

English alumni profiles

Sian Rhiannon Mitchell, [BA English \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx), 2013

Sian Rhiannon Mitchell graduated with a degree in English in 2013. She is now studying on a postgraduate course entitled MSt in English from the period 1830-1914 at Oxford University.

Sian decided to pursue further study after graduating: "I love academia, and have continued my studies by doing a postgraduate course at Oxford University. The writing and presenting skills which I learnt during my undergraduate degree, as well as the responsibility gained from work on social committees and in class group work, will help when I eventually make it out to the working world! The University of Birmingham really prepared me for this next step into postgraduate academia."

Sian talks about her experience at Birmingham, "The Careers Network at the University of Birmingham was invaluable in helping me find out about different careers. Although I went on to do a Masters degree, I still had to find out about what possible careers I could look into, and it was a fantastic resource for students."

Sian recalls her favourite memory at Birmingham, "It is very hard to pick a favourite memory from studying at Birmingham because I have so many wonderful memories from my degree. I made some amazing friends who I am still in touch with, met some fantastic academics and learnt so much about the subject I love. Some of my best academic memories involve working on my dissertation and finding out what I'm really interested in, what time period of literature and what types of writing I really want to learn more about. Outside of academia, my favourite memories have to involve the friends I made, from hanging out in the library café after lectures, to making the most of Birmingham's night life! And the proudest moment was walking out of my graduation ceremony underneath Old Joe, knowing I'd made it through my degree!"

Trisandhya Trott, [BA English Literature and American Studies \(/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/american-and-canadian-and-english-lit.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/american-and-canadian-and-english-lit.aspx), 2013

Trisandhya Trott graduated with a degree in English Literature and American Studies in 2013. She is now working, in partnership with Teach First, as a secondary English Teacher at Ninestiles School, Birmingham.

Trisandhya says, "The best aspects of my degree were the range of topics available and the support I got from the department. The initial adjustment from A-level study to the depth and independence required at degree level was a challenge but I was able to adjust effectively. My degree helped me to have a cultivated work ethic and interest in a subject. Also, working with lecturers and tutors allows you to practice at developing professional relationships."

Trisandhya talks about her career in education, "Working with a diverse range of young people and trying to raise their aspirations is the best thing about working in education. The experiences I gained at university allowed me to decide which sector I wanted to work in and I was able to gain experiences in those areas (for example, working on outreach visits as a Student Ambassador). My employer was particularly keen on getting a University of Birmingham student to work at the school as she herself had studied there and knew that the course was rigorous enough to prepare us for the world of work. The work experience I was able to gain as a Student Ambassador gave me invaluable opportunities to work with local schools and pupils in a field I wanted to go into."

Her advice to current students is, "Get involved in all activities available to you as you won't get a chance to have such a wide range of opportunities anywhere else."

Henrietta Brealey, [BA English \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx), 2012



In a day I can be doing anything from speaking on local radio in the morning, to lunching with CEOs and Directors in the afternoon!



Henrietta Brealey

Policy and Patron Advisor

Henrietta Brealey graduated with a degree in English Literature in 2012 before completing a Master's degree in Public Management. She is now Policy and Patron Advisor with the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce.

Henrietta recalls her time at the University of Birmingham: "I enjoyed the variety of avenues for study my course offered. The flexibility to choose what areas to focus on was really worthwhile and by final year I was able to create a lot of my own essay titles. Being able to construct an argument, use evidence and communicate effectively and clearly in a variety of media are skills that employers genuinely value. Studying English Literature certainly provides an

excellent basis for developing these skills."

Henrietta tells us how the University helped to further her career, "While studying for my degree, I worked as a Student Development Assistant at the Guild of Students and took part in the UpRising Leadership Programme. After graduating from the programme I was assigned a mentor. I wanted more work experience outside of traditional student roles so discussed my career options with my mentor. He approached a number of contacts working in Policy and Public Affairs asking if any would benefit from an intern. The Director of Policy at the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce replied and, after an interview, I was offered an unpaid internship."

"After beginning my Master's I was offered a part-time job as a Policy Assistant at the Chamber before being offered a full time role as a Policy Advisor on completion of my degree. I was promoted to Policy and Patron Advisor in February. In a day I can be doing anything from speaking on local radio in the morning, to lunching with CEOs and Directors in the afternoon and attending or running an event in the evening!"

Her advice to current students is, "Your degree alone is not enough! With the increasing number of students graduating every year it is very important that you consider ways to boost your CV while studying if you want to stand out from the crowd. Do get involved in societies or volunteer, do get a job or an internship and do visit the careers centre for advice and guidance."

