

# Role descriptions

## Creating role descriptions for your volunteers

Creating role descriptions is good practice in volunteer management. This guide identifies the benefits of role descriptions and guides you through the creation of role descriptions for all of your volunteering opportunities.

### Introduction

Part of good volunteer management is about having clear role descriptions for every type of volunteering opportunity.

The term 'volunteer' is often associated with just community volunteers. However we consider volunteers as anyone who gives up their time to perform a role or function with no payment. Volunteers in students' unions are diverse; from society committees to part-time officers, from sports club captains to campaigners. Before creating these role descriptions it is a good idea to identify who the volunteers are in your students' union.

### Why are role descriptions useful?

Role descriptions are useful as they outline the duties, expectations and responsibilities of the organisation and the volunteer.

Potential volunteers can identify the typical activities involved with each role and can consider whether they want to take on the volunteer position.

The students' union can use volunteer role descriptions to identify the skills that each volunteer needs and identify training that is appropriate.

### Creating role descriptions

There are some fundamental elements of a role description that you should include:

- **General purpose of the volunteer position** – why is the work valuable? What will the volunteer be a part of or be contributing to?
- **Specific responsibilities of the role**
- **Qualifications or experience** (if relevant)
- **The staff and/or officer responsible for the volunteer** (someone they can ask for advice and support)
- **The hours and place of volunteering** (can be general but do give guidance on this)
- **Benefits** – what do they get out of being a volunteer? (Training, supervision and guidance, a t shirt, discount in SU shop, skills development opportunities)
- **Volunteer's position within the organisation** (identify where they fit with the democratic structure, how they contribute to the success of the students' union)

A volunteer role description is very similar to a job description but you must ensure that the role description does not sound contractual, as you may then be expected to pay your volunteers.

There's some [guidance from NCVO](#) about the difference between volunteers and paid employees.

## Contents

This inspiration sheet contains content from:

- University of Salford Students' Union
- University of Warwick Students' Union

If you have any questions about this guide or would like to suggest any amends please contact [rosie.hunnam@nus.org.uk](mailto:rosie.hunnam@nus.org.uk).

# University of Salford Students' Union

## About

Student committees were unsure of their committee roles and responsibilities so to help the students out we created 'Job Specs' for each role, which helps outline what their responsibilities are.

The role guides are available on the University of Salford Students' Union [Committee Hub](#).

## The idea

The role guides were also designed to help the students with understanding what skills and experience they would gain from their position. Additionally it would help students when they are looking at employability skills, they could refer back to their job specs and state what their role was and how they could apply themselves to the role they have applied for.

## Development stages

During committee training with new committees, we give out the job specs as well as going in to details about what each role means and what's expected. The students can use the job specs to refer to when they need it.

The job specifications are also downloadable from our website, which is useful as new groups can see what will be expected of them when they take on a committee position.

## Indicators of success

The committee job specs have helped us out greatly as students understand from the start what is expected of them in their roles. I would highly recommend other Students' Union's to use them for their committee training.

We have had students contact when they have left University to state that their role on the committee was really helpful. Specifically they have said that having a job specification to refer back to has helped them to understand the skills and attributes needed for future employment.

## Further information

For more information about this, please contact [Stephanie Pratt](#) at the University of Salford Students' Union.

# Warwick Students' Union

## About

This case study explains how Warwick Students' Union created a series of role guides to help newly elected Society Execs understand what is expected of them and to provide tips and tools to help them make the most of their positions.

The role guides are available on the Warwick Students' Union [Exec Resources](#) pages.

## The idea

Warwick SU now has over 240 societies each run by a student Executive Committee made up of at least three key roles of President, Secretary and Treasurer. The idea behind developing the guides was to provide consistency in helping Execs define exactly what each role entailed. This clarified expectations right from the start and provided a resource for use throughout the year - particularly when it came to handing over to the next Exec.

## Development stages

Developing the guides was definitely a collaborative approach. I looked over our existing society resources, researched other SU's and organisations. I also made a note of various Society Exec issues that our Student Activities team had to most commonly deal with. Crucially, I sat down with our Societies Officer on many occasions to plan content and to ensure the correct subject matter and tone.

There is a lot of information to be shared with our Society Execs, which meant that editing and prioritising what needed to be included was a real challenge. I would advise that it's also important not to under estimate the amount of

time it takes to gather feedback and produce the content.

I also would have loved to get it designed, but simply ran out of time!

Indicators of success

Having the guides has meant we're able to save time by referring new execs to it right away when they have queries about their role.

## Further information

For more information about this, please contact [Rebecca Quansah](#) at Warwick Students' Union.