



# THE UNITE CHARTER

for Employees and Volunteers  
in the Community & Non Profit Sector

A Charter of Fair People-Policies and Practice  
for Community and Non Profit Organisations

# Introduction

Every organisation should value its workforce. In voluntary and community organisations there are often two workforces; those who are paid employees and those who are volunteers. Sometimes there is movement between these two; volunteers become paid employees, and paid employees take up voluntary work sometimes because their contracts or careers have come to an end. Also individuals combine volunteering with their paid employment. These sets of workers, volunteers and paid, have their important and yet different roles to play in the Community and Non Profit Sector. Without either, organisations would be less able to achieve their objectives or deliver the services they are there to provide. Volunteers and employees should be encouraged to make their most creative and useful contributions to the organisations they work for.

Unite seeks to encourage voluntary and community organisations to recognise the legitimate needs and interests of both employees and volunteers.

As well as developing comprehensive and best practice policies and procedures for employees, Unite believes that these should be extended, where relevant, to all volunteers. No matter if you are salaried or not, you should expect a high level of health and safety protection in the work that you undertake, you should work in an environment free from discrimination and be treated with dignity at all times.

As a volunteer you will have a valid contribution to make to your organisation and the delivery of services since you are at the front line of this, and therefore need a route to feed this into the organisation, as do paid employees.

Likewise, if you are not being managed in an appropriate way or identify other bad practices, all staff must have the opportunity to raise a grievance regarding this.

In a similar way, and for the protection of clients, the organisation, both employees and volunteers, need processes in place to deal with alleged inappropriate conduct.

Unite is aware that a number of developments have been occurring which will increase the pace of change in the Sector and in so doing, offer it new opportunities, new challenges, and new sources of uncertainty and stress for the workforces with whom they engage. At the same time, the sector has its old traditions and standards, some of which are frankly unacceptable in a modern employment context and need changing.

Many new initiatives have been introduced in the Sector. "Change Up", which constitutes the Government key proposal for professionalising the management and related initiatives of the Sector, focuses on employees and volunteers and looks at issues like good human resources, development, ICT and trustee governance. Unite has also been involved with the work the Government is doing on volunteers.

However, we recognise that it is the translation of national initiatives into your own organisations that matters. Unite believes that partnership at work between the organisation and the union provides the most constructive way of working. We also find that this is embraced by the Sector, not least because the ethos of these organisations would seem to lend itself to this type of approach.

## Unite and the Community and Non Profit Sector

Unite as the trade union for the Community and Non Profit Sector, recognises the important role that volunteers and employees play in the life of the union. Both can play an essential role in recruiting other volunteers and employees, building collective strength and protection for individuals in their organisations. They can also become involved in supporting and representing members once accredited, and can play a key role in engaging with the campaigns of Unite.

Unite also wants to ensure that management are concerned for you. Hopefully this Charter will be a starting point for a broader involvement of those who work for the organisations, volunteers and employees, that together make up the sector, and may well play a part in the debate about what voluntary and community organisations should be doing to make their workforces genuinely treated as their most precious assets.

The following points are therefore put forward for adoption by voluntary and community organisations, so the Sector as a whole, can elevate the status and treatment of employees and volunteers to a level which reflects their true importance to the organisations they work for.

# The Charter

## **1. "The people who work for us are integral to our effectiveness and success."**

Organisations should recognise that their effectiveness and success is dependent on the people who work for them. Human resource issues should be central to their strategic plans.

## **2. "Our human resource policies aim for best practice."**

Organisations should aim constantly for best practice, rather than compliance with the minimum legal requirements, professional or donor requirements.

## **3. "Our human resource policies towards both paid employees and volunteers, aim to be effective, efficient, fair and transparent."**

Policies should enable organisations to achieve both effectiveness in their work and a good quality of life for their staff. They should therefore be effective, efficient, fair and transparent. This includes having fair approaches to all categories of their workforces, particularly those most likely to suffer discrimination.

## **4. "We consult with our staff and volunteers when we develop human resources policy. We genuinely welcome and encourage the collective expression of views through trade unions as we believe that responsible trade unionism adds value to our organisation."**

Organisations which embrace the idea of involvement, and encourage their workers to influence human resources policies, are likely to reach better and more consensual decisions.

## **5. "Plans and budgets reflect our responsibilities towards our employees and volunteers."**

All too often organisations make grant aid applications on the basis that they stand a better chance of success if they are kept as low as possible. Budgets should include elements for pensions, maternity leave cover, training and all the necessary on-costs which should be taken into account in employing staff or engaging volunteers.

## **6. "We develop our employees and volunteers so that if and when they leave us, they are equipped and trained with skills and experience to find fulfilling and rewarding work and contribute to the betterment of society."**

Organisations should provide relevant training and support to help staff work professionally and effectively. Organisations should have appropriate systems for managing the accreditation of skills and appraising all staff and volunteers.

## **7. "We take all steps to ensure staff security and well being, including by paying proper regard for their health and safety and by being committed to the protection and enhancement of their dignity at work."**

The psychological and physical health and well being of its employees and volunteers are important responsibilities for any organisation to observe. Putting in place measures which will have the effect of protecting health and well being, and preventing employees from suffering loss of dignity at work for any reason or no reason, requires commitment and a planned course of action.

## **8. "We will recognise the rights of our employees and volunteers to join unions, grant recognition to those unions, enter into meaningful negotiations and consult with them wherever this is in accordance with the wishes of the workforce."**

Organisations should respect the wishes of their workforce on union representation, without obliging them to use the statutory procedures provided by the Employment Relations Act.

- For more information about Unite in the Community & Non Profit Sector **please call 0207 420 8978 or email [nonprofit@unitetheunion.com](mailto:nonprofit@unitetheunion.com) or go to [www.unitetheunion.com/nonprofit](http://www.unitetheunion.com/nonprofit)**

*A draft version of this charter was circulated among Unite members and discussed at the branches and sector committees of Unite dealing with the Community & Non Profit Sector. It represents therefore, not only the formal policy of Unite but broad consensus from our members and leaders, on the reasonable standards the Sector should observe.*

*We wish to acknowledge the People in Aid code from which we drew inspiration for this Charter.*

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Published by: Unite,  
Community & Non Profit Sector National Office,  
35 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8JG.

[www.unitetheunion.com/nonprofit](http://www.unitetheunion.com/nonprofit)

