

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# BUBBLING UP: EMBRACING CHANGE & UNCERTAINTY

**Termly collection of wellbeing stories  
shared by staff and students, because we  
care**

**ISSUE 3: MAY 2020**

Editors: Manpreet Kaur and Andrew Lacey





# ABOUT US

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# FROM THE EDITORS

**MANPREET KAUR AND ANDREW LACEY**

Adaptability and stress are inter-related and current times are probably the best testament to this. The longer it takes to adjust to the 'working from home' life, the more stressful it gets for the individual. However, what ought to be remembered is that the more you allow stress to take control, the more it clouds your judgements, therefore making it harder for yourself to adapt.

Life in lockdown is difficult enough and now exam stress has returned to add a new host of concerns. Meanwhile, the news produces stories on the more negative side of things as speculations on the state of the economy as well as job prospects build, at present, a very bleak picture of life post-pandemic.

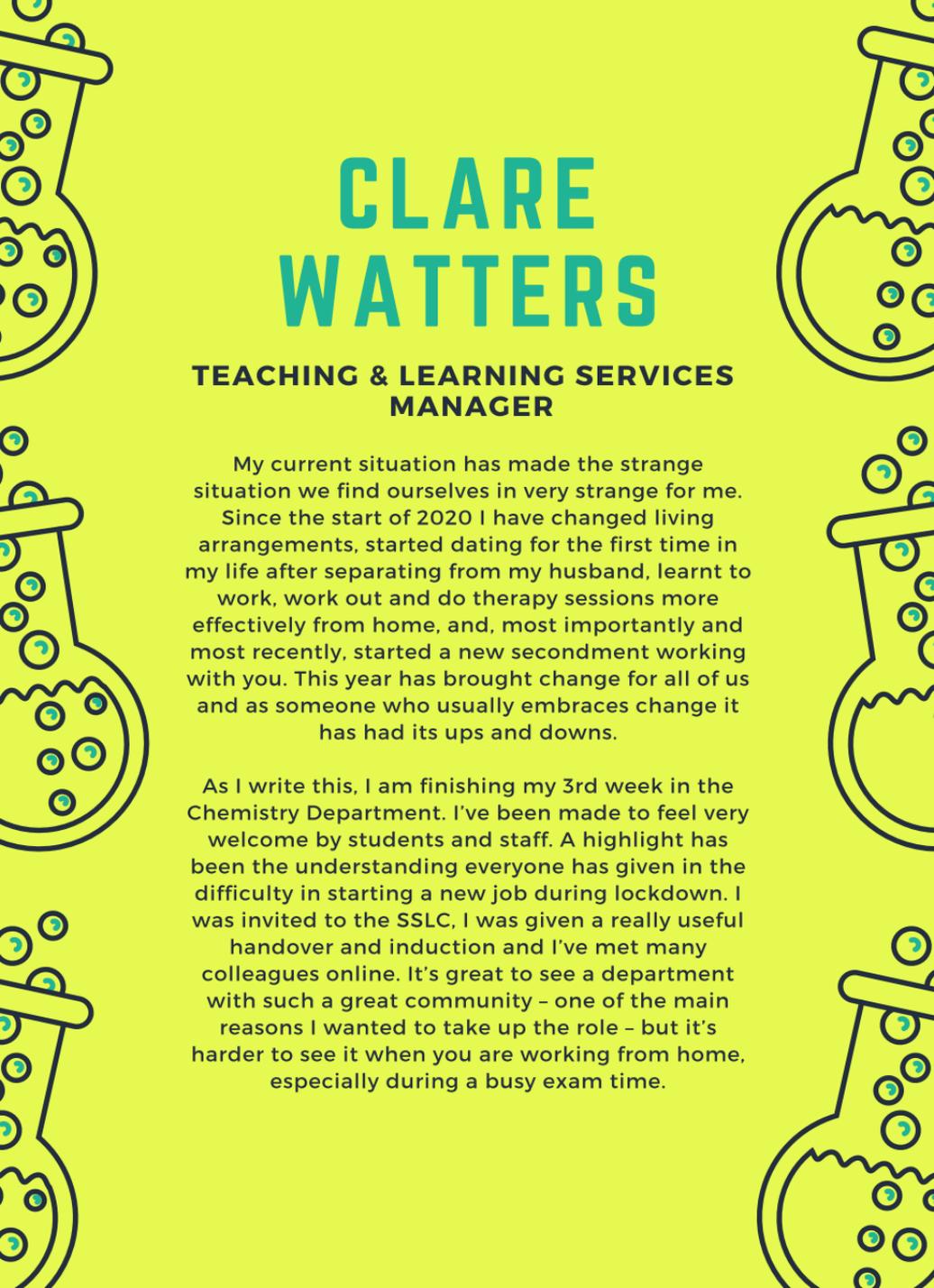
While the current situation with the lockdown is an extreme example, adaptability is always demanded from us in this ever changing world. The developments we bring about ourselves - our knowledge and skills - are what help us grow and progress as we respond to the changes in our environment. As students, we have had to adapt from year to year, facing new challenges all along the way. Some of us are even entering a new phase in our lives as our degrees finish in these uncertain and unfamiliar times.

