

# The Unstoppable Kiara Orchard: A Rising Star in the Nuclear Projects Industry

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**When we last spoke with Kiara Orchard, she was fresh off her win as the Emerging Professional of the Year. Now, a few weeks later, we're diving deeper into the story of this remarkable young project manager.**

Hailing from Cumbria, North West England, Kiara's journey began on a degree apprenticeship with Sellafield Ltd., a cornerstone of the UK's nuclear industry. "Being born and raised here, starting my career at Sellafield was a natural choice," she explains. "They're a major employer in the local community, and their apprenticeship scheme was the perfect opportunity."



In 2023, Kiara graduated with an honours degree in project management, including achieving a distinction in her dissertation. Her dedication to the project field is evident, and her ambitions soar high. “I knew project management was my calling after A-Levels. I loved business, but my real passion was organising, planning, and directing.”

Today, Kiara holds a demanding and unique role as a Package Manager at Sellafield.

As the organisation prepares for a new nuclear facility, she’s part of a team developing the site. Her work involves rigorous inspections and tests, ensuring the site is ready for the removal and replacement of the existing heat exchanger.

Navigating a complex nuclear project environment with potential hazards like radiation and asbestos due to the age of the plant facility, Kiara’s role is safety-critical. “It’s intense,” she admits. “We’re measuring ground stability while adhering to strict safety protocols. It’s always a balancing act between progressing the project and acting with prudence.”

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But Kiara’s project management skills extend far beyond her day job. She’s an active community member, serving as a Parish Councillor. Additionally, she’s the youngest member of Sellafield’s Menopause Employee Network, championing issues like workplace inclusivity and supporting staff members. “It’s about challenging the status quo and creating a better work environment for everyone,” she explains. “I don’t need to be experiencing the issue directly to be an ally and champion of the cause. But being supportive of colleagues is important”

One recent project that Kiara was involved in was improving access to sanitary products on site. “It might

seem simple, but in a highly regulated environment, it's a complex logistical challenge."

Kiara's leadership extends to large-scale events as well. And she organized a three-day engagement event for Sellafield employees spanning across all divisions.

Sellafield offers a unique blend of traditional and cutting-edge project management, and it is one of the reasons Kiara has centered her career here. "We're decommissioning old sites while developing new ones. It's a fascinating time to be in the industry," Kiara enthuses. She's drawn to the long-term impact of her work: "I'm contributing to something that will benefit future generations, even though it may take decades to fully realize Sellafield's vision."

As a young woman in a male-dominated industry, Kiara has faced challenges head-on. "I've had positive experiences at Sellafield. I feel heard and respected. Of course, building one's confidence takes time, especially as an introvert," she admits, "I've had to step outside my comfort zone."

Her advice to aspiring project managers? "Embrace challenges and don't be deterred by industry's current demographics. The Nuclear industry is evolving, and it is becoming more diverse. Diversity an issue that is becoming more of a priority as we need to embrace diversity of thought and encourage greater collaboration to deliver the creativity needed for innovation."

When asked about potential improvements in the nuclear industry, Kiara advocates for greater adoption of new technologies and methodologies. "Safety of course is paramount, but we can be more innovative and welcoming of new ways of working. It's about striking the right balance."

With a clear vision for her future, Kiara aims to pursue a Diploma in Scope Management and a Masters in Leadership. She aspires to become a Projects Delivery Director, and continue to work in the Nuclear sector.

Having recently been awarded the Association for Project Management (APM) Emerging Project Professional of the year, I ask how the APM has supported her growth? "The APM has been instrumental in her development." She states "I became a student association member during my apprenticeship and a full member following graduation. The Project Management Qualification (PMQ) was a significant milestone for me, and I'm working towards Chartership." Kiara has also been an active member of the APM's Regional Network, with it playing an equally vital role in Kiara networking, gaining specific industry insights and learning lessons from other project delivery sectors.

Kiara's passion for project management is contagious. She sees it as more than just task management. "It's about problem-solving, team leadership, and being aware of the complex culture in which you are delivering. No two days are the same, and I love the challenge."

Without doubt, Kiara Orchard is a rising star in the nuclear industry, and we can't wait to see what she achieves next.

**Kiara Orchard is an Assistant Project Manager and Package lead on the Sellafield Ltd, Calder Heat Exchanger Deplanting project, delivering the removal of 6 Heat Exchangers (weighing**

**360 tonnes and over 23m high) from the original reactor buildings. Kiara leads critical work to characterise the Heat Exchangers and ground investigations to initiate the design of the Heat Exchanger Laydown Slab. Kiara was also the driving force for implementing Urgent Access Sanitary Supplies across Sellafield. Leading her to be awarded the Sellafield Employee of the Year. Most recently Kiara was awarded the APM's 2024 Emerging Project Professional of the year**