Family-friendly and flexible working in the School of Biosciences

Our academics describe how the working environment in the School of Biosciences helps them to balance jobs and family life.

Anne Marie Krachler

I joined the School of Biosciences as a Birmingham Fellow in Molecular Microbiology in 2012. Shortly after I arrived from the US to take up this new role I found out I was two months pregnant. Even though this came to me as a bit of a shock at the time, my colleagues were extremely supportive, not least because many of them are parents themselves. I took three months off following the birth of my son in autumn 2012. After that, I went back to work full-time. This has largely been facilitated by my husband, who took over the role of a full-time carer.

My son is 17 months old now and I try to spend some quality time with him every day before his bedtime. Because I have a long commute, this means most days I get into work early in the morning but then leave the lab around four in the afternoon. This gives me enough time to take care of my teaching and admin duties as well as do science. After my son's bedtime, I get back to writing on grants and manuscripts, answering emails and marking. I think for me the key to making this work is being able to use my time very efficiently and more importantly, having an extremely supportive partner.

The intention of this story was to demonstrate how I achieve a good work-life balance. I don't think this is always possible– sometimes, my son will be sick and I have to put my family first and stay home for the day. At other times, there will be an experiment running and I'll stay late to finish it. But in any case, I feel my current role and the support of my work and personal environment allow me to deal well with these imbalances and probably better than many other jobs would do.

Read Anne Marie's academic profile (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/biosciences/staff/profile.aspx?ReferenceId=33241&Name=dr-anne-marie-krachler)

Mike Tomlinson

I grew up in Birmingham, studied in Bath and Oxford, and then spent several years as a postdoc in the San Francisco area. I returned to the UK in 2004 and had five years as an MRC Research Fellow in the Medical School. I then moved across the canal to the School of Biosciences as a British Heart Foundation Senior Research Fellow.

It was at this point that I realized that my wife and I had accumulated four children, now aged 9, 7, 5 and 3. My wife, Victoria Heath, is a lecturer in the Medical School and works 90% time. I'm not sure how we would cope without being able to both work flexible hours. This enables one of us to pick up the children from school each day and then spend time with them in the early evening, so that they don't have to spend a long time in school aftercare. We are also grateful for grandparental help on one day a week. Our workload is such that we have to work most evenings once the children are in bed.

It's a hectic life, but I really enjoy the balance of quality time with our children, running a research lab and teaching the students in Biosciences.

Read Mike's academic profile (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/biosciences/staff/profile.aspx?ReferenceId=9908&Name=dr-michael-tomlinson)

Juliet Coates

I have been in the School since 2004. My son was born in December 2007. I took maternity leave for 6 months and came back to work flexibly (full-time) for 3 months over the summer and then moved to part-time working (80%, 4 days a week).

While he was small, my son was cared for at the University nursery (gradually moving from 2 to 4 days per week as he got older) and by family, while I was at work. I became a single parent in 2011. When my son started school shortly after this, I rearranged my part-time working to fit around the school day. I now work 5 short days a week in the office/lab (9.30am-2.30pm) and then work for a few hours at home every evening when my son is asleep (this requires a certain amount of self-discipline, and I don't have a TV!).

I'm not saying that juggling teaching, research and admin has always been plain sailing. I received a Royal Society-Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship this year in recognition of the fact that I could benefit from a period of full-time research. I feel like my research career is slowly getting back on track!

I am very lucky to have a job that can be carried out flexibly so that I can spend the time I need caring for my child, which to me is the single most important thing that I do. Emails and writing can easily be done from home, and the School is supportive in making sure that my teaching, and day-to-day running of my research group can be carried out during my "office hours".

Read Juliet's academic profile (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/biosciences/staff/profile.aspx?ReferenceId=4301&Name=dr-juliet-coates)

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