

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the UK Government's Emergency Volunteering Leave (EVL) Scheme that was contained in Schedule 7 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

The project team are seeking to utilise the term 'Emergency Placement Scheme' in operating the scheme in order to differentiate the very specialist nature of the scheme in contrast to regular volunteering.

2. Scheme overview

The UK Coronavirus Act there contains provisions allow UK Government to establish a UK-wide scheme for providing emergency leave for staff who wish to support specialist volunteering within health, community health, or social care sectors.

This provision impacts on matters of employment law, which under the Scotland Act is reserved to Westminster. The Programme Manager has been supporting Scottish Government colleagues in their engagement with the scheme design team at Westminster.

The aim of the scheme is to boost the workforce capacity of health and care systems when there is a critical shortage, and would only be triggered should paid work and informal volunteering be unable to supply sufficient workforce. The scheme provides a 16-week window for EVL to take place.

The Emergency Volunteering Scheme enables people to take unpaid leave for 2, 3 or 4 weeks from their regular employment and claim some compensation. It is separate from, and sits alongside the process through which potential volunteers find their placements.

The following people are not allowed to join the Emergency Volunteering Scheme:

- (a)** work for a business with a headcount of 10 staff or less (micro-business)
- (b)** are a crown servant
- (c)** work for the armed forces or police
- (d)** work as a member of parliamentary staff in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- (e)** are already employed in the health and social care sector
- (f)** filling essential roles relating to critical infrastructure

The process includes a certification stage which results in the potential volunteer being provided with a certificate that they can present to their employers in order to take emergency volunteering leave, and is also required in order to claim compensation. The specific certifying authority has yet to be determined in Scotland.

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Prospective volunteers are responsible for sourcing a suitable placement with the host organisation. The process for this is to be determined locally though it may be advisable to agree a national approach to this.

The scheme development is almost complete. We await the publishing of the official guidance.

The scheme will be put into hibernation until ministers decide to trigger it. A 10-day notice period will precede the opening of a 16-week window of EVL.

3. Considerations

(a) Roles and recruitment

NHS Boards and social care organisations may wish to come to an agreement for a national approach, perhaps aligning to the Scotland Cares campaign as an additional pathway. Otherwise each organisation will be responsible for identifying, advertising and recruiting prospective volunteers.

Experience to date has shown that national campaign lead to an increase in volunteer enquiries and that considerable work is required to respond. The importance of defining roles before inbound enquiries are received has been reinforced recently.

(b) Need for the scheme

UK Government and devolved administrations have agreed that the scheme is not imminently required. However, the triggering of EVL will be UK-wide and therefore may be brought into action when workforce pressures in one country and not mirrored elsewhere. The project team are exploring with lawyers how it could be phased or staggered.

NHS boards and social care organisations may wish to begin identifying what these specialist roles might be prior to the triggering of the scheme.

4. How NHSScotland can inform the decision to trigger the scheme

The Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme had previously suggested that boards may benefit from reviewing each staffing domain and identifying where any temporary extension of volunteering into service delivery would begin and end, in effect a 'red line' for volunteering in each domain. We also proposed the following steps for addressing service gaps:

- (a)** recruitment of paid staff (directly or via the Scotland Cares returning workforce pathway)
- (b)** redeployment of paid staff within boards

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- (c)** redeployment of paid staff from non patient facing boards (already happening, e.g. Healthcare Improvement Scotland to NHS24 and also in NHS Education for Scotland)
- (d)** recruitment and deployment of volunteers:
 - (i) under the UK Gov Coronavirus Bill Emergency Volunteering Leave Scheme
 - (ii) from existing volunteer base and recruitment/transfer of volunteers from third sector agencies
 - (iii) from the general public

NHS Board Strategic Leads for Volunteering contributed to an information request from Scottish Government in April that partially informed ministers' decision on the need for triggering the scheme. It was not possible to extract accurate information on placed volunteers from the Volunteering Information System as four NHS Boards do not use the system, a number of boards had stopped using it or had not updated their data whilst others had chosen not to use it for managing data during the pandemic.

The returns from Strategic Leads indicated a total of 747 active and placed volunteers across NHSScotland, that no additional workforce gaps had been identified that volunteers were being sought to, and unable to fill.

Scottish Government require monthly updates on this so that ministers remain informed. If workforce issues reach a critical point, a more immediate collation of information may be required.

The volunteering component only forms a part of the decision-making. Scottish Government Workforce Directorate are engaging regularly with the HR Directors Group to remain appraised of the workforce element of the decision-making process.

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