# FROM THE EDITORS

**MANPREET KAUR AND ANDREW LACEY**

No doubt whatever directions we are heading in - PhDs, a gap year, a full-time job - we will have to change but also bring along the wealth of experiences we've enjoyed and partaken in at Warwick.

In adjusting to the situation these past few months, there can be benefits in holding onto something constant - doing simple tasks such as exercise and speaking to people about how you feel. Now more than ever, in doing our best to adapt, it continues to be important to maintain our connections with each other. Use those group chats and video calls to stay in touch with friends, uplift and support each other, and give this term's exams and assessments your personal best. We hope the pieces within this edition of Bubbling Up bring fresh and useful perspectives on adaptability.



# CLARE WATTERS

## TEACHING & LEARNING SERVICES MANAGER

My current situation has made the strange situation we find ourselves in very strange for me. Since the start of 2020 I have changed living arrangements, started dating for the first time in my life after separating from my husband, learnt to work, work out and do therapy sessions more effectively from home, and, most importantly and most recently, started a new secondment working with you. This year has brought change for all of us and as someone who usually embraces change it has had its ups and downs.

As I write this, I am finishing my 3rd week in the Chemistry Department. I've been made to feel very welcome by students and staff. A highlight has been the understanding everyone has given in the difficulty in starting a new job during lockdown. I was invited to the SSLC, I was given a really useful handover and induction and I've met many colleagues online. It's great to see a department with such a great community - one of the main reasons I wanted to take up the role - but it's harder to see it when you are working from home, especially during a busy exam time.

