MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

work/life experiences of Brookes’ academics
Foreword from Professor Linda King

For me, success is about enjoying what you do. When you are lucky enough to work in a vibrant and supportive environment with engaged and passionate colleagues, that enjoyment comes easily.

Everyone is different and has a different approach to life, their career and how they manage both.

This publication, Making a difference: work/life experiences of Brookes’ academics, began as an opportunity to explore this further; to get to know staff better, their journeys into academia and their lives outside of Oxford Brookes.

What we ended up with was so much more; a wonderful collection of inspirational stories celebrating the rich and diverse experiences of our academic colleagues from across the University.

Individually, these stories showcase different career paths taken, different backgrounds people have come from, the highs, the lows and the different ways they combine their professional and personal lives.

Collectively, these stories showcase a shared commitment, shared talents and a shared enthusiasm in whatever they do.

My thanks go to all those involved in this project, from those who shared their stories to those who captured them.

I hope that you enjoy reading this publication as much I have and it gives you a fresh insight into Oxford Brookes and who we are.

PROFESSOR LINDA KING
Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Global Partnerships,
Oxford Brookes University
Welcome

Making a difference: work/life experiences of Brookes’ academics celebrates the rich breadth of academic colleagues’ lives. Staff from all four of Oxford Brookes’ Faculties were interviewed about their professional trajectories, their lives outside Brookes and about what makes them tick. The range of experiences and stories collected was remarkable. Some colleagues have been at Brookes since they were undergraduate or PhD students. Others came from completely different overseas institutional environments. For others still, academia was a second - and in the case of Pro Vice-Chancellor Paul Inman - a third career.

Not only was the diversity of backgrounds evident, but the interviews revealed a variety of home lives, which was universally considered not only necessary, but also an enriching counterbalance to their work life. Professor Helen Walkington is a beekeeper and triathlete; Professor Nigel Crook is actively involved in his church - playing in their music group, preaching and rolling out a course on discipleship. A number of colleagues who are also parents discussed how the skills learned through raising children - such as patience, people management and meticulous organisation - also translate into the workplace. They felt proud that they were role models for their children. Alison Honour, for example, relayed how her children would tell their friends: “My mum is a Professor” and Mary Briggs described how her daughter, on a recent trip to a bookshop, had pulled out a copy of one her many books and jokingly asked her to sign it! In this way, it became clear that there was a positive feedback loop between colleagues’ work and home lives - with each one enabling and enhancing the other.

Alongside this richness of experience, some common themes also emerged from the interviews. “Making a difference” was a key motivator for many staff. For some, this was about producing research that could be applied in a practical context, whilst for others this came through teaching. Lots of interviewees mentioned, as a highlight of their work, witnessing the “moment when it clicks” for a student while teaching. Making a difference also extended to helping colleagues. Many staff discussed their positive experiences (formal and informal) of being mentored, and were keen to lend a similar hand of support to junior colleagues to support their careers. The stories here reflect just a few of the heterogeneous experiences contained within Brookes. They evidence the various routes that can be taken into academia, and each end with their advice to someone embarking on this journey, hopefully inspiring a future generation of individuals who wish to pursue academic careers. They also highlight how diversity is an essential part of a successful university research community and that without the range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives we see here, Brookes would not be the dynamic place that it is.

Over the course of the interviews, a number of themes emerged. These reflected the ways in which academics’ work lives had been supported and made possible by the help and support of others - including colleagues, friends and family. They also brought personal stories to bear on key facets of academia: its international dimension and the possibility of making a difference. This desire to effect change was felt at the level of students, the University and, through impactful research and outreach activities, society. Each of these levels will be explored in more depth.

Collegiality: Mentoring, Support, Friendship

Many interviewees reflected on the role that collegiality had played in their careers. For some, the decision to pursue research was thanks to the supportive role a tutor had played early in their careers. Katja Graumann researched her PhD with Professor David Evans, who remains a support and mentor for her to this day; he supports her with grant writing and co-organising conferences with her.

“Through all the stages he [PhD supervisor at Brookes, Professor David Evans] helped me to gain the skills, the confidence; really pushed me”
Dr Katja Graumann, Cell Biology

Catherine Dilnot had been working at KPMG when, at the launch of the firm’s Oxford Office, she met former Brookes Professor Laura Spira, who encouraged Catherine to teach at Brookes as a guest lecturer. This slowly led to Catherine taking on more hours, and then again thanks to Laura’s encouragement, a move into research. Catherine’s research is now being read by the Department of Education and influencing policy. There are many such stories of academics at various stages of their careers, being encouraged by supervisors, colleagues or peers to take certain steps that have proved transformational. Dr Johnny Collett would not have become a researcher if his boss at Brookes, Professor Helen Dawes, had not encouraged him to take on a Research Assistant position.

“[Helen Dawes] has probably been the biggest influence as she gave me the RA position”
Dr Johnny Collett, Sport and Health Sciences

Meanwhile, Professor Christiana Payne was encouraged to aspire to Professorship by the warm letter of congratulation she was sent by the Vice-Chancellor upon attaining a Readership. The letter said: “I hope this will lead to further promotion” at which point she thought “Oh, could I be a professor?”

As well as certain individuals playing a big part in some people’s careers, collegiality is also institutionalised at Brookes. Dr Ana Souza had found the buddy system, whereby a member of staff volunteers to offer informal, friendly support to a new colleague, extremely valuable in helping her to navigate the institution when she first started. Others felt a duty to help other colleagues through mentoring and peer support schemes. Professor Helen Walkington is passionate about the role that mentoring can have on a researcher’s career. Having just completed the Brookes coaching and mentoring qualification, she believes that it can have a transformational impact.

Professor Anna Barnett, a clinical psychologist, wants to give back to her students some of the benefits she had accrued from having peers and colleagues look out for her career.

“I do whatever I can to support students’ careers because I can see how important it [mentoring/support] has been for me”
Professor Anna Barnett, Clinical Psychology

Professor Anna Barnett, Clinical Psychology

Over the course of the interviews, a number of themes emerged. These reflected the ways in which academics’ work lives had been supported and made possible by the help and support of others - including colleagues, friends and family. They also brought personal stories to bear on key facets of academia: its international dimension and the possibility of making a difference. This desire to effect change was felt at the level of students, the University and, through impactful research and outreach activities, society. Each of these levels will be explored in more depth.

Collegiality: Mentoring, Support, Friendship

Many interviewees reflected on the role that collegiality had played in their careers. For some, the decision to pursue research was thanks to the supportive role a tutor had played early in their careers. Katja Graumann researched her PhD with Professor David Evans, who remains a support and mentor for her to this day; he supports her with grant writing and co-organising conferences with her.

“Through all the stages he [PhD supervisor at Brookes, Professor David Evans] helped me to gain the skills, the confidence; really pushed me”
Dr Katja Graumann, Cell Biology

Catherine Dilnot had been working at KPMG when, at the launch of the firm’s Oxford Office, she met former Brookes Professor Laura Spira, who encouraged Catherine to teach at Brookes as a guest lecturer. This slowly led to Catherine taking on more hours, and then again thanks to Laura’s encouragement, a move into research. Catherine’s research is now being read by the Department of Education and influencing policy. There are many such stories of academics at various stages of their careers, being encouraged by supervisors, colleagues or peers to take certain steps that have proved transformational. Dr Johnny Collett would not have become a researcher if his boss at Brookes, Professor Helen Dawes, had not encouraged him to take on a Research Assistant position.

“[Helen Dawes] has probably been the biggest influence as she gave me the RA position”
Dr Johnny Collett, Sport and Health Sciences

Meanwhile, Professor Christiana Payne was encouraged to aspire to Professorship by the warm letter of congratulation she was sent by the Vice-Chancellor upon attaining a Readership. The letter said: “I hope this will lead to further promotion” at which point she thought “Oh, could I be a professor?”

As well as certain individuals playing a big part in some people’s careers, collegiality is also institutionalised at Brookes. Dr Ana Souza had found the buddy system, whereby a member of staff volunteers to offer informal, friendly support to a new colleague, extremely valuable in helping her to navigate the institution when she first started. Others felt a duty to help other colleagues through mentoring and peer support schemes. Professor Helen Walkington is passionate about the role that mentoring can have on a researcher’s career. Having just completed the Brookes coaching and mentoring qualification, she believes that it can have a transformational impact.

Professor Anna Barnett, a clinical psychologist, wants to give back to her students some of the benefits she had accrued from having peers and colleagues look out for her career.

“I do whatever I can to support students’ careers because I can see how important it [mentoring/support] has been for me”
Professor Anna Barnett, Clinical Psychology

Professor Anna Barnett, Clinical Psychology
Work and Home: Complementary Sides of a Full Life

Work and Home lives are typically presented as in conflict: opposing and mutually exclusive options, where more of one will always come at the cost of the other. However, the picture that emerged during the interviews was far from this. Staff felt that, in fact, when one of these aspects of their life was going well, it would have a positive knock-on influence on the other.

For Professor Christiana Payne, her passion for her work made her a happy mum.

“Research has always been something that’s energised me, satisfied me and stimulated me, made me happy basically.”

Professor Christiana Payne, History of Art

For a number of colleagues, such as Professors Mary Briggs and Linda King, an academic career had meant that their children had opportunities to travel which would not have otherwise been possible, and that they remember as highlights of their childhood to this day.

“The children have benefitted from my travelling around. That’s given them the opportunity to see different things. Kenya was really very memorable. My daughter was quite little but she still remembers the Masai”

Mary Briggs, Education

For Dr Sara Hannam, who also has to travel a lot for work, there was a different but equally positive picture.

She found that these short trips away from her family enabled her to have a break from the demands of family life - making her refreshed and rested when she came back, perhaps even with a present for the family. And her children saw her absences as an opportunity to have some of the rules relaxed a little!

“Even though I’m working really hard and need to stay on top everything, I’ve got the privilege of being my own person for that time I am away and having some space to relax and do things - things that I may not always have time to do at home”

Dr Sara Hannam, Business & Management

Family life also extended beyond simply having a partner or children, with many staff having fascinating hobbies that occupied their time outside of the university. Ross Jordan is a stand-up comedian and Dave Carter used to be a competitive table tennis player.

Whatever it was that kept colleagues busy outside of the university walls, it tended to benefit their job. Reflecting on the challenge of managing people, Linda says:

“That’s where having children helps! Learning to deal with children helps you deal with people and listen to everyone’s points of view. It’s never one sided”

Professor Linda King, PVC and Virologist

Meanwhile, Ross Jordan recognises the aptness of the term “lecture theatre”. He borrowed some techniques from stand-up and sees similarities between this and lecturing:

“There’s no greater reward or pleasure than enabling someone to laugh. In the same way that I think there’s an equal reward and pleasure in helping someone learn something about themselves [...] a lot of entrepreneurship teaching is about helping people to understand themselves”

Ross Jordan, Business & Management

These stories pointed to the complementary, rather than conflicting, nature of the work life relationship. They do not constitute a zero-sum game, but in fact are mutually reinforcing.

International Academics: Pushing Borders and Pushing Boundaries

Brookes is lucky to have academics from across the world, bringing international talent and world-leading research to its centre. Interestingly, many staff who came from overseas had not planned on staying. They saw working in Oxford as an opportunity next step, particularly young academics with few ties. However, falling in love or getting a job that they really cared about led colleagues to start their own families here. Dr Esra Kurul, from Turkey, was in fact very close to returning home when she met her partner with whom she now has a family.

The experiences that growing up in or experiencing different cultures afford have been extremely influential for many people. Professor Alison Honour’s tendency to “back the underdog” comes from spending time growing up in places like the West Indies and the Caribbean where educational inequality was stark. Dr Emma Wragg, who grew up in Zambia, now researches unplanned settlements in Zambia, using her academic position to make sense of what she had observed as a child.

Meanwhile, for Dr Brigitte Clark, the decision to enter the Masai “back the underdog” comes from spending time growing up in places like the West Indies and the Caribbean where educational inequality was stark. Dr Emma Wragg, who grew up in Zambia, now researches unplanned settlements in Zambia, using her academic position to make sense of what she had observed as a child.

The experiences that growing up in or experiencing different cultures afford have been extremely influential for many people. Professor Alison Honour’s tendency to “back the underdog” comes from spending time growing up in places like the West Indies and the Caribbean where educational inequality was stark. Dr Emma Wragg, who grew up in Zambia, now researches unplanned settlements in Zambia, using her academic position to make sense of what she had observed as a child. Meanwhile, for Dr Brigitte Clark, the decision to enter research itself was informed by the political situation in South Africa at the time.

Knowledge is thus gained through exposure to cultural and institutional difference and this in turn positively influences research. Dr Farzaneh Yazdani has taught perspectives gained through travel and living in Iran, Jordan and the UK to her discipline:

“Travelling helped me to bring the concept of sociology and later even politics into my understanding of occupational therapy and counselling”

Dr Farzaneh Yazdani, Occupational Therapy

Helen Wilson’s role at Brookes has seen her travel to a myriad of places and this has been hugely instructive to Helen’s own development:

“I’ve learned so much by meeting people from different countries”

Helen Wilson, Education

The international dimension of research itself is also extremely important to colleagues. Professor Tim Shreeve has an international network of colleagues, and he finds having these external links central to supporting his career. Dr Bridget Durning is extremely proud that her highly successful book on environmental assessment and management has now been translated into Chinese.

Meanwhile, Dr Verena Kriechbaumer’s network of colleagues across the world meant that she was awarded a fellowship from the Korean Brain Trust to work with scientist Wooong Juwe Park in South Korea, which she took for three months.

 “[The fellowship in South Korea] was probably one of the best times in my life”

Dr Verena Kriechbaumer, Plant Biology

Academia is a necessarily international profession, with knowledge being generated through exposure to new ideas and different practices. It is only through crossing borders that breakthroughs in knowledge can be generated. Keeping the international spirit alive and animated at Brookes is essential.
Making a Difference

For many of the academic staff, making a difference was a key motivation. This was construed in many different ways and applied to both work and home. For Orit Sarfatti, for example, making a difference was about being ethical in every aspect of her life. She chose to move into architecture because she felt that it was a path that connects to people's lives directly. In her teaching, she gets most reward out of encouraging students to take seriously the social side of architecture. At home, her family includes two adopted children, with Orit feeling that it's important to help and have a social imprint in every way you can.

Catherine Dilnot is proud of the impact that she is having on education policy:

“What I really like is that my work does seem to be making a difference now in policy. So I know that Justine Greening [Secretary of State for Education] has read a paper that has come out!”

Catherine Dilnot, Accounting, Finance and Economics

For many colleagues, making a difference was about their research having a social impact. Professor Linda King established a successful spin out company with her husband which disseminates the research she has done into viruses, and she finds the fact that this can be used to develop vaccines for serious diseases extremely fulfilling.

For Professor Christiana Payne, making a difference is about impacting the way people see things:

“Success is being able to change the way people think and getting them to look at things”

Professor Christiana Payne, History of Art

Other colleagues saw their impact as being generated through the teaching part of their job. Many discussed the “moment when it clicks” with students as being one of the highlights of their work and a key motivating factor.

Dr Katja Graumann and Kate Clayton-Hathway echo many staff at Brookes when they discuss the sense of reward that comes from impacting on students’ lives:

“Knowing you make a difference in a person’s life; that’s quite nice”

Dr Katja Graumann, Cell Biology

“I’ve been teaching in some form or another for 25 years or something. And I’m very proud of that. I know I’ve made a positive contribution to some people’s lives. So that’s really important to me”

Kate Clayton-Hathway, School of Law

Some colleagues also discussed the happiness they felt when they heard about what their students had gone on to do. Dr Igea Troiani, a senior lecturer in architecture, finds that when students go on to start their own practices, she feels a personal sense of success. Dr Kate Ringham, who teaches in the Oxford School of Hospitality Management, takes immense pleasure in seeing her students succeed, often overcoming significant challenges in their own lives.

Making a difference had in fact inspired some colleagues to make the move into academia from other professions. Kate Clayton-Hathway, for example, transferred to the University from a highly successful career in the private sector. She is also among a number of colleagues whose commitment to social justice means that she also has additional roles outside the University – with local charities. For Professor Nigel Crook, these energies are directed towards his tireless work with the church. Nigel preaches about six times a year and has written a course on discipleship which is in the process of being rolled out.

We will now let our colleagues tell you their own stories.

Messages to Colleagues

Finally, staff were asked what their advice to a younger colleague would be. A familiar refrain was that academia was hard, but worth the rewards.

“Despite the fact that lots of people will tell you how hard it is: If you want to do it, do it!” Dr Carol Brown, Education

“Be sure of what you want to do because it can be tough, but if you really want to do it then you’ll carry on with it through thick and thin” Professor Christiana Payne, History of Art

Linked to this was the idea that you need patience to work in academia

“Be stubborn, be patient but make sure that you show the world what you can do” Dr Verena Kriechbaumer, Plant Biology

“Be patient, be tenacious and hardworking. If you have those qualities, the rewards will come. Dr Brigitte Clark, Law

Passion and having a research niche also emerged from interviews. Being clear about what you want from a career in academia will help you to make the most of opportunities as they come up.

