

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Voluntary Work: Volunteer Generalist Adviser

These volunteers provide advice to members of the public on a wide range of topics including benefits, employment, debt, immigration, consumer, utilities, taxation and housing.

Generalist Advisers interview clients, find information for the client from our CAB Information System, interpret and explain that information to clients, help clients to take action such as writing letters and filling in forms and complete clear case records. They must also recognise cases when unfair rules are the root cause of the client's problems and make the Social Policy Coordinator aware of them.

Advisers need excellent communication skills, enthusiasm, the ability to review and understand complex information, respect for other people including people whose values and views may be different to their own and a willingness to work as part of a team. Advisers will also need to have some experience of using computers and be willing to undertake demanding but interesting training. We find that Generalist Advisers need to have a regular pattern of volunteering of at least one day per week in order to stay up to date. We also ask that volunteers attend at least 4 of our monthly training sessions per year.

Training involves a combination of classroom-based training, e-learning, self-study and shadowing/mentoring with an experienced adviser. Training usually takes 6 – 9 months if volunteering for 1 day per week with some (up to a couple of hours per week) home study.

No previous experience is required.

Main Duties

- Interview clients at the bureau, by phone or in person.
- Draft e-mail advice to clients.
- Provide information from our electronic information system, AdviserNet and other sources
- Explain the choices the client faces, and what these choices mean
- Offer practical help to clients by writing letters, making phone calls and helping fill in forms
- Use computer programmes to carry out benefit entitlement calculations
- Refer clients to other advisers or agencies if they are better placed to help
- Accurately record contact with clients on the client database CASTLE
- Maintain their own account on CASTLE by undertaking administrative tasks such as closing cases
- Prevent future problems by identifying issues that affect a lot of clients – this is called social policy work

Skills Required

- Excellent communication skills including telephone and written communication
- Ability to empathise with clients from a wide range of backgrounds and to gather information by appropriate questioning and discussion.
- Basic IT skills as required for recording the work completed in CASTLE
- Willing to undertake the initial training and in-service training to keep you up to date.
- Good team player with ability to work closely with other roles
- Understanding and acceptance of the CAB aims and principles.

Volunteering in a Citizens Advice Bureau

CAB asks that all workers in the service support and implement its aims, principles and policies.

Aims

CAB aims to:

- Provide advice services through a network of bureaux.
- Carry out social policy work by campaigning on social issues and giving feedback to government on the effects of social policies.

Principles

The CAB service follows twelve principles, but the top four are:

- **A free service** – the CAB provides information, advice and assistance free of charge.
- **Confidential** – the CAB provides confidentiality to clients. Nothing learned from clients, including the fact of their visit, will be passed on to anyone outside of the bureau without express permission from the client.
- **Impartial** - advisers give information and advice in a non-judgemental way. The service provided by bureaux is impartial, open to all, and is regardless of any subjective opinion as to whether or not the client is deserving.
- **Independent** – CAB's are completely independent organisations. The policies and practices are decided solely by the member bureaux. No other agency or individual, even if they are giving financial support or other aid, will influence individual bureaux.

Equal Opportunities and anti-racism policies

The CAB service is:

- Committed to ensuring that all services are equally available to all people, regardless of race, creed, disability, gender, age or sexual orientation.
- Committed to an equal opportunities policy and is striving to encourage participation of all people at all levels in the service.
- Opposed to all forms of racism and discrimination and will resist and challenge acts of discrimination and support its clients and staff when confronted with racism harassment.