

Virtual Volunteer Conference 2021 - Summary Report

On Tuesday 5 October 2021 hundreds of volunteers from around the globe joined the IET in their first ever virtual Volunteer Conference.

With a full agenda of networking opportunities, a keynote speaker, interactive seminars, as well as the final of the IET's #PresentIn10 competition for young engineers and technicians - the day was truly jam-packed from beginning to end.

The Conference was created to shine a light on the IET's volunteers who play a critical role in helping us to achieve our mission to inspire, inform and influence the global engineering community to engineer a better world.

To kick things off, we were welcomed to the Conference by Nigel Fine, Chief Executive and Secretary of the IET. He provided viewers with an agenda of the day as well as an overview of our [IET Strategy 2030](#) and the Volunteer Engagement Strategy (VES).

At the IET we have over 4,600 volunteers around the world, and we recognised the need to introduce a VES that clearly defines the volunteer purpose, what volunteers do and how they engage with the IET and each other.

IET Volunteer Engagement Strategy aims:

- IET will provide a global volunteering home for life
- IET will provide the right opportunities for new volunteers and volunteer-facing staff, to help grow our reach in depth and breadth
- IET will raise the profile of our volunteers and volunteer facing staff to their peers and other stakeholders
- IET will be a recognised leader in volunteering management
- IET will provide the tools for volunteers to understand and be committed to the IET's strategies and societal challenges

[Find out more about Volunteer Engagement Strategy.](#)

Keynote speaker

Nigel then introduced the Conference's keynote speaker – Tiger De Souza MBE – the National Trust's People Engagement Director. Within his role he is responsible for inclusion and strategic volunteering development at the Trust.

He spoke about what he thought the future of volunteering would look like and the impact that Covid-19 has had on volunteering, both in the UK and globally.

Research Tiger commissioned with M&C Saatchi Intelligence has shown that the number of people stepping forward to volunteer had gone down and that in order to encourage more people into the volunteering community we would have to change the ways we set up volunteering opportunities, and in particular look at new ways to engage the younger generation.

As our volunteers know, volunteering has many benefits on not only skills development and improved mental health, but it can also make a profound impact on our community and the wider world.

Thinking about the next generation of volunteers, Tiger highlighted that we need to think about the volunteers' needs, especially in a post-covid world. People may be more inclined to prioritise time spent with their loved ones over time for their volunteering.

“Even though we have seen more people volunteer throughout the pandemic in terms of vaccination or mutual groups locally, what we are also seeing is that the return to the traditional forms of volunteering that people were doing before the pandemic is slower.” said Tiger.

He continued to highlight challenges that we face in encouraging future volunteers in today’s generation and how we should be evolving to fit their needs. Expressing the importance of diversity within volunteering teams, stressing that diverse teams make better decisions.

To promote and retain volunteering in the IET we need to ensure that all volunteering experiences are inclusive, flexible, and overall, time well spent. And with Tiger’s final words *“creating a diverse team is driven by thinking inclusion; start with inclusion and diversity will happen.”*

It was safe to say he provided plenty of food for thought on the future of volunteering!

Having your say

Throughout the Conference, there were several breakout and seminar sessions for delegates to take part in. The Keynote Breakout sessions gave people the chance to be part of discussions on how volunteers are vital in delivering the IET 2030 Strategy, as well as developing and delivering our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) Strategy.

These breakout sessions were excellent and gave us the space to hear thoughts and opinions on a variety of topics:

- Adapting to ensure inclusivity in all our operations
- Are we perceived to be an inclusive volunteering organisation?
- Challenges facing volunteers in achieving our 2030 strategy objectives
- Engaging employers and demonstrating the benefits of volunteering
- Operating fairly and consistently with our global volunteer community
- Virtual working without losing the benefits of personal contact

So many of the attendees really engaged with these sessions and the thoughts and feedback we captured will enable us to better engage with our current and future volunteers, and will also guide us in taking a holistic approach and being adaptive to how volunteering will change and evolve in the future.

Key themes which were highlighted were:

Communication of the IET 2030 Strategy to volunteers has only just started – it is not a fixed position, feedback from volunteers will help us evolve the strategy and ensure it is fit for purpose.

We have still not managed to balance the right amount of communication to volunteers; people want to be consulted on the important elements, but sometimes these are missed in the volume of emails.

We need to attract more young people to volunteer at the IET. Volunteers would like to help with encouraging them, but they are unsure how to attract them and would like support and tools to help them do so.

Hybrid and virtual working is very efficient and could really help with membership and volunteer growth. The ability to offer professional registration interviews virtually removes many barriers, if it continues it could help attract more volunteers willing to support excellence in engineering, and the faster process means we can register more people quicker, attracting more members.

The societal challenges are global challenges but may impact in different ways in different countries – the IET can play a role in uniting engineers. A legacy for the next 150 years could be in helping to educate our children’s children about global issues like reaching carbon net zero.

Being able to communicate online has made volunteering more inclusive, as it is easier to do a few hours of volunteering throughout the day rather than having to take a whole day out of other priorities. It makes volunteering more accessible to all and helps increase diversity. Virtual ways of working have also broken-down barriers to global opportunities and engagement.

Among the Conference delegates, the majority felt a sense of belonging at the IET – no matter their background.

#PresentIn10

[#PresentIn10](#) is a brand-new virtual competition from the IET to help young engineers and technicians master their virtual presentation skills. Over 50 heats took place this year under 3 themes: Sustainability and Climate Change, Digital Futures, and Healthy Lives.

During the Conference we met our three finalists:

- Xianghao Zhan for #HealthyLives
- Connor Meringolo for #DigitalFutures
- Paul Longe for #Sustainability

They showcased their presentations and after all three attendees were asked to vote for their favourite!

[Learn more about the #PresentIn10 finalists.](#)

Celebrating our Volunteers

Nigel Fine was joined by the IET President, Air Marshall Sir Julian Young and the Immediate Past President, Professor Danielle George, as they celebrated the achievements of our wonderful volunteers.

We have been bowled over by the positivity, creativity, flexibility, and drive demonstrated by all our volunteers from around the globe throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Now more than ever we are so thankful for the amazing work all our volunteers do.

This part of the Conference announced the winners of the Volunteer Core Value Awards 2021, celebrated the short-listed nominations for the Volunteer Achievement Medal and Paul Fletcher Award, as well as highlighting our Volunteer Honorary Fellowships which were awarded in our 150th anniversary year.

And to finish the Conference off on a high we announced live this year's winner of the #PresentIn10 competition.

Congratulations to Paul Longe on his presentation on #Sustainability and for the use of kites to gather airborne wind energy.

Well done to the other finalists, Xianghao Zhan and Connor Meringolo, for your hard work and dedication to the competition, you are all winners!

But thank you to all of our volunteers at the IET and thank you for attending this year's virtual Volunteers Conference. The IET would not be the organisation and charity it is today if it wasn't for you – our volunteers.

We hope that we will be able to celebrate you all in person soon.