



James

For me, before I started distance learning, I thought that the experience would be quite a solitary experience, with me just sitting in front of a computer and a few books. It's been far from that. It's kind of exceeded my expectations. I work with students virtually on a daily basis: both digitally, via social media, the online tutor group, video conferencing; and also through kind of social media channels, maybe WhatsApp, and different groups that we kind of set up to support each other.

With my - I suppose - work, and academic, and kind of hobbies and interests, being together as a family, you would perceive as being quite a challenge. But, I think I've managed to actually establish a pretty strong work-life balance: I definitely value family time. What we tend to do is make certain sections of our week, where we make time together and dedicate time together as a family.

So, my academic journey has not been as mapped out as most people. A couple of years before I started my GCSEs, I suffered from an illness, when I was younger. Actually, towards my GCSEs, I was home tutored and didn't come out with a full, massive array of qualifications. So, I kind of left school, but I didn't go into the university progression.

When, later on in life, I actually started working in the civil service, I got to a pretty good position, but I needed to try and improve my academic qualifications. So, I did my degree: BA Honours in leadership management. And I was fortunate enough, through the degree, to kind of pass with a first-class honours and actually get an International Student of the Year award for my academic achievements, which has fostered my academic journey into the masters', and it's something that has been a transformational, life-changing experience.

To work with students located across the world has been brilliant and I've developed a network of people and even friends. I'll give you an example where I've been working recently, collaboratively, with another student: we've been able to bring up a document, share it on the screen, and actually work on that document live.

Time zones is a challenge: trying to work out a time that's most convenient for everybody. We've got around those challenges by setting clear roles, clear expectations, clear timelines. I think if you take the time to make sure you've got the latest kind of software and programs to support it, you can transform your experience as a distance learner.

Personally, I've decided, over the years, to transfer all of my work into the cloud. The greater advantage that gives is I'm able to access it from any device at any location. I could be kind of travelling out and about and I could be updating stuff from my mobile. It gives you complete versatility on any device and I think that's been a big advantage for me.

And I think from the kind of network of contacts I've had from studying with distance learning, I have actually developed some lasting relationships; I can see myself kind of having that network many years later, even when I finish studying.

When I first started studying on a degree, I would work Monday to Friday. I would come home, I would do the family kind of life, and then I would just sit in front of my computer five nights a week. And then as I finished that and started my master's, I realised the importance of my health. So, for me, running gave me that opportunity to focus on my health, and then from that I've managed to build that up into longer-distance running and I'm looking to do the half-marathon a day before my master's exam, in the next coming months.

Go the distance.