

Impact Assessment Outlook Journal  
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# Careers and Skills in Impact Assessment

Thought pieces from UK practice



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# Careers and Skills in Impact Assessment

Welcome to this edition of the Outlook Journal, which provides an insight into some of the skills required by environmental practitioners in 2021 and how these can influence career paths. The articles included in this edition reflect on the experiences of those entering the profession, the skills sought by those responsible for recruitment and the experiences of those working in a rapidly evolving industry, including consultation and digital skills.

In his article, **Richard Shortridge** discusses his experiences of identifying suitable candidates during the recruitment process. He explains that excellent technical skills provide a strong starting point. However, Richard and his colleagues also look for attributes such as willingness, appetite and enthusiasm. In a competitive industry, I agree that it is attributes such as enthusiasm and a willingness to learn that can set a candidate apart. The ability to work well as part of a team, to listen to and understand client requirements and communicate findings of work undertaken is critical to developing further in your career.

**Beccy Wilson** and **James Banks** provide insight into the early years of their careers. Beccy, a graduate at Arup, reviews the skills needed to enter the industry and ways in which graduates can stand out from the crowd. James, a consultant at Turley, reflects on his

experiences in the early stages of his career since entering environmental consultancy as a graduate.

**Jenny Wade** considers diversity within the environmental profession. Her article looks at the potential barriers to diversity and inclusion within our profession and the unconscious biases we can hold when engaging with others, including when recruiting.

**Ryan Maidment** provides an overview of learning styles and how each style affects the way in which you learn – something worth considering, both as individuals and as line managers or mentors.

In addition to technical knowledge and soft skills, there is an increasing need for digital skills as part of the role of an environmental practitioner. The development

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of digital project management skills and of digital documents and outputs has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with rapid adoption of techniques such as virtual consultation across many sectors. This is considered by **Matthew Snape** in his article on the rapid evolution of digital skills across the industry.

In addition to digital skills, many environmental practitioners require consultation and engagement skills in order to provide effective engagement with stakeholders and the public on behalf of clients. This is frequently a core part of a practitioner's role and **Ros Boalch** identifies this as a key skill for an environmental professional.

In their article, **Julia Faure Walker** and **Niall McCarthy** review the benefits of mentoring and the reasons why we should encourage this. With reference to Professor Dumbledore and Steven Spielberg, it's clear that this is an area where environmental practitioners can learn from other professions (and legendary wizards).



## Getting on to the environmental ladder: how to be the most valuable candidate

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Obtaining a first role in a chosen career path is a challenge. Candidates must develop skills in advance, build a personal network and make it through often multiple interviews. Successful new starters must stand out from the crowd, and there are several key attributes they must demonstrate to catch the eye of environmental employers. When hiring junior team members within the environmental disciplines, it's a question of aptitude and attitude.

### Look beyond your discipline

When talking to environmental professionals for this article, it was notable that not one person mentioned discipline knowledge, but all identified that the ideal candidate must have something more. That isn't to say that discipline knowledge is not important; it's still critical for all candidates to build up knowledge through academia, early career roles and outside interest, whether that's a grounding in spatial analysis or species identification. However, hiring managers also know that university curriculums and relevant roles elsewhere will never provide an exact match to the knowledge required in the role they're hiring for. They know that, given basic knowledge, a successful candidate can go on to quickly pick up new sector skills through on-the-job learning and specific discipline training courses. For example, a Geographic Information System (GIS) graduate in Atkins would often start on a large

infrastructure project where they could develop their skills, and would also attend formal GIS software training.

Therefore, discipline-specific skills cannot always be relied on to make you stand out from the crowd at interview. However, candidates can shine when they demonstrate technical skills that go beyond the area they're interviewing for. One such area applicable across all of the environmental disciplines is a knowledge of data, and the digital processes that go with it.

Environmental professionals, particularly those who work in the infrastructure sector, are increasingly implementing digital optimisation. A digital process might be as simple as a calculation in Excel, or involve complex analysis using a tool such as Python scripting. For any candidate looking to enter the profession, showing that you can be innovative and have ideas for how to change current ways of working is a great asset. To complement this digital innovative development, staff coming into our industry need a higher level of data skills. At the very least they need to be proficient in the use of Excel, and some experience of GIS would help hugely, as a large volume of data used in environmental assessment has a geographic element so an understanding of GIS would help inform what analysis could be done to get you to your answer more quickly. Data and digital is bringing disciplines ever closer together, so having the skills to continue building these data bridges is of real value.

### Soft skills - it's as much attitude as aptitude

When asked, Atkins junior staff highlighted the soft skills which their interviewers had picked up on, proving their potential as candidates. These soft traits will vary between individuals, but for apprentices, graduates and those in the first years of their career, here are some ideas of what hiring managers are looking for alongside a technical grounding.

The most highlighted attribute was a willingness, appetite and enthusiasm to learn. In early careers this is paramount, as you will learn exponentially in a very short space of time. However, possessing an enduring curiosity to learn will also help throughout your career. In our rapidly changing world, it's critical that all environmental professionals continue to develop, to achieve the innovations that will help meet the challenges we face.

