**Volunteer policy**

**University of Dundee Nightline**

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1 Introduction**

Nightline is a University of Dundee support service. The service is composed entirely of volunteer students and serves to support the health and well-being of the student body by providing emotional listening support and information. This support is provided through a nightly service (8pm-8am) via phone, instant messaging and email.

**1.2 Aims**

This policy was created with the aim of arming current, prospective and future volunteers with essential information about the Nightline service. This policy will provide a structured framework for all volunteers and should be complied with at all times.

**1.3 Definitions**

**‘Nightline’** is an umbrella term for the university listening service which operates across almost 100 universities across the UK, but for the sake of simplicity it will, in this policy, refer to the University of Dundee Nightline service.

The **‘Nightline Association’** is the governing body for affiliated Nightline services. It is a registered charity which exists to represent and support Nightlines.

**‘Nightliners’** is a term used for Nightline volunteers.

**‘We’** refers to the Nightline committee.

**1.4 Core values**

Nightline is structured around 6 core values which are embedded into our service as a whole and each volunteer’s practice. The values, central to our service, form a basis for our actions. Volunteers should bear in mind the values when they engage with service users and committee members should use the values to guide their practice.

1. **Conﬁdential**: Our volunteers don’t divulge contents of a call to anyone outside of the service. Only non-identifying, anonymised information is recorded for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

2. **Anonymous**: Our volunteers don’t try to discover the identity of callers. In fact students accessing the service don’t even have to give their name. Our volunteers will also not disclose any information about themselves in order to protect both parties.

3. **Non-judgemental**: Nightlines have no political, religious, ethnic, cultural or moral bias. Our volunteers accept and respect the views of any caller.

4. **Non-directive**: Our volunteers won’t steer students towards any particular course of action or get them to think about their situation in any particular way.

5. **Non-advisory**: Our volunteers give callers an objective caring space in which they can work things out for themselves and make decisions and take actions that they’re ready to take responsibility for.

6. **Empathic**: Our volunteers will recognise and appreciate service user’s emotions and be sensitive to their feelings.

**2. What to Expect**

**2.1 We recognise your commitment**

Nightline values individuals who choose to support their fellow students and we appreciate their commitment to both our service and the university. We recognise the challenges of managing both academic and volunteering responsibilities, so we commit to support our Nightliners at every stage of their involvement.

Nightline would not exist without student volunteers; they are the driving force behind this unique and invaluable service. We will ensure that they receive adequate support, training, guidance and opportunities to develop whilst volunteering with Nightline. Consequently, we are confident they will find the experience enjoyable and rewarding when adequate effort and commitment are applied.

**2.2 Equality**

Nightline fosters a culture of equality and we are committed to ensuring every volunteer has an equal opportunity to progress to committee. Elections are democratic and unbiased and decisions that affect every volunteer should involve every volunteer. We will continually endeavour to break down barriers between committee and non-committee members in order to create a more open environment for volunteers.

**2.3 Your rights**

Every volunteer has the right to be treated with respect at all times without exception. We support a culture of transparency which allows us to learn from mistakes. There are fair procedures in place to protect the rights of any volunteer who may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

**You have the right to:**

* Be treated with respect and never experience discrimination.
* Vote in committee elections and constitutional changes.
* Attend committee meetings to share your views.
* Receive adequate support (adequate defined in section 6).
* Receive adequate training (adequate defined in section 5).
* Run for a committee position in a fair election.

**2.4 Benefits and rewards**

All of our volunteers receive university endorsed certification for their commitment to Nightline. We also regularly hold socials for our volunteers in the Nightline office or local venues. Furthermore, all volunteering hours may be put through Saltire Awards which can be present in your CV. After leaving Nightline, your volunteering may be put in your CV in detail showing many interpersonal skills.

**2.5 Facilities**

Nightline operates from a dedicated facility near the city campus which includes an office space, beds, a kitchen and a bathroom. The office location is confidential in order to protect both the service and it’s volunteers.

**3. Your Responsibilities**

In addition to complying with the Nightline constitution, both committee and non-committee alike have a number of responsibilities as volunteers. Nightliners deal with serious matters and handle sensitive information, therefore you are expected to act accordingly; in a responsible manner.

**3.1 Volunteers responsibilities:**

* If you are unable to attend shift, inform the Deputy Director immediately and arrange cover with another Nightliner as soon as possible.
* Take appropriate measures to protect confidential information relating to Nightline.
* If you are unable to fulfil your shift quota, contact the Director.
* Maintain a line of communication if you are on extended leave.
* Treat all volunteers and committee with respect at all times.
* Escalate concerns appropriately (section 7.3).
* Be honest, reliable and sensitive of others.
* Comply with the 6 core values (section 1.4).
* Provide feedback to improve the service.
* Accept responsibility for your actions.
* Comply with Nightline’s policies.
* Attend shifts on time.
* Attend training.
* Attend socials, welfare meetings and preparation for publicity events.

**3.2 Committee member responsibilities:**

* Attend committee meetings whenever possible.
* Inform the Director if you are unable to attend committee meetings.
* Engage in committee meetings, sharing your views and ideas.
* Act independently, developing your own initiatives (with support from the committee).
* Maintain good communication with other members of the committee.
* Accept a higher level of accountability.

**4. Recruitment and Selection**

We recruit volunteers from the entire student body of 16 000 individuals and ensure equality is at the heart of the whole process.

