



## Winning the Microbiology Award - My journey to success

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I am a final year Microbiology student at Salford, and I chose to do this course as microbiology has always been a huge interest to me. I am employed as a Research Assistant at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the Liverpool Vaccine Group. In this position, I am responsible for processing human samples from our Experimental Human Challenge models with a particular focus on pneumococcal disease. I obtained the role without a degree due to my previous experience in laboratories and my desire to work in the field. I always felt like an underdog not having a degree but working in an academic environment. I felt that people may be judging me. I was always thinking and exploring the option to obtain a degree, but it would mean giving up my job and changing my lifestyle, something I was not willing to do. When COVID struck, I saw an opportunity to finally do a degree, as everything was being taught online and I just thought now is the time and if you do not do it now, you never will!

I spoke to my manager and expressed my interest, and she gave me the green light as she wanted to support me knowing I would be a better scientist for her team and on a more personal level I could fill skills gaps. When Salford accepted my application, I was so excited but apprehensive as I would be going in as a mature student who has been out of the game for many years. My previous learning is very different to current teaching methods, so I thought I was going to struggle. I was right, degrees are hard and demanding! Much more than I thought but it is still the best thing I have done. I have put 100% of my effort into this as I want to achieve the highest possible mark, network, and develop myself as a person.

Three years on, I now look back at everything I have achieved. Since my degree began, I have had a promotion and become a senior scientist. I attended a conference to present my research to others in the field. I have led presentations, been part of public engagement events and in Uni I won the Microbiology Society award! All of this would not have been possible without attending university. I have gained a great deal of confidence by engaging in lectures and asking for help and advice. The conference I attended for work was made easier as we did posters for the microbial communities and interactions module, this is proof that what we are taught really can help us in the future. I have applied a lot of the knowledge I have gained from the course into my role, and it has inspired me to continue exploring my career in academia. I now believe in myself that anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

If I have any advice that might help someone, it would be not to hold yourself back! Even if others think they know what you are capable of, they will almost certainly be wrong, because only you know what you can do! Don't be afraid to speak up or ask for help that is the best way to learn and develop. Engage with people who interest you and never stop progressing yourself. It can be surprising what you can achieve in a small amount of time if you are willing to focus and put effort into it.