A quote often used by Geoff Waite our Geospatial Business Manager is *"When hiring young professionals, we have not selected them for their current technical skills, we hire them for their potential."*

Collaboration is also key in meeting challenges head-on. Environmental teams are diverse in terms of background, experience, skills and the projects they work on. New joiners are expected to possess and exhibit skills which can demonstrate their ability to fit into and complement our teams. This diversity will provide an environment which fosters career development through joint inspiration, while also contributing towards organisation goals and sector achievements.

Thirdly, in our industry there is a big requirement to multi-task, being flexible and adaptable. Environmental professionals work on projects of a hugely variable size, where tasks can last several hours to several months or even years. Time management is an important skill, as well as an understanding of priorities. Interviewers need to know that the candidate they choose isn't afraid to ask a senior colleague about which tasks should be done first or flag a problem. This is the dual challenge of responsibility: new staff need to take on responsibility for the tasks they carry out, fully completing and finishing them; however, if a task falls outside their knowledge or skillset, their responsibility is instead to demonstrate judgement and inform their supervising colleagues that they need help. Struggling with a task that you can't successfully complete is a failure of responsibility, asking for help instead is an opportunity to learn. Confident communication can get new starters through their tough first few months with ease and is a skill for life.

### Recognise the value you offer

Given the attributes described in this article the challenge for the environmental industry is to develop application forms and interviews which allow candidates to truly reflect what they will bring to the workplace. And successful candidates must seize the opportunity these platforms offer to demonstrate these attributes when writing applications and CVs, as well as during interviews. They need to show that they are proactive and, with time, have the ability to flourish and make a place for themselves in the bigger picture of our industry.



## Experiences: a graduate's perspective on entering the world of Impact Assessment

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Careers in the environmental and sustainability sector are diverse and far reaching, with few set requirements dictating who may enter and succeed in the field. There is no singular or set path and, therefore, no prescribed course that can teach a person all they need to know to be a proficient impact assessment practitioner. Since I joined Arup - as a Graduate Environmental Consultant - 18 months ago, I have been fortunate to work with many highly talented and capable people who each have followed their own path to get to where they are now, each drawing on unique past experiences that feed into their knowledge and skills set. Impact assessment practitioners are in the relatively unique position that the skills needed to be successful span a range of various categories from technical policy and planning regulation knowledge to project management skills, along with a comprehensive range of communication skills.

My own path to becoming an environmental consultant was conventional. I studied Environmental Geography BSc followed by Environmental Management MSc at the University of Stirling. Both programmes covered practical environmental assessment, management and conservation elements, with a large emphasis placed on gaining experience that would translate into the working world. These degrees gave me the building blocks I needed, providing an opportunity to explore environmental issues and solutions deeply through research and discussion, as well as supporting my development with systems and methods for assessing and analysing data. The invaluable experienced I

gained through my degree was enhanced through a large amount of volunteering with environmental groups, taking the position of president of a large university sports team, and directing both of my dissertations to incorporate industry partnership. I believe it was these additional experiences that gave me the rounded learning necessary to transition from university straight into a consultancy career.

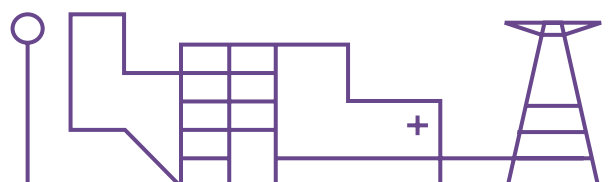
Appreciating the impact that mentoring has had on my own professional development, I am keen to contribute to the development of those coming into the profession. It is not a quick or easy feat to teach (or learn) core skills such as effective communication and relationship building, analytical and critical thinking, plus a broad knowledge of impact assessment regulations such as all of the technical chapters that support impact assessment reports. I believe that we must encourage people to learn across the disciplines, so that they develop a holistic understanding of the broad field of impact assessment. I have been proud to call myself a 'generalist' so far in my learning and career, but it is not always a term perceived in a positive light. Specialisms and deep expertise can be held in higher regard, and some may view an impact assessment practitioner as simply a project manager. However, this is not the case. Having a broad understanding across many environmental topics and disciplines as well as the technical knowledge of an impact assessment practitioner is a highly skilled position to be in.

This can be a daunting prospect to people who seek to enter the field: how do you secure the experience and knowledge that leads to being a successful impact assessment practitioner? In my experience, it is not something that can be taught exclusively through traditional education. There needs to be greater engagement between higher education facilities and industry, to facilitate the learning opportunities that support soft skill development and exposure to the many components that feed into impact assessments. Some career-oriented courses such as accountancy or architecture use the 'sandwich course' structure, to incorporate a year or semester in industry but this seems to be a missing component from environmental management and assessment courses in the UK.

Prescribed work experience and industry partnership should become more commonplace within higher education, but this must be approached with caution to avoid those with connections and social advantages getting placement opportunities over their peers. IEMA could facilitate such connections between higher education institutes and IEMA corporate partners, developing more cohesive teaching and learning. This would have the added benefit of tailoring higher education programmes more closely to the skills most desirable for the environmental and sustainability sector. For example, as digital impact assessments are brought towards the forefront of thinking, skills associated with these will need to be embedded into programmes that produce the next generation of impact assessment professionals.

