

Dr Jeannette Roddy

1. What is your current position?

I am a Senior Lecturer in Counselling and Psychology at the University of Sunderland, however I am in the process of moving to the University of Salford where I will be a Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

2. Could you say a bit about your career trajectory so far? How did you get to be where you are today?

I began life as a chemical engineer, graduating from the University of Edinburgh and joining ICI. After a period working as an engineer, I moved into commercial work where I held roles in marketing, sales, procurement and strategic planning, ultimately becoming the commercial operations manager for a utility company. By now I had small children and wanted to work locally, so I left the multi-national I was working for and became a self-employed business consultant. Business consultancy became business coaching, as much of my time was spent supporting management teams to manage and implement the strategies we developed together. However, once involved in business coaching, I began to work with people in a more in-depth way which led to my interest in counselling. I decided to take the certificate in counselling skills in 2006 to find out more about counselling, as I wanted a better understanding of when I should refer people into counselling from a coach perspective. However, once on the course I discovered that what I really wanted to do was work at depth with individuals as a counsellor and I continued on to complete the diploma in counselling. As part of my training, I had to do a literature review on a counselling topic, and I chose working with victims of domestic violence. To my surprise, I discovered there was very little in the literature to help, and certainly nothing from a client perspective. I began to extend my review into the development of a research proposal for a PhD and was lucky that York St John University were able to offer a studentship to fund work in this area. During my study, the university supported me to complete a teaching qualification in HE, which enabled me to get some teaching work at York St John and the University of Sunderland. I concluded my PhD in 2014 and have been in academic posts since then.

3. When did you decide to be an academic? What was it that prompted this decision?

I decided I would like to be an academic about half way through my PhD. I was really enjoying doing research and was starting to think about how I could continue to do this type of work after my PhD. Being able to do the HEA associate fellow course allowed me insight into teaching in HE and found, to my surprise, that I did actually enjoy working with students and helping them to understand things and to develop as individuals. Once I could see myself as a potential teacher as well as a researcher, the decision to apply for academic posts was a relatively easy one.

4. What have been the challenges so far in your career in academia?

As is the case with many academics, my main challenge is balancing teaching with research. Whilst it is possible to some extent to write for publication whilst in the middle of a busy teaching term, conducting research is more complicated as it often requires a whole day (or two) at a time to be able to travel to the research site and back again. Such constraints can push research work into the summer period where it is harder to recruit to studies as everyone else is working hard to prepare for annual leave! I have found that I have had to be particularly organised, using many of the engineering project planning skills I gained early in my career, in order to bid for research funding, plan and deliver the research programme and produce identifiable research outputs. This has been possible but at a much slower pace than I have been used to in other jobs I have done. If nothing else, it has encouraged me to be a bit more patient about life!

5. What advice would/do you give to other female academics?

One of the benefits of academic life is the amount of flexibility allowed in terms of managing time (provided the main areas of the job are covered) and that can help with managing work and home-life. However, I think it is essential to start each year with an idea of what you want to achieve (which is non-timetabled) and also have an idea of when that is going to happen. There will always be unplanned issues which come up and take up time, but if you have a clear view of your own work, it becomes more of a decision on how to shuffle things around, than being unable to deliver your own projects because of everything else going on. Even if the pace you move forward at is reduced, I think it is important to keep making that movement, however small. Momentum keeps things going, once you have stopped, it takes a lot more energy to start again.