

CHANGE YOUR CAREER PATH

Choosing a different postgraduate degree from your undergrad may seem daunting, but our conversion programmes are designed to help you navigate that change of direction. These programmes are a really great stepping stone, allowing you to set out on a completely new career!

We sat down with PhD student Megan to discuss her journey from an undergrad in History to a doctorate in Computing – two very different subject areas.

A CHAT WITH MEGAN

Hi, my name is Megan and I'm a PhD student here at the University of Plymouth. I have previously studied an undergrad in History at a different university, but I came to Plymouth for my masters degree, which was in Data Science and Business Analytics. Now, I'm doing my PhD in Computing, focusing on using AI to try and detect Parkinson's disease early through brain scans.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH FROM WHEN YOU COMPLETED YOUR UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE.

Between my undergraduate degree and now, I've done a lot of different jobs. I did my undergraduate degree

in history, but I decided not to pursue that as a career. The first job that I had out of university was as a domiciliary care worker, which I thought would be a nice, helpful thing to do; I was going to people's houses and providing personal care. Then I decided I was interested in becoming a detective with the police, so I became a special constable, which is a voluntary police officer, and there I did a number of civilian police roles – I was a 999 call handler, and I worked in major crime preparing evidence for court, and then finally, I worked in roads policing.

At that point, I had decided that having worked in major crimes, I'd had a lot of experience working with detectives

and that I decided it perhaps wasn't the job for me!

I was particularly interested in going back to academia because I really missed university, and at school I had always loved maths and sciences, and I felt that I had kind of missed out on applying that in life. So that's how I ended up doing the masters in data science. My dad's actually a data scientist, and he suggested that it might be something I'd be interested in. And he was right! I really loved the programme and I really love what I'm doing now.



Find out more about how to change direction with our conversion programmes.





DID YOU FACE ANY BARRIERS WHEN STARTING YOUR POSTGRADUATE JOURNEY? WERE YOU ABLE TO APPLY FOR LOANS TO HELP WITH THE FINANCIAL SIDE?

To contextualise my financial situation, when I applied for the masters, my husband and I were both working full time. We had salaries at that point and we had bought a house, so my major financial commitment was the mortgage, of course. I very much had to take that into consideration when applying for the masters. I should acknowledge that I've been very fortunate in terms of finances, that I've been able to pull on a number of resources. When I applied for the masters, I applied for a postgraduate loan, which covered me for that year. I also continued to work part time for the police, so I did have a small salary coming in as well. I had some help from my husband's salary and also a bit of help from family as well.

When it came to doing the PhD, I'm doing a studentship, which is funded. I now have a stipend, so I no longer need the postgraduate loan and I could stop

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working full time and just focus on the PhD.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE RETURNING TO STUDY? WAS THERE A BIG JUMP BETWEEN UNDERGRAD AND POSTGRAD?

It was a very interesting experience – it's almost impossible to compare. For one thing, I was at such a different point in my life when I went to do my history degree: I was 18 and I was leaving home for the first time. I was setting out to establish

myself and work out who I was. Whereas about ten years later, coming to the postgraduate degree, I was a lot older, I was married, I had a house. I knew what I wanted in life.

I think it was really important for me that I had had that big break between undergraduate and postgraduate. I had done a lot of work and a lot of quite serious real life work for the police. I'd done the 9 to 5 jobs and been very stressed at various points. It allowed me

to mature and get to know what I wanted in life, and from my studies. I enjoyed being part of a community of students again. It's been particularly great being able to meet other mature students, like myself, who had had different life experiences and were coming to this at different stages of their lives. So overall it's been great to meet new people.

I came to the postgraduate degree very focused, very set on working hard and to get a lot out of it. What I wanted to study was entirely unrelated to history, so that is why I did the conversion programme. The Data Science conversion programme here was just brilliant for taking all kinds of levels and abilities and getting us all to do data science and teaching us coding from scratch. So, a completely different experience, but both of them really fun in their own way!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE CONSIDERING A CAREER CHANGE OR A COURSE CONVERSION?
My advice to someone considering a career change or course conversion would be, if they can, to absolutely go

for it! It's been so important and positive in my life and I'm so much happier now having had time to think about my career over the past years. It's obviously something you have to think carefully about before you undertake a big change like that. But if you are sure that this is something that could work well for you, then you should do it.

I've now started a career that I intend to go on in. I finally feel, after ten years of studying and working different jobs, that I'm in the place that I'm supposed to be.

WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORIES OF STUDYING HERE?

I have been very well supported, I have great supervisors and a really interesting project that I'm absolutely loving working on. So, the whole thing has been my favourite memory! If I had to be specific, I might point to the travel opportunities that it has given me; I've been to a couple of conferences. I went to Madrid last September and, as I haven't been able to travel much before, it's been really exciting that my studies have allowed me to do that, and for it to be a part of my

studying and be able to present my work at these conferences.

IMAGINE YOU'RE ABOUT TO START UNIVERSITY AGAIN. WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT, WHAT WOULD YOU NOW TELL YOURSELF?

I ask myself that question all the time... what I would do differently if I were starting university again? I probably ask myself that question every day because I've had such a strange career path and I've done all these different things. The answer that I come to all the time is that I wouldn't actually do anything differently. Everything has been so valuable and has got me to where I am today. It's given me all sorts of skills that I personally don't think I would have gained if I had gone straight into what I'm doing now. Life has just been serendipitous – I met my husband when I was doing my history degree and I wouldn't change that for the world.

So, it might seem strange, but I wouldn't change a thing.