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**PATHWAYS  
INTO POLICY  
SOCIAL SCIENCE  
ALUMNI STORIES**

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# PATHWAYS INTO POLICY SOCIAL SCIENCE ALUMNI STORIES

INTRODUCED BY  
**PROFESSOR JACKIE CARTER**

Social Science students often wonder what they can do with their degree. If you are an undergraduate Social Science student at the University of Manchester you will be studying Politics and International Relations, Criminology, Social Statistics, Sociology, Social Anthropology or a combination of these on the BA in Social Sciences degree. Or you may be studying Law, or for a BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) or be on the BA Economics and Social Studies degree. If you are a graduate student, you will be specialising in your area of interest.

You will read a lot. Be introduced to many theories. Have opportunity to discuss ideas and be challenged on your thinking. You may have some practical lab classes in data analysis.

You may also have the opportunity to put your learning into practice through a work placement or internship or a year-long Professional Year of Experience, or spend time studying abroad.

During your time at The University of Manchester you may join a society or undertake volunteering or engage with extra-curricular activity. You will probably have a constant eye on how your degree could lead to employment or further study in an area that you are motivated by and interested in. But you may not know what a degree in social science can lead to and be curious about what type of career you can progress into.

Some of you might be interested in following a career in a policy-related area. Others will have no idea what this entails, especially if you are not connected with people who work in this space.

This booklet will help you find out what a graduate policy-related career can look like for someone studying social science at The University of Manchester. By gathering stories from those who have gone before you, the purpose of this publication is to show you what is possible.

All of the people included here are former social science students. One of the most important aspects of this collection of alumni voices is to provide information that will help you see the relevance of your degree to a role in policy.

Read on and – hopefully – be inspired.





# RESEARCH SKILLS ANALYTICAL SKILLS PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Each of the people reflected in the case studies in this booklet talks about how what they learned in their degree helped them in the role they are currently in. They all make reference to the research and analytical skills and the professional skills that their jobs require them to have. And they reflect on what they did during their university degree course(s) that has helped them along the way.

It can be difficult for students to understand the relevance of their degree and course units to a future career. The frameworks used here were developed in the book 'Work placements, internships and applied social research' (Carter, 2021). They cover research and analytical skills together and professional skills as a separate category. Policy roles require all three of these skill sets.

Columns one and two identify the research and analytical skills, adapted from a British Academy 2017 report, 'The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences.' Column three highlights seven top skills sought by employers according to reports published by LinkedIn in 2019 and McKinsey in 2018.

## RESEARCH SKILLS

- Designing research and collecting evidence
- Formulating a research question
- Deciding what evidence is needed to answer the question
- Determining how evidence can be collected
- Understanding the ethics of undertaking the research
- Organising the information, selecting relevant information and identifying gaps in the evidence

## ANALYTICAL SKILLS

- Undertaking the analysis
- Ability to manipulate, analyse and filter information
- Ability to interpret and synthesise information using qualitative and quantitative research methods, and appropriate technology
- Detecting partial or ambiguous information by critically evaluating its source
- Understanding the consequences of using unreliable data and information sources
- Drawing conclusions based on critically assessing the evidence and findings
- Appreciating the need to be open-minded and reflect on the evidence base and conclusions drawn

## TOP SEVEN PROFESSIONAL SKILLS SOUGHT BY EMPLOYERS

- Communication
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Time management
- Creativity
- Persuasion
- Adaptability
- Networking

# AMY DWYER

BA Politics and Modern History (2020) and MA in Politics (2021)  
Current role: Electric Vehicle Policy Adviser in Department for Transport

After graduating Amy, having been unsuccessful in her applications to the Civil Service Fast Stream programme, nevertheless secured a place on the Civil Service Summer Diversity Internship Programme where she was placed into the Department for Transport to work on its electric vehicle policy.

Although she knew next to nothing about electric vehicles her colleagues assisted her in getting up to speed. She undertook some early analysis of data following a consultation that had been launched, supporting the drafting of the government response and looking at impact assessments. She sums this experience up as:

AMY'S THREE WORDS  
**DRIVEN**  
**PASSIONATE**  
**EXCITED**

But a lot of the time [I spent in] different chats with people across the Department of Transport, trying to figure out what different roles people can do. It was mainly just, like, getting to grips with policy, how it works, engaging with stakeholders, all that kind of stuff.

She then applied for a policy role in government, was unsuccessful in her first attempt but placed on a waiting list and a month later was offered a role with the department.

So that was how I got into policy. But I think ultimately, it came from some of the stuff I'd done outside of uni with, like, work experience and internships before that, because I think that kind of gave me a bit of an edge in interviews and a bit more setting of what the actual roles were.

But how did Amy become interested in a policy role? By her own admission when at university she had no connections in this area at all. She decided to get involved in extra-curricular activities. In her second and third year she volunteered at a local MPs office, learning about how a political office works. Then she decided to join The Young Fabians (she now sits on their national committee), and through this she set up The University of Manchester Young Fabians Society .

We had quite a few events, with influential speakers like Andy Burnham. This was completely out of my comfort zone. But chairing events with these kinds of speakers really helped with my confidence. It set me apart from other people that were applying for policy roles as well. During my Master's I was chair of the Education Network, and we produced a policy pamphlet with 20 different policy essays. I was just trying to take the initiative.

As well as her experience outside of the university Amy talks about what helped her during her studies. She got interested in politics through her Bachelor's degree and knew that she wanted to work in a policy role when she was studying her Master's. She recalls the foundational skills she learned which gave her the grounding she needed to start thinking about a career in policy. In particular she spoke about presentation skills and speaking up in seminars, on her degrees. And she was incredibly proactive in linking up what she was learning with the opportunities that were made available to her by her lecturers and professors.

I know no one likes to speak in seminars but actually doing that, once you get used to it, it's not that bad. I don't think I did as many presentations as I should have done though. I wish I'd taken the opportunity to do more as that's such an important part of my role now. A couple of things at uni really helped – The Politics of Policy Making course unit taught me a lot and I did The Policy Boot Camp (which was voluntary) and that was really good. Oh, and I also attended some research seminars on European politics and got other people to go along as they were so good – so relevant to what I was interested in. I thought this was a really good way to broaden my knowledge.

Amy was a student without any connections in the world she wanted to work in but went out of her way to use her university

**I don't think I did as many presentations as I should have done though. I wish I'd taken the opportunity to do more as that's such an important part of my role now.**

education to make connections by being proactive and focused. She knew she needed to take up opportunities that would set her apart. She looked for variety and thrived on taking on new challenges. She says that having pushed herself when she was studying has paid dividends as now she is not fazed by taking on new work. Her foundational skills, learned at university, have enabled her to understand the need for strong evidence, to question and critically evaluate everything that she is given, to be focused on the policy area she is tasked with and to ask for help when she needs it. She learned to get up to speed quickly and her degrees taught her how to work through large volumes of research, to synthesise the information and to present this coherently in a way that could be understood by non-experts.

Asked about her policy role in particular, and what professional skills she has developed since graduating, she responded:

It was quite a big jump from university to civil service style writing. But the quality of writing - my degree definitely helped with that. The presentations and communication I did in my degree and especially through extra-curricular activities definitely helped a lot. I've been involved in some high-profile stakeholder engagement, presenting policies to foreign government delegations, which has been really exciting. I've recently got involved with the gender equality network, so that's quite good. I work with statisticians, analysts and economists. There's lots of different opportunities to do different bits of work which is great. It also helped that I understood how government works – the background in policy for example has helped a lot because a lot of people in the Civil Service don't necessarily have that background. It was good to come in knowing a bit about select committees, how Parliament works and something like that I think does actually help.



# JIM MONTGOMERY

BSocSc Politics and International Relations (2019)

Current role: Senior Digital Performance Analyst at The Department for Work and Pensions

Upon graduating Jim entered the Civil Service and has developed his career apace, winning two promotions since starting. His story recounts how he developed his quantitative skills while studying politics, and how he has gone on to use these in his current role.

He entered the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in the Government Statistical Service but is now a generalist (showing it is possible to change professions within government).

Although Jim had done well in maths at school - studying it to A-level and taking a statistics module as part of this - he found it quite a dry subject and instead chose to follow his interests and passion in his politics degree. Whilst at university in his second year he applied for a two-month, paid, summer work placement through the Q-Step programme, and was successfully placed in New Economy (this has now been subsumed into the Greater Manchester Combined Authority). While there he was able to combine his love of politics and interest in data analysis and learn new research skills.

I walked into the office the Monday after the Brexit vote, which was chaos. They had a dataset on domestic migration, down to local authority level, which no one had time to look at, so I spent time analysing that, and learning new statistical techniques. I was able to uncover new insights that no one else had discovered. I also learned a valuable skill - the most important skill maybe - being able to relay something to non-technical colleagues. These two skills really helped me in my final year and continue to do so in my job.

Jim brought these new skills back into his third year where he chose to use quantitative research methods in his dissertation. He went on to receive the highest mark that year for a politics dissertation and was awarded a prize for his research. His work placement helped him realise that combining statistical analysis with his interests in voting behaviour - in his case the results of the Scottish Nationalist Party's landslide results in 2015 - provided an opportunity that he embraced. This also helped him realise the type of career he wanted to go into. His dissertation experience taught him a lot of skills which he now uses in his current role.

My dissertation taught me how to chunk down a bigger question. So my broad dissertation question was - how did the SNP do it? And it's a very complicated answer, and you've only got access to the data you've got. And what I inadvertently did at the time, but have now been taught at work and was probably taught maybe without realising it at university, was that you need to take your bigger question and chunk down what you want to find out. So that key skill is critical thinking - that's what university taught me is - how to take a broader question, and chunk it down into key things. And I have to use that every day with non-analytical thinking colleagues who have broad questions, and I help them to break them down into smaller ones.

**You need to learn how to tap into your academics' knowledge - because they are the expert in their fields - and learn from it.**

Jim also found that at university and in the workplace, there is a need for developing strong relationships with people and use time productively. He finds that in his current role he often needs to encourage people to think about things differently, and to do this he needs to develop rapport with his colleagues and use clear communication. He has found that this helps him, and his colleagues, better understand the task and appreciate it from each other's perspective. He practised this, albeit unknowingly, during his time at university too, especially when writing his dissertation and having limited supervision time.

