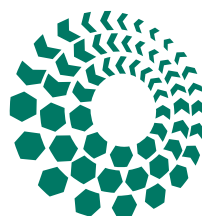


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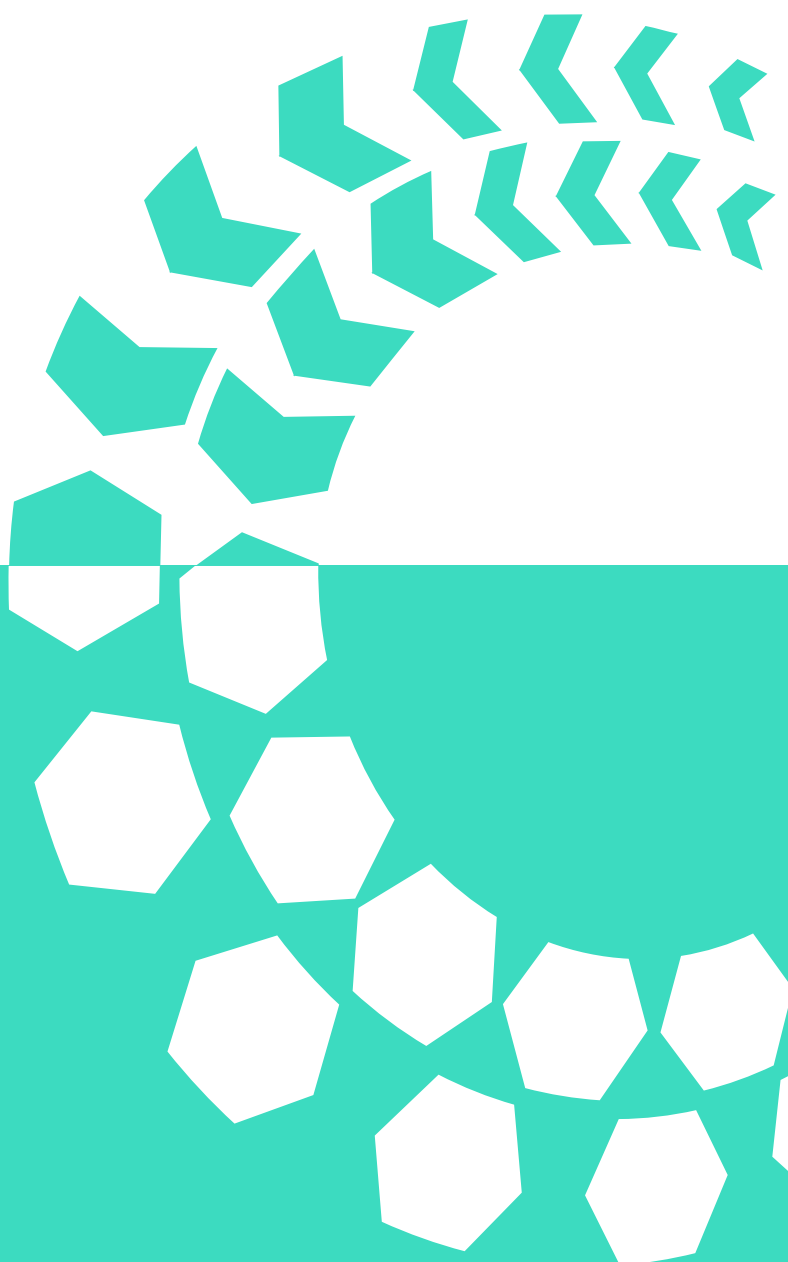
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**ISEP**  
Impact Assessment

# **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Thought pieces from UK  
and international practice





## JULIETTE CALLAGHAN

Partner, Trium Environmental Consulting LLP

Chair of ISEP's Impact Assessment Steering Group (2023-present)



**I am delighted to be able to guest edit this Outlook Journal on the theme of recruitment and retention in Impact Assessment. When starting my own consultancy business, Trium Environmental Consulting LLP in 2017, I had no idea that recruitment and retention of staff would be our biggest challenge! Over the last eight years, I have learned a lot, through past experiences and trial and error, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to select several articles for this Journal that have been written by Impact Assessment practitioners covering a range of topics related to recruitment, staff retention and health and wellbeing.**

Impact Assessment is a tough industry in which to work. It is a complex, technical, and iterative process involving collaboration and input from a wide range of stakeholders. That said, there are a wide range of benefits. Impact Assessment helps protect the natural and human environment and facilitates the identification and mitigation of detrimental impacts. Impact Assessment supports design evolution and enhanced project performance to strive for the best outcomes for the environment and results in decision-making that is transparent and informed.

With over 20 years of experience in the Impact Assessment field, I have witnessed the role of the Impact Assessment coordinator evolve significantly. Legislative changes, a more litigious environment, risk-averse mindsets among local authorities and consultees, and heightened scrutiny of Environmental Statements have all contributed to this shift. Add to that the challenges of managing client expectations and navigating demanding project schedules, and it is clear why recruitment and staff retention can be a challenge.

However, the articles presented in this Journal are testament to how this challenge can be overcome although identifying correctly that one size doesn't necessarily fit all. The articles are from a range of perspectives – both professional and personal.

**Jeanette Gill**, Green Tech Skillnet, explains how adopting a sectoral response to Impact Assessment recruitment enables you to bring industry and academia together so that you can rapidly develop responsive and scalable solutions to workforce gaps. Importantly, her article identifies that successful recruitment is about systems, partnerships and people, and not just about individual projects or technical competencies.

**Jemma Lonsdale**, Haskoning, explores the need to balance technical expertise and soft skills in Impact Assessment recruitment. Jemma's article is clear that Impact Assessment professionals must bring more to the table than technical acumen and that soft skills are not optional – they are integral. Soft skill sets that are demonstrated by both candidates and employers

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contribute to effective, resilient, and impactful practices.

**Josh Fothergill**, Fothergill Training & Consulting Ltd, discusses the role of Impact Assessment competency frameworks as a means of setting out a pathway, ladder and roadmap for talent retention and career development. Josh is clear that by understanding what is needed to deliver different Impact Assessment roles, organisations can improve the positioning of recruitment and be better placed to manage Impact Assessment staff and identify specific capacity enhancement needs to nurture and retain talent.

**Recruitment and staff retention can be an industry-wide challenge, but with the right mentality, co-professional support, tools, training, recognition, compassion and understanding, successful recruitment and a resilient workforce can only enhance the profession for everyone.**

**Polly Clifton**, Waterman, provides insight into how Waterman's Apprenticeship Scheme can help early-career professionals find their feet in Environmental Impact Assessment. Polly explains how Waterman's apprenticeship programme supports investing in people, offering structured learning, and building an inclusive culture.

**Rebecca Walker**, an Executive Coach and Leadership Trainer, who I have had the pleasure of working with for the last five years, and I discuss how professional development plays into the retention of Impact Assessment talent. In this article, we highlight the importance of developing and growing our talent and that the value felt by people often outstrips the investment – both financial and time-wise.

**Sophie Nioche**, LUC, explores what drives long-term career satisfaction in Environmental Impact Assessment with a clear message that sustained career satisfaction in Impact Assessment is shaped by an interplay of personal motivation, organisational support, and the purpose of the work delivered. As the sector responds to global, environmental and social challenges, professionals who are purpose-driven and supported by companies focused on positive impact are most likely to thrive.