“Find out what really makes you interested and passionate and don’t lose it” Professor Linda King, Virology and PVC

You just have to work really, really hard, there are no shortcuts. And find a research niche” Dr. Dave Carter, Biomedical Science

“Think big and work towards a vision” Professor Nigel Crook, Computing and Communication Technologies

We will now let our colleagues tell you their own stories.
Kate is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice in Oxford Brookes Business School. Additionally, she is the Research Director of an anti-FGM charity.

**KATE'S STORY**

**Transition to Academia**

Academia is a second career for Kate, who left school at 18 with A-levels, went straight into the corporate world and subsequently enjoyed a high-flying 20-year career in the financial sector, working in consultancy and change management for a number of prestigious firms. When she started to feel that she had achieved as much as she could, Kate revisited her longstanding interest in the social sciences.

Committing to a career change, Kate decided to follow the academic path and enrolled herself in a bachelor’s degree. She transferred to study Social Change at Oxford Brookes University after initially enrolling in Psychology with the Open University, but soon realised that she wanted to pursue a career that contributed to social justice.

Kate graduated in 2004 and proceeded to undertake a master’s degree in Equality and Diversity at London Metropolitan University, before returning to Oxford Brookes where she has worked as a researcher and consultant on educational participation and equalities in projects focused mainly on gender inequality.

**Key Turning Points**

Kate recalls that the biggest influence on the direction of her career was the Open University. In her second year of study she went to a summer school and was amazed by what a contrast it was to the financial world: “I went to this Open University summer school, and nobody could care less about your age, where you came from, all anybody was interested in was the experiments you were doing, really getting into the learning, this intellectual exchange. And I’d never experienced that before because I left school and went straight into the workplace and it just blew me away. I remember getting off the train and coming home, my husband picked me up (at the station) and me saying: I want to be a student”. From this moment, Kate’s commitment to academia was established.

**Motivations**

Kate loved her master’s degree and the work that she produced during this period: “It was really proud of my master’s and my dissertation on the British National Party. It was really challenging, really hard. I was very proud of that”. However, despite the hard work required, it is clear that an intellectual challenge is a key driving motivation for Kate. “To have to really read it and read it and you start to read what you came to achieve”. FORMULATION TO AN IDEA. And then you get those breakthroughs”.

Making a difference is also a central concern for Kate and this is exemplified across her different roles. “I've been teaching in some form or another for 25 years or something. And I'm very proud of that. I know I’ve made a positive contribution to some peoples’ lives. So that's really important to me”.

**Personal Life**

Kate is married and says that her husband has always been extremely supportive of her career decisions and her busy work life, managing her multiple roles as a Research Fellow and consultant. Kate finds that the biggest help is the flexibility of the hours, which is one of the reasons she enjoys research. “I’ve never liked a nine to five. I hate nine to five. I like to work the hours around: one- what I like doing, because I prefer to work later in the day and in the evenings and two- because I’ve got other roles I like it to be flexible”.

Kate’s message to early career researchers

“Make sure that you protect part of your home life - have something that’s yours that’s away from the workplace”.

Looking forward, Kate hopes to be able to dedicate more time to her preferred research area and wants to establish herself in an academic community. In the future, as long as she is engaged in research, teaching and writing, Kate is happy: “And I don’t see myself ever retiring, not fully... I still see that I’ve got quite a lot to achieve”.

Kate’s commitment to academia has had its ups and downs. On the one hand, Kate has transferrable skills such as project and people management which are of great use. However, she finds that these are often not recognised in academia, putting her in the difficult position of being regarded as inexperienced despite her numerous skills learned in the corporate world.
“Have confidence in yourself!”

Catherine Dilnot is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics at Oxford Brookes University. She started at Oxford Brookes in 1991, and has had various part-time roles since.

CATHERINE’S STORY

Professional Journey

After graduating with a degree in Physics from the University of Oxford, Catherine took on a job at KPMG where she qualified as a chartered accountant. She spent eight years at the firm, during which she got married and had a child, before shifting careers entirely and taking up a job at Oxford Brookes.

Her move to Oxford Brookes was the fortunate result of an encounter with a former Professor in the Business School, Laura Spira. The pair met at the launch of the Oxford Office of KPMG where Laura, herself an ex-KPMG accountant, encouraged Catherine to teach at Oxford Brookes as a guest lecturer.

This meeting came at a good time; Catherine had been considering moving into a role that would enable her to spend more time with her young family. She felt that teaching was a more interesting prospect than the part-time work she was offered at KPMG so when she heard that there were some part-time jobs available at Brookes, and was subsequently appointed as a senior lecturer on a half-time contract, she was delighted: “It was great and it was compatible with family life”.

Catherine had a year off when her second daughter was born and when she came back to work, had to look after her elder daughter who was unwell at the time. She dropped her hours and became an associate (hourly) lecturer for a few years.

“It was interesting but part-time and flexible which was a great joy really. I have felt incredibly lucky at Brookes that Brookes has been so flexible.”

This flexibility also enabled her to do voluntary work which she finds extremely rewarding. She has brought her voluntary experience into her course at Oxford Brookes, establishing the ACES scheme (Accounting for Community: Engaging Students) where students can provide accounting and bookkeeping services to local charities in their second year.

Whilst Catherine was initially inclined towards teaching, the balance slowly shifted towards research. It was when Professor Laura Spira, a key figure in Catherine’s career, alerted her to the fact that the Institute of Chartered Accountants wanted someone to conduct some research into gender and access to the profession that Catherine realised this was what she was interested in: “This made me realise I was more interested in who did what and why…I did that and loved it”.

As a result, she decided to pursue a research career and took a year out of teaching to do a master’s degree in research methods at the London School of Economics. She says this was “the really big turning point which was to upskill to be able to do quantitative research properly” and she describes this decision as “just wonderful”.

Now Catherine is back teaching at Brookes, but also pursuing a part-time PhD at the University College London’s Institute of Education, exploring fair access to universities and the leading professions, and in particular the role of subject choice.

MOTIVATIONS

Catherine is clearly driven by her love of numbers and the potential to make a difference. She says:

“If I’ve got a day and I can just sit and number crunch, I really love that”.

Her research is having a considerable political impact:

“what I really, really like is that my work does seem to be making a difference now in policy. So I know that Justine Greening has read a paper that has come out”. She enjoys the combination of affecting policy, and impacting directly on students’ lives through teaching. The fact that her students’ lives will be “transformed” through their education is of utmost value to her and she is now at the stage in her career where she is able to affect social mobility both at the macro policy level and at the micro, individual level.

Thus, she gets immense satisfaction out of both the teaching and research aspects of her job. With students, she says “that moment when you can see the penny drops, that’s lovely too” and research-wise “I love it when people say I read your work and thought it was really interesting. That’s just fabulous”.

For her, success constitutes others taking notice of her work. She says: “I’m not very good at applying for promotions and things” although she hopes to progress through to Reader so that she has more time for research. “I’ve got so many papers in me, my supervisors sort of laugh at me because I have this long list of things I really want to look at. So managing to do some of that would be success.”

Family Life

Catherine is from an academic family and so education is extremely important to her, hence her research interest in affecting policy to broaden access to university education. Her husband is Warden of an Oxford College and she appreciates the fact that this means that she gets to meet students at Oxford Brookes and the University of Oxford, and so has access to an incredible network of stimulating people.

She has two adult daughters, both teachers and reflects: “I think the children are quite sweetly proud that I’m doing what I’m doing now”. She believes that age brings you a confidence to excel. “Doing a doctorate at my age, I have the confidence that if I don’t understand a paper for the first few times, I’ll get there in the end”.

Catherine’s message to early career researchers

“How confident are you? Have confidence in yourself!”. 
“One of the things I like about Brookes is I feel aligned with their values”

Sara is the Oxford Brookes Business School Head of International Partnerships.

SARA’S STORY

Professional Journey

Upon graduating with a degree in English and Cultural History, Sara moved to Greece where she taught English (ELT). Whilst abroad, she completed a master’s degree, another teaching qualification and a PhD. Before doing these qualifications, she started working for City College (the University of Sheffield’s International Faculty, located in Greece). She worked there for 15 years as Director of English Studies. She moved back to the UK in 2012, when she started working for Oxford Brookes.

New Challenges

Sara has always pushed herself to take on new challenges, both academically and career-wise. Doing a PhD whilst working full-time was an important move: “I’m really glad that I did my PhD… I think having the PhD, having pushed myself to study at that level is really important because it’s a rite of passage intellectually… The push that it gives your brain, you wouldn’t get that in any other way”.

She has also “been bold” in her career; proposing early on that Brookes also came as the result of her having the confidence that her skills were transferable. On her current role with Oxford Brookes she says: “when I saw this job advertised, it wasn’t 100% my sphere…I am not from a business background… It meant going outside what might have been my obvious career trajectory but I stepped outside that”. Thus, Sara is constantly seeking and making the most of opportunities that come her way. “My natural tendency is to keep running forwards but there are times I’ve had to pull myself back”.

Success

In keeping with this momentum, she says: “success for me personally is coming away at the end of the day and feeling like I’ve had a productive day. That I’ve achieved what I wanted, I’ve had good interactions with other people, any problems that have arisen have been solved. Everybody’s happy. It’s those things”.

Sara is married with two children and so she also has a criterion of success for her home life: “In my home life it’s feeling that I’ve spent an appropriate amount of time with my kids. That I haven’t missed anything that’s going on for them. Giving them support”.

Her current role, because of working around different time zones, means that she can spend time with them too - taking them swimming and dropping off and collecting them from school a few times a week: “I really try and protect those moments because I think they are really important for the kids; that I’m there to meet them when they come out of school sometimes”.

Travel

Sara met her husband in Greece and he is extremely encouraging of her career. She travels for work and feels “very lucky that I have a very supportive husband”. Sara is also exceptionally organised: “I have to be someone who has made sure I know in advance what’s happening so everybody is warned. Lots of measures have to be put in place in advance. For a couple of weeks before I go I have to get everything in place to make sure it’s all going to run smoothly while I’m not there”. However, Sara clearly excels at organisation and this enables her to manage a high-profile career with her family life: “It’s a bit crazy sometimes. In terms of organising everything for the kids, getting everything done at work. So I kind of thrive on that organisational element”.

Moreover, once all the organisation is in place travelling from work enables her to have a break which means that she comes back to the family in some ways rejuvenated:

“You’ve got to be someone who has an ability to switch off. When I get on the plane, I know everything is planned at home so I can then go ahead without feeling any stress. It’s almost like a break space for me. Even though I’m working really hard and need to stay on top everything, I’ve got the privilege of being my own person for that time I am away and having some space - things that I may not always have time to do at home”.

MOTIVATIONS

Sara clearly takes immense pleasure from her job. She likes the autonomy that Brookes affords her, as well as her colleagues and the University’s ethos. She says that she has a “really good bunch of colleagues” and says that “one of the things I like about Brookes is I feel aligned with their values. I like the fact there is an emphasis on being ethical, that our University is actually doing good things in the world”.

This focus on tackling injustice and creating a better world is a value Sara holds dear: “There are a lot of things that are taken for granted and unless you crack them open, they will continue. Gender is one, race is another. It’s taken for granted and unless you put your shoulder to the wheel, it won’t move. That’s something that is incredibly important to me and is a big part of my ethos”.

Sara’s message to early career researchers

“Stay true to yourself. Don’t compromise who you are for success.”

Don’t compromise who you are for success.”
ROSS JORDAN

**ROSS JORDAN**

**Entrepreneurial Background**

Ross has a highly entrepreneurial background himself. He spent the first stage of his career as a retailer, initially working behind a counter and then starting his own business which lead to him running a chain of five musical instrument shops, or more precisely “rock and roll shops: pointy guitars, drums, loud noises, that sort of thing”. This was an intense but highly enjoyable time: “we were so busy you couldn’t sit back and enjoy it. Only upon reflection do you realise that was something really special”.

Eighteen years on, when he exited that business he had a “huge career change” and embarked on an MBA at Oxford Brookes. He quips: “so like a number of my colleagues, I came here as a student and have yet to escape!”

During this career transition, Ross had a number of different jobs: he worked for the Music Industries Association, ran a programme called “Weekend Warriors” which encouraged lapsed musicians to take up their instruments again and “was about having fun”. He was also integral in setting up a charity called “Music For All”, which was about promoting the benefits of playing music at school.

**Transition to Teaching**

Two years on, the opportunity presented itself to do some Associate Lecturing at Brookes. He had always wanted to teach and despite his initial reaction to his first day - “I thought I couldn’t do it” - he persevered: “Luckily I came back and worked out how to help students realise their potential with lots of help and support from very experienced colleagues”. Ross also borrowed some techniques from his hobby, stand-up comedy and sees similarities between this and lecturing. “There’s no greater reward or pleasure in helping someone learn something about themselves [...] a lot of entrepreneurship teaching is about helping people to understand themselves”.

Alongside his teaching, Ross also worked in a number of different roles for Land Securities PLC (the developer of the Westgate Centre in Oxford), and set up his own business called “Brit Picks” which manufactures guitar plectrums out of recycled plastic. Ross continued juggling these various roles until 18 months ago, when due to the demands of teaching, research and commercial activity, then I think we are doing an amazing job… but that’s really tough to do”.

In terms of advice for entrepreneurship he says: “There is a great benefit in education for entrepreneurship, I think there is a notion that you are born an entrepreneur, and you might be, but I subscribe to the belief that you can learn to be entrepreneurial.”

**MOTIVATIONS**

In addition to his passion for teaching, Ross is also developing his own research and is half way through a professional doctorate with the School of Education at Brookes. Ross loves thinking strategically, and being involved in and able to influence all aspects of the University: teaching, research, commercial activity are extremely important to him. “The opportunity to make a difference in a strategic sense” he says, is a key motivation.

Ross has a partner with whom he has been since his music shop days. She has been extremely supportive and, coincidentally, also ended up as a university lecturer for a time. Now that she has moved into a slightly different role, working with a social enterprise, he says “we are able to have conversations about work without boring each other silly”.

Ross loves thinking strategically, and being involved in and able to influence all aspects of the University: teaching, research, commercial activity are extremely important to him. “The opportunity to make a difference in a strategic sense” he says, is a key motivation.

Ross has a partner with whom he has been since his music shop days. She has been extremely supportive and, coincidentally, also ended up as a university lecturer for a time. Now that she has moved into a slightly different role, working with a social enterprise, he says “we are able to have conversations about work without boring each other silly”.

Ross has a highly entrepreneurial background himself. He spent the first stage of his career as a retailer, initially working behind a counter and then starting his own business which lead to him running a chain of five musical instrument shops, or more precisely “rock and roll shops: pointy guitars, drums, loud noises, that sort of thing”. This was an intense but highly enjoyable time: “we were so busy you couldn’t sit back and enjoy it. Only upon reflection do you realise that was something really special”.

Eighteen years on, when he exited that business he had a “huge career change” and embarked on an MBA at Oxford Brookes. He quips: “so like a number of my colleagues, I came here as a student and have yet to escape!”

During this career transition, Ross had a number of different jobs: he worked for the Music Industries Association, ran a programme called “Weekend Warriors” which encouraged lapsed musicians to take up their instruments again and “was about having fun”. He was also integral in setting up a charity called “Music For All”, which was about promoting the benefits of playing music at school.

Two years on, the opportunity presented itself to do some Associate Lecturing at Brookes. He had always wanted to teach and despite his initial reaction to his first day - “I thought I couldn’t do it” - he persevered: “Luckily I came back and worked out how to help students realise their potential with lots of help and support from very experienced colleagues”. Ross also borrowed some techniques from his hobby, stand-up comedy and sees similarities between this and lecturing. “There’s no greater reward or pleasure in helping someone learn something about themselves [...] a lot of entrepreneurship teaching is about helping people to understand themselves”.

Alongside his teaching, Ross also worked in a number of different roles for Land Securities PLC (the developer of the Westgate Centre in Oxford), and set up his own business called “Brit Picks” which manufactures guitar plectrums out of recycled plastic. Ross continued juggling these various roles until 18 months ago, when due to the demands of teaching, research and commercial activity, then I think we are doing an amazing job… but that’s really tough to do”.

In terms of advice for entrepreneurship he says: “There is a great benefit in education for entrepreneurship, I think there is a notion that you are born an entrepreneur, and you might be, but I subscribe to the belief that you can learn to be entrepreneurial.”

Ross’ advice for someone going into academia would be not to specialise too quickly and don’t feel like you have to make that decision.

“This is an amazing job… but that’s really tough to do”.