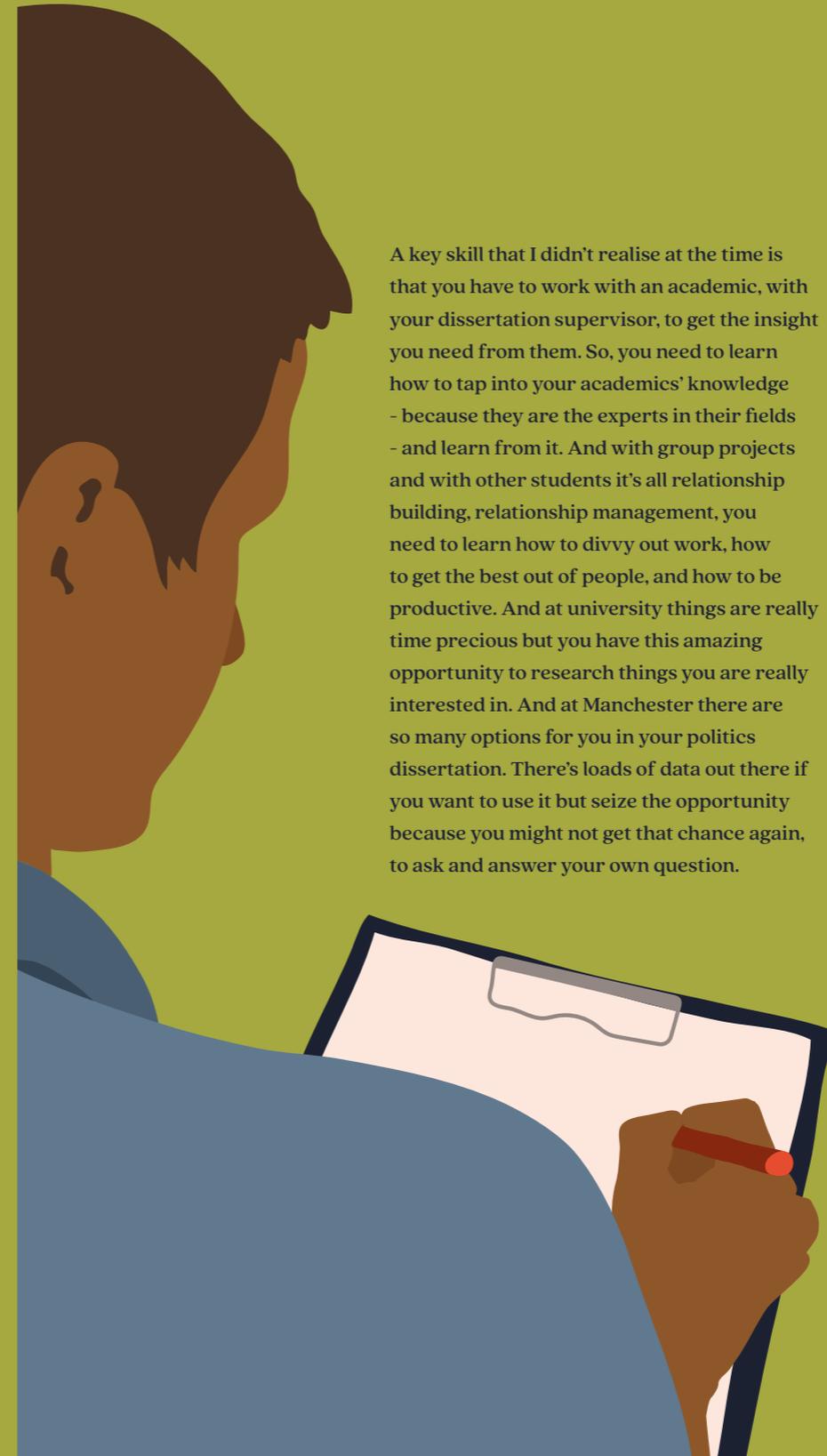
A key skill that I didn't realise at the time is that you have to work with an academic, with your dissertation supervisor, to get the insight you need from them. So, you need to learn how to tap into your academics' knowledge - because they are the experts in their fields - and learn from it. And with group projects and with other students it's all relationship building, relationship management, you need to learn how to divvy out work, how to get the best out of people, and how to be productive. And at university things are really time precious but you have this amazing opportunity to research things you are really interested in. And at Manchester there are so many options for you in your politics dissertation. There's loads of data out there if you want to use it but seize the opportunity because you might not get that chance again, to ask and answer your own question.

JIM'S THREE WORDS  
**STRATEGICALLY-  
CURIOUS  
DISLIKES  
SPONTANEITY**

Jim also uses good presentation techniques he learned at University, mostly from one of his favourite lecturers. He attends a lot of meetings and presentations in government but in his own delivery he ensures that he tailors his content to his audience, makes presentations snappy tries to be interesting and focuses on the main message.

Finally, here is what Jim says about his role.

A performance analyst - it's a digital role. There's lots of digital projects within government. When paper forms go online, we get access to loads of data. So, there's two sides to it. Helping teams understand how the user is behaving on the site (which page are they falling off? Where are they struggling?). There's loads of data crunching and insight generated there. And then there's the wider context which is about working with other teams to think about why we are putting this online in the first place. What do we want to achieve? How would you want to benefit DWP and the user about setting those goals and then measuring them and reporting on them?



# ROSIE LATCHFORD

BA Social Science Politics (2019)

Current role: Youth Parliament Programme Officer at the British Youth Council

Rosie graduated just before the COVID pandemic took hold. She managed to travel for a short period then returned to the UK to undertake a Master's in International Relations in London.

She had really enjoyed studying international politics at The University of Manchester, and even though she had only taken a couple of modules this helped her decide what she wanted to focus on in her future. She knew that she wanted to work in a field where she felt she was making a difference, and her role in the British Youth Council is satisfying that wish. What does her current role entail?

I support the UK Youth Parliament programme and various other programmes at the British Youth Council. I oversee the running of events, registration of Youth Parliament members, and support the programme delivery. It's really varied, and involves all sorts of things like supporting campaigns, and tomorrow we're having an event in the Houses of Parliament about votes at 16. I like the mission of the organisation: to empower young people to create social and political change.

Rosie shared how her time at Manchester really helped her develop her worldview and how her learning challenged her thinking. She had started her course studying philosophy and politics but specialised in politics in her final year. She still recalls a couple of courses (and lecturers) who had a profound effect on her, to the extent that she still would like to do something in environmental campaigning and policy in a future role. The two courses were Ideologies of Global Capitalism and the Politics of Climate Change.

...that really sparked my passion in environmental politics. And actually, I went on to do my master's thesis on a combination of environmental politics, inspired by the interests of the lecturer, about utopia and imaginings of climate change solutions. These courses sparked this combined interest and I wrote my thesis on that. And I know that's not quite linked to what I'm doing now. But I really, really enjoyed that. And I think maybe in the future, I'd like to explore that, maybe in academia.

Rosie was actively involved in a University of Manchester Society called 'People and Planet' during her second and third year. The society had been running a campaign for seven years when she joined. The campaign was to get the university to divest from fossil fuels and this required her to work with others to research the issues, present evidence and communicate findings to the university's Board of Governors meetings.

And the experience I got from that, running quite a big campaign in a university setting, gave us all so much experience, confidence and inspiration because it was such a tough campaign and so many students taking part and over the course of I think it was nine years actually, we did end up getting the university to divest. So yeah, it was really great.

Rosie's experience on her first degree at Manchester was a positive one. She clearly benefited from being taught by lecturers passionate about their own research and subjects, and this helped her focus on her own interests and develop her skills and knowledge both at university and when she graduated. She was especially mindful of being trained to undertake rigorous social science research, acknowledging that these are skills she now uses every day in her role. She described her undergraduate degree as providing the foundation to what she does now, both for her research and professional skills.

Knowing how to how to speak with people and getting them on your side and sharing your opinions, and expressing why an issue is really important, is definitely something I use that was massively strengthened by my time at Manchester.

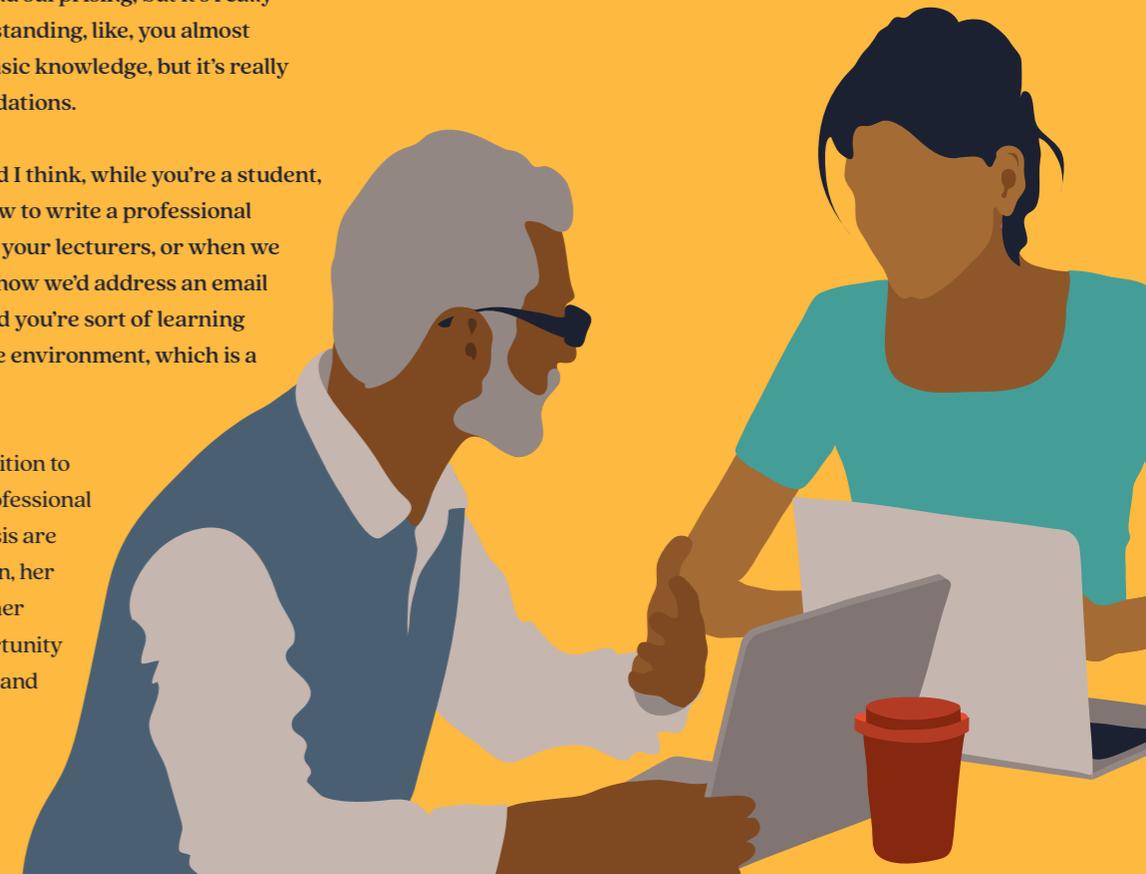
The research skills that you'll learn are so important for anything you'll find yourself doing – such as how to research a topic, get a really good understanding of it, and then put that into practice, be it through writing an essay, or running a campaign writing, like a policy proposal, you know, doing something in the world of work. Words like qualitative and quantitative and primary and secondary, come up all the time. Maybe people will find surprising, but it's really important to have that understanding, like, you almost take it for granted. Now, it's basic knowledge, but it's really important to build those foundations.

And, with communication, and I think, while you're a student, you learn a lot of skills, like how to write a professional email, how you might address your lecturers, or when we were running this campaign, how we'd address an email to the Board of Governors, and you're sort of learning all this stuff in a relatively safe environment, which is a really great experience.

Rosie also described how, in addition to communication, some of the professional skills that she uses on a daily basis are persuasion and teamwork. Again, her university experience through her society work gave her the opportunity to practise and hone these skills and she took full advantage of being able to do so.

We would talk to students, almost weekly about the campaign and about why divestment from fossil fuels was important. And that was something speaking to peers and building a rapport with people, and those sorts of relationships to help you get someone on your side. And it's something that was strengthened during my time at Manchester, because I did it so often. And then certainly, like, speaking to lecturers, writing to the Board of Governors and people in a higher position. And that's something that, you know, I hadn't really done before, and doing that there was building a skill, and helping you feel more confident about it. And working in campaigns and the third sector, in a political sense, like knowing how to how to speak with people and getting them on your side and sharing your opinions, and expressing why an issue is really important, is definitely something I use that was massively strengthened by my time at Manchester.

ROSIE'S THREE WORDS:  
**SOCIALLY-DRIVEN  
PASSIONATE  
HIGHLY MOTIVATED**



# SONIA SINGH

BA Theological Studies in Philosophy and Ethics (2019)

MA in Philosophy and Political Theory (2020)

Current role: Fast Stream Civil Service

Sonia did her first degree in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures and then her Master's in the School of Social Sciences. She was successful in her application to the Civil Service Fast Stream programme which she has been on since graduating from her Master's.

She had really enjoyed studying international politics at Manchester, and even though she had only taken a couple of modules this helped her decide what she wanted to focus on in her future. She knew that she wanted to work in a field where she felt she was making a difference, and her role in the British Youth Council is satisfying that wish. What does her current role entail?

My degree is not necessarily one I could take and apply to a subject area such as a role in a nuclear project delivery. It was definitely more those transferable skills of reading text, analysing data, etc. In my current role, where I'm a commercial policy adviser in BEIS, I was essentially joined with the policy team with the project and have been working on different policy commissions and different policy work.

Sonia believes that the skills she learned at university are vital to her current role. She has to read and assimilate huge amounts of complex and often technical information, then present this to government officials and other stakeholders. It calls for excellent time management and organisational skills which she points out are critically important to develop. What Sonia didn't realise at the time she was studying is just how essential the research, reading and synthesis of knowledge was going to be for her future career. She recalls feeling it was an endless to-do list but recognises how valuable that preparation was for her to be able to perform in her role now.

