

# Beth Hodkinson

The idea of doing a degree apprenticeship was first suggested to me whilst I was at college; I had organised a meeting with a careers advisor as I was torn between going to university full-time and getting a full-time job straight after college. I was doing maths, physics and art A-Levels, with the original intention of going on to study architecture. However, after speaking with the career advisor he suggested that my interests were more closely aligned to civil engineering and that based on the fact I wanted to have job and study, a degree apprenticeship would be ideal.



I went to a few different open evenings and recruitment events and spoke to family and friends to find out more about what civil engineers do and although I got a wide variety of answers it all sounded of interest to me. I applied, and in September 2017 I started working for Laing O'Rourke as part of MPT (a joint venture between Laing O'Rourke, Thales and VolkerRail) on the Manchester Metrolink Trafford Park Line project and started studying a part-time HNC in Civil Engineering at Liverpool John Moores University.

For the duration of my HNC (two years) I worked four days a week on site on the Metrolink project and spent one day a week at university. When I first started on the project, I had no previous construction experience and received a lot of training and support from the team on what was a very steep learning curve!

I started as a trainee site engineer, setting out for highways, ducting, drainage, concrete pours, and landing pre-cast concrete units for the tram stops and the retaining wall along Park Way. As well as producing task sheets, permits to dig and carrying out quality checks. Following the completion of my HNC, I applied my experience and qualification to achieve a technician engineer accreditation with the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE).

I gained a broad range of experience and practical skills from working on that project but also a lot of personal development. When first started working, it was daunting to begin with, but that soon changed. After working between three of the six sections on the project I had worked with a large number of teams and trades all of which I learnt from and gained a lot of confidence which I have taken forward onto my subsequent projects. After completing my HNC, I started a part-time bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering with Site Management at the University of Exeter (typically a five year course part-time but given that I had already achieved my HNC I joined in the second year of the course).

Around this time, I also moved to Birmingham to work on the HS2 enabling works working for LMJV (the joint venture between Laing O'Rourke and Murphy), where I was involved in the construction of four new bridges including the M42 and A446 bridges which were built away from the site and then 'driven' into place, nearby to the future Birmingham interchange station.

I then got involved in major utility diversions to clear the footprint for the Curzon Street Station, as well as my main responsibilities of overseeing the installation of the western utility corridor, I also got heavily involved with the soil management and reuse on site. My personal interest was supported by the team and I also received additional training to support my role. This interest has continued beyond the project and two years later I am writing my dissertation on the use of fly-ash stabilised soils in highway construction, and I am extremely grateful to the team there for supporting me in pursuing that interest!

After Curzon Street I moved to East West Rail working for the EWR alliance (which includes Laing O'Rourke, VolkerRail and Atkins) in Section A (Bicester), where I worked as part of the fencing and landscaping team. Most recently I have moved to the Oxford Corridor Phase 2 Project working for Kier to deliver the new platform and station entrance and replacement and upgrade of Botley Road bridge which will include widening the existing Botley Road to include a four metre cycle and footway on either side.

I am working here as a section engineer for the utility diversion works that enables the construction of the Botley Road, Sheepwash and Cemetery Road bridges. Next month I will submit my dissertation and after my final exams in May, I will have finished my BEng, and gained six years' experience in industry whilst doing so, with no university debt! Later this year I am also planning to become an Incorporated Engineer with the ICE.

My degree apprenticeship has allowed me to move around the country and work on several major infrastructure projects that I am very proud to have been a part of, while also allowing me to pursue a professional qualification that supports my role and future progression. Although it is not an easy route it is definitely a rewarding one and I would recommend it to anyone interested in a career in construction.