



Voluntary Work & Mentoring Scheme (VWMS)

STUDENT INFORMATION

November 2008

WHAT IS THE VOLUNTARY WORK AND MENTORING SCHEME?

The Voluntary Work and Mentoring Scheme (VWMS) was initially set up to encourage and help students on the BSc Psychology programme to undertake relevant work experience within voluntary and educational organisations whilst they are studying. This has recently been expanded, and the scheme is now also open to students on the BA Social Sciences and BSc Human Biology with Sociology and Psychology programmes.

The aim of this scheme is to allow you to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills (for example, social and interpersonal skills) that should improve your employment and postgraduate prospects when you graduate. It will give you the opportunity to reach out to people in the community who may be in need of additional support, forge useful connections within the voluntary sector and enhance your CV.

The scheme aims to make links with organisations that can provide students with useful and relevant work experience and these opportunities are then advertised to students. If you are interested in undertaking a particular volunteering opportunity, you would then contact Lesley McAleavy, who runs the scheme within the Division of Psychology (contact details at the end of this guidance sheet), for further information on how to apply and any support needed to make an application. The scheme therefore facilitates and supports you to obtain work experience with organisations that we have established links with, rather than directly setting up a placement for you.

The Division of Psychology has obtained 3 years of funding to support and further develop this scheme, which has been up and running for a number of years. This is allowing us to broaden connections within the voluntary sector to ensure that there are opportunities available within a wide range of organisations, depending on your particular area(s) of interest.

WHAT KIND OF OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE?

The opportunities available are of a person-centred and supportive nature, such as befriending, mentoring, advocacy, working in a school, support group or helpline etc. Undertaking these kinds of activities allows you to develop key attitudes and skills that employers indicate that they look for and value in prospective employees. They may include 'people' or interpersonal skills,

good communication, effective negotiation, time management, adaptability, flexibility etc. To date, students have been involved in working with a wide range of people including those with, for example, learning disabilities, mental health problems, epilepsy, autism or Asperger's Syndrome, people with acquired brain injuries, children and young people, older people, people affected by crime or going through in the judicial process...to name only a few. There are really no limits to what kind of voluntary or educational organisation you can work with – if we do not have links with any in the area you are interested in, we are happy to work with you to find somewhere suitable. Likewise, if you may be interested in volunteering but are not sure what you would like to do, please do not hesitate to contact Lesley to explore your options.

WHAT COMMITMENT DO I NEED TO MAKE?

To take part in this scheme, we ask you to commit to volunteering for the equivalent of half a day per week over the course of at least 12 weeks. You can begin at any point throughout the semester or vacation time. As training is normally provided by the organisation and a Disclosure Scotland Certificate arranged for you, some organisations do ask you to commit to a longer period of time and this can be discussed or negotiated when you meet with them. If you complete 12 weeks of volunteering and obtain a letter from your employer to this effect, we will supply you with a certificate which you can add to your career portfolio or CV.

In return for your commitment, you will receive full training and support from your organisation as well as travel expenses in most circumstances. The work does not have to be unpaid – the scheme is 'voluntary' in that it is not compulsory to take part – so you may in some instances receive payment but normally your time will be given free of charge. You will also be able to contact Lesley McAleavy in the Psychology Division at any time if you have any concerns or queries; she is here to support you in whatever way she can.

YOUR ROLE

To get the most out of the scheme, we recommend that you keep a reflective log of your experiences. Write down what experiences and skills you wish to develop in order to obtain work in your preferred area, to access postgraduate study or even for personal development, and what you hope to gain from the role. Then use your experiences to record how you are meeting these goals and what you would like to improve on. This works best if it is an ongoing process: keep looking back at what you have achieved and what you would still like to achieve. Keep a note of what generic or transferable skills you are developing, e.g. communication skills, listening skills, effective negotiation and think *how* you are developing them. Think about how you can evidence these skills to future employers, i.e. exactly what did you do to develop the skill?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE SCHEME?

There are many potential benefits to gaining work experience whilst you are studying. You should be able to:

- Add to your CV;
- Improve your employment or postgraduate prospects;

- Develop key skills that employers are looking for;
- Explore and evaluate academic content in a real life context;
- Obtain a certificate to add to your career portfolio;
- Obtain a work-based reference from the organisation;
- Get an taste of working in a particular sector or role to see whether it is right for you in the longer term, and
- Gain personal satisfaction, a new challenge, the chance to meet new people and hopefully have some fun.

