



Jayne Johns and Ian Williams (mentor)

Case study of a Foundation degree student

Jayne Johns completed her Foundation degree Communication in Organisations* in June 2009. *The programme is now running under the course title Foundation degree in Business, Management and Communications at Abingdon and Witney College, validated by Oxford Brookes University.

While at Exeter College Jayne obtained O-Levels (equivalent to GCSE qualifications) in English, Law, Sociology and Biology, but on reflection felt that at that stage of her life her focus was perhaps more on the social pursuits than it was on learning. Jayne left education after O-Levels to go into employment and although undertaking some short courses offered through work had not studied at a higher education level until enrolling at Abingdon and Witney College.

Jayne found out about the Foundation degree when she attended the college open day with her daughter who was just about to start 6th form. As she was reading through the prospectus the Foundation degree caught her eye. Jayne had been working at the Ministry of Defence as a command clerk for the past four years and as the Foundation degree programme involves work-based assessment and an afternoon release from work, Jayne discussed the possibility of studying with the regimental officer who was her supervisor. He was very supportive and felt that there would be many benefits, including promoting an improved communication model within the workplace and for Jayne's continued professional development in learning oral presentation techniques. Jayne recognised that completing the programme would give her the opportunity to progress in higher education to undertake the final year of an Honours Degree, which she plans to do with the Open University.

The part of the course which Jayne enjoyed the most was the fresh perspective it offered for insights into communications within the workplace.

"I am far more aware after an assignment I did on semiotics and body language of when someone is uncomfortable or even being untruthful".

Jayne also found the work-based project particularly interesting. She organised a questionnaire of her colleagues in the EOD regiment, from both military and civilian clerks gathering their opinions on how effectively communication operates within the regiment. Jayne had to make sure that her questions followed approved ethical guidelines and used appropriate terminology. This is where her work place mentor Ian (a warrant officer managing an

administrative unit of 500 people) was particularly useful. Jayne had a 99% return rate for her questionnaire and felt that her colleagues had appreciated the opportunity to raise problems and also responded well to the fact that the survey was anonymous. Jayne had been able to make 7 or 8 recommendations for senior management and one of those recommendations to incorporate regular meetings into the work schedule attended by a senior representative from a squadron has already been adopted.

Jayne enjoyed the balance between the time spent at College and found that one day a week from 2-8:30PM at College was manageable for work. The majority of Jayne's classmates were also in full-time employment from a variety of backgrounds which encouraged interesting discussion within the class about the work-based projects they were undertaking. Foundation degree students have access to both college and Oxford Brookes University facilities, which Jayne found particularly useful especially when it came to accessing the sociology material in Brookes library.

Jayne explained that her attitude towards higher education has changed completely, since studying on the Foundation degree.

"Before I regarded higher education as exclusively for the privileged and also did not appreciate the different modes of part-time learning available which make it possible to undertake a course while also working full-time".

Jayne would like to now go on to the third year of an Open University Honours Degree in Communication, Media and Culture and is not ruling out in the future undertaking a Masters. The Foundation degree has also given Jayne the confidence to apply for a higher pay grade. She plans to take the exam and 2 interviews which are a pre-requisite to complete before moving up a grade.

Jayne praised the Foundation degree programme leader at Abingdon and Witney College for the support that she has received and stated that she would like to keep in touch with her. Jayne's advice for others thinking of or about to undertake the Foundation degree would be to schedule your workload carefully according to your deadlines, "as otherwise the works backs up and it isn't the sort of assignment work that you can undertake at the last minute".

Supporting Jayne through the Foundation degree as a mentor has also broadened Ian's knowledge and whetted his appetite in the subject. "It has also opened my eyes to the possibility of entering into HE and given me a greater awareness as a manager of communication tensions. I have watched Jayne grow in confidence and deal with problems within the workplace by identifying issues early and becoming a peacemaker".

Jayne feels undertaking a Foundation degree has also been a good example for her family. Her eldest daughter is currently undertaking A-Level exams while the youngest daughter is studying for GCSEs.

"Our kitchen table has been piled with books recently".