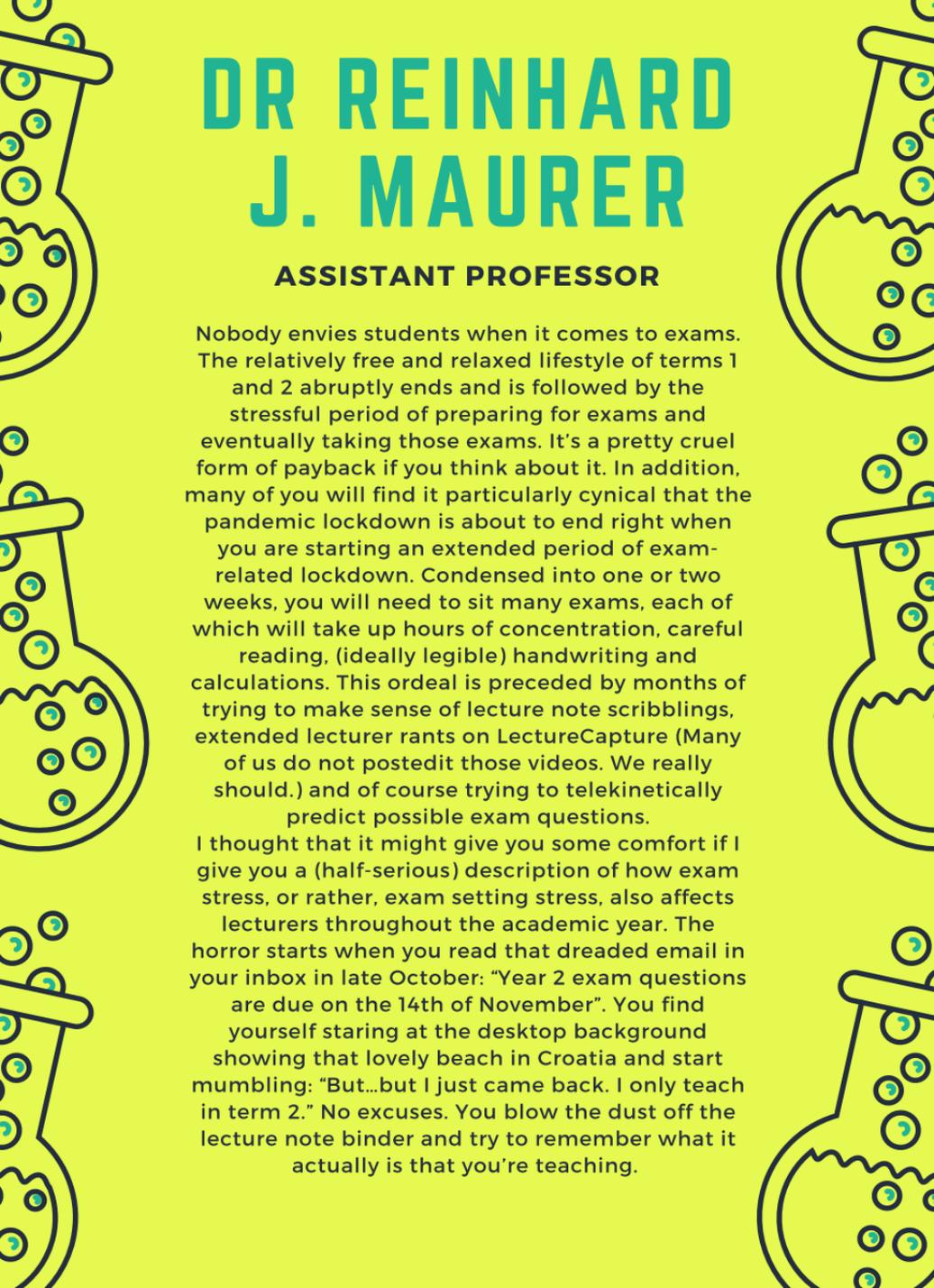
# CLARE WATTERS

## TEACHING & LEARNING SERVICES MANAGER

I have taken medication for anxiety and see a therapist weekly. Keeping this routine online along with keeping going with my hobbies of dancing and gym have been really important for me. My chocolate and gin intake may have gone up, but my energy and weight are just about still on the same level. I'm a hugger, so having my cat Hollie at home is also keeping me calm - except when she's meowing in meetings! It's quite a change to have me there all day.



Change and adapting to different circumstances takes energy. I have to constantly remind myself of this. I feel very happy for those who have the space and time to start new creative projects and give themselves new challenges. For me, areas of work and home have changed and so have the way I am able to interact with others. To navigate those challenges are enough for me and sometimes even too much, so I make sure I keep my hours flexible if I need to. Be kind to yourself, make the space you need to regroup and reflect on your priorities including your health - going through change is a big effort, even for the coolest of cats.

