Chilled Careers

Career Progress

Esther Chartres

Esther Chartres is Head of Regulatory Affairs for Pilgrim's Europe

What does your current role involve? What are your responsibilities and how many people report to you?

My key responsibilities include:

- providing regulatory and technical guidance across Pilgrim's Europe and ensuring the business has an appropriate understanding of all existing, relevant legislation and new relevant legislation
- providing influencing papers on the company's positions on key Government agendas, e.g. drafting company responses to Government public consultations
- liaising with food agencies, Government and industry bodies
- providing guidance and support across the business on global import and export; and intra-UK movements, to allow for business compliance with regulations and requirements in those areas
- oversight of the Finished Specifications Team – a small but extremely accomplished team of ten experts who ensure all our finished product artworks/labels are legally compliant.

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

Yes, I wanted to be a PE teacher. I was so sporty. During school and university I had a part time job in a bakery, which is what introduced me to the world of food!

What were/are your main interests – e.g. science in general, food technology, microbiology, nutrition, or something else?

Before my current job I spent 14 years at the Food Standards Agency which really developed my interests in the wider food industry and food regulation. My main interest was in food labelling and over the years I have seen and been involved in some great steps forward, such as the Food Information Regulations in 2014 and the progression of food hypersensitivity controls.

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

Bachelor of Arts Hons Degree in Human Resource Management.

I'm also a qualified Irish Football Association (IFA) youth football coach – in my spare time I coach under-11s girls' football.

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 university, I joined the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which introduced me to government.

After two years I accepted a post as Executive Officer within the Food Standards Agency and over 14 years I spent time in various roles from food incidents and food hygiene, and then to food labelling and standards.

My last role was Senior Executive Officer leading on policy development and implementation of legislation in Northern Ireland, covering the areas of food compositional standards, food labelling, food contact materials, food additives, food contaminants, genetically modified food, bottled water, allergens and novel foods. I have extensive experience providing advice and expertise on matters relating to food standards/ labelling to Government Departments, enforcement authorities, industry and consumers.

In 2019, I stepped out of the public sector and took up the post of Regulatory Affairs Manager at Moy Park. Joining at a crucial time for the industry, my first two years were spent heavily focussed on the challenge of preparing for Brexit. Providing regulatory advice to a business with a footprint across three regulatory regimes (Europe, GB and Northern Ireland) continues to be my biggest challenge, although it does also provide me with continuous learning. I'd say I'm not alone in this!

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

My aspiration was to work within government, and my years at the Food Standards Agency were very rewarding. It was there that my interest in the food industry grew and currently, my aspirations are to continue developing my expertise in regulatory affairs within Pilgrim's Europe.

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

Just go for it and don't be scared to step outside of your comfort zone!

What would you say to encourage them further? ie: what are the best bits?

Every day is a school day. After 20 years I'm still learning new things and meeting interesting people.