In addition, I personally feel that holistic learning and a 'generalist' approach to learning and ongoing development should be encouraged. People should not feel pressurised into selecting a specialism, especially in the first few years of their career progression. The more we learn about the work our colleagues do across the field, the stronger our collaborative working will be, to the benefit of all involved. I plan to continue this path, gaining further insights and learning from those more experienced around me as I develop in my career.

*"Having a broad understanding across many environmental topics and disciplines as well as technical knowledge of an impact assessment practitioner is a highly skilled position to be in."*



# Career paths: from graduate to EIA Coordinator – 2 years on...

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Previously I provided a personal insight into the transition from a graduate in Environmental Science (BSc with Hons) and Environmental Consultancy (MSc) to an EIA specialist within the built environment sector. I have now been given the opportunity to reflect on this again and provide further thoughts on my experiences (as an EIA consultant of 3 years) and what it is like and the skills necessary to progress successfully into a career in EIA.

My first observation of the transition from a recent graduate into the industry was in relation to the skill set required. The initial perception of most outside of the EIA industry (or those new to the industry) is that EIA is limited to the regulations that underpin it<sup>1</sup> and very little else. With the role surmounting to the coordination of technical documentation, however, this is a simplistic view of it.

I will admit that having strong coordination and project management skills is vital to being a successful EIA specialist, especially given the sheer number of technical disciplines that are often needed to feed into the EIA process for most projects, which also requires strong communication skills. However, there is also the requirement to have a broad understanding of each of the technical disciplines that do feed into the EIA process<sup>2</sup>. This is not to say that as an EIA specialist you need to have studied or have practical experience in all of the technical disciplines you might come across on a

project, more that you need to understand the processes and approach to assessment that each technical discipline requires. This is because EIA is no longer a reactionary industry, where EIA is undertaken as a step or tick box exercise required through legislation, but rather EIA is a tool that is used to help shape and deliver quality development within the urban environment. As such, it is a process undertaken in line with the design development of projects, where technical investigation works identify effects/impacts and measures required to mitigate effects where possible. The role of the EIA specialist then takes on an advisory role for clients, to ensure the project delivers their requirements as well as the requirement of the EIA regulations and other consenting regimes that may be relevant for the specific project (i.e. HRA). This 'advisory' role also brings into play commercial skills (i.e. budgeting, programming etc.) that are also necessary, not only for projects but for a successful business.

The one key thing that I have learnt over the last few years is that my education was never going to prepare me fully for my role as an EIA specialist, rather that there was still a learning curve early in my career. My educational background was a more diverse learning experience, learning about multiple sectors and specialisms in the environmental consulting world. However, not all those in my team followed a similar pattern, some specialised in EIA (primarily at masters level), with others coming from

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<sup>1</sup> Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended).

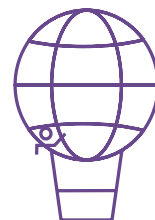
<sup>2</sup> Including but not limited to: Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Noise and Vibration, Air Quality, Daylight, Sunlight & Overshadowing, Flood Risk and Water Resources, Wind Microclimate, Agricultural Land, Built Heritage, Archaeology, Biodiversity, Transport and Access, Ground Conditions and Contamination, Artificial Lighting, Climate Change, Socio-Economics and Human Health, Waste, and Major Accidents and Disasters



more diverse programmes (i.e. environmental science/ geography) like myself. Nonetheless, all members of the team bring their specific attributes and skills. Those with a broader knowledge base are more understanding of the various technical disciplines, whilst those specialists in EIA have a strong technical knowledge of the regulations, process and legal requirements of EIA. The key thing here though is that one is not better than the other and each can support the other in their roles and advancing their knowledge. I believe that educators should look to incorporate more of each element into degrees/ courses/modules to ensure that those graduating start their careers from a more rounded and informed base.

For those who are nearing the end of their education, or in fact recently graduated, this is not to say that their degrees will not be adequate to support their transition into the EIA workplace/industry. Rather I would say it is best to identify where your strengths are already (based on degree) and understand that there are areas/ skills that you will need to work on and to be honest about this with any potential employer. If you are able to gain experience of knowledge in some of your weaker skills (i.e. short courses, seminars etc.) then by all means peruse these and make it clear that you have taken those extra steps to obtain these skills. But it is well understood in the industry that graduates will indeed start a role with a 'base' knowledge from which to develop. Therefore, being malleable and open to the education that you will receive whilst working on the job will set most up for success as an EIA specialist.

*"...it is best to identify where your strengths are already (based on degree) and understand that there are areas/skills that they will need to work on and to be honest about this with any potential employer."*



## Diversity & inclusion in Impact Assessment

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In 2017, the think tank Policy Exchange published a research note that measured the extent of ethnic diversity across occupations in England and Wales using data from the 2015 Labour Force Survey<sup>1</sup>. The research made for a sobering analysis of our profession by finding that 'environment professionals' comprised the second least ethnically diverse category of professional occupations included in the analysis, with only 3.1% reporting as minorities, of whom only 0.6% described themselves as non-white minorities. This compares to 19.9% of the workforce of all occupations reporting as minorities and 12.1% as non-white minorities.