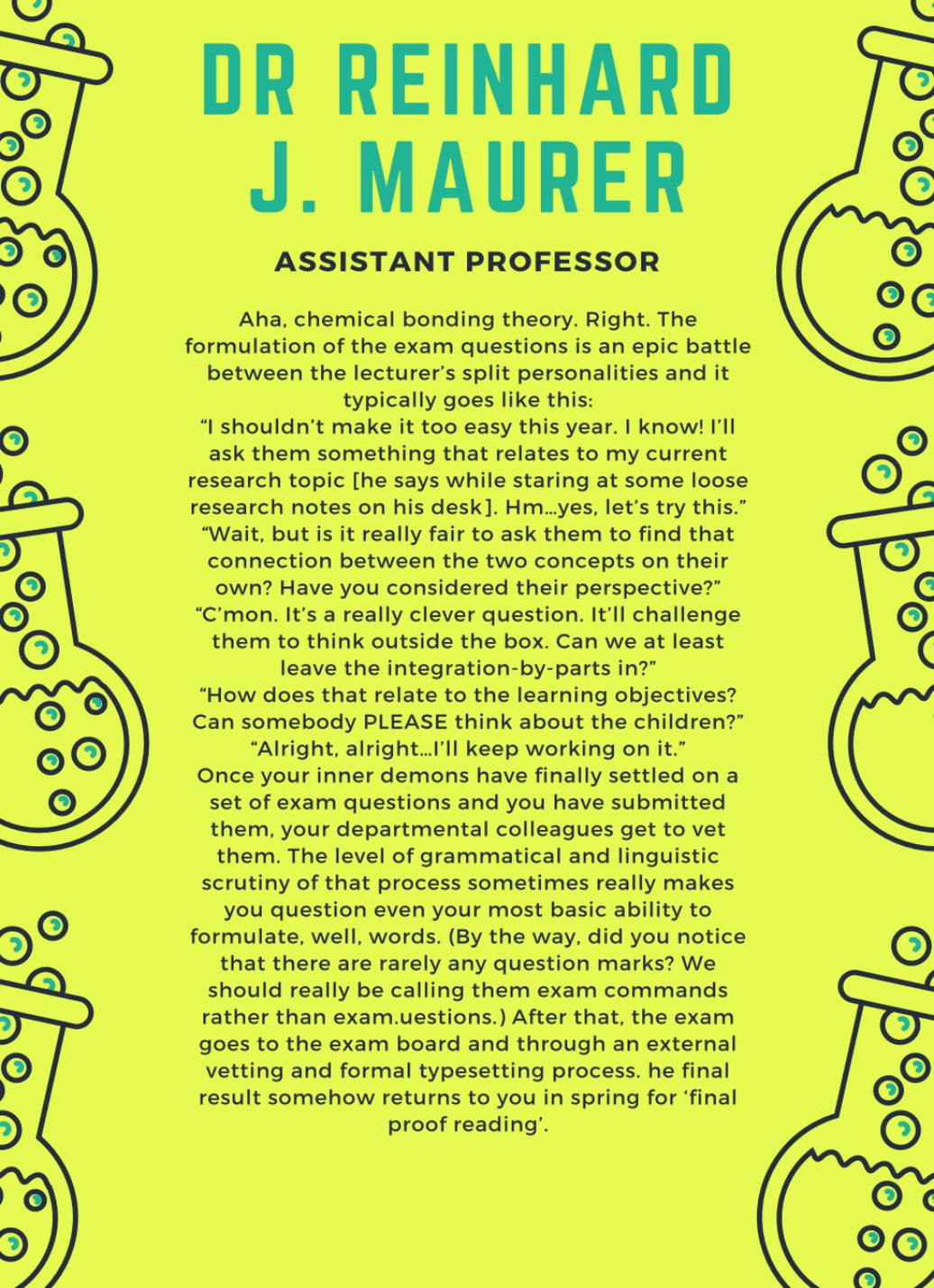


# DR REINHARD J. MAURER

## ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Nobody envies students when it comes to exams. The relatively free and relaxed lifestyle of terms 1 and 2 abruptly ends and is followed by the stressful period of preparing for exams and eventually taking those exams. It's a pretty cruel form of payback if you think about it. In addition, many of you will find it particularly cynical that the pandemic lockdown is about to end right when you are starting an extended period of exam-related lockdown. Condensed into one or two weeks, you will need to sit many exams, each of which will take up hours of concentration, careful reading, (ideally legible) handwriting and calculations. This ordeal is preceded by months of trying to make sense of lecture note scribbles, extended lecturer rants on LectureCapture (Many of us do not postedit those videos. We really should.) and of course trying to telekinetically predict possible exam questions.