Daniela Waters, [BA English Literature and Drama \(/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/drama-and-english-literature.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/drama-and-english-literature.aspx), 2012



I will remember the good times forever.



Daniela Waters

Media and Communications Officer

Daniela Waters graduated with a degree in English Literature and Drama in 2012. She is now a Media and Communications Officer at The National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society.

Daniela talks about her inspirational career, "Working with the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society means I can make a huge difference to the 690,000 people in the UK living with the debilitating disease while getting really great experience in working with the media. I began working, in conjunction with my studies, with a student events company: this required time management, prioritisation and good social skills! It is this balance of studying and working

that enhanced my CV and helped me to get a job after graduating. Studying at University of Birmingham helped my career because I learned to be self-disciplined and how

to write properly. Essay deadlines meant that I really don't know how to write well and now I do not struggle with deadlines in my career at all. University also gave me great resources such as career talks which helped me to choose my current career in Public Relations!"

Daniela tells current students, "Enjoy every minute of your time and utilise every resource that you can. Your tutors are there to help you so don't feel intimidated to ask for help. Learn to reference in your first year or you will really struggle throughout. Most of all make friends on your course. It's great if you are poorly and miss a day and need to catch up!"

"My favourite memory of the University is walking into the English Department in 2012 and finding my name on the 2:1 notice board with all my peers. That elated feeling is something I will truly never forget. The English office were all hugging us and crying with us and the atmosphere was amazing. There is a real sense of 'togetherness' at the University of Birmingham and I will remember the good times forever."

Rebecca Wilson, [BA English \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx), 2012

Rebecca Wilson graduated with a degree in English in 2012. She is now working as a Client Executive at Millward Brown, and International Insights Agency.

Rebecca talks fondly of her time at the University of Birmingham, "The most positive parts of my degree were the opportunities I was given every week to discuss literature with the brilliant staff at Birmingham - they really encouraged us to stretch ourselves and to develop a critical mind-set which has been invaluable since leaving university. The most challenging but rewarding part of my degree was the final year research project - although initially daunting, this really gave me the chance to pursue a topic which became more and more fascinating the more work I put into the project. My degree gave me the skills to articulate in a persuasive and confident way, and to construct an argument using both my independent opinion and the thoughts of others."

Rebecca's exciting new career as Client Executive is giving her lots of opportunities in the working world, "I'm given the chance to work with the world's biggest brands on a daily basis having a real impact on their marketing strategy. Studying at Birmingham sparked my passion for research, and made me realise that I wanted a career that involved this skill. My career requires a lot of the skills that I used in my degree, and has opened my eyes to how central research is to the way that brands behave and the decisions which companies make. I got a place on the Millward Brown graduate scheme, have now been promoted off this and am really enjoying the chance to stretch myself and grow in this industry. Birmingham is a great city for graduates with a range of opportunities! I attended multiple graduate fairs whilst at university and sought advice from the Careers department in the Arts department each time I was offered an interview or assessment day. The experience I gained as an Outreach mentor and Student Rep also helped me to build my confidence whilst studying, and was highly regarded my prospective employees."

Rebecca gives her advice to current students at the University, "Make the most of the careers resources available and any opportunities you are given to develop your skills beyond just those you will learn whilst studying. English is very much an independent course, and so getting involved with activities outside of this will really help to broaden your horizons."

Rachel Moriarty, [BA English Literature and Philosophy \(/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-literature-and-philosophy.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-literature-and-philosophy.aspx), 2012

Rachel Moriarty graduated with a degree in English Literature and Philosophy in 2012. She has recently been made an account executive in the marketing department of customer insight firm Dunnhumby.

Rachel recalls "There was thoroughly engaging and interesting content on my modules and the lecturers were inspiring in both delivery of modules and in their academic reputation. Some modules provided experience of teamwork but I would say that the most useful preparation for my career was more subtle than that - that is, learning to be more articulate. This is an incredibly useful skill both in the working world and when applying for jobs. I learned to be articulate, concise, engaging and persuasive both in writing and when giving oral presentations of my work. This has been invaluable in applying for jobs."

Rachel talks fondly of her time at the University: "My favourite memory is of late, stressful nights in the library. Although it's a bit of a bittersweet memory, I found completing pieces of academic work that I was pleased with (after some hard work and a bit of blind panic) to be my proudest achievement so far!"

