Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences



FOOTSTEPS: CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF OUR STAFF



LEEDS

The Athena SWAN charter, established in 2005, recognises commitment to the advancement of gender equality in HE, encompassing representation, progression and success for all.

I am delighted to introduce this brochure presenting profiles of a selection of my colleagues working in the new Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences at the University of Leeds. Of course, the success of any organisation relies on the people who work within it and there can be no doubt that the many successes of the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, in terms of education, research, impact and internationalisation, are really down to the individuals and teams within our schools.

With the selection of profiles that are included in this brochure, we have aimed to present a cross-section of the Faculty which has recently grown from five schools in the former Faculty of Engineering to eight schools, now also including Chemistry, Maths, and Physics and Astronomy. This growth in number and variety of academic Schools is also an opportunity to celebrate the even wider range of backgrounds and experiences that are represented within our Faculty. By reading the profiles of my colleagues I have learned many things that I was unaware of, but I have also seen a number of important recurring themes, such as the satisfaction gained from working with great colleagues and students, the importance of role models, the value of the right work-life balance and the variety that comes with the job.

It is important as a Faculty that we provide the support that our staff need in order to succeed in achieving their professional goals, in a way that respects these themes as well as the many individual differences that make us a richer community. I hope that you will enjoy reading this brochure as much as I have, whilst learning more about our inspirational staff!

Professor Nora de Leeuw Executive Dean Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences I am delighted to see the first edition of the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Footsteps brochure which showcases the diversity of our staff across all eight schools. The Footsteps initiative stemmed from Athena SWAN (which focuses on gender) and has now grown to involve a broad range of protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability).

Our Faculty strives to provide an inclusive working and learning environment where everybody feels welcome and equally supported to achieve their full potential. Our integrated equality and inclusion strategy focuses on five priorities: (a) Staff Recruitment: increase the overall diversity of staff across the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, including staff from broad under-represented groups; (b) Career Development: provide equitable career support, development and progression for everyone, in all staff categories and at all career stages; (c) Student Diversity: attract, recruit and support diverse student cohorts in all schools and across all levels, including students from under-represented groups; (d) Inclusive Culture: ensure we have an inclusive, supportive and balanced culture in all schools; (e) Engagement and Support: ensure wider engagement and support for effective actions that influence the Faculty and beyond.

We are grateful to our colleagues for sharing their stories providing inspiration and motivation to others. Special thanks go to Briony Thomas, Sandra Kitchingman and Susan Preston for their passion and drive to shape the Faculty Footsteps initiative. We are looking forward to future editions, celebrating the diversity of our staff, students, and alumni.

Professor Vania Dimitrova

Equality and Inclusion Lead Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences



Equality and Inclusion ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES







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In the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences we believe that our diverse community is fundamental to the achievement of excellence. We promote a culture of mutual respect where everybody feels welcome and are equally supported to achieve their full potential.

> Professor Nora De Leeuw Executive Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

The Schools of Chemical and Process Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computing, Electronic and Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering have been awarded an Athena SWAN Silver award. The Schools of Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics and Astronomy have received an Athena SWAN Bronze award.

This is evidence of our strong commitment to supporting women in Engineering, Computing and the Physical Sciences, and our broader inclusion strategy, which uses gender as a catalyst to address broader challenges faced by students and staff from under-represented groups (including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability).

These prestigious Athena SWAN awards from Advance HE, the national body that promotes equality in the higher education sector, are given in recognition of our strong and continued commitment to gender equality and reflects the significant progress made over the past five years.

Our sustained outreach programme, extensive use of role models, and carefully planned web and marketing materials have helped us to attract outstanding female students. At Faculty level:

21% of our full-time undergraduate students are female, and this has been consistently above than the national average.

25.8% of our full-time postgraduate taught students are female, with increase in applications in recent years.

30.5% of our full-time postgraduate research students are female, and this has been consistently above than the national average.



Members of the Faculty Equality and Inclusion Committee. Left to right: Dr Terence Kee, Ms Susan Preston, Dr Ornella Iuorio, Dr Joao Goncalves Faria Martins, Prof Nora De Leeuw, Dr Emilio Garcia-Taengua, Prof Andrew Bayly, Prof Vania Dimitrova.

