

## Nicola Clarkson



Nicola Clarkson is Senior Group Technical Support Manager for Greencore.

### *What does your job involve? What are your responsibilities?*

I manage three Technical Support Managers working across all Greencore manufacturing sites, supporting areas including microbiological investigation, introducing new customers, customer visits, internal hygiene audits and sharing of best practice. We also horizon scan by networking with industry bodies, sharing up-to-date information on food related issues via a weekly newsletter to 100+ technical and other Greencore colleagues.

I am involved in technical training, including our mentoring and technical graduate programmes, as well as overseeing the facilitation of contracts – for example for pest control, labs and insurers for product claims. I've been in the post for less than a year but I am really enjoying the variety.

### *Thinking back to school days, did you know what you wanted to become?*

Not science-based at all – I wanted to be a solicitor and studied law at 'A' level. I thought about psychology and forensic science but dismissed these to start a Business Studies Degree at Sheffield Hallam. But I quickly decided this was not for me. Though I did return to this later in my career!

### *What qualifications do you have? GCSEs? A Levels? Degree(s)/other?*

I have 'A' level Law, English and Psychology and a BSc Hons in Business Management, PGCE in Meat Business Management and a PRINCE2 Foundation (Project Management) qualification.

### *In rough outline, what was your job pathway – companies and job titles, plus anything of particular note, e.g. level of responsibility, exposure to any particular developments/issues?*

After leaving Sheffield Hallam, I joined North Nottinghamshire College as a business apprentice in the Entry to Employment Department. A year later I moved to Shell LPG in contract negotiation, working my way up to be a Customer Services Manager. During this time I also studied for a BA Hons in Business Management. After seven years there it was time for me to move on – I craved new challenges. A job with Greencore at the corporate office in Barlborough came up and I was taken on to work on the integration of the Uniq business, recently acquired by Greencore at the time.

I celebrated ten years with Greencore in September 2021 and I am enjoying the diversity in roles the decade has brought. After my first year I moved into the Group Purchasing Team working on the administration of supplier contracts, the Sedex ethical trading platform and as a PA. It was through my PA role that I first got involved in technical work. Being in contact with technical bodies piqued my interest and after a year I was keen to expand my experience. At this point the 'horsegate' issue flared

up (in 2013, traces of undeclared horse meat were found in frozen beef burgers made in Ireland). The incident led to wide-spread media and public interest in traceability and supply chains.

While Greencore and chilled foods were not directly involved in any such practices, the company took an industry-leading role in its approach to reviewing its specification processes. This is where the idea for SpecSafe (a massive data system containing thousands of pieces of information on raw materials) was born.

As I needed to expand my knowledge of meat, I took a PGCE in Meat Business Management. This taught me about the legal side of meat and specifications. During this time I also worked in the project management team for SpecSafe. When the Project Manager left, I took on the role and over five years, worked on the implementation of the system. The SpecSafe project is one of my proudest achievements – it's used across our 16 sites by hundreds of colleagues and externally by thousands of suppliers. It's been a massive change for the business, but I work with a great team who are passionate about what we do.

With that project now up and successfully running, I've been focusing on training and managing smaller one-off projects. This has, again, called on scientific knowledge in a technical role. I admit it's a challenge but, thankfully, I'm surrounded by supportive, knowledgeable colleagues who are more than happy to share their experience. That's the really inspiring part of my work – the passion of the people I work with. And that passion is infectious! I'm keen to share it too – that's why I'm enjoying the role of training others.

### *What were your aspirations when starting your career and what are they now?*

It's fair to say I've moved a long way from my solicitor ambitions and I'm really enjoying my role so I can see myself staying in this area. I feel lucky to be with Greencore, who support their colleagues and encourage development – wherever they work within the company. They expect us to work hard but it is recognised and appreciated. As colleagues we are in the driving seat – the more effort we make, the greater the opportunities. I want to just keep learning and keep developing with Greencore.

### *What single piece of advice would you offer someone curious about working in the sector?*

Keep an open mind. There are so many opportunities, so be prepared, take them and run with them, you never know where they might lead you. There are so many routes into this industry – with my business background I never imagined ending up in a technical role but here I am. There's a lot more to the food industry than you may think; it's not just creating recipes. There's a job for just about everyone in roles including, for example: Technical, NPD, Process, Supplier Approval, HR, Purchasing, IT, Engineers, Specifications, Laboratory, Innovation and Operations.

### *What would you say to encourage them further? i.e. what are the best bits?*

The variety in the work and the people are, for me, the best bits!