"I would advise students to make the most of the vast opportunity for extracurricular activities while they are on campus. There is something for everyone and it is unlikely that you will have such a broad range of opportunities after graduation. Most of all, enjoy your academic study while you can. It is easy to lose sight of the intrinsic value and appeal of your degree when getting bogged down with stress and pressure about careers, but remember that you are (hopefully) studying for this degree because you enjoy it and are passionate about it. You have the rest of your life to earn a living: enjoy your studies now!"

Louisa Grocott, [BA English Literature and Creative Writing \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english-creative.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/english/english-creative.aspx), 2010

“ One of the positive aspects of my degree was the freedom to be creative ”

Louisa Grocott
Core Marketing and Events Ltd



Louisa Grocott graduated with a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing in 2010. She is now working as a PR Account Executive in Birmingham.

Louisa writes, "One of the positive aspects of my degree was the freedom to be creative – there were no restraints; many people wrote screenplays or short stories, but I chose to specialise in poetry, which I loved. Another aspect was the Children's Literature module (3rd year) - I was given permission to independently study my own choice of texts rather than the recommended ones, and thoroughly enjoyed researching and writing about children's literature

of war and atrocity, reading foreign texts in translation to prepare my argument."

"I now work as a PR Account Executive at Core Marketing and Events Ltd, based in Birmingham. One of the best things about my job is the variety. From working alongside the project management team organising fundraising dinners for Birmingham Children's Hospital, to writing press releases for national residential housebuilders, every day is different. I am also a member of the development committee at Birmingham Future, a networking organisation for young business professionals in Birmingham. Through this role, I mentor two students and organise a variety of professional development events for both members and non-members within the business community."

"One of my favourite memories from my time at Birmingham was volunteering to show English alumni around the university and talking to them about my experience. Many of the visitors had given large sums of money to the university over the years, so it was great to talk to them about what their donations had been spent on, telling them about my experience as a student in today's society, and discuss all the great work the university was continuing to do to make it a better place for students and staff. Another was handing in the last essay of the year and buying an ostrich burger from the farmer's market – sitting with friends on the grassy areas on campus. It reminds me of one of the only times in life when I really had not a care in the world!"

Nicola Fleet-Milne, [BA English and Classics \(/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-and-classical-literature-and-civilisation.aspx\)](/undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-and-classical-literature-and-civilisation.aspx), 2000



“ My time at the University of Birmingham planted a love of the ”

Nicola Fleet-Milne (BA Hons, English and Classics, 2000) is the owner and managing director of FleetMilne Property, Birmingham city centre's premier independent residential property agency. She is also chair of [Birmingham](#)

city that has developed into an enduring passion



Nicola Fleet-Milne
Fleetmilne Property

[Future \(http://www.birminghamfuture.co.uk/\)](http://www.birminghamfuture.co.uk/), the city's young professional network.

"I enjoyed exploring beyond the expected boundaries of my course during my dissertation, and honing my skills in articulating a coherent and persuasive argument. I was heavily involved in the University Air Squadron – I learned to fly! I had to learn to balance that with my academic studies which also helped me to carve my own career path.

Nicola's favourite memory of her time here? "Spending my afternoons at RAF Cosford flying aerobatics in glorious sunshine, then asking my housemates how they'd enjoyed the library that day!"

"The best thing about owning my own business is being able to make my own rules and balancing that with the responsibility of having a team of 18. My time at the University of Birmingham planted a love of the city that has developed into an enduring passion and a driving force for the choices that further my career."

Nicola has since returned to campus to share her entrepreneurial experiences with students. She recommends that students get out and see the city!

"Seriously consider a career here, as a primary choice, rather than a fallback option. Get a summer job as it's very easy to accelerate your career by networking in Birmingham, even as an undergraduate. Make sure that your degree forms only a part of your university career; get involved in lots of activities/ because this is what working life is like if you want to get ahead quickly."

Jo Usmar, [BA English \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx\)](#), 2005



I loved the fun, inclusive and creative English course at Birmingham.



Jo Usmar
Cosmopolitan / freelance writer

Jo Usmar (BA English, 2005) is a columnist for Cosmopolitan magazine and freelance writer, working for titles including Fabulous, Stylist, Heat, The Mirror, 3am.com and Look. She was even one of the first journalists to interview One Direction! She is also co-authoring a series of self-help books for women that will be published in January 2014.

Jo said "I loved the fun, inclusive and creative English course at Birmingham. It was great to be taught by experts and academics I admired who encouraged me to pursue my personal interests. I was able to indulge my obsession with Roald Dahl and fairy tales in my dissertation - and I got a first for it, which blew me away. That support boosted my confidence and gave me faith in my ability

as a writer.

