

There is a Lot to Play for: My Career in Energy Management



What inspired you to pursue a career in energy management?

Growing up, I always had an interest in the outdoors and became fascinated by environmental issues. I took this interest through college and into university where I studied Geography at Lancaster University and then took a Masters in Environmental Management. It was during my Masters that I started to really consider what I could do career wise, and I really wanted to find a job where I could use my knowledge and skills in a practical way.

Following university, I took my first role as an Energy Consultant which involved managing energy procurement arrangements for a wide range of clients from a variety of sectors. At the time, it was a huge learning curve, not only as it was my first real full time role, but also dealing with real life energy issues for clients was a bit of a shock to the system. Looking back though, the practical experience and industry knowledge has been invaluable throughout my career.

My next role moved into a wider sustainability focused role for a social housing provider. I supported the Asset and Environmental Manager in improving sustainability of the housing stock through capital projects, mainly focused on insulation but also through

initiatives aimed at tackling fuel poverty, whilst also driving performance against the Social Housing Index for Tomorrow (SHIFT) metric, a system aimed at improving sustainability within the sector.

My next role was in the manufacturing sector where I took on the role of Environmental Officer. The role focused heavily on legal compliance and my time in the role was short lived. On reflection, I think a big driver for the short time in the role was that it felt solely focused on compliance and the lack of variety in the role didn't really excite me!

I was lucky to be able to move on quickly into the NHS where I was appointed as Environmental Manager for my local NHS Trust responsible for delivering mental health services. The role was extremely varied and the scale of opportunities was significant. It also gave me my first chance of developing a sustainability strategy as well as delivering a suite of energy efficiency projects, including LED lighting, building management system upgrades and solar PV projects. As well as these large projects, I was also able to work with service users in developing biodiversity projects that contributed to positive mental health and recovery, which was incredibly rewarding.

I gained valuable experience in the role and I then moved into my current role as a Sustainability Manager for Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

What does your current role entail?

My role focuses on delivering the sustainability strategy for the organisation. The role is wide ranging and has developed beyond energy alone into other areas such as resource efficiency, environmental protection, supply chain sustainability and sustainability leadership. However, a key driver still remains, and that is the need to reduce the carbon footprint of the organisation, so a large part of my role focuses on energy management, delivering energy efficiency and carbon reduction projects.

What is the most exciting part of your job?

The role is so broad ranging and diverse that it never feels like any day is the same. The nature of sustainability means that engaging with people, be it colleagues, contractors or peers, is a key requisite and this is something that I really enjoy.

The organisation is also hugely supportive of sustainability which helps to keep me challenged and motivated in equal measures!

What is your biggest achievement to date?

I was really lucky and honoured to be asked to attend COP28 as part of a National Fire Chiefs Council delegation. A specific event was held focused on reducing emissions from fire, so I was able to network and collaborate with peers from across the world, where I learnt an incredible amount in a short space of time. We also managed to get some time at the Green Zone at COP28 which was fascinating. It is definitely something that I look back on with great pride.

What was the most exciting project that you worked on?

Although challenging at times, it was great to work on the first phase of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Grant funding hadn't come around for a long time, so to be able to acquire a large chunk of grant funding for widescale decarbonisation of the estate was exciting. The daunting part then came in trying to find appropriate supply chains and contractors who could deliver before the funding deadline, but I guess that is what made it exciting, if a little stressful! In total, my team managed to deliver two large solar PV systems and full LED retrofit at 18 fire stations, which was a phenomenal achievement given the time constraints and other challenges involved.

What is the most frustrating part of your job?

It can be frustrating working to long-term net zero targets as people can tend to think they are very distant, which can take the focus away from them. I find this frustrating at times as we require widescale, transformative change to achieve net zero, which will involve

a whole range of various actions along the way. The longer we leave this, the tougher this becomes!

If you had the opportunity to change one thing that would make your job easier, what would you change?

It often feels like a constant cycle of upskilling people and creating a base level of knowledge around key areas such as energy. If we could somehow create a standard level of knowledge for everybody, a lot of time would be saved and we would definitely be able to progress at greater speed!

If you could recommend three things to have success as an energy manager, what would you recommend?

Finding ways of embedding sustainability into existing activity



within an organisation can often have greater results than running standalone projects. I often find this approach leads to actions being embedded better too!

Understanding context and using this to develop a clear strategic approach is something I have found to be very useful. Sustainability is such a vast topic and not having a clear strategy as to how our organisation intends to tackle it would leave us facing a huge challenge with no clear idea as

to where we intend to put our resources.

It probably comes across a bit simple, but I always think having a curious mind and openness to talk with people is vital. Data can tell you one thing, but past data and performance information, understanding how processes work and how people work will open many doors. People will often open up about issues, challenges and even frustrations but by engaging with people, I often find a willingness to support rectifying issues and coming up with solutions that will have a long lasting effect.

What advice would you give to someone looking to become an energy manager?

The profession is always changing. We continue to learn more about why we need to reduce energy consumption and our carbon footprint, and technologies continue to advance to meet this challenge. It often feels like a constant evolution of the role and profession, so being open and willing to learn, sometimes from mistakes, is a key attribute that I have carried with me through my career.

What is the most absurd statement that you have heard in your job?

There are too many to mention throughout my career, but I often think they come from good places – there is a lot of misinformation and sustainability is complex!

What are your long-term motivations?

The overall goals within sustainability are huge so there is a lot to play for. My long-term motivation in my career is that I am playing a part alongside amazing and inspiring peers in making a difference for future generations.