Of course, the category of environmental professionals is broad and covers more than our Impact Assessment (IA) subset of the profession. Nevertheless, the findings highlight the need for a serious evaluation of diversity and inclusion in our workplaces, and how we attract and retain people from more diverse backgrounds into our profession.

Why does it matter? Well, let's first consider why we are in the IA profession in the first place. If, like me, you were drawn to this career because you care about environmental protection and the health of our communities, then you will realise that much of our work is about problem solving. How do we support our society's current needs without compromising the needs of future generations? Is there an alternative route for

that road or pipeline which reduces the damage to the environment? How can we increase the biodiversity value of that site? How can we enhance the quality of that built environment? Problem solving requires creativity. And creativity requires different ways of looking at problems. In other words, we need diversity of thought if we are to tackle the environmental issues that we face.

Ethnicity is just one aspect of diversity. Differences of gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, regional background, social status, disability, experience and culture all result in different perspectives and different ways of working. The more diverse we can make our profession, the more likely we are to be able to provide our communities with innovative and effective solutions.

So what are the barriers to diversity and inclusion in our profession? In response to the Policy Exchange findings, the NUS, IEMA and the Equality Trust formed a partnership to look more deeply into the issues. Among the findings<sup>2</sup> was that 9% of UK students studying higher education subjects relevant to the environment sector identified as non-white minorities compared to 22% of UK students as a whole. This indicates that more work needs to be done to attract people of more diverse backgrounds to study relevant courses. With fewer ethnic minorities studying for relevant academic qualifications, it follows there will be fewer applicants from these backgrounds for environmental positions.

<sup>1</sup> Norrie R, March 2017, The Two Sides of Diversity: Which are the most ethnically diverse occupations? Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-two-sides-of-diversity/>

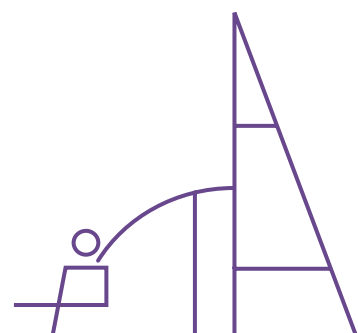
<sup>2</sup> NUS, The Equality Trust, IEMA, December 2018, Race, inclusivity and environmental sustainability. A scoping study. Available at: <https://www.sos-uk.org/research/our-research-reports-race-inclusivity-and-environmental-sustainability>

Another issue that we must be aware of is unconscious bias – our underlying attitudes and stereotypes which we unconsciously attribute to various social and identity groups, and how this affects how we engage with those people. However, it is not enough to be aware that we hold biases, we need to consciously include people with different perspectives from our own in the work, decisions, opportunities and conversations that we have. We need to translate awareness into positive action. For some of us, this may involve challenging deep-set ways of working we have adopted for a long time.

When I was first in a position to recruit new staff, I asked a more senior member of staff his advice on what to look for. His advice was that ultimately you need to look for someone who will fit in with your team. I am fairly sure that this is widespread, well-intentioned advice. But surely if we recruit on this basis, we are at risk of a team all looking and thinking the same? Ever since then I have actively sought different types of personality for my team. From the gregarious and motivational, to the studious and analytical, we must each respect the different strengths and abilities we bring to our work.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace are essential if we are to have creative and innovative solutions to the problems we face. But being aware of issues of diversity and inclusion is not enough. We must consciously embrace diversity and inclusion if our IA profession is to be truly representative of the society and communities we are trying to reflect and support.

*"..it is not enough to be aware that we hold biases, we need to consciously include people with different perspectives from our own in the work, decisions, opportunities and conversations that we have. We need to translate awareness into positive action..."*



# Professional development: what's your style?

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The endeavour to learn and develop new or existing skills in the workplace is one which varies depending on the individual and the business or sector they work in. It is fair to say that no two individuals will learn and develop exactly the same skills and understanding, even if they are exposed to the same training and environment. Each human is unique and their capacity to learn equally unique. Recognising that people have different learning styles, it is clear that diverse and flexible frameworks for learning and development play an important role in building knowledge and expertise within a given area. This article looks to recognise and understand different learning styles and frameworks, their use to individuals and how they are applied in the field of environment and sustainability.

## What do we mean by learning styles?

Many researchers have theorised 'learning styles', which aim to interpret differences in how individuals learn. The more popularised theories develop models that aim to group learning styles into discrete categories, such as the Honey and Mumford Model developed in 1986. The Honey and Mumford model has four learning styles with unique characteristics to differentiate between them (The Activist, The Reflector, The Theorist and The Pragmatist). Similar theories use different names, such as The Artist or Philosopher, however, ultimately they use similar definitions. An assessment is used, via a questionnaire, to categorise individuals into these four groups, which help

participants to recognise their preferred learning style. The characteristics of the four learning styles are as follows:

**The Activist:** An Activist learns through activity-based training courses in a hands-on style. Activists often tackle problems by trial and error through brainstorming and move from one activity to the next very quickly.