I thought that it might give you some comfort if I give you a (half-serious) description of how exam stress, or rather, exam setting stress, also affects lecturers throughout the academic year. The horror starts when you read that dreaded email in your inbox in late October: "Year 2 exam questions are due on the 14th of November". You find yourself staring at the desktop background showing that lovely beach in Croatia and start mumbling: "But...but I just came back. I only teach in term 2." No excuses. You blow the dust off the lecture note binder and try to remember what it actually is that you're teaching.



# DR REINHARD J. MAURER

## ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Aha, chemical bonding theory. Right. The formulation of the exam questions is an epic battle between the lecturer's split personalities and it typically goes like this:

"I shouldn't make it too easy this year. I know! I'll ask them something that relates to my current research topic [he says while staring at some loose research notes on his desk]. Hm...yes, let's try this."

"Wait, but is it really fair to ask them to find that connection between the two concepts on their own? Have you considered their perspective?"

"C'mon. It's a really clever question. It'll challenge them to think outside the box. Can we at least leave the integration-by-parts in?"

"How does that relate to the learning objectives? Can somebody PLEASE think about the children?"

"Alright, alright...I'll keep working on it."

Once your inner demons have finally settled on a set of exam questions and you have submitted them, your departmental colleagues get to vet them. The level of grammatical and linguistic scrutiny of that process sometimes really makes you question even your most basic ability to formulate, well, words. (By the way, did you notice that there are rarely any question marks? We should really be calling them exam commands rather than exam.uestions.) After that, the exam goes to the exam board and through an external vetting and formal typesetting process. The final result somehow returns to you in spring for 'final proof reading'.

# DR REINHARD J. MAURER

## ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

This is when you are summoned to the undergraduate office to sit there (quietly) and read the questions as this is your **LAST CHANCE** to find typos and mistakes. In addition to the stress that comes from remembering how various words are spelled, this is when you typically restrain yourself from banging your head against the table. "What

was I thinking with this?" Turns out, actually teaching the course for which you've set the exam questions really helps to gain some perspective.

The day of reckoning is when the exam booklets arrive for marking and it always is the day when you realise that you really had no reason to stress out about this. Most students did a fine job and almost all of them understood the question. You laugh about yourself. Rinse and repeat in autumn.

On a more serious note, let me note that stress is an emotional response. As it goes with emotions,

they typically don't respond well to rational arguments. Being told that there is no reason to stress out and that you'll be fine, typically has quite the opposite effect, which is why I won't say that. My advice is the following: Find effective

measures to cope with exam stress by developing strong routines during exams. It's harder to stress out about something you do routinely. For

example, plan how you will lay out your pens and tools during the exam. When reading the exam questions (multiple times!), write down the exact (sub)tasks that you are asked to perform in a to-do

list and execute the to-do list as best as possible while ticking off the items as you go through it. All the best for your exams and stay safe.

# EMILY BROGDEN

## VICE PRESIDENT OF CHEMSOC AND BSC FINALIST

Coping with exam stress: In all honesty, I still haven't got a fool proof way to deal with exam stress. I can't imagine that many people do have it all sorted out. However, here are a few things that have helped me deal with exam stress and so they may help others. 1) Exercise: Go for a run, walk or anything active. 2) Reserve 20 minutes of the day to do something you enjoy; reading, gaming etc. 3) Practice exam questions so that you know what to expect during the exam. 4) Take time out to cook a meal each night, nothing fancy, but not take-out or a microwave meal. 5) Speak to friends, ask them questions about the content you don't understand. Often other people can be very good at explaining a concept in a clearer way. 6) On the exam day, don't let other people make you more stressed. If you need some time alone, take it. Alternatively, if you feel you need to talk through content before exams then find a group that is happy to do that.

