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Learning and Development Trainer

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Learning and Development Trainer

Organisation: Ministry of Defence

Location: London, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I studied MA Human Geography at St Andrews. My first job after graduating was a GIS caseworker for the Scottish Government. I also undertook a lot of volunteering to explore other career pathways, including an internship with the National Trust for Scotland and volunteering with a local Edinburgh conservation charity. I met a lot of interesting people on the way and was able to get stuck into some fun conservation projects. I then had a change of heart and decided to do a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to become a Geography teacher. I taught for a few years and then moved to London, ready for a change. I saw the opportunity to be a learning and development trainer within the Defence Geography profession for the Ministry of Defence. This was a perfect fit for me as I could apply the skills I had developed in the classroom environment to train adults to progress in their career.

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

I did a TEFL course and tutored English to children at an Italian summer camp, where I discovered my strengths in my teaching abilities; communication, patience and stamina. I also volunteered with the Girl Guides and Explorer Scouts. Supporting young people in the community to develop new knowledge and skills through action and adventure was really rewarding. Not only was I able to indulge in my joy and passion for the outdoors, I also developed transferrable skills, providing me with a good foundation for teaching.

What do you do as part of your role?

I provide orientation and induction training for new recruits arriving at the Defence Geographic Centre within the Ministry of Defence. I am responsible delivering the 'Basic Geoliteracy' module, training individuals to a professional standard within the Defence Geography framework. This entails training new staff to read and interpret Foundation GEOINT (geospatial intelligence) as well as giving them an awareness of geospatial sources, formats and product types used to support defence requirements. I also have line management responsibility, inducting new entrants into the Civil Service. When I'm not training, I assist in the design and maintenance of courses required by the business, helping ensure the alignment of training and professional standards within the Defence Geography Profession and the Government Science and Engineering (GSE) Geography Profession.

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

To be an engaging trainer, you need to be adept at listening, questioning, explaining, and giving feedback. It doesn't just happen overnight, the more you train people, the better the communicator (and trainer) you're going to be.

Strong organisation skills are also vital; preparation can be the difference between the success and failure of a course. If you have delivered any training before, you will know you cannot just walk into the room and start a session! To be a great trainer, I think you need to have a good training methodology, be willing to adapt new approaches, have enthusiasm for the subject and really enjoy teaching people. Having a sense of humour and not taking yourself too seriously if it goes wrong also helps!

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

My main role is to train new staff to have an appreciation of maps and understand the need for reliable geospatial and environmental information, products and services in UK Defence. Geography is undoubtedly a key feature during training sessions on map interpretation, skills, concepts and terminology.

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

There's a huge variety of roles on offer within the MOD and wider Civil Service, with a plethora of networking opportunities, career routes, training and development programmes to help you progress in your career. DGC is relocating to Cambridgeshire in 2023, so it is expected there will be new opportunities for staff who decide to stay on or join after the move.

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

Don't expect to know exactly what you want to do after school or university. I didn't! Keep learning and never stop studying your niche. You're unlikely to succeed as a teacher or a trainer if you don't have a strong background in your chosen subject. There is nothing more inspiring than sharing a passion for the world we live in, stimulating a sense of wonder for the places, the people and environments around us, so get as much teaching experience as you can and share this enthusiasm! This could be through volunteering, observing others teach, tutoring, or providing one on one support to colleagues and friends. The RGS Ambassador Scheme is a good place to start.

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

Being brought up by a Scottish mother and an Italian father helped me appreciate both my own country and different cultures. I benefited greatly from travel, particularly many family holidays driving to Italy. I was always intrigued by the variation of the landscapes and the diversity of the human settlements throughout Europe. I was particularly mesmerised by the Alpine region of Italy where I was amazed to see present day glaciers, dramatic high peaks and how the people had adapted so well their Alpine setting. This interest in the relationship between human development and the physical environment led me to study Geography further.

Geography is a wide ranging and fascinating subject which equips you to make sense of this complex and constantly changing world. Geographers develop a wealth of knowledge and skills: problem solving, analytical and communication skills to name a few, which continue to be in demand in the graduate job market. The face of our planet is constantly evolving, whether we like it or not. From climate change, to population pressures, socio-economic inequalities and pandemics, Geography matters.