## SONIA'S THREE WORDS: CURIOUS CONFIDENT AUTHENTIC

I remember the amount of extensive reading that I would do at university and needing to prioritise which papers to read and obviously my workload, and the need to highlight key information. And then using those skills to transfer the key information identified onto another document, and to give key pointers, and these research skills have been absolutely crucial in my role in both departments. It's a generic thing that civil servants have to do. They might be given a very short deadline to read perhaps 10 different and complex documents. So maybe a Cabinet Office published guideline book, or a contract for legal support or a recommendation from technical experts, and being able read and understand those documents, to fact check and cross reference the

My degree is not necessarily one I could take and apply to a subject area such as a role in a nuclear project delivery. It was definitely more those transferable skills of reading text, analysing data, etc.

information, and then taking that information and holding conversations with colleagues, with stakeholders with external investors - that's been absolutely key in my role. And throughout my degree, I'd be doing all of this in preparing for, and then holding discussions in seminars, lectures and holding debates with fellow classmates and staff.

Sonia's reflections provide a fantastic example of how important your university education is in preparing you for your future role: in her case in a complex policy environment. She acknowledges that all the learning and deep thinking, the discussions and debates, and the research skills she developed at university were worthwhile. She recognises the transferability of many of her academic skills to her Fast Stream role, highlighting independent learning, prioritisation and time management, delegation and teamwork as key skills.

I think prioritisation is key as ultimately, your study and the way that you navigate that is completely down to you. And the way that you prioritise your deadlines, again, down to you, and similarly, in the professional world, too. So even though you may have calls and meetings in the diary, you have your day job too. And your time management is a skill that is transferable, and absolutely key. It's so important to be able to recognise and prioritise different work, and different deadlines. Also, delegation of work, so for instance, at university, you may be working in a group. I can think of

a few examples when I was at university, in group work, I tended to take over a lot more responsibility, as opposed to other members of the group, which is something that I've recognised - it's a brilliant skill to be able to be a team leader, but also simultaneously to recognise that work should be shared out equally within a group. But again, those skills can be transferred to the professional world. Teamwork is key in the professional world.

Joining the Fast Stream meant that in her first role (in the Cabinet Office) Sonia was exposed to different policy teams but not directly involved with policy. She worked with different commissions, with colleagues, which related to policy, and documents would go to ministers for their sign off. Enjoying this, she requested to get more involved. Her second posting enables her to do this. One of the modules she took which she really enjoyed was The Politics of Policy Making course in which she recalls discussing how policy making happens in government, and how things might go wrong, which she found incredibly interesting. She is now immersed in this landscape.

I wanted to take something that I've studied and put it into action. And I really wanted to engage in policy. And I'm fortunate to do that in my current role. I remember studying The Politics of Policymaking course and hearing terms like 'ping pong' and 'bills going through the Houses of Parliament'. Now I'm on the other side and I'm actually contributing to the writing of legislation of a bill which is currently going through Parliament, going through its second reading in the House of Lords, and we're having to implement changes from feedback from the Lords. We're being ping-ponged back to Commons. Studying it is one thing but having the opportunity to contribute to legislation is another. It's difficult and complex but I have developed so many skills and knowledge; it's so rewarding.



# FRANCESCA SAUNDERS

BSocSc Politics and International Relations (2018)

Current role: South Asia Desk Officer, Directorate for External Affairs in The Scottish Government

After graduating from The University of Manchester, Francesca started working in a casino. When an opening in Social Security Scotland (an agency in the Scottish Government) became available, she decided to apply.

I applied for just an administrative position there, organising inboxes, diary management and putting on events because I feel, well, I've done a degree. And that was really difficult. This can't be harder than that. My ability to actually juggle multiple assignments helped me to be able to organise multiple events at the same time, so handling deadlines and prioritising your work are important skills.

After working there, a job become available in the Scottish Government. Though 'terrified to apply' she thought 'it's now or never' and much to her shock she got the position. After two and a half years she transferred to a Scottish Government position, to her current role. Francesca works in a Directorate for External Affairs, where she covers India and Pakistan as her main geographical focus, with the cover extending to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka for reactive work.

A lot of my day-to-day job is briefing, and accompanying ministers who engage with these countries, so they're fully equipped with all the information they need in order to best represent Scotland, but also to better engage and build up stakeholder engagement across the countries. We have scholarships that we deliver in Pakistan for young women and girls. And part of what very much interested me in this role was the ability to work on that. And the modules and the theoretical frameworks that I studied, and learning about

**A lot of my day-to-day job is briefing, and accompanying ministers...so they're fully equipped with all the information they need in order to best represent Scotland.**

feminism, and then leading into feminist foreign policy was one of the things that attracted me most to this job. And my degree prepared me for it. All of my competencies for this job came from university.

Francesca emphasised how her degree prepared her to evidence the analytical and research competencies she was asked to give examples of during applications and interviews. Even when she initially thought she might not have the skills, upon further reflection she was able to frame her answers to address all the questions put to her.

Whenever you're applying for a government job, it's usual to have to demonstrate how you meet the criteria. You usually choose a single example. I remember one of them was analysis and use of data. I talked about my dissertation – how I looked at different sources of information to identify and answer my research question. And how I had to design that question in such a way that I would be able to answer it sufficiently and provide a decent argument. And for each competency, you have to break it down into: the situation that you were in, the task, the action you took, and a reflection [the STAR method].

Francesca was really unclear how the learning outcomes from her courses would actually teach her what they claimed to be delivering, never mind help her develop her skills for the workplace. In retrospect she can see that critical thinking, reading and writing, synthesising information, analysing theory and developing arguments are all skills that she honed at University.

Every single week, you're given certain articles to read. And I remember thinking - this is so useless, when am I ever going to need this? But the skill that actually helps you is critical thinking - you're looking at these articles and you're extracting pieces of information, so that when you go into

writing your essay, and you start off thinking 1,500 words, oh, that's so many, how will I ever use that many words, but soon you've read, say 20 or 30 articles, all of them with really relevant information in them that will support your argument [then your challenge is] how on earth am I ever going to summarise all of this and defend my argument?

Those skills were very subtle to her at the time and she did not realise until entering the workforce that her politics degree was structured to emphasise critical thinking, analysis and research. The way the course was taught enabled her to engage in conversations with students from other degrees, not just the social sciences. Nowadays, Francesca thinks that pretty much every essay she wrote at university has some relevance

to her work. Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, she has been helping out with the Ukraine desk officer, not just in communicating with the public, but also with briefings, applying the knowledge she gained while studying. Some of the units she took on her degree have stayed with her, and her experience in striving to do well, and reflecting on her own learning, has persisted in her role.

... [in my role] you often have to summarise bits of information that you've learned previously. And the module Terrorism and Political Violence in Modern Europe was probably most formative for me. [Modules such as] Introduction to Comparative Politics, just ... the many different readings that we did, and the way in which that we had to approach the readings, but then in tutorials the way that we had to engage with analysis. It was instrumental in helping form your ideas, and think about 'why do I find this topic so difficult? And what is it that I find so interesting?'

And the more I read, and engaged with the tutors, the easier it was to understand complex issues, and to apply them and have ridiculous debates with people over dinner.

Francesca also practised important teamwork and communication skills during her degree. When others come to her for advice now, she is more than happy to help. She believes being collaborative and part of a team is important, as, if you only focus on yourself, you will miss out on a lot of information and experiences that could help you later on.



FRANCESCA'S THREE WORDS:

**LOYAL  
COLLABORATIVE  
GIVE-BACK**

# ELEANOR CAREY

MA Poverty and International Development (2011)  
MSc Social Research Methods and Statistics (2015)

Current role: Policy Analyst in the Development Cooperation Directorate of OECD

Eleanor held an undergraduate Politics and History degree from her native Republic of Ireland before going on to take two Master's degrees at The University of Manchester: the first in the School of Environment and Development, the second in Social Research Methods and Statistics (SRMS) in the School of Social Sciences. She now works as a Policy Analyst for the OECD.

Eleanor has had a wide variety of different roles. After her first Master's she worked for the Co-Operative in Manchester where she was able to work with partners in the developing world. She came to realise that her desired career - working in international development - might require further skills, especially quantitative training. She decided to take the MSc and although she found it tough to begin with, her commitment paid off.

Organisations want people who are quantitatively literate, even if it's not necessarily specifically important for the role. And so, it was a little bit of a leap of faith, in some ways reflective of my faith in The University of Manchester, that I would get a decent course there, and that they would kind of bring me through it because really, I had no quantitative skills at all at that point - apart from some bits and pieces that I was doing at work. So, the fact that I didn't need prerequisites for the Master's made it possible.

It was a very steep learning curve for me in the beginning but at some point, it clicked. And I'm not really sure how, but I did graduate top of the class. It is important for people to know that you can switch; you can change trajectory and change direction as you go and adding new skills is always helpful.

**It is important for people to know that you can switch; you can change trajectory and change direction as you go and adding new skills is always helpful.**



Whilst on the MSc Eleanor heard that the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Fellowship scheme was opening up to non-Economics students. The two-year scheme matches early career economists with government placements around the world. She became one of the first cohort of statistics graduates to be placed on the ODI Fellowship. In that first cohort of non-Economics graduates she also found herself among many students from established well-worn degree-to-career paths from a few other UK institutions. Whilst not feeling an outsider, as a statistics postgraduate from Manchester, Eleanor did get a double sense of being a trailblazer.

On her ODI Fellowship, Eleanor was placed with the National Statistical Office in Accra, Ghana. It was a learning curve for all involved. She began working on Ghana's implementation and measurement of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals connecting government departments with external and international organisations. She describes her role in that period of international data revolution as less sitting down working with data but more of management connection. She then moved to Washington DC to work on a data initiative with the United Nations Foundation. After two years there she took an opportunity to work in her current role in Paris for the OECD.

Eleanor has demonstrated resilience and adaptability throughout her career. She puts great store in perseverance and determination and is a strong advocate for 'just keep trying', having been rejected for many roles that she has applied for.

Reflecting on the specific and general skills that her MSc provided her, she notes that in Ghana being seen as 'data and statistics literate' was a real bonus even if the particular advanced skills she had learned were not called upon every day in her job.

In international organisations, there is a cadre of people who work in statistics - we have a statistics cadre who are sitting with the data, ensuring data quality, doing the basic analysis. But often, they're so stretched, and it's not in their remit to push the envelope, to ask more questions of the data, than what they are instructed or mandated to do. The role of the policy analysts and others in the organisation is to say, 'Ah, but what about this?' 'Could we say that, or could we do this type of analysis?' And honestly, I think those have been the most rewarding relationships that I've had, where, I've been able to

ELEANOR'S THREE WORDS

**VERSATILE  
SOLUTIONS-  
ORIENTED  
SAVVY**

work with our statistics colleagues to say, 'From what you're telling me, it sounds like this, is that right?' And then I can kind of bounce ideas with them to encourage more analysis that they never thought about. My role is to be thinking about the wider space, and what is the message, or the piece of evidence that we need to present from the data, in order to be part of the narrative, to be relevant in the current discussions and also to raise issues that maybe aren't being discussed.

Being able to target the primary audience for her analysis is a highly valued skill in her role. As is the need for clear and effective communications to those audiences.

Whilst the OECD has 38 member countries, the Development Assistance Committee that I serve has 30 members. We have delegates who sit in Paris as part of a standing committee. If you were to be very narrow about it, they are the key audience, policymakers more widely. The report I work on changes topic every year. And that means that we're building a new community, a new audience, every year. And that's really challenging.

I think I can phrase something differently than a statistician can phrase it, but still know that it's accurate. So, I can read a statement that a statistician has written and understand what it means and why they are saying it in exactly that way, because that's the way I was trained to write. But I'll be able to say if we phrase it like this, then that's accurate, but also makes sense to the wider audience that we're trying to reach.

# DANIEL MALOCCO

MSc Social Research Methods and Statistics (2018)  
Current role: Analyst for the Department for Business, Energy  
and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)

From school to his current role Daniel had, as he defined it, a very sideways progression. Having studied Sport Science, Biology and Maths at A-Level he then took a Management and Leisure Bachelor's degree, hoping to go into hotel or leisure management.