In terms of advice for entrepreneurship he says: “There is a great benefit in education for entrepreneurship, I think there is a notion that you are born an entrepreneur, and you might be, but I subscribe to the belief that you can learn to be entrepreneurial.”
“One of the biggest challenges is to not underestimate what you can do”

Kate Ringham is Programme Lead for the master’s programme in the Oxford School of Hospitality Management. She joined the School at Oxford Brookes University eight years ago.

**Kate’s Story**

After graduating from the University of Oxford, Kate qualified as a chartered accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) in London before moving to Oxford and changing career when she had her family.

It was during Kate’s time at PWC that she first got a taste for teaching. She decided to move away from audit practice into Training and Development and she soon realised that the teaching aspect of this role was what she really enjoyed. Kate pursued this within PWC, running training programmes which is, she says, “where the love of teaching adults came from”.

Kate left PWC when her children were born and the family moved to Oxford. While her children were young she had several different jobs before taking on her role in the Oxford School of Hospitality Management at Oxford Brookes University. In making her career moves, she says she has always kept an “open mind” and “thought laterally” about how her experience in one job might prove useful in another. For example, she realised that her work as an accountant would be useful in supporting her role as a school governor. Kate describes her key turning points as “lucky breaks” and her move to the Oxford School of Hospitality Management as the “complete serendipity” of seeing the job advertised in the local press.

**Turning Points and Influences**

When Kate took on her role at Brookes, she says “I hadn’t really thought about the possibility of a research career”. However, thanks to the encouragement of the former Head of the School of Hospitality Management, Don Sloan, and Professor Levent Altinay, she decided to pursue a PhD on a part-time basis. She got on extremely well with her PhD supervisors, Dr Samantha Miles and Dr Rebecca Hawkins, and Kate still works collaboratively with them.

Kate also has a close relationship with her own students and was proud of the fact that she was able to graduate and receive her PhD alongside them.

**Personal Life**

Kate was the first generation of her family to go to university, at St Catherine’s College, Oxford. She met her husband there, and the pair have supported each other’s careers and lives ever since. They carefully made decisions together regarding their respective careers and how they would combine these with bringing up a family.

Their decision to move from London to Oxfordshire was made with family in mind: Kate felt that it would be easier to have a good work-life balance in Oxfordshire, which she achieved by being flexible work-wise when her children were young. She did freelance work for about seven years after her children were born in order to spend lots of time with them. The main thing that she missed about her previous work during these years was the social aspect, which you don’t get as a freelancer: “I enjoy working as part of a team”.

As her children grew up and went through the education system, Kate increased her hours at Brookes from part-time to full-time when they went to secondary school. A few years later, when it came to researching her PhD, her children were teenagers and her move to the Oxford School was a social aspect, which you don’t get as a freelancer: “I enjoy working as part of a team”.

Kate describes being at home with small children as one of the most levelling experiences, but you can almost forget what you can do in other spheres.

**Motivations**

Of all Kate’s jobs, she says this one has “the most favourite bits”. It is the combination of working with students alongside the intellectual stimulation of the research that she most enjoys and she finds the balance between research and teaching stimulating.

Kate not only enjoys teaching and the challenge of having to explain complex concepts, making finance seem interesting and relevant, but says that she learns a lot from her students as well.

“We are always seeing students as one of the most levelling experiences, but you can almost forget what you can do in other spheres.”

Kate’s message to early career researchers

“Lots of opportunities will come your way; be very clear of the benefit to yourself in undertaking them. Equally if you are going to say no to something, be very clear on the reasons why. And if it’s not I don’t think I can do it, think twice, challenge yourself”.

VOICES FROM OXFORD BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL
MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

ANN’S STORY

Personal Journey

Anna never imagined that she would go on to university, let alone become a Professor. In fact, she describes herself as a “just about average” student at school and, due to health issues in her teenage years, she says that she “scraped through with two A-levels”. It was thanks to the encouragement of her family that she thought she might as well apply to university.

“I never thought about going to uni but I was encouraged to apply and then I got in. I never planned anything, it just sort of happened. Looking back, family were key, I didn’t realise that at the time.”

Anna then went on to study Psychology and Physical Education and remembers struggling with the fact that her peers were all much more serious athletes than she was. However, this apparent disadvantage in fact sowed the seeds of Anna’s lifelong research interests. At the sports centre where many PE students worked, she recalls taking a keen interest in the children’s activity club:

“Whereas all my colleagues were interested in training up elite performers, I got interested in the kids who just couldn’t catch a ball at all.”

However, she didn’t know where this spark would take her. After spending a year working in a big psychiatric hospital, when she was about to embark on a clinical psychology course, Anna saw an advert in the Guardian for a PhD at the Institute of Education, University College London which would allow her to research her passion: children with movement difficulties. She successfully applied for the place and this was to be the beginning of an illustrious research career in the field.

Influences

Anna has been extremely lucky in having lots of support and influences throughout her career.

“I’ve had some really key people rooting for me and still do, which is really important actually.”

During and after her PhD, she was extremely close to her supervisor, who she says to this day continues to be “absolutely central to my development”. Her external examiner for her PhD also became and continues to be an important mentor.

“If I have anything I want to talk about in terms of work or development I just give him a call and he’s informally my mentor.”

Additionally, she has been influenced practically by some of the world class clinicians she has worked with. Thus, Anna’s appreciation of the role of informal mentors in her own career influences how she behaves with her PhD students today.

“I do whatever I can to support their careers because I can see how important it has been for me.”

Family Life

Family is extremely important to Anna, who had both her children during her PhD. The ensuing combination of being a young mother and a young scientist was the hardest part of her career. She had short contracts and her husband’s work meant that the family regularly moved to different parts of the country. This involved frequent commuting: at one point, Anna was working part-time in London and living in Cardiff, all whilst bringing up two young children under five.

Her husband and his family were particularly supportive at this stage: “You need a whole army supporting you really and I was very lucky to have that.”

The couple considered having a third child, however made the difficult decision not to do so, realising that this would prevent Anna from being able to pursue her career, as well as being a significant financial cost. This tough decision made Anna realise that there were certain trade-offs that she had to make in order to balance both career and family.

Some of these challenges are resurfacing, as Anna is now a very proud new grandmother and keen to spend a lot of time with her grandson. However, her parents are just getting to the stage of needing care themselves. Coupled with the expectations laid on an academic at the peak of their career, new balancing acts are presenting themselves, which Anna is aware that she will have to consider in due course.

MOTIVATIONS

Anna now sees helping other people to progress as the most important thing for her career; this is what she values about her role as Research Lead.

Anna sees success as personal attainment: “Success is about recognising your skills and seeing where you want to go with them.”

What she has learned throughout her career is that you never know what options will present themselves to you, as the world is a constantly changing, unexpected place.

Anna’s message to early career researchers

“The advice I give to all my students is keep your options open.”

Anna Barnett is a Professor of Psychology and Research Lead in the Department of Psychology, Social Work and Public Health. She joined Brookes 12 years ago as a Senior Lecturer and has since progressed to Professor, as well as holding the role of Interim Head of Department.

Success is about recognising your skills and seeing where you want to go with them.”
“I love this job, I think I’ve got the best job in the world”

Dr David Carter is a Reader in Biomedical Science at Oxford Brookes University. He runs a Research Group at Oxford Brookes and his areas of expertise are cancer research and sickle cell disease. Dave joined Oxford Brookes in 2010.

DAVE’S STORY
Evolving Passion for Science

Whilst Dave recalls that: “as long as I can remember I was interested in Science. Since I was 10, 11, I wanted to be a scientist”, he didn’t actually know what such a career would look like. His father was a kitchen salesman and his mother worked in care homes so it was only when he went to university that he got a real sense of what academia looked like.

“There was a moment during my undergraduate when I realised you could do a PhD and that was quite a revelation because I didn’t realise you could do a PhD.”

Dave’s passion for research and confidence in his own ability to carry out research developed when he took a year out in industry. He spent this year working on the Human Genome Project at the Sanger Institute and this turned out to be a pivotal year in his life. Even being accepted to the project in the first place was a huge achievement; he recalls the interviewer being so impressed that he had managed to read and understand the paper on the project that this led to him being offered the placement.

Once there, he not only fell in love with research but also met his wife whom he married three years later while they were doing their PhDs at Cambridge. He appreciates being able to share his passion for science with her:

“The fact that we are both scientists is really nice. It means we can chat about work and I can tell her about results and tell her about ideas and things like that”.

After his PhD, Dave moved from Cambridge to the University of Oxford, taking a postdoctoral post before being awarded a Lectureship at Cranfield University, where he stayed for a couple of years before joining Oxford Brookes about seven years ago. Reflecting on his current role, he says:

“I couldn’t have envisaged myself being a lecturer… I used to hate public speaking… but I still get nervous now. Before every lecture I get nervous.”

His strategy for coping with nerves is to remind himself that lecturing is really just sharing his love of science.

MOTIVATIONS

Dave is clearly motivated by his sincere passion for science. He says that even when he goes on holiday, he brings a stack of scientific papers with him because it’s his hobby as well.

“I love this job, I think I’ve got the best job in the world. And I want to work really hard because I want to succeed at this job… The fact that I get to do lots of science… the fact that I get to talk to people about science… the fact that I can be creative and have intellectual freedom to come up with my own ideas and test them… I can plot my own course and I can do what I want to do. And I like the flexibility. Here that’s great because you just get the freedom to work flexibly. And I also really like teaching. I love my interactions with the students.”

Being able to discover something new is what really drives him.

“The best thing is when you are doing a project, and you get the result - you make the graph and you can see the correlation. You’re the first person in the world that discovers that, the Eureka moment. That feeling - there’s no other high that I’ve experienced like it.”

Highlights

Dave’s highlights are linked to his research successes:

“My PhD paper was probably one of my proudest. It was published in a really good journal; to me it was a journal but now looking back I think - that was pretty good”.

He’s also extremely proud of the first paper he published as a group leader and his most recent highly impressive funding grant “which means I’ve now got the resource to not just think about ideas but actually to execute them”.

Hence, for Dave, success is made up of research success - grants and papers which, he admits, he “craves the most” and teaching: “I take pride in my courses and my modules. So, the other thing I would define as success is when the students enjoy the module”.

Family

Dave and his wife have two children, of whom he is extremely proud. His commitment to his family, like his commitment to science, is wholesale: “I always want to get home at 6 to make sure I have dinner with my wife and the children. So that’s my goal, to make sure I get home at 6”. He says that his mother is a huge help, often taking the children to school.

Dave’s message to early career researchers

“You just have to work really, really hard, there are no shortcuts. And find a research niche”.
Johnny’s message to early career researchers

“Only do it if you really want to do it. Your motivations have got to be right and you have to really want to do it; so it’s not about prestige but about passion”.

Johnny’s Story

Route into Academia

Johnny has been at Oxford Brookes since his undergraduate degree. He initially enrolled on a BA at the University of Northampton, however transferred to Brookes part way through so that he could live at home and continue his hobby, a job as a gardener. Johnny had been a gardener prior to going to university and it is something that he still loves. On completing his undergraduate degree, he initially went back to gardening, however was soon offered a job as a Research Assistant which he eventually received at university. Therefore, whilst there was a clue to this academic potential when he did very well in his GCSEs, he did less well at A-Level and so went to college to top them up. It was at college that his talent was really noticed. He says he was lucky to have a particularly supportive tutor who encouraged him to apply for university and to study for his first degree. “I didn’t see myself as at all academic but they obviously saw it”.

Positive Impact of Dyslexia Diagnosis

Getting diagnosed as dyslexic, after one of the tutors at Oxford Brookes suggest he get tested, was in many ways a relief. “Suddenly my bad A-levels made sense […] I just thought I wasn’t academic but it was actually a problem with my writing […] I thought I was clever but I didn’t really understand why I wasn’t getting good grades”. This enabled him to reconsider his relationship with academia and to gain confidence in his own intelligence. In fact, the diagnosis was a key turning point as otherwise he wouldn’t have taken this career path.

The next big turning point came when he was offered a job as a Research Assistant. He says that Professor Helen Dawes, his boss at Brookes: “has probably been the biggest influence as she gave me the RA position”.

Motivations

Johnny is driven by his love of research and the potential to make a difference. “I do really like research, I like finding out new stuff and I like the fact that ideally the research I’m in can directly help people and improve their lives… Knowing that you’re trying to make a difference is rewarding.”

There are some aspects of academia that he finds challenging: the instability of an early research career - and for him personally - conferences and the focus on public speaking which can be hard with his dyslexia. However, on the other hand, he takes great satisfaction in achieving publications and grants.

Family Life

Johnny is married with a two-year-old son. He says that he was extremely lucky in that he got a permanent position at the same time that he started his family. Family life is extremely important to him and he takes a lot of responsibility for his son. As a result, he has found that he has altered his work to best accommodate the two:

“Having a son made a big difference in terms of having to make compromises. Suddenly you have to fit everything around your son’s timings”.

Success

Johnny thinks that it is important to balance what is important in the present, as a husband and father, with more future-oriented career ambitions. Hence, he says that “success is a feeling of contentment" - adding that to feel content you need to be achieving. So, it’s balancing a sense of progression without losing sight of what is valuable in the present.

Advancement is important for him career-wise, but not to the extent that it comes at the cost of a work-life balance. “Meeting those responsibilities at home yet being able to put enough into your career that you are progressing. There’s always going to be some conflict between work and home, sometimes you have to prioritise one over the other.”

Johnny has never set out with a clear plan, preferring to be open to opportunities as they present themselves: “I prefer to see opportunities and take them as they come”.

Johnny is a Research Fellow in Movement Science at Oxford Brookes University.

Johnathan (Johnny) Collett

Dr Johnathan Collett

Voices from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences

“I prefer to see opportunities and take them as they come”
"In the day you are a scientist and then you come home and you are this totally different mummy person”

Dr Katja Graumann is Lecturer in Cell Biology and an Early Career Research Fellow in the Plant Biology group. She has been at Oxford Brookes University since her undergraduate degree in 2001.

**KATJA’S STORY**

**From Germany to Oxford**

Katja came to Brookes as a mature student to study for her undergraduate degree in Cell and Human Biology. When she initially moved from Germany to the UK, it was only with the plan to spend a year abroad after her A-levels. However, she started working here as a carer with disabled people and really enjoyed it. A few years on, she realised that she wanted to study and on hearing from her German friends that all the textbooks were in English, she thought: “I might as well stay here”. It was during her undergraduate degree that Katja discovered research, and, after doing some projects in the lab, she fell in love with it. She reflects that being a mature student was an advantage: it meant that she was entirely focused on her studies and as a result got such a good first that she was able to go straight into a PhD without needing a master’s degree.

**Influential Supervisor**

Katja did her PhD at Brookes with Professor David Evans, who was a huge support to her. To this day, Katja explains, “he’s still around and he still mentors me”. He helped her with how to write grants, how to manage people and they have collaborated and organised conferences together. She feels extremely lucky to have been able to work with someone so supportive at Brookes: “Through all the stages he helped me to gain the skills, the confidence; really pushed me.” The research from her PhD was so valuable that it enabled her and her supervisor to establish a research group around some of the key data. After her PhD, Katja continued along the research route. She was successful in securing funding for a postdoctoral position and then she went on to win a prestigious Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship which enabled her to establish her own research.

**Mother and Scientist**

Katja handles the challenges of being a mother and a scientist by being flexible. She has gone back to work on an 0.8 FTE contract which enables her to manage her workload; although she says that she has had to be “quite disciplined with herself” in terms of resisting the pressure that academics face to work over and above their contracted hours. Her partner also works two days a week from home and the couple have a “very good family network”.

She also finds it a relief to have a complete break from work when she gets home. She is grateful that her partner is not also a scientist: “It’s nice to come home and not talk about science and research”.

However, having two such distinct sides to her life brings its own challenges. She says that when she came back from leave, it “really hit me your two personalities. In the day, you are a scientist and then you come home and you are this totally different mummy person.”

**Personal Journey**

Katja met her partner in Oxford when she was researching her doctorate. Recently, they have had a child together through IVF and surrogacy and she says that it was a “lucky coincidence” that she was offered her permanent position when the IVF and surrogacy all came together. Now she is in the very fortunate position of being a young mum with a permanent job.

Katja says that David Evans in particular, and Oxford Brookes more generally, have been very supportive in this process. She describes David and the rest of the cell biology research group as being “very flexible and very supportive” if she had to have a few days off to go to a clinic. And when they had the baby, Brookes was understanding and accommodating and granted her the whole maternity leave, even though it is not a statutory requirement.

**Motivations**

**Working with Others**

Katja enjoys working with others. She says that being surrounded by young people and students “keeps you young as well” and she also values the difference she can make through teaching and working alongside people: “knowing you make a difference in a person’s life; that’s quite nice”. For this reason, Katja is looking forward to her new role as a lecturer, and says she has compared notes with her mum who herself was a teacher and so has given her some ideas.

