

Volunteer expenses: frequently asked questions

Please note: these FAQs are updated to reflect new questions from volunteers and Witness Service colleagues.

What form should I be using? Why can't I use one I've used before?

We ask everyone to use [this form](#) as it is up to date. It is held on the intranet.

How do I know if you've paid my expenses?

Once your claim has been processed for payment, you will receive an email from the finance team directly to let you know payment has been made.

I've not been able to submit my expense claim within the three month deadline - will I still be paid?

We understand that volunteers, on occasion, will not be able to submit their claim form within the three months detailed in the policy. Where that happens we ask volunteers to speak to their Team Leader

Why do you need receipts for subsistence items?

Under HMRC rules we are required to evidence that any expenses we reimburse to a volunteer are wholly and directly related to their volunteering.

Why can't we just have an allowance?

Because we are required to evidence that the expenses we incur are directly related to volunteering, which we cannot do with an allowance.

In addition, payment of an allowance could count as income and so volunteers could need to disclose payments as a potential taxable benefit to HMRC and to the DWP if in receipt of means tested benefits.

Why can't socials be claimed on expenses - people volunteer for free, they should get some reward and recognition.

We are required to evidence that any out of pocket expenses claimed are incurred directly from your volunteering activity. We do however recognise the valuable contributions of all of our volunteers so the Volunteering Team are currently working on a recognition scheme based on recent feedback to recognise our volunteers in a way that is important to you.

What should we do about evening meetings to help us collaborate?

Witness Service staff are able to order essential refreshment items e.g. tea and coffee, via stationary orders to support meetings in court locations. The expenses system should not be used to support events e.g. socials at pubs/restaurants.

What should I do if a receipt is lost or damaged?

We cannot reimburse expenses without a valid receipt so please keep them. This is one of the reasons it is important to claim expenses regularly so there is a reduced chance of receipts going missing.

If your receipt is damaged please share it with your Team Leader - we will be able to reimburse you if it is possible to discern the amount, date and item, even if the receipt is not very clear.

Where a scanned receipt is less clear than the original, then Team Leaders should confirm to the Service Admin Team that the claimed cost is reflected on the receipt to avoid a claim being unnecessarily rejected. You may find that taking a photo of a receipt produces a clearer image than a scanned receipt.

For lost or damaged receipts, Team Leaders should include specific confirmation when the claim is submitted explaining:

1. Why the receipt is not available
2. That they can confirm that the volunteer completed volunteering on this day (s)

Can we reimburse weekly tickets/parking permits?

If a volunteer has paid for a weekly bus pass or parking permit, we can only reimburse them for the portion of the cost which can be directly attributed to their volunteering. For example, if a weekly bus pass costs £35 and a volunteer volunteers for one day in that week then they can claim £7. As with single tickets, evidence of the costs in terms of a copy of the ticket or a receipt must be provided.

Do we provide any allowance or higher mileage rates if volunteers give a lift to another volunteer?

No, while the Witness Service has been part of Citizens Advice this has never been part of our policy or approach on volunteer expenses. Our mileage rates are in line with HMRC guidance.

Can I claim for the congestion charge or ULEZ fees?

Citizens Advice takes a sustainable approach to travel and tries to minimise environmental impacts. We would not reimburse claims for congestion/ ULEZ as standard. However, we also want to support volunteers with any accessibility needs to access volunteering opportunities. If you feel you may incur any additional charges as part of your travel, please speak to your volunteer manager (Team Leader Court ; Team Leader Outreach) and they can advise. They may be asked to provide a rationale when submitting any claims with additional charges.

When can I claim for refreshments? Sometimes I am too busy to pop out during the day to get lunch.

To legally reimburse a volunteer expense we must satisfy ourselves (and the HMRC) that the cost incurred by the volunteer was wholly and directly related to their volunteering.

We understand some volunteers may purchase food/drink items in advance of their day in court. We will reimburse you if you buy hot food or drink for **consumption during your shift on the day of volunteering**. These are considered **refreshment costs incurred in the course of volunteering**. The maximum that can be claimed for subsistence is £8.

We know the court environment is often busy and therefore sometimes volunteers may not be able to get out for a break during the day so purchased and consumed refreshments just after a shift finishes. We will reimburse this cost however we would encourage all volunteers to take breaks wherever possible.

I bought my lunch through a food delivery app - will you pay the service and delivery charge?

Whilst we know that some people may choose to use a delivery service to get their lunch, we can only reimburse the cost of the food/drink delivered not any additional surcharges applied by the provider.

I have used a voucher to pay for an item, can I claim back the full amount of the item on expenses?

No, we can only provide reimbursement for expenses incurred using cash / money. This would be like providing a cash back service. For example, if a volunteer has a loyalty card with a chain and gets their 10th hot drink for free, they cannot make a claim for the item.

How was this policy developed?

The policy was developed in collaboration with the Expenses Scrutiny and Oversight Groups. We have two groups. One includes representatives from operational Witness Service staff. This includes Team Leaders, an Area Manager and representation from Outreach services. We also have a volunteer group which includes representatives from volunteers. Both groups include representatives from a range of geographical areas.

The policy draft was developed by Witness Service staff using experience from operating the volunteer expenses system and its processes. Frequently asked questions received over a number of years were used to provide insight on areas of policy requiring improvement.

In drafting the policy, Witness Service staff also completed research on the policies used in other not for profit and organisations with volunteers.

The policy was shared with the Expenses Scrutiny and Oversight Groups to hear about key considerations for amendments and clarifications. This provided an opportunity to reflect the voice of lived experience in the policy document and supporting materials.

What can I expect for claims submitted which contain content outside of the policy?

Team Leaders will discuss this with volunteers and explain how it is not possible to support this part of the claim. These claim forms should be amended to reflect items only within the policy.