He mostly enjoyed the marketing modules and planned to find a job in marketing post-graduation. Being unsuccessful, he started a job for a call centre as a market researcher. This led him to conduct customer satisfaction surveys for housing associations tenants. Gathering data for different clients, and seeing the same questions asked in multiple ways, led him to evaluate his role and he decided to seek a new career path. He realised he needed skills to enable him to analyse the types of data he was collecting, and that would require him to do another degree – which led him to the MSc in Social Research Methods and Statistics. What does his analyst role with BEIS entail?

My current role is on a cross analyst team working to improve modelling and post-processing of modelling for use by other analysts who work with specific policy areas. So, we have modelling software for modelling domestic energy efficiency policies, which I used to work on. I now do work to develop the post-processing of this new software, from modelling domestic energy policies all the way through to cost benefit analysis, and final impact assessments - the monetary sort – to analyses whether this policy is a good idea.

Reflecting back on the MSc Daniel noted it was very 'data heavy', but whilst taking it he developed a breadth of quantitative skills and methods – starting with linear and logistic regression, then progressing to multi-level modelling, structural equation modelling, and a variety of longitudinal data analysis techniques. Daniel emphasised the intrinsic importance of the variety of techniques and methods touched upon during his degree.

That definitely helps me be able to go into any kind of analyst job and just know various techniques that could be applied to a problem. But also gives me the comfortableness to use a new technique that I've never heard of, and have the confidence that, OK, I've got to go learn enough about it to

be able to use it. So that was definitely one of the strongest points of that Master's course in particular: the breadth and giving me the confidence.

So how did the breadth of the course, and the variety of techniques that he studied, change Daniel's mindset towards approaching complex new methods? He developed adaptability in the understanding and application of a range of advanced quantitative methods to research social science questions. He was able to use his training in the fundamentals of what he was taught on the MSc to tackle problems without being weighed down by each component of the research he was undertaking, showcasing his open approach to learning. Reflecting on the range of techniques, and the versatility of applying his learning, he clearly enjoyed the challenge that his MSc provided him with and learned to think beyond the specific statistical methods he studied.

I don't need to know how to do something. I just need to know it can be done. And then I can go away and work out how to do it at a later time.

So, for my dissertation, I used a technique, partial proportional odds modelling, which was not taught on the course. I had to read papers and was like, 'Oh, that looks like a technique for the question I wanted to answer'. And so, I went away

**One thing I've learnt in being in government is you could be the best analyst in the world, but if you can't present your findings, [...] and convince people that you are correct, it means nothing.**

## DANIEL'S THREE WORDS: **CROSS-TEAM- ANALYST ALWAYS LEARNING**

And because social science has a lot of the qualitative stuff and that definitely shapes the questions for the quantitative research as well.

Daniel also really emphasised the importance of the professional skills that he developed during his degree, alongside his research skills. Particularly working in government, professional skills are essential as you make your way through that sphere of work. In Daniel's work, his research and analytical skills go hand in hand with his professional skills.

One thing I probably didn't appreciate at the time, but now being an analyst, a policy analyst, is the skill of presenting. That was definitely something that I think everyone hated in the course - having to stand up and present group presentations or presenting your dissertation topic. Everyone hates doing it. But one thing I've learnt in being in government is you could be the best analyst in the world, but if you can't present your findings, [...] and convince people that you are correct, it means nothing.

and learnt it. And again, the fact that the course had given me a breadth of techniques gave me the confidence to go try something that I had no idea even existed until I read about it in a paper [...]. That's just my personal preference is finding a challenge, [...] a way of doing something new.

Daniel is part of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) profession, but he works alongside analysts from the other professions. He stressed the importance of understanding the theoretical context for the analysis that you are doing, noting how government social researchers push the boundaries for thinking critically about the work that they are undertaking; rather than solely analysing a problem, they ask what the next steps are and think about what this means on a wider scale. This openness of approach, the ability to conduct analysis but also frame the questions in the context of 'What do we want to know and why?' is, for Daniel, the value of a social science training. Daniel reframes the phrase, 'Statistics never lie', saying that it really means 'You're just asking the wrong question'. Finding the right question(s) to ask is in the social scientist's skillset, due to their rigorous methods training and broader theoretical knowledge.



# NICOLE BURGESS

BA Social Sciences (Sociology) (2019)  
Current role: Project coordinator at ReachOut

Nicole works for the organisation that she first volunteered at as a mentor then worked for whilst in university. ReachOut is a mentoring charity working with children in disadvantaged communities to raise aspirations and help them grow in character and competence.

Growing up on a council estate in Lewisham, seeing the challenges faced by young people, motivated her to want a role working in education. After graduating she travelled, then worked in a secondary school with children at risk of exclusion, then applied for and secured her current position. Her background in studying sociology helped her prepare for what she is doing now.

I've been doing sociology since GCSE. One of my teachers [at school] told me he thought I'd be really good at it. I actually didn't want to do it but now it's literally become my whole life. Where I grew up helped me see why things were happening around me, and make sense of it, like it wasn't my fault. But it was only when I got to university and applied what I was learning in the context of children and in a school environment that I was able to understand what was happening and how I can help. That's the end goal for me – helping young people.

She took modules on her degree that really interested and motivated her, really enjoying one on race and education. This was a turning point for her – when what she was reading and discussing was set into the context of her own experience. She realised this was what she wanted to do with her future and started to narrow down her interests. For her dissertation getting ethical approval to research children proved too difficult, so instead Nicole took her lecturer's advice to focus on something else she was passionate and knew about. Her mum is a midwife, she had grown up around midwives, so decided to research gender in midwifery instead. In reflecting on her supervision Nicole is full of positive and constructive advice.

I had to think really hard about what I needed her [my supervisor] for. She made me more organised ... and sometimes I wasn't prepared, then I'd just wasted our dissertation meeting. She was really good at keeping me in a routine, on track. I found that someone who gave me strict 'this is what we're doing in this hour' help was really what I needed. Looking back on it ... one of the things I didn't do well was utilise my chapters enough. I wasn't organised enough in looking forward, I think. It still annoys me I missed out by one mark. I think if I'd looked for examples of where I could have improved in my essays that could have helped. But I also learned my strengths. And it's not held me back in any way – I'm doing fine now.

Nicole is open in discussing and sharing her struggle with anxiety. She acknowledges that being organised helps her deal with feeling anxious. She writes everything down to help her to remember what she has to do and has used this technique for a long time. This helped her through her studies and is a practice she uses daily at work. These organisational skills are critical for her to be able to do her work well.

I set loads of reminders. I have a monthly planner and a daily section on it. And a separate weekly one. Every month I write down what's going on, because I have ten projects and about 100 students I look after so there's a lot happening. There are so many different things I need to remember so I write it all out. Then I go through it and spread it out over the days that month, so I know exactly what needs to be done. It's a lot of balls to be juggling at the same time. And a lot can go wrong working with young people. So, setting time aside for problems is important too.

Nicole also stresses the need to have good presentation and communication skills. She used to like interacting in tutorials and seminars and is very confident with talking to groups of

But it was only when I got to university and applied what I was learning in the context of children and in a school environment that I was able to understand what was happening and how I can help.

young people but is less self-assured in speaking with groups of adults. When she applied for her current role, she spent a long time preparing, knowing how much she wanted it but also that she might lose out to someone more qualified or experienced than her.

I made this whole PowerPoint presentation, going into really detailed theory from my degree, to be able to convince them I knew what I was talking about. I remember speaking to my manager a month after I got the job and he said, 'you were the most prepared of everyone even though you didn't have the experience you showed that you could do it'. And that was the change. That was what pushed me from learning at uni to knowing I could apply it – and I wanted to do it, I had that drive. Having that desire and passion is really good.

Nicole's role is informed by national policies around disadvantaged communities and access to educational opportunities. She needs to evidence the impact of ReachOut's work. Whilst 'shying away from numbers' in her degree, she is now involved in data analysis.

I don't even realise I'm using numbers whilst I'm doing it. We do a baseline survey at the beginning which gives us the academic competencies, social confidence etc, and create a dataset. I have to sift out what is important and relevant for the project leader. And we use that to ensure we're getting the maximum impact in the group. And then we do the survey at the end of the year as well so we can track improvement. So, part of my role is to work with the data and figure out the individual child's needs.

NICOLE'S THREE WORDS:  
**PASSIONATE  
DRIVEN  
ANXIOUS**



# GIUSEPPE MAIO

BSocSc Politics and International Relations (2016)  
MSc in Social Research Methods and Statistics (2018)  
Current role: Senior Data Scientist at Impact Cubed

Giuseppe is quite surprised to find himself in the role of senior data scientist, having never conceived of doing that role when he came to study at the University of Manchester.

Having done his first degree in politics and his MSc in statistics, his journey to his current position has been punctuated by several work placements, a period working as a research assistant whilst doing his Master's part time and several different roles since graduating.

Giuseppe's story starts by outlining what research and projects he is currently involved in then demonstrates how his degrees helped him get there. The company he works for is a business analytics start-up, working in sustainable finance, creating and evaluating models that ensure capital can flow to sustainable companies. The range and versatility of the research he undertakes is impressive.

I tend to do Python coding for 90-95% of my time. I've already completed a few projects about physical risk due to climate change. Environmental, societal and governance (ESG) is the umbrella for what we're after. We consider the societal impact that companies have.

**Many people in data science come from STEM backgrounds. As a data scientist you need to be a little bit creative, and coming from humanities, from political science, gives you a different angle.**

In terms of projects, and methods, I've used longitudinal linear regression, some web scraping to get gender pay gap data and build models and an algorithm that would predict the gender pay gap of big corporations that don't reveal theirs ... and a project – which I'm quite proud of – on geospatial mapping, to get the coordinates of the locations of the of corporations [of interest], and then mapping those with satellite imagery that tells you the physical risk of a particular area. And what I'm currently doing is an NLP (natural language processing) based project.

How did Giuseppe develop the skills that he now uses on a daily basis? He traces his technical and analytical skills back to his politics research project, and then his final year dissertation. Both gave him the opportunity to explore areas he was substantively interested in and develop his quantitative research skills. He received support and guidance from a politics academic, a quantitative researcher. At the end of his second year he also undertook a two-month paid data fellowship, through the Q-Step programme, with the World Bank. He conducted the research remotely, liaising weekly with the team in Washington, D.C., and at the end of the placement accompanied two of his lecturers to D.C. to present his results.

The World Bank placement had a massive impact on my life and career. We were using data from the Bank's Open Knowledge Repository – where people can download books, white papers and all sorts of knowledge – to examine south-south cooperation. We explored whether people in India downloaded publications about China and vice-versa. This really kick-started my career as a data professional, quantitative social scientist, data scientist - whatever we want to call it.



Giuseppe's passion for data analysis having been ignited he continued to build on these skills, learning coding and applying the research methods he had learned at university on multiple projects. Whilst studying his MSc he worked alongside social science academics, then undertook a paid internship for a company which resulted in his first role as a data scientist. He was drawn to applied social research. This has persisted. He attributes his approach in his current role as a senior data scientist to his social science training, using this to best effect.

Many people in data science come from STEM backgrounds. As a data scientist you need to be a little bit creative, and coming from humanities, from political science, gives you a different angle. I think the ability to be able to have very conceptual, almost philosophical, discussions helps. Once you've developed those quantitative skills you can put the theory into practice with data. I was recently discussing how a measure that had been developed could be evaluated. We realised that the evaluation method was actually very distant from the original conceptual idea .... and so we took the 'do nothing' approach, ignoring an evaluation method that was too conceptually distant from the original idea, which in this case was the right thing to do.

## GIUSEPPE'S THREE WORDS **CURIOUS DATA-DRIVEN MULTILINGUAL**

On professional skills Giuseppe gave an excellent example of how his writing and communication skills developed through his degrees have real-world relevance. He remembered coming to the UK to study, from Sicily, having real concerns about his ability to write well in English. He soon realised his Italian education, including learning Latin and Greek, had given him a strong foundation to build upon.

100%. ...in my previous role I used to write quite a bit of proposals for funding, just because it was a more research heavy position. And we were quite successful, we won quite a bit of funding for several projects. And I think doing an essay-based degree where there isn't often a ground truth, you know, you get evaluated, you get assessed, based on how persuasive and how strong your points are. And the same goes when it comes to proposal writing. I mean, when you're writing a bid for funding, they don't know in advance what to expect, and which one is going to win. But it's all about how well it's presented and is persuasive, how the points are made, and how well things are connected. And I think that those communication skills really, really helped.

