

Royal Asiatic Society Volunteer Policy

Adopted by Library Committee April 2016

To be reviewed April 2018

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline the relationship between the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland and its volunteers. Volunteers have been involved with the Society over many years. In particular, the Society acknowledges the major contributions of those who have given their time freely to help describe and interpret its collections.

There is now an increased focus on volunteering at the Society, a reflection of the greater role volunteers play in the wider cultural and heritage sector. Organizations like the Society encounter a growing expectation from government, funders, partners and the public at large that volunteers should be involved in helping care for cultural heritage.

This policy is intended to provide volunteers, staff and other stakeholders with an understanding of the Royal Asiatic Society's approach and attitude to volunteering; to help ensure uniformity of process and experience across the institution; to illustrate the kind of areas volunteers can be involved in; and to clarify expectations.

This policy covers volunteers on a short or long term basis and people on work experience or work placements. Generally volunteers work in the Library and Archive but potentially can be involved in other areas of work as well, such as helping with Events or Exhibitions.

Volunteers who are Fellows of the Society are particularly welcome, but volunteering is also a way to develop links with new audiences.

The Society does not aim to rely on Volunteers to deliver its core services or to replace paid, professional staff.

Background

The Royal Asiatic Society is open to all. Our collections include over 60,000 books and journals, 2500 manuscripts, 1000 paintings and drawings, and over 30 collections of personal archives as well as the Society's own archive dating back to 1823. The Society holds regular public lectures highlighting new research and thinking on wide-ranging issues to do with the history, languages, and cultures of Asia. Through our collections, lectures, journal and other publications, the Society seeks to promote the finest scholarship and research into Asian history, as well as to promote an interest and appreciation of Asiatic studies among the public at large.

The Library Reading Room is currently open two and a half days per week. The present opening hours are Tuesday and Friday 10.00-17.00, and Thursday 14.00-17.00.

Working with Volunteers is one of the many ways the Society seeks to deepen its relationship with the public in general as well as with specific professional, academic, and local communities. Working with Volunteers not only leads to more of our collections being better described and interpreted, but also expands our roots in the wider world and helps to make the Society more active and resilient.

The Society's collections and events draw visitors to its building from all over the world. The Society's website and online presence on social media also enable it to communicate with a worldwide audience. The Society's physical location at the boundary between the Bloomsbury 'knowledge quarter' and the densely populated, ethnically and socially diverse residential areas of Camden and Islington also provide an opportunity to engage with Volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds, including students and professionals as well as people from local communities. Volunteering is one means by which we can include and involve more people in our activities and help to build new working relationships as we realize our vision and mission.

Aims of the Volunteer Policy

- To outline how the Royal Asiatic Society is committed to supporting volunteers and adopting best practice in volunteer management.
- To adopt a policy of fair and equal treatment of volunteers that avoids exploitation, coercion or manipulation.
- To add value, support and diversity to the work of the Royal Asiatic Society through successful volunteer programmes.
- To define the Society's and volunteers' expectations.

Definition of a Volunteer

A volunteer is a person who undertakes agreed activities on behalf of the Royal Asiatic Society without financial expectations or a contract of employment, for their own benefit and that of the Society. Volunteers can be involved in routine work, though are more commonly directed towards particular projects or activities.

Volunteers add value to our services and are not seen as a cost cutting replacement for existing staff. They are a valued part of our work culture, extending the range of ages and cultures represented at work, and bringing new skills, experience and enthusiasm that enhance our services.

The minimum age of a volunteer is 18 and there is no upper age limit. Younger people may be taken onto work experience placements when sponsored through a school or education establishment.

Code of Good Practice

The Royal Asiatic Society recognises the four principles fundamental to volunteering, which inform the Code of Good Practice of the National Volunteering Compact:

Choice: Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

Diversity: Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

Mutual benefit: Volunteers offer their contribution and skills unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution. Giving time voluntarily must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also benefits and feels that his or her contribution is personally fulfilling.

Recognition: Explicit recognition that valuing the contribution of volunteers is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, voluntary and community organisations, and Government. This includes recognising the contribution to the organisation, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

Volunteer selection

The Royal Asiatic Society aspires at all times to follow best selection practices. Volunteers are selected on the basis of their skills, experience, interests, and availability for a particular project.

Volunteers may be engaged through a variety of channels, e.g.

- self-presenting in person or by email or letter
- referral from schools, colleges and universities
- referral through Volunteer Centres
- through advertisement in academic or professional communities, eg, on a library or archive email list
- information in libraries, Council website or in the community

All volunteers must go through a selection process of application and informal interview. The Royal Asiatic Society has no obligation to accept all volunteers and reserves the right to refuse any applicant.