Claims which contain content outside of the policy should not be submitted to the Witness Service Admin team. Any that are will be returned to Team Leaders to be amended.

What happens if I am inactive for a period of time or have other commitments and I have some expenses I haven't submitted yet?

If you are due to be away for a period of time e.g. due to other commitments, we recommend that all your outstanding expenses are submitted prior to taking time away.

If you haven't planned to take time away but something comes up and you are inactive as a volunteer for a while, we would encourage you to submit any outstanding expenses if you are able. Our policy is not to reimburse expenses over 3 months old.

We can consider exceptional circumstances. If you have had a period of absence and have an issue with expenses, please speak to your Team Leader / Deputy Team Leader in the first instance.

What's happening with a digital solution for making expense claims?

We remain committed to exploring a digital solution for making and processing expenses claims. It's important that we explore this in the right way and at the

right time in our roadmap. We will keep you up to date with our progress and if there are any changes, we'll communicate this via our Volunteer newsletter.

Why the restrictions on what we can claim within the maximum permitted spend?

Because we are required to evidence that the expenses we incur are directly related to volunteering; we are not permitted to make payments for items which may be consumed at another time. This is why we can't pay for a whole loaf of bread, butter, cheese and pickle to make a sandwich - even if the total cost lies within the limit.

What is considered a multipack?

Claims can only be reimbursed if they relate to an **expenses directly incurred because of volunteering** so the key issue is, will you be eating/drinking what you have claimed for lunch solely whilst volunteering?

What is considered a multipack/sharing item and what is a single portion / serving item?

A multipack is one which contains more than one individual portion or serving (please note this is as advertised by manufacturers. The Witness Service does not define this).

An illustrative example of a biscuit multipack is provided below:



Manufacturers also sell "individual portion or serving" packs. An illustrative example of an individual biscuit portion or serving is shown below:



These are individually wrapped biscuits which may be available as part of lunch meal deals or in cafes.

The Witness Service will only support claims for individual portion or servings, not multipacks/sharing packs.

Why can't I buy and claim for the cost of items bought for other people?

We can only reimburse you for the expenses you incur while volunteering with us, buying items for other people is not an expense which relates to your volunteering role.

The other volunteer should submit an expense claim in the normal way with the receipt showing the expense. We will then reimburse that volunteer.

If you need to pay for a legitimate volunteer expense for any other people you will need to get prior approval from your Area Manager and this should accompany the submitted claim.

Can I submit my claim electronically?

Yes. Just complete the form as usual, type your name where it asks for a signature and forward to your Team Leader for authorisation together with scans of any relevant receipts.

I get charged a small fee for a parking receipt via text- can I add this fee to my claim for reimbursement ?

Yes, we understand that some parking locations only operate via app / digital and they may charge a small fee to receive a receipt by text. We require receipts as part of claims. So if you incur a small fee to get one for parking in these locations, where no other method is available to obtain a free receipt, then we will process this as part of your claim.

How long do I have to keep my claim form and receipts?

We recommend that you keep your claim form and relevant receipts until that claim is processed and you have been reimbursed.

What should I do if I have a change in circumstance which you think will have an impact on your expense claims e.g. travel arrangements?

We recommend that you speak to your Team Leader if you have a significant change of circumstances that could impact your expense claims e.g. temporary alternative travel arrangements. This can support your Team Leader to take any actions required to support claims processing.

My expenses have not been paid, what do I do?

First speak to your Team Leader and check when the claim was submitted. Your claim should be processed within 10 working days from your Team Leader authorising and sending it to the admin team for processing. You then need to allow for a few more days for funds to appear in your bank account.

If you are waiting a long time please speak to your Team Leader in the first instance.

Can I make a claim for carrier bags?

No, our policy does not provide reimbursement for carrier bags.

I purchased my lunch the day before court. When I arrived I found I was no longer required as the hearing was rescheduled. Can I still make a claim?

Yes, you purchased your subsistence in advance and the change was out of your control. Please note, we will not reimburse claims for purchases AFTER volunteers have been stood down. But if they have been purchased in advance, with a receipt showing the date, we will reimburse.

Multiple court/Outreach claims - why can't I show it all on the same form?

We know some volunteers support both Outreach and Court witnesses. In addition, some volunteers support at more than one court.

When submitting your expenses we need to ensure that the claims are reviewed and approved by the appropriate Team Leader. This means if you support at two different courts that are managed by two different Team Leaders, you will need two claim forms - one for Team Leader number one at X court, and another for Team Leader two at X court. The Team Leader is confirming that you were present at court on the day stated and that the claim is valid. They cannot confirm this if it is not their court. In the same way an Outreach Team Leader cannot verify that you supported in court on a certain day and vice versa because they were not there.

For Outreach volunteers only

Mobile phone costs can be claimed for Outreach volunteers only as they are not usually based within a court setting and use their personal mobile phones when speaking with witnesses.

Where a volunteer has unlimited minutes as part of any mobile phone agreement, we will not contribute to the cost of this.

Should a volunteer not have unlimited minutes, then we ask for evidence of cost/charges to be provided.

We ask that all mobile phone costs are claimed at the end of the month.

Can I purchase refreshments for a witness and claim back the expense?

No, this is not possible. By purchasing refreshments for witnesses we could be at risk of legal action should a witness experience an issue arising from what we've purchased such as experiencing an allergic reaction. We also cross our boundaries regarding supporting vulnerable clients in this space.

I work 5 hours or over but its not all at court. Can I make a claim for lunch?

If you are volunteering for 5 hours or more, and it covers the lunch period, you can make a claim for subsistence. This can be if you are visiting clients in the community, at court or travelling to visit clients as part of outreach work.