**The Reflector:** A Reflector likes to work closely with those more experienced in a given area of expertise and learns through observation and discussing reflections with others to confirm learning outcomes. Reflectors learn from books, articles and case studies and like to be clearly briefed before proceeding.

**The Theorist:** A Theorist values clarity and theory-based courses with well-qualified and experienced trainers, they integrate observations into complex but logical theories. Theorists tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme.

**The Pragmatist:** A Pragmatist looks for succinct and quickly available learning materials, such as practical books and open and flexible learning. Pragmatists are attracted to working on real-life projects, they like an expert to demonstrate and appreciate feedback or coaching on the job.

Understanding the differences between the categories and identifying one's own learning style is important in order to get the most out of learning and development

opportunities. For example, a Pragmatist will often be more attracted to self-directed online learning methods, that include real-life project examples, as opposed to lectures or workshops that are more aligned with the attributes of a Reflector or Theorist. Sources of available learning and development therefore play a key role in the development of individuals within the environment and sustainability industry, and having a range of sources/ methods tailored to each learning style is of great benefit.

A good example of providing multiple sources of learning material is IEMA's approach to information provision on Major Accidents and Disasters in EIA. As a new EIA topic introduced by the 2014/52/EU Directive (EIA Directive) many professionals sought to understand what this meant for their assessments and projects. IEMA's approach to developing multiple sources of available training and self-directed learning included: an initial webinar in 2017 planned in-line with the regulations coming into effect; a comprehensive primer launched in 2020; and a paired launch webinar for the primer with project examples delivered by topic experts. The delivery of the three training/learning resources noted for Major Accidents and Disasters vary, which ensures the information is available and useful to individuals with different learning styles.

### Learning models

Taking into account the broad range of specialisms within the environment and sustainability industry, paired with the theory of learning styles, it is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all learning pathway. With this in mind, many consultancy firms use models or frameworks to provide a structure to learning and ensure professionals continue to develop. A popular approach is the 70:20:10 model that explains how learning occurs at work. It represents a ratio of learning from experience (70%), learning from others (20%) and learning in a formal setting (10%). The model is used to recognise learning occurs in all aspects of work and not just the formal courses

recorded as Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The model is flexible and accommodates all learning styles, which often makes it the model of choice for firms with a variety of specialisms and diverse skill sets. Many large consultancies host internal training that aligns with the 70:20:10 model using their own online training platforms, such as 'universities' or 'academies' that offer structure for personalised learning journeys.

The application of learning styles and models help to provide an idea of how one should approach learning, they are useful reminders to consider our own CPD and support course developers in facilitating intellectual diversity.

*"Each human is unique and their capacity to learn equally unique. Recognising that people have different learning styles, it is clear that diverse and flexible frameworks for learning and development play an important role in building knowledge and expertise within a given area."*



## Skills: digital skills in environmental careers

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Once upon a time, an environmental practitioner needed technical expertise and, ideally, the ability to use a pen or computer (the latter not necessarily particularly well). Some, particularly landscape consultants, were also good at drawing masterplans or survey findings up by hand. At one time, the ability to use a photocopier to reproduce these hand drawn plans was an essential skill.

Since this time, digital skills have come increasingly to the fore. A graduate recruited today will typically have excellent skills across a range of software packages, including at least a basic understanding of GIS. Most larger consultancies have specialist digital teams that not only produce plans for documents such as Environmental Statements, but can also provide digital project management tools, interactive mapping and host project websites.

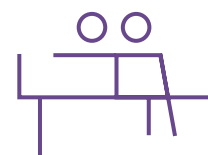
The development of digital project management skills and of digital documents and outputs has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced rapid adoption of techniques such as virtual consultation across many sectors. Social distancing measures have meant that face-to-face forums for public consultation became more complex, time consuming and costly. Virtual consultation events have kept projects moving during these challenging times. Even after restrictions are lifted, the use of virtual engagement tools can enable a more resilient approach to community and stakeholder

engagement, removing barriers related to time and location and allowing clients to connect and engage with a wider community who cannot attend in person.

At the same time, interest in the use of digital techniques throughout the EIA process has grown. The use of digital tools to streamline the EIA process, improve access to common data sets and improve presentation of information has many advantages to practitioners, stakeholders and the public. This approach can make the presentation of complex information easy and improve the ability of others to access and interpret it.

As the pandemic (hopefully) recedes, it is likely that some of the key advantages of improved accessibility and engagement associated with interactive digital products will continue to be adopted alongside more traditional techniques.

As a result of ongoing progress in digital delivery, environmental practitioners commonly hold strong digital as well as topic-based skills. In addition, there are increasing opportunities for digital specialists and graphic designers to work with environmental teams to produce digital products and enhance the accessibility and ease of use of documents, such as survey results and Environmental Statements.



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Matthew Snape, an Associate in the Digital and Design team, recalls his recent experience in recruiting new members to the team:

It was 10am on Monday morning and I was staring at a pile of CVs. What makes this task difficult is the dizzying array of different skills that this team currently needs. At a basic level we make maps, analyse data, design things, and visualise them. But this expands into a huge range of different software and specialist techniques. Graduate CVs often have a few of these skills and experienced people a few more.