In fact, Katja remembers one undergraduate student who, when she came in, was initially quite nervous but then quickly settled into a PhD without needing a good first that she was able to go straight into a PhD without needing a good first. Now she has gone on to work for the Oxford Fertility Clinic and actually helped Katja and her partner in that part of their life.

Katja’s message to early career researchers

For Katja, success is about research and helping others progress their research. As a result, her advice to anyone starting out is that “You need to really be driven by the research question or something that interests you and you need to be good working with people: a social and very driven kind of person.”
I like being in a position where you can help and support other people to develop their careers. I find that quite rewarding."

Combining Career and Family
Linda has combined her career and family hugely successfully, saying that each of these two parts of her life benefits from the other. Her children enjoyed the advantage of being able to travel a lot when Linda and her husband went to conferences. She recollects that the Royal Society were fairly progressive at the time (this was the early 1990s) as they gave grants for childcare, which meant that when the couple went to an international conference, the children could come too. They would extend the work trip into a family holiday.

Similarly, having children has its benefits in the workplace as well. Reflecting on the challenge of managing people, Linda says: "That's where having children helps! Learning to deal with children helps you deal with people and listen to everyone's points of view. It's never one sided."

Linda clearly sees these two aspects of her life as mutually reinforcing. Although they have been based at different institutions, they have a collaborative research group, as well as their spin out company. Upon completing her DPhil in 1986, Linda was awarded a job at Oxford Brookes, then Oxford Polytechnic, and she describes this decision as "probably the best thing I did."

Move into Leadership
Over her time at Brookes, Linda has transitioned slowly into leadership and management roles: she was Head of the School of Life Sciences for eight years before progressing to Associate Dean and then PVC. She says that she finds the problem-solving aspect of these positions particularly rewarding. Additionally, Linda takes great satisfaction from helping her colleagues to progress. "What I've always enjoyed and why I applied for my current job is that I like being in a position where you can help and support other people to develop their careers. I find that quite rewarding."

Linda finds the applications of her research extremely fulfilling. For instance, the fact that the virus she studies and the research she has done can be used to develop vaccines for serious diseases. Reflecting on her career, Linda is particularly proud of the role she played in helping to build the research profile of Brookes. Another highlight is the spin-out company that she co-founded to disseminate some of this research, and which is still thriving ten years on.

Success
Linda's current role as PVC is even more intensive than she expected, with regular early starts and evening functions. However, for her, success is about enjoying what you do. She says that ultimately being passionate about what you do and having good colleagues to work with, is what enables you to do all the juggling.

"The people at Brookes have always been amazing to work with."

Linda stresses the importance of being open-minded, flexible and patient. She identifies passion for your subject as essential to becoming an academic, as everything will follow from this initial spark. "Find out what really makes you interested and passionate and don’t lose it."
“I love it that every single day is something new”

Verena is a Senior Research Fellow in Plant Cell Biology at Oxford Brookes University.

VERENA’S STORY
From Munich to Brookes

Verena is originally from Germany and studied for her undergraduate and master’s degrees at the Technical University of Munich, focusing on Genetics, Virology and Zoology. She specialized in Genetics, which involved her doing a big project on plant genetics. Whilst she hadn’t intended to go on to do a PhD in Plant Biology, she recalls the unlikely route by which this came about:

“One day, I was at the train station and my Professor who had never really talked to me said: ‘you have enough practical experience, you can start a PhD next month’. So there wasn’t really a question… it was more like a statement’.

Whilst she had considered doing a PhD, she had thought of doing it in Virology, not Plant Biology. However, this encounter she felt “was a bit of fate hitting at me” and so she decided to do it. She had also considered going into industry, but loved the research, independence and the novelty of academia which eventually informed her decision to choose the latter.

Her next big move, both for her career and geographically, was also the result of happy coincidence: “Again serendipity, at the end of the PhD I was contacted by Chris Hawes at Oxford Brookes, who I had already had some professional contact with, and he offered me six months of a postdoc.” She thought “Yeah, I’ve always wanted to go abroad for six months….. That was ten years ago!”

Verena then took a post-doc position in Sheffield, and as this was coming to an end heard from Professor Chris Hawes again, who offered her another opportunity at Oxford Brookes.

Influential Colleagues

Verena learned a lot from a scientist, Woong June Park, with whom she worked with on her undergraduate project and has known for 17 years now. In 2012, Verena was awarded a three-month fellowship from the Korean Brain Trust to work with Woong June in South Korea: “It was probably one of the best times in my life; to live with the Asian culture which is very different.” She still has particularly fond memories of the students.

Verena feels lucky to have had a number of role models and influences in the scientific community who have looked out for her. She was especially impressed by a Professor from Denmark, and she recalls having thought: “There’s nothing this guy can’t do; he does every aspect, every technique, he’s running two massive centres…”. So when, last year, she invited him to a conference to give a talk and he complimented her own research: “I was just on cloud number seven”. Another person who has had a big influence on her career is Professor Chris Hawes here at Brookes: “he has always helped me and opened me to opportunities that I wouldn’t otherwise have.”

Verena also takes great reward from the academic lifestyle:

“I love it that every single day is something new. And you are working at the cutting edge of areas that no-one has seen or researched before. So that’s fantastic… with our findings we can change how people see the world. And I do like, especially within the university, interactions with students. Especially in research projects when they come in and you see them transform from thinking about grades to realising “I’m doing something that no one else has done before”. This change in attitude from how to get the best mark to taking ownership…” This is fantastic, this is the great part of the University.”

Therefore, making a difference is of utmost important to Verena and she defines success as “making a difference on any aspect; making a difference on people, on knowledge. That’s what I would call a successful career in science”.

Personal Life

Verena was the first one in the family to go to university. She was always very good at school and had a lot of support from her family: “my mum went out of her way to help me do everything I always wanted to do. She would always tell me to do the best you can do, even though she had no idea about my work”

Four years ago, Verena had the opportunity to move back to Germany. However, she didn’t take it for personal reasons: “Whilst being in England I made the mistake of finding my better half here”. She met her partner at Sheffield and despite moving to England without the intention of meeting anyone, in the end she fell for him!

Verena’s message to early career researchers

“Be stubborn, be patient but make sure that you show the world what you can do. At the end of the day you have to be proud of yourself”.

Influential Colleagues

Verena learned a lot from a scientist, Woong June Park, with whom she worked with on her undergraduate project and has known for 17 years now. In 2012, Verena was awarded a three-month fellowship from the Korean Brain Trust to work with Woong June in South Korea: “It was probably one of the best times in my life; to live with the Asian culture which is very different.” She still has particularly fond memories of the students.

Verena feels lucky to have had a number of role models and influences in the scientific community who have looked out for her. She was especially impressed by a Professor from Denmark, and she recalls having thought: “There’s nothing this guy can’t do; he does every aspect, every technique, he’s running two massive centres…”. So when, last year, she invited him to a conference to give a talk and he complimented her own research: “I was just on cloud number seven”. Another person who has had a big influence on her career is Professor Chris Hawes here at Brookes: “he has always helped me and opened me to opportunities that I wouldn’t otherwise have.”

Verena also takes great reward from the academic lifestyle:

“I love it that every single day is something new. And you are working at the cutting edge of areas that no-one has seen or researched before. So that’s fantastic… with our findings we can change how people see the world. And I do like, especially within the university, interactions with students. Especially in research projects when they come in and you see them transform from thinking about grades to realising “I’m doing something that no one else has done before”. This change in attitude from how to get the best mark to taking ownership…” This is fantastic, this is the great part of the University.”

Therefore, making a difference is of utmost important to Verena and she defines success as “making a difference on any aspect; making a difference on people, on knowledge. That’s what I would call a successful career in science”.

Personal Life

Verena was the first one in the family to go to university. She was always very good at school and had a lot of support from her family: “my mum went out of her way to help me do everything I always wanted to do. She would always tell me to do the best you can do, even though she had no idea about my work”

Four years ago, Verena had the opportunity to move back to Germany. However, she didn’t take it for personal reasons: “Whilst being in England I made the mistake of finding my better half here”. She met her partner at Sheffield and despite moving to England without the intention of meeting anyone, in the end she fell for him!

Verena’s message to early career researchers

“Be stubborn, be patient but make sure that you show the world what you can do. At the end of the day you have to be proud of yourself”. 
“Different perspectives are fun. You learn a lot from your colleagues”

Tim Shreeve is a Professor of Conservation Ecology and has been at Oxford Brookes since he joined in 1982 as a PhD student.

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

Family Life
Tim has three children aged between 12 and 18 with his wife Deborah, a colleague in the Biology department at Brookes. He jokes: “We used to be the gossip. It was like are they aren’t they...Yes they are!” He feels that the combination of academic flexibility, and the fact that they both work at the same institution has made juggling children with high profile careers fairly easy. Although he does quip that when his first child was born, “we were actually quite lucky because I broke my Achilles tendon so I was homebound when she was two months old. So I wasn’t coming into work for a month which made things very easy for Deborah, But I don’t recommend breaking your Achilles tendon.”

However, whilst the flexibility of academia makes juggling children with a career possible, the other side of this is that occasionally he’ll find himself working at two in the morning. “But the understanding is that we are professionals and you will get things done as you need to get them done, there’s an expectation that everybody lives up to.”

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

The Scientific Community
Tim credits his colleagues at other institutions with supporting his career. He says of Professor Roger Dennis, a colleague from Staffordshire University: “We fire ideas off each other, which is actually quite good”. He also has an international network of colleagues and he finds having these external links very important for supporting his career: “different perspectives are fun. You learn a lot from your colleagues”.

Reflecting on his research success, Tim says: “You never know what you’re going to find out. You have to go with the opportunities”. Nonetheless, as with all academics, Tim has had his fair share of pursuing avenues that ultimately don’t work. However, he takes a positive approach to these and is of the opinion that “blind alleys are part of research, you learn from them”.

Success
Despite his international acclaim, and being a highly respected scientist in his field, Tim says that the biggest thing for him is having three children.

The intellectual rewards of his research are the highlight of his job, and linked to this, the respect that he receives from his colleagues and the fact that he has built up an international reputation, which he says “has just happened”.

He also really values what ex-students go on to do: “You see what some of your old students are up to and you think actually I’ve had a bit of an input into that. It’s great. It’s about encouraging that next generation”.

Tim’s message to early career researchers
“Relax and enjoy it”.

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

Family Life
Tim has three children aged between 12 and 18 with his wife Deborah, a colleague in the Biology department at Brookes. He jokes: “We used to be the gossip. It was like are they aren’t they...Yes they are!” He feels that the combination of academic flexibility, and the fact that they both work at the same institution has made juggling children with high profile careers fairly easy. Although he does quip that when his first child was born, “we were actually quite lucky because I broke my Achilles tendon so I was homebound when she was two months old. So I wasn’t coming into work for a month which made things very easy for Deborah, But I don’t recommend breaking your Achilles tendon.”

However, whilst the flexibility of academia makes juggling children with a career possible, the other side of this is that occasionally he’ll find himself working at two in the morning. “But the understanding is that we are professionals and you will get things done as you need to get them done, there’s an expectation that everybody lives up to.”

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

The Scientific Community
Tim credits his colleagues at other institutions with supporting his career. He says of Professor Roger Dennis, a colleague from Staffordshire University: “We fire ideas off each other, which is actually quite good”. He also has an international network of colleagues and he finds having these external links very important for supporting his career: “different perspectives are fun. You learn a lot from your colleagues”.

Reflecting on his research success, Tim says: “You never know what you’re going to find out. You have to go with the opportunities”. Nonetheless, as with all academics, Tim has had his fair share of pursuing avenues that ultimately don’t work. However, he takes a positive approach to these and is of the opinion that “blind alleys are part of research, you learn from them”.

Success
Despite his international acclaim, and being a highly respected scientist in his field, Tim says that the biggest thing for him is having three children.

The intellectual rewards of his research are the highlight of his job, and linked to this, the respect that he receives from his colleagues and the fact that he has built up an international reputation, which he says “has just happened”.

He also really values what ex-students go on to do: “You see what some of your old students are up to and you think actually I’ve had a bit of an input into that. It’s great. It’s about encouraging that next generation”.

Tim’s message to early career researchers
“Relax and enjoy it”.

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

Family Life
Tim has three children aged between 12 and 18 with his wife Deborah, a colleague in the Biology department at Brookes. He jokes: “We used to be the gossip. It was like are they aren’t they...Yes they are!” He feels that the combination of academic flexibility, and the fact that they both work at the same institution has made juggling children with high profile careers fairly easy. Although he does quip that when his first child was born, “we were actually quite lucky because I broke my Achilles tendon so I was homebound when she was two months old. So I wasn’t coming into work for a month which made things very easy for Deborah, But I don’t recommend breaking your Achilles tendon.”

However, whilst the flexibility of academia makes juggling children with a career possible, the other side of this is that occasionally he’ll find himself working at two in the morning. “But the understanding is that we are professionals and you will get things done as you need to get them done, there’s an expectation that everybody lives up to.”

It was in 1982, a year after completing the MSc, that Tim came to Brookes to begin his PhD. He then spent some time between part-time teaching, temporary contracts and consultancy work before he applied for and was appointed to the role of lecturer. This was an ideal role for Tim because, alongside his love of research, he values teaching, which he describes as: “encouraging the next generation enormously”.

The Scientific Community
Tim credits his colleagues at other institutions with supporting his career. He says of Professor Roger Dennis, a colleague from Staffordshire University: “We fire ideas off each other, which is actually quite good”. He also has an international network of colleagues and he finds having these external links very important for supporting his career: “different perspectives are fun. You learn a lot from your colleagues”.

Reflecting on his research success, Tim says: “You never know what you’re going to find out. You have to go with the opportunities”. Nonetheless, as with all academics, Tim has had his fair share of pursuing avenues that ultimately don’t work. However, he takes a positive approach to these and is of the opinion that “blind alleys are part of research, you learn from them”.

Success
Despite his international acclaim, and being a highly respected scientist in his field, Tim says that the biggest thing for him is having three children.

The intellectual rewards of his research are the highlight of
“Travelling helped me to bring the concept of sociology and later even politics into my understanding of Occupational Therapy and Counselling”

Farzaneh is a Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy at Oxford Brookes.

Farzaneh’s Story
Early Career in Iran and Jordan

Dr Farzaneh Yazdani started her academic career in Iran. She completed her BSc in Occupational Therapy at the Iran University of Medical Sciences, where she stayed on to do a master’s degree in Mental Health Occupational Therapy. Farzaneh then moved to the University of Jordan where she completed a second MA in psychological counselling followed by a PhD. She spent eight years here, during which time she established the first Occupational Therapy department in Jordan and also held a position as a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois. She joined Oxford Brookes University as a Senior Lecturer in 2008.

Farzaneh grew up in an environment that valued education highly. Her parents, a merchant and a housewife, were both very encouraging and her culture prioritised girls’ education. Not only is it the case that “education has been extremely valued by Iranian culture” but, she explains, “growing up as a teenager during the war, one of the messages was that while the boys were fighting, the girls had to get an education for the future of the country”.

During her time at Iran University of Medical Sciences, Farzaneh progressed extremely quickly due to a tutor, who, she says “discovered me”. Despite the fact that she was so young, he had such confidence in her abilities that he took the unusual move of making her a lecturer at the age of just 22. However, being a faculty member at such a young age did have its challenges as she had to try and prove herself as a young academic.

Influence of Travel

Travel has played a big role in Farzaneh’s career. It has shaped her academic interests. “Travelling helped me to bring the concept of sociology and later even politics into my understanding of occupational therapy and counselling” - and has also seen her adapt to different systems of working. Her discipline in Iran, for example, was much more practice-intensive than it is here in the UK.

Farzaneh has learned a lot from different cultures in her work. When she was establishing the Occupational Therapy Department at the University of Jordan, she had to compare how it was done in other countries which involved her learning English and translating not only across languages but across cultures. However, these experiences of different cultures and travelling have, Farzaneh says, “opened my eyes to the similarities rather than differences that human beings have”. For her, what initially might look like differences in behaviour across different cultures are often merely different ways of manifesting shared beliefs and human values.

She is attuned to the similarities in the fundamentals of human life that she has observed.

Personal Life

When Farzaneh moved from Iran to Jordan, she was married with a young child. This led to a long separation between her and her husband during which time she was effectively a single parent. However, she felt very at home at the University there and outside of that focused on being a good mother. She describes herself as “very much family oriented” and would make sure that she spent play times with her child every day; either playing outside or doing arts and crafts - her daughter is now an art student at UCL.

Tragically, her husband died in an accident soon after they moved to Oxford and so again Farzaneh had to adapt to looking after her daughter alone in a new country. She found it hardest to maintain the balance between her personal and professional lives during this period, but she prioritised spending time with her daughter at home: “I cook cakes, I make jam, I make pickles; I am very much into hand crafts”.

