

Guidance for staff working with charities, October 2023.

Charitable Donations by the University

The University supports personal charitable giving and initiatives by members of staff. However, In common with other Universities, our Financial Regulations (s2.7) prohibit the use of our funds (including research funds) to make charitable donations unless at an institutional level in very limited prescribed circumstances approved by the Director of Finance. A past example is the University making a donation to an appropriate charity to incentivise student participation in the NSS.

Charities who engage in trading activity either directly or through a commercial arm

Many charities engage in trading activity either directly or through a trading subsidiary arm. It is wholly acceptable to purchase goods and services from such organisations, subject to our standard procurement rules and requirements. Goods and services must be provided under commercial arrangements - any payment which is not a fee for services rendered will be considered to be a donation and is not allowable.

Charities which do not offer services commercially

The University fully supports engaging with charities where this is appropriate for our community and the relevant charity. However staff must be mindful that they cannot create any expectation of financial recompense from University funds when establishing a relationship or making a request of a charity, or make a payment to the charity. This includes in response to a 'suggested contribution', documents badged as 'invoices' from a charity which does not trade commercially, a payment reclaimed using expenses or using a University Barclaycard – these would all constitute a donation and are not allowable.

Things to consider when charities do not offer goods and services commercially

In addition to clarity around our Donations Policy it is important to consider what alternative support we can offer a charity, the amount of work the charity is being asked to do with us and whether this is appropriate:

Non-financial support for a charity	Whilst the University cannot make financial donations, charities can be supported by enabling them to showcase their work at appropriate events to raise awareness with staff, students, alumni and the wider community which may lead individuals to support the charity directly. Charities may also benefit through our official social media coverage of events or by the University recognising them as a partner charity - for staff volunteering for example.
Appropriate use	We should not routinely use a charity which does not offer goods and services commercially to address University needs, and never on the basis that a charity's unpaid goods or services save us money. However it can be appropriate and helpful to engage such charities for specific managed events to benefit our community and where the charity can showcase their services, as above.
Responsible use	We must avoid the University unintentionally dominating the workload of a charity. This is a risk as, outside of charities who are commercial suppliers, there is no means of identifying centrally which charities are providing services to us, potentially leading to a high volume of requests. For example in 2022/23 one local charity made

	over 20 charitable visits to campus in a six month period at the request of different areas of the University. It's important to check with the charity whether other areas of the University are also making requests of them and to ensure it is comfortable with this.
Organisational fit/standards of conduct	As for a commercial supplier it is essential to ensure that the values and ethics of a charity are aligned with those of the University and that working with the charity does not create any unmanageable conflicts of interest or reputational risks for the University.
Risk assessment and insurance	As for a commercial supplier it is essential to ensure relevant risk assessments are carried out and that the charity has the appropriate insurance arrangements in place.

FAQs

Does this guidance mean that I can't volunteer for a charity or personally fundraise on campus or amongst colleagues?

This guidance relates only to the use of University funds in situations where a charity which does not trade commercially is asked to supply goods or services. The University supports personal charitable giving and fundraising or volunteering initiatives and in addition offers [paid time off for volunteering](#) in some circumstances.

My area purchases goods or services from charities, does this mean we need to stop or review the arrangement, or that we can't work with new charities?

This guidance relates only to goods or services which are provided on a charitable basis. Many charities trade commercially either directly or through a trading subsidiary and in this case we work with them in the same way as any other commercial supplier. Our standard procurement requirements apply and there is no need to re-consider an existing relationship, or not to work with a new charity, in the light of this guidance.

Can the University make donations to charities which are set up as commercial University suppliers?

The University can only make payments to suppliers to pay for goods and services which have been invoiced under a commercial arrangement. Any other payment would constitute a donation and is not allowable under the Financial Regulations in any circumstances.

If a charity can't invoice commercially, can I make a donation and claim it back on expenses, or use a University Purchasing card?

It is against the Financial Regulations to use University funds to make charitable donations in all but the most exceptional circumstances agreed in advance by the Director of Finance. Encouraging or authorising a donation based on a document badged as an invoice, using a University purchasing card or trying to claim a donation back on expenses is impermissible.

How do I know if a charity trades commercially or not?

The easiest way to find this out is to ask the charity concerned.

What if a charity offers goods or services that I can't find anywhere else but doesn't trade commercially?

The University fully supports engaging with charities where this is appropriate for our community and the relevant charity. In this situation it is important to work through the considerations above with the charity to decide the best way forward.

Does this guidance impact financial support for the University of Sussex Students' Union?

There is no change in the ongoing financial relationship between the University and the USSU.

How do I find out if University insurance will cover the proposed activity?

You can contact the University insurance manager through the [Finance Service Desk](#).