

Real-life story - Christopher Northey

Christopher began his career as an apprentice plumber and now specialises in public health engineering, advising on building services design. He is president of the Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management, a specialist institute for the healthcare estates sector.

Christopher Northey Associate director, Chapman BDSP; public health engineering specialist

Employer or university Chapman BDSP, London

Salary range Unknown

How I got into the role

I started my engineering career as an apprentice plumber working towards the City & Guilds, I then completed BTEC, ONC and HNC, followed by an engineering design and management degree. I was fortunate in that I had very supportive lecturers who helped guide me into the specialism.

I also helped set up the Society of Public Health Engineers (professional engineers who are raising the profile of this specialism through services, education, and a support network). Unbeknown to me in 2011 I was nominated for the Prince Philip Medal and was awarded the Gold Medal for outstanding academic and professional development. In 2006 I was offered my current position at Chapman BDSP, an engineering consultancy.

What I do

The role of a public health engineering specialist is to provide advice and support for building services design. Building services engineering is made up of mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineering (MEP), also known as public health engineering. This includes such aspects as advice on the provision of hot and cold water, adequate drinking water supply and public health elements in building design, e.g. sanitation services, fire- engineering and gas services.

I work closely with other engineering and construction professionals such as architects, structural engineers and quantity surveyors to influence the design and long-term sustainability of a building, whether this is a new build or a refurbishment which could be an upgrade to canteens, gyms etc or a change in building use.

Typically my day comprises monitoring and managing ongoing building projects, meeting with clients and other professionals and team members, developing specifications for new projects to meet client requests, team management and staff development, internal company resource meetings and contributing towards the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) ensuring work conforms to legislative codes and British Standards guidance.

Although I'm London based I do get to travel outside the capital for projects and even overseas to Los

Angeles.

The best bits and challenges

This is both a challenging and rewarding career. I really enjoy helping to broaden the understanding of other team members as well as the opportunity to work with external architects, project managers and clients. Public health engineering occupies a niche role and is one that is generally not well understood or familiar to those working within the construction industry or schools and colleges.

In the long term I would hope to become a full director of Chapman BDSP but there are many openings and I have a particular interest in encouraging and training young engineers.

Career plans and top tips for others

In 2014 I began my term as president of the Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management (IHEEM) which is an international professional engineering institute and a specialist Institute for the healthcare estates sector.??

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