"Now I get to write for a living which is all I've ever wanted to do. Having my own column in Cosmo allows me to rant away to my heart's content in my own voice which is a rare opportunity and a privilege I don't take for granted. As a freelancer I have written about so many different things – from interviewing Heston Blumenthal for Heat to writing about the London riots for Stylist to interviewing psychologists on health issues for Fabulous. I love everything about my job. (Actually, that's a lie - I hate deadlines!)"

During her studies, Jo worked on the student newspaper and radio station which she credits with helping her along the way to a successful career in journalism. She advises students to make the most of their time at university...

"I knew I wanted to get into television or magazines and so hunted down opportunities myself. Getting involved in extra-curricular activities and doing work experience during this time can really help in building your CV – but be prepared to work for free and make thousands of cups of tea. And make sure you make the most of the nightlife in Birmingham as it's brilliant. My university years were definitely some of the best of my life."

- [www.jousmar.com \(http://www.jousmar.com\)](http://www.jousmar.com)
- [twitter.com/jousmar \(http://www.twitter.com/jousmar\)](http://www.twitter.com/jousmar)

Adobe Flash Player or QuickTime is required for video playback. [Get the latest Flash Player](#) [Get the latest version of QuickTime](#)

Christine Arthur, [BA English and Communications \(/undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx\)](#), 1988



I chose to study here at University of Birmingham because I loved the campus, the course and the sports facilities.



Christine Arthur
McCann Birmingham

Christine Arthur, one of University of Birmingham's Alumni of the Year 2012, has lived and worked in Birmingham for over 25 years. Following support from the University careers network, she organised work experience in a Birmingham based public relations firm, subsequently securing a permanent role there, and within five years of graduating she had risen to Associate Director. She was then picked to head Key Communications, a top 20 UK PR company. Here, she grew the Birmingham office from a staff of just three and an annual turnover of £200,000 to a team of 25 staff and with revenues in excess of £2million.

In 2007, Christine became Managing Director of McCann Birmingham – the West Midlands branch of the world's largest communications and advertising network which operates in 130 different countries. She provides creative and strategic input whilst overseeing and steering the implementation of a range of PR activities. Over the years, Christine has advised a client list which includes The AA, Siemens, Bosch, RWE npower, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Stanley Black & Decker, Marriott Hotels, Nivea, National Express and Conoco Phillips.

She said: "I chose to study here at University of Birmingham because I loved the campus, the course and the sports facilities. My degree was supported by fantastic

lecturers and I also worked on the Student newspaper 'Redbrick' and in the Film and TV video producing the University's own Television channel, which gave me an excellent skill set for a career in public relations.

"My experiences here, both academic and social, formed the basis of my career and family life and I have continued to support the great work of the University through guest lectures, seminars and through careers events. I have been really pleased to be able to offer placements and work experience for undergraduates from the Arts and Law College, including one UoB alumnus who is now working for McCann PR full time."

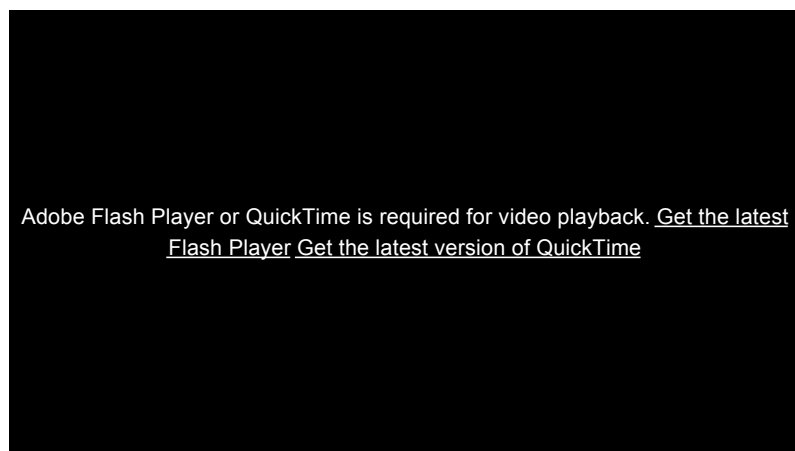
Philippa Parry, BA English Literature and Classical Literature and Civilisation (</undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-and-classical-literature-and-civilisation.aspx>), 2009

Philippa graduated in 2009 with a BA (Hons) in English Literature and Classical Literature and Civilisation. She is now the Community Manager (MBAs & Masters) and the Programme Assistant (Executive MBA) of the EADA Business School in Barcelona.