I am thrilled to be able to include two further articles in this edition that come from more personal experiences. This allows a balanced outlook on the topic of recruitment and retention. Both articles are focused on retention and provide important messages to employers on the sensitive subjects of maternity, parental leave, and family life for the Impact Assessment professional and managing mental health in the Impact Assessment profession. Thank you **Rachel Moore**, Mott Macdonald and **Mark Cope**, RSK, for sharing these candid and important views.

I hope you get as much pleasure out of reading this Journal as I have had guest editing it. Recruitment and staff retention can be an industry-wide challenge, but with the right mentality, co-professional support, tools, training, recognition, compassion and understanding, successful recruitment and a resilient workforce can only enhance the profession for everyone.



# TAKING A SECTORAL RESPONSE TO EIA RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES: EXPERIENCE FROM IRELAND'S RENEWABLES SECTOR



**JEANETTE GILL**

Development Specialist,  
Green Tech Skillnet



Energy security, cost of energy, and the climate crisis are central issues facing countries across the world, and they have been expedited by global politics and war. The action plan that Ireland has taken to address these challenges is building more renewable energy in the form of onshore and offshore wind energy, solar energy, grid, and energy storage to name a few. With is monumental step change in development, ambition, and financing comes the need for the people with the knowledge to deliver.

Across Ireland there is a shortage of skilled professionals in the field of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). From ornithologists and ecologists to environmental planners and Impact Assessment experts, there simply aren't enough people to meet the current and future needs of the sector. And this gap is doing more than stretching resources; it has the real ability to delay project timelines and compromise national ambitions for climate and biodiversity action.

So how do we respond? In Ireland, the answer has been to go sectoral. Through Green Tech Skillnet<sup>1</sup> and Skillnet Offshore Wind Academy<sup>2</sup>, government-backed initiatives focused on addressing skills needs in renewable energy, we've taken a collaborative, targeted approach to the environmental skills crisis. At the heart of this effort is the Environmental Skills Advisory Group: a voluntary panel of subject matter experts drawn from across industry and academia. This group acts as

a sounding board, a think tank, and a working group all in one, helping shape training initiatives that are agile, employer-informed, and most importantly, directly relevant to current project demands.

In 2024, we took a major step forward. With input from the skills advisory group and support from Skillnet Ireland, we partnered with two of Ireland's leading universities, the University of Limerick and University of Galway, to co-design two micro-credentials specifically focused on EIA. These were not traditional academic programmes. They were developed from the ground up to be practical and immediately applicable in the workplace. 'EIA for Onshore Windfarms' and 'Environmental Impact Assessment of Marine Renewable Energy Developments' became the first micro-credentials of their kind in Ireland, and they've already begun to equip professionals with the focused expertise needed on live projects.

But technical training alone won't solve a workforce crisis. You also need to build professional networks, raise the profile of the discipline, and foster a shared understanding of what good EIA looks like. That's where Ireland's first EIA conference focused on renewables came in.

What began as a chance encounter at the International Association for Impact Assessment's (IAIA) Conference in Dublin in 2023 with Josh Fothergill (FISEP) and

1 Find out more about Green Tech Skillnet here: [greentechskillnet.mykademy.com/](https://greentechskillnet.mykademy.com/)

2 Find out more about the Skillnet Offshore Wind Academy here: [skillnetoffshorewindacademy.ie/](https://skillnetoffshorewindacademy.ie/)

attending his already established national EIA conference in Scotland, our conversation quickly grew into something much larger. By March 2025, we had jointly delivered Ireland's first dedicated<sup>3</sup> EIA conference focused on the renewables sector. Developed in partnership with FothergillITC<sup>4</sup>, Green Tech Skillnet, and the Skillnet Offshore Wind Academy, the conference drew over 130 professionals, from ecologists, statutory bodies, planning authorities and the Government to consultants, NGOs, academics, and developers.

**Technical training alone won't solve a workforce crisis. You also need to build professional networks, raise the profile of the discipline, and foster a shared understanding of what good EIA looks like.**

The event, which sold out in under three hours, wasn't just a talking shop. It was a call to action. Under the theme *Effective EIA for Our Renewable Energy Goals*, attendees dug into real-world challenges and solutions, from streamlining scoping and improving report proportionality, to building capacity across agencies and organisations. The presence of government departments, An Bord Pleanála, local authorities, and key consenting bodies demonstrated a shared recognition that unless we close the skills gap in EIA, the energy transition will slow or stall.

Our response has not stopped there. In 2025, the Environmental Skills Advisory Group has approved the development of two new micro-credentials in high-priority areas: ornithology and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), with plans to begin delivery of these from 2026 onwards. These new programmes will sit alongside the two existing EIA courses, continuing our emphasis on practical, field-based learning designed with and for professionals who are already shaping Ireland's environmental and planning landscape.

The appetite for action is strong. We're already booked for our 2026 EIA in Renewables Conference, building on the momentum and community formed this year. The future of environmental training in Ireland is more promising than ever, guided by those working in the field, responding to real challenges, and ensuring the sector is equipped to meet both present and future demands.

*This work is about more than just filling gaps, it's about building a workforce that's ready to enable the energy transition while safeguarding our natural environment. We're creating clear, practical pathways for companies to upskill their teams, supporting mid-career professionals to move into high-impact roles, and setting industry-led standards that inform university training. When those closest to EIA challenges define what skills are needed, we not only shape better education, we build capacity for the kind of skilled, solutions-focused assessment that's essential to progressing planning applications and delivering renewable energy projects at the pace and scale required.*

**– Mark Ruane, Head of Renewable Energy Skills at Wind Energy Ireland.**

Our experience in Ireland shows that when Skillnet Ireland's<sup>5</sup> government-backed support enables industry and academia to come together, supported by a structured framework like Green Tech Skillnet and Skillnet Offshore Wind Academy, responsive and scalable solutions to workforce gaps can be rapidly developed.

But, more importantly, it shows that solving environmental skills shortages isn't just about individual projects or technical competencies. It's about systems, partnerships, and people. It's about recognising that EIA professionals are not just assessors of impact – they are enablers of the renewable future we urgently need.

<sup>3</sup> Find out more and access the presentations and workshop outputs from Ireland's EIA Conference 2025 here: [www.fothergilltc.com/irelandeiaconference25](http://www.fothergilltc.com/irelandeiaconference25)

<sup>4</sup> Find out more about Fothergill Training & Consulting Ltd here: [www.fothergilltc.com/](http://www.fothergilltc.com/)

<sup>5</sup> Find out more about Skillnet Ireland here: [skillnetireland.ie](http://skillnetireland.ie)

# BALANCING TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND SOFT SKILLS IN EIA RECRUITMENT



**JEMMA LONSDALE**

Principal Consultant, Haskoning



Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are essential tools for managing the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of projects. They form the basis for whether projects receive planning consent and can be costly undertakings<sup>6</sup>. Given their critical role in future developments, EIAs must be executed by a multidisciplinary team of qualified professionals. These include ecologists, engineers, planners, lawyers, and communication specialists, among others.

