

Vicky Rust

Vicky Rust is Technical Support Manager for Greencore Group.

What does your job involve? What are your responsibilities?

This is a fairly new role. I'm responsible for the technical graduate scheme, technical mentoring and supporting colleagues in their early careers. This involves setting up networking and training opportunities and procedures to support technical colleagues' development.

Using my experience and knowledge of the industry, and the company, I am able to support new colleagues as well as those who have been here for a while – through mentoring, providing structure and support via our Line Manager Framework, which is an online development tool, designed to enable and support all Greencore managers. It's a role I really enjoy because I'm passionate about bringing people into the industry and nurturing them with the best possible experience, so that they want to stay with us. It's about getting the best people for the roles and keeping them. I am also working on the SpecSafe portal.

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

I always enjoyed science, in particular chemistry and biology, and thought I might become a pharmacist. But a conversation with my biology teacher set me on a new path – into food science. I love food and thought about becoming a chef. But that teacher triggered my lightbulb moment. "We all need to eat" she said and suggested a food science degree. This was such a life-changer for me and I've never looked back – and I still love food.

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

As well as nine GCSEs I have 'A' Level Biology, Chemistry, Geology and General Studies. I graduated from the University of Humberside with a BSc Hons in Food Technology.

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?

I graduated in 1998 and joined ET Sutherlands as a Process Technologist, initially working on ready meals then moved into the bakery. This involved everything from ensuring foods are effectively scaled up from the kitchen to the factory, and meeting the critical paths, retailers' codes of practice and legal requirements on labelling. This work requires excellent communication skills, confidence in your knowledge and attention to detail – all coupled with a flexible approach.

I next moved to ABF as a Technical Administrator working within a bakery. Once again, those key skills I mentioned earlier were required to ensure specifications were met. A move to Roberts Food Group saw me involved in the transition of the company after it was acquired by Greencore in 2000.

There I remained as Development Services Manager, overseeing areas ranging from packaging and labelling to new product launches – all the time ensuring everyone was working to agreed, mandatory specifications.

In the early 2000s, public and regulators' focus on foods' sugar and fat content and labelling increased. I worked with retail customers and the Food Standards Agency on the now familiar traffic light system.

After spending some time away to start a family I returned as an interim technologist working across a number of Greencore sites. I enjoyed the flexibility of the role and did this for four years. A move abroad took me away from the industry for two years and I re-joined Greencore in 2013 to resume interim work in product specification roles.

Since 2015 I've been working on the company's SpecSafe system, a massive database holding thousands of specifications for raw materials, including legal and technical information. It's a dynamic system, under constant review – at any one time there are more than 5,000 'live' pieces of information and around 13,000 archived data points. It's an exciting project that is revolutionising the way we work. I'm now working as a Technical Support Manager and enjoying supporting the development of colleagues.

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

My interim roles have served me well, but I'm now enjoying working in a team again. I'm fortunate to work in a company that wants to nurture and support its colleagues. I'm helping people to reach their potential and my aspirations are to keep using my experience to make this possible for everyone I work with.

The food manufacturing industry has changed, – for the better – since I joined it. Back then Continuing Professional Development, mentoring and training were largely unheard of. There was a high turn-over of colleagues and little attempt to retain people. Like most sectors we need continuity and consistency, so it makes perfect sense to support and develop our colleagues. And not just the 'early careers', this applies to everyone at all stages of their careers.

I don't regret not being a chef – I can still do that at home and I know the science behind what I'm doing, even if that can make me overly critical of my creations. I also find myself acting as advisor on the labels in our fridge!

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

Keep an open mind. You'll hear a lot about the industry, but come and try it for yourself. Not many people are aware of businesses like Greencore and other CFA members. It's easy to focus on careers with retailers but the food manufacturing industry offers so many opportunities – you'll be spoilt for choice.

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

The chance to try different things and the variety of opportunities on offer.