The selection process will analyse the motives, expectations and time commitments of the prospective volunteer. It will outline the kinds of opportunities available and determine if these match in a way satisfactory to both parties. If necessary, a trial period can be agreed.

Selection process

- Expression of interest received from Volunteer
- Communicate Volunteers Policy to Volunteer
- Volunteer provides evidence of personal experience/CV, and a reference
- Informal interview
- Agree mutual obligations, i.e. nature of experience and time commitment

- Agree a start date
- Sign Volunteer Agreement indicating agreement with Volunteer Policy

Volunteers agree to:

- Work to the organisation's existing customer service standards
- Commit to a period not shorter than 3 months or the duration of a specific project
- Help and support the Royal Asiatic Society in delivering its objectives in a mutually beneficial manner
- Adhere to a high standard of behaviour to enable the organisation to maintain its reputation
- Adhere to codes of conduct such as collections handling guidelines
- Respect Royal Asiatic Society's confidentiality and Data Protection
- Comply with Royal Asiatic Society's security procedures
- Perform duties consistently and diligently to the best of their ability
- Attend relevant induction and training programmes and take part in any feedback procedure if necessary
- Inform relevant Society staff if unable to undertake agreed activities, and to give adequate notice if resigning earlier than indicated
- Act under the direction of named supervisors and inform them about any problem arising, or of any medical problem or physical disability that may interfere with the work so that support can be arranged
- Operate as part of a team and care for themselves and others around them

The Royal Asiatic Society agrees to:

- Consider volunteering as mutually beneficial, understanding and facilitating the volunteer's own objectives
- Provide a clearly defined voluntary role and safe volunteering environment
- Select and treat volunteers in accordance with equal opportunities
- Give support and supervision with a named point of contact at all times while on site
- Offer an induction session and adequate training for agreed roles and duties
- Communicate health and safety issues in order to maximise safety and welfare
- Monitor the volunteer's attendance
- Acknowledge the volunteer's contribution and make known any further opportunities
- Respect the confidentiality of the volunteer's personal information
- Maintain good communication and ensure adequate feedback
- Provide indemnity cover under the Corporate insurance policy
- Provide volunteers with all essential information, policies and procedures

Relationship between Volunteers and Staff

Volunteers complement the paid staff of the Society but are not a substitute for employees. The Society does not replace paid staff with volunteers nor should volunteers undermine the working conditions of the employees. The working relations between paid staff and volunteers will be strengthened by mutual trust and clear definition of respective roles.

Management of Volunteers

The Director has ultimate responsibility for volunteers working in the Society's service. Individual members of staff may act as supervisors, will generally be the main point of contact and will provide the necessary guidance.

Volunteers working on a particular project may be recruited and trained by the member of staff responsible for the project, who is the first point of contact, in consultation with the Director. The supervisor will be responsible for feedback and will discuss progress and further opportunities. In addition to this, another named site contact should be identified to the volunteer by their primary supervisor.

Feedback meetings should be offered annually for long-term volunteers, and occasionally during the project for short-term volunteers and a final one at the end of each project.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity

The Royal Asiatic Society has a policy of equal opportunity. The Society is committed to ensuring that the recruitment and treatment of its volunteers are carried out without prejudice regarding gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, age or religious belief or disability, thus making volunteers' opportunities as accessible as possible. Volunteers involved in contact with the general public must have an awareness of the above issues.

The Society's premises are fully wheelchair accessible.

Health and Safety

Health and safety information about Volunteers is necessary at the initial application stage to ensure that they do not expose themselves to unnecessary risks and to enable the provision of reasonable additional support to accommodate individual needs.

Expenses

The Royal Asiatic Society will reimburse volunteers' travel expenses (with receipts) within the London area.

Confidentiality

The Society regards volunteers' personal data as confidential. Equally volunteers are expected to treat any official information both during and after their period of volunteering as confidential.

Copyright

Volunteers must not download, copy or transmit to third parties the works of others without their permission as this may infringe copyright.

Insurance

Activities of volunteers are covered by the Society's corporate insurance policy.

Disciplinary/Complaints Procedures

Any problems arising from either side should be resolved through informal discussion. If the issues prove to be irreconcilable, either side has the option to terminate the arrangement.

Examples of typical Volunteer Roles and Projects

Library

- Cataloguing books and pamphlets onto the online catalogue

Archives

- Cleaning and listing archival documents
- Arranging and cataloguing personal papers

Conservation

- Currently the Society hosts a group of NADFAS volunteers (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies), who visit one day per month to repair books, pamphlets and journals