

I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

Philip Jackman



What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering?

My volunteering did not start with INCOSE UK, but when an appeal was put out by the IEE (prior to its rebrand as IET) for Engineers to be considered for co-opted school governors. I thought this is a great way to try to put something back into the education system that had served me well and at the same time potentially provide a 'stage' to highlight why Engineering was a good career choice. I hoped, and was not disappointed, that it would offer me an opportunity to explore other skills that were not currently open to me as a contractor. I was given a few options for schools in my local area, which was then Colchester in Essex, and finally settled on Manningtree High School which was my local senior school.

I had to relinquish my post as a school governor when we moved to Lincolnshire 5 years ago, but I soon found other avenues by which I could contribute to both my local community and by chance INCOSE UK. When INCOSE UK became able to offer professional registration it put out an appeal for those Systems Engineers who already held CEng to be considered for a role as a Professional Registration Assessor (PRA). This presented the perfect opportunity to offer, and repay, that guidance I was once given when making my CEng application.

In addition to becoming a PRA, I was asked by the local Parish Council if I would consider being a public (non-parish council) member of the Community Park Committee. A committee responsible to the parish council for the running of the park, running of community events e.g., fundays, and general fund raising/grant applications for large capital projects such as children's play equipment. The original chair of that committee was a district councillor who within 6 months resigned due to ill health. I was asked to step up to the role of chair.

One more largely part time volunteering role I hold it that of 1940s Triumph Roadster Owners Club (TRCL) Spares Secretary, another role I sort of fell into. The TRCL were looking for a new home/volunteer for their spares, the current incumbent in the South of England wanting to retire. The club had a potential volunteer but had no available storage space for the spares. I had space to locate and erect a spares building, so why not, after all it could prove mutually beneficial as I had just acquired a Triumph Roadster 2000 restoration project. The role is mainly a worldwide distribution service of spare parts for the Triumph 1800 and 2000 roadster cars to help keep the approximately 400 cars of the 4500 produced between 1945 and 1949 on the road. There is also an element of stock maintenance and negotiation with engineering companies to get spares made.

What originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

I decided to become a Professional Registration Assessor for INCOSE UK as it offered me a route to help young engineers - those aspiring to be professionally registered at EngTech, IEng, or CEng as I had once benefited from. It also allowed me to support the Institution that champions my chosen engineering field.

There is a second professional development aspect to being a Professional Registration Assessor that is often overlooked, that of developing one's own people skills. Managing an individual's expectations without appearing too authoritative or pompous. So, it is a good symbiotic relationship.

What do you feel you get out of volunteering?

It had been a long time since I obtained my CEng and the Engineering Spec had developed over that time. Therefore, from a technical view, volunteering gave me an insight into what is being expected of today's professional registrants. I could of course have just read the Engineering Specification to get that information, but being a PRA supplements that with a view, via each application, of how Systems Engineering is being applied across domains very different to the day job. As previously mentioned, there is also the people element, the practicing and development of one's own soft skills. The Professional Registration applicants are helping us as much as we are helping them, if only they knew it!

The same applies to the volunteering activities I still undertake outside of Engineering. They all involve that interaction with people of different backgrounds and sometimes limited (dare I say it) age related IT skills. A real handicap when the spares' ordering facility is all online. I am often told I have the patience of a saint. If only they could see my head pounding the desk as I try to explain which virtual button to press with which mouse button. However, if you don't know, you don't know, and I will do everything I can to help. Hence, I have developed a higher level of patience and tolerance for certain groups of people.

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

My advice is why are you even asking if you should. There are many positives to volunteering. You will get as much out of any volunteering role, be it inside or of outside INCOSE UK, as it will demand from you. Yes, it will be frustrating at times. Things will not go to plan. You may even find time difficult to allocate at times. If this is the case, particularly with an INCOSE UK PRA role, then talk to the professional development team. They will find a temporary or permanent solution. But in the end your contributions will always be well received and you will get the feeling of worth for a job well done when that applicant achieves their professional registration of which you did your part in getting them over the line.