



# H&S PROFESSIONALS VOLUNTEER TIME AND EXPERTISE

National Volunteering Week on 17-23 May presented an ideal opportunity for the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) to thank members who give their time voluntarily on the committees of its branches, districts and sections. Here we take a look at the voluntary work of some IOSH members who are based in Ireland.

## TO INFLUENCE AND TO ENABLE

Speaking to IOSH volunteers, you could be forgiven for thinking that volunteering can be a full-time job in itself. You can be extremely busy, depending on the particular voluntary role that you have and it means being accountable to

Volunteers continue to contribute enormously to society, from charity fundraising to organising clubs and associations.

They are recognised each year during National Volunteering Week – a celebration which takes place during the third week of May.

Non-profit organisations are managed by voluntary boards of trustees, and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) is no exception.

Representing over 47,000 health and safety professionals worldwide, the organisation has several branches and districts in Ireland, each with its own

committee of volunteers.

Whether they act as chairs, treasurers, communications co-ordinators, mentors or in other voluntary capacities, they share a deep conviction in keeping members informed, updated and motivated.

Meetings to discuss important topics and professional developments don't just happen, and briefings don't appear from thin air. They are the result of dedicating huge amounts of time, care, energy and thought. IOSH members are so much the richer for the hours put in by the volunteers, and IOSH can achieve far more – for many more people – than it otherwise could.



For Deirdre Sinnott McFeat, Chair of IOSH South Eastern District Branch, the cliché of “wanting to put something back into the profession” initially led her to give her time.



*“Having a network that puts on events and conferences about topical subjects is vital for raising our professional standards” – Yvette Moffatt, who chaired the Ireland East Branch for four years and remains an active committee member.*

others. So, what is it that makes IOSH members take on this extra set of tasks and responsibilities?

For Deirdre Sinnott McFeat, Chair of the South Eastern District of IOSH’s Ireland South Branch, the cliché of wanting to put something back into the profession was what initially led her to give her time. “I wanted to reinvigorate the safety conversation and re-engage the profession,” she says.

However, as she herself developed professionally, her focus began to change. Now she is concentrating on using her experience and national and international contacts to enrich the South Eastern District and its membership.

“I’m an influencer and an enabler. I influence committee members to give back to the IOSH cause and I try to help them with their personal and professional development. I enable volunteer networking opportunities, peer support, opportunities to learn and develop expertise, and the promotion of health and safety topics in the local area.”

**SUPPORT FOR OTHER MEMBERS**

Having chaired the Ireland East Branch for four years, Yvette Moffatt remains an active committee member, and understands that her role is vital in providing support for other members.

“I realised that many health and safety professionals tend to be in a team of one in their organisations. It’s really important to be able to talk to peers and mix with like-minded people – to vent and

discuss, get support and share ideas.

“We’re all as good as our learning, so having a network that puts on events and conferences about topical subjects is vital for raising our professional standards. That’s one of the reasons I got involved in the committee,” Yvette notes.

Ruth Donohoe, who succeeded Yvette, has been Chair of the Ireland East Branch for more than three years. She had been a committee member for some time, inspired by a commitment to deliver value to the membership – ensuring that members are informed about the latest guidance and any new developments in the field.

Asked why she wanted to take on the role of Branch Chair when it became available, Ruth replies that she wanted to challenge herself. At that time, the situation in her workplace was that she had no direct reports or need to manage a budget.

Her voluntary role offered her “a great opportunity to acquire new experiences and skills”, a view echoed by Yvette: “Volunteering has helped with my professional development. You need – or soon learn – marketing and organisational skills.”

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

With volunteering, there is a passion, a commitment and a determination to do something well, not because of the promise of a financial reward, but due to some less obvious return. Deirdre gains great satisfaction in knowing that her contribution can make a difference.

“With more than 23 years of experience in regulatory occupational safety and health, I have a position of influence and authority and I feel that I can use this to good effect to, for example, attract high-quality speakers to our meetings,” she says.

Yvette measures it in terms of a sense of achievement and fulfilment, and this seems to be a common factor for many IOSH volunteers: “When you finish running an event and people come up to you to saying, ‘that discussion really helped my thinking and I’m going to introduce that process or practice in my workplace’ – that’s a real satisfaction.”

One of Yvette’s main goals is to see graduate members move on to Chartered status quickly, rather than years after achieving Grad status.

So, she decided to join the IOSH Mentoring Scheme and since then has helped three Graduate members to gain Chartered status – an achievement of

which she is justly proud.

Ruth is clear about her responsibility to the health and safety profession and enthusiastic about wanting to get more people involved.

“I think that the profession always has to move forward, to be aware of what’s coming up next. Being part of the committee, and especially as Chair, gives you a role in helping to shape the future of the profession – you’re active in that process, rather than a passive recipient. You produce rather than consume.”



*Current Chair of the Ireland East Branch for more than three years, Ruth Donohue was inspired by a commitment to deliver value to the membership.*

**COMMUNITY OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE**

A commonly-held feeling among the volunteers is a sense of shared endeavour, mutual support and collective identity. “Even though we have different roles, I wouldn’t say that I manage committee members; as they are more like friends. It’s very collegial and we work closely to ensure the best outcomes for the membership,” Ruth points out.

“It’s great working with committee members, and we pool our knowledge from different work areas. You learn a lot from others.” As Yvette notes, joining in with others is one of the highlights of voluntary work: “Benefiting from this teamwork is second to none.”

*If you know someone whose volunteering for IOSH deserves recognition, perhaps consider nominating them for one of IOSH’s Presidential Awards. For criteria <https://iosh.com/more/our-gov-structure/presidential-team/awards>*