7) Stay hydrated. 8) If everything is getting too much, find someone to talk it out with. Generally, I would say that preparation is key. I find revising throughout the year is the most helpful as I can't cram the night before (my short-term memory is terrible!). However, starting now is better than starting a few days before the upcoming exams. Finally, look after yourself. These are really difficult times and the department is aware of that. If anything has negatively affected you this term, which you believe will affect your exam results, tell someone and submit a mitigating circumstances form.



# DR ROBERT SMITH

## CHEM TUTOR

Some of you may know what you want to do after you graduate. Some of you may have no idea still.

Throughout your education it can feel that your path of progression is very clear. After you graduate though the possible routes you can take become very diffuse. These pathways can be difficult to navigate at the best of times. Whether you know which path you want to take or not, what you all have in common right now is the looming unknown after you graduate. Over a decade ago, myself and many peers in my age group, faced a similar dilemma. We graduated directly into the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008. Everyone was asking themselves the same questions. Where do I go from here? How do I get my first job? Why is this entry-level job asking for 5 years experience? What on earth do I do? Although the challenges you will face will be different, I hope to offer some advice that may be of use.

You may have talked to people in your parent's generation about finding a job. I remember one such conversation going something like this. "How did you get your job?" and the answer, "Oh easy, I just wrote to [insert company], they offered me a job and I've worked there for the last 40 years" No. Nuh uh. I don't want to hear this. Those days are gone. Put it out of your head. It does no good to dwell. It's different now. I'm closing in on 32 and this is my eighth job. Though I admit my case is extreme, few people my age are still in their first job.

