

# Meet the team

Jess Heaps



**UKHSE**  
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY  
PART OF THE OUTSET GROUP

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# Meet the team - Jess Heaps



## What do you do at UKHSE and how do you support our clients?

I'm a Radiation Protection Adviser (RPA) which means I can advise employers on compliance with the Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017 (IRR17). In other words, I'm a specialist in radiation safety and help look after employees who work with ionising radiation, such as veterinarians who use X-ray machines. This includes advising on best practices to ensure exposures are kept As Low As Reasonably Practicable (ALARP). There is often a lot of misinformation and even fear surrounding radiation, meaning effective communication of the hazards, risks and control measures is vital. I like to think I am good at translating the scientific "gobbledygook" into practical measures which keep people safe and compliant.



## Give us a brief timeline of your career so far

My radiation protection career started at the University of Liverpool, where I studied nuclear physics whilst gaining work experience in the nuclear industry. Upon graduating, I joined Rolls-Royce Submarines in Derby as a Health Physicist where I stayed for six years. During this time I completed two distance learning courses in radiation protection, successfully obtained RPA accreditation and was promoted to Senior Health Physicist. As part of this role I advised on the design of a brand-new nuclear manufacturing facility. In 2020 I received the SRP Founders' Medal for contributions of distinction to radiation protection. I recently joined Outset Group's safety business UKHSE as a Radiation Protection Adviser (RPA) in October 2021.

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## What has been your biggest challenge in your role?

Health and safety is often seen as a “boring” or “non-value-added” aspect of work, or at best a reluctant necessity. Of course I disagree with this, but it can sometimes be difficult convincing people otherwise! This is why good soft skills are essential for an RPA – you need to be able to successfully communicate why the advice you’re giving is important whilst remaining professional, approachable and helpful.

## What do you enjoy most about your job?

There are very few things I don’t enjoy about radiation protection – I love what I do! I adore learning new things, and there is never a shortage of knowledge to be gained in RP. It’s also a niche field and a small community, meaning I am lucky enough to have a network of friends and colleagues in all different sectors across the UK

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## What do you think sets Outset apart?

The wide variety of subject matter expert advice on offer! The provision of legal, HR and health and safety advice means Outset is pretty much a “one-stop shop” for employers.

## When you were young, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I’d always wanted to join the Navy, especially as so many members of my family had served. I did do a brief stint when I was 18 but it wasn’t the life for me - I don’t regret joining but I don’t regret leaving! I’m much happier now as a scientist.

## What do you wish someone had told you when you started out? Or what piece of advice were you given early on that has stuck with you?

One of the difficulties of giving RPA advice is that there is often a large element of judgement involved. The Regulations state what is required, but how you go about actually achieving that in practice can be done in any number of different ways. When I was new to radiation protection, I remember feeling overwhelmed at the thought of this responsibility and asked a senior RPA, “how do you know the advice you’re giving is right?!”. Her reply was something along the lines of, “your advice will inevitably differ to another RPA’s at some point – the important thing is that you’re able to back it up with sound reasoning and justify how it demonstrates compliance with the Regulations”. She also stressed that confidence comes with experience, which thankfully I have found to be true!



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## What do you enjoy doing when you are not working?

I have a young daughter so don't get an awful lot of time to myself but I do enjoy dancing. I've been doing amateur adult street dance for 3 or so years now and often partake in exams and shows. I'm not great at it but I do it for the love of it!

## Who inspires you most and why?

Marie Curie, the Polish-French scientist who conducted pioneering research on radioactivity. Her countless achievements include discovering two elements and winning two Nobel prizes - amazing achievements in themselves, notwithstanding the hostile male-dominated environment in which she lived and worked. I actually gave my daughter the middle name Marie in her honour! I hope she grows up to be as inspired by Curie as I've been.



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## What piece of advice would you give someone in business?

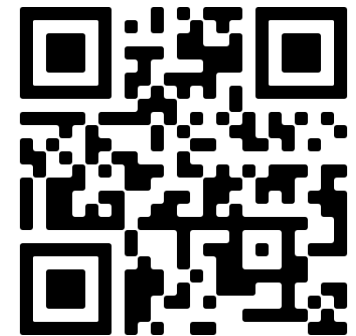
It is far cheaper and easier to consider radiation safety as early on as possible, particularly when designing new facilities. Noncompliance with the Regulations can be extremely costly - not only in terms of the financial impact, but also resources, time, health and safety, the environment, company reputation etc., especially if an incident occurs. Doing the upfront work might feel painful but it'll pale into insignificance if you need to remediate a situation where something has gone horribly wrong. Talk to your RPA and don't be afraid of asking questions – we are here to help. When they give you advice, try to take it on board. If you decide not to take RPA advice you may have to demonstrate to the Regulator that the alternative action was IRR17 compliant.



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Scan the QR code below to save Jess' contact details



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