

## SLD — The Joys of Volunteering

Why should you volunteer to work with Student Learning Development and advise students academic on academic matters, especially writing?

The fact you have thought about it means that you are interested in helping students. I found it a very pleasant and rewarding way of maintaining contact with students after 'retirement' from full-time work as an academic.

I have always liked students and regard it as a privilege to have worked with them all my life. As a volunteer I was able to help many of them in their first steps into the world of academia.

Much of the advice one gives may come under the heading of the 'very obvious' but that is exactly what students don't know — and what nobody tells them. This means that helping students is quite straightforward most of the time.

Volunteering is about 'making a difference' and in my experience it did make a difference to many of the students I met. Many of them even said so.

Students are greatly reassured by being listened to by someone knowledgeable who is 'on their side'. As former academics we know what staff are looking for and have a grasp of the relative importance of different exercises.

I developed a lot of skills from volunteering. I got much better at listening to what students were saying and tailoring my response to their needs. (The best interviews were those where the student kept talking and resolved their own issues!)

I also learned the skill of moving an interview along and closing it effectively. This was very important when there was a waiting room full of students or when I was doing successive 15-minute appointments online. (I have summarised the 'practice wisdom' from those experiences elsewhere.)

Don't be put off by concerns that you might get involved in students' difficult personal issues. SLD works with very clear boundaries and the whole SLD team — and indeed the whole Student Counselling Service — is there to advise and support volunteers — and students.

You will be hard put to find a more congenial group of people to work with. They are skilled, professionals dedicated to helping students to develop. As a volunteer you can contribute to that worthwhile goal. Go for it!

Alan Tuffery

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