Again, this move was also coupled with the demand of countering people’s misconceptions and stereotypes. Oxford Brookes University was always “very welcoming” but she found dealing with other institutions and processes, like finding a house for her and her daughter, difficult. She felt that coming from Iran meant that she faced the assumption that she was only here to seek asylum or to marry a British man. As a result, when she did marry a British man she says she kept her own visa for her own sense of dignity.

She met her husband, a fellow academic, at Oxford Brookes. Once again this confirms to Farzaneh how similar people can be - she finds it amazing that they have such similar interests and values, even though they were brought up in vastly different cultures and contexts.

Motivations

Farzaneh loves academia because of the constant stimulation it affords. “I love seeing how those big philosophical understandings of the world, which are in the textbooks, I can transfer them into day-to-day life”. She likes to stay on the cutting edge of things and as a result, enjoys how “dynamic” academia is.

“Things keep changing and you have to keep reading, you have to keep looking at things.”

For this reason she also loves working with young people which she finds “keeps you in touch with the latest developments”.

Looking forward, she is developing a model that brings her extensive academic and cultural experiences together. However, she is also mindful of her health problems; Farzaneh was diagnosed with ME when she came to the UK, something she has always suffered from but without knowing what it was... Success for her then is managing to be productive and maintain her academic standards.

Farzaneh’s message to early career researchers

“I have found that, whatever life throws at me, I can cope with it if I can find some meaning in what happens; what it means for me, my values and my hopes for the future, if I can find meaning, then I can get on with my life”. 

Dr Farzaneh Yazdani

V O I C E S  F R O M  T H E  F A C U L T Y  O F  H E A L T H  A N D  L I F E  S C I E N C E S
”When teaching goes well that’s brilliant, when the research goes well that’s really great. I feel it is really rewarding when I’m able to do all aspects of my job well.”

Chara Bakalis is a Principal Lecturer and Programme Lead at the School of Law at Oxford Brookes University. She joined in 2003 from the University of Oxford.

**CHARA’S STORY**

**Professional Journey**

When Chara graduated with a BA and BCL in Law from the University of Oxford, she initially followed the route of many of her peers and became a Management Consultant. However, she soon realised that she missed the intellectual stimulation that she had previously derived from studying Law and so went back to Oxford to take on a teaching role at the University. Soon after this, when a permanent role came up at Oxford Brookes, she decided that staying in academia was what she wanted to do and so successfully applied. This was a key turning point as having a permanent position at a young age enabled her to plan her private life accordingly.

**Personal Journey**

Chara’s husband is also an academic. She describes it as “great” that her husband has such a similar role: “we both understand each other. We work at universities and there are lots of things we can compare and help each other in that way”.

**MOTIVATIONS**

Chara really enjoys the stimulation of academia: “I love the intellectual side of it; being able to learn new things all the time”. In addition, she also loves the variety offered by teaching, research and now her role as Programme Lead: “being able to do lots of different things that appeal to different parts of my character is immensely satisfying. In particular “when teaching goes well that’s brilliant, when the research goes well that’s really great. I feel it is really rewarding when I’m able to do all aspects of my job well”. Additionally, Chara puts great value on being able to contribute to the development of others.

**Success**

For Chara, success is about being able to achieve a balance. She says that this is very personal, because it’s not about the milestones that other people might recognise. Rather, she has her own criteria for success. It is not the external markers of success that matter for Chara, but “being able to achieve what matters to you”. This perspective comes from Chara’s realisation that there is a balance to be achieved between being successful at work and at home. For example, she says that “when choosing to take time off to have and raise children, you are inevitably going to be slightly behind your peers who don’t do that”. However, this doesn’t mean that you should see yourself as less successful, but rather successful in a different way.

Now that her children are older, Chara is excited to throw herself into her work. She observes that academia is unlike many other careers in the sense that it is not all about the work and hours you put in in the job in your 30s which determines whether or not you will be successful. This makes it more women-friendly than a law career, as the decision between raising a family or pursuing being made partner is not there. You can slow down slightly when your children are still young and still have a good chance of promotion and seniority down the line.

Chara has felt that her gender has impacted her career in some ways. “When you are younger I do think women have a harder time being taken seriously. It’s just about people’s presumptions. It’s about what happens when you walk into a room; whether people will listen to what you say.”
“I just love the university environment... it’s the place I feel comfortable and happy”

Joanne Begiato is a Professor of History and Head of the Department of History, Philosophy and Culture. She joined Brookes in 2005 from Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge.
Mary Briggs is the Principal Lecturer and Programme Lead for Early Years and Primary ITE at Oxford Brookes University. She joined Oxford Brookes three years ago from the University of Warwick.

**Mary’s message to early career researchers**

“A crucial question to ask yourself is what will be your focus, teaching excellence or research? As focusing on both is a considerable challenge”

**Personal Journey**

Mary fell pregnant for the first time when she was on secondment at Westminster College. She recalls the children that she worked with loving the fact that she was pregnant. “In fact in one of the schools I went to in Blackbird Leys, the children were weighing and measuring me every time I went in.”

Her son was born almost two months premature whom now that he is a grown up adult!

Mary and her husband entered parenthood as a partnership, with her husband being able to take time off work if the children were ill during term time, as Mary had more time to spend with them during the holidays.

In many ways, Mary’s career and motherhood have fed into one another. Her passion for child development has meant that she has always been a hands-on mother who made sure that she had lots of time to play with her children.

“I used to make tents in the living room and when we moved house, out of boxes, I made a submarine with a working periscope for my son. We had this in the dining room for so long that we couldn’t use the dining room.”

Mary’s family has also benefitted from her travelling around. For example, when she was teaching in Kenya, the whole family came out during the Easter holidays and they went on Safari. That’s given them the opportunity to see different things”. Similarly, when she was teaching in Cairo, and they did a trip to the pyramids. “They’ve still remembers the Masai.”

**Travel Opportunities for the Family**

Mary’s family has also benefitted from her academic career through the opportunities to do lots of travelling. A few years ago, before the Arab Spring, she presented at a conference in Cairo, and they did a trip to the pyramids. “They’ve benefitted from my travelling around. That’s given them the opportunity to see different things”. Similarly, when she was teaching in Kenya, the whole family came out during the Easter holidays and they went on Safari. “That was really very memorable. My daughter was quite little but she still remembers the Masai.”

**Learning from others and helping others to learn**

Mary is always pushing herself, taking on new challenges. She is currently part way through a second master’s degree in mentoring and coaching.

Ongoing learning is central to her life philosophy. She likes to remind her students that she is also a student, seeing education as something reciprocal.

“I think I’m still learning and I think that makes me a good teacher. I learn a lot from people”. It is not surprising then that, for her, success is about helping other people to learn.

“The teacher in me is really proud when my students do well, that’s my success as a teacher.”

It is not surprising then that, for her, success is about helping other people to learn.

“The teacher in me is really proud when my students do well, that’s my success as a teacher.”
“For me success is being able to achieve something you were aiming for and are happy to achieve”

Carol Brown is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Education at Oxford Brookes University. She joined Oxford Brookes in 2016, while she was completing her DPhil at the University of Oxford.

**CAROL’S STORY**

**Professional Journey**

Carol’s first degree was in Psychology from Royal Holloway, University of London. After graduating, she undertook a master’s degree in Social Studies. She initially trained as a mental health social worker before working in the field for about five years. When Carol started her family, she retrained as a psychology teacher, seeking a job that she felt would fit in with family life. At this time, she also did some research projects and wrote textbooks. However, as her children started to grow up, she wanted to transition from being an A-level teacher into academia because she enjoys “the academic demands of research”.

Although her background was in psychology, Carol was offered a DPhil place at the University of Oxford doing education research. She says she sort of “fell into that… I wouldn’t have thought of doing education” but she soon realised that her skills could be applied in a different area.

Thus, she began her DPhil in Education in 2012. At this point, her children were going from primary to secondary school. “That meant there was more flexibility in terms of not needing to be around all the time. It also meant that I was able to work during the day while they were at school. That made it quite a good transition at that time.”

However, Carol was soon faced with the challenges of combining multiple roles, as she had also taken on a research assistant job to support her studies. This meant that she was effectively doing three jobs: “It was quite challenging to split myself against work and doing a DPhil and being a mum. That was quite challenging in terms of the number of hours available”.

Moving to Oxford Brookes, she was pleasantly surprised with how accommodating the University is around childcare considerations. “I think that Brookes are particularly good. I was particularly struck when I came for interview and they said we’ll ring you later but obviously not around three o’clock. So, there was that automatic assumption that of course you wouldn’t be around at three in contrast to the assumption that you should be…I think the inherent assumption is that you can do both [your job and childcare] adequately and that is fine.”

**Home Life**

Carol was the first in her family to go to university. She laughs: “I come from a working-class non-academic background so to go to university was quite radical; to do a PhD is considered an alternative to having to get a proper job!” Her husband and children have been extremely supportive throughout her DPhil, which she feels has now paid off, as being in academia gives her more flexibility than when she was a teacher. She is able to work part-time and, in contrast to teaching, values being able to manage her own workload.

Carol’s longstanding desire to enter academia has proved fulfilling. She says that one of her biggest achievements was being able to get this job at Oxford Brookes: “that felt like a big achievement and made me feel like my professional background had been a benefit in itself” and she is extremely happy in it: “I love most things about my career and lifestyle: I love the demands, I love academia, I love the debates”.

**MOTIVATIONS**

For Carol, the most important thing career-wise, is being happy in the job she is in and feeling like she can benefit students.

Success for her “is being able to achieve something that was your aim or your goal. And therefore that’s my priority when I’m teaching the students: everyone comes from a different place and what is achievable for some is not for others. So, for me, success is being able to achieve something you were aiming for and are happy to achieve”.

Looking ahead, she wants to carry out more research and more outreach work, using her knowledge and skills to aid people beyond the academic community.

**Carol’s message to early career researchers**

“You have to be self-disciplined, make sure you’ve got a good support network and I would say choose your institution carefully…Despite the fact that lots of people will tell you how hard it is: if you want to do it, do it!”
Brigitte is a Senior Lecturer in the Law School at Oxford Brookes University and has been at Oxford Brookes since August 2012.

**BRIGITTE’S STORY**

**Professional Journey**

Brigitte, who grew up in Zimbabwe, completed her first Law degree at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa before moving to the UK to study for a master’s degree at Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge. After this short spell in the UK, during which Brigitte had been accompanied by her fiancé, the couple moved back to South Africa to get married.

Brigitte then spent three years doing her training contract in a law firm in Cape Town where she qualified as a solicitor. However, she found it very challenging working as a practising lawyer under the legal system in South Africa at that time so, when a job came up as a Junior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town, she decided to apply and was appointed as such. This role enabled her to write and research with greater freedom.

After eight years at the University of Cape Town, she moved back to her old alma mater – Rhodes University. It was during her next nine years at Rhodes University that she was awarded her doctorate, which she completed alongside a full-time teaching and administrative load and bringing up three children.

“Eventually I just sat down and wrote my doctorate in a year after many years of research and trying to write with multiple distractions. I felt a great sense of achievement (although I knew it was far from perfect).”

In the same year, she was awarded a medal for distinguished research at Rhodes University. The third time came when the couple moved to the UK and she was again appointed as Lecturer at the University of East Anglia despite having previously held the post of Associate Professor and Deputy Dean. Unsurprisingly, Brigitte finds that “There’s a sense of déjà vu when I’m filling in these forms”. Thankfully, when she moved to Oxford Brookes, she didn’t have to go through the same process a fourth time, “that was a great tribute to Oxford Brookes that they didn’t put me back to Lecturer again!”

When Brigitte moved back to Rhodes University, she was already a Senior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town, the oldest and one of the best Universities in South Africa. However, the Law Department at Rhodes University only offered her the position at Lecturer level. This was the first time Brigitte had to go back to being a Lecturer, and then reapply for senior lecturership because, as a woman whose husband had secured a job in the area,

“...They knew they had me...In fact, I’ve applied for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in my life three times. I think I’m probably the only woman who has ever had to do that”.

It was during her next nine years at Rhodes University that she was awarded a medal for distinguished research at Rhodes University. The third time came when the couple moved to the UK and she was again appointed as Lecturer at the University of East Anglia despite having previously held the post of Associate Professor and Deputy Dean. Unsurprisingly, Brigitte finds that “There’s a sense of déjà vu when I’m filling in these forms”. Thankfully, when she moved to Oxford Brookes, she didn’t have to go through the same process a fourth time, “that was a great tribute to Oxford Brookes that they didn’t put me back to Lecturer again!”

Moving between different institutions and countries has taught Brigitte a lot. “I’ve been employed at four different universities and I’ve seen how they all work which I think has been interesting...If there is one thing I have learned from this, it is that you never tell your new university how the previous university used to operate...”

**MOTIVATIONS**

Brigitte loves academia, and has found that it fits well with family life.

“I think academic life is ideal for me...I enjoy the flexibility of it, the academic stimulation. I enjoy seeing students develop and improve. And I enjoy the response from students when you talk about something which is interesting to them. That response is very satisfying”.

She also loves being able to talk about Family Law with other specialists in the field, for example, at conferences.

Success for her means successful juggling. She is married to a Headmaster and has three (now adult) children, who still need moral support, so she says:

“I just want to carry on with what I’m doing; being able to support the other members of my family [...] I just take one day at a time really. You can’t do everything. You can’t be a perfectionist... As long as I’m doing things as well as I know I can, that’s success”.

It is for this reason, that she looks up to Baroness Hale of Richmond, the President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom.

“She manages to juggle all those things successfully and she has a good sense of humour, she doesn’t take herself too seriously. I think she’s a great role model for many girls and women. She’s gone from being an academic to a judge but she still goes to all the academic conferences. I don’t know how she does it!”

Brigitte herself comes from an academic family. Her father was a barrister, solicitor, academic and judge and her mother was a schoolteacher and librarian. It is a source of “great pride” to Brigitte that her own daughter has gone on to follow in her footsteps; she is currently starting her own career after qualifying as a solicitor.

“Be patient, be tenacious and hardworking. If you have those qualities, the rewards will come. But there’s a lot of hard work and difficult times before you get to a position where you can really enjoy the fruits of your labour. Also - think carefully about what you want in life.”
“Success is being able to change the way people think and getting them to look at things”

Christiana Payne is Professor of History of Art and Research Lead for the Department of History, Philosophy and Religion. She joined Brookes in 1990 and gradually moved from being an hourly lecturer, through various part-time arrangements to a full-time position in 2012, by which time she was already a Professor.

CHRISTIANA’S STORY

From a young age, Christiana has been very inquisitive. “I remember when I was young, saying I want to know things and not being able to articulate precisely what. But I just love finding things out.”

This desire for knowledge led her to study Modern History at the University of Oxford, before moving to the Courtauld Institute of Art where she completed her MA and a PhD.

Research

Christiana has always been interested in combining her research with exhibitions – feeling strongly that academics have a place outside of universities. Accordingly, she was delighted when in 1991, the topic of her thesis was accepted as an exhibition in Nottingham. This was an opportunity to publish the catalogue of the exhibition, Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890 which then led to her being offered a permanent role at Brookes in 1998.

This desire to combine research with practice and Christiana’s outward-looking approach to her work has paid dividends. Whilst earlier in her career, her approach was seen by some as “not really research”, now - due to the increased emphasis on impact in academia - it means that she is submitting lots of top quality research for the REF.

Another significant career achievement came in 2008 when, after giving assistance to colleagues who were applying for readerships, Christiana realised that she ticked most of the boxes and successfully applied for Reader herself. Upon this promotion, she was particularly encouraged and flattered by the warm congratulation letter from the Vice-Chancellor saying: “I hope this will lead to further promotion” which was the point at which she thought “Oh, could I be a professor?” When this promotion did come, it felt like a significant achievement:

“It was really nice being made a professor. I did really enjoy that. And I had to give an inaugural lecture and I was absolutely terrified. But once I’d done it, the warmth of the response I got from people was really nice.”

Looking forward, Christiana’s professional aspirations are research-related: to broaden her research, interact with other disciplines and make transnational comparisons. She also wants to continue to curate exhibitions and deepen the impact of her research, remaining adamant that “we shouldn’t just be in ivory towers.”

Family

Christiana’s daughter was born in 1987, the year after she finished her PhD, and so the initial years of her career required fitting her academic and teaching work around her work as a mother. She says that her husband has been very supportive throughout and that his encouragement made a huge difference to her ability to be so successful. Working part-time when her daughter was young enabled her to balance both, and also enabled her to carry out research in her spare time.

She feels like her research work has had a positive impact on her as a mother because “it has always been something that’s energised me, satisfied me and stimulated me, made me happy basically”.

MOTIVATIONS

Christiana enjoys sharing her passion for History of Art with others. She enjoys research, and loves “working with others and sharing the pleasure I get from studying art and curating”. For her, a true art historian, the most important thing is affecting how people think and how they observe the world: “success is being able to change the way people think and getting them to look at things.”

