

Claire Scott-Bardwell

Claire Scott-Bardwell has an MBA from Warwick which she finished in 2012, and her first degree is from St Andrews. She has spent several years overseas and works in the area of project management. Student Careers and Skills spoke with her on 17th February 2016

1) Did you experience any additional challenges with settling in and getting started?

The first challenge I had was getting in! I'd had glandular fever in my first year of A levels and, because I didn't want to be separated from my friends, I went against the school's advice and didn't retake the year. My A level results were devastating; nowhere near good enough for St. Andrew's. Somehow I managed to persuade them to interview me for a deferred place anyway, and having nothing to lose drove all the way to Scotland on my own to talk to them. They asked me several exam-type questions, and I must have done something right because I was offered a place.

Between school and university I had a busy gap year – Raleigh International, working, travelling. But when I started at uni, my previous experience in education didn't seem to have given me the study skills I needed. Other students – maybe it was because their parents knew more about what to expect, I don't know – seemed to be able to make effortless lecture notes and sail through revision and exams. Of course my parents helped all they could, but they hadn't been to university and didn't know what I might expect. There was quite a lot of trial and error for me before I worked out how to get through what needed to be done. There were some challenges outside of the academic context too. Some sporting societies wouldn't let you in unless you'd done the sport before or played at a much higher standard.

2) What advice or reassurance would you have for current students coming from an atypical background or facing additional challenges?

Accept that there will be differences. Everybody comes from a different background – ultimately it doesn't matter, you're all there to study. It's natural not to understand. But don't be afraid to ask. Universities are a melting pot. Join any club or society you want to and take advantage of this opportunity to meet students, particularly those further on through university and those from different departments. If there are student mentors, use those too. Give yourself time to settle in – it may take some time (and Freshers' Week can be really daunting), but uni is a wonderful experience. There is absolutely no reason why having parents who have not been to university should be a barrier, it's a wonderful thing. In fact it's not that unusual, since there are far more people going to university now than there were a generation ago.

I think it was Warwick that I came to on a chemistry weekend for sixth formers – it was an inspiring introduction to Higher Education - events like this are really important.