"Through my degree I learned that preparation is at least half the work of every task, whether it's a lecture, seminar or essay. The same is true for teaching, as you can't teach grammar you don't know or invent successful learning activities off the top of your head. The degree also developed my sensitivity to language and analytical skills, which helped me to break down students' learning processes into manageable steps, and to tease out the answers. I couldn't have got my first job without my degree, not least to persuade my employer to take someone on who had no related practical experience! The fact that I came out with a 1st also showed that I was dedicated and thorough, so I think that helped too.

The best thing about both of my current jobs is the contact that I have with the students. There is a lot of energy and sense of desire to analyse and improve. I enjoy the more creative side of the job too, like interviewing guests from the business world and staff about events, writing the newsletter for future students at the school. As for life here - well, it's Barcelona! Working means it's not the party that people imagine it to be, but it's true that it's a city with everything. It's impossible to be bored here, I've discovered so many more interests and hobbies while living here. The best part is certainly the people I've met, who have opened my mind to so many different ways of life."

Lorelei Mathias, BA English and Philosophy (</undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-literature-and-philosophy.aspx>), 2001



Lorelei graduated in 2001 with a BA (Hons) in English and Philosophy and is now a Senior Copywriter/Advertising Creative at Beattie McGuinness Bungay Ad Agency in London. She has written two novels, Step on it, Cupid and Lost for Words.

"My first job was as an in-house copywriter at Random House Publishers. Often the new books meetings were just like going to tutorials and talking about books we'd just read! [My English degree] plays a big part in my career, in that both my jobs are about using your imagination, writing, and analysis, so three years of training in that was a big help. But also, when it comes to the craft aspect of my job - writing succinctly and expressing yourself - three years of writing essays and being able to argue a point is also very relevant. It was also very useful on paper, as it's a great solid base for any arts or media job. And getting a First meant that employers could see I had some kind of proven writing ability.

My degree was a stepping stone for my book career too. My English dissertation was all about women's romantic fiction, from Mills & Boon to the birth of chick lit. It was an interest of mine ever since studying Deb Parson's course in this subject."

Aimee Postle, BA English and History (</undergraduate/courses/jointhonours/english-literature-and-history.aspx>), 2007

Aimee graduated in 2007 with a BA (Hons) in English and History and currently works as an account manager for Prova PR.

"Having a degree got me through the door and the fact it was in a subject which showed I could research and write articulately certainly helped. While studying in my second year at Birmingham University, I attended a session on careers in the media. Inspired by that session, I applied for work experience placements across a number of marketing and communications organisations. I was fortunate enough to be taken on for a six week placement with Kinetic Communications in Birmingham during my final year and was then offered a full-time role with the company. Throughout the next four years, I was heavily supported and helped to develop. Kinetic supported me through three qualifications with the Chartered Institutes of Public Relations and Marketing and I was promoted through the ranks to Account Manager.

After four years at Kinetic, it was time to move on and I've now spent just over a year as an Account Manager with Prova PR in Warwick. The best thing about working in PR is the variety of people you meet and areas of industry with which you get involved. I've worked with lawyers and scrap merchants, rally drivers and shopping centre managers, biofuels producers and vehicle testers. Every day is different and the pace of life is exhilarating – albeit incredibly tiring at times!"

Katie Allsop, BA English (</undergraduate/courses/english/english.aspx>), 2009



Having an English degree was fundamental in securing my first job, as I was a fluent and confident writer.



Katie Allsop
Senior Accountant Executive at McCann PR

Katie graduated in 2009 with a BA (Hons) in English. She is now a Senior Accountant Executive at McCann PR.

"Having an English degree was fundamental in securing my first job, as I was a fluent and confident writer, able to draft articles on various topics from finance to healthcare. Being able to digest a lot of information and produce a succinct and comprehensive version is also an important skill I learnt as an English undergraduate. After graduating from university, I applied for work experience at a small PR firm in Birmingham which was recommended to me by the

university. On receiving my application for work experience, the company asked me if I would like to interview for a junior position as they were currently recruiting. I was offered the job as PR account executive and worked there for a year, before joining McCann PR in 2010, where I work on large national PR accounts.

As a degree, English really opens up the doors to whatever profession you want to enter. Being able to write in a focused, interesting and succinct manner is an important skill across a range of jobs, and being capable of working independently is also a key skill for employers. An English degree also allows you to be very individual – I wrote on various, perhaps unusual topics, as an undergraduate but having the freedom to write about subjects that really interest you is the best way to enjoy your course and be successful.”

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