Teaching, helping younger colleagues and working with museums through her exhibition curation are all sources of pleasure. However, there are also challenges that come with the territory: the ups and downs of publishing, having work rejected. Christiana adds that academia is a tough profession to work in because, even though it might not seem like it to your students, you are being judged all the time.

“Be sure of what you want to do because it can be tough, but if you really want to do it then you’ll carry on with it through thick and thin”. 
Dr Ana Souza is a Senior Lecturer in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and Applied Linguistics at Oxford Brookes University. She started her career in Education as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher in Brazil, before moving to the UK where she completed an MA and a PhD, switching to teach ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) as well as Portuguese to children as a heritage language.

**ANA’S STORY**

**Professional Journey**

Ana initially wanted to be a speech therapist. However, after learning English alongside her mainstream education, she fell into a career in teaching when she was offered a job as an EFL teacher. Ana went on to study translation at university and upon graduation got a job as a civil servant to work on translations for the post office in Brazil. Instead of pursuing this path, she made a big leap - both for her career and geographically, and accepted a place on an MA studying English Language Teaching at Thames Valley University (now the University of West London).

At this stage, Ana did not have a career ‘plan’ and envisaged returning to Brazil to continue teaching EFL. However, during her master’s degree she became involved with complementary schools - voluntary organisations which exist to support mother tongue learning in the UK. Ana became so interested in these organisations that she decided to research them, resulting in her staying in the UK to embark on a PhD.

**Influences**

Ana has been lucky enough to have what she describes as “a number of angels” who have been part of her career journey, including her MA supervisor and the academic who gave her a PhD place at the University of Southampton. She feels that she has been very fortunate, “always having someone who identified with me as a person, as a professional, taking me by my hand and guiding me to what I need to do next”.

Having this type of support has been particularly important for Ana due to the challenges of navigating the system as an international student. Similarly, she has found the “buddy system” – where a colleague volunteers to offer friendly support to a new member of staff - at Oxford Brookes University very useful.

Ana’s ethnicity and nationality have also played a very positive part in her career; she has links to both Brazilian and UK academic networks and her research is informed by both.

**Challenges of an academic lifestyle**

Ana finds the biggest challenge of her career to be managing the uncertainty in higher education that comes with not having a permanent contract. On the one hand, she feels very lucky that since her PhD, ten years ago, she has always worked in higher education. However, she explains that she has always been on temporary contracts, sometimes multiple contracts at different universities, which is very stressful. With each new job, there is the pressure to make an impression so that they might extend your contract. However, she appreciates the flexibility of the research aspect of her job, and the fact that you can often work remotely. “I do a lot of work from home.” She says that Oxford Brookes University has been very good at accommodating a flexible approach to work.

“It has been very easy to negotiate when I teach, when I come for meetings, when I work from home. Obviously, I’m also very good in terms of keeping an eye on the emails, replying, doing Skype supervisions or even meetings over the phone. So being flexible from my part as well.”

**Family support**

Ana feels grateful that her family were so supportive of her decision to move overseas. She says that they encouraged her to pursue her career here, and make sure that she never feels compromised when there are family issues back home.

Ana met her husband in the UK before she started her PhD and she says that he has been very supportive, especially during the stressful time when she was writing her thesis. He has always been understanding in giving her the time and space she needs to pursue the work that she does.

**Motivations**

It's very important for Ana to make a difference and so she finds the research she does very rewarding because it has a practical application. “It’s very practical in terms of the impact it has. It really has a social impact. So it’s nice to see that whatever I’m doing in academia or behind closed doors I actually manage to transfer that into social action.”

She also enjoys seeing students develop: “It’s nice to see the progress. It’s rewarding to see that you’re part of that.”

Career-wise, doing something she likes is the most important. Looking forward she says that she hopes to get a permanent position, so she has more security and can do longer research projects - there are certain projects that she can’t do because her contracts are temporary. Otherwise “I’m already doing everything I like to do”.

**Voices from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

“I’ve got a number of angels who are part of my career journey”
"The realisation that you could say what you wanted to say and put in in print and someone would publish it is great"

Lucy Vickers is a Professor of Law, the Assistant Director of the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice and a Research Lead at the School of Law. She joined Oxford Brookes in 1991 as a lecturer in Law and has subsequently completed her PhD here and held numerous roles across teaching, research and management.

**LUCY’S STORY**

**Route into the University**

From a young age, Lucy knew that she wanted to study law but was unsure whether she wanted to practise as a lawyer. After completing her law degree at Cambridge, she followed the route of many of her peers and qualified as a solicitor. However, when she qualified, and a job teaching law came up at what was then Oxford Polytechnic, this seemed better suited to her interests, and so she applied and was successful.

**Move to research**

Despite not having set out to become an academic, Lucy soon had an inclination towards research and so decided to undertake a PhD. This came from her desire to communicate her opinions on what she was teaching:

“Often you have an opinion on something and you rant over the newspaper or you discuss the implications of a recent case that’s just been decided… and normally you have to have the conversation and then you move on. But the realisation that you could say what you wanted to say and put it in print and someone would publish it is great. So I suppose I realise I had things I wanted to say.”

The PhD itself was a huge achievement for Lucy - in no small part because she was pregnant towards the end.

“Finishing the PhD felt absolutely fantastic, because I didn’t think I’d finish it at one point: I had a baby towards the end of it and I remember when I told my supervisor I was pregnant saying ‘I will finish, I promise I’ll finish’ and I did. So that felt really great.”

**Seizing Opportunities**

Lucy has pushed herself to take opportunities as they presented themselves, cleverly employing strategies to make her brave enough to take these steps. She says: “I remember thinking I can do this, it will be interesting and if I can’t do it, I’ll have to admit that and go back to my old job!” which worked as a safety net to encourage her to push herself. She applied the same approach to promotion: “Each time I’ve gone for any promotion I’ve thought ‘If this is a disaster I’ll turn it back down’”. Needless to say, Lucy has excelled in each new role and her willingness to take on new challenges has led to her surpassing even her own expectations of what her career would look like.

**MOTIVATIONS**

**Career Highlights**

Lucy describes her career in academia as “More fulfilling that I thought a job could be”. In particular, she appreciates the fact that you can be yourself.

“What I find about this job is it’s a bit all-encompassing but I just feel like I’m me and I’m doing things that I’m interested in and that I like.”

Reflecting on her achievements after the PhD, Lucy recalls that “finishing the first book felt like an almost overwhelming moment. Pressing print to take a hard copy down to the publisher just felt extraordinary.”

She is also proud of her professorship:

“Being made Professor felt great. I got the letter saying I’ve been made professor the week that my fourth baby was born. So I was at home and I got this letter and he’d been born about three days before and I felt really, really chuffed at that one. That felt absolutely amazing.”

Looking back on all these achievements, she is slightly surprised by quite how well she has done, as she has just followed what motivates her rather than setting out with specific ambitions. However, this fits with her understanding of success, which is about enjoying what you do.

“Everyone’s going to have bits of the jobs they don’t like but keeping the balance right so predominantly the days are full of things you want to do.”

**Personal Life**

Lucy places a lot of value on balancing her successful career with her family, and hence she values the flexibility of academia. Despite her heavy teaching and research schedule, she enjoys the sense of control that academia affords - despite the fact that there are lots of deadlines, pressures and commitments.

“If I want to go to assembly and see my son at the back I can go. And I don’t have to arrange time off for that. I can just go and I think that’s really great”.

Lucy realises that she has been extremely fortunate when it comes to balancing her home life and work life. She lives very close to the University and her husband works part time, which helps not only time-wise but also frees up some mental space as she doesn’t have to carry all the responsibility of remembering and arranging the children’s commitments.

"Go for it because it’s a really great job… I’ve said yes to opportunities that came my way. Looking back those were really good moves to make".
“There’s been a few of those really big keynotes where I’ve kind of thought: people know my work”

Helen is Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Social Sciences and she teaches Geography at Oxford Brookes University.

HELEN’S STORY

Professional Journey

Following her degree in Geography at Durham, Helen did a teaching qualification at Cambridge and then taught in Zimbabwe for two years as a Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteer. Interested in a career in development work, she undertook a master’s degree in Soil Science. However, as a female at the time, she was unable to get a job in that field, finding herself losing out to lesser qualified candidates because employers doubted her ability to do the physical labour.

However, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it prompted Helen to apply for the job of Lecturer at the University of Reading, with lecturing in both geography and education. Without this move, Helen says she may never have got into higher education teaching, which had seemed an impossible dream.

Helen’s next move was to the University of Oxford where she took up a research post as soils expert in a small archaeological unit at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

“That was a massive turning point because someone stuck their neck on the line for me and said we will create a job for you at Oxford University”.

However, she missed her students and teaching and so took a part-time job at Oxford Brookes in 2002, which gradually became a full-time post.

Combining Disciplines

From a young age, Helen wanted to be a university lecturer and she describes herself as having taken a "roundabout route" to get where she wanted to be. “I gradually shifted from being a geography and education person to a geographer but in the process developed a passion for Education and HE”. She says that now she is in the “peculiar position” that her day-to-day job is as a geography lecturer but she has just become a professor in higher education. She uses the metaphor of a “zip” to describe how she “knits together” the two sides.

Combining her two interests, teaching Geography and researching higher education, has not always been easy. She has had to “tussle between this is what I’m supposed to do and this is what I want to do…Brookes has supported me hugely and I just don’t think I would have achieved the same at another institution”. However, Helen has always been headstrong in confronting obstacles, getting her first external examinership after writing to a list for external examiners saying, “I’m a woman, how do I get to be an external examiner if I’m not in the old boys’ network?” To which a university wrote back saying “we’ll have you”.

Feelings of Success

A key career boost came when Helen was accepted as an international delegate on a funded research project with Elon University in North Carolina. Over three summers she would work with the other researchers and she became the team leader for that group. This “was a big confidence boost for me that made me put my professorial application in”.

For Helen, success is linked to being recognised for your work. She says that “there’s been a few of those really big keynotes where I’ve kind of thought: people know my work. They’ve recognised for your work. She says that “feeling of success” to me. They know it better than I do. They’ve read it and they can quote it back to me. They know it better than I do sometimes. It’s like whoa”.

Having female role models has been important in enabling Helen to have the confidence to aspire to top positions and she believes that visibility of women expands your horizons. It’s what’s happened at Brookes this year”. Her commitment to students extends to her establishing a national journal for students.

MOTIVATIONS

Helen takes a great deal of pleasure from helping others to succeed. She “gets a real buzz out of teaching” finding that:

“The most rewarding bit for me would be supervising dissertations and independent studies. It’s those little bits of teaching where I feel I can add significant value to students by helping them through the research process”. This desire to support others has led her to organise the student “Get Published!” conference and she was delighted when someone walked out saying “that was one of the best things that’s happened at Brookes this year”. Her commitment to students is linked to her establishing a national journal for students.

Mentoring

Helen practises her commitment to enabling others through mentoring colleagues. Having just completed the Brookes coaching and mentoring qualification, she believes that it can have a transformational impact.

Beyond Brookes

Helen finds that having an active home life is a good way to achieve balance. She is a triathlete and a beekeeper and says having interests that also put demands on her time outside of work helps her to maintain a work-life balance.

Helen’s message to early career researchers

“Get a mentor!”

PROFESSOR
HELEN
WALKINGTON

VOICES FROM THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

WALKINGTON
HELEN
PROFESSOR

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

"There’s been a few of those really big keynotes where I’ve kind of thought: people know my work"
“The reason I did Physics was because it was the subject where I thought I can’t stop now, I need to know more”

Helen Wilson is a Principal Lecturer in the School of Education. She has been part of Oxford Brookes since 2000, following the 1996 merger of Westminster College with the University.

HELEN’S STORY

Background
Helen says her parents, neither of whom had enjoyed the luxury of a particularly good education themselves, really valued education. She describes them as supportive without being pushy and thanks to this encouragement she gained a place at a direct grant school.

Route into teaching
Helen has always had a passion for Physics. She says the reason she decided to study it at degree level was “because it was the subject where I thought: I can’t stop now, I need to know more”. After graduating from the University of Birmingham, she proceeded to embark on a PGCE to enable her to teach secondary school physics and chemistry. This career path became apparent to her when she visited her careers officer at Birmingham, who asked her to describe her ideal job:

“I found myself saying I love my subject, I’d like to keep doing physics, I’d like to work with people, I really like explaining my subject. Oh bother, I’m describing teaching.”

Informal mentoring
During her five years of teaching at secondary level, Helen became close friends with one of the teachers and she said they played an important role for each other, in terms of support. They would compare notes on lessons and talk things through in detail over coffee. She says, “mentoring during my teaching career has mainly been through my friends.” This confluence of friendship and mentoring is something that Helen has experienced throughout her career, perhaps because working with people and having colleagues as friends has always been highly important to her.

Taking Opportunities
Throughout her career, Helen has made opportunities for herself: “my philosophy was if there’s an opportunity you say ‘yes’ and worry about it later. So, I’ve grabbed those opportunities.”

Four years after Helen joined Westminster College, it merged with Brookes and she has loved the opportunities that working for this institution has afforded her:

“Being at Brookes has given me the sorts of opportunities I wouldn’t have had anywhere else and I’m incredibly grateful for those. So, for example, I’ve travelled the world with this job”. She’s been to China, Thailand, Japan, Stockholm working with international schools and attending international conferences. “I can’t think of how I’d have had those opportunities if I hadn’t been here”. She has also harnessed this as a chance to keep learning: “I’ve learned so much by meeting people from different countries.”

Within Brookes she has also taken on new challenges as they presented themselves: for example, the new demands of management that come with being a principal lecturer.

Motivations
Helen is motivated by her students. She says, “working with students who are going to be primary teachers is fantastic because on the whole they are wonderful people.” The highlight of her job is seeing her students become professionals. She describes it as “a joy” that “now if I go to almost any school in Oxfordshire I will have trained one of the teachers there and so, as we chat, I hear about how their career is developing”.

In addition, she likes to push herself. She says her Christian faith “influences everything I do… Wanting to do my best and find out what my strengths are and to follow them”. Thus, she also finds her research extremely exciting. Her current research, on the impact of creative ways of teaching science, has already been highly successful and now has been scaled up with the potential to yield important results.
“Think big and work towards a vision”

Nigel Crook is a researcher in Artificial Intelligence and robotics and is Head of Computing and Communication Technologies (CCT) and Interim Head of MEMS (Mechanical Engineering and Mathematical Sciences). He joined Oxford Brookes as a PhD student in 1985.

NIGEL’S STORY

Professional Journey

Nigel studied for his undergraduate degree at Lancaster University, initially doing Maths and Philosophy before switching to Computing and Philosophy, being particularly attracted to the logic side of Philosophy. He moved to – as it was then – Oxford Polytechnic in 1985 to undertake a PhD in Medical Diagnostics Systems and upon completion in 1989, became a lecturer. Whilst he never set out with the explicit intention of becoming an academic, he has followed his interests - logic, philosophy and computing: “the career path emerged from this, if you like”. Over the following 20 years he moved through various positions including Reader, before deciding to take voluntary severance in 2008.

His intention at this point was to go into full time church work as he is extremely interested in the field of apologetics. This was “a difficult decision to take because you are stepping out of security”. However, he realised that this was in fact not quite the right path for him, and that in fact his faith would best be served inside the University.

He thus decided to switch course and took a postdoc position at the University of Oxford on a European project for two and a half years which he describes as “fantastic”. Nigel then returned to Brookes as Head of Department in 2011 and early in 2017, took on another department head role. So, he found himself “heading out of the door of the University and then…coming back in”.

During his time at Oxford, Nigel was inspired by Professor John Lennox, who was a Professor of Maths there. “He’s one of my heroes really, he’s been successful as an academic and also been able to follow this apologetics route in a difficult environment”. It inspired Nigel himself to want to be in a position where he could talk about his faith in contact with his work. This period was a real eye-opener, he says it: “inspired him to think big. It’s only since coming back and into this role that I can see that it is possible to do this stuff and it’s not beyond reach”. Coming back, his focus is more on his own research whereas earlier in his career he was aspirational in terms of status- becoming reader, for example.

Nigel put a lot of thought into how he could best combine his faith with his research, reflecting on how his academic expertise might enable him to marry the two. He realised that AI and apologetics were asking many of the same questions, particularly regarding what and who human beings are. Now he is lucky that both his main interests are coming together. Over last six months he has realised that he can combine his theological perspective with his AI work, in how to develop Robots with moral character. This speaks to questions at the heart of both his religious and academic interests.

Family Life

Nigel is the son of bakers and confectioners and was the first in his family to go to university. He is married and has five children spanning the ages of six to 25. Whilst his work often required him to work evenings, he is lucky that his wife works part-time and describes himself as quite protective of family life.

