

## Volunteer Role Description: Weston Library ‘Conversation Station’ Volunteers



### About the role

The [Weston Library](#) is looking for volunteers to pilot its new ‘Conversation Station’ in the Blackwell Hall (the public space at the entrance to the Library). Volunteers will have conversations with visitors and encourage them to engage more deeply with topics relevant to current exhibitions and displays. This could be before *or* before and after visiting the exhibition or display.

The Station (a table) will be equipped with signage, a prompt for visitors to consider, interpretive materials or objects, response cards, questionnaires, and a hand-held clicker for recording visitor numbers. Staff will actively seek volunteers’ feedback about the volunteer experience, the role, different topics, and different resources as part of the pilot.

A version of the activity was trialled alongside last year’s ‘Magna Carta’ display and included English transcripts of the document, a glossary of terms, postcards for visitors to record what they would add to a modern Charter of Rights, and a pinboard to display the postcards. It prompted some really interesting discussions, and 80 - 140 participants were engaged during each two-hour session.

Conversation Station sessions will initially run **2 - 4 pm on Thursdays** and **11 am - 1 pm and 2 - 4 pm on Saturdays**, although timings may vary during school holidays and there may be occasional opportunities to volunteer at evening events. Volunteers should allow extra time to collect a resource box and set up the Station beforehand and pack resources away afterwards.

The activity will be reviewed after six months, with the aim of extending it following any adjustments. For now, the volunteers’ main role is to invite visitors to think about and share their views on different aspects of an exhibition or display. This includes:

- proactively encouraging visitors to take part: to connect and converse in a welcoming, open, safe space
- looking after the space and resources – keeping things tidy and letting staff know if anything needs replacing
- supporting data collection and evaluation by noting how many visitors they engage and asking visitors to complete surveys
- highlighting what else visitors can see and do in the Library, including the printing press, the 'Space for Reading', family friendly activities, tours, talks, etc.
- generally supporting visitors to have the best possible experience

Volunteers will normally help in pairs: usually alongside another volunteer but occasionally supporting a specialist who will be leading discussions on a particular topic of expertise. Volunteers may occasionally be asked to deliver the activity alone, although there will always be staff nearby.

The team will be coordinated by Hayleigh Jutson, Helen Tilby, and Neil Stevenson from the Learning and Engagement team. Front-of-house Visitor Experience staff will provide any extra support on the day.

#### **We are looking for volunteers who:**

- are curious to learn about different topics
- enjoy interacting with all sorts of people, including both first-time and repeat visitors, people who live locally and those visiting Oxford from other parts of the country and world, families, teenagers, adults, etc.
- are confident to approach people and ask if they would like to take part, but won't pressure them or mind if they prefer not to engage
- are chatty, welcoming, and reassuring; this will help conversations to flow and feel comfortable
- are confident to explain things in English, although other languages may also prove useful
- can identify when they need to adapt the activity and/or their language to fit the audience; this includes accommodating visitors with (in)visible access needs
- are polite and helpful: public-facing volunteers are often asked a variety of unrelated questions, which they may or may not know the answer to
- are flexible and considerate of each other when helping in pairs
- are happy having constant interactions and managing small groups of people during busy periods, as well as soaking up the atmosphere during any quieter moments
- ideally, are available for the pilot period and can offer one or more shifts per month – although there is flexibility in the rota

#### **Training**

The Conversation Station's theme will change to reflect changing exhibitions and displays and may rotate between weeks. Initial training (dates tbc) will help familiarise new volunteers with the role and how to set up the activity. Volunteers will then be given topic information in

advance of each new theme being introduced and will need to spend time learning this information so they can lead conversations with confidence.

### Why you might enjoy this role:

It's an opportunity to:

- meet a variety of visitors, other volunteers, and staff and have interesting conversations with people
- improve your knowledge of the Weston Library, contribute to its public engagement programme, and learn something about a variety of exhibition-related topics
- develop and practise communication and customer service skills

### Other practicalities

- A table and chairs will already be set up, and this role can be done seated or standing.
- The Weston Library has step-free access from Broad Street. Blue badge holders can park on the street nearby.
- Volunteers can claim travel expenses up to £5 per volunteering session.
- This opportunity is open to volunteers aged 18+.
- Volunteers new to onsite GLAM volunteering will need to be registered on the Volunteer Service mailing list (MyImpactPage.com), and the Volunteer Service will need to have received two references and carry out an ID check before volunteers can start in this role. The role does not require any additional checks.

### Next steps...

Staff hope to invite as many people as possible to a 10-minute informal 'audition' at the Weston Library but may not be able to involve everyone who expresses an interest this time. Audition slots will be **1 - 3 pm on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March and 10 am - 1 pm on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March.**

If you are interested in getting involved, then please **[complete a Microsoft Forms form by following this link](#)**. It will ask you to:

- confirm which times you could potentially attend an audition
- confirm your general availability to join the rota in the coming months
- briefly (max 150ish words) tell us why you're interested in this role

**If sending a video or voice recording would make it easier for you to apply**, then you are welcome to email one to Caroline at [volunteering@glam.ox.ac.uk](mailto:volunteering@glam.ox.ac.uk) – just make sure you include all of these points!

The deadline to apply is **12 noon on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March**. Someone from the Weston team will be in touch as soon as possible after that.

Information will be kept in accordance with our [Data Retention Schedule](#).



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