmark's insurance does not cover volunteers' personal belongings.

Problem solving and complaints

Volunteers may raise concerns or make a complaint about an employee, another volunteer, or the charity. Details of this process are covered in the [Volunteer Problem-Solving Procedure](#). Likewise, it is important that Bookmark is able to maintain its agreed standards of service and volunteers should enjoy making their contribution. This policy also covers action taken if the participation of a volunteer does not meet with the Charity's standards.

Moving on

Volunteers are requested to inform us if they no longer wish to volunteer at Bookmark. They will also be asked, but not required, to provide us with feedback on their volunteering experience and reason for leaving. This allows us to understand how we may improve the volunteering experience at Bookmark. Volunteers may request a reference from us.



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Volunteer information

All volunteers are required to share their relevant personal details with Bookmark in relation to their volunteering role. All data is be processed and retained in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Further information on how we collect, process, retain, and remove data may be found in Bookmark's [Volunteer Privacy Policy](#), and [Data Protection Policy](#).

Further information

This document has provided various links to individual supporting documents and policies. For ease of access, it is possible to view all of these in the following link: [Bookmark Policies & Procedures](#).

THANK YOU

As a Bookmark volunteer you are playing an essential role in tackling the UK's literacy problem.