

Elena Hofman joined the Opus cadetship programme when she finished sixth form. She was always interested in maths and physics, and wanted to do something which was hands-on and mentally challenging – so a career in civil engineering was ideal for her.

Elena says, "My role at Opus is extremely varied, and I've gained a wide range of experience. At the moment I'm in Christchurch, working on a project for the Ministry of Education. My role is to assess and report on earthquake damage to school hardstand areas such as car parks, courtyards and walkways.

"When I'm in Greymouth I could be doing anything. My job includes rock fall and slip monitoring, bridge and culvert inspections and building construction monitoring. I also do a fair bit of geotechnical work such as ground investigations for both building foundations and state highways. I'm just starting to do more work in the structural team too, assisting in earthquake assessments of buildings.



"Opus cadetships include study towards professional qualifications. So far, I've gained a New Zealand Diploma in Engineering (NZDE) and a New Zealand Diploma in Engineering Practice (NZDEP).

"I completed the NZDE through block courses at the New Zealand Institute of Highway Technology (NZIHT), and worked towards the NZDEP at the same time. Combining work and study has worked very well for me. With the NZDE I found that I could apply a lot of the theory straight to my job. Being able to use my knowledge in a real life setting really helped me to learn.

"I completed the NZDEP through Connexis. It focuses on practical skills and builds on the theory covered in the NZDE. It's a good qualification to have because it's well-regarded by industry, and shows that I can apply my knowledge in a practical setting.

"Now I've gained the NZDE and NZDEP I'm eligible for registration as an Associate Member with the Institution of Professional Engineers (IPENZ).

"I'm continuing my studies with a Bachelor of Engineering through the University of Southern Queensland. I'll be completing it through distance learning, which should take around four years. I've already done the first semester, and have cross credited some of the units from the NZDE towards it. My long term career goal is to become an IPENZ Chartered Professional Engineer.

"I think we need to attract and retain more female engineers to help expand the skill set within the industry. We think differently, and it is good to get a different perspective on things. I enjoy working in civil engineering and challenging the stereotype that engineering is a guy's job. I would definitely recommend engineering as a career for both men and women as it is a very interesting and rewarding job."