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Jessica Prest

**Sustainable Drainage Systems and
Flood Risk Officer**

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**
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Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and Flood Risk Officer

Organisation: Cambridgeshire County Council

Location: Cambridge, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I graduated from the University of York with a Master of Environment (MEnv) degree in Environmental Geography, which explored a wide range of environmental topics. In my third year I studied a module on environmental hazards which included coursework which involved producing a report to assess flooding in Salisbury, England and develop a flood protection strategy for the area, with the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to aid this work. This provided skills particularly relevant for my role, which involves assessing Flood Risk Assessments and using GIS on a daily basis.

The course also had a strong focus on climate change, and this encouraged my passion to mitigate against flooding, which is a local side-effect of our changing climate.

What do you do as part of your role?

My role is extremely varied, involving a mixture of

office-based work and site visits throughout each week. The role is generally split between two key aspects: planning and flood investigation.

The planning part of my role involves reviewing and providing technical advice on the sustainable management of surface water to promote the achievement of sustainable development in Cambridgeshire. This involves consulting new planning applications submitted to the Council and assessing the potential flood risk of the proposed plans through software such as GIS. The planning applications I consult can range in size from just 10 houses to entire towns.

The flood investigation side of my role involves assisting with the development of new projects to manage flood risk in Cambridgeshire. I assess previous flood events in the county by analysing past flood data and assist in the investigation of current flooding by undertaking site visits and engaging with the local community.

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

My role requires skills in resilience and communication. The planning side of the role involves regular stakeholder engagement and consulting with developers, which requires the ability to communicate your points effectively and stand your ground. Furthermore, engaging with various stakeholders and members of the public also requires the ability to translate complex, technical issues into plain, understandable language.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

What I enjoy most about my role is the influence I have in future developments in Cambridgeshire. It is extremely rewarding to be involved in making new developments more sustainable and consulting on state-of-the-art developments that could inspire future urban regeneration.

W: www.rgs.org/iamageographer



Do you get to travel for your role?

In a typical week, my role involves multiple trips to places throughout Cambridgeshire. This can include meeting with developers on site to assess the drainage implications of proposed developments and visiting areas and meeting with residents to assess and discuss current flood risks and issues.

Where might you be in five years' time?

I have gained skills relating to stakeholder engagement, consultancy, communication and project development. This role has given me experience in environmental management, providing a strong stepping stone into future roles associated with environmental protection, environmental consultancy and sustainable development. In addition, I have acquired skills in Geographical Information Systems and other mapping software, which is a valuable asset within the environmental sector.

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

Most careers in flood risk involve regular use of GIS. While most roles provide training in this software, prior experience is seen as a valuable skill by employers within this sector. Therefore, I would advise choosing the more GIS-based modules within your degree.

Also regularly reading up on flood events (they're always well broadcasted throughout the media) will improve your knowledge of flooding, and knowing some specific details about past flood events demonstrates your enthusiasm to employers. This can also allow you to detect patterns between previous events and identify issues which could potentially be avoided in future events through better preparedness.

How do you maintain your knowledge and interest in geography outside of work?

I receive a regular newsletter from the Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF) which updates me on environmental events in Cambridge throughout the upcoming month and new scientific research findings on both a local and national scale. I also make sure I sustain my passion for travel by visiting different places

every weekend and taking time off work throughout the year to travel outside of the UK.

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

Geography confronts some of the biggest issues threatening the global fabric of today and the future of our planet. We are now living within a critical window of opportunity in which we need to act fast to offset the devastating impacts of climate change. However, there is still much uncertainty surrounding these major impacts. Studying geography will allow you to become engaged in new ground-breaking scientific findings on a regular basis on globally widespread issues. Geography holds the key to conserving the natural beauty of our planet, allowing it to be enjoyed by future generations to come.