MOTIVATIONS

Outside of Brookes, Nigel is also very active in his church - preaching about six times a year - and his faith is a key driver of his personal and professional decisions. He plays keyboard and bass guitar in the music group at his church and his passion for music doesn’t stop there; he is also learning jazz piano. Nigel has written a course on discipleship and is in the process of rolling that out. He has done the course with four or five small groups so far and it consists of 24 weekly sessions that cover the essentials of discipleship as understood in 1st Century Christianity.

Nigel’s message to early career researchers

“Think big and work towards a vision”.

PROFESSOR
NIGEL CROOK

Nigel Crook is a researcher in Artificial Intelligence and robotics and is Head of Computing and Communication Technologies (CCT) and Interim Head of MEMS (Mechanical Engineering and Mathematical Sciences). He joined Oxford Brookes as a PhD student in 1985.
"I want to go to university, I want to do a PhD and I want to go and do research"

Bridget Durning is a Senior Lecturer in the School of the Built Environment at Oxford Brookes University. Bridget is an experienced sustainability consultant and has worked in both research and consultancy in the public and private sectors for over 25 years. Bridget joined Brookes on a research project in 2000 and has held different posts in the University ever since.

**BRIDGET’S STORY**

Professional Journey

Upon graduating from the University of Liverpool with a BSc in Geology, Bridget was awarded a place to study for a PhD in Geology at the University of Exeter. Bridget found that she loved the academic world but felt that it was not a good time to enter her field. Academic geology, she says, was in flux - it wasn’t a buoyant subject and there few jobs. Thus, on completion of her PhD she went to work in consultancy, as a geologist in the field for a company called Wimpey Environmental.

Her first career move came when her husband’s work saw the couple move from London to the North West. Seeing an advert in The Guardian for Wimpey, however, with hindsight returning to her old firm was not the best move: “never go back”, she reflects, as she found that her newly acquired skills weren’t taken advantage of. When the company was sold and relocated, she decided it was time for another move. She was also pregnant with her first child and so wanted less of a commute. However, she said that it took her five years from deciding she wanted a different job to find one that she wanted to apply for.

Move to Brookes

The job that met her aspirations was the role in which she was first employed at Brookes; managing a big research project. This role was in many ways the perfect synthesis of Bridget’s career experiences. Moreover, she had always hoped to work in academia: “When people asked me when I was 18 what I wanted to do in the future and I said: I want to go to university, I want to do a PhD and I want to go and do research”, So I always had that thought at the back of my mind; this is always something I wanted to do. Her move to Brookes thus enabled her to combine her knowledge and experience (how much expanded beyond just geology) with the interest and desire to develop a career within academia.

During her time at Brookes she said she made the most of opportunities that came to her. Despite not being appointed to an academic role, she talked to colleagues about teaching in environmental management, and took on research and teaching opportunities as they came. Thus, over her time at Brookes she has always had positions that combine a variety of different responsibilities: “I’ve never had a role where I’m purely an academic. I’ve always had roles where there is some administrative support within them”.

Her current role involves teaching, research and she is also research ethics officer for the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment.

**MOTIVATIONS**

Bridget enjoys having a positive impact on people’s lives and likes the opportunities that are afforded for this in the University. She finds that, like with local authorities, in a university you feel like you are making a difference to people’s lives. She says that in contrast to the private sector, which is client focused, at Brookes you can help people. For this reason, she finds her role as faculty ethics officer immensely rewarding, as she can help other staff as well as students. Bridget also values the autonomy of the academic environment. She enjoys the flexibility it offers and being able to manage your own workload.

**Highlights**

Bridget’s highlights relate to influential research that she has produced with colleagues. She says about the first paper she had published, which she wrote with her colleague at Brookes, Professor Alan Jenkins, and which is still one of the most popular papers on the topic, “I think that’s been quite a highlight”. Again, reflecting on a further result of collaboration with colleagues, an edited book on environmental assessment and management, which has been extremely popular and has now been translated into Chinese, Bridget comments understatedly: “that was quite good.”.

**Background**

Whilst neither of Bridget’s parents went to university, her father was influential on her academic interests; “My dad worked on building sites. That’s why I went into Geology”. Bridget is now married to an environmental scientist and she says that their careers complement each other; they work together collaborating on research opportunities. Their co-operation extends to their family life as well. In order to ensure that the distribution of childcare and household responsibilities is equitable, “I would plan out the whole year” to ensure that, for example, they are both picking their daughter up the same number of times: “He knew where he should be and I knew where I should be”.

Bridget’s message to early career researchers

“Make the most of opportunities that come your way to gain knowledge and experience and develop your skill set. It may mean it takes longer to achieve your goals and aims in life, but they can give you a more interesting journey getting there.”
MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

“Providing students around the world with an excellent learning experience with their ambitions being realised, continues to motivate me”

Alison Honour is a former Professor and Associate Dean for Student Experience at Oxford Brookes University.

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that I’ve been able to observe the key leadership influences: “I’m very lucky that I’ve been able to observe their leadership approaches and strong personal qualities and to have had those role models.”

Women Role Models at Brookes

In 2008, Alison successfully applied for the position of Head of School, and credits the support and inspiration of her female colleagues: “I’ve been really fortunate to work alongside very strong female leaders…When you are creative, you tend to be mildly disruptive”- and only doing this, such as getting her students to work on tattoo designs. Alison has also applied this talent for teaching in her voluntary work in Further Education (FE) Colleges.

Success

Following from this drive to help others, Alison’s idea of success is helping others to get promotion. She gets immense satisfaction from knowing that she’s helped students as well. “In FE, when a parent says: ‘I don’t know what you’ve done but they’ve never, ever stayed in their room to do work and they’re coming in every day and they’ve never attended school. They are like a different person: happy, confident, ambitious’. If I feel like I’ve had a part in that through my teaching, that’s pretty great. Hearing from students who now are employed around the world, their ambitions being realised, gives me such a thrill.”

Family Life

Alison is married with three children. Her husband, an Executive Manager and PA at Brookes, takes over when work takes her abroad and over time their roles have changed: her husband went from being the main breadwinner to Alison’s career taking the bigger focus. “We always have those conversations about how family and working life is going to work and I think that’s really important.”

Alison manages her responsibilities at work alongside those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that on the whole, the key important stuff that they remember now is that mum has always been around”.

She’s thinks that it is important that her children have their mother as a role model - “They are really proud of their mum is a professor, and they go and tell their friends.”

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that I’ve been able to observe the key leadership influences: “I’m very lucky that I’ve been able to observe their leadership approaches and strong personal qualities and to have had those role models.”

Women Role Models at Brookes

In 2008, Alison successfully applied for the position of Head of School, and credits the support and inspiration of her female colleagues: “I’ve been really fortunate to work alongside very strong female leadership. The person who gave me my very first job, Catherine Atherton…she was amazing, she had an incredible work ethic but she also really understood what it was to be a parent. If it wasn’t for Catherine supporting me when our first child was born with a serious congenital heart problem, I probably would have abandoned my career so I owe a great deal to her”.

She also cites Professor Anne-Marie Kilday and Professor Janet Beer as key leadership influences: “I’m very lucky that I’ve been able to observe their leadership approaches and strong personal qualities and to have had those role models.”

Life at Brookes

Alison carries this passion for education into her role at Oxford Brookes. Missing the intellectual environment, she took up a job here as lecturer in 1995 after having run her own successful Art Agency and Gallery.

Life at Oxford

Alison’s awareness of social and educational difference: “Coming from quite a modest background, there were some students there who were much more connected and had much higher social and cultural capital”.

Upon graduation in 1991, Alison became a Technical Specialist at, as it was then, Oxford Polytechnic. During this time, she managed to be the first technician to get support to study for a part-time postgraduate degree, which she did at Wimbledon College of Arts (UAL). Getting this support “was quite hard as at the time this wasn’t available for technical support staff, so I’m always someone who is pushing the boundaries a little bit”. She started doing part-time teaching and then lecturing at this time - the beginning of her career as an academic.

Alison pursued her commitment to education and went on to work in Further Education (FE) Colleges. Whilst some of these were “quite hard stints”, she says: “I believe that education has the ability to transform, especially if you can locate an intrinsic motivation, a love of wanting to learn. It’s about finding a way of engaging students who have disengaged due to previous educational experiences.”

Alison came up with ingenious ways of doing this, such as getting her students to work on tattoo designs. Alison has also applied this talent for teaching in her voluntary work in prisons and with children excluded from mainstream education.

“It was really about getting them excited and building their self-esteem. Making them feel, for probably the first time in their lives, that they were good at something.”

Personal Approach to Leadership

Leadership is extremely important to Alison - and she brings her creativity to shape her personal approach to it which she describes as “Conscious leadership, responsible leadership and generous leadership”.

“I like to be creative in my leadership…When you are creative, you tend to be good at wanting to find solutions, going around barriers to find solutions”.

Leadership for her is largely about helping other people to succeed. Alison mentors colleagues on the Aurora and Springboard programme and is also a national role model for the Aurora Leadership Foundation programme speaking at national events. She also leads on Social Enterprise at Brookes which has seen her support around 60 enterprise proposals from students and staff.

Success

Following from this drive to help others, Alison’s idea of success is helping others to get promotion. She gets immense satisfaction from knowing like she’s helped students as well.

“In FE, when a parent says: ‘I don’t know what you’ve done but they’ve never, ever stayed in their room to do work and they’re coming in every day and they’ve never attended school. They are like a different person: happy, confident, ambitious’. If I feel like I’ve had a part in that through my teaching, that’s pretty great. Hearing from students who now are employed around the world, their ambitions being realised, gives me such a thrill.”

“Always work to your discipline strengths whether it’s practice, action or textual based research and be prepared to be more flexible and research differently once you’re a parent”.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

“Providing students around the world with an excellent learning experience with their ambitions being realised, continues to motivate me”

Alison Honour is a former Professor and Associate Dean for Student Experience at Oxford Brookes University.

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that on the whole, the key important stuff that they remember now is that mum has always been around”.

She’s thinks that it is important that her children have their mother as a role model - “They are really proud of their mum is a professor, and they go and tell their friends.”

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that on the whole, the key important stuff that they remember now is that mum has always been around”.

She’s thinks that it is important that her children have their mother as a role model - “They are really proud of their mum is a professor, and they go and tell their friends.”

“Always work to your discipline strengths whether it’s practice, action or textual based research and be prepared to be more flexible and research differently once you’re a parent”.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

“Providing students around the world with an excellent learning experience with their ambitions being realised, continues to motivate me”

Alison Honour is a former Professor and Associate Dean for Student Experience at Oxford Brookes University.

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that on the whole, the key important stuff that they remember now is that mum has always been around”.

She’s thinks that it is important that her children have their mother as a role model - “They are really proud of their mum is a professor, and they go and tell their friends.”

“Always work to your discipline strengths whether it’s practice, action or textual based research and be prepared to be more flexible and research differently once you’re a parent”.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: WORK/LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BROOKES’ ACADEMICS

“Providing students around the world with an excellent learning experience with their ambitions being realised, continues to motivate me”

Alison Honour is a former Professor and Associate Dean for Student Experience at Oxford Brookes University.

ALISON’S STORY

Alison’s upbringing had a big impact on her. Due to her father’s job as an engineer, the family moved regularly for his work - living abroad and travelling to places like the West Indies, USA, Canada and Europe. These early experiences exposed Alison to the differences in educational opportunity across the world. This, along with having the background as the first in her family to benefit from higher education, entrenched her belief in the value of educational opportunity across those as a parent as well: “I never miss parents evening, I never miss plays and I’ve always been at sports days. I feel quite fortunate that on the whole, the key important stuff that they remember now is that mum has always been around”.

She’s thinks that it is important that her children have their mother as a role model - “They are really proud of their mum is a professor, and they go and tell their friends.”

“Always work to your discipline strengths whether it’s practice, action or textual based research and be prepared to be more flexible and research differently once you’re a parent”. 
PAUL INMAN

PAUL’S STORY
Professional Journey
Academia is Paul’s third career, following earlier spells in political campaigning and working as a television producer and filmmaker. What might appear as initially disparate professions are held together with a golden thread of belief in, and political commitment to, social justice.

“Politics isn’t something that sits separately. It is very much part of everything I do.”

Paul worked in areas of unemployment and housing as a campaigner and lobbyist in the 1980s, before moving into making documentaries and programmes about unemployment and mental health. At Oxford Brookes he is equally concerned with political matters. For him, “education is a right, not a privilege. You can offer a university education that is accessible and elite. It’s not a trade-off”. He brought his contention, that the University should have permeable walls, to his first SMT portfolio at Oxford Brookes in civic and community engagement. In management he retains his egalitarian politics:

“I wear a suit at work these days, but that shouldn’t detract from my belief that people should be enabled to have the responsibility and the power to make decisions as locally as possible”. He has led on the introduction of distributed leadership and management and it is evident that, from his mental health work to his role at Brookes, Paul aims to empower the people around him.

Move to the University
Paul’s move into universities came when he was headhunted to head up a film and television department at Bournemouth University’s Media School. From there he moved to set up another Creative Skillset media academy at Falmouth University before bringing his vast experience into management at Oxford Brookes.

This desire to keep moving and take on new challenges drives Paul, who recognises that he has a pattern: every five years “building something, get to a point where it’s built and then move”. Thus, Paul is constantly assessing his next challenge: “You should always be thinking where you want to go next and not stagnate”.

His motto is: “Achieve things and then move on”.

This self-reflection is accompanied by his sporadic diary writing. He says he’ll write down what he wants to do in five years’ time, not look at it again and then one day miraculously rediscover it and smile. He describes this as a “magical process”.

His definition of success is linked to this reflective process:

“Something you’ve written down, and you wish to achieve, and it happens…

Essentially: you want to do something, you make a plan and you do it. It’s the filmmaker in me, I have to have something tangible, a plan that I work to and then deliver.”

Personal Life
Paul recalls the impact of his early life on his career. He inherited his work ethic from his father, who worked in a factory, and it was also his father – who was always making cine films of the family - who ignited Paul’s interest in film. His politics are also informed by his upbringing. After growing up in a factory, and it was also his father – who was always making cine films of the family - who ignited Paul’s interest in film. His politics are also informed by his upbringing. After growing up in Erdington, a suburb of Birmingham, which he describes as “one of the five places in England where you are least likely to go to university”, his perspective is “working class focussed”.

A big change came when Paul decided to get married and have children (he and his wife, Debbie, have two children) as he had to slightly relax his hard-working impulse. He laughs that this decision involved a commitment to not travelling around the world as he had done during his television career; instead given the travel involved in his current role, heading up international student recruitment at Oxford Brookes.

Cancer and its impact on Paul’s priorities
Three years ago, Paul was diagnosed with throat cancer. This was a scary, difficult period: “I had 11 hours of surgery to remove a large tumour from my tonsil area and then have my throat reconstructed using tissues from my right arm. This was followed by six months of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. I spent a lot of time on my own, pretty much going through hell… It very much looked like I was going to die at that point”. However, this experience made him even more reflective, and determined to live.

“Cancer reminds you of your priorities. I was certain before I got cancer that I wanted to be a Vice Chancellor, but I’ve rethought the timeline of that ambition. I’m doing more writing and photography again at the moment. I also have had to help my wife and kids get over what they witnessed of my suffering. Incredibly, everyone has moved on in a good way.”

Upon returning to work, Paul used this newfound perspective to make sure he achieves what he had hoped to in his current role. One of his key aspirations is to bring all of the University’s “making activities” together - so that engineering, computing and the creative design disciplines, for example, can all share space. That desire will now be realised over the coming three to four years.

Coming out of the worst of the cancer treatment period, “one of the things that kept me going was a great relationship with my VC and senior colleagues, who said, ‘you just take as long as you need’. You really want to hear that. I’m sure if I’d been at a different kind of employer that conversation would have been very different”. Creative work also helped him in this difficult time: photography, reading, writing and film/TV: “I worked my way through all the Italian neo-realists, the entire series of Breaking Bad. I did a lot of stuff I hadn’t done for a while.”

MOTIVATIONS
Ultimately, Paul is motivated by making a difference whilst staying true to himself.

“Everybody likes to think that they’ve had some effect on something. When you get to my stage of life you start talking about legacy. I try not to, but you like to look back and think that things changed for the better, and that you have had an impact.”

Paul’s message to early career researchers

“Of course there are rules, but they are there to be broken. For me it’s about living life to the full. If you put your own happiness and that stuff at the centre of everything, then you quickly realise what you want to do”. 
ESRA’S STORY

Esra trained as an architect in Turkey. She was working as a research assistant alongside studying for her master’s degree at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, when her friend encouraged her to sit a second exam to see if she could get a scholarship for a master’s degree at the University of York. Esra was initially reluctant, having sat the exam the previous year and been unsuccessful: “I hate failing and I framed that as failing”. However, thanks to the encouragement of her friend she went for it and won the scholarship.