Regulatory frameworks and national planning authorities require that EIAs be prepared by 'competent experts' (Part 5, Regulation 18, paragraph 5 of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017). While technical qualifications and knowledge are essential, success in EIA delivery hinges just as much on soft skills – those interpersonal and professional attributes that allow the ability to successfully and professionally work with others<sup>7</sup>.

In recruitment, candidates often demonstrate strength in one area – typically technical expertise. However, as the complexity of EIA projects increases, the need for professionals who can balance both areas is becoming ever more critical. This article explores the role of soft skills in EIA work, shares practical examples, and offers strategies for developing these often-overlooked attributes.

## The role of soft skills in EIA

Among the most vital soft skills is communication, which is multi-faceted within EIA. Specialists must be able to articulate their methodologies and findings in a technically robust manner within EIA reports, while also being capable of explaining complex information to non-specialists – such as clients, stakeholders, or planning authorities – in clear, accessible terms.

**While technical qualifications and knowledge are essential, success in EIA delivery hinges just as much on soft skills – those interpersonal and professional attributes that allow the ability to successfully and professionally work with others.**

Moreover, internal communication is just as crucial. Within project teams, members must regularly update one another on progress, risks, timelines, and key milestones. Communication should be honest, professional, and solution-oriented. A lack of clarity or professionalism can disrupt team dynamics, damage client relationships, and even jeopardise planning approvals. Conversely, strong communication builds

<sup>6</sup> [guidetoanoffshorewindfarm.com/wind-farm-costs](http://guidetoanoffshorewindfarm.com/wind-farm-costs)

<sup>7</sup> Cote, J., 2025. What Are Soft Skills and Why Are They Important in the Workplace? [www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/career/what-are-soft-skills](http://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/career/what-are-soft-skills).

trust, fosters efficiency, and enhances overall project quality.

Beyond communication, soft skills such as collaboration, adaptability, intercultural competence, and conflict management play essential roles in team cohesion. Each team member brings a unique working style and perspective<sup>8</sup>. For example, through a personality profiling exercise during a professional development course, I discovered that I prefer concise, task-focused communication, while many of my peers favoured emotional intelligence and strategic discussions. These differences had the potential to cause friction, but by having this knowledge, we were able to support each other and enhance collaboration.

**Strong communication builds trust, fosters efficiency, and enhances overall project quality.**

Developing self-awareness is foundational for personal and professional growth. Leaders, in particular, benefit from understanding and modelling soft skills – such as giving constructive feedback, mentoring junior staff, and creating environments where others feel safe to learn from failure.

### Strengthening soft skills in practice

Not everyone is naturally adept at all soft skills, but they can be cultivated. The key is self-reflection and a willingness to accept feedback. Leaders should foster a culture where feedback is delivered and received constructively, and where continuous improvement is encouraged.

There are multiple avenues for developing soft skills:

- training courses focused on specific skills
- coaching or mentoring relationships to explore personal challenges and opportunities
- feedback mechanisms, such as 360-degree reviews or peer observations

- self-assessment tools, such as SWOT.

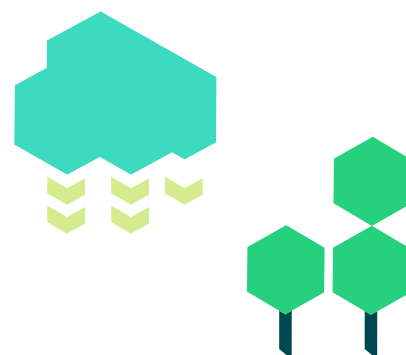
One technique I've found particularly effective is what I call the 'Fried Egg Approach'. Draw an egg with three layers: the outer shell, the egg white, and the yolk. On the outside, note your current level of soft skill proficiency. In the yolk, identify the skills or qualities to which you aspire. In the egg white, brainstorm the steps, resources, or people that can help you bridge the gap. This simple exercise can serve as a personal development plan and should be revisited regularly.

### Presenting soft skills in recruitment

In job applications and interviews, candidates must make both their technical expertise and soft skills explicit. Don't assume interviewers will infer interpersonal strengths from the résumé or examples. Use frameworks like the STAR technique (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to articulate not just what you did, but *how* you did it – highlighting soft skills used, including the challenges faced, how these were addressed, and what was learned.

### Conclusion

EIA professionals must bring more to the table than technical acumen. In a field where collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and communication are essential to success, soft skills are not optional – they are integral. By recognising their importance, actively developing them, and clearly communicating them during recruitment, both candidates and employers can contribute to more effective, resilient, and impactful EIA practices.



8 [www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles](http://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles)



# IA TALENT RETENTION AND CAREER BUILDING: A JOURNEY OF PATHS, LADDERS AND ROADMAPS



**JOSH FOTHERGILL**

**FISEP CEnv**

Founder & Director, Fothergill Training & Consulting Ltd



For some, working in Impact Assessment (IA) is a short-term step within a broader sustainability career or an additional responsibility allocated to them within a wider role. For others, however, IA plays a far greater part in their professional journey, progressing through multiple roles and perspectives to build a career working in IA. For those organisations that regularly undertake or engage with IA – across consultancies, financial institutions, developers, statutory bodies and government consenting – the need to attract and retain talented IA staff is essential to successfully and efficiently delivering their duties.

That talent, however, has increasing opportunities to a growing number of roles across environment and sustainability (E&S). This in turn creates competition to attract and retain good people not just within organisations but across the IA profession. While E&S graduates still face the challenge of lacking the experience often needed to gain a foothold in IA (a topic that could be the basis of a whole article in itself) those tables quickly turn on the employers of IA. Organisations are having to spend increasing effort to retain their existing IA talent and attract new IA staff to respond to market growth and losses of good people to competitors.

In the UK, roles in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) have been common since the late 1980s, with plan level Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) a potential career pathway since the early 2000s. As

such, an IA career may be considered a well-trodden path; however, despite nearly 40 years of UK IA practice, the capability-oriented stepping stones of that career ladder are not particularly well defined. Professional bodies provide some assistance but – bar ISEP's underutilised EIA Quality Mark Register – such graded membership levels are not specific to those focused on the IA field.

**While developing an IA competency framework is by no means essential for organisations operating in IA, their use is increasingly being explored as part of the broader race to gain and retain talented E&S professionals.**

In response to this need to develop high-quality IA staff, many organisations have internal systems to evaluate and promote IA professionals. Having worked for over two decades on IA policy and systems, it is perhaps not surprising that I have been contracted to both research and help develop such systems in a number of contexts in recent years. The remainder of this article therefore reflects on my experiences building and enhancing 'IA competency frameworks' with organisations working on IA in the UK and internationally.



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The drivers behind the decision to establish an 'IA competency framework' vary between organisations and inevitably relate to their role in the process. In international finance, IA is applied within risk management during the pre-financing evaluation process. In this context, a key driver is often a combination of seeking to better define capability needs across a multi-regional/global portfolio and a desire to deliver consistent levels of quality that are proportionate to the environmental and social risks of different investments. Whereas, for consultancies, a key driver often links to providing a clear roadmap for progression of IA staff with the aim of building longer-term relations and retaining 'home-grown' talent. In all cases the desire to understand the needs of different roles and enhance support and training for IA staff also act as drivers.