Reviewing CVs is like playing bingo with different buzzwords. One CV has TwinMotion and AutoCad but no experience with ArcGIS Online. Another will have years of experience in R and Python but no experience with 3D visualisation. And each of these skills is a career path in its own right, with whole industries around them. We need people and careers where we can focus and develop deep expertise, but be agile enough to react to change.

Virtual consultation was that change in 2020. Our team has always produced posters for consultation events and undertaken an element of graphic design. In 2020, we transferred the whole consultation experience online. We built a platform for virtual rooms, deployed new websites, and dealt with dozens of new issues. It was not just a technical challenge but one of guiding clients through a new process.

But back to the CVs. What really stands out is an ability to learn new skills. Being able to take a new technology, learn it and make it useful to clients. I think that takes a different mindset to traditional EIA practice, and results in a different career profile. It could seem unfocused, and lacking direction. But that belies the soft skills that make innovation possible. As EIA practitioners we need to understand and develop those skills.

*"What really stands out is an ability to learn new skills. Being able to take a new technology, learn it and make it useful to clients."*



Julia Faure Walker

Associate Technical Director  
Environmental Planning

Arcadis Consulting (UK) Ltd

Niall McCarthy

Graduate Environmental Consultant

Arcadis Consulting (UK) Ltd



# Mentoring: what's all the fuss about?

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*"The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves."* Steven Spielberg

Granted, we are not all destined to be multi-Oscar winning film directors, but Spielberg's words are as applicable to us within the environmental sector as to emerging talent in Hollywood.

What unites us all, regardless of chosen professions, is our ability to inspire and be inspired by others, to feel empowered, learn from each other and apply that knowledge to help us grow as individuals personally and professionally. For this reason, mentoring differs to other forms of professional development such as training.

It comes as no surprise that countless successful individuals attribute their success, in part, to their mentor – Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and even Oprah Winfrey, to name a few.

Sir Richard Branson, whose mentor was the father of cheap holiday flights, Sir Freddie Laker, goes so far as to say *"if you ask any successful businessperson, they will always (say they) have had a great mentor at some point along the road. I wouldn't have got anywhere in the airline industry without the mentorship of Sir Freddie Laker. Now, I love mentoring young entrepreneurs."*

And what was the great Professor Dumbledore if not wizard and mentor supreme to his famous prodigy Harry Potter?

So how do we mere mortals get to enjoy this hallowed ground of mentoring? Within Arcadis and, no doubt, many of the businesses represented by IEMA members, there is a carefully considered mentorship programme available to employees who put their hand up for it.

If your organisation has a mentorship programme, engage with it – for one of the crucial components of mentoring is that the individual should proactively seek out the opportunity.

If your organisation does not have a mentoring programme in place yet, perhaps now is the time to raise the subject and the benefits while also taking the initiative yourself and seeking out a mentor. IEMA also offers their own mentoring programme specifically designed to support members in their preparation for Full and Fellow membership and/or Chartered Environmentalist applications. Further information can be found on IEMA's website: [iema.net/about-us/vacancies/mentoring](https://www.iema.net/about-us/vacancies/mentoring).

Having decided you want a mentor, what next? Mentoring can be vertical, where the mentor is more senior than mentee, or peer-to-peer, so horizontal. Your mentor can be career focused or centred on broader life skills, or you may even have a mentor for both.



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Alexis Haass, Arcadis' recently appointed Global Sustainability Officer, is a great advocate of mentoring relationships and shared her advice on vertical mentoring: *"Ideally your mentor should be somebody with at least five years more experience than you, or someone in a leadership position whose style and accomplishments are something that you admire."*

Depending on your objectives, mentoring doesn't always have to be from someone within your own discipline. In technical matters probably, but if you want to further your personal development in generic skills such as leadership, communication and problem solving, a mentor from a completely different background could be ideal.

You must be clear in what you want to get out of the mentoring relationship and the key topics on which to focus. Work with your mentor to set goals and decide how those goals will be achieved. Listening is vital, as is being receptive to constructive feedback and allowing time to reflect and adapt. Sharing this with your mentor from the outset will provide the basis for your relationship to develop and should be the first step in an exciting partnership.

Like all relationships, however, they take real effort to become a success. Give too little to the relationship and one side will feel hard done by. Demand too much and they could become overwhelmed. Honesty and good communication from the outset can help avoid hiccups along the way.

Haass revealed one of the keys to success *"is to find a way to make the mentorship relationship very easy for the mentor, being flexible about when and how works*

*for them, how much time they are willing to commit – even if that's only one 20 minute conversation – and for the mentee to show gratitude for any time spent. Lastly, what is really important is to reflect the advice back to them and show your growth and learning over time."*

This explains why so many people, as Sir Richard Branson said, offer their time as a mentor – watching their mentee blossom is a rewarding experience and will keep them engaged in continuing to help you. Other benefits to the mentor include time to reflect on their own knowledge and achievements to date, enhancements to their CV, and the refreshing opportunity to listen to new perspectives or learn about evolving ideas in the workplace or industry.

