

# I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

## Rebecca Ridler



### What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering?

I was always encouraged to get involved in volunteering and give back to the community as much as possible when I was at school. This has ranged from helping out at local Scouts groups to assisting in rugby coaching.

I set up Synoptix's Academic Engagement section where I liaise with schools and academic institutions to hold engagement events with them. These could be on the topic of girls in engineering, value of apprenticeships or joining the engineering discipline. I've coordinated the last two years of work experience placements as well, ensuring the students get the most of out their time with us – one of these students went on to an apprenticeship at Synoptix after.

Since then, I have been involved with the continuous improvement of our work experience by internally developing projects for them and ensuring the program covers the aspects the students need, such as professional development and careers skills.

This year I joined the INCOSE UK Early Careers Forum as the Outreach & Communication Coordinator. I am responsible for ensuring all members receive the correct information/links for any events we hold and ensure that the Outreach initiative aligns with ECF's overall strategy.

### What originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

There are two main reasons why I wanted to get involved with INCOSE UK; the work I do with Academic Engagement and the experience I have had completing my apprenticeship. The apprenticeship is a four-year course covering the topics for my degree, alongside different modules designed to improve me as an employee. As part of the work experience weeks, we introduced a session around the benefits of completing a Degree Apprenticeship and provided help to the student in applying. This session received tremendous feedback from the students and has allowed them to apply for various apprenticeship schemes since.

I wanted to create a way of promoting Systems Engineering to students, so I leaned more into INCOSE UK for guidance on this. Following my attendance at ASEC 2022, I applied for the Outreach & Communication Coordinator role, since I've been developing a strategy to deliver sessions around SE for early careers individuals.

### What do you get out of volunteering?

Volunteering has helped me develop my soft skills by event exposure. Being an undergraduate there are limited opportunities to developing certain skills such as leadership/project management. By volunteering it has helped me develop these skills in a supportive environment where I've been able to use them in my project work. It's also helped improve my confidence and public speaking skills by understanding effective means of communication and how to deliver that to a variety of audiences.

Volunteering has also given me the chance to meet new people in different domains of work. This allows me to broaden my network outside of my company and helps develop my ideas as I meet new people.

As part of my role within INCOSE UK ECF, it has given me a better understanding of what Systems Engineering is and how I can apply that to help early careers individuals understand the subject more. Attending different events has allowed me to meet people from other sections of INCOSE UK and understand how they apply Systems Engineering across different industries.

Most importantly I really enjoy being able to support others and helping them wherever possible. I now volunteer as a girls' rugby coach alongside working which helps me give back to the community that I grew up in and be a role model for the next generation of young rugby players coming through the age groups.

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

Manage your time effectively. As much as volunteering is rewarding you can get sucked up inside it. It can be difficult at times managing the balance between volunteering, social life and work so make sure you consider what can be achieved in the activity before you commit. It's more effective leading 3 really meaningful sessions than 10 sessions you haven't had the time to plan correctly for.

Share responsibility: If there is an event coming up that can facilitate more volunteers take the opportunity to reach out to your network and see who else wants to help support. This means that the responsibility of the event is shared among you and helps develop more skills through team sharing and collaboration.

Pick a cause that you relate to. Volunteering means you will be working with people in that area so ensuring that you are enthusiastic about it will go a long way. It also means it will be easier working with people as you will have similar interests which makes it easier to deliver opportunities and work with that team.