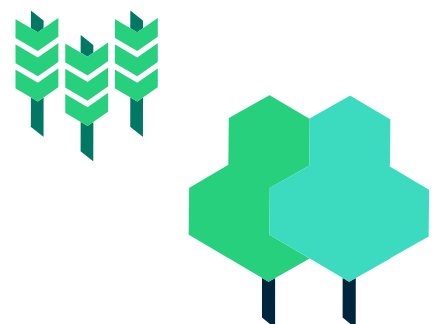
All too often the process starts from reviewing previous recruitment and promotion records with the aim of defining a mix of demonstrable IA knowledge (e.g. legislation, good practices, topic expertise) with some 'years served' analysis of experience. While such information can be quick to gather, it fails to define the required capabilities to incentivise individuals – and the organisation itself – to create a positive pathway towards staff retention and an in-house route to an IA-oriented career.

Across the companies FothergillTC has worked with – including IEMA/ISEP, the World Bank, Environment Agency and various consultancies – knowledge of both E&S and IA does play an essential element. But it is necessary to define progressive steps for an individual from their involvement to their leadership of increasingly complex knowledge areas, e.g. around significance evaluations and assessment of cumulative effects. Alongside this, in developing an effective IA competency framework, is the need to recognise and define progression across a range of personal *characteristics* and *capabilities* that are essential in enabling effective project design/plan-making.

While such *characteristics* and *capabilities* vary with context – and rarely apply common terminology – I have found common features emerged over time. In terms

of the *characteristics* for an effective IA professional, organisations need problem solvers, who are great communicators, have personal resilience, the ability to listen across contexts, and have the assertiveness to be heard and negotiate as needed. In terms of IA-oriented *capabilities*, I have found each rung on the IA career ladder requires improvement in the application of critical judgement, the ability to cut to the quick in analysing the root cause of E&S issues, and the ability to recommend suitable management techniques commensurate with risk and context. In addition, more senior roles require individuals to take on organisational responsibilities, which can see the need to build in/link across to wider business skills including project and budgetary management, client relations, and business strategy.

In conclusion, while developing an *IA competency framework* is by no means essential for organisations operating in IA, their use is increasingly being explored as part of the broader race to gain and retain talented E&S professionals. Additionally, in-house development with focused external support means they need not be a costly exercise and have the potential to deliver considerable upside. In seeking capable, new IA professionals and retaining talented IA staff, they help demonstrate your organisation is interested in IA practice, enhancing individual capabilities and providing a career home with structured support to aid advancement. By understanding what is needed to deliver different IA roles, organisations can improve the positioning of recruitment and be better placed to manage IA staff and identify specific capacity enhancement needs to nurture and retain talent, with the aim of generating a more stable IA team that actively coaches across all levels and shares learnings from each plan or project it supports.



# HELPING EARLY-CAREER PROFESSIONALS FIND THEIR FEET IN EIA: LESSONS FROM WATERMAN'S APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME



**POLLY CLIFTON**

Regional Director (London Environment), Waterman



Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) plays a pivotal role in shaping sustainable development in the UK and globally. As the industry grows, so does the need to attract and support new talent. Waterman's Environmental Practitioner Apprenticeship Scheme offers valuable insights into how early-career professionals can be nurtured into confident consultants. This article explores that journey, from education to the workplace, while highlighting the importance of mentorship, training, and inclusion.

Waterman Group launched its Apprenticeship Scheme in 2017 alongside the introduction of new apprenticeship standards and the apprentice levy. Since then, they've recruited 76 apprentices across environmental, engineering, and transport planning disciplines.

As a member of the Technical Apprenticeship Consortium (TAC), a network of employers and institutions committed to apprenticeship development, Waterman has helped shape industry standards. Notably, they co-led the development of the Environmental Practitioner Apprenticeship with WSP. Since recruiting their first apprentice in 2021, the programme has expanded, supported by new training providers.

## The transition: from university to consultancy

For many, moving from academia into consultancy can feel overwhelming. While university provides a

strong theoretical foundation, consultancy demands hands-on experience, client interaction, and deadline management.

That is where Waterman's structured apprenticeship shines. Over five years, apprentices combine academic learning with real-world project work. They rotate through different environmental teams, gaining exposure to areas like biodiversity, contaminated land, and preparing various planning reports. This blend of responsibility and education builds both confidence and capability. 'The scheme allowed me to apply what I learnt in class directly to live projects,' says Nancy Unger, a current apprentice. 'Working with the contaminated land team helped me understand how soil quality principles translate into real challenges.'

## Habiba's journey: Growing into a consultant

Habiba Bernier joined Waterman as a degree apprentice just after the COVID-19 restrictions eased. She was attracted by the structured career path and immediate involvement in live projects. The ability to apply her university studies directly to consultancy tasks accelerated her development.

By her second year, Habiba's course gained accreditation by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA, now ISEP), which opened even more doors. She gained wide-ranging

experience in reporting, assessments, and stakeholder engagement, while honing key consultancy skills like communication and critical analysis.

With steady mentorship, Habiba was able to define and pursue her career goals. 'I never felt like just an apprentice; I was encouraged to ask questions, contribute to discussions and take on responsibilities early.'

Now in her final year, Habiba is supporting new apprentices herself. Her progress shows that early support and responsibility can lead to long-term success and the development of leadership skills.

### Why mentorship makes all the difference

Mentoring is often underestimated in early-career development, yet it can be a game-changer. Having someone to guide, reassure, or simply listen can make navigating a new industry far less intimidating.

At Waterman, mentoring is part of the apprenticeship experience. It is not a one-off formality but an ongoing relationship. 'Having a mentor who had been through the same challenges made a huge difference,' says consultant Stephanie Jones. 'They helped me work through obstacles without judgement.'

Alongside mentoring, structured training also plays a vital role. EIA professionals need a broad skill set including technical knowledge, project management, legislation understanding, and communication skills. Waterman delivers on all fronts, offering internal training sessions and encouraging professional development. 'The internal training sessions on legislation and the EIA process were brilliant,' Stephanie adds. 'It really felt like the company was investing in us.'

Mentorship helps bridge the gap between academic behaviours and professional expectations by enabling accountability, communication, and confidence.

### Opening doors: the importance of inclusion

Attracting new talent is only part of the equation. Retaining it requires a culture where everyone feels

valued and included. In EIA, diverse perspectives lead to better and more balanced decisions. Waterman works to remove barriers by reaching out to underrepresented schools and universities, designing inclusive recruitment processes, and ensuring interview panels reflect the diversity they aim to build.

**Mentoring is often underestimated in early-career development, yet it can be a game-changer. Having someone to guide, reassure, or simply listen can make navigating a new industry far less intimidating.**

The apprenticeship route itself is inherently accessible since it is designed for those without industry connections or extensive experience. Inside the company, Waterman promotes a respectful and supportive culture through diversity training, internal networks, and open communication.

