

## **Volunteer Survey 2013 – Findings**

We would like to say a big thank you to all the 540 volunteers who took the time to answer our survey. The information gathered has been extremely useful in establishing fact from fiction, understanding where our priorities for action lie, and in generating a plethora of useful ideas for further investigation.

### **Overall Conclusions**

It is difficult to make a simple summary of such a large and complex piece of work. It can be seen that there are areas where the IET works extremely effectively with its volunteers and where the working relationships, commitment and outcomes are excellent. It is also evident that this is not consistent across the organisation and we need to extend the good practice. Areas for focus should be:

- communication,
- recognition and ensuring volunteers are well supported with good information,
- access to training,
- materials,
- systems,
- procedures and timely responses from staff (or other volunteers).
- Regular communication is essential – and networking with other volunteers appears to be a vital component of a good experience for many.

The number of positive comments have been encouraging, especially where volunteers report that they are very satisfied with their experiences. Needless to say, there are some key learning points that will require early action to address. These are:

- Recruitment of younger people into volunteering roles needs to emphasise skills development, as well as the other key motivations.
- There is an urgent need to improve the ways we recognise and thank our volunteers. The ways we do this will vary, but it needs to be more consistent and regular.
- Feedback on the results of volunteering activities is also very important and there should be a stronger emphasis on providing feedback, as well as more updates on general IET news and developments.
- We need to do more work on developing our communications to ensure they are more helpful both in terms of content and accessibility.
- Our development of the Volunteer Gateway should be targeted at the problems volunteers are experiencing regarding finding key information on the web site – creating a single reference point for all volunteers to explore and share.
- In some areas we need to ensure volunteers have regular interaction with a primary contact, and to ensure this brings benefits in continuing to improve response rates, ensure feedback and key information is getting through, and helping to level expectations. This should also support the continuation of good working relationships.

In the free text comments our volunteers tell us many things that could make their volunteering roles easier. The most common appear to be more support or better engagement with staff, improved recognition and feedback, better resources (including improvements to help find information on the web site), more communications and information on 'the bigger picture', and improved induction and reference materials (which includes more networking with other volunteers).

The survey has also provided a large number of ideas all of which have been captured. Many will be input into priority projects but those that are not included in the first phase of actions will be extremely helpful in a process of continuous improvement as we aim to develop the way we work with our volunteers in future.

### **Next Steps**

The Volunteer Talent Support Working Party are working with the results to formulate a prioritised action plan to address the issues raised. This will be agreed at their meeting in February and communicated to all volunteers at that time.

### **Facts and Figures**

The majority of volunteers are engaged in the UK (78%) and most are involved with Local or Technical Networks, Professional Registration or Professional Development activities. For 58% of our volunteers one of these areas is where they are most active.

Our volunteer age profile is top-heavy with 53% being 56 or over. Amongst our respondents only 1% were below 26 years of age. However, over 40% have been volunteering with us for over 10 years – an astounding level of commitment.

Only 33% of our volunteers have a single volunteering role. Volunteers who have (or have had) two roles is 24%, and there are 6% of people have been involved in 6 roles or more.

### **Notes on interpretation**

It has been possible to analyse each question against set criteria, e.g. age, length of engagement, country, and role. This has been done for the well represented areas - – local and technical networks, professional registration (related) and professional development (related) – but not for any other groups due to the numbers being insufficient to be statistically sound and therefore have not been used.

### **Recruitment**

Most volunteers found out about their role(s) through another member or colleague, or at a meeting. Another significant trigger for volunteering is through the professional registration process, on becoming Fellow, or when being given an award or engaged in an activity such as PATW. This will be significant in guiding our recruitment in future.

For the most part, starting a volunteering role is informal, with 46% accepting a request for help, and an additional 20% taking the initiative in seeking a role. Only 15% of the respondents had been nominated and elected into their main role.

Also important to our future recruitment activities will be to improve our understanding of what motivates people to volunteer. Overall, the motivation is mainly to give something back and to grow the profession, with promoting the IET,

meeting other members, sharing knowledge and developing own skills also commonly cited. The general profile of motivation remains the same for those under the age of 40, but with one notable exception – developing my own skills rises from 34% to 70%. (Note that responses to this question were tick all that apply.)

It is encouraging to note that our existing volunteers are keen to take up additional volunteering roles within the IET in the future – 25% definitely and a further 49% for the right role. This is helpful in helping us understand how to promote succession planning, especially for key governance roles. Whilst there is observable bias for volunteers to desire a role within the same broad category as their current main role (eg networks, professional registration) this does present good scope for sharing knowledge and building capability across the IET.

### Feedback, Recognition and Volunteer Experiences

A shocking 27% of volunteers say they haven't received any kind of recognition for their volunteering. Some form of recognition is valued by the majority of respondents.

	No view or not important	Nice to have	Very important
From the IET (538)	16%	55%	29%
From my employer (474)	48%	40%	12%
From those you work with (other members, candidates, colleagues, etc) (516)	23%	59%	18%

Number in brackets is number of respondents.

