

Handbook

How do I find a job
in the Environmental
Remediation sector?





Finding a job is always difficult, not just for graduates, but for everyone. The motivation behind this booklet is to give you some guidance on how to avoid common mistakes and to develop a successful strategy when it comes to job hunting as a graduate. It is a tough game but definitely not a mission impossible and ALGA is a very good start!

Not long ago I was an international postgraduate student just like many of you and I had a hard time finding a job after I had finished my PhD course. Then I attended the Student Night organized by ALGA and it opened up new possibilities. ALGA has a strong and proactive community with lots of opportunities, events and knowledgeable experts. If you are a uni student and want to find an appropriate job after the university years you will find this brochure very useful. We collected hints, tips and advice that you will not hear or see in most of the materials/workshops prepared for graduate job seekers. So read on and keep trying, you will get there!

All the very best!

Dr Andras Fehervari



Ian Brookman

Ventia



Ian Brookman has a degree in Environmental Earth Sciences, along with nearly 20 years' experience in the assessment and remediation of contaminated land and groundwater. He is currently the Manager of Business Strategy for Ventia's environmental and remediation business unit, and in that role, he assists Commonwealth, State and Corporate clients with practical remediation solutions to complex contamination problems. During his career, Ian has been involved in many of Australia's most significant remediation projects including the \$405M Hunter River Remediation Project, the HMAS Platypus remediation project, the Macdonaldtown and Toowoomba gasworks remediation projects and the Cox Peninsula Remediation Project. More recently he has been focussed on the proposed remediation of the Barangaroo precinct which Ventia is undertaking. Ian is the current President of the Australasian Land & Groundwater Association (ALGA), which is the Peak industry body for people dealing with contaminated land and water.

Ian's advice

The hardest part of starting something is knowing how it will end. That's particularly relevant when you are considering your career. Often I think it's better to start with the end in mind, and that's how I would suggest a graduate should try and think today.

Try to visualise the type of career and what you'd like to be working at in 20 years and then fill in the steps between. Filling the steps is obviously the hardest thing to do at the outset, but being fresh out of university your research skills will be at their sharpest, so this is what you must utilise. There is a lot of available information about the environmental industry in Australia (and internationally) and you

should start by understanding the various environmental services and sectors to start to narrow your field of interest. For example, if you think that you'd like to work on Environmental Effects Statements (EES) for Major Projects (e.g. Infrastructure, Resources etc.) then start by looking for previous EES that have been prepared and look at the Companies that prepare them and the various environmental elements that make up the statement. Generally, documents like these are prepared by larger multidisciplinary engineering consultancies. However they also often

draw on external expertise. If you are considering the contaminated land sector as a career, then understand the process of site investigation and remediation. There is a lot of published information (e.g. Environmental Audit Reports on the Vic EPA website) that will inform you of the steps involved in assessing, managing and remediating contaminated soil and groundwater.

Understanding what a company does is critical to be able to communicate with them and outline your qualifications and more importantly your interests, skills (not just environmental) and how you will be able to support their objectives. I suggest that you read their annual report (if they have one) and at the very least make a list of their projects and what areas they are focussed on.

Finally, get involved in the relevant industry association. In this case, membership of ALGA can assist you greatly. Look at the names of the companies that sponsor or are members of ALGA, research them and then attend ALGA events and talk knowledgeably with employees of those companies about the work they do. Focus on your own skills and abilities that may be relevant and useful, not just on your qualification.

Good luck!



Jon Miller The Remediation Group



Jon is Managing Director and a founder of The Remediation Group (TRG). He has over 18 years of experience in business administration and development. Jon's business skills complement the technical expertise of the rest of the team, and have been vital in keeping TRG on course. He adds process, rigor and people skills to the company's assets and communicates in a direct, no-nonsense way. Jon holds the senior management and administrative role, which he couples with business development and marketing. He also is an active member and was previously on the board and Chair of ALGA. Jon's formal qualifications include a Bachelor of Science Education, and a Graduate Diploma of Business, to which he has added the Company Directors Course and various industry specific diplomas and certificates along his journey from school teacher, hotel manager, business development manager in the corporate world and now as business owner.

