

Claire Nicholls, Business Development Manager, Williams Advanced Engineering

From studying Psychology and Physiology to working in engineering companies, Claire's career now focuses on customers, with a little James Bond thrown in



I've always worked in engineering companies, apart from a short stint handling insurance claims and even that was in the automotive sector. I've worked in programme management previously and now I'm in business development, specialising in the automotive sector.

My role is to win new and repeat business from a variety of original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and manage key accounts for Williams Advanced Engineering. I don't really have an 'average' day, because my job is fairly varied, but it usually involves bidding for work that aims to solve an engineering problem for a customer. I have to be very good at

communication because I act as a link between the customer, all the engineering teams at Williams and the company's senior leadership team.

When I was younger my career aspirations changed almost on a daily basis. I wanted to be an archaeologist for a while, but I've always been interested in cars, bikes, and motorsport. I studied Psychology and Physiology at Cardiff University. I find Psychology and the study of human behaviour really interesting and I enjoyed A level Psychology so much that I decided I wanted to follow that as my career. I realised half-way through my degree that even though I enjoyed Psychology, I would actually rather do something with cars and ended up applying for an admin role at another engineering consultancy after university. Everything went from there.

As a motorsport fan, I obviously knew [Williams as a Formula 1 team](#) but I was less aware of what Williams Advanced Engineering did because as I joined only a few years after the new company began as an offshoot of the F1 team. Initially I was attracted to Williams because of F1 but I wanted to have the customer interaction and variety that Williams Advanced Engineering offers. I've done similar roles in the past so I'm quite experienced in dealing with customers and getting the best out of the engineering team around me. We work well together, which is a theme that runs through Williams Advanced Engineering. Williams still has the family business feel about it and, while we achieve big things, we're still small enough to be agile to meet the needs of customers in an innovative, cost-effective way.

I enjoy being involved in projects that are a bit different or specialist. A really fun project was working on the six 'B24' cars that Williams Advanced Engineering made for the [24th James Bond film 'SPECTRE', developing stunt Jaguar C-X75s](#) for actor [Dave Bautista to chase Bond through Rome](#) as his character 'Hinx'. This project pushed the business to achieve new things in a very quick time frame and has proven our capabilities to customers in terms of rapid, quality delivery of a low volume vehicle programme to a high specification. It was great to see the final result on the big screen and to know that I was a part of that.

I feel an immense sense of achievement when we are successful in a bid as every bid takes a huge amount of time and effort. I also feel very proud when I see something go from existing as an idea to existing as a product in the real world.

I'd summarise the best aspects of my job as:

- Variety – rarely do I have two days that are the same.
- Autonomy – I'm given targets and trusted to get on and achieve them.
- Technology - working for a cutting edge company we are at the forefront of engineering innovation and we're close to an F1 team, which really sets us apart from other, similar companies.

I enjoy customer interaction, I enjoy variety in my work, and my psychology background is actually surprisingly helpful when trying to win business. It is also really, really important to enjoy what you do.

As my career progresses I want to keep getting better at what I do, to gain more knowledge and be successful at what I do. My parents have always encouraged me to do my best and do whatever makes me happy. I get my interest in cars and motorbikes from my Dad so I have him to thank for my career choice.

I'd certainly share that kind of outlook with others, including people studying now and considering what choices to make. Firstly, things have a way of working out for the best, so don't stress so much. Secondly, do whatever makes you happy and don't let anyone tell you that you can't achieve your dreams. I think that particularly applies to women interested in a career in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) [careers](#), who can sometimes be put off by what is currently a male-dominated industry. Having a more diverse workforce will deliver more viewpoints on how to solve challenges, leading to more effective solutions. It will work out well for all concerned to encourage more women into these careers. It's important that everyone feels encouraged to do whatever interests them. I would love to see more women getting into STEM because I feel that we all have something important to contribute.

I am proof that you do not necessarily need an engineering degree, just a keen interest and lots of ambition!