



Gabrielle Powell from Stantec

Gabrielle Powell joined Stantec in May of this year as a graduate water management consultant. After studying human and physical geography at the University of Reading, she began a PhD in environmental science, having been headhunted by professors, specialising in natural flood management.

She has put this PhD on hold, getting stuck into the world of work, as she discovered an academic career wasn't fulfilling her goals.

What do you do?

Natural flood management is my specialism within water management consulting. The rain keeps me in business! Stantec had been on my radar for a while – it was actually a module I did at university called Loddon Catchment Consultancy that really piqued my interest in environmental consulting. I didn't even know it was a career that existed. My job involves a variety of tasks including natural flood management opportunity mapping and reporting, flood modelling, and creating flood risk assessments.

CAREERS MENTORING PROGRAMME CASE STUDY

I am currently learning how to use new software, Flood Modeller Pro, and I am incredibly grateful Stantec have allowed me the rewarding opportunity to mentor alongside my daily role.

What do you think makes a good mentor?

I think a good mentor will not only talk about their own experiences but really encourage a two-way conversation, providing a safe, enriching environment where everyone is learning. More so, a valuable trait is adaptability; a mentor should adapt their techniques to suit the mentees within a group that is diverse in its needs, promoting inclusivity.

Why do you think you'll be a good mentor?

I've mentored before while at university – I mentored first years to help them with the transition into the university. And I think because I'm young I am relatable, as I have just gone through the hiring process.

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How have you found the mentoring sessions?

I'm finding it very insightful. This group seem very concerned about the current cost of living crisis – they want to get a job with a decent salary. We've talked about how social media can help in their career search, by looking at other people's LinkedIn profiles to get ideas.

In our last session we talked about strengths and weaknesses, which I understand are hard to identify, but when it comes to the interview process, having an awareness of your weaknesses but also a drive to improve can be a strength. For example, I am quite a perfectionist. While that may produce high calibre work, it also may mean that I do not want to let go of a piece of work until it is 'perfect', which in the industry of consulting may not fit within the budget. So, tailoring 'perfect' to each project is key!

We also discussed transferrable skills – for example if you play basketball, you're demonstrating dedication and loyalty to a team, which is something that employers will value.

Some of the mentees are chattier than others, so I changed my method in the second session, using more pen and paper to get everyone involved. Even the quiet ones I hope will get something out of our time – if they don't respond in the session, who knows? They may go home and Google something, or it may stick with them.

What do you want your mentees to know?

I want them to know that there are many options out there and you don't have to be stuck on your original path. I for example, found out through trying that perhaps a career in academia is not for me.

Coming from a UTC, these students are potentially looking for jobs in the engineering or computing field. But I've entered an engineering environment through studying geography. There are so many areas that overlap, so don't rule anything out.

If your company would like to work with UTC Reading in the future please email Jane.Fitzpatrick@alet.org.uk to arrange a discussion.