It is never too early to start. Arcadis offers early career support through mentorship to the University of Birmingham. Through an annual program, the students set their own targets and dictate how often they meet with their mentor; it is then up to the mentor to help guide their plan.

Niamh Murphy (Senior Consultant at Arcadis) is now helping her second mentee through this process. Whilst it may be difficult to manufacture a relationship in an assigned mentorship programme, these formal relationships can greatly help mentees gain insight into potential future roles and forge careers aspirations. They can also help develop the mentor's skills in interpersonal communication, as well as personal and professional confidence.

Natalie Duley-Moore (Principal Consultant at Arcadis) has been involved in various informal mentorship relationships and believe this style of mentorship provides the best



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basis to form a pool of colleagues that can be sought for advice on a variety of topics. Duley-Moore believes the best sign of a good mentor relationship is how comfortable you feel going to them with your problem.

The benefits to the mentee appear clear. You benefit from one-on-one guidance which, if nurtured appropriately, can help you realise the aspirations you already have – and reveal those as yet undiscovered. What about the benefits to your employer? Equally compelling – with often cited improved employee satisfaction and reduced staff turnover in businesses with active mentoring programmes. The results in performance in the workplace beg the simple question – ‘why wouldn’t you?!’

*"And what was the great Professor Dumbledore if not wizard and mentor supreme to his famous prodigy Harry Potter?"*



# Skills: Impact Assessment consultation skills

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Consultation, both in the formal statutory and non-statutory sense, and consultation amongst the planning, design and technical specialist team, is a key element of the impact assessment process and therefore a key skill for an environmental professional. As a collaborative exercise, consultation provides a forum for a wealth of knowledge, experience and views to be shared. Particular types of consultation skills are useful for the impact assessment professional to ensure consultation is effective. Each of these skills are discussed in turn, together with suggested ways of growing these skills.

- **Be aware of procedure and get the timings right.** Early engagement is a useful tool to obtain data and ensure guidance/policy is the most up to date. However, consulting too early could lead to frustration on the part of the consultee, increased consultation costs, and confusion over what a project is seeking to achieve later down the line if design details change significantly. As an impact assessment professional, the skill lies in obtaining useful information to inform design and mitigation early, while ensuring the design team are clear on the proposed project before seeking the advice of the statutory consultee. Consultation too late in the process may lead to abortive work if project design work is too advanced to be amended in response to consultation. The Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations set out a basic procedure

for consultation in respect of screening, scoping and in relation to the preparation of an Environmental Statement. For Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning projects, these requirements are more detailed, with greater emphasis on front-loaded consultation. Knowledge and understanding of these processes will inform and guide consultation timings. Increasingly, informal scoping requests are discussed with Local Planning Authorities, with meetings held to clarify and discuss certain issues to assist in ensuring the resultant scoping opinion minimises the need for further protracted discussions.

- **Know your audience.** Understanding the remit of statutory consultees, availability of resources and their overarching agenda is an essential skill for effective consultation. For example, the Environment Agency (EA) are responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea, but Lead Local Flood Authorities are responsible for managing the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. Shortage of resource means that tact is required when chasing responses and in building good relationships.

Although it is unlikely that the impact assessment practitioner would always lead public consultation, technical specialists are increasingly required to meet members of the general public. Ensuring

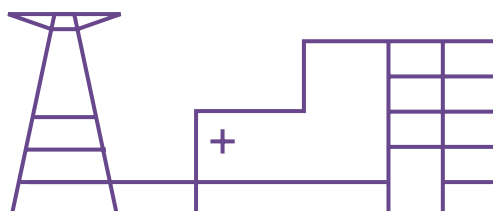
the right level of detail is provided is a key skill, balancing technical knowledge with local concerns, particularly if a new development is proposed close to homes. Listening and appreciating the views of the public is an essential skill required for gaining support and reassuring the public that a robust and compliant approach is being undertaken. However, it may also prove useful to identify additional data or mitigation suggestions that may not have previously been considered.

- **Keep abreast of updated guidance and policy.** Knowledge and understanding of emerging guidance and policy will assist impact assessment professionals in understanding where the guidance or view of a statutory consultee may be headed. Attendance at networking and briefing events, including online webinars, or reading IEMA publications and industry press are useful way of keeping up to date. These also provide a useful forum for non-project related queries and questions to be raised, or to share useful resources and to understand the individual and consultee organisations, useful in building relationships.
- **Be prepared.** Preparation of targeted presentation materials is essential to effective communication and, related to knowing your audience, the detail needs to be tailored to the particular consultee. Using a variety of presentation materials and methods of consultation will engage a variety of different individuals. Furthermore, whilst an individual

may be representing a specific organisation, they will have their own approach to consultation and views. Consultees do not have endless resources, so targeting consultation exercises is useful to ensure the key topics are discussed and decisions are made. Regular contact is beneficial, particularly following a meeting where individuals may have had the opportunity to think further on a matter and seek guidance from others.

- **Professional integrity.** The environment is often a very emotive theme. Therefore, maintaining professional integrity, upholding the IEMA code of professional conduct, and not over-promising is an essential skill. A positive attitude, keeping an open mind and bringing consultees along the journey of the project and seeking their inputs is a useful way to engage and gain project support and improvement.