STUDENT LEADERS PROGRAMME

The VWMS is now attached to the University's *Student Leaders* programme, which exists to support and recognise student volunteering. When you sign up to the VWMS, you will be given the opportunity to sign up to *Student Leaders*. If you choose to do so, you will then be required to keep written evidence of your experiences and progress (the exact nature depends on how many years you have been involved in the *Student Leaders* programme), and attend a personal development seminar of your choice (this may be on public speaking, or time management for example). On successful completion of *Student Leaders*, you will receive a certificate signed by the University's Principal and the Student President, and will be invited to attend an awards ceremony to recognise the work you have undertaken. This is in addition to the completion certificate which is offered to all students who successfully complete 12 weeks of volunteering through the VWMS.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

For information on opportunities and to be put in touch with organisations, please contact Lesley McAleavy on 0141 331 8724, at volunteerandmentor@gcal.ac.uk, or just drop in to room M434.

There is a VWMS notice board on the 4th Floor of the George Moore building which you can use for obtaining ideas about what kind of work you would like to do but please then contact Lesley to let her know that you would like to take part in the scheme.

WHAT IF I AM ALREADY VOLUNTEERING?

If you are already volunteering or working with a voluntary or educational organisation, please contact Lesley (contact details above) and, providing your existing work meets the criteria of the scheme, she will be able to register your volunteering with the scheme and provide you with a certificate to that effect when it is complete. Likewise, if you are working with an organisation that may need more volunteers, please contact Lesley who may be able to promote the organisation through the scheme.

ARE THERE ANY RELEVANT BSc PSYCHOLOGY MODULES?

You can choose to take PSYP208 – Work and Psychology and PSYP419 – Psychology Related Work Experience. For the Level 4 module, Psychology Related Work Experience, you may wish to use the scheme to help you find a suitable opportunity. If so, it is advisable that you do this as soon as possible before the semester begins to allow you enough time to be Disclosure Scotland checked and to receive the appropriate training beforehand.

WHAT GUIDANCE IS IN PLACE FOR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS?

Whilst working with an organisation, you will be representing Glasgow Caledonian University and will be playing an important role in our efforts to develop good working relationships with voluntary sector and educational institutions. To date, the response from student volunteers and organisations has been very positive with organisations subsequently taking on more students from the university and some students opting to continue volunteering on a longer-term basis, or even obtaining employment in the sector upon graduating.

For the well being of both you and the clients you will be working with, we have issued some basic guidance here for you to follow. It should be noted, however, that organisations will have their own rules and procedures which you will either agree to follow or may feel you need to negotiate on. You should think about the following before and whilst undertaking a commitment to an organisation:

- Make sure you are clear about your mutual expectations from the outset and that you are happy with any agreements that are made.
- If you are unhappy with the proposals or expectations from an organisation, negotiate with them directly wherever possible. If you feel you cannot do this for any reason or are not happy with the response you receive, please contact Lesley McAleavy in the Psychology Division for support.
- If you need to withdraw from your commitment at any time, please inform both the organisation and Lesley as soon as possible. Likewise, if you are unable to make an agreed meeting or shift, make sure you contact the organisation giving as much notice as possible.
- Remember not to over-commit yourself. Organisations prefer volunteers who can give fewer hours a week but can do so reliably. You need to think about yourself, including your academic study, paid work, family commitments – and you also need some recreational time! That said, volunteering is often very rewarding and can add great value to your academic studies by allowing you to relate academic theory into real practice.
- Ensure that you are professional and courteous at all times and be aware of your behaviour and language within the context of your role. Follow the organisation's guidance and observe any dress code that is in place.
- Maintain strict client confidentiality, including within any reflective log that you are keeping.
- Adhere to any health and safety rules that are in place, and use sensible precautions to protect the well being of yourself and any client you are working with.

- For your own protection, avoid meeting clients outwith the times and places agreed with the organisation. Try not to get too emotionally involved with clients if you can – talk to your organisation if you have any worries about this.
- Finally, remember that the organisation and the scheme’s organiser within Psychology are here to help and support you in any way possible. If you have concerns or need to talk anything over, do not hesitate to talk to your organisation or get in touch with Lesley at the contact details below.

FEEDBACK

If you have any feedback on your experiences of the scheme, or suggestions as to how we can make improvements for future students, please do not hesitate to let us know.

CONTACTS

For information and to sign up for the scheme, please contact:

Lesley McAleavy
Student Liaison Officer/Administrator

Room M434
George Moore Building
Glasgow Caledonian University
Cowcaddens Road
Glasgow
G4 0BA

Tel: 0141 331 8724
Email: volunteerandmentor@gcal.ac.uk
Website: www.gcal.ac.uk/employability

MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Management Group for this scheme are:

Dr Douglas Forbes
Ms Rachel Mulholland
Dr Lindsey Burns
Mr David Carse

FINALLY

We recognise, and very much appreciate, the additional work that you will be putting in if you decide to take part in this scheme. We hope that you will find it to be a rewarding, worthwhile

and useful experience and that you will keep in touch and share the knowledge and insights you gain from the work you do.

Thank you.