Giuseppe's career trajectory has been, in his words, 'research heavy'. He deliberately put himself into the path of opportunity, not always taking the easy route. Throughout his education, and now in his career, he strives to find interesting, socially-relevant projects.

The important skills the Master's gave me were the coding and modelling. My advice would be to try to pick things that really spark your interest. See your tutors often, especially when it comes to essay writing. I'd rather have a tougher but interesting life than take the easy option.

# HANNAH WATTS

BA Criminology (2017) and MRes Criminology (2018)  
Current role: Principal Social Researcher in the Civil Service

Hannah works in the civil service, in a role she finds challenging and fulfilling, having navigated into it from her background in criminology at The University of Manchester. She feels incredibly grateful to have had the opportunities that have led her to her role.

## HANNAH'S THREE WORDS ORGANISED ENTHUSIASTIC REFLECTIVE

She attributes her success to having had the opportunity to go to university and receiving excellent support throughout her studies and career. She wants others to have the same opportunities as she has had, regardless of their background. Hannah is a truly supportive alumna, now helping to give other people the experiences that she enjoyed.

At the start of her Bachelor's degree Hannah thought she might pursue a career in the police force.

... when I joined uni I wanted to be a police officer. I did lots of volunteering at uni for Victim Support, Youth Offending Teams, Manchester Action for Street Health and then finally started the process to become a Special Constable. However, I realised soon after that I didn't think it was the job for me and really had just been clinging to this idea as it was an easy option. I had a panic in third year - rethought about the Fast Stream and went from there.

In addition to her extra-curricular activity – her volunteering – Hannah secured a paid Q-Step work placement at the end of her second year, undertaking research for a government department during the summer before her final year. She regards this as a turning point, a transformative experience that led to what she is doing now.

Very simply, I'm in this role because of my placement. The Civil Service was offering paid summer internships to carry out regression analysis on a large household survey and this sounded really interesting to me. I absolutely loved it. I was fascinated by how research could support policy decisions and enjoyed understanding how government works. It provided a great insight into the everyday working of a government department. It also really brought to life what I was doing in my degree and gave it purpose. I was encouraged to think about the Social Research Fast Stream which I applied to after I graduated my undergraduate degree. Meanwhile I also applied for, and was awarded, a scholarship to stay at Manchester to do my MRes in Criminology. Fast forward to December 2018 I had been offered a place on the Fast Stream and had graduated from my postgraduate degree.

She started on the Fast Stream as a research officer in drugs and alcohol research. After a year she moved to be a senior research officer in a central research team working on domestic violence, diversity and inclusion and modern slavery research. Just two years after starting her career she became a principal social researcher, the position she currently holds. Her role involves supporting her policy team on drug use research. As the person who leads her team, she now does less research but needs to support, upskill and guide analysts to deliver impactful research, which are skills she had to learn in her role.

She recognises that she uses many of the skills developed at university. Her critical thinking was developed through her degrees, and she learned analytical skills too: to code and undertake both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Her motivation for developing these skills was driven by her passion for her subject, and particular topics she found deeply fascinating.

I think I'm essentially doing my degree in real life. I scope, design and carry out analysis and research. We have to write reports, read lots of articles/research – all of which I learnt the skills to do when at uni. One of the main skills I learnt was critiquing and considering the limitations of research which I have to consider every day in this job.

[on my degree] I learnt how to code in R, which was really valuable, and conduct regression analysis and other quant skills, but I also learnt qualitative skills especially in my postgraduate degree. The combination of both quant and qual, plus understanding theories and policy development have been invaluable. I found the range of lectures really interesting, I definitely preferred my quant lectures because of the challenge but the subject specific lectures on mass violence, violence against women and girls and drugs and society really built my passion for research.



I think I'm essentially doing my degree in real life. I scope, design and carry out analysis and research. We have to write reports, read lots of articles/research – all of which I learnt the skills to do when at uni.

On professional skills, Hannah noted that at university she learned to prioritise. Doing lots of extra-curricular activities alongside her degree, meant she had to manage her time well and find methods of working that suited her. She recalls failing her first ever university assessment - receiving a mark of 27%. Although she was devastated this taught her to ask for help when she didn't understand, and to get support to improve her marks. She continues to do that still, and acknowledges it helped her to progress to where she is now.

Hannah's team of researchers supports a policy team in providing evidence and research. This can vary from conducting a small quantitative analytical piece such as cluster analysis of a household survey, to conducting interviews to understand pressures for certain sectors. They also commission external evaluations which require project management.

I spend most of my days in meetings, answering questions about metrics, methods and challenging other research. I also do people management, which I love though this can also be quite time consuming. My degree gave me the foundations, I wouldn't have the understanding of social research that I do now – although I often have to go back and revise certain methods (haha).

Hannah's advice to current students is to try to understand the real-life impact of what you're studying. Understanding how your degree is applied really helps build passion for what you're doing, and it's helpful to cogitate - when you're sat in endless lectures - on what you might want to do with your future.

# SIDDHARTH SHEKAR YADAV

BSocSc Sociology (2016)

MSc International Development: Environment, Climate Change and Development (2017)

Current role: UN Diplomat/Adviser (Climate Change and Oceans) to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Vanuatu to the UN

When Sid was studying in Manchester, he wasn't sure what area he would end up in in his career. He decided to embrace all the opportunities that his education offered him and as his story shows he balanced a lot of activities whilst he was a student.

When he finished his Bachelor's degree, he decided to narrow down the field of study, and start to specialise in an area. He chose the environment, climate change and development pathway on his Master's degree after speaking with his lecturers to help him focus in on what it was he was interested in studying further. He wanted to learn more and enhance his expertise in a specific area. The research skills he developed at The University of Manchester proved to be very useful.

I've now published two papers, on ocean policy. And, and one of the things that really helped me, was the social research skills I learned at University, and all the assignments that we had, so I'm really grateful to my lecturers. That was one of the key things that helped me - doing all the research and academic writing and referencing. I didn't have a background in social science when I came to university, because back in high school I was doing science. So, in the beginning, it was a bit challenging, but then with time, it started to make sense. And it makes full sense now I have to do the actual work in my role.

Sid was very proactive at university, seeking out the support of his tutors and lecturers and applying for one of the paid Q-Step

summer work placements that had been established under a programme to get more social science students to gain experience of doing quantitative research (he was part of the second cohort that did these). He went to work at a polling organisation – YouGov in London – producing some excellent work there. In addition, he participated in the Manchester Gold scheme through which he was given a mentor who he is still in touch with. This person, John, helped Sid by guiding him in asking questions about what he wanted to get out of his degree and helped him focus on becoming an expert in one area. He also assisted him with his planning and time management skills development.

John helped me, giving me ideas about how to plan well, how to think ahead, and brainstorm. John suggested I focus on one field but be aware of other related areas as well ... so that's one of the things that I remember. We had regular meetings, every month or something. He also helped me with time management which is really important [in my job] because there's so much going on. You have to prioritise. I invest a lot of energy in planning and managing.

Sid spent his time at university wisely. He was very active in athletics, being the president of the Athletics Society at one point, and was also involved in various activities in his halls of residence. These extra-curricular activities enabled him to develop skills which are very useful in his role now.

I have to deal with a lot of diverse people, professionals, in my current job. And back in university, when I was part of these clubs, sometimes we had to have meetings with other team members or other clubs or get in touch with the relevant university departments.

And I think that's where I developed this skill, getting in touch with external partners to support us with the athletic trainings or looking for a new coach for the team. And then with the hall of residents, they were similar responsibilities as well.

Another professional skill that Sid has developed is adaptability. Whilst his role is secured for another year he has been on a series of temporary contracts and as such has had to cope with huge uncertainty. Adaptability is a much sought-after skill but often hard to evidence. Here is what Sid says about it:

I've now published two papers, on ocean policy. And, and one of the things that really helped me, was the social research skills I learned at University, and all the assignments that we had.

It's very true. Because when I first came to the UN, it was supposed to be a five-month position, and then even after that, it's been uncertain, especially during lockdown. And I just tried to make the most of the responsibilities that I had at any moment. Not knowing what's coming next was - it was a challenge in itself, but I tried my best to make the most of the tasks and the main responsibilities I had, for example, the two papers that I was working on, I did the best I could. And also trying to make contacts with relevant people, and then things unfolded along the way.

Sid's story shows huge strength and courage. He has taken opportunities at every step of the way and been strategic in developing his interest, skills and expertise. He has handled insecurity with a philosophical approach, whilst remaining focused on how he wants to see his career unfold. He proactively sought out mentoring whilst still at university and it turns out this was instrumental in guiding him to the role he is in now. In addition, he has sought out opportunity to raise the visibility of his work and research, publishing two papers to date.

He is deeply passionate about his work and even though he doesn't know where this position will take him next, he is fully committed to learning all he can whilst he is in post, publishing his research and embracing development opportunities.

And doing all of this work has made me really passionate about protecting the ocean and, like, looking for solutions to climate change. And I think this is where I want to grow my long-term career.

SID'S THREE PHRASES  
**OCEANS AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE  
UNITED NATIONS  
ATHLETICS**



# SILVIA GALANDINI

MSc Social Change (2010)

PhD Social Change – Residential Concentration, Ethnic Social Networks and Political Participation:  
A mixed methods study of Black Africans in Britain (2014)  
Current role: Domestic Poverty Lead at Oxfam GB

Silvia has a background in academia and now works for the third sector. After completing a Master's, then PhD at The University of Manchester (her first degree was gained in Italy), she worked first as a university researcher, then as UK programme researcher when her career with Oxfam began.

Prior to her current role as Domestic Poverty Lead at Oxfam GB, Silvia's work was predominantly research based. She characterises the style of research carried out in the third sector as being a lot more practical than that carried out in academia. Her experience reflects that with academic research the focus is on filling gaps in knowledge, whereas research in the third sector is likely to be used to inform policy thinking and influencing and programme planning.

Silvia says that the goal when carrying out research for Oxfam is to stay applied and practical; she drives home the importance of this type of research as the foundation for the influencing work she undertakes. She believes that her academic training prepared her for this style of thinking, as it led her to consider practical applications. The 'research toolkit' that she developed at university – predominantly through her PhD – informed her current approach.

**The kind of the research skills that I strengthened through my PhD, have been very valuable in terms of understanding what methods can be used to answer certain questions.**

I think, definitely, the kind of the research skills that I strengthened through my PhD, have been very valuable in terms of understanding what methods can be used to answer certain questions, you know, what methods will be stronger, how to really, really be aware of the weaknesses, but also utilise the strengths of say, qualitative and quantitative research.

When reflecting on the research skills that she developed at university, and skills she views as particularly important when transferred to the working world, Silvia stresses the importance of being able to conduct a literature review. She says that this is always the first step in her work, whether that be policy or programme related. Alongside this she highlights the importance of the type and validity of the evidence she uses in her work.

I think the first one [research skill] is how to do a literature review, how to find the literature that you need, and the sources you need to think about a problem or question an issue. Through a Master's, that's what you learn, especially if you work on your thesis or an assignment, you have to look for sources and question them and put them together and critically read the literature. So that is always the first step, every time we do anything.

In the policy sector, research is used to make very practical, and at times, very important decisions. It's crucial to be aware of what kind of evidence you're using to inform your decisions and your thinking. The critical thing is questioning all the processes and the complexity of social change, being aware of different perspectives and different groups and the evidence that you have to look at and being able to make sense of it.

SILVIA'S THREE WORDS:  
**PASSIONATE  
GROUNDED  
AMBITIOUS**

Silvia also stresses the importance of developing skills for data collection, analysis and management. Whether your research is qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, managing your data well, and ensuring you have ethical approval, are important considerations.

Even thinking about research ethics, and how you seek consent, how you just plan the whole research project from beginning to end. Whether it's qualitative or quantitative, you still have to do that design and planning at the very beginning. If I think about the Master's, that was through my dissertation, and if I think about my PhD, that was the whole process of really managing a project. And thinking about the software and data management, I think, exposure, as you study for a Master's or a PhD is what you need. You think about, you know, for qualitative or quantitative research, the way you manage the data, record data, transcribe data. I think that's a very practical skill that you learn.