Insight into how volunteers think it is appropriate to be recognised and when this should occur will be helpful in confirming our practices for doing so. There is no strong preference for when people should be recognised, with a mix of views covering annually, at end of a term of office, and ad hoc or at times of special achievement. A simple thank you is seen as an appropriate form of recognition for 63% of people, but other things are also valued, especially invitations to events or celebrations (55%).

The aspects of volunteering that are most rewarding and most challenging have highlighted some wonderful anecdotes and a few surprises. Categorising 540 free text comments for each question has been a challenge in itself, but there are some obvious trends.

Most rewarding: by far the most mentioned are all things related to helping others with achieving career goals, membership and registration; then experiences relating to organising events; meeting other members and organisations. Also mentioned as rewarding are working on/with committees; receiving a thank you; activities related to developing the Institution and/or profession; and activities related to accreditation.

Most challenging: the most frequently mentioned challenge relates to handling difficult candidates or making difficult decisions (e.g. when mentoring or involved in registration/accreditation); then issues with dealing with procedures, systems or staff; motivating others to participate (e.g. in events); difficulties organising events;

steering/managing committees or other groups; finding time; and understanding, influencing or implementing strategy and change.

## **Communications and Support**

Communications was an area where the survey showed that we need to improve to ensure all our volunteers receive regular and useful communications regarding their volunteer roles and about the IET particularly in terms of strategy, news, updates on processes and products. There has been a mixed response regarding our current volunteer information channels, although on average these are seen as useful. However, this includes a worrying number (a broad average of 30%) of our volunteers who report that they either don't receive or don't open key pieces of information. It is difficult to understand the reasons, or how we can improve, from this survey, but this is an area that requires more investigation.

Where we had already anticipated a desire to change to receiving information in a digest format with a searchable archive, this has been broadly endorsed as helpful, with 60% agreeing the digest idea and 73% wanting the archive.

The Volunteer Gateway – which is planned to become our portal for all things volunteering and is currently in development – is not well known by our volunteers. Only 39% have visited it in the last 6 months, and 30% were not aware of it at all. As well as improving this central resource area to meet volunteer needs, we need to do much more to publicise it.

For those who are using the Gateway, news is the most sought after resource (57% viewed) followed by tools and resources (46% viewed), and 79% of people found what they were looking for. For the few who couldn't find what they wanted, the main items required were local network guides and information, and other forms and advice.

Two-thirds of our volunteers have a named staff contact, and a further 12% have a volunteer contact to support them in their role. This does vary depending upon the role, so we have work to do to ensure that this is consistent across the IET for all volunteering roles.

For the 76% who have made contact with their named person in the last six months, 95% either got a response straight away or by return. Of these, 90% had their query resolved satisfactorily, with 6% still being resolved (4% either not resolved or unsure).

Across the IET 84% of volunteers say they enjoy a working relationship with staff that ranges from satisfied to very satisfied. This does vary depending upon the role undertaken, so clearly the best practice that we have found both within departments and volunteer groups needs to be propagated throughout the IET.

Fifty-four percent of volunteers also feel that staff and volunteers are working as one team. A further 27% are not sure.

## **Resources, Processes and Information Technology**

Overall, just over two-thirds of our volunteers are confident they know how to access the IET resources they need to undertake their role. However this varies depending upon your role. For those in professional registration related roles this rises to 81%, but for local and technical network volunteers this stands at 56%. It can be surmised

that this is due to the number of recent changes to systems and processes, but clearly needs further investigation and action.

It is worth noting that our more mature volunteers have the highest level of confidence in accessing resources (81% for over 71s compared to 61% of the 41-55 year olds).

Feedback on what else we could do to support our volunteers in accessing resources showed that many have problems finding information on the web site, and that there is need for clarity over both the structure of the organisation and specific contact details for key areas. It is also clear that many would appreciate a clear induction pack of reference material and more training.

## **Induction and Training**

The type and amount of information given to volunteers when they start depends upon the role undertaken, but it appears there are too many volunteers who don't recall being given key information such as policies, procedures and organisation charts. In some areas – notably local and technical networks – only around a third of volunteers are aware of receiving this key information and we need to improve on this. It is also clear that volunteers would appreciate a regular reminder of key reference materials and resources.

Of the training provided for volunteer roles, the most useful has been face-to-face training days, induction conversations and networking. However, in some areas training is lacking, with only 28% of volunteers reporting having received training for their role.

Although many volunteers are content that they do not need additional training at present, the most common requests have been for regular updates on policies and procedures, mentoring, refreshers on standards and processes for registration, how to organise and promote events, and support using systems such as MyCommunity and other on-line resources. Clarity on issues around the way the organisation is structured and governed is also highlighted. In terms of delivering training it is clear that short, on-line videos, case studies and reference documents are in demand, but face-to-face networking and regular opportunities to meet and discuss are the most popular.