

Cécile, head of penitentiary and judicial projects (Agence publique pour l'immobilier de la justice), graduated from the urban school



After earning a master's degree in urban planning and sustainable development law, Cécile wanted to further her specialisation in urban planning, so she enrolled in the urban planning programme. She graduated in 2017 and is now project manager for prison and justice projects at APIJ. Interview.

What is your current job?

I work for the APIJ, Agence publique pour l'immobilier de la justice, which is the public agency in charge of the construction, renovation, and rehabilitation of buildings in the Ministry of Justice's real estate portfolio—courthouses, prisons, etc.—throughout metropolitan and overseas France.

I am a project manager in Guadeloupe and work on the extension of the Baie-Mahault prison and the renovation of the historic courthouse in Pointe-à-Pitre. For these projects, my duties include technical, architectural and environmental support, organising the design and construction phases, setting up public participation, scheduling and budget monitoring, contract management, as well as contracting authority support and project supervision support.

What do you like most about your job?

The diversity of subjects and stakeholders. I deal with issues related to the environment, construction techniques, contract negotiations, but also with construction issues specific to the West Indies, such as seismic and cyclone risks, or risks related to old buildings, including asbestos and lead. I also interact with a wide range of stakeholders: construction companies, engineering firms, architects, local and regional authorities, etc. I learn something new every day.

Furthermore, working in an overseas part of France and having to adapt to a different pace and way of doing things is a great learning experience.

Can you tell us about your career path since graduation?

I first worked for the international engineering group Artelia, as contracting authority support on the Grand Paris Express project. I was the adviser on environmental regulations. That allowed me to bridge the gap between the two fields I'm trained in: law and the environment with contracting authority project management and urban planning. I stayed there for just over two years.

I then wanted to get back to something a bit more urban-focused and applied for a job at Espaces Ferroviaires, the SNCF's urban planning and property development subsidiary, which redevelops former railway brownfields into urban districts. I worked for a year on the development of the Ordener-Poissonniers district in Paris, which consists in redeveloping a railway depot into a low-carbon urban district. Moreover, I came across several other graduates of the Urban Planning Programme in the organisation.

Finally, I discovered APIJ through a professional contact. I saw that the position would let me continue exploring contracting authority project management while linking back to the first area I trained in. The only issue that arose was my limited experience with construction techniques. I was able to train in-house and that has given me a broader view of urban planning, from the building level to the neighbourhood level.

What did you gain from your education at Sciences Po?

I learned to work in a team, to listen and understand different points of view, and to put myself in other people's shoes. The working groups were also very instructive in terms of professional organisation. In the Urban Planning Programme, I got to meet people from other backgrounds and other countries. We were able to compare the organisation of different cities, the perception of urban projects, differences in scale and tools... That helps to develop your curiosity and adds depth to your professional expertise.