**4.1 Equal opportunities and diversity**

Nightline is committed to promoting diversity and providing equal opportunities for all prospective students and we will strive to promote equality throughout the recruitment process. We believe all students should have an opportunity to volunteer, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or ethnic origin.

There are, however, certain limitations which may prevent some students from volunteering:

* All volunteers must be be able to speak, read and write English to a reasonable standard in order to effectively handle calls and emails.
* The facility is currently not wheelchair accessible, so some students may be limited in this sense. However, this is in the process of changing.

**4.2 The application process**

Prospective students should complete an application form. This can be found at <https://dundeeuni.nightline.ac.uk/> , or collected from a public face. Applications are assessed by the Training and Recruitment Officer for suitability (unless they know the student personally. In that case they will declare an interest and a different public face will assess the application). You can expect a reply within 2 weeks of submission during open application periods. Successful applicants will be invited to an interview. Any information provided will be protected and handled sensitively.

**4.3 The interview process**

Interviews are typically held on campus and by a public face interviewee. At the beginning of the interview you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. Applicants will then be asked a series of questions, after which the interview will conclude.

The interviewee will determine the applicants suitability after the interview, with potential feedback from other public faces. Applicants can expect a response within 2 weeks, however, will often receive a response the same day.

If an interviewee knows the applicant personally, they will declare an interest and will be substituted with a different public face, wherever possible.

**4.4 The selection process**

We assess suitability throughout the recruitment process and have modest expectations of applicants. The qualities, skills and attributes we search for in applicants are: honesty, reliability, sincerity, kindness, integrity and humility. Naturally, we expect applicants to be good listeners and they must be able to work both independently and in a team.

**5. Training and Development**

All volunteers receive extensive training which should prepare them to cope with the role of a Nightliner and fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

**5.1 The training weekends**

The training weekends are compulsory for all new volunteers and typically occurs twice: in September and January. It provides essential training on a variety of skills, procedures and concepts which prepare volunteers for the wide variety of situations they may encounter. Some of the areas covered in training include active listening techniques, information about the service and the association, and procedures for different call types.

**5.2 On-going training**

Throughout the year, we provide training, typically once a fortnight. Sessions last for around 2 hours and comprise a variety of topics which may include simulated phone calls, problem callers, e-listening skills, and more. This minimal commitment is an essential element of volunteering and allows volunteers to remain up to date with policy changes, meet other Nightliners, and maintain their skills.

We base our training on the needs of volunteers. If they feel there is a particular issue that needs addressed we will do our best to accommodate.

**5.3 Additional training**

Nightliners may also have the opportunity to receive training from external bodies such as the Nightline Association or Samaritans.

**6. Support, Guidance and Welfare**

We recognise the vital importance of support, considering the emotional costs of volunteering for Nightline. Volunteers can potentially encounter emotionally traumatic issues such as rape, abuse and suicide, therefore an adequate support system is paramount. Support for Nightliners is manifested in a number of different ways and can be divided into two types: internal support and external support. All Nightliners are welcome to access the type of support they feel would suit them best.

**6.1 Internal support**

Internal support is facilitated within the Nightline system and does not involve non-members, but can easily translate to external support. There are a number of formal and informal support mechanisms:

* As volunteers get to know each other they often find that they can turn to each other for support. This informal level of support is innate, but is sometimes simply not enough, or is unsuitable for some.
* Nightliners are welcome to approach any member of the committee for support, but are encouraged to approach either the Deputy Director who is responsible for welfare, or the Director. Although the committee will treat whatever you choose to share with complete confidence, they will have to notify the Director if they believe you are at risk of harm.
* General queries should be sent to the Director.

**6.2 External support**

External support utilises a range of non-members and student services. You are permitted to disclose your volunteer status to the following individuals/services, but must take care not to disclose any other information which may compromise the service or it’s members. Volunteers will receive guidance on how to access this form of support.

* The Nightline Board is partly comprised of DUSA and University representatives. All volunteers are welcome to approach these individuals for support:

Graham Nicholson - Director of Student Services.

Keith Mackle – Deputy Director of Student Services

Caroline Adamson – Senior Counsellor

Sofia [Skevofylaka](https://www.facebook.com/sophuli) - DUSA President

Charlie Kleboe Rogers - DUSA Vice President of Academia

Joely Nicol - DUSA Vice President of Student Welfare

Craig Reoch - DUSA Vice President of Student Activities

* Our Nightline service has a sister relationship with Newcastle and Glasgow Nightline services. Our volunteers are welcome to use these services if they wish.
* Samaritans and Breathing Space both provide emotional support via phone and email (Samaritans).

**7. Further Information**

**7.1 Data Protection**

Compliance with the Data Protection Act is important to us, therefore we will do our best to ensure that we follow the 8 principles of data protection in order to protect both our volunteers and service users.

To find out more about the 8 principles visit: <http://www.ico.org.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide/the_principles>

**7.2 Escalation of concerns**

Nightliners can approach any member of the committee if they have a complaint or concern, but are encouraged to approach the Director (exceptions - see below).

* If a complaint relates to another Nightliner, the Director should be notified, who will then use their discretion to decide whether to escalate the complaint.
* If the complaint relates to a committee member, it should be raised with a board member who will then decide whether the complaint should be escalated.

Our disciplinary procedures are fair. All Nightliners are fully informed of our disciplinary procedures during training.

**7.3 Disclaimer**

Although all volunteers are expected to comply with this policy**,** it is not comprehensive and should not be treated as such. Any questions related to this policy should be sent to the University of Dundee Nightline Director - nightlinedirector@dundee.ac.uk