

RCVS Knowledge Volunteering policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement with RCVS Knowledge. It is of relevance to all within RCVS Knowledge including volunteers, staff, members, and those appointed to positions of responsibility.

This policy is endorsed by the Trustee Board and will be reviewed annually, to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of the charity and its volunteers.

Definition

Volunteers are people who are, unpaid and of their own free will, contribute their time, energy and skills to benefit the community.

Commitment

RCVS Knowledge acknowledges that volunteers contribute in many ways, that their contribution is unique and that volunteering can benefit users of RCVS Knowledge's services and its staff, the veterinary profession and the volunteers themselves.

RCVS Knowledge values the contribution made by volunteers and is committed to involving volunteers in appropriate positions and in ways which are encouraging, supportive and which develop volunteering opportunities.

RCVS Knowledge recognises its responsibility to arrange its volunteering efficiently and sensitively so that the valuable gift of the volunteer's time is best used to the mutual advantage of all concerned.

Statement of values and principles

Volunteering is a legitimate and crucial activity that is supported and encouraged by RCVS Knowledge and is not intended to be a substitute for paid employment. The role of volunteers complements but does not replace the role of paid staff.

Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that paid staff are clear about the role of volunteers, and to foster good working relationships between paid staff and volunteers.

Volunteers will not be used during times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. The volunteer role is a gift relationship, binding only in honour, trust and mutual understanding. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on volunteers to attend, give or be set a minimum amount of time to carry out the tasks involved in their voluntary activity. Likewise, RCVS Knowledge cannot be compelled to provide either regular tasks, payment or other benefit for any activity undertaken by the volunteer.

Although volunteers offer time freely and willingly without binding obligation, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged – both what RCVS Knowledge expects of volunteers and what volunteers expect of the charity.

Rights and Responsibilities

RCVS Knowledge recognises the rights of volunteers to:

- know what is (and what is not) expected of them
- have adequate support in their volunteering
- receive appreciation
- volunteer in a safe environment
- be insured
- know their rights and responsibilities if something goes wrong
- receive relevant out-of-pocket expenses
- receive appropriate training
- be free from discrimination
- be offered the opportunity for personal development.

RCVS Knowledge expects volunteers to:

- be reliable
- be honest
- respect confidentiality
- make the most of training and support opportunities
- carry out tasks in a way that reflects the aims and values of RCVS Knowledge
- carry out tasks within agreed guidelines
- respect the work of the charity and not bring it into disrepute
- comply with RCVS Knowledge policies

Volunteer coordination

All volunteers will have a nominated member of staff to offer guidance and advice to help the volunteer carry out tasks effectively. The nominated post holder with overall responsibility for the development of voluntary activities within RCVS Knowledge is the Chief Executive Officer. This person is responsible for the management and welfare of the RCVS Knowledge's volunteers.

Recruitment and selection

RCVS Knowledge is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs or offending background that does not create a risk to vulnerable groups including children. The acceptance of volunteer assistance for a particular role is made on merit, the sole selection criterion being the individual's suitability to carry out agreed tasks. Information about the volunteer not relevant to the performance of the volunteering tasks concerned will be disregarded by RCVS Knowledge in terms of recruitment and selection.

Volunteering opportunities will be widely promoted in ways that makes them accessible to all members of the community.

Volunteers who are considered unsuitable for a particular task will either be offered alternative voluntary involvement within RCVS Knowledge, if possible.

If the volunteer will be carrying out activities with vulnerable groups (children and/or adults), an interview will be carried out, two references followed up, and other additional safer recruitment procedures may be carried out including an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) check. More detailed information will be made available specific to legislative requirements for particular volunteer position.

Volunteers will have a clear and concise task description, which will be subsequently reviewed every year. The task description will be prepared in conjunction with the volunteer and the designated person referred to above.

New volunteers will have an induction. Volunteers will be properly briefed about the activities to be undertaken and given all the necessary information to enable them to perform with confidence.

Training and development

Volunteers will be made aware of and have access to all RCVS Knowledge's relevant policies, including those relating to volunteering, health & safety, safeguarding vulnerable groups and equal opportunities.

The development of training and support for volunteers is a high priority for RCVS Knowledge to equip them with the necessary information and skills to carry out their tasks. It will be the responsibility of the designated person to see that this training is provided. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to attend relevant training.

Support, Supervision and Recognition

Volunteers will have access to regular support and supervision. This will enable both the volunteer and the supervisor to identify, monitor and evaluate the volunteer's involvement, recognise achievements and identify individual training needs including those relevant to their particular volunteering role and to their wider personal development. The frequency, duration and format of these sessions will be agreed between the volunteer and the designated officer.

Volunteers will be given the opportunity, where relevant, to share their views and opinions with RCVS Knowledge's staff.

Expenses

RCVS Knowledge recognises that the reimbursement of expenses incurred in travelling to and from the place of volunteering or in the course of volunteering is important from an equal opportunities point of view. This is necessary to ensure that all individuals have access to voluntary opportunities.

RCVS Knowledge's volunteers are able to claim reasonable out of pocket expenses, subject to the production of receipts as evidence of the expenditure. What can be reclaimed from RCVS Knowledge and the calculation of expenses will be explained to the volunteer before they start any activity likely to give rise to expenses.

RCVS Knowledge has a consistent approach to the reimbursement of expenses which are the same for volunteers, staff, etc. and are as approved by the Inland Revenue.

It is the responsibility of the designated person to make volunteers aware of the procedure for the reimbursement of expenses.

Insurance

RCVS Knowledge's liability insurance policies include the activities of volunteers and liability towards them, however, this coverage does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage.

Confidentiality & Privacy

RCVS Knowledge will advise the volunteer on its confidentiality policy and procedures, where relevant. This would include those relating to personal information held by the charity relating to the volunteer.

RCVS Knowledge offers both a data protection policy and a privacy policy available on our website.

Settling Differences

RCVS Knowledge aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We seek to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly and aim for a positive and amicable solution based on the charity's guidelines for complaints.

The designated officer is responsible for handling problems regarding volunteer complaints or conduct and these should be referred to them. In the event of a problem, all relevant facts should be obtained as quickly as possible. Support will be provided by RCVS Knowledge to the volunteer while we endeavour to resolve the problem in an informal manner. If an informal resolution proves impossible, RCVS Knowledge's wider grievance or complaints policies and procedures (which include volunteers) will be referred to. If a volunteer's behaviour is repeatedly or seriously unacceptable, they may be asked to change their role, or to leave the charity.

Version control			
11.2024	2025 Version	Shared at November 2024 Board of Trustees meeting	Approved by Board
03.2026	DRAFT 2026 V.01	Amended format and small changes to links and text, added version control	Approved at March 2026 board meeting