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Lynn Arthurs

Associate/Project Manager

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Associate/Project Manager

Organisation: WSP

Location: Belfast, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I graduated in Geography (with a Diploma in Area Studies) from the University of Ulster in 1997. I chose geography purely because I enjoyed the subject and was good at it. At the time, I didn't know what career it would lead me to and I continued to work in the hospitality industry during my degree course and for a while afterwards. I was successful in getting on the Rapid Advancement programme with BICS Systems in Belfast following my degree. This was an intense one year IT programme for non-IT graduates and allowed me to achieve a number of Microsoft qualifications. This course really pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me think of combining IT with geography as a career through Geographical Information Systems.

In 2000, I applied to Parkman (now WSP) for a GIS role and in the interview, discovered that they were trying to set up a new Lands team in Belfast to help support the delivery of a road scheme which straddled both the Northern Ireland and

Ireland jurisdictions. I accepted the role and spent the first summer out on site meeting landowners around the Ring of Gullion AONB which was amazing!

What do you do as part of your role?

I initially started as a Land Referencer/Consultant undertaking site visits, visiting landowners and interviewing them regarding the finer details on the land, how they use it, what rights exist etc. and recording and processing the information in our GIS and Database systems. This progressed over the years to become a Referencing Manager overseeing the production of statutory orders. As I progressed technically, I then became more exposed to the business management and commercial side of the business, becoming a Team Leader of our NI and Scotland teams. I am now a Team Leader for the Land Referencing business across the UK and Ireland (200+ people), delivering technically on projects throughout the regions and having a particular focus/placing emphasis on the 'People' element of our business.

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

You need to be able to question and highlight potential issues/risks, have an excellent eye for detail and place great focus on quality. Being a team player is really important as there are so many people involved in bringing infrastructure schemes through the necessary statutory procedures. The momentum and excitement of being part of a team effort is still something that really drives me today. Interacting with people and the public is also key, as well as being sensitive to landowner issues as they try to accept how schemes may impact their lives.

How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?

W: www.rgs.org/iamageographer

Geographers have an interest in the world around them and have a questioning mind. This means that they are good observers, researchers, are good at recording data and highlighting patterns and issues. They also have an interest in people and how they interact with their surroundings. All of these strengths mean that they can approach a particular challenge in a positive way and try to understand how best to resolve it. A knowledge of lands and rights, land use and agriculture, the planning process and environmental management all help contribute to an individual asking the right questions and taking a holistic approach on how scheme developments can impact people and what factors need to be considered and mitigated for.

environmental teams - so do not feel that you have to make up your mind now on what specialist area you want to move in to.

What is the most interesting project you've worked on?

The A5WTC project in Northern Ireland was such a fantastic opportunity to work alongside a multi-disciplinary team of engineers - roads, drainage, pavement engineers, structural engineers, environmental engineers, ecologists, landscape, acoustics, geotechnical, water quality experts – it gave a real insight into what needs to be considered when planning a significant infrastructure project.

Do you get to travel for your role?

When I first started as a graduate Land Consultant, I would travel to sites throughout Ireland and NI to talk to landowners who were impacted by scheme developments and I also travelled to our offices in Scotland and England to assist on other infrastructure projects. Now that we have better technology and systems in place to manage our land information and GIS data we are encouraged to use Skype and video conferencing more, so when I travel now, it is more to do with business management and our people.

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

A placement is a great opportunity - even over the summer months. A consultancy may also give you an opportunity to start working in a specific team but also be exposed to other