

# In conversation with...

## Max Richards

Energy Transition Consultant, OPC

Welcome to the third edition of "In Conversation With..." where we share the experiences of young professionals navigating their way through the industry!

This quarter we sat down with Max Richards. Max is an Energy Transition Consultant at OPC where he leads a team supporting clients through carbon capture and storage projects, greenhouse gas inventorying and ESG strategy development. Max holds a sustainability focused MSci in Environmental Geoscience from University College London. His Master's project, a preliminary study working alongside CarbFix in Iceland and Aramco, focused on the development and implementation of a novel Carbon Capture and Storage technology. Max is on the PESGB Young Professionals committee having joined in May 2022.

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### Tell us more about your Master's project and how it inspired you to join the industry.

The story is in fact quite entertaining and I have discussed it previously during an SPE careers talk. But it goes something like this, during my third year of university I was working in a pub. The Pineapple pub in Kentish Town, its brilliant place and I enjoyed working there a lot. Anyway, during my time there it was frequented by an older gentleman who I would often talk to when I was behind the bar. One evening I discussed having to make a decision regarding what I would do my masters thesis on (you can choose from a range of topics with a several different professors). I had a couple of options and one of them was carbon capture and storage, examining carbonate mineralisation in basalts (ultra/mafic). The older gentleman who implored that I should pick the CCS thesis claiming that it would be very topical in the future with the direction of the oil industry. Me and that man talked at length and he gave me his business card. At the time I had almost no interest working in the industry, my masters and degree did not focus on oil and gas whatsoever. I chose my thesis based on the advice I was given and enjoyed it thoroughly. Working with Aramco and Carbfix was fascinating.

About a year after my initial conversation with the man in the pub, I decided to write him an email (I was very unsuccessfully job hunting) and we spoke at length. I gave a presentation covering the topics in my thesis and he was very interested. About 6 months later I started at OPC, the man in the pub was Piers Johnson. My thesis didn't just help me get into the industry. It has helped me on some of the projects I have been involved with. There have been several occasions where I am writing a report and I am pulling information directly from my thesis. Count me lucky.

I have included a picture of me in India examining some of the basalts of the Deccan Traps with a local geologist, I went and collected samples for a potential PhD project. But I decided against that, as I wanted to start working.



Examining basalts of the Deccan Traps, India

## What is a typical day like at OPC and what kind of projects do you work on?

It's cliché but there really isn't a normal day at OPC, working for a small business you are involved in almost every aspect of running the business. As I manage and lead the energy transition department, beyond doing a lot of business development I have developed the sales and marketing of projects and new service lines. This means one day I might be writing an article for our website, pulling together a project completion post for LinkedIn and the next having a meeting with a VP of a supermajor. The diverse nature of my day to day keeps me busy and entertained. I can't say I have ever been bored. I spend a lot of time talking to clients doing introduction calls and putting together proposals, there has been a large aspect of learning on the job and trusting my knowledge and expertise to drive projects where we can offer the most value to clients and solve problems (big and small). When you spend a lot of time generating leads it can be really up and down, but when it goes well it is such a buzz.



*Iman Hill and I at a client outreach event*

I have done geochemical modelling on CCS projects, performed financial analysis and modelling of exploration projects (including comps...), assessed and modelled greenhouse gas emissions for concept select reports, performed regional CCS screening studies, assessed corrosion rates in geothermal wells, and more recently modelled future hydrogen supply/demand as part a strategy consultation for a government. I have made a lot of new friends and connections in the last 18 months. I have attached a picture of me and Iman Hill at one of our client outreach events. I am constantly inspired by some of the people I meet. Who knows what will come next, I think that's the best thing about it.

## Do you have the opportunity to travel much with work?



*Conference in Georgia*

All the bloody time, it can be quite exhausting but certainly one of the best parts of the job. I am lucky I am young and full of energy and curiosity. I couldn't imagine travelling a lot for work when I get older. Jet lag is a killer. Anyway, this year I have been to Houston twice (both on my own). When I went for the first time in March I was very nervous, I convinced my boss I needed to go as there were so many energy transition opportunities that needed to be followed up on. So I scheduled about 15 meetings with various people to develop the relationships. I don't think you can beat traditional face to face engagement, so that does mean travelling every now and again. When I landed in Houston for the first time I was so excited, I'd never been to America before so everything was so novel. I was able to travel home via New York which was incredible. Since March I've been back to Houston and am planning on going again. I would love to share some pictures from my trips but they're largely our client's reception areas and pictures of gigantic plates of food (never get the blue cheese on your salad). Outside of Houston I have been to Georgia for a conference where I presented a project we completed, there's a photo of me stage and another that night with Niko (of Georgian Oil and Gas Limited). I have also been to Budapest and am planning a trip to Prague and Perth.

### What do you enjoy most about your career?

Well, I have already touched on most of the things I like about my career, working at OPC has been a complete blessing and I feel so lucky for all the opportunities I have been given. But I would also say, you make your own luck. So far, the highlights have been the projects I have won for OPC and had a chance to contribute technically towards. No better feeling than that. Otherwise, I have enjoyed the travelling, socialising, and the relationships I have built. I think there are a lot of exceptional people within our industry who are extremely intelligent and a lot of fun. Meeting them is a highlight in itself. I was also able to hire an intern this summer, which has been an eye opener. Being able to help support and foster the career of someone else has been great. During university I was largely on my own in London with little family support in my career, a few people took a chance on me and helped me get to where I am today. If I can offer someone a similar leg up, I think that's a highlight.



Presenting results at a conference in Georgia

### What role do you see hydrogen playing in the energy transition?

It's very topical for me at the moment considering I am on the cusp of finalising a project. But hydrogen will replace fossil fuels where direct electrification cannot. We have had a look at long distance heavy transport (buses, HGV's etc), high temperature heat applications, gas blending, and uninterrupted power. If you actually do the modelling and look at potential supply (from curtailed or dedicated wind) and examine potential demand, there is a massive decarbonisation opportunity. I am involved in the Bacton Energy Hub (OPC is in one of the special interest groups), and this project and my involvement with Bacton has really opened my eyes to the potential hydrogen may have. There is one elephant in the room, and that is price. If the economics can get sorted out it could be one of the main tools in our decarbonisation arsenal.

### Why did you join the PESGB Young Professional committee?

I joined the committee because I have found it quite difficult to find other people around my age in the industry. There really aren't many. The committee was also attractive as it organises events and socials. And I love socialising. It's been brilliant being involved and I see that continuing in the foreseeable future. Big thanks to Jade and Maria for getting me involved.

Article assembled by Maria Lake, Geoscientist - ERCE, PESGB Young Professionals Committee Member

# Calling Young Professionals!

Are you a young professional who would like to share your story in the next issue of the magazine?

Please drop us a message at [pesgbyp@gmail.com](mailto:pesgbyp@gmail.com)