

Emma Ballard

Surveyor

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Surveyor

Organisation: Knight Frank

Location: London, UK (with six month placement in Paris, France).

How did you get to where you are now?

At school I focussed on geography with economics, maths and physics at A Level. After taking a year out to learn Mandarin in Shanghai, I studied for an undergraduate degree in geography at Durham University. Upon graduating I was fortunate to be accepted onto the graduate scheme at a big four firm to audit investment managers and private equity firms and train as a chartered accountant. Whilst the training I received and the exposure to clients was second to none, I was not excited by the day to day work and so after completing the three year accountancy training scheme I decided to move into the property industry. I went back to university to study for an MSc in Real Estate at Cass Business School, which helped me get my current position at Knight Frank.

What do you do as part of your role?

As a surveyor you can be involved in a variety of

aspects of property including agency (leasing), investment (buying and selling), valuation and asset management. Commercial surveying involves dealing with commercial properties i.e. offices, warehouses and shops, instead of residential flats and houses.

For two years I am completing four six month rotations at Knight Frank to get to know different areas of the property industry. This provides an excellent foundation for a career in property, giving exposure to prestigious clients and landmark buildings as well as providing the breadth of experience necessary to sit the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Assessment of Professional Competence. Initially I spent time in the West End office leasing team where I was leasing space on behalf of landlords in central London, before joining the National Office investment team where I helped buy and sell offices for a variety of investors with a focus on South East England and the major cities in the UK.

I have recently returned from a six month placement with the valuation team in the Knight Frank Paris office. In Paris, I was fortunate to inspect and help value a diverse range of properties from retail units on the Champs-Élysées to office towers in La Défense and even the odd Chateaux!

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

The ability to build rapport with people and to feel comfortable asking challenging questions; to have a detailed approach to work; to be creative and to be able to think outside the box.

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

Geography teaches us to question the world around us and to understand how humans

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interact with the physical and the built environments.

In my work geography helps in understanding how the physical features (e.g. flood zone, geology, topography) of a location affect the value of property, and also allows us to appreciate how the national and local economies and demographics influence the property market.

Geography is also important through the technical skills of map reading, measuring buildings and being comfortable working with numbers for valuation and investment work.

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

Talk to as many people in the industry as possible and try to get as much work experience as you can (ideally property related). Don't be afraid to contact people and ask for advice or work experience. I think it is best to use each opportunity that presents itself as a new learning experience.

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

I am passionate about the interaction of people with the environment. I enjoy travel, visiting new places and experiencing different cultures; these are central to the study of geography. I think geography is a challenging subject which includes a broad range of topics and it equips you with a broad range of skills including team work and presentation skills, as well as written and numerical ability. There are lots of career options open with studying geography - I went in to the financial services industry initially and I am now working in the surveying/property industry.