Jon's advice

1 *Your qualifications are only a pre-requisite to getting a job in this game. They do not bestow upon you a right to a well-paid job. You have to pitch your skills and knowledge in terms of how they can help would-be employers to fulfil the strategies they are pursuing in a manner that can generate a profit - that is revenue over and above the costs to employ you. To help your thinking consider the possibility of employing yourself in your own business - what is your proposition that can be sold to a customer; if you get that question right you might just start that business.*

2 *If your education has been worth the time, effort and cost then you should have come out knowing that what you have learnt is only the beginning and be excited about how much more there is to learn. Look for jobs that are going to satisfy that excitement.*

3 *A low paid job in an area that you find interesting and exciting is so much better in the long run than hanging out for the high paid job that (if you get it) may pay the bills but leaves you wondering why.*

4 *Start building your network as early as possible. It will not only help to get your first job but also your last. There is more to it than the number of LinkedIn connections you have but I am probably showing my age.*

5 *In a few years time in your next stage in life you will be competing for your second or third job with people who are fresh out of university with all the latest skills and a willingness to take a job at a lower price wherever it may be. Always understand your point of difference relative to others.*



Dr Will Gates Deakin University and SmecTech



Dr Will Gates is an internationally recognised clay mineralogist and physical chemist with 20 years' experience in applications to bentonites, cements and other poorly crystalline materials. For 10 of the past 11 years Dr Gates worked at Monash University in the Department of Civil Engineering in engineered barrier research while also operating a part-time consultancy in bentonite technologies. He joined the Institute for Frontier Materials at Deakin University in 2016 to work on developing new collaborations within the Australian Centre for Infrastructure Durability (ACID) network as well as continuing active collaborations with researchers from Monash University, Niels Bohr Institute (Denmark), ANSTO and industry.

Will's advice

Change is the only constant, so maintain the willingness to learn new things and adapt to new technologies, ideas and applications.

As industries modernize or adapt to new technologies, they need well-educated employees that are flexible and able to adapt as well. Keep a positive and open mind - even though it might seem (at the time) painful and difficult to do so. Benjamin Franklin once wrote that an investment in knowledge will pay the best dividends, a meme I have followed after first reading it as a student. Being able to successfully adapt to changes will also pay dividends in future by providing you with

tools to cope with more change sure to come.

Life happens, so learn to balance work with life. Learn to know and embrace your abilities, capabilities and, yes, inabilities.

Honesty and integrity matter, so be honest and have integrity. Most (good) employers appreciate someone who tells it like it is, but also someone who has ideas on how to solve problems or make changes.

What is old is often new (and vice versa), so don't be afraid of that "grumpy old guy sitting at the basement desk" (who may not have been so successful in coping with the changes you've been able to adapt to). Listen to their gripes without judgement and then ask for their advice. These men (and women) often are the source of enormous knowledge-banks and experiences that could be made useful in new methods, technologies and ideas coming your way, and their input could save you from reinventing wheels and stirrups.



Pete Mercuri

Matrix Drilling



Pete Mercuri is a Director at Matrix Drilling and a qualified Environmental Scientist with over seven years' experience in the contaminated land industry. Pete has been a long-term committee member of the Australasian Land and Groundwater Association and chaired the committee 2014-15.

Pete's advice

Leading into my post-graduate studies in 2003 I was painfully aware that many of my less academic mates from high school were now fully-qualified tradesmen, driving around in late model cars, taking out investment loans and wielding wallets that bulged from regular "cashy" jobs. I, on the other hand, had an unframed bachelor's certificate and a 1983 Toyota Corona called The Red Rocket that would occasionally start.

I knew I wanted to work in the geosciences by then and had selected my undergrad courses accordingly. However, until that point I hadn't given much thought to the benefits of work

experience in my preferred industry. What would my prospects be if I graduated with naught but the knowledge of how to learn and a peculiar ability to pour the perfect beer at my part-time pub job? What was my edge going to be over the others in my class let alone those from half a dozen other universities?

I decided to go part-time during my fourth year, which freed up two-three days a week. I then went through the 'Environmental Services' section of the phonebook and rang every company on that list, saying the same thing over and over – "Hi, I'm currently studying earth sciences part-time and was hoping you might have some casual work available".

After loads of polite knockbacks, I finally got a positive response from a local petroleum services company where my role varied between

poisoning weeds in the yard to assisting with the setup of pneumatic pumping systems for groundwater treatment on contaminated service station sites. I learned about underground petroleum storage systems and was involved in the removal and replacement of underground tanks and pipework.

When I finally finished my postgrad, I started applying at consulting firms and got a job almost immediately with a tier one company. The reason I was chosen for the role wasn't my university grades or that I had a postgrad degree, it was because I had experience working on a particular big oil company's sites. This particular oil company happened to have a requirement that field consultants must have two years of consulting experience before they were able to step foot on their sites. I essentially leap-frogged consultants that had up to 2 years' experience because of the work experience I gained.