Many of the skills described can only be achieved through exposure to consultation, and spending time building relationships. Whilst these skills are gained through time and experience, increasing opportunities to engage with consultees, particularly in an informal setting, will serve to advance these skills.



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# Do you make effective use of ALL of IEMA's IA member resources?

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IEMA's website contains a treasure trove of IA related content, as well as information about IEMA's volunteer network groups, blogs, webinars and policy. But not everyone makes the most of this free member content, including:

- Future events and webinars.
- Recordings of past webinars, with over 24 hours' worth of IA content.
- IA Guidance & advice: such as recent EIA guides on climate change adaptation and major accidents & disasters.
- The Proportionate EIA Strategy.
- Over 400 EIA articles and 200 case studies related to EIA, developed by Q Mark registrants in recent years.
- Individual and organisational recognition specific to EIA, through the EIA Register and EIA Quality Mark schemes respectively.
- Contact details to engage with the steering group members for the:
  - Impact Assessment Network.
  - GESA Group (Global Environmental & Social Assessment).
  - Geographic/Regional Groups.



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# Summary

## Amy Robinson - Guest Editor

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This volume of the Outlook Journal includes input from a range of professions, providing their insights into the potential careers for environmental practitioners and some of the skills that are useful in entering the profession, and in progressing careers within the industry.

What this does start to highlight is the enormous range of roles within our industry, from topic specialists, to project managers, to engagement professionals and digital teams. This offers those entering our industry a dizzying array of choices to suit their skills. In many cases, individual careers progress based on specific opportunities and experience gained on individual projects rather than by design.

Many graduates entering the industry are not fully yet aware of the range of roles available, or what they involve, and therefore can benefit from gaining exposure to many aspects of the profession to be able to make an informed decision about the direction they would like to take. At RPS we aim to offer this variety of experience within the first two years through the graduate scheme, which allows rotation to various offices and disciplines, providing a good basis for understanding the range of services a multi-disciplinary consultancy offers.

The range of services and careers within the environmental sector is constantly evolving, offering opportunities for all professionals to gain additional skills and expertise in order to meet new challenges, including digital EIA, net zero carbon and virtual consultation. This makes it an exciting time to work in the profession, as described by one of our graduate consultants Hugo Forster:

*"My career choices have been driven by a deep desire to shift the emphasis of development to one of sustainability. I genuinely believe we can create harmony and balance between our current lifestyles (albeit with some significant behavioural changes being necessary!) and the natural world. The clock is ticking on the urgent need to protect our environment from the adverse effects arising from anthropogenic activity, however it is not too late to change the way we continue to develop our built environment. It is my goal to be on the frontline for bringing about such change."*

Well, that seems to be a good reason to keep developing our skills to meet the challenge!



# Acknowledgements

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We also offer thanks to the editors and reviewers of this edition: Rufus Howard, Julia Ambrose and Charlotte Lodge (IEMA). We would like to thank the authors of the articles in this ninth edition of the Impact Assessment Outlook Journal:

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IEMA's EIA Quality Mark - a scheme operated by the Institute allowing organisations (both developers and consultancies) that lead the co-ordination of statutory EIAs in the UK to make a commitment to excellence in their EIA activities and have this commitment independently reviewed. The EIA Quality Mark is a voluntary scheme, with organisations free to choose whether they are ready to operate to its seven EIA Commitments: EIA Management; EIA Team Capabilities; EIA Regulatory Compliance; EIA Context & Influence; EIA Content; EIA Presentation; and Improving EIA practice. In April 2021, IEMA celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the EIA Quality Mark.

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Celebrating 10 years  
of the IEMA EIA  
Quality Mark



Year  
Anniversary

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## Careers and Skills in Impact Assessment

This ninth edition of the Impact Assessment Outlook Journal provides a series of thought pieces on the consideration of skills and careers in Impact Assessment. In this edition, the Guest Editor (Amy Robinson) has selected eight articles produced by IEMA professionals and EIA experts. The result is a valuable yet quick read across some of the different aspects of UK practice exploring careers and skills in Impact Assessment.

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### About the Guest Editor: Amy Robinson (BSc, MSc)

*Director at RPS*

Amy is responsible for the co-ordination of large multi-disciplinary EIA projects and the production of Environmental Statements. Amy provides advice on all stages of the EIA process, from screening and scoping through to Environmental Statement production, submission of application documents and work at Public Inquiries and coordination of Expert Witness input for major projects. Amy is responsible for the EIA team in the Oxford office, including development of digital EIA.





## About IEMA

IEMA is the professional body for everyone working in environment and sustainability. We're committed to supporting, encouraging and improving the confidence and performance, profile and recognition of all these professionals. We do this by providing resources and tools, research and knowledge sharing along with high quality formal training and qualifications to meet the real world needs of members from their first steps on the career ladder, right to the very top.

We believe that together we can change perceptions and attitudes about the relevance and vital importance of sustainability as a progressive force for good. Together we're transforming the world to sustainability.

[iema.net](http://iema.net)

