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Development Manager

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Development Manager

Organisation: Network Rail

Location: London, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I always intended on specialising in human geography so I applied to geography degree courses that I felt had a strong human element. I was accepted at the University of Cambridge and studied there for three years. Originally, I wanted to be a town planner so I knew that I would have to do a further qualification down the line, but I also knew that geography would give me a diverse foundation to study a lot of relevant topics.

In my final year at university, I applied to two graduate schemes and was accepted, at Savills. Throughout my time there I also undertook a Masters part time in urban planning at University College London (UCL), which together with my undergraduate degree gave me a strong platform to qualify for chartership.

From here, I moved to the development team at Network Rail.

Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

W: www.rgs.org/geographyprofessionals

In my last year of university I really wanted to get some work experience or an internship, so I emailed lots of planning consultancies to see if they could provide a week's experience for me. This resulted in an internship with the Olympic Delivery Authority's planning team and also with Quod, a planning consultancy in Central London. I also did a placement in Ecuador which provided me with more international experience too. So my advice is don't underestimate the power of emailing companies directly to get experience as it definitely helps when it comes to job applications later.

What do you do as part of your role?

At Savills I worked on the consultancy side of the business which focused on advising a variety of clients on valuation, planning and consultancy, so that they could maximise the value of their land through residential and commercial development. Geography was a really good foundation for this, because surveying requires you to understand lots of processes related to both the physical and human environment. Now, my main remit as Development Manager at Network Rail is selling surplus land that the company no longer requires for operational purposes. Land situated next to the railway line is much more difficult to develop due to safety and engineering requirements, so I work with developers to help them through the development process. A lot of this requires going through legal documents and understanding general due diligence processes of working up a site to market which is really interesting, especially with the variety of things that you have to consider.

What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

In my role strong communication skills are

essential because we have to convince engineers and operational colleagues within Network Rail that selling our land is the right thing to do. Therefore, you have to be able to show your understanding of the business but also understand multiple different viewpoints too. You do have to have self-awareness in property as there are lots of stakeholders involved. From a technical point of view, it's important to have good attention to detail when looking at land and trying to understand what you can do with it. You also need vision too, and an understanding of the general property market you're working in, to know what your future strategy is going to be.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

The most enjoyable part of my job is getting a site which no one has looked at before and seeing it as a challenge. You have to look at everything from the legal side to the physical condition of the site. I really enjoy building up that picture and understanding what you can and cannot do with a site and solving that problem. I am also a people person so being involved in stakeholder management allows me to talk to a lot of different people, which I really enjoy too.

Do you get to travel for your role?

Aside from travelling within the UK on occasion to visit sites, I don't get to travel too much in my current role. But in my previous role at Savills I got to travel to Cairo and Ibiza when I was part of the international development consultancy team working with hotel operators who wanted to develop serviced apartments.

What are the opportunities for career progression? Where might you be in five years' time?

I think in terms of career progression in the industry it does depend as the process is very different depending on whether you are working in the public or private sector.

Personally, I'm moving to a new role in a few weeks' time at the Associated British Ports as I want to build my experience so that I specialise in property relating to infrastructure projects. Although I will be doing Development

Management as I am now, it will be more focused on understanding the project management side of development. It's good to career hop in the beginning so that you get to experience different parts of the industry.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?

My first piece of advice is not to underestimate the power of directly emailing companies for work experience. You won't lose anything by doing this and often companies are taken aback by the level of initiative this shows. Make sure that you put the effort into understanding the type of experience you're applying for and the company too, as this certainly helps when it comes to interviews.

Also don't let people tell you that you can't do something. I think that if you really want something go with your gut and have the conviction to do what you want to do.

Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?

Initially I thought I was going to do history, but because A Level becomes that bit more intricate and interesting, geography came much more naturally to me and I enjoyed the diversity of the subject. I also had two really good geography teachers which helped too. I also knew that I wanted to do urban planning, so geography was the right step for me in terms of the foundation and diversity of topics.

I would encourage people to do geography because it is a really good subject to be able to pick different specialisms, it also improves a wide range of skills from essay writing to data management and stats. There aren't that many subjects that give you that level of variety. Geography broadens your mind set - if you want to come away with an enriched vision of the world, then geography is the subject to do that.