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# Sophie Leigh

## Climate Change Consultant

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**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Climate Change Consultant

**Organisation:** ERM

**Location:** Manchester, UK

### How did you get to where you are now?

I chose to study A Level geography, geology and psychology (and AS maths) at college and really enjoyed the interactions between people and the environment. I decided to continue my passions at Durham University with a BA in Geography, selecting modules concentrating on topics such as governance, urban geographies and climate change perspectives to combine human behaviour with natural phenomena. I thoroughly enjoyed my three years at Durham; I got to travel to some amazing places such as Cape Town in South Africa, and focused a range of topics including renewable energy technologies, natural disasters and sustainable futures.

Following on from my undergraduate degree, I decided to attend Lancaster University on the MSc Environmental Management course to upskill myself in the climate change/energy sector and refine my knowledge in the field. This Master's degree facilitated my application to Environmental Resources Management (ERM) for an

environmental consultant position, focusing on energy transitions, environmental auditing and controversial energy sources.

### What do you do as part of your role?

In my day-to-day life as a consultant I work on a variety of projects within three main sectors: environment, health and safety, and climate change. More specifically, I work on energy projects revolving around legal compliance and reporting, such as the climate reduction commitment (CRC), Energy Saving Opportunities Scheme (ESOS) and Greenhouse Gas reporting. This involves data analysis, team collaboration and client liaison to reach deadlines and accurately report on climate change future scenarios.

I project manage and conduct a variety of global audit programs which involves confirming logistics, communicating with clients and managing budgets for the projects. I also conduct audits throughout the year in the manufacturing and technology, media and telecom (TMT) sector allowing me to explore behind the scenes of production lines and high-tech companies. These audits are conducted across the world, meaning I get the opportunity to work with colleagues in a plethora of different countries.

I also work on more niche projects identifying the main environmental, health, safety and community risks within establishments to deliver innovative solutions to complex issues. Other examples of work include: environmental permitting, legal compliance registers and Task Force on Climate Change work.

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

The world of consultancy is a very fast-paced environment with many consultants working on the same projects. No one can be an expert in

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every field and so relying on colleagues for their expertise is a key part of consultancy. This cannot be done without effective communication, delegation and time management.

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

The work consultants do saves the lives of both people and animals, helps to prevent contamination of the natural world and creates innovative solutions to adapt to the ever changing planet. This would not be possible without key geographical skills which teach you to incorporate many different scenarios and disciplines into one solution. Governance, environmental processes, financial implications and community engagement are all fundamental aspects of geographical knowledge and are vital in many consultancy projects.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The most enjoyable aspect of my job must be both the people that I work with and the wide variety of opportunities available to me. Before becoming a consultant at ERM I never thought I would be able to work on such a wide variety of projects within the same job and follow both my passions for auditing and climate change.

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

At ERM there are many avenues to progress down. You can specialise in a certain subject, maintain a general outlook or focus on project management. In five years' time I hope to be well into my career as a level two consultant at ERM, maintaining focus on auditing and climate change projects with more responsibility.

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

Take the time to work out which area you would like to work in. There are so many sectors in consultancy that you won't have even dreamed of so don't rule them out to focus on one particular aspect. Make the most of every opportunity that you can and widen your knowledge base as much as possible in the first

few years, the more you know the more opportunities you will have further down the line.

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

To maintain my geographical knowledge whilst working as a consultant I communicate with my colleagues as they are all experts in their field so what better source of information can you get!? People are happy to talk about their interests so I suggest asking what your colleagues are working on whenever you have the opportunity. This will keep your knowledge up to date and also provide opportunities for future work. I also travel as much as I can to see natural geographical wonders for myself.

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

I chose geography as an option due to its multidisciplinary nature, meaning that it can incorporate all of my passions within one subject. The subject allows you to design your education/ career around your interests and also facilitates travel to some amazing sites all around the world.