My advice to those of you seeking your first job in the environmental consulting field is this –

- *Be open to opportunities that will provide you with experience in your preferred field.*
- *Think outside the square when considering work experience.*
- *Become an active member of an industry association (ALGA, ACLCA etc.) by attending their forums and workshops and volunteer to assist on their committees and events.*
- *Start to build relationships with people you admire in the industry.*

Best of luck!



Peter Mirkov Peraco



Peter has 30 years' experience in engineering with 25 in the contaminated land management industry. As an owner and senior executive he has directed several specialist contaminated land consultancies including Groundwater Technology, IT Environmental and Coffey Environments. His career has been centred in Australia but his operational span has been global including Operations in Asia, the Middle East, North America and Europe. He is a Principal Fellow and honorary Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne where he has lectured in contaminated land assessment and remediation for almost 20 years. He has a special interest in the application of innovative and cost effective remediation solutions and has contributed to some of the largest and most challenging contaminated land remediation projects in Australia. As an accredited Statutory Auditor he has completed Audits in South Australia and New South Wales and has been actively Auditing in Victoria since 1997.

Peter's advice

The most important element in applying for a job as a graduate is to be as project/company specific as you can in your application.

Writing "generic" applications that all contain the same information to numerous organisations is a "gunshot" approach that rarely succeeds, or at best places you into a large mix of "potentials". To differentiate yourself from the pack it is important that your letter of application and your resume address the specific company and position that you are applying for. Don't fall in the trap of having a single resume and a single letter that you make small changes to and send in with all your

applications. Think of the letter and the resume as your opportunity to shine in front of the HR Manager who is reading dozens of other applications. Above all else do your research about the company you are applying for a position with and about the job that they are seeking someone to fill. Your research should include, to the extent possible:

- *internet searches about the company*
- *calling people that you know who work for the company or who know others who work for the company to ask questions about the company and how they do business*
- *if you don't know anyone at the company search out people that may have worked for similar companies and seek out what things they value the most and what they expect of people*
- *find out about the business models of the company you are applying for – how do they make money and what possible role would you have in that (remember that a company is employing you to make money for them and not to train you (although they need to invest in you if they are to get the most out of you)) – a consulting engineering business has a totally different business model to a contracting business*
- *find out what specific attributes you have that they may value and this will help in focussing your application letter*

The above are only some aspects of the research that you need to do to succeed. Remember that your application isn't only about you, it is about how you fit into their business – so you need to cover off on both your attributes and on the business model of the company and how it is that your attributes help them in their business.



Dr Monika Fekete Monash University



Originally trained as a chemical engineer, Dr Monika Fekete is a chemical scientist with over 8 years of experience as a research chemist at Monash University and the CSIRO. Currently, Monika is working with Monash University's Food and Agriculture Innovation Agenda, as well as in her developing business. With a passion for both science and great coffee, Monika launched the Australian Coffee Science Lab in 2016, the first independent business in Australia solely dedicated to providing scientific consultation to coffee professionals. Described as Australia's Chief Coffee Scientist by *The Age*, Monika Fekete has worked with some of the biggest players in the coffee scene around Australia and beyond. Monika is actively involved with the Melbourne startup scene, looking to develop innovative ideas in the coffee industry.

Monika's advice

Study what interests you and don't worry too much about which discipline is described as the most sought after. Finding a job is not easy in any field, but true enthusiasm is valued by employers.

So how do you prove that you really stand out? Competition is fierce, so you will need a lot of track record to show for it.

1 *Get involved in your field outside uni while you're studying. Any real-world experience is valued higher than your grades (true story). Volunteer, but choose wisely where you invest your time. A relevant volunteering experience can help you find the right network and set you up with valuable connections. Remember it's all about who you know- in my experience, connections will get you a job a lot sooner than ads.*

2 *Other involvement options include start-up communities, conferences, trade shows and professional networking events (Meetup is a good resource). Attending regular events in your field will help you establish a name in your industry before you get your first job.*

3 *If you're studying engineering or science, a (paid!) overseas internship with IAESTE can be a fantastic experience*

broadening your horizons and adding a real job to put on your CV. (check it out here <http://www.iaeste.org.au/>)

4 *Any work experience matters, just use it to your advantage. Have you worked as a barista or in McDonalds? You have shown endurance working long hours, coped under pressure and developed your skills in customer relations and conflict management.*

5 *Present your best on LinkedIn – I'd say it's more important than your CV. Follow companies you are interested in, join groups, participate in discussions, post updates (even just by sharing an interesting article) – these will all serve to boost views of your profile by future employers and improve your credibility. Make your Facebook profile presentable and make sure it's consistent with the image you would like to project of yourself. Even adding a page to your profile where you share photos of your work, professional events, more articles etc. could be worthwhile. Presenting a strong, credible personal brand online has indeed become more important than we might like to think.*

Failure to secure that dream job time and time again is very distressing and it can make you feel that your skills are worth next to nothing. It's a tough game, so don't get discouraged. Ask for feedback, learn from failed attempts and just keep trying, you will get there in the end.