### Key takeaways for employers

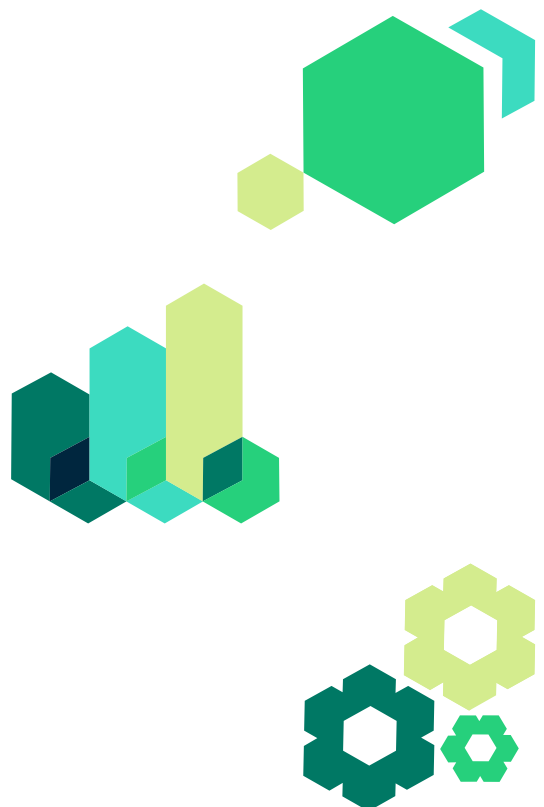
Organisations looking to build a sustainable talent pipeline in EIA can learn from Waterman's example:

- **Offer structured entry points.** Apprenticeships and graduate schemes create real opportunities for new professionals.
- **Prioritise mentorship.** Early-career guidance turns uncertainty into growth.
- **Invest in training.** Comprehensive development builds well-rounded consultants.
- **Remove entry barriers.** Focus on potential, not just qualifications.
- **Create an inclusive culture.** Diverse teams lead to better project outcomes.
- **Celebrate journeys.** Real success stories inspire and attract future talent.

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## Conclusion

As the environmental sector expands, the demand for passionate and skilled professionals continues to rise. But talent must be nurtured, as it rarely arrives fully formed. Waterman's apprenticeship programme demonstrates the impact of investing in people, offering structured learning, and building an inclusive culture. With the right support, early-career professionals can find their place and thrive in EIA.



# THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN RETAINING EIA TALENT



**JULIETTE CALLAGHAN**

Partner at Trium Environmental Consulting



**REBECCA WALKER**

Executive coach and leadership trainer



*It can sometimes feel like the easy option to cut back on training and development when the economic climate remains uncertain. But is this a false economy?*

It's well known that in periods of economic and political uncertainty people tend to become risk averse and professional development is contained and budgets are reduced or removed.

At a time when we need our people to be feeling engaged, motivated and able to take necessary risks for business growth we can stifle that much-needed boost to productivity and performance that can lift us out of an economic dip.

Scaling back on the development of our people can create other issues. Retention of good people is a constant challenge in EIA, as well as other industries. A recent study revealed that 86% of employees in the UK would remain with their current employer longer if offered frequent learning and development opportunities – a statistic worth remembering when balancing the cost of training with the cost of recruitment.

So, what can we all do to make sure we invest in our people and that we continue to develop much needed professional skills in EIA as well as the human skills necessary for leading a team or a business?

The good news is that they don't all have to have a big price tag attached. We've collated a range of ways that Trium and other companies in EIA and beyond have chosen to double down on the development of their people and be creative in how they retain, grow and invest in the future leaders of our profession.

**Most people love to share their knowledge, so running regular internal sessions for graduates and junior consultants, is a great way to deepen their expertise and increase your team's sense of involvement in the business.**

## **Deepen expertise – and be life-long learners**

Most people love to share their knowledge, so running regular internal sessions for graduates and junior consultants, is a great way to deepen their expertise and increase your team's sense of involvement in the business. Everything from the basics of EIA and planning policy through to understanding parameter plans and screening and scoping can be covered.

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We all benefit from regular CPDs on a range of subjects, drawing on internal specialists and external speakers – the latest at Trium being on Environmental Outcome Reporting; as well as professional development through alternative project opportunities such as working across differing consenting regimes, geographies and assessment processes.

### **Look up and out – encourage people to feed their brains**

We all work in a high-intensity profession with tight deadlines, multi-stakeholders and an increasing reliance on technology to communicate. And it can stifle human connection, new experiences and an understanding of how each other works. A great way to cross pollinate knowledge is for multidisciplinary companies to create opportunities for ‘job swaps’. For example, an EIA project manager working as part of the noise or ecology team for a period of six months to widen their understanding and deepen their awareness of each other’s work and decision-making.

It’s also important to encourage business development and an understanding of how the industry knits together at graduate level upwards, encouraging people to attend events, expand their network and find a mentor. The team at Trium recently held a next-gen industry networking event for those relatively early in their career and there was a real energy in the room.

### **Human skills – relationships, connection and leadership**

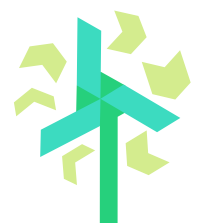
Human skills are incredibly important in EIA, so finding ways to deliver tailored development in areas such as influencing and leadership, presentation skills, stress management and resilience is important. Inviting in experts for lunchtime talks, holding small workshops or training on specific topics ensures your people and the quality of their work grows. Trium also offers coaching, with Rebecca Walker, to everyone in the company, as well as team coaching for the Partners.

Senior leaders also need investment. Being an expert in EIA doesn’t make you a great leader! And yet a leader’s behaviour often ripples through a business. Investing in

management development as well as the business side of leadership such as dealing with contracts, budgeting and conflict resolution is well worth the investment.

And finally, we mustn’t forget that learning often comes from regular company updates. Companies we spoke to, who commit to this, said that giving people the business context has a real impact on their engagement, motivation and ownership.

So however you choose to develop and grow your talent, and there is never one size fits all, there can be no doubting that the value felt by people often outstrips the investment. From higher engagement, accountability and performance through to minimising future skills gaps and investing in the future leaders of our industry. It’s easy, when we’re all busy, to take our eye off the talent ball but it’s a risky place to stay for too long.



# WHAT DRIVES LONG-TERM CAREER SATISFACTION IN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT?



**SOPHIE NIOCHE**

**CEnv MISEP MSc**

Associate Director, Environmental Planning, LUC



Impact Assessment (IA) is a critical tool in sustainable development, balancing economic growth with environmental protection. Professionals working in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) assess how proposed projects affect the natural and social environment. But what leads to long-term career satisfaction in this field?

This article explores this question, through a case study of the EIA team at environmental consultancy LUC. Several team members joined as graduates and now hold senior leadership roles, having grown their careers over 20-plus years – good evidence of enduring career satisfaction!

## **Purpose and impact**

EIA professionals are motivated by the desire to make a difference. At LUC, much of the work focuses on the energy sector, including large-scale renewable projects and enabling grid connections. Contributing to the delivery of low-carbon electricity brings a deep sense of fulfilment. The team recognises the challenge of balancing environmental protection with the need for energy generation, and we take pride in navigating this complexity.

Our mission is to create better futures for nature, people and places. This purpose informs how the company operates and underpins the lasting

satisfaction many employees report. Delivering a meaningful legacy is not always easy, but it is a core part of LUC's identity.

## **Professional growth**

The scope of EIA has expanded significantly over recent decades, and now integrates social, cultural, health, and cumulative effects. This evolution demands interdisciplinary skills and continuous learning, which many professionals find intellectually stimulating and rewarding. The opportunity to work at the intersection of science, policy, and community engagement contributes to long-term job satisfaction.

