

I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

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What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering

I was encouraged to get involved in volunteering as much as possible at school and so set up a variety of things from art and music clubs during lunch breaks to volunteering as a teacher's assistant at a local school.

I got involved in my office's Engineering Awareness group when I joined Atkins. I have given talks to schools in the South West including my old girls school to promote careers in STEM as well as coordinating the year 12 work experience weeks for the past two years. In that time, I have lead a team to redevelop the weeks and we have been able to include new activities with some of the latest technologies such as Virtual Reality and 3D printing as well as partnering with Bristol Aerospace museum to host a day trip.

I have recently taken up the post as the INCOSEUK Early Careers Forum Events Co-ordinator. I am responsible for planning the events for the Early Careers Forum over the coming year that align with our priorities (see ECF page) and working with the INCOSE UK Events Director to support this year's 25th anniversary celebrations.

What Originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

There are two main reasons why I wanted to get involved with INCOSE UK, my Systems Engineering Masters Apprenticeship Programme (SEMAP) and my work in STEM. SEMAP is an apprenticeship scheme that develops people to INCOSE Practitioner Level competency through project experience but also academic courses, I found that both myself and others in my cohort were keen to get specialist advice to support academic assignments and also understand how SE can be used once the course was finished. As part of the work experience weeks, we introduced a Systems Engineering activity and it has been very successful in helping students to understand the bigger picture of engineering problems. I felt that there was an opportunity to promote Systems Engineering to audiences at all stages of their career and so following the Early Careers Forum summer event I applied to be the Events Coordinator. We have already run an event in November with the plan to do more next year!

Do you have any advice or feedback to offer anyone who is considering volunteering?

Pick a cause that matters to you. A lot of volunteering is related to working with people and it really helps to do something that you feel enthusiastic about. It may also mean the people you work with similar interests and which can help with working in teams.

Manage your time carefully. Although making the most of the opportunity is great, consider what can be achieved alongside work and other commitments such as a social life! I have found this can be difficult at times but sticking to one role or volunteering cause and building up from there really helps.

Speak to your line manager/supervisor. Lots of companies actively encourage volunteering and often have paid volunteer days. Making your manager aware of your commitments outside of work can also help to manage your time effectively and even provide additional support where possible.

Work in a team. Particularly if you are working towards an event or looking after groups of people, volunteering in a team hugely beneficial. It means that duties are shared and helps to develop a range of skills from team collaboration to effective communication.

Make the most of the opportunity. Volunteering is hugely rewarding, you get to meet new people and most importantly support great causes. Try and get involved as much as you can as this will help to gain a variety of skills.

What do you feel you get out of your volunteering?

Volunteering has helped me to develop new skills. As a graduate early in my career, there are limited opportunities to develop certain skills such as leadership and managing budgets. Volunteering has helped me to do this in a supportive environment which I have then been able to apply in my project work. It has also helped me to develop effective ways of communicating to a variety of audiences.

It has also given me the chance to meet new people. I have met a group of people that I have really enjoyed working with. It has given me the chance to broaden my network both inside and outside of my company.

As part of my role in INCOSEUK, I have learnt more about the disciplines of Systems Engineering and have the opportunity to support the development of the Early Careers Forum. I have had exposure to working groups and other members which has helped me to see how Systems Engineering has been applied across other industries.

Most importantly I am really enjoyed helping others whatever the cause. I have particularly enjoyed helping school children learn about the opportunities STEM subjects can give and emphasising the application of creative thinking particularly in Systems Engineering.