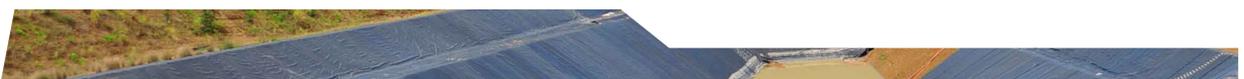
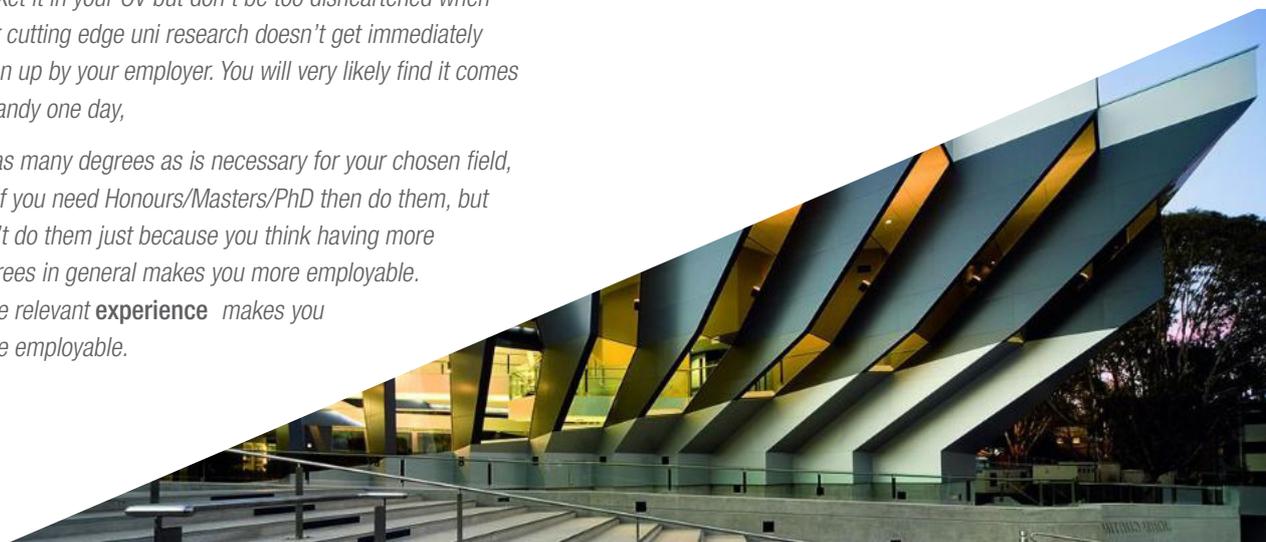
Mitzi Bolton Environmental Protection Authority



Mitzi Bolton is a PhD Candidate at the Australian National University, a Senior Policy Officer for the Victorian Government, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Australasian Land and Groundwater Association. Mitzi holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours from The University of Melbourne, and a Master of Commercial Laws from Monash University, and was the inaugural Principal Expert - Contaminated Environments at the Victorian Environment Protection Authority.

Mitzi's advice

- *Think about what you enjoyed at uni (not what seems like a popular line of work), and seek that out.*
- *Apply for everything, even the jobs that you think are only 60% you – get a foot in the door to your chosen field.*
- *Don't lose hope (it can take months or even years to get the job you really want).*
- *Market it in your CV but don't be too disheartened when your cutting edge uni research doesn't get immediately taken up by your employer. You will very likely find it comes in handy one day,*
- *Do as many degrees as is necessary for your chosen field, i.e. if you need Honours/Masters/PhD then do them, but don't do them just because you think having more degrees in general makes you more employable. More relevant **experience** makes you more employable.*
- *Talk to people working in the fields you're interested in about a standard week for them. Ask them what they like and don't – this will give you more insights into what that field is really like than any studies can.*



Notes



Useful contacts





www.landandgroundwater.com