



Employer Profiles – Vicky Belton



Name: Vicky Belton (was Vicky Ainsworth)

Employer: WSP UK Limited

Job Title: Civil Engineer

What is the story of your career to date?

When I left school after sixth form, having taken A levels in Maths, Physics, Chemistry, General Studies and an AS level in Biology, I studied Civil Engineering at the University of Salford. I decided to do a four year “thick sandwich” course (which meant that I worked in industry for the third year) and graduated with a BEng Honours degree in 1994.

My first job was at W A Fairhurst and Partners in Newcastle where I worked for three years as a Graduate Engineer, generally on former colliery reclamation schemes. A lot of this work was undertaking initial feasibility work and I didn’t really get involved in building anything.

I decided to leave Fairhurst and took a position of Assistant Engineer at Carl Bro Group in Leeds in 1997. I started off doing similar schemes i.e. colliery reclamation, but these schemes went through to the actual construction. I worked with a team to design the reclamation scheme, then draw up the proposals and supervise the works on site. Design work included designing the final ground contours, the road and drainage, organizing for utilities (like electric and gas) to be included in the road pavement, sorting out planning applications and working closely with the local council.

In the latter part of my career I swapped to the Highways team and worked on projects for Highways England. Some schemes were motorway widening schemes, some were called “Smart Motorways” and others were junction improvements to remove congestion or improve safety.

I was at the same company from 1997 until last year (2017) when I joined the Highways team at WSP, also in Leeds. WSP is a global engineering consultancy with over 39,000 staff. I’m now the Project Manager for a scheme for Leeds City Council, helping to redevelop a whole area to the south of Leeds and making it HS2 ready.

Since I joined WSP, they’ve asked me to be the team leader for the whole of the highways team in one of the Leeds offices so now I spend quite a bit of time mentoring the staff.

What does a typical day look like for you?

In engineering, there is no such thing as a typical day, which is why I like it so much. Some days I may be doing design work, sometimes I may have to go on site to do surveys, sometimes I might be in meetings with the client or other key people involved in the project



and sometimes I might be having to review financial information to confirm how the project is performing.

Since taking on a more senior role, I now have a more management and leadership type of role to ensure that members of my team are motivated and know what they are supposed to be doing.

What skills do you think are important in your role?

I think problem solving is a crucial element of being an engineer and also the ability to think about practical solutions. In addition, the ability to communicate effectively with different people.

One of the wonderful things about a career in engineering is that we work as part of a team and that team can benefit from people with different character traits. Some people are better at management and leadership, whereas others are totally focused on doing calculations. I think a career in engineering can accept both.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to do your job?

Once you've started at university, if you can get summer jobs with either an engineering consultancy (that designs things) or a contractor (that builds them) then this is most beneficial. It means that you can put what you've learnt to practical use early on in your career and it makes you understand things better.

Once I started at Fairhurst and Partners, I joined their graduate training scheme to gain my professional qualification. It takes quite a long time but I did pass my Professional Review with the Institution of Civil Engineers so now I can call myself a Chartered Civil Engineer and put letters after my name. I would encourage all engineers to try to gain this professional qualification.

From a personal perspective, I would also encourage students to actually do their homework and revise properly. I wasn't very good at doing this whilst I was at school so my grades weren't as good as they could have been!

Does your employer offer volunteering/apprenticeship opportunities?

Yes. I actually have a young lady in my team who is an apprentice and she is doing extremely well.

What is the best thing about your job?

A career in Civil Engineering is one of the most rewarding careers I can think of. It basically shapes the world around us and our communities wouldn't be what they are without civil engineers. We design and build things, such as landmark buildings, bridges, roads and railways, to other things that may be not be quite so obvious like clean water supply networks and sewerage systems.

Where can I find out more?

The Institution of Civil Engineers, founded in 1818, is the place to go for information. The main website is <https://www.ice.org.uk/>. The section "What is Civil Engineering" has further information and guidance for students on what to study and how you can build your career.