

Charlotte Hatto- North Energy Associates

Building on a wide range of existing skills to move into a job in STEM

With a Physics degree and research experience from UMIST, I felt that I had much to offer potential employers, but had virtually given up hope of ever finding a job to suit my lifestyle and interests. Looking after children and living in a rural location had limited my career choices and left me feeling that I would never find employment that used my skills and fitted with my outlook on life.

Like many women, I found a succession of part-time administrative jobs to fit in with children, recognising that I needed to be in a position to 'fetch and carry'. Finding out what is out there when you live in a rural area is particularly difficult. When my children were young we ran a small-holding but with the children at school, I began to think about looking for work where I could use my background and skills.

I started teaching physics in a school in Durham and eventually decided to do a PGCE through the Open University. Although I taught Maths and Physics for some years I felt that full time teaching at secondary schools was not for me. I also completed an adult basic skills training programme and taught in the evenings and during school hours. However, insecure funding made this impossible as a viable long-term option.

Still searching for ways to use my Physics degree and interest in matters environmental, I found out about the free Open University T160 Returners course for women in SET and wondered if this would be a way of realising my goal.

I almost didn't go through with the course as the case studies in the information leaflets were all high flyers. I don't see myself as a high flyer, and they talked about childcare problems which were no longer an issue for me. However I undertook the course and through this came across the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET. I took advantage of various courses available through them including the Built Environment Returners course delivered by the Women in SET (WiSET) team at Sheffield Hallam University. This included a work placement which was really what I felt I needed. I was also at the time studying the OU course, Energy for a Sustainable Future to provide me with a recent academic qualification in my key interest area.

The WiSET team encouraged me to think 'outside the box' in terms of where my skills could lead and they arranged a work shadowing placement for me with [North Energy Associates](#) relatively near my home. I found my new colleagues incredibly welcoming and flexible. The company was very open to the idea of a placement, and their approach to recruitment and diversity made me feel really welcome and valued. During the few weeks I spent with the organisation I attended meetings and a one-day conference, completed a short biomass course, went on site visits and contributed to feasibility studies.

They understood my situation - North Energy Associates pride themselves on being very flexible. It took a while before they felt they could offer me something, but then an opportunity arose to undertake life cycle analysis. I was thrown in at the deep end and nearly 7 years later still work for them 3 days a week.

My work includes looking at the greenhouse gas emissions from products and processes, and renewable energy and energy efficiency feasibility studies. It can involve me in working with almost any type of organisation. I work as part of a team and feel that I am continually learning from very helpful colleagues. The highlight for me is feeling that I am doing something towards addressing climate change.

For anyone following in my footsteps I would give the following advice: keep persevering - it often seemed as though there was nothing out there for me. I wasn't in a position to move and there were no relevant jobs within travelling distance. However, I did eventually find something that suits my outlook, that I really enjoy doing and am working with like-minded colleagues.

For anyone looking for that elusive job, take every opportunity to go to workshops and meetings and interact with people. It's the people you know who can help with contacts. The more people you know, the more opportunities that might come up.

As well as working in the renewable energy sector, I also practice what I preach, and my home in the North Pennines has a 5kW wind turbine and a 6 m² solar heating system.