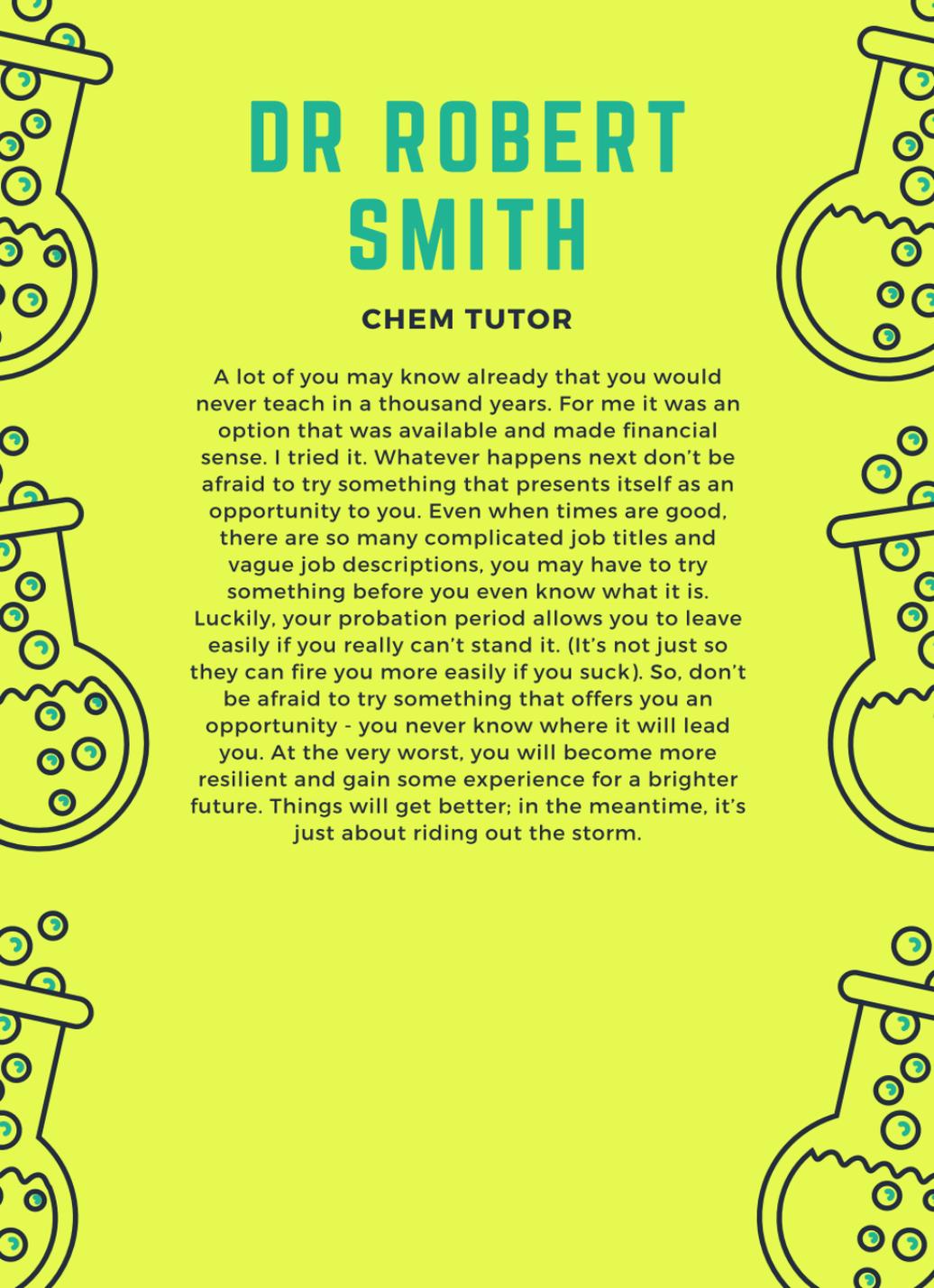
# DR ROBERT SMITH

## CHEM TUTOR

Today, in a world that is changing ever more rapidly, putting all your eggs in one basket for 40 years is incredibly risky. So, take some comfort in this. If you haven't found your calling, you have a long time to work it out. In the mean time you just need to work out how to get some experience. So how to do this?

Most people I knew back then were going into teaching, recruitment or further study because these were the only fields offering anything. I decided to cover two of these bases and went to teach in secondary schools through a PGCE. I hated it. Every month I resolved to quit. But I stuck with it (I needed the money!) and it paid off. First this delayed me having to look for a job for a year, which was invaluable at a time when economic recovery was...painfully slow. It wasn't easy going to work every day to do something I didn't like. But it gave me some experience. I can't deny this experience helped me get onto a PhD (again delaying the job search), it helped me get several of my jobs and eventually find a job that I really enjoy. You may well have to do something that you don't like to get there, but while you are doing it stay strong in the knowledge that it is not forever.

You are just paying your dues. Once you have gained some form of experience your options open up considerably. Even though teaching in secondary schools is not my first-choice, it is nice to have a backup in case anything happens in this increasingly changeable world.



# DR ROBERT SMITH

## CHEM TUTOR

A lot of you may know already that you would never teach in a thousand years. For me it was an option that was available and made financial sense. I tried it. Whatever happens next don't be afraid to try something that presents itself as an opportunity to you. Even when times are good, there are so many complicated job titles and vague job descriptions, you may have to try something before you even know what it is. Luckily, your probation period allows you to leave easily if you really can't stand it. (It's not just so they can fire you more easily if you suck). So, don't be afraid to try something that offers you an opportunity - you never know where it will lead you. At the very worst, you will become more resilient and gain some experience for a brighter future. Things will get better; in the meantime, it's just about riding out the storm.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# NEXT ISSUE: SOCIAL MEDIA

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COMING 2020/21 ACADEMIC YEAR

If you have been affected by this issue, please  
find out more about the support available on  
[warwick.ac.uk/bubbling](http://warwick.ac.uk/bubbling) up or by speaking to your  
Personal or Senior Tutor in the department.

