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Zoe Collins

Sustainability Data Manager

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Sustainability Data Manager

Organisation: Fresca Group

Location: Kent, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I have a first-class honours degree in geography from Royal Holloway, University of London and a Masters with distinction in Environment, Development and Policy from the University of Sussex. Throughout these qualifications I researched the environmental and developmental challenges surrounding sustainability, with a focus on labour justice, corporate accountability and ethical business.

Following graduation, I spent just under a year interning with a range of different organisations, including Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), an anti-trafficking charity; Children in Crisis, an education NGO; and Social Enterprise UK, the national body for businesses with a social or environmental mission. All of these roles were research based and explored areas ranging from the social and creative city economy of the future, to women workers abuse in feminised labour sectors and sustainable livelihoods for mothers of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

W: www.rgs.org/geographyprofessionals

Although interesting and fulfilling, these experiences enabled me to realise that I did not want to work as a researcher in the charity sector but rather in a corporate role with a research element and, more importantly, a supply chain I could directly influence to increase transparency and accountability. As such, I took a corporate responsibility internship with RELX, a FTSE 100 company that operates in the business and information analytics sector. This led to an opportunity to provide maternity cover for Project Manager during the annual reporting season, and the exposure and responsibilities I gained provided the stepping stone to my current role as the Sustainability Data Manager for Fresca.

What do you do as part of your role?

My role is to make the company more sustainable by ensuring environmental and human rights considerations are integral to how we do business. Primarily, this involves making our ethical systems more robust and mapping how climate change will affect our supply chain in order to enhance food security and producer resiliency. I'm also researching plastic-free packaging alternatives, reducing our site's carbon footprint, helping to develop our diversity and inclusion strategy and updating our pesticide approval lists based on changes in regulation and new research outputs.

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

I work with large datasets and so accuracy and analytical skills are very important. Strong communication is also key, as I often have to explain complex ideas to audiences with little existing awareness. In these situations, I have to ensure that my arguments are well evidenced so that the magnitude of what I am saying is understood, particularly in regard to climate

change and human rights issues. Most importantly though you need a passion for sustainability and a determination to find the answers and change things for the better.

their place within it, geography is the perfect subject.

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

Being a geographer makes me incredibly inquisitive and means that I rarely accept things at face value. This is crucial for my work as I have to be able to interrogate the complexities of our global supply chain in order to identify social and environmental risks to the business and develop mitigation strategies to increase our resiliency. Without a degree in geography, I simply would not have the global awareness required to be successful in my role.

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

During one of my early internships, a colleague told me that to get a job in sustainability, it was important 'to fake it till you make it'. What she meant was that I needed to embrace every opportunity that came my way, no matter how challenging it initially appeared, and that if I didn't know how to do something, I should either teach myself or find someone who could show me. Effectively, don't turn down an opportunity just because you don't meet all the criteria, or you feel you aren't experienced enough. This sector is difficult to crack and it's crucial to be passionate and ambitious but also resilient. Step out of your comfort zone, put your ideas forward and have faith in your abilities – when you finally get your foot in the door, and people realise your value, opportunities will come your way.

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

I've had a long-standing interest in where things come from and how we can consume more responsibly. This, combined with my passion for environmental justice, feminism and development issues, made geography an obvious choice. As both a social and natural science, geography has significant breadth and scope which fosters real engagement and intrigue. For anyone who wants to further their understanding of the world and