

## **THIS DOWN-TO-EARTH JOB**

*A science ambassador with a rock-solid passion for geology explains why revisiting the classroom is vital to the future of her industry.*

At first glance, 23-year-old Samme Brough is a relative newcomer to the STEMNET Ambassadors programme, having joined it just eight months ago. With that said though, her commitment is evident. Boosting the engagement of young people is the means to secure a future for the science industries, she tells us. Then there are the ways she herself benefits from taking part.

Samme works with Ikon Science, a company that develops software and physics models to aid worldwide petroleum exploration. In September 2007, she joined STEMNET as an ambassador, and in November she became a member of the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering & Technology. In the new roles, she has already made trips to local schools, run practical sessions on geology, and developed a new group called Scientific Edge.

One thing is clear: Samme definitely finds her involvement with the STEMNET programme rewarding. "It's been fantastic to speak with primary and secondary aged pupils," she says. "You can make such a difference to 15 and 16 year olds who are facing big decisions and choices for the future. You can truly change lives."

"For me, work is about pursuing a passion. It's great to do something you enjoy, and you do it better because you enjoy it. Students can get a lot from someone else's energy. The process gives me more energy too. It reminds me why I'm doing this kind of work in the first place."

Returning to the future of science and technology for a moment, she speaks about the major need for new interest. "People are retiring from the industry, but there are very few trainees coming through – especially women. I think it's critical that we bridge the gap, and it's great that I have the chance to fly the flag for geosciences specifically."

### **A ROCK ROLE MODEL**

It was during her student days at the University of Norwich that Samme was first nominated to be a role model for science. Taking the stage as a speaker at the BA Festival of Science 2006, she decided to keep in touch with the event's organisers and became involved in school visits and careers days, as well as face-to-face and email mentoring.

The STEMNET programme seems to fit perfectly with Samme's own visions for her industry, in fact. In her own time she recently co-founded an online resource to draw in young geologists and oceanographers: [www.geologise.com](http://www.geologise.com). What's more, she tells us that experience in the classroom helps with her own development in presentation and communications skills – things you would certainly pay for in regular business life.

Staying with the subject of the classroom, Samme says the most common things she is asked by school pupils relate to her studies and travel time. It often leads to showing off holiday snaps and telling stories about mountains, jumping volcanoes and glaciers. The chance to relive her experience is fun in every aspect, she says. Unsurprisingly, the tales of volcanoes and mountains are also an attractive prospect for her audience.

"Kids always come back with the best questions. Often these are things I can't answer there and then, and I have to go away to do my own research before getting back to them.

"I know teachers who are very passionate. But, sometimes the children struggle to see how what they are learning relates to the outside world. In my job, I have the pleasure of getting out there and seeing how it really works. So, passing on these experiences can give students a great insight to what could lie ahead."

## **FISSION FOR NEW RECRUITS**

***A small nuclear energy company on the North West coast tells us about the real business benefits of being part of STEMNET's Ambassadors Programme.***

The company we're speaking to is REACT Engineering, based in Whitehaven Cumbria. High up on the north western shores of England, director Pete Woolaghan admits that theirs is certainly a remote part of the country; and that this has not come without its challenges.

One of the biggest challenges of all, we're told, has been attracting good-quality young recruits over the years. "We're a small knowledge-based company, which means people are definitely our most important asset," he explains. "But, after setting up the business, we quickly found it difficult to get new employees. The fact we're a high-tech company in the engineering industry can make it harder still."

It was facing this truth that inspired REACT representatives to reach out to its public rather than wait for CVs to arrive in the post. It started with a handful of local projects designed to engage young interest, but this soon led to bigger things. In [year], REACT joined the STEMNET Ambassadors Programme.

"I should say, this has never been a solely altruist gesture," Pete comments. "We're always looking for those who will make this company a success in the future. There are real business requirements and benefits of being involved – it's a business strategy as well as being great fun. Companies like ours need to start with good people, because these people will be the ones who will make the company profitable."

### **A genuine partnership**

Since working with STEMNET, Pete says that he has been struck by how closely the programme's objectives have fitted with those of his own company. Suggesting that their partnership with STEMNET has been nothing short of excellent, he brings particular attention to the fact that there haven't been rules and regulations to get through, and that Tony Gill – their local STEMNET contact – has added real value without expecting changes.

All of this has meant that the last 18 months have been busy at the company's Whitehaven offices. Employees have hosted a Science & Engineering show for 2,000 Year 6 pupils. They established 'Into Engineering Week', where Year 12s took part in a simulated project and pitched their ideas to local dignitaries. And the REACT Foundation was rolled out – a charity that provides a bursary to encourage local young people to go to university.

It's all been worthwhile, Pete adds enthusiastically. "People are choosing to go into further education and then coming back to the company. The message is: have a think about science and engineering as a profession. If you don't want to work in the field, that's OK. But at least think about it."

“We’re now accepting two people a year onto our Year in Industry Scheme, and we’ve had some tremendous candidates. In one case, a candidate inspired us to set up another company – in offshore wind farming. We’re also speaking to this person about being Managing Director.”

### **Lording it up**

As recognition of REACT’s efforts with primary and secondary schools in Cumbria, the company received a well-deserved XXXX award in March 2009. Collecting the award from Lord Sainsbury at the House of Lords, Pete stressed the rewarding nature of his work as an ambassador and REACT Foundation chairman. “Working towards the charity represents some of the best days I have,” he repeats to us.

He adds: “Lord Sainsbury mentioned the importance of good careers advice – good advice in order to make informed choices. He believes that it’s young people who can improve the health of our economy here in the UK. And I think it’s incumbent of engineers like us to go out and talk about our profession. Because, if you can’t get excited about science? Well...”

For more about the REACT Foundation, visit XXXX.