Now Esra is managing a young family alongside her career: “we have two careers to look after as well as two beautiful children to look after, and ourselves to look after.”

However, Esra is lucky that the flexibility of her husband’s job enables Esra to focus on her: “I have a very, very supportive husband. He’s prepared to give my professional needs a priority over his own… I don’t think without him I would have managed”. Additionally, Esra finds that the flexibility of her job helps her manage to maintain both aspects of her life - that she can work at home a couple of days a week if she needs to.

The couple are also fortunate because, despite both parents living far away - her husband’s are in Northumberland - they have a close support network of international friends that they made through the children’s nursery. “I feel sometimes we have this pseudo-family network”.

The couple make sure that they take the opportunity to visit parents in Turkey or Northumberland during holiday time. Esra says her parents are very supportive of her decision to move to the UK, despite the fact that it was difficult for them because she was leaving home and the country all at once. But Esra is still extremely close to them; “they are still my rock and a big part of my life, I love spending quality time with them and so do the girls”.

MOTIVATIONS

Esra loves the flexibility and stimulation that comes from academia, the “ability to keep an inquisitive mind”. Moreover, in comparison to Turkey, there is much more job security for academics in the UK.

For her, the highlights pertain to both her own research and enabling students’ research: “winning external funding for research” as well as the feeling that “comes from students who come with very little confidence in their ability to do research or write a dissertation and you work with them over a period of time and they get a distinction quite unexpectedly.

Dr Esra Kurul is Reader in the School of the Built Environment. She joined Brookes in 2004.

“Success is about having that belief in yourself”

“Be single minded about what you want to achieve, set yourself career targets and try to stick to them as much as possible. And be a bit selfish, if you can. You need to put your effort into what’s going to get you where you want to be”.

Not planning to stay in the UK for a long time, Esra left Turkey without much hesitation: “there was a bit of a moment when I was questioning what I was doing as the flight took off from Ankara. But until that point I had no questions about what I was doing”. Esra’s love of travel gave her the confidence to move: “I have always loved traveling and getting exposed to new places, new cultures and meeting people”. Her master’s degree was extremely international and she loved this.

However, when the master’s degree offered the opportunity of being extended to a PhD, Esra took it - deciding to move to London where she completed her PhD at the prestigious Bartlett School of Graduate Studies at UCL. Upon completion, Esra took on a role as a Research Fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University for 16 months before taking her appointment here at Brookes in 2004.

Personal Life

Esra is married with two young daughters. She met her husband, a physicist, in 2006 and the young couple spent a few years together, travelling and enjoying life in Oxford, before subsequently starting a family. Their encounter came at a very lucky time; having spent ten years in the UK, Esra was wondering whether it was time to move back to Turkey and if she hadn’t met her husband when she did, she may have done so.
ORIT’S STORY

Professional Journey

Orit joined Brookes as a relatively mature undergraduate student, having spent a few years doing obligatory military service in Israel, followed by travelling and studying - Orit had already completed a degree in Economics and Management. Her background at school had been maths and physics and it wasn’t until she moved to the UK that she decided to change to art and design. This was as the result of careful reflection and social mindedness: “Like everything in life I kept questioning and decided that if I want to make an impact, I need to choose a path which connects to people’s life directly. Economics just wasn’t that.”

Upon graduation, after spending a few years in practice, she felt that she wanted to keep her options open and so embarked on a master’s degree in Interior Design at the University of Westminster in London. “The fact that you keep on learning in a way that expands your horizons and constantly challenges the way you look at the world, is wonderful in its own right. You get to learn theories that impact on the way you perceive life - I keep feeling like a little child getting into a sweet shop”. She also finds teaching immensely rewarding: “when you see that something clicks. Or when you can persuade someone to go and explore more or to care a bit more about the social side; to be more of an open-minded person - you know you did some good”.

Motivations

Orit loves the constant learning afforded by academia: “the fact that you keep on learning in a way that expands your horizons and constantly challenges the way you look at the world, is wonderful in its own right. You get to learn theories that impact on the way you perceive life - I keep feeling like a little child getting into a sweet shop”. She admits that having four young children is “very intense”. However, the flexibility of academia is a help. She has also made use of childcare – carefully introducing new people into the family fold. Both she and her husband are careful to strike a balance between work and home.

Home Life

A few weeks before graduating from her undergraduate degree at Brookes, Orit had her first child. The couple then had another girl less than two years down the line. More recently, the family expanded again: almost three years ago, whilst Orit was teaching at Brookes, they adopted another two children. “So we had four children... and a dog and five hens and a cat.” Orit took adoption leave and her husband also took some time off and together they juggled the increased workload and sensitive situations between work and at home.

Home is clearly extremely important to Orit, whose family values include extending the fortune that she has had to those who are less lucky in life. The couple’s decision to adopt was influenced by the way they were brought up: She says, “we’ve always wanted to adopt, my mum used to look after kids from unprivileged backgrounds and I witnessed the difference it made to their lives”.

Success

For Orit, success is about living in an ethical way: “I don’t think I fit any ‘normal’ profile of a success story but I do feel very proud that we’ve managed to do things we like, that we’ve managed to do something that is beyond our selfish needs. That we manage to pass on to children that it’s not just about us. That we manage to pass on to fellow colleagues wouldn’t have to be made redundant.

Looking forward, on an academic horizon she wants to publish and finish her PhD, and on a personal level, despite all the pressures she wants to be able to appreciate and enjoy the world around her.
“I was raised to think my contribution would be extremely valuable and I’ve carried that with me”

Igea is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture. She teaches architectural history and theory as well as architectural design and has been at Brookes since October 2005.

IGEA’S STORY
Australian-born Igea initially trained and practised as an architect. She worked as an architect in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on some fabulous social projects - “I’ve always been interested in architecture which has a social agenda” and she believes that social and ethical responsibility are fundamental to an architect from her practice experience gained in Germany, in Australia and the UK.

It was when she had her first child that she thought of entering teaching and so began to teach studio at the Queensland University of Technology. It was here, thanks to the encouragement of Professor Jennifer Taylor, who had moved there from the University of Sydney, that Igea was inspired to undertake a PhD. “She was a really influential Professor in Australia and I really liked and admired her [...] she was a great mentor for me in my life and a great friend”.

She encouraged me to pursue an academic career, so I moved to the University of Queensland in 2003.

After completing her PhD and after the birth of her second child, she moved her family to the UK to take up a Senior Lectureship at Oxford Brookes. Teaching is extremely important to Igea, who reflects: “I get a hugely positive feeling from teaching students because students are very enthusiastic, open minded... I’ve been extremely fortunate to teach extraordinary students and they are a primary main reason I continue in academia today”.

Influences
As well as Professor Taylor, at a young age Igea was inspired by the teachers at her school who wouldn’t let any of the girls at her all-girls school say they were not going to do something when they grew up.

“The construct of my entire education was: ‘you are studying something so that you can do whatever you want to do’. I was raised to think my contribution would be extremely valuable and I’ve carried that with me”.

MOTIVATIONS
Igea enjoys both the teaching and research aspects of her role: “Studio is very good for me because I get environments where there is a very equitable workplace exchange. While I lecture in history and theory I am committed to developing architectural design studio. Being an academic that actively researches is key to my academic career because it allows me to expand the intellectual and practice-based realms of my discipline”.

She believes in women gaining professional equality and aspires to the day when there are equal numbers of women and men teaching at all levels of all architecture schools and in architectural practice. She gives lectures on gender and architecture based on her research publications and keynote lectures and in keeping with her social conscience, she thinks that having a diversity of backgrounds and experiences in academia and professional practice is not only positive but essential to workplace well-being.

Personal Life
Igea finds that her family life supports her work life, the former being much easier than the latter. “My home life allows me to be able to express things”. She describes her husband, Andrew Dawson, with whom she has an architecture practice in Oxford and co-teaches architectural studio, as having “supported me in every way. He’s been quite seminal”. They have both worked full time and finding a balance between work and home life is and continues to be hard. Since their parents and siblings are all in Australia, the task of juggling family life and professional life is very difficult. When Igea has suffered workplace discrimination or sexism, Andrew has unquestionably understood and empathised with Igea’s experiences. That support has been a key driver for her continuing to work in architectural academia, a space that is known for being sometimes overtly political and competitive.

Looking Forward
With age, Igea finds that she knows what her priorities are. Thus, she sees the next ten years as being her most valuable. With age comes confidence, perseverance and a desire to take control of her academic life.

“I now want to focus on writing the books I’ve wanted to write. I make films - I want to make more, better films… My drive is to produce a world which is inclusive, positive and productive in relation to architecture”.

Igea’s message to early career researchers
“If you are an architecture student, find a university that allows you to evolve the skills you are best at for a long career which you can direct. If you are an academic or practising architect, female or male, make life choices based on what you want as a work-life balance, not be dictated by those your employer gives you. At all times challenge inequality and discrimination within your place of study or workplace and always empathise and support your colleagues rather than be selfish in your professional life.”
“Academia is the perfect job”

Dr Emma Wragg is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher with the School of the Built Environment. She has been at Oxford Brookes University since her master’s degree in 2002.

**EMMA'S STORY**

**Professional Journey**

Emma started her career as a solicitor. Her longstanding desire to go into law was inspired by her upbringing in Zambia and Swaziland. Growing up, she attended a school in Swaziland that was set up to challenge apartheid and so from a young age she had been surrounded by a focus on social justice. Thus, she moved to the UK in the 1980s to embark on a law degree, with the intention of becoming a Human Rights lawyer.

When she graduated, she practised as a lawyer for ten years. First in London, where she met her husband, and then in Cyprus, where they had their first child. Emma thoroughly enjoyed the experience of getting to grips with the different practice environment in Cyprus and this learning through exposing oneself to difference is something that has driven her in her professional life: “I think it’s fantastic if you do get an opportunity to go and experience a different work environment, different culture, and different ways to deal with some of the challenges.”

As her career progressed however, Emma ended up doing largely commercial work, which she says she really didn’t enjoy. So, in 2002, when she moved back to the UK with her husband and two young children, she took the opportunity to have a career break and joined Oxford Brookes University for her master’s degree in Development Planning. This career break turned into a whole new direction and Emma has been at Brookes ever since.

**Turning Points**

Emma describes the master’s degree as a big turning point. Not only was it a significant career change, but the substance of what she learnt was also transformational. She says that until then she thought that she had a good sense of what was going on in Zambia in terms of development. However, the master’s degree actually opened her eyes to how little she knew: “And then I got here and did the master’s and it really opened up a completely different way of seeing things.”

The master’s degree helped her to make sense of what she had observed growing up:

“Of course, it’s difficult not to notice the stark disparities between different neighbourhoods in the city, but I hadn’t connected the dots on what was behind this”.

She now seeks to use her position to continue to comprehend her early experiences, researching unplanned settlements in Zambia. Emma is committed to forging links between Zambia and the UK and she is currently in the process of developing a new programme at Brookes which aims to build networks with other universities in Southern Africa, including Zambia, where she feels there is a big opportunity for collaboration both in teaching and research.

**Key Influences**

During the master’s degree, Emma’s attention was captured by the “very inspiring” Professor Roger Zetter, and she became fascinated with the areas that he taught around the political economy and development. He encouraged Emma to go on to study for a PhD and had astutely recommended to her that she would enjoy teaching. He was right: “I find teaching really rewarding especially when you feel you have introduced someone to a new way of thinking and understanding what’s around them.”

**Personal Life**

Whilst neither of Emma’s parents went to university, they were “absolutely determined” one way or another that their three girls would go on to higher education. Therefore, she says that both her parents were extremely invested in her education and provided a very supportive environment for her growing up.

Now that Emma is a parent herself, she has experienced the juggling act of managing a family alongside her career. This first presented itself when she was working on her PhD, which was a learning curve in terms of time management: “I think you learn every hour is very precious”. However, this was a beneficial experience for her children who were lucky enough to spend a whole year in Zambia while Emma did her fieldwork: “they had a fantastic time!”. Emma also had a strong family network in Zambia who helped out with looking after the children during this year and equally, this meant that the children got to spend time with family members that they otherwise do not see regularly.

**MOTIVATIONS**

For Emma, academia is “the perfect job. It’s the only job where you’ve got an excuse to be constantly researching and looking up new things and trying to understand what’s changing in your field”.

**Emma’s message to early career researchers**

“Try to make sure that what you teach and your research interests dovetail as far as possible.”
Making a difference: work/life experiences of Brookes’ academics

I am a PhD Student in Philosophy and was pleased to carry out this project as a Research Assistant with the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice. Over the course of this project, I have learned a huge amount, meeting and interviewing the members of staff featured here. Despite having been at Oxford Brookes for over two years, as both a student and a member of staff, researching Making a difference: work/life experiences of Brookes’ academics has exposed me to so many aspects of the University of which I was not aware. From fascinating subjects that I had previously little to no knowledge about, to all the mentoring opportunities and institutional support systems that Brookes offers, of Brookes’ academics has exposed me to so many aspects of the University of which I was not aware. From fascinating subjects that I had previously little to no knowledge about, to all the mentoring opportunities and institutional support systems that Brookes offers, which I am part.

Getting to interview so many inspirational colleagues was a wonderful experience. As someone commencing my own research career, hearing about the various routes that people had taken to get where they are, proved that there is no single path to a university career. I was surprised by the number of academics who had taken each step as it comes, so to speak. As someone without a clear sense of where I want to be in ten years’ time, it was reassuring to hear that actually such open-endedness was a familiar feeling and one perceived by many colleagues, on reflection, to be an advantage in making one open to opportunities as they come.

EMILY’S STORY

Journey into Research

My first inkling, although it did not present itself as such at the time, that academia might be something that I would be suited to, came when I was doing my A-levels. I was extremely lucky to have a Politics teacher, Ms Heaton, whom I got on with extremely well, and who really opened me up to the world of political theory. I have found it interesting to hear about how many colleagues have had influential or supportive teachers or supervisors at various points in their careers, as this is something that I have certainly experienced.

Jacqueline Heaton, with whom I remain friends to this day, encouraged me to apply for Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford, and it was there that a second academic support and friend came into my life. When I was in my final year, I started going to Feminism in Philosophy seminars, and the tutor who led these, the late Professor Pamela Anderson, became a huge source of encouragement and went on to supervise me when I stayed on to complete a master's degree in Women’s Studies. In fact, it was Pamela who alerted me to the possibility of doing a PhD at Oxford Brookes, and so it is thanks to her that I am where I am today.

I am now in the final year of my PhD, and I have spent the last year as a part-time research assistant to the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice. I have enjoyed the experience of doing a more applied kind of research for the department, and producing reports that contribute to a policy discussion. Like many of the colleagues I interviewed, the sense of “making a difference”, or feeling that one’s research has applications, is something that resonates with me. My own research looks at the meaning of vulnerability for feminism, and in keeping with this desire to be outward-looking as a researcher, I have taken particular joy in translating some of the ideas from my research into mainstream comment articles for newspapers such as The Independent.

Motivations

As someone who was first animated by the political possibility afforded by theory, when studying my A-levels, I would say that this is something that has stayed with me. During my undergraduate degree, I started a feminist discussion group as I wanted to bring theoretical debates and insights to bear on my own experiences, as well as those of my friends. This year, I am organising the London Free School of Applied Critical and Feminist Theory, a week-long summer school dedicated to debate and discussion in an inclusive and intimate egalitarian environment.

Other Interests

I also felt an affinity with colleagues who perceived having a full home life as enabling them to do well at work. I run regularly and play football three times a week. I find that having these hobbies helps me to concentrate on my own research without it becoming entirely all-consuming. In this way, it also helps me to switch off at the end of the day and enter a completely different environment and head-space. I am sure that the commitment, competitiveness, hunger and focus required in a football match translate into a healthy confidence and inform my research as well.

Emily’s message to early career researchers

“Think carefully about what you want to research, and what animates you. This is what will make it a fulfilling experience, and give you the drive you need to motivate yourself. Make sure your institution caters to your topic, not vice versa.”
Final Remarks

The stories collected here showcase the many different journeys that our academic colleagues have been on. Whilst some had aspired to be scientists or professors from a young age, for others academia was something that, for many different reasons, they had never even considered. For some, the world of academia was first encountered at university during undergraduate study - and many of our colleagues were proud to be the first in their families to enter higher education. Others fell into academia indirectly - after pursuing careers in teaching which then led them into the University, or having practised in professions such as architecture and education. They then went on to teach these subjects to future generations of practitioners.

Alongside the breadth of paths taken to get to where they are now, we also see the varied ways in which colleagues combine their academic roles with other aspects of their lives which they cherish.

Whilst it is difficult to distil any one message from the diversity of experiences collected here, the picture that is painted is one of a vibrant intellectual environment, enriched by each individual who has worked incredibly hard to get to where they are now, and who displays the same tireless commitment to their students, fellow staff and their research. We hope that others may find inspiration and encouragement in their stories.