Silvia's role has now transgressed past solely research; she is involved with the strategic direction that Oxfam takes to tackle poverty in the UK, working closely with colleagues across teams. From research to advocacy, to policy and campaigning, and involvement with the media, the poverty and inequality programme expands on the complex issues brought up through research and navigates towards working with others to influence change.

I'm much less involved in delivery of or designing research. What I do now is to think about research partnerships, and how research can support our work. So, part of a bigger process. I would say what I use is definitely knowledge of how research can contribute to influencing more broadly, as



a starting point to improving understand about an issue, but also to amplify voices. So, the people experience, you know, the lived experience of poverty and inequality, and how to really give space to these voices. And it doesn't necessarily have to be qualitatively, a survey can also amplify voices by highlighting issues.

Using research to frame and conceptualise lived experiences, Silvia's inter-connected understanding of her work in the third sector anchors research to the world. Having honed her skillset as an academic researcher, she is now passionate about advocating for research to be undertaken wherever possible in a way that gives something back. For her, collaborative work with colleagues and partners is essential.

... trying to connect your research to the external world and see it less as a separate exercise that you do, but more as part of a complex picture that is society, and you are in that picture, because you're doing research about an issue that is relevant to what others have contributed, but can also give back. For example, sharing your findings after a Master's project, because that shows really commitment to sharing back in a way and being less extractive.

# MATTHEW SUDDART

BA in Social Sciences (Politics) (2021)

Current role: Project and Policy Officer, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Matthew began on the Philosophy and Politics BASS pathway, then switched to straight Politics after his first year. This provided the chance to specialise in the subject that had been his passion for a long time

Matthew's upbringing and his values are a prominent theme in his story. Raised by his grandparents in a northern English industrial town, benefiting from government interventions like free school meals and good NHS care, and seeing his grandparents with long-term health conditions led him to be a passionate social justice campaigner and political activist. He volunteered to work on his local MP's campaign during the 2015 election and by the time he was 18 he had been elected twice – as a member of the National Youth Parliament and then as an elected Labour councillor for his local ward.

Matthew often chose modules on his degree that reflected his passion for equality and challenging social disadvantage. This culminated in his final year dissertation which studied the impact of deindustrialisation on Labour's traditional core vote in northern towns. Guided by his dissertation supervisor he designed an effective methodology – building a case

I think, coming from the background I had I wouldn't say there wasn't any imposter syndrome at all, but people were different. You know, my friendship group were predominantly from privately educated backgrounds.

study approach from mixed-methods analysis. He interviewed party activists and politicians including the MP for his old constituency, Dale Campbell-Savours, and academics, like Professor Will Jennings whose work on the politics of towns, rather than cities, was crucial to Matthew's analysis of the Labour party's difficulty in the polarised post-Brexit world of British politics. Coming from a non-traditional, historically excluded background, finding a dissertation supervisor who could not only advise him of the best methodological path to take but also act as mentor was a transformative experience. Matthew's supervisor gave him the vital support he needed, taking him through the journey of his dissertation from a basic idea originating in his own lived experience (the predicament that Labour were in electorally), to a rigorous piece of research interrogating fundamental questions about class and politics in the era of culture wars. Matthew drew on his own values and campaigning experience to succeed in his studies.

I think, coming from the background I had I wouldn't say there wasn't any imposter syndrome at all, but people were different. You know, my friendship group were predominantly from privately educated backgrounds. That was a real insight into understanding a bit more about

society. Our university, you all come to this one place, and there's all these different cultures and backgrounds, you know, brilliant, but it made me determined. I wanted to grasp every opportunity.

If his formal modules were helpful in moulding Matthew's research skills an extra-curricular activity proved a golden opportunity for him to establish a network in the policy landscape. In his second year he attended the policy boot camp. As well as Matthew finding these sessions inherently fascinating, it led directly to a summer placement opportunity for him with GMCVO (Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation). Without the resources or social capital to call in favours from relatives or well-connected associates, the boot camp provided Matthew with the confidence and opportunity to apply for the position. During his placement COVID happened but Matthew called upon the skills of adaptability and resilience that he feels his degree was preparing him for.

At first, I would research different policy areas. So they had some areas where council housing and social housing was really needed across Greater Manchester. And this was an interest of mine. Another was on community-led sport, and how in Greater Manchester, we [were looking at] improving things like football grounds or their infrastructure for their sports teams.

But because of the pandemic my role changed completely, and I had to adapt. And that was a really good skill. So, GMCVO launched an Emergency Investment Fund for organisations in the voluntary community and social enterprise sector to access for local support. It was a £2.25 million project from memory. And I did some of the research on that, wrote some of the materials, asking, 'How would you

## MATTHEW'S THREE WORDS WORKING-CLASS SOCIALIST COMPASSIONATE

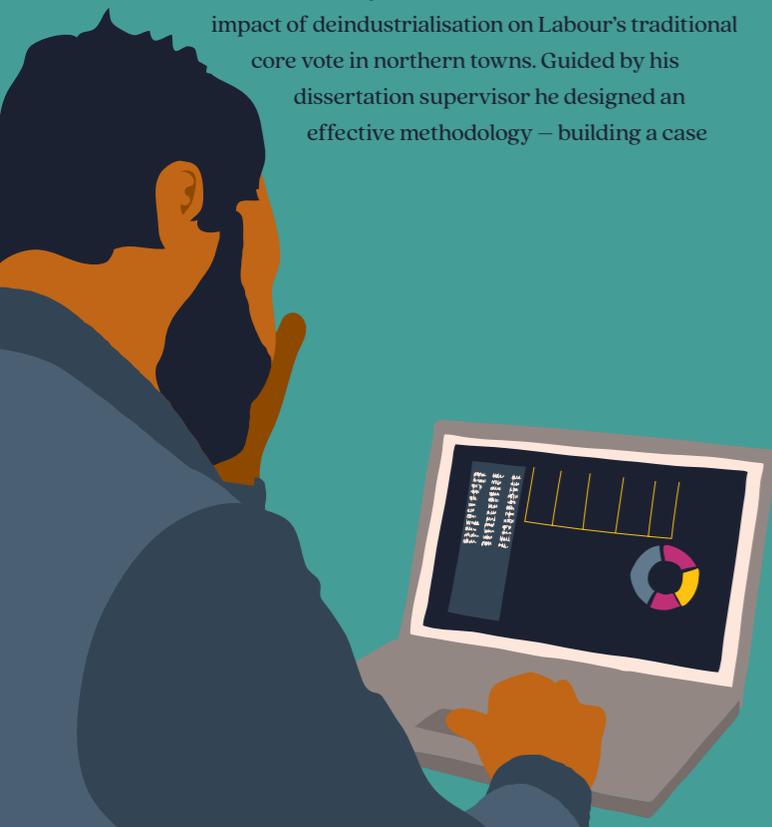
be eligible?' and I chaired an information session for some of those organisations in the sector to see who might be interested and kept in touch with them. And I worked with the marketing and comms team to get the message out far and wide. What an experience!

Matthew's current role with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has built on and added to his skillsets and given him the chance to expand on his passion for policy-driven justice and equality. Matthew is keen to view his journey into the world of policy work as being one he wants to develop further.

The GMCA is brilliant organisation, and some of the policy areas that they work on - the role that I'm doing at the moment is quite administrative but I'm working on a youth unemployment programme – brilliant; an issue close to my heart. It's a mentoring programme for young people in Greater Manchester, who, due to the pandemic have found themselves as what are called NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

I think the majority of people who are in a policy role are in it for the right reasons and go into the sort of social conscience or, you know, wanting to better the world or make a positive change. I got that from my upbringing and The University of Manchester.

Some of the values that I've got through my early life through to some of the modules that I studied give you that sort of social conscience or values really, that you want to reflect in a job. So, I wouldn't say I fell into policy. I don't think that's the case because I had that experience before University where I essentially saw policy making people I grew up with, our residents that I suppose represent your electorate, making the area worse. So, you know, I want to make it better really.



# IULIA-CLAUDIA BRAGIN

BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics (Final year undergraduate)  
Data Fellowship on Net Zero: Regional Outlook with Policy@Manchester (2021)

Iulia is in her third year of her undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) degree at the University of Manchester.

Her story is included here as at the end of her second year, she completed one of the Q-Step Data Fellowship paid work placements hosted by Policy@Manchester, a University of Manchester initiative that aims to impact lives globally, nationally and locally through influencing and challenging policy-makers with robust research-informed evidence and ideas. The projects that she worked on during her data fellowship fell into three categories.

I worked on an individual research project, which was on the shortage of skilled professionals in the energy sector, both regionally and nationally in the UK, and what this means for the wider ambitions around net zero, both regionally and nationally. I also worked on a joint project with my fellow intern - her internship was on health inequalities. We had this project that focused on elements of neighbourhood disadvantage. So, as poor people tend to live in more polluted areas, what does this mean for their health, and how can we can tackle this from an ecological point of view? And then the third thing that I did was help the institute according to their needs at the time, for example with their publications, focusing on pre- and post-COVID mobility. COVID also had implications for public transport, the means people were using, how often they were using them, and what they were using them for.

Though she had previously held positions of responsibility in various societies (including the university's Romanian Society), this was her first time working in a professional capacity. Particularly due to the nature of remote work (as her placement was conducted online due to the COVID pandemic), she was unsure how to establish a healthy working pace and be comfortable with taking breaks. As an international student, Iulia was especially unsure about what professional working would look like in the UK – working remotely, how would she foster positive relationships with her colleagues? What if there was a cultural barrier?

## JULIA'S THREE WORDS EXCITING FORMATIVE STIMULATING

Every single week, we had like an hour where we had the team coffee meeting. And it was basically for us to catch up. And yeah, I was telling them about the trains in my country and seeing my grandma and museums and things - it was really nice. It felt like everybody was really keen to get to know us as people as well.

Iulia believes that the guidance delivered to her, and support from her team and work placement manager, furthered her confidence in her own abilities and allowed opportunities for networking.

I had the opportunity to participate in some meetings organised by a parliamentary group on net zero. And it was really interesting to represent an organisation in something like this. So, it definitely made me a lot more confident.

Iulia says that the Policy@Manchester team's friendly approach towards helping her use and understand the data and software packages they used led her not only to improve her understanding but transfer that knowledge back to her degree.

I was already quite familiar with Excel because I had used it both at home during my pre-uni years, and during my course modules, but I definitely feel like I'm more confident with it now. Also, R Studio - I took econometrics and we worked a lot in R Studio, but I really feel like I expanded my knowledge. I also learned a completely new software, the mapping

software I use, which was QGIS. All of this has been helping me with my dissertation.

Iulia has gone on to use all of the software that she used during her data fellowship for her final year dissertation and feels far more confident with her thought processes in terms of data ; the experience has helped her develop good practices in work. Having this applied learning experience through the work placement has helped her in applications for postgraduate study. She has been able to develop genuine research and professional skills, and her great relationship with her manager secured her an excellent reference.



These organisations know that you are a student at the end of the day and you're there to gain experience and they're very happy to help and in all honestly, it's been like a massive confidence booster for me as well.

I know I have a few offers .... they're all conditional. If I get the grades that I need, I'm probably going to Oxford, studying economics, and also applying to programmes in public policy. I'm still waiting to hear back. I definitely think it's helped me secure a lot of the more competitive courses - like offers on them.

Iulia's advice for aspiring Data Fellows is to just go for it – she says it's easy to succumb to your imposter syndrome.

These organisations know that you are a student at the end of the day and you're there to gain experience and they're very happy to help and in all honestly, it's been like a massive confidence booster for me as well. Everyone has been so supportive, in a way, right? Like it was, 'oh you are totally okay to Google stuff, like, I do this every single day'. So yeah, that's the first thing. Second of all, really think about what it is that you like, you know, never forget that. Sure, you want the organisations that you're applying to like you, to offer you a place. But at the same time, really think about: what do you like? Do you like them? Also, during the interview – if you have any questions for them - ask. Or if you want to know more about what you can expect to get on the experience, interview them! And don't forget that's a very important component.

