

Get connected

Pankaj Koria explains the benefits of networking



STUDIES profiling people with successful careers tend to find one theme time and again: people want to spend their careers doing something they are good at and enjoy, and if they find something that plays to their talents then they will indeed be successful.

Chemical engineers are especially spoilt for choice, and the diversity of career paths open to them is still increasing even further; after all chemengers are playing key roles in newly-emerging categories such as nanotechnology and modern medicine, whilst new challenges in the more traditional areas such as petroleum and pharmaceutical engineering make these fields more complex and exciting. Choosing the right career path, therefore, can be a bit tricky, making it all the more important to find your strengths and know your passions.

One of the best ways to get experience and get an idea of a possible career path is by taking part in an industrial placement scheme. Graduates who have gone down this route typically find that they are much clearer on what to expect when they begin their career.

But this is not an option for everyone, since not all students are able to take part in placement schemes or their placement does not cover all the

options they are interested in. One way of making up for this is networking with people they meet from different industries.

Networking is becoming easier every day, especially through the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook; most UK universities, institutions such as IChemE and even some large companies such as GlaxoSmithKline maintain groups on these sites.

Graduates, institutions and industries alike benefit from exchanging views and posting events such as the details for the next Frank Morton sports day or for technical lectures on these sites. Companies also value them; for example GSK uses social networking sites to get feedback from students on what they really think and help them better tailor their sponsorship of events.

For myself, IChemE has played a big part in facilitating communication between students and industry. Back in 1999, when I started my chemical engineering degree, IChemE was my first port of call for finding out what kind of careers were available. The Institution hosted many industry-sponsored events with significant discounts for students, which helped me broaden my outlook on the kinds of roles I could take on with the new skills I was learning.

Once graduated, IChemE's support was still strong and I found my local regional branch held regular interesting technical and social events. It was not long before I became a committee member and young member rep.

With Institutional events and initiatives ranging from assemblies via conferences to subject groups, it should be very easy for everyone to find something to suit them – and through this, find likeminded individuals to network with.

While I was still at university, I



problem: while I was walking round I came across the GlaxoSmithKline stand and soon realised that this was the kind of company that could offer me the career I was looking for.

With this in mind, I used my "Masters in Management" project to study the company in detail. I also seized on the opportunity this provided me to get to know various people at the company a bit better. It was through this that I decided that a role within the consumer healthcare division was for me since it is tremendously fast-paced, gives me the chance to make a contribution on a global scale and work with products that I as a consumer use regularly – toothpaste for example.

Four years into the job, I have had the fortune of working on a number of great products and innovations including the Sensodyne Pronamel toothpaste for sensitive teeth. My company has supported my chartered chemical engineer goal and has encouraged me to attend conferences to help my continued professional development. I have also been actively involved with promoting science and engineering in schools and universities and have recently joined the IChemE's *whynotchemeng* campaign.

Since graduating, it does seem as if the relationship between students and industry has come a long way and changed considerably. Companies are becoming

Top right: Careers fairs are ideal for checking out potential employers

Below: Events like the Frank Morton Sports Day help meet peers



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