

Josephine Durdin, BSc Environmental Science

What are you currently doing?

I am currently participating in a future leadership graduate programme with Rentokil Initial Plc. The idea is to fast-track individuals who show potential into a managerial role within the first two years with the company. The company is built up of levels and tiers. We enter at level 2, and are expected to reach level 3 within two years and level 4 within five years. The top tier of level 4 and those levels above form the top 120 in an organisation of 68,000 people. They have high expectations of us as graduates and have put a £2million pound investment in the graduate programme. I was one of 3 girls hired out of 17 graduates recruited from an applicant pool of 900 people.

The graduate programme is made up of four 6 month placements, designed to challenge you and allow you to learn from the different areas of the businesses. Mentoring, professional qualifications and formal training are built into the programme so that personal development is gained at all stages through the first two years with the business.

My first role has been within Initial Facilities – working with Shopping Centre waste management to add value to our clients by using our portfolio to benchmark our waste statistics, recyclates and harness best practise to be more cost-efficient and environmentally sound with the rising landfill costs.

Within this I have explored many different new technologies, particularly for food waste, and have been involved with bids for new contracts. I have used my own knowledge of municipal waste management gained from my Environmental Governance and Environmental Issues modules to add my own expertise to the business.

Can you give a short outline of the course you studied at the University of Birmingham and how it benefited you?

I studied BSc Environmental Science and achieved a 2:1. The course was something I had always been interested in from a young age and is completely relevant to the working world at the moment. Everything in business is about being sustainable and cost-efficient, so that nothing is wasted. The Independent Research Project and the research project for Landscape and Urban Ecology taught us basic project management and time keeping skills which are crucial for a working environment.

How did you find your first year in Birmingham?

My first year was a great experience, the university halls made the social “freshers” experience amazing and the course was interactive. I think it would have been more beneficial to have a dedicated society to Environmental Science, because it got lost in the Geography “Kinvig” with only a small number of us; however I know there is now a society which should improve the first year experience. Overall first year was a great experience and I was very happy I had picked a place with a thriving social life!

How was university beneficial to you generally?

University has been really beneficial. I had a great experience, received excellent teaching and gained a greater passion for my subject. I think having to adhere to a standard format for writing can improve your grammar and independent learning skills. In a way it is management training because you have to manage yourself efficiently to succeed.

What do you consider were the unique aspects of your course, and what was the most enjoyable part of your time at university?

The course was very diverse, covering many aspects of the Environment, and provided a working knowledge of the chemistry of the Environment to the people interacting with Environmental economics. The diverse curriculum all linked back to the same buzz words (e.g. global warming, pollution) and involved many different projects that we could get stuck into.

I enjoyed the field trips and the bonding experiences! In second year, we were supposed to go to Portugal when the volcano in Iceland erupted and disrupted the flights. Between the staff and the group of people we managed to make the change to a learning experience in the UK an easy transition and we had a lot of fun. We did not get tans in the Forest of Dean and Cheddar Gorge, but we had a lovely time and explored an area of the UK that I had not been to previously.

Did going to university give you any skills that you were not expecting to get out of it?

I think that through working part-time, my work with the Maple Bank Residents Association (RA), lectures, essays and a personal life, I really had to manage myself efficiently. I handled doing all of that within first year and still managed to pass! Time management skills are crucial and you may not be expecting to gain them. I studied in the UK, whilst my family were abroad in the USA and this meant that I had to cope with things on my own and make sure that I understood how I worked at my optimum and replicate that working environment. I think some people can be very reliant on their family for support, but full independence is one of the most important skills to gain at university and to develop yourself and capabilities so that you will be employable at the end of the degree.

Can you describe how it was to study here at Edgbaston Campus rather than in a city centre location? Did you enjoy campus life, and how did you find it living in Birmingham?

The University Campus is a beautiful place to be and study, particularly in summer for studying for exams. The campus was always a buzzing environment and the buildings are never too far apart from each other for those back-to-back days of lectures.

How did you find living in Birmingham? Was it how you expected it to be? Did you find the student community here supportive?

The student community is made up of a diverse selection of people! Everyone is different and that is what makes Birmingham a great place to live. I think sometimes you are literally thrown together with people who can result in storming or norming and becoming extremely close. First year roommates become more like family and can truly be friends for life. Birmingham has all of the amazing things about being in a large city with the feeling of a smaller community. Edgbaston is particularly great and The Vale is within easy walking reach of the main campus and Birmingham City Centre.

Did you join any student societies or take part in any events?

I joined the dance society, environmental society, guild council and resident's association. I was Representation Officer for the Maple Bank RA, and was involved in organising many events involving a summer and winter ball, a trip to Amsterdam and many nights out for the residents.

Any tips or words of wisdom that you would like to pass on to other students thinking of coming to study here?

Make sure that you create a work and personal life balance that suits you best. Attend all lectures because once you are in student debt you will wish that you had gotten everything that you paid for! University is one of the best times in your life, so make sure you enjoy it.

What are your aspirations for the future?

I would love to eventually have gained the skills needed to set up my own sustainable business.



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