



Entering into Energy

Having an aptitude for science and mathematics the career options are vast and wide from medicine to engineering, technology, design, and research. I had no idea in what direction to go. My experience at school was that career advisor rarely mentioned engineering as an option. The typical roles were suggested which included doctors, dentists, veterinary practitioners but never engineering – especially not for females. Thankfully the stigma of females considering engineering career routes has changed and with the efforts of engineering professionals volunteering to promote engineering, along with an increasing number of apprenticeships and entry programmes, career advisers now have engineering on their agenda.

I left school after A-levels to start my training as an apprentice for the local coal power station. This was a fantastic option for someone who did not want the burden of university fees, with the added benefit of an ‘earn while you learn’ scheme. The apprenticeship provided me with the academic training alongside hands on vocational skills required to become an electrical craftsperson. I went on to study my master’s degree via distance learning alongside work based development to become an electrical engineer. The latter does require a certain level of motivation to forfeit evenings and weekends for study. This is one route that has seen increased interest with the UK government promoting work based apprenticeship schemes. However, there are other pathways.

An alternative route into engineering is to continue with further education straight from school and complete an engineering degree. Whilst in university there is the option to take a gap year or a sandwich placement to try out the industry. This gives you the benefit of work place experience to assist with completing your degree and the opportunity to try out a particular sector of engineering. It will give you an idea of what jobs to look out for and something to talk about in any future interviews. Some employers supporting placements students may offer bursary’s to aid with tuition fees and sometimes commit to offering them post-graduation roles.

On completion of a degree, applications to a junior or assistant engineer role will get you straight into the workplace and hit the ground running. However, there are plenty of trainee or graduate training programmes available which will allow you to again ‘earn while you learn’ without the immediate responsibility of a fully-fledged engineer. There will be greater scope for a graduate trainee engineer to be given the time to get to know colleagues, understand how the business operates and get mentoring from senior colleagues without being thrown into the ‘thick of it’.

Technical functions may be the head of an engineering business however, the likes of health & safety, compliance, finance, procurement, solicitors, administration, human resources, and learning & development will be the strong neck of the business supporting and allowing it to move in any direction.

“Even if being an engineer is not for you but you are interested in the energy, engineering or technology industry there are still career options available. Any business cannot function without a significant support network.”

Additionally, to function effectively, the energy sector also relies on consultancies, private equity, government departments, independent regulators and much more. If you are currently at school, in further education, or even working in another sector there are Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) based volunteering opportunities which may be enough to give you a taste for engineering & energy.

Alternatively ask around for a work experience placements or discuss with other engineers at engineering events such as that provided by the IET. Regardless of the route you choose, I am certain that the final outcome will result in a career that is as diverse, challenging and rewarding as I have been fortunate to experience to date.

Nia Roderick, 28, Switchgear Engineer, RWE