

## Interview about the experience of studying on a distance learning course at Brookes: the Masters of Children, Young People and Family Wellbeing.

### **So Hazel can you tell me what course is it that you're taking at Oxford Brookes?**

I'm doing a Masters in children, young people and family wellbeing and I've been on the course since January.

### **When you applied for the course what were your main considerations?**

Well, I'm a primary school teacher, so I have quite an interest in children in general, and I think from my experiences...I've spent some time travelling and working with children in India, and particularly with vulnerable children in those kinds of places, and so have an interest in it anyway, so I was really looking for a course that would help me to explore that a bit further, in a bit more detail and learn more about something that seems to be becoming quite a passion for me, so I just searched online and found it and read through the module descriptions and it looked like exactly what I was hoping for and then also I do a full-time job so I was needing a course that could be fairly flexible, and that I could do part-time and that was manageable alongside working full-time as well, and I feel like I found that in this course.

### **Have your expectations of the course been met?**

Definitely, I find it's a very flexible way of learning which suits me perfectly with the way that life is right now. I love the way that you can really pursue those areas that interest you, and read as much as you want and you can make it very manageable for you in your life situation, so I really appreciate that and really like that about it. I found it very easy to use especially being over the Internet and never meeting the people that you're working alongside in your groups but really benefitting from being able to chat to them over the Internet, and post on discussion boards and hear lots of different points of view about something so I guess in that way it's exceeded

expectations 'cos I wasn't really sure what to expect from an online community, but it's been really good!

**I wonder if you could elaborate on what a “virtual learning environment” feels like from a student's point of view?**

At first I was nervous of it, to be honest, 'cos I've never really done anything like it before, and wasn't really sure how it would work, what it would look like, but actually after a couple of weeks, just fiddling around and getting used to it and benefitting from the early things that were online about how to use this VLE, and how to find different reading materials and all of that. That's all been really helpful...and...I really like it! It's very clear, it's very manageable, each topic comes in...it's like reading through a lecture that you would go to at University, so you read through it and it's...you don't feel overwhelmed by information, it gives you enough to get really interested in what you're learning about, and then through the different tasks that are set, and there's quite a lot of tasks per topic, you can really pursue the things that interest you and it's a really good starting point, a springboard to direct your own learning. I really liked that about it.

I found the reading material very easy to access, which has been good 'cos I was worried about that, 'cos I wasn't sure where I was going to get a lot of academic reading from, but actually it's all on the Internet so that's been great. And it's really good to chat online with other people, and share on discussion boards, and then quite a good group of people from a real diverse range of backgrounds: different countries, different jobs, working in situations I've just never been exposed to before, and so that's really great because...you might throw a question out there, until it's gone into cyberspace, and then someone will come back and they'd interpreted the question in a way you never would have thought of, but you learn from that, and I've just found that, really...exciting in some ways.

**So in the process of the course, have you had any surprises along the way that you hadn't expected?**

I found it surprisingly easy to use the VLE, and I didn't anticipate finding it that easy, so that was good. I don't know whether anything's

been hugely surprising, more it's just opened me up to a lot of topics I've never studied before, and maybe had a tiny bit at school... maybe had a tiny bit of knowledge about but not hugely, and suddenly I'm finding out there's lots of different points of view on it, and there's lots of things that impact on that situation in a different way, and so it's just opened me up and helped me think about things differently, and think outside my own experience, and I've really appreciated that about it.

**That's great...and if...as we're recording this interview for prospective students, is there any advice you would offer prospective students when they're looking at this course?**

Coming from the point of view of someone who is working full-time, I think you have to schedule yourself fairly well, because it is hard work, and it is a lot of reading, and if you're going to get the most out of it, you've got to be committed to going online, and to reading through discussion boards, and accessing materials that you can then read in your own time, so I found that what works for me is to schedule an evening per week where I leave work early and come home and that's it, it's my "Masters night", and I'll work on things then, and then check into the VLE at different points during the week just to keep up with what's going on...and that hasn't always been easy, but I think if you have that mindset to schedule it in, then that's quite helpful.

And I think as well, not being afraid of pursuing the things that catch your interest even if you've never experienced them before...I looked at something about children who have mentally ill parents, and that was something...I'd studied mental illness a *tiny* bit at university, but not a lot, but it just caught my interest, and so within the environment and the culture that's set up through this course I just felt really able to just go for it, and read about it, and I think, yeah not being afraid to just have a go, and ask lots of questions, because although it might seem obvious to you what you're asking, it's amazing how differently people interpret the things that you throw out there. And I feel quite well supported, as well, so that's really good.

And I guess as well I really appreciate the "pay by module" approach to the course, I find that...that makes me feel like it's quite

manageable and I'm fairly in control of my own learning in that way, so I would recommend picking modules that you're really interested in first, because it grabs your attention and you can get going on the course feeling really motivated, and that's definitely something that has benefitted me.

**So Hazel, that's the end of the planned questions. I want to thank you very much on behalf of everyone at Oxford Brookes for sharing with us your views and experiences of the course that you've been doing at Brookes, and we wish you all the best in your future studies.**