



Volunteers' experiences

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A view from a volunteer: Carole Ryden



Carole Ryden is a Fellow of the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA) based in Northern Ireland where she is a Director of Ryden Mckenna Ltd. Carole has volunteered for the IFoA since 2012.

The experience of a volunteer who found volunteering got her back into work

“In 2012 after a career break to bring up my young daughter, I was ready to go back to work. I had the skills and I felt my experience remained relevant. I didn't think it would be difficult to go back out and find a job in Edinburgh, where I was based. I discovered that I was wrong. Experience and relevant skills would not be enough. I was reminded of what my father had continually told us growing up. He used to advise that *'It's not what you know, it's who you know'* and *'When you have a job, you'll get a job'*. This was the first time I'd thought seriously about this advice.

I began to talk to the small number of work contacts I still had in Edinburgh. I discovered that people generally seemed pleased that I valued their opinion enough to seek their advice. The hard bit was being brave enough to ask. The best advice I was given was from a senior actuary who suggested I join a working party and make new, valuable contacts that way. This was good advice. I had to build up my network and do something to raise my profile. I needed to engage with the profession. I had volunteered with the Faculty in the past and enjoyed it. I was happy to get involved again. I looked for interesting volunteer roles. I sought help from IFoA staff. Their support and encouragement were invaluable. I began to appreciate what a great opportunity volunteering would be. I'd be able to make new contacts, rebuild my confidence and learn new skills. So, I eagerly began my volunteering afresh. Soon I found that my volunteer work was the job I needed . . . *'When you have a job, you'll get a job'* and within months I had secured a 'paid' job!

Since then, I have put myself forward for several volunteer roles. I have volunteered as a member of the Scottish Board, going on to become Deputy Leader. I have also volunteered as a Career Ambassador, been a member of various working parties, presented at IFoA events including acting as Chair of the 2015 CPD Co-ordinators' Briefing, in London, and in 2013 I was elected to Council where I served until 2016.

Relocating to Northern Ireland

In 2016 my family and I moved to Northern Ireland; I had left when I was 18. I didn't know anyone in the NI business world. Luckily, I could use the volunteering route again to meet actuaries in Belfast and build new relationships and connections.



An IFoA Member
Engagement Profile



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With the good volunteering relationships which I already had established I started making enquiries. I was quickly able to connect with the Society of Northern Ireland Actuaries (SONIA) – the regional society for IFoA members, in Belfast. Through volunteering with them I got to know many new people in a very short space of time. Suddenly I had my foot in the door of the Belfast business community. At times like this I realise what an asset it is to belong to a profession. Particularly a profession like ours which values volunteering and gives so much support to those who wish to get involved.

Have courage and believe in yourself

Don't be afraid of change. Volunteering can be a safe environment in which to build up your confidence, grow your network, gain relevant experience and develop new skills.

Volunteering isn't easy (at least, not if you work hard at it) and at times I found it frustrating. For a long period, I was way out of my comfort zone. I found it scary to be the lone voice asking a difficult question in a packed meeting room of people I didn't know. I found it stomach churning to be the only one voting against a motion I didn't agree with. (I wasn't the only one against the motion, but I was the only one prepared to voice my dissent!) Looking back, I am glad I found myself in those situations. It tested me in ways that I wasn't being tested in my paid job. I persevered regardless of my fears and it was worth it.

I strongly believe that if you work hard as a volunteer then *'You will reap what you sow'*, not necessarily right away but at some point. It helps if you take the attitude *'To give and not to count the cost'* because it may be some years down the line before you fully appreciate what you have gained.

Rich and valued experience

I had many great opportunities to contribute to the profession and at the same time meet new people through my volunteering. As Deputy Leader of the Scottish Board I proposed an initiative for the IFoA to host an event focussing on diversity, which I worked on with the IFoA's Head of Engagement. We took the opportunity to collaborate with the Morton Fraser Business Women's Network. Together we hosted a joint panel event in Edinburgh in 2016 entitled *Leading by Example: Diversity in Business*.^{*} The speakers encouraged women to act as supportive role models for other women. During the discussions, Dame Susan Rice spoke about her work ethic. She said that sometimes she was paid for what she did and sometimes she was not paid (i.e. volunteering). Paid or unpaid, she viewed all of it as work.

Good advice

Make the most of our profession. Get involved. Talk to as many people as possible and ask for advice. Don't be afraid to contact people, especially members of the IFoA staff. People are more than willing to help. If you know senior contacts approach them. Be brave, be honest and just tell them you would value their advice on your situation.

Volunteering for the IFoA helped me to get back into the workforce by building my confidence and enlarging my skillset. It helped me to establish a new network after my relocation. The profession is a community and all communities help us to belong. Make the most of your professional community. Get involved and reap the rewards.”

^{*} The 'Leading by Example: Diversity in Business' panel discussion was recorded and you can access the recording on the [IFoA's Diversity Advisory Group webpage](#).

To get involved in volunteering for the IFoA visit:
www.actuaries.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering-ifo