At LUC, continuous learning and development is prioritised. The company supports professional membership and all senior EIA leaders/practitioners are Chartered Environmentalists. Excellence is celebrated through project milestones and promotions, reinforcing a culture of recognition and progression.

This emphasis on growth begins early. One early-career professional remarked, 'I can already see myself working here long term. I feel supported by my colleagues and proud to work in the renewables sector. The work feels meaningful, and there's a sense of job security with the drive towards net zero and the urgency of addressing the climate crisis.'



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## Taking ownership

LUC is a fully employee-owned business. Profits are shared equally among staff, and everyone contributes to key decisions. This model fosters a common purpose and strengthens the connection between employees and the company. The result is low staff turnover and consistently high job satisfaction, as reflected in annual staff surveys.

**Excellence is celebrated through project milestones and promotions, reinforcing a culture of recognition and progression.**

## Flexibility at all stages of life

Since the late 2000s, LUC has supported flexible working, particularly around parental leave. Staff returning to work had the option to reduce their hours or work from home long before this became common practice elsewhere. This flexibility helps maintain a healthy work-life balance, a key factor in long-term job satisfaction.

Life events such as maternity leave or sabbaticals may seem like significant interruptions, but in the context of a long career, they are relatively minor! Companies that embrace these transitions often gain staff loyalty and higher morale.

Since the pandemic, flexible hours, remote working, and a focus on employee wellbeing have become central to job satisfaction. LUC's longstanding commitment to flexibility has helped retain staff and foster a positive workplace culture.

## Secondments

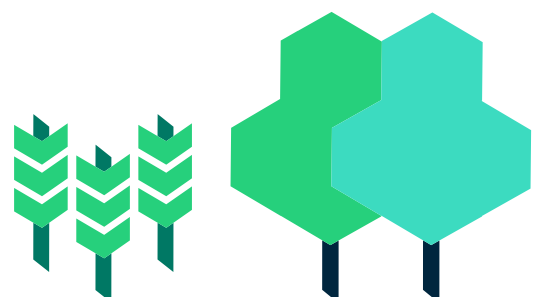
While LUC has high retention rates, some employees express a desire to explore other aspects of the role. IA professionals often work in the public sector or for private developers, so facilitating secondments offers a

valuable opportunity to gain broader experience without changing employer.

Secondments allow staff to build diverse skills and gain fresh perspectives, enhancing their adaptability and confidence. This variety keeps work engaging and aligned with evolving personal interests. Several members of LUC's EIA team have completed successful secondments in both public and private sector organisations, enhancing their expertise and contributing to long-term satisfaction.

## Conclusion

Sustained career satisfaction in IA is shaped by an interplay of personal motivation, organisational support, and the purpose of the work delivered. As the sector responds to global, environmental, and social challenges, professionals who are purpose-driven and supported by companies focused on positive impact are most likely to thrive.



# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT: MATERNITY, PARENTAL LEAVE AND FAMILY LIFE FOR THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROFESSIONAL



**RACHEL MOORE**

Senior Associate, Mott MacDonald

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**MOTT**  
**MACDONALD**

Whilst our society is changing and becoming more diverse, and the companies we work for provide an inclusive and equal workplace, I find that there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of the challenges people may face with fertility treatment.

**We need to create an open, inclusive and supportive culture, being mindful of what people could be going through. Having frameworks or policies in place in organisations will support this.**

In the UK, growing numbers of different family groups are seeking fertility treatment. In just three years (2019-2022), in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) increased by over 11%<sup>9</sup>. This form of treatment may be required for heterosexual couples who are having difficulty conceiving (around 1 in 7 couples in the UK<sup>10</sup>) or for single women, like me, the numbers of which are also on the increase (IVF cycles have risen from 1,400 in 2012 to 4,800 in 2022<sup>11</sup>).

My IVF journey as a single person was challenging like many others who go through this process. It requires huge investment and commitment, of finances, time,

emotions, and health. My IVF journey lasted four years. I had three egg retrievals, several invasive biopsies, one intrauterine insemination, seven cycles of IVF, four failures and two losses. My last embryo stuck, and I carried to full term, delivering a healthy baby in November 2023.

To increase the chances of success, I improved my overall wellbeing, which included minimising stress and exhaustion. After having spent the last decade concentrating on my career as an EIA coordinator, operating at a high-intensity level, it was hard to accept that I could not sustain the pace I had previously held and that my career may not progress at the rate it had been. In addition, I worried about underperforming and the risks associated with this.

Fertility treatment varies so much. Each cycle I endured required numerous appointments and a regime of medication, including daily injections at specific times over a course of several months before and after a transfer (of an embryo). I was able to schedule appointments around work commitments, working flexibly or taking annual leave. Taking my medication into the office did, however, cause me to feel vulnerable and anxious, and using my annual leave reduced leave for a proper break.

During the two-week wait, it was good to keep busy.

<sup>9</sup> Fertility treatment 2022: preliminary trends and figures | HFEA

<sup>10</sup> Infertility – NHS

<sup>11</sup> More single women and female couples having IVF – BBC News

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Work helped with this, but equally it was important to remain calm and reduce cortisol levels. This can be very challenging when working in a pressured environment and acting as environmental lead on a demanding and complex project. Taking lunch breaks, getting outside, undertaking gentle exercise, eating well and applying a positive mental attitude were all important during this time.

When tests came back negative or when they were positive but did not sustain, it was heart-breaking and time to grieve was needed. On my final and last attempt, I got a positive result and I tested daily until my six-week scan to help me manage my anxiety levels. Even after the first scan, my anxiety consumed me until week 30 when I finally was able to enjoy the pregnancy.

As a single person, it was exceptionally important for me to have a support network. I was therefore quite open about the treatment I was having; however, I decided to limit those I told at work, mainly due to the lack of awareness and potential judgement. At times, I felt isolated and alone, and constantly battled with anxiety. I maintained healthy routines and through the support from my line manager and one key colleague, I continued to lead and deliver a complicated EIA as well as several high-profile bids. I put more effort into developing a resilient project team so that tasks could be shared and I was not taking on too much.

People's wellbeing and mental health can be significantly impacted when undergoing fertility treatment. I found that there was little support and advice from both the NHS and private fertility services. A study undertaken by The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development<sup>12</sup> (CIPD) shows there is a lack of workplace provision to help people through this demanding time in their lives, and that almost 19% of employees said they had considered leaving their job because of their experience at work in relation to fertility challenges, investigation or treatment.

We need to support people through this process so that they can balance the demands of work with treatment. It is a sensitive topic. The CIPD study found that almost half of employees (47%) didn't tell their manager or HR they were experiencing fertility challenges, and just

under a fifth said they felt quite or very unsupported.

From my experience, the key challenges I faced in the work environment were insensitive comments, such as people assuming I was already a mum or asking if I wanted a family; working with other pregnant women; scheduling appointments in working hours; and focussing on work during the challenging times. Reflecting on my journey, I have no idea how I juggled it all, undergoing seven rounds and working full time. I believe if more support was available in the work environment, the fertility treatment journey could be less harrowing. People would feel supported and valued, leading to continued performance and retention.