As Iulia works towards finishing her undergraduate degree, her experience interning with Policy@Manchester has provided her with an excellent launching pad for her final year studies, her future studies, and her career. It was a good investment of her time.

# PHILIPPE LARSSON

BSocSci Politics and International Relations (2020)  
MA International Law and Human Rights student, University of Peace, Costa Rica

Philippe came to study at the University of Manchester with an already developed sense of global justice and an internationalist perspective. As a school student he had taken the International Baccalaureate and taken part in Model United Nations exercises both of which he feels broadened his perspective on global rights and responsibilities

Philippe graduated from his Politics and International Relations degree, went on to take an MA in International Law and Human Rights in Madrid and is now studying for a second Master's degree at the University for Peace in Costa Rica. He explains that while he had an interest in global politics and diplomacy from high school, his degree allowed him to refine his interests in international relations and development and his participation in The University of Manchester's Q-Step summer work placement programme in his second year boosted his employability skills.

So, in Manchester I knew that I wanted to go towards the international space and actually work in development policy. And then the Q-Step internship was a great way to see how civil society can help in creating policy and working at Open Data Watch in Washington, D.C. made me more interested in technology actually, and how data can be used for policy purposes. So, I acquired great skills plus got an introduction to how the world works in that sort of sphere.

Philippe's experience after graduation is a testament to his flexibility and adaptability. His first degree gave him the confidence to adopt an eclectic approach to further study. His two Master's degrees are preparing him by combining the interests he hopes to pursue in a policy environment. He says that his passion for technology and environmental politics made him realise that geographic location was far less important than he had previously thought. He feels fortunate to have been able

PHILIPPE'S THREE WORDS  
**MOTIVATED,  
RESOURCEFUL  
CURIOUS**

to relocate (after the lockdown) but believes his undergraduate training and internship experience gave him the confidence to move to new environments and prosper.

So, I was in quarantine in Spain and then I found this programme in Madrid, which has the official title of Masters in Dynamics of Cooperation, Conflict and Negotiation in International Relations and Diplomacy.

I consider myself quite a pragmatic person. So, this type of teaching was perfect for me to sort of build on the theoretical foundation that I had got from my first degree. So Manchester gave me the groundwork to work from and helped in shaping my political ideology, and the way I see the world, and then I am using that foundation to build my own interests, which became more personalised.

Reflecting on his time at Manchester, Philippe identifies some critical foundational skills from the approaches to teaching he experienced.

(Studying) politics is a bit more subjective than say biology or physics, but the classes give you really strong tools to develop your own approaches and shape your thinking internally about issues, ... how you approach a topic of interest. And quantitative and qualitative data research (approaches) will have an impact on how you see the world and thus how you impact the world later on. So, the way that Manchester helped me was to focus on how to conduct research and was where I found my passion for technology. Manchester really helped me explore further what I thought I already knew about research methods, but it's actually very multifaceted, and it can take you in very different directions.

Manchester gave me the groundwork to work from and helped in shaping my political ideology, and the way I see the world, and then I am using that foundation to build my own interests, which became more personalised.

Philippe went on to explore topics that he interested him in international and transnational issues - such as environmental politics - and benefitted from the skills he had acquired in his studies and through his work placement.

After my Q-Step placement, I was able to fine-tune some of the research and data skills that I had acquired [in the classroom] and apply to a setting of development.

My thesis supervisor was then extremely helpful in guiding me towards the right sort of path. I wrote my thesis on the global change to renewable energy and I could not have done that properly without training.

Reflecting more generally on the undergraduate experience, Philippe stresses that he found university to be a 'reinforcing and supportive environment'.

That goes for the teachers, but also for fellow students; we had great class conversations in seminars ... Being at a Russell Group university, you don't know what to expect, but you do expect to be with the best of the best, in the educational space. So that helps shape you even from your first year. But as you then move on, in time, you could do a fantastic internship, like I did, and you're still comfortable enough to apply your own thinking and do your own commentary on what is being done... Being

professional certainly means that you are able to express your own point of view in that setting. Because if you can't do that, then you can't really change much. And I think having that sort of professional training helps us to achieve that goal.

Philippe's university experience has established his view that his skills are well suited to research and policy making, particularly in his preferred policy arena of environmental policy and climate change. He has developed a passion for human rights advocacy and global development and thinks it likely that he might pursue an ambition to work for NGOs or international institutions such as the UN. He also thinks that his thirst for new experiences and appetite for travel have chimed with his skillset honed by his university experience.

Philippe is not sure what will come next. He does however hold an impressive CV and record of achievement, both academic and professional, that will help take him to the area he wants to work in. He has also used networking to great effect, including on LinkedIn.



# JESS CONLEY

BSocSci Politics and International Relations (2016)

MA Political Science (2018)

Current role: Assistant Project Manager for Major Highways Project Service, Manchester City Council

Having undertaken a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Politics, Jess then spent a short time in a graduate role at the law firm, Eversheds, followed by a spell working at the estate agent where she had been a Saturday assistant, and has now found her way into local government as an assistant project manager working in the policy area of transport, sustainability and working towards a carbon neutral Manchester.

Her story illustrates wonderfully how she took opportunities as they arose (for example, she shadowed an MP for a week as an undergraduate), walked away from positions that were not enabling her to grow and how she has drawn on all the skills from her previous work experience, as well as her degree, to get to where she is now.

So, job applications ... ask you about how you would problem solve or how you would deal with a complex issue, ... how would you deal with stakeholders or with multiple people that you have to report back to? As part of my work placement with the council they wanted to do a pilot of patient data and patient flows to see how they were going to merge thing into practice when [devolution] finally came into place. And so, we had to speak to the public, at the council bodies, and we had NHS colleagues. So, I was used to having to deal with and report to multiple stakeholders through that experience, but then also the things we were looking at were all very complex because of the geography of Manchester. And it means that patients don't necessarily have an awareness of when they were accessing a service, how that technically wasn't the right service to access.

Jess has realised in retrospect the enormous value and transferability of her degree skills to her current role. Through her paid Q-Step work placement with Manchester City Council in 2015 she had undertaken some extensive data analysis, and her final year dissertation allowed her to develop her research and analytical skills. As a result, she had some concrete examples to use on her application forms for graduate roles, and in interviews.

## Even though you don't think about it when you're writing a dissertation, it actually does set you up for a job.

... and when you mapped out the data on public transport, because most of them didn't have a car, it was one bus ride that drops you off outside the door. And that's how we saw people were using the wrong service. So, we put that into an excel sheet and did all those fun V lookups, and pivot tables ... and used that as an example ... to show my wider skills.

Also, as a politics student you've got a lot of transferable skills. I did two dissertations, undergrad and postgrad. And you have to do your own research methods and justify why you've chosen to do what you've done. And then show that you do have an ability to go off on your own initiative and find something out and come back and be that solution-focused productive individual. Even though you don't think about it when you're writing a dissertation, it actually does set you up for a job.

Jess wasn't especially interested in transport policy at university, but she was always interested in the application of her degree to issues that affect people. She speaks very persuasively about how her role is making a difference to the lived experiences of people in Manchester, and how her own actions are bringing about change. Jess has taken her drive, motivation and interest in her degree subject and is using all her skills, educational and life experience, in her current role.

A job came up as a project control officer for highways. Politics does not help building roads and looking at surveys and things like that, but I had the skills from Eversheds in terms of project and risk management. And I had problem-solving from being at uni as well as real life experience. And I was genuinely interested in ... transport strategies, and that whole cleaner, wider picture in Greater Manchester being carbon neutral by 2038. And being interested in policy, as well as the day-to-day of running projects. They took me on and then I guess the rest is history, because I did that for ten months. And then I got promoted to the assistant project manager role, ... and am now supporting a number of project managers looking after social value procurement and scheme activation.

Jess is very driven to ensure that the council is seen as providing services to its citizens that can bring about behaviour change to improve lives. She has oversight, in her role, of multiple projects which requires her to have excellent communication skills both with her colleagues and the stakeholders she engages with. She is a creative and adaptable person, constantly looking

## JESS'S THREE WORDS DRIVEN DETERMINED AMBITIOUS

for ways to make things better. She also uses research skills acquired through her degree to ensure that the policies in place are evaluated, and the practice that follows from them is evidence informed.

... scheme activation is what they brought in to create a wider behaviour change. So rather than just implementing the infrastructure - and those that would use it would anyway, - we want to get everyone [who can benefit] involved. So those that haven't cycled before putting stuff in place for them to feel confident for them to want start cycling. So, you do a data analysis of the area - both quantitative and qualitative - use the census data, and Mosaic, which enables you to drill into the wards. And then you can use that as your springboard, then go and speak to the neighbourhood officers who've got ward priority plans and climate change action plans to see how the two marry together. And then you can come up with a table of ideas and activities ...and then you monitor that.



# HELENA ROSS

BA Social Science (Sociology) (2016)  
Senior Policy Adviser for Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport

After studying Sociology at The University of Manchester, Helena was keen to stay in education – and so completed her Master’s in Conflict Resolution at King’s College London. At the end of this, she applied for the Civil Service Fast Stream and secured a place on the Generalist Scheme.

I lucked out. It was the first graduate scheme that I’d applied to; I knew that I kind of wanted to do something properly in the political or third sector. I was quite keen on doing something where I felt like I was making a difference. So, I had got onto the Generalist Fast Stream and spent a year on that scheme before deciding that I’d rather just take a permanent role in the Civil Service.

Whilst undertaking the Fast Stream scheme, Helena worked for the prison and probation service – where she thoroughly enjoyed the field work aspect. Working first-hand within prisons and observing how and through what means data is collated, she registered a big difference in the nature of data sets in university and those used in her employment.

I think one of the things that’s really interesting moving from, I suppose, university study to actually working in policy ... [is that] when we did quantitative research methods modules, you always used SPSS or stats packages and you thought it was the case that once you get into government, everything will have data backing it up, the [government survey] data that you’re used to using as a student ... whereas you discover there’s actually these huge gaps. And there’s a lot of guesswork to do or lots of really poor-quality policy data. [...] So that sense of understanding what data you can use, in what way you have to

use caveats, and why you have to bring in other sources or use your own judgement – I think it’s been really important.

The ability to deal with incomplete data, a complex world, and ambiguity across your work is, Helena says, a skill which studying sociology has equipped her with, as the broad range of topics studied begets an understanding of the interconnected nature of the world, and the ability to be comfortable with uncertainty. Helena explains this in terms of her work with the prison and probation service.

...through all of the jobs that I’ve done, in quite different policy areas and environments, I think it’s, for lack of a better term, the kind of the intellectual curiosity that sociology gives us, just a real interest in the way that the world works. How the same phenomenon looks different at a very micro, or individual, level – when you’re interviewing a probation officer or someone in their day-to-day experiences – versus looking at it at the macro level of probation funding and privatisation of a service and moving it back into state. [...] I think sociology really gives you the tools to understand how things are connected.

Helena’s approach to the research she does foregrounds ethics. Contradictions and ambiguities are commonplace in her research, and so making judgement calls is essential. She believes that social science subjects are more geared towards preparing students for a certain level of comfort with ambiguity, and the confidence to acknowledge that just because findings are incomplete doesn’t make them bad or wrong. Helena now works for DCMS on gambling policy: a complex issue for which being able to offer multiple interpretations is a skill.



**And I think one of the things that you learn to do really well as a sociologist is to kind of work with contradictions and accept that things that contradict one another exist and they don’t necessarily cancel each other out.**

I think one thing that’s really useful is understanding that there’s not one version of the truth, or there’s not one set of evidence, that perpetuates the single narratives. So, I mean, with gambling, the big debates around are of social harm versus economic benefit, and to what extent does tax revenue brought in by gambling cancel it out? This is very difficult to cost, and there’s sometimes intangible costs that it may also bring. And I think one of the things that you learn to do really well as a sociologist is to kind of work with contradictions and accept that things that contradict one another exist and they don’t necessarily cancel each other out.

Another key skill is the need to synthesise and reduce volumes of information. The policy advice that Helena is required to recommend in her DCMS role requires significantly more brevity than the work she did at university. Moving from academic work to the Civil Service, she is expected to deliver at pace and succinctly, a big change from writing lengthy essays. However, the ability to generate this broad knowledge base, and present her findings, is a skill that she uses constantly.

