



The varied paths of women's career journeys

Name: Anna Foakes

Current role at UCL:

I am a Senior Teaching and Learning Administrator based in the Faculty of Brain Sciences/ Queen Square Institute of Neurology/ Education Team. I have been at UCL for 11 years, working part-time. I look after the



distance learning in clinical neurology programmes. This involves supporting the students (who are medical doctors) throughout their studies who are based all over the world. These programmes are modular flex, where students are very much geared to their own self-directed learning. I deal with a range of things from the admissions cycle, exam boards, student meetings, working with overseas exam centres, presentations/ course development, quality checking materials (we have over 320 e-lectures), providing pastoral care, advice and guidance, setting up forums and knowledge cafes, servicing committees, developing communications with students and stakeholders. I am also a Mentor for the Faculty of Brain Sciences Mentoring Scheme, a UCL Dignity Advisor, Coach and in an QSION EDI working group.

Please could you describe your career journey:

Firstly, I worked in the private sector in insurance working on the sales side. I then went to university as a mature student (in my mid-twenties) and completed a degree in business with marketing. I went on to gain experience in marketing, firstly working part-time and then full-time. I worked for a media company, sports company and then a petrochemical company as a marketing assistant (back then there weren't many jobs in marketing). I was made redundant from my last marketing role and applied for jobs in London.

I found myself working in London around the time of 9/11. I managed to find contract work before getting a permanent job in the legal sector as a marketing executive. I worked for a few law firms over the years, managing their marketing activity for a specific legal department. The work was varied including, working on projects and tenders, events and newsletters (it was before social media took off). It was an interesting time, my roles were very busy, working with different stakeholders. I then went to work in Higher Education starting off in more marketing/ project/ student recruitment roles before moving into teaching and learning roles. I have worked at both small and larger

universities starting off at St George's University of London, King's College London, IOE (pre UCL) and then UCL.

As you moved through your career journey, please describe your experience(s) in how you progressed to your current role?

I started off in a completely different industry doing something different before I got to UCL. When I left school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. There were no great career services like there are now. I worked in insurance mainly because my friends were in that field and where I lived there was a lot of work in this area. After getting some work experience under my belt and getting my degree in marketing, I went for marketing jobs. This was an interesting time as marketing roles were quite a new thing then with not so many opportunities. I worked in different sectors as an assistant and then finally as a marketing executive in the legal sector. The last role I learned a lot, but it also came with a lot of responsibility, working long hours, supporting experienced lawyers and newly qualified lawyers.

Eventually I left the legal sector. I had a family bereavement and took a break from work – it was not sustainable to do my job and there was not the support around from employers like there are now. This gave me some space to think about what was important to me and I decided to use my transferable skills and go into education where there seemed to be more of a work life balance. Alongside this I had counselling for my bereavement, and it really was life changing for me. I decided to retrain as a counsellor and moved to working part-time in education to support myself while undertaking the training.

I worked at a few universities and my decisions for taking the roles were based on what was available, what would fit my skills set, part-time hours and what sounded interesting. From 2008, I did my counselling training and worked in busy HE roles for four years, this was often very challenging. I had to fit in placement, supervision, course work as well as working in HE and having a life and running a home. It also was a shock to go back to study in 2008 and write essays and a dissertation. The last time I did that was back in 1997.

Since being qualified as a counsellor, I have continued to work in HE part-time. I left King's College London in 2013 and obtained a role at UCL in the Institute of Neurology in the education team, looking after distance learning programmes where I am based now. The role has changed a lot. I grew this role to FTE along with my Course Director. We added more routes to the programme and increased the student numbers significantly. It was an exciting time. I got my role regraded from a grade 6 to 7 and have had several increments.

I think my business marketing background has helped me in this role as well as my therapy background. I have also completed the UCL women in leadership programme back in 2022 which I really valued, as well as having some great mentors in and outside UCL. Alongside my work in HE, I have developed my therapy career: working in GP surgeries, the housing sector, charity field and more recently in the workplace providing therapy and wellbeing services. As well as my initial training, I have trained in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness and coaching - as a therapist you are always required to do continued professional development.

What lessons have you learnt on your career journey?

I have managed to juggle two completely different roles, building up my therapy business and working in HE. I like the variety of doing two roles that are completely different and working for

myself part-time. I have and am still learning a lot about myself, business, people and life. Looking back, I went with what I was drawn to in a role, (sometimes it was the circumstances) and my intuition, particularly when I found myself overworked and unsupported working in the legal sector in a great role. I really stopped and focused on me thinking about my mental health. It was a wake-up call, even though it was a difficult time, it was life changing for me to go on a different path. It just opened other options that I hadn't seen before. Yes, it did take a while, but I took a chance, and I felt the benefits. I feel determination, following my interests, connecting to mentors, peers, reaching out to people in areas of interest, and listening has been helpful.

Unfortunately, I have found it really challenging to find part-time roles within UCL for the next opportunity, whether it is upwards to a grade 8 or a sideways move, using my teaching and learning experience, transferable skills, coaching and therapy background. On the positive side I am keeping in mind, I have lots of areas that I am interested in and that the working landscape is changing with such things as portfolio careers and of course technology moving fast – I really hope that more part-time roles become available here for potential candidates like me. Part-timers do have a lot to offer, with excellent skills and can create great things within the flexibility of working part-time.

What working achievement or initiative are you most proud of?

Here are a few achievements/ initiatives since being at UCL: I set up the knowledge cafes online for my students. This involved grouping them into different time zones where they were based around the world and providing an honorary tutor in each café. I did some research into the initiative before it was created. The idea being to create a community where students could communicate with each other on a more local level (same/ similar time zone) with a dedicated tutor. I also used the knowledge cafes as one of my case studies for my arena associate fellowship (AFHEA). I highly recommend doing the Arena Associate Fellowship.

I have led on collaboration work with Alumni. I came up with some opportunities that would allow them to use their experience from the course and impart their knowledge to current students. This has allowed them to contribute to a growing community of teachers on the programme.

I was part of a select team of certificate awarded short listed finalists for the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) Excellence in Patient care awards 2019 (Medical Education and Training category. Team shortlisted finalists). It was an honour we were shortlisted and to be among other amazing finalists at their grade I listed headquarters at Regents Park.

A speaking opportunity at my graduation (face to face) for the UCL women in leadership (WILD) programme came up. The organiser put a call out to all of us to speak about our experience on the programme and I was the only one that volunteered. This was out of my comfort zone, but I was curious and wanted to have a go. It was a fabulous experience; I highly recommend it to anyone.

What advice would you offer to others?

If you are feeling stuck or not sure what to do next, create some space for you and ask yourself - What interests me? Where would I like to be? Is there someone that has done this before I know, or in my network? Reach out to them and ask about their career journey – these can be valuable conversations which can help towards the next step. Find a mentor or coach to support you through your next career move. I have had both and the experiences were invaluable.