Raising awareness across our organisations about the challenges of infertility and fertility treatment is required and it needs to be recognised as an important workplace wellbeing issue. We need to create an open, inclusive and supportive culture, being mindful of what people could be going through. Having frameworks or policies in place in organisations will support this. Measures could include, for example, allowing for flexible working; providing additional support on projects to provide reliance and spread the load; allowing for time off for appointments (paid or unpaid); paid compassionate leave during those particularly hard times; and training for line managers and those in HR on this sensitive topic.

The fertility treatment journey is different for everyone. For me, the key takeaways I want to share are:

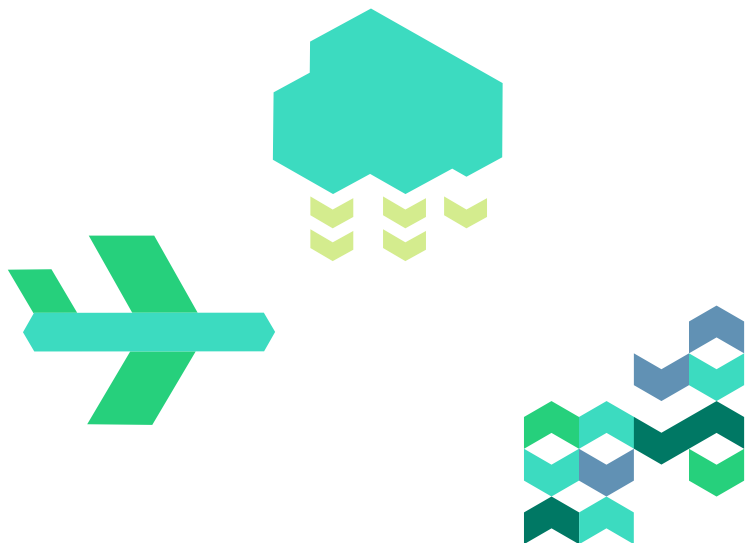
- Be realistic with your availability. Do not set yourself up for failure and take on too much.
- Work on and retain a positive mental attitude in the work environment and at home.
- Build a trusted and resilient team, and lead by example, such as taking lunch breaks.
- Manage expectations and set realistic and achievable goals during your annual review.
- Obtain additional support through counselling, either through work or privately.
- Have a support network – could be one person or a whole team, in or out of work.
- Find someone in the workplace to support you, such as your line manager. Schedule regular check-ins

<sup>12</sup> Workplace support for employees experiencing fertility challenges, investigations or treatment | CIPD

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with this person and try to be as open as you can so they can provide support.

- Prioritise self-care.
- Set boundaries in and out of work to allow health and wellbeing to be maintained.
- Above all, when things are not successful, allow time to grieve and do what you need to do to get through that time.



## WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN EIA: RECOGNISING THE CHALLENGES AND FINDING PERSONAL SOLUTIONS



**MARK COPE**

Associate Director of EIA, RSK



Everyone is busy. Even finding time to write this article has knocked five other things down my to-do list for today. But it is important that we do find time and prioritise, otherwise we end up never getting anything meaningful done.

Since 'normality' returned following the COVID-19 pandemic, I seem to be prioritising far more than I ever was before. I don't even have the time to read every email I receive anymore. Typically, I get about 60 emails a day, and I know that some colleagues receive more, but 60 is too many. Perhaps it's because we are relying more on technology, working from home, communicating electronically.

**If we are to recruit and retain people in the industry, we need to remember they are people with needs outside of work.**

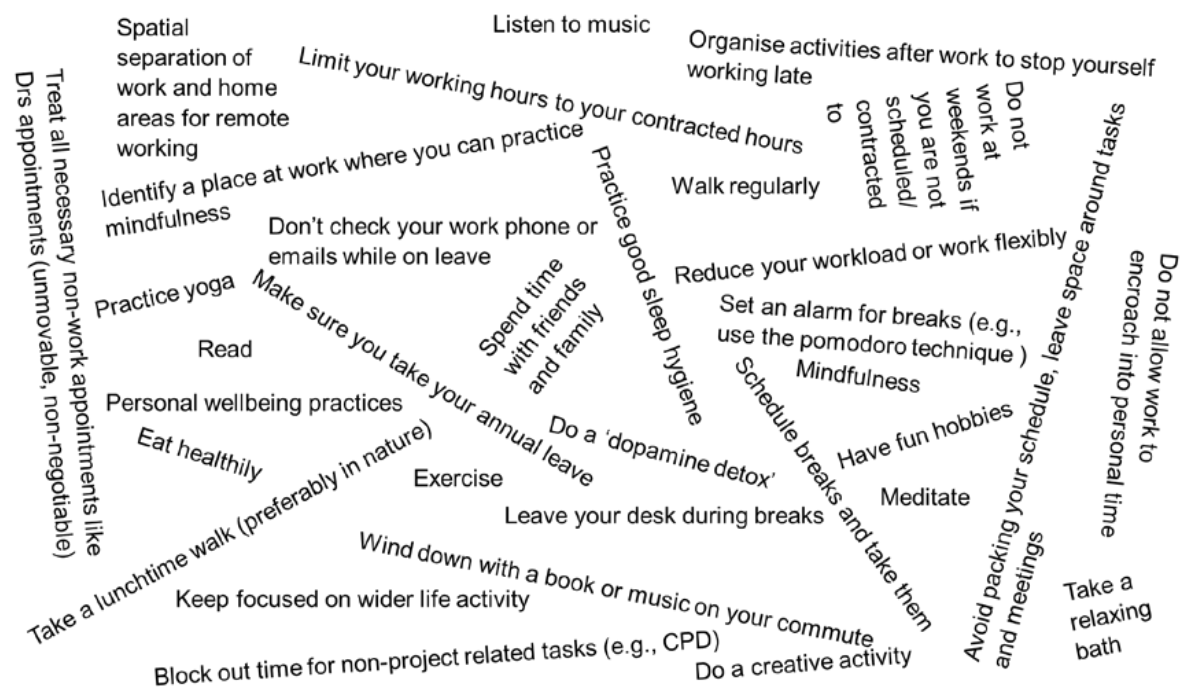
Perhaps it's also because EIA has become more complex, with more problems to resolve. Environmental statement reports are certainly getting longer, and it seems to be taking more time to go through the EIA process. EIA workloads can still be very much up and down depending on the stage that a project is at. Up when a project is kicking off, or a deadline is looming.

Down when waiting for technical reports and ES chapters to be written by others. But the lulls between ups seem to have narrowed, filled by other things.

Not travelling into the office every day has freed up a couple of additional hours to get more done. But it hasn't helped me to find any more time for the extra-curricular activities. For some reason, when working from home I feel guilty if I am not fully utilised during office hours, even though a short break to take my dog for a walk would probably increase my productivity overall. The dog loyally sits with me while I am working from home, but he has not benefited from this arrangement in any other way!

I know that working long hours is bad for my physical and mental health, but it's a very difficult habit to break when everyone else is busy too. However, I do intend to turn over a new leaf. Soon I will be moving to the coast, in the hope that this will encourage me to get outside with my family (and the dog) more often. I am sure my employer would prefer it if I was able to get into the office a little more. But thankfully they value my wellbeing more.