Giving advice that’s evidence based, but also as concise as possible is something that I struggled with quite a bit. But I think a lot of people who come into the Civil Service struggle, because you’ve come from an environment where you have to cite 100% of your sources. And you’re used to writing 1000s and 1000s of books and essays and things. And when you give advice [to ministers for example], it should be no longer than, like, three pages in length, which is quite a dramatic change. I think, taking any opportunities as a student to do presentations; speak out loud, as much as people don’t like doing it, is really helpful. Because you will find that they will ask for three pages of advice, but then they will also ask to meet you. And ask lots of questions about it. So as long as you have the extra evidence squirreled in your brain, and you’re able to respond on the spot, you can give them that reassurance.

The research and professional skills that Helena developed throughout university, through studying sociology are used daily, and continue to evolve, through her work. In her current role within gambling reform, specifically, she advocates that qualitative evidence, and lived experience, are given equal credibility.

HELENA’S THREE WORDS  
**MEANINGFUL  
CHALLENGING  
CHANGING**

# GABRIELA LECARO

BA Economics and Social Studies (2015)

Current role: Research Fellow, Centre for International Development, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University

Gabriela graduated from her BA Econ and Social Studies in 2015. She also holds an MSc in International Public Policy, from UCL. Throughout her Bachelor's degree, and during her Master's study, she embraced opportunities to get involved in other activities.

She was a student rep for the BA Econ course, a peer mentor coordinator at The University of Manchester, and did a four-month-long internship in Peru for an organisation - Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) - during her graduate studies. Although she didn't really know anything about starting a career in policy, she became motivated to learn more about policy and research in international development contexts. She specialised in politics in her Bachelor's and focused on the courses that she was most interested in.

I remember three or four that I really, really enjoyed. I took the Politics of Development, and the Politics of Policymaking, which was really interesting as well. I took a critical thinking course, the ideologies of Global Capitalism, [which gave me] exposure to more critical theories and critical thinking. I recall enjoying those courses a lot. And my best grades were in those courses. But I also forged close, intellectually rich relationships with my lecturers, and TAs (Teaching Assistants). And that helped me a lot. Those conversations, especially during the seminars, the discussion was so enriching, and I really enjoyed that part of my degree. And I would definitely say that exposure to such a diverse cohort in my politics courses magnified my interest in public policy.

Gabriela now works with multiple stakeholders and her role entails both conducting, and coordinating, research for different research projects. Her experience in Manchester enabled her to develop her confidence in dealing with people from many different backgrounds, not just her student peers but with others she interacted with, through volunteering and paid opportunities. She attributes her communication strengths in her current role in large part to her time at The University of Manchester.

Do network. That's something I got from Manchester because I was so involved in things and that became really valuable down the line. Now I do a lot of stakeholder management and partner relationship management and being able to speak in front of people when I was a peer mentor coordinator, and when I was a student rep was immensely helpful. I used to work in the Tincan building [University Place] ... on the reception desk. I had to speak to people of all ages and backgrounds on a daily basis. I feel like I wouldn't be so confident or so at ease talking to people in the Dominican Republic and Pakistan if it wasn't for that early exposure.

Gabriela now recognises that the quantitative analytical skills she developed throughout her education have opened doors to her that might otherwise have remained closed. In retrospect, she wishes she had focused on developing these computational skills earlier; nevertheless, her wish to pursue a role in international development and policy inspired her to acquire these skills during her studies, and the internship in Peru was a formative moment to enable her to imagine her future. She sees her role now as being a 'bit of a hybrid' between research design and data analysis and the management side of the research, working with stakeholders. She believes quantitative skills – what she calls 'hard skills' – are highly sought after in international development roles. As a passionate supporter of others getting into international development, she now mentors people to help them understand

what is required, and how they can gain the skills and experience, through an initiative she co-founded called EconThaki.

One thing that's very true about this industry [international development], it's very hard to get your foot in the door. But once you do, the opportunities are vast, you can go anywhere. Colleagues I met along the way, they're now working in UNICEF and the UN system and World Bank and the IMF - all sorts of places. And also, places like Google and Amazon and Meta. I have former colleagues now working at Meta in their public policy division. And a few years ago, that would have never occurred to me that it's possible to, you know, want a career in policy and work for firms like that. But it is notoriously difficult to get your foot in the door.

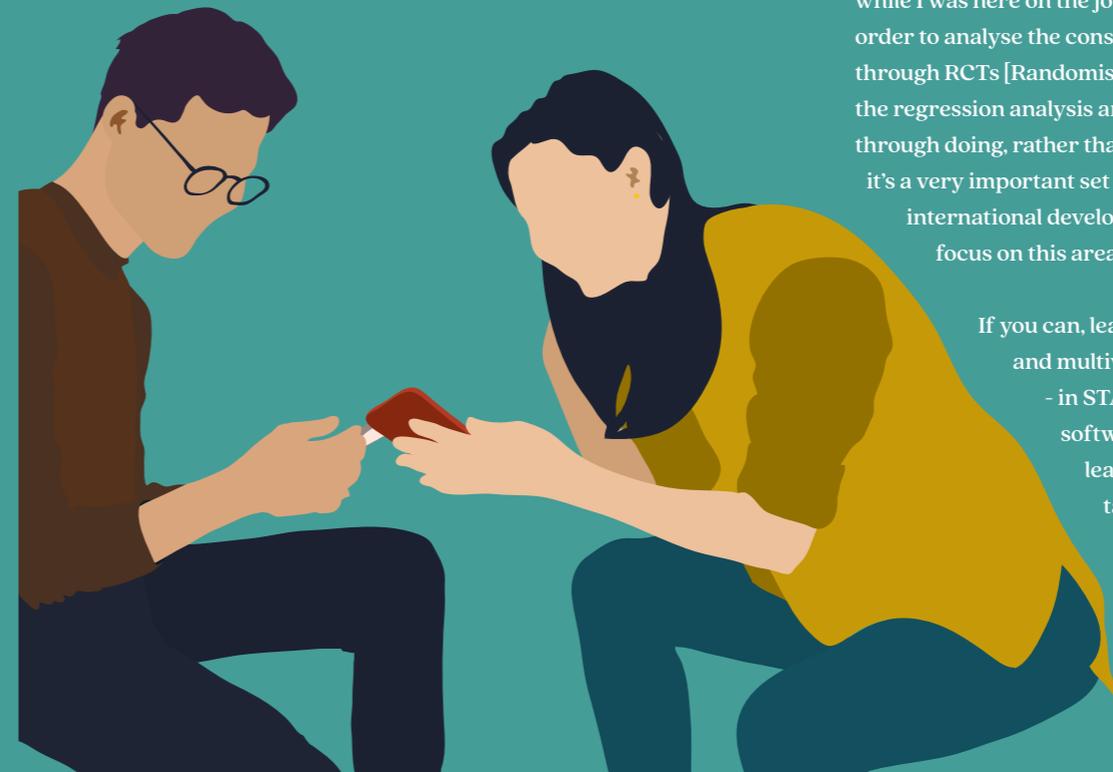
... most of the transferable skills I got from my degree are the analytical skills.... thinking about theories of change, literature reviews and all that.

Reflecting on the research skills that have enabled Gabriela to do her job, which includes evaluation of policy interventions, she draws upon her statistical skills in particular, whilst acknowledging how vital the critical thinking skills she acquired were too.

... most of the transferable skills I got from my degree are the analytical skills.... thinking about theories of change, literature reviews and all that. But if I think more about my statistical skills, in my case, I learned that later on, while I was doing my master's to do my dissertation, and then while I was here on the job. I do a lot of programming. So, in order to analyse the consequences of data that we collect through RCTs [Randomised Control Trials], and in running the regression analysis and statistical tests, I mostly learned through doing, rather than taking a course. But I do find that it's a very important set of skills when you want to work in international development ... there's a very quant heavy focus on this area.

If you can, learn things like regression analysis and multivariate analysis, and programming - in STATA, R and Python - the three core softwares. I think people are expected to learn on the go, by doing rather than taking courses. And if you know how to programme, if you are that data analyst person, so to speak, you do have the upper hand relative to the people who don't.

GABRIELA'S THREE WORDS  
**PASSIONATE  
ADVENTUROUS  
RELENTLESS**



# SUMMARY

## PROFESSOR JACKIE CARTER

This publication provides a framework to help you understand that what you learn in your Social Science degree at The University of Manchester has relevance to careers in policy related fields. The analytical, research and professional skills presented here give you a hook to hang your learning on, to help you make sense of the knowledge and skills you acquire as a student.

The eighteen stories, told from the perspectives of current students to those who graduated some time ago, illustrate how a University of Manchester Social Science degree can give you the foundation for a career in a policy-relevant field. All of the alumni reflect on what it was about their degree – Bachelor's, Master's or PhD – that helped them in the job they do now. Many also referred to the extra-curricular activities they pursued whilst studying, that enabled them to evidence skills and knowledge beyond their academic studies.

Of the eighteen stories featured, eight currently work in central government departments, two internationally (for the OECD and the UN), two in a local government or a city region policy role, two in the third sector, one for a start-up, one is a research fellow overseas and two are completing their studies and plan to progress into policy related graduate careers. They all reflect on the research, analytical and professional skills that they took away from their Manchester degrees. The roles they perform now include analyst,

researcher, project manager, adviser, and are all related to policy roles in the environments in which they work. They demonstrate compellingly how a Social Science degree can position you for an interesting, fulfilling and challenging role in a policy arena.

Each story contains three words, or phrases, which sum up the alum or their job. You only have to flick through the document to see the strong, uplifting and energising words they use to reflect their roles. The words they most shared were passionate, curious, driven, motivated and ambitious. Some of the words they chose will undoubtedly apply to you too.

The stories included here reflect how the careers that these alumni are now in were not necessarily the ones they expected to pursue. Hopefully you can be inspired by their journeys. Some alumni decided to study at Master's level to improve their skillsets and knowledge and enter the policy-related careers they aspired to. Others have worked in multiple sectors, adapting and applying their analytical, research and professional skills to different environments. Some are still pursuing the role they want to achieve, developing their skills and experience along the way. Almost unanimously the voices included talked about wanting to 'make a difference' in their roles.

This collection of stories has brought to life the experiences of eighteen alumni interested and involved in policy careers. It has described the pathways into their current roles. Hopefully this has opened your eyes to what is possible in the policy landscape with a Social Science degree from The University of Manchester.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank to the eighteen alumni who agreed to be included in this publication, and Policy@Manchester who provided the funding to make it possible. Thanks also to Alya Magness-Jarvis who assisted with the editing, and Julian at copper media for the publication of this brochure.

### FURTHER READING

British Academy (2017) The Right Skills.

Online at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/flagship-skills-right-skills-arts-humanities-social-sciences/>

Carter, J. (2021) Work placements, internships and applied social research. Sage.

LinkedIn (2019) Global Talent Trends Report.

Online at <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/trends-and-research/2019/global-recruiting-trends-2019>

McKinsey (2018) Skill Shift: Automation and the Future of the Workforce.

Online at <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce>

### THINGS YOU CAN DO NEXT

- Take a look at the Policy@Manchester website at [www.policy.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.policy.manchester.ac.uk) for their blog, publications and activities. This has an academic focus but covers a rich tapestry of policy relevant research.
- If you're not already on LinkedIn create an account. This is a professional networking platform and most of the stories featured here are contributed by people who are on LinkedIn
- Use your award-winning career service at [www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/)
- Talk to your lecturers, academic advisers and your subject employability lead for their advice about careers you can pursue with your degree

**Driven Passionate Excited Strategically-curious**  
**Savvy Dislikes spontaneity Socially driven Passionate**  
**Highly motivated Curious Confident Authentic Loyal**  
**Collaborative Give-back Versatile Cross-team-analyst**  
**Always learning Passionate Driven Anxious**  
**Data driven Multilingual Organised Enthusiastic**

**Reflective Oceans and climate change UN Athletics**  
**Passionate Grounded Ambitious Socialist Curious**  
**Working-class Compassionate Exciting Formative**  
**Stimulating Motivated Resourceful Curious Driven**  
**Determined Ambitious Meaningful Challenging**  
**Changing Solutions oriented**

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August 2022

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