

Dr Jackie Gray

What is your current position?

Principal Lecturer in Forensic Psychology, Middlesex University

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

I started as a lecturer at Middlesex University in 2003, whilst I was finishing writing my PhD, and within a couple of years I was promoted to Senior Lecturer. In the early days I contributed to teaching across undergraduate and postgraduate modules, mostly in the forensic psychology area. I was also the deputy programme leader for our BPS accredited MSc Forensic Psychology. Over time, my teaching has moved more towards postgraduate level, and I supervise a number of PhD students. I have maintained my research activity, and undertake a number of roles that contribute to the wider university community. In 2010 I took over as programme leader for the MSc Forensic Psychology programme, and in 2011 I was promoted to Principal Lecturer.

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

I started at University as a mature student, and initially was doing it out of interest and because I had always been bored by the jobs I had previously held. I soon discovered that I thrived in the academic environment, and went on to complete an MSc Forensic Psychology. It was during this time that I realised that I was more interested in the academic world than becoming a practitioner. I had done some work experience in practice settings, and felt that the academic world of research and teaching was more likely to offer the challenges and variety that I need in my career.

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

My main challenges have been around balancing the competing demands of the academic role, with the occasional home issues also adding to the mix. The early days of my career were dominated by a lot of teaching, and preparation for teaching, which meant that my research was always the thing that was pushed to one side. However, once this side of my work was developed it became less burdensome, and I have reestablished my research. However, this is an ongoing pressure, and when there are a lot of competing demands it does tend to be the research that gets put on hold. Overall, the challenges are really around prioritisation, deadlines, and ensuring that all aspects of the job get done.

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

I have never felt my gender to be an issue in the academic world, but I do work in a university that has a lot of women at all levels (from the Chancellor downwards). I am therefore not sure that I know how to answer this from a specifically gendered perspective.

To be a successful academic, you do have to deal with periods of great stress, and the job is challenging – but that is also what makes it interesting. I do think that it is important to establish a work-life balance, and this may vary for different individuals. Personally, I have always taken the approach that I work hard, and I do often work long hours during the week to get everything done. However, unless there is a real deadline crunch (for example bidding for contract research that often has very short turn-around times) I do not regularly work at weekends. I also think it is important that when you finish work for the day (whatever time that is), that you don't check work email all evening, answering questions on a constant basis. The same applies when on leave – we are allowed holidays where we do not have to think about work!