Different people will find different ways of achieving a better balance between working and living (Figure 1). Relocating to a different part of the country is perhaps a more extreme solution! But I have come to realise it is important to find some way of achieving that balance.



**Figure 1.** Personal tips for improving work-life balance [from *Supporting Mental Wellbeing in the Impact Assessment Profession*, ISEP Advice Note, June 2025.]

If we are to recruit and retain people in the industry, we need to remember they are people with needs outside of work. It's also important to lead by example, and so I want to be seen by colleagues 'to work to live, not to live to work', as the saying goes.



# MAKE THE MOST OF ISEP'S IMPACT ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

ISEP's website includes a host of content and tools designed to support IA professionals at every stage of their careers. From guidance and case studies to webinars and networking opportunities, the resources available are invaluable – but often underutilised. Here's a guide to what's on offer and how you can take full advantage:

## *Stay informed with events and webinars*

- **Future events and webinars:** Keep up with the latest in IA trends and practices by joining ISEP-hosted events and live webinars.
- **Webinar library:** Access over 24 hours of recordings, featuring expert insights and discussions on essential IA topics.

## *Comprehensive guidance and advice*

ISEP has developed an array of guidance documents tailored to key areas of IA, recent guides include:

- Supporting Mental Wellbeing in the Impact Assessment Profession
- A Roadmap to Digital Environmental Assessment
- Implementing the Mitigation Hierarchy from Concept to Construction
- A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment
- Assessing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Evaluating their Significance
- Determining Significance for Human Health in Environmental Impact Assessment
- Effective Scoping of Human Health in Environmental Impact Assessment
- Environmental Assessment of Traffic and Movement

Additionally, dive into the **Delivering Proportionate EIA Strategy** for a roadmap to efficient and effective assessments.

## *Expand your knowledge with articles and case studies*

With over **400 EIA articles** and **200 case studies** contributed by EIA Quality Mark registrants, the site offers real-world insights and lessons learned from diverse projects and contexts.

## *Showcase excellence in IA*

- **EIA Register:** Gain individual recognition for your IA expertise.
- **EIA Quality Mark Scheme:** Highlight your organisation's commitment to delivering high-quality assessments.

## *Get involved and shape the future of IA*

Join ISEP's thriving volunteer network and contribute to the profession:

- **IA Steering Group**
- **IA Network and Working Groups**
- **Regional and Geographic Groups**

## *Don't miss out!*

These opportunities allow members to engage with peers, influence policy and stay at the cutting edge of IA practice.

All of these resources are included as part of your ISEP membership, making it easier than ever to grow your skills, connect with others and drive positive change in IA. Explore these benefits today at [ISEP's website](https://www.isepglobal.org).

To get involved or form more information, please email [ia@isepglobal.org](mailto:ia@isepglobal.org).



# SUMMARY

The environmental and sustainability sectors are under unprecedented pressure to deliver results amid an era of rapid legislative change and escalating environmental demands. Within this shifting context, the need for a resilient, highly skilled workforce in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is greater than ever. This volume brings together a compelling suite of reflections and practice-based insights from professionals confronting the challenges of recruitment and retention in the Impact Assessment field.

From system-wide approaches in Ireland to the intimate realities of maternity and mental health support in the UK, the articles illustrate both the diversity and the unity of the sector's challenge: how to attract, nurture, and retain talent in a high-pressure and high-impact profession.

Jeanette Gill outlines a model sectoral response from Ireland's renewables sector, where structured collaboration between government, academia and industry has fast-tracked skills development through micro-credentials and national conferences – setting a precedent for others. Jemma Lonsdale reminds us that EIA professionals must offer more than technical expertise; soft skills like communication and collaboration are not 'nice-to-haves' but essential to project success. Similarly, Josh Fothergill highlights the potential of IA competency frameworks to define career pathways and improve staff retention through structured professional growth.

Supporting the next generation, Polly Clifton shares Waterman's apprenticeship model – offering an entry point that combines education with live project experience and mentorship. This theme is echoed by Rebecca Walker and me: we explore how continuous professional development supports retention, especially in times of uncertainty.

The volume bravely opens space for deeply personal reflections. Rachel Moore discusses the intersection of fertility treatment and EIA workloads, underlining the importance of workplace understanding and support. Mark Cope calls for rebalancing professional demands with personal wellbeing to create a sustainable working culture.

As the UK's planning policy landscape evolves and global environmental commitments intensify, the ability to recruit and retain skilled EIA professionals will become a critical success factor. This volume reminds us that this is not a technical problem alone – it is about systems, people, and purpose. A resilient, well-supported workforce is not just beneficial – it is essential to achieving meaningful impact in the years ahead.

Juliette Callaghan, August 2025



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Juliette Callaghan** is the Guest Editor for this edition of the new IA Outlook Journal. We recognise and appreciate her contribution.

We also offer thanks to the series editors and reviewer of this edition: **Rufus Howard** and **Vanessa Hawes**. We would like to thank the authors of the articles in this twenty-second edition of the Impact Assessment Outlook Journal:

**Juliette Callaghan**  
**Polly Clifton**  
**Mark Cope**  
**Josh Fothergill**  
**Jeanette Gill**  
**Jemma Lonsdale**  
**Rachel Moore**  
**Sophie Nioche**  
**Rebecca Walker**

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**RSK**  
**Trium Environmental Consulting**  
**Waterman**

**ISEP's EIA Quality Mark:** A scheme operated by the Institute allowing organisations (both developers and consultancies) that lead the co-ordination of statutory EIAs in the UK to make a commitment to excellence in their EIA activities and have this commitment independently reviewed. Founded in 2011, the EIA Quality Mark is a voluntary scheme, with organisations free to choose whether they are ready to operate to its seven EIA Commitments: EIA Management; EIA Team Capabilities; EIA Regulatory Compliance; EIA Context & Influence; EIA Content; EIA Presentation; and Improving EIA Practice.

## Recruitment and Retention in Impact Assessment

This twenty-fifth edition of the Impact Assessment Outlook Journal provides a series of thought pieces on recruitment and retention in the Impact Assessment profession. In this edition, the Guest Editor, Juliette Callaghan, has selected eight articles produced by ISEP professionals and Impact Assessment experts. The result is a valuable yet quick read across some of the different aspects of recruitment and retention in Impact Assessment.

### About the Guest Editor:

#### Juliette Callaghan

Partner at Trium Environmental Consulting  
Chair of ISEP Impact Assessment Steering Group



Juliette Callaghan, a full member of ISEP and a Chartered Environmentalist, is a founding member of Trium Environmental Consulting with over 22 years experience in UK Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), Urban Regeneration & Construction and Masterplanning, primarily within the property industry. Over her career to date, Juliette has either directed, managed or contributed to over 400 EIAs, both within the UK and overseas, and is highly experienced working alongside the requirements of EIA and planning legislation in addition to strategic, regional and local planning policy and guidance. Juliette has experience in managing the issues and impacts surrounding large scale, high profile urban regeneration projects.

### Contact the Series Editors:

To be considered for a future article, propose a future volume or volunteer as a guest editor, contact [ia@isepglobal.org](mailto:ia@isepglobal.org).



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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS (ISEP)

We are the global professional body for over 22,000 individuals and 350 organisations working, studying or interested in sustainability and the environment.

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