

## Michelle Briggs



Michelle Briggs is Senior Head of Technical Food for Now and Logistics at Greencore

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

I have two direct reports, both Heads of Technical. I am a functional leader, so all six manufacturing site technical leads have a dotted reporting line to me. The functions I am responsible for within technical are Hygiene, Process Development, Quality and Technical Services – a lot of people!

My main responsibility is Food Safety & Quality, I guide, support, and ensure that all sites operate at the highest standards. I lead the Food Safety and Quality Culture agenda for Greencore, and this has been a very rewarding part of my role.

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

I was hoping to become a primary school teacher as I wasn't aware of careers in food. No one in my family had been to university so I wasn't sure what was possible.

*Also thinking about school, did you have a particular teacher who inspired you to take the career path you've followed?*

To be honest, not really. I didn't always feel supported at school, and I didn't reach my full potential until starting college at the Northern Ireland Catering College.

I am a real self-motivator and I think the fact that school didn't expect me to do well made me work harder! Any time I failed an exam or was told I couldn't do something I made sure I could do it. My determination helped me through – and my amazing parents who always believed in me.

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

I was really interested in the practical side of food, making things simple, scaling up (even at home batch cooking!) I also enjoyed the end consumer view, the customer service angle and innovation on the supermarket shelves.

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

I studied Home Economics (as it was then called) at GCSE and A level and then went on to study an HND in Food, Consumer and Marketing Management at the Northern Ireland Catering College in Portrush.

After that I started into the second year of a degree in Consumer Studies at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. My placement year was at Marks & Spencer in London's Baker Street as a Business Placement Programme selection assistant. This was the point when I realised the technical side of the food industry and factory environment was what I wanted to do.

*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?*

My interest in food, combined with my love for the factory environment

helped me take on my first role as a Process Technologist at Northern Foods. I was very ambitious and applied for their graduate training programme whilst working for them. I then progressed to Senior and Process Manager very quickly. I worked extremely hard and took opportunities like maternity leave covers to make it happen. I was very flexible in location, and this helped at the early stage in my career. At this stage I was involved in moving Marks & Spencer into using the first cardboard sandwich skilnet, moving away from plastic. This opportunity opened future roles as everyone else wanted to also move away from plastic into cardboard.

After Northern Foods I joined Greencore as Process Manager to learn about other customers, as up until that point I had only worked with Marks & Spencer. During that time we moved the entire factory at Manton Wood from plastic sandwich skilnets to cardboard.

I then had a great opportunity to join Bakkavor and relocated to Lincolnshire to be Process Manager for four factories in Spalding. After four years the business was restructuring, so I left to go back to Greencore.

During my second time at Greencore I had a few roles within technical and reached the most senior level at site as a Technical Controller.

I then left to go to Tulip, back to a site supplying Marks & Spencer, and was part of this business until the site closed. It was good to go into the meat sector for a while as it added to my technical knowledge.

I took a Head of Technical role at Freshtime, now known as Greencore Boston and came back into Greencore as part of the acquisition.

I took on Head of Technical for the Salads Business unit at the time and then grew my career further to become Senior Head of Technical for Food For Now (six sites) and Logistics.

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

My main aim throughout my career is to work hard and be the best I can be at each stage. I am always looking to learn and develop my skills and the best part is seeing others grow in your team.

When starting my career, I wanted to be the most senior technical person at a site; once I reached that position I started to think, how can I make more of a difference? Why not go further?

My aspirations are to lead at the most senior level and develop my leadership skills to support others.

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

Ask lots of questions, be curious, network with others. Do not put barriers in your way as anything is possible. Networking is something I was never good at in the early days of my career. I met some amazing people and got to see some fantastic factories. I wish I had kept in touch more with people and made more notes. It is easier now with platforms like LinkedIn.

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

No two days are the same in my job. I enjoy even the challenging days as it makes it interesting. I enjoy making a difference and seeing progress at sites and with people.