Through a series of actions to attract and grow female staff, we have significantly increased the number and proportion of female research staff within the Faculty. Our diverse professional, support and technical staff are invaluable members of our community. We provide a wide range of support to reflect their needs across a broad range of roles.

Juno Practitioner status was awarded to the School of Physics and Astronomy for their proactive approach to achieving equal gender opportunities and encouraging best practice among staff.

Project Juno (Institute of Physics) recognises and rewards Physics departments, institutes and organisations which demonstrate their commitment to an equitable working environment. Leeds' School of Physics and Astronomy was recognised for progressing their equality and diversity agenda, which resulted in the award.

Resources supporting the wide range of equality and diversity-focused activities hosted within the School were also commended by the panel. Commitment to the needs of staff and students were shown by the School's Juno representatives, who collected, analysed and clearly acted upon data provided by them. Workload allocation and pay were also investigated by the team.

Alison Parker

1994-1998:	BSc (Hons) University of Sydney
1998-2001:	PhD Queen Mary, University of London
2001-2003:	Junior Research Fellow, Sommerville College Oxford
2003-2005:	Sesquicentennial Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Sydney
2006-2007:	Lecturer in Pure Mathematics, University of Leicest

2007-2016:	Lecturer in Pure Mathematics, University of Leeds During this time – Maternity Leave (6 months) 2014, Maternity/Parental Leave (total 5.5months) 2016. Promoted while on Parental Leave.
2014-2018:	Held EPSRC standard grant
2016-present:	Associate Professor in Pure Mathematics, University of Leeds



I did my BSc (Hons) at the University of Sydney graduating in 1998. I then did my PhD, after I became a postdoctoral fellow, then a lecturer.

I was promoted to Associate Professor in Pure Mathematics whilst on Maternity Leave in 2016.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

Associate Professor in Pure Mathematics

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

My career progression has been fairly standard I think. I did a 4 year undergraduate degree then a 3 year PhD then a couple of postdocs before getting my first permanent job. I left Leicester because the opportunity arose in Leeds to join a bigger research group in Algebra, with the promise of less administration to do. I successfully applied (jointly) for a standard EPSRC grant in 2013. I was able to delay the start of the postdoc this grant funded to coincide with my return from maternity leave in 2014. I successfully applied for promotion to Associate Professor in 2016 while I was on maternity leave with my second child.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I chose to be an academic as I loved reading and discovering new things. I love

the intellectual satisfaction of understanding a piece of Mathematics deeply and also being able to develop new theorems and theory in Mathematics.

WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO CONTINUE IN ACADEMIA?

Partly opportunity, partly stubbornness, and partly not knowing what else would provide the same levels of intellectual satisfaction.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I enjoy leading tutorials, I get to have an interaction with students and ensure that students can understand the material. I also enjoy supervising PhD students and seeing their growth into independent researchers. Doing new research and exploring ideas with collaborators is also very rewarding.

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

My mother obtained her PhD while I was at high school so the idea of being an academic was there with my own role model. I was also fortunate to be mentored by senior women while in Oxford. When I started my undergraduate degree I thought I would go into Physics as I am still fascinated by fundamental particles. At that time Physics tended to have a "blokey" culture which put me off. Whereas, Maths seemed more agnostic about gender at the time(!).

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

I have been lucky in being able to take advantage of the flexible working policy in terms of going part-time and not having to make a business case to change my annual hours. I came back full time after my first period of maternity leave, but then went to 80% and then 60% and then back up to 80% again. The Head of School has been extremely supportive of this policy and has worked hard to ensure that 80% really means 80% (and not 100% of the work for 80% of the pay).

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

I found 60% was not enough time to keep my research ticking over. It is also very hard to sustain research while working part-time and teaching a full first year module. Having collaborators and postdocs definitely helps. You also need to ensure that rest happens, otherwise you get too tired to do good work.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

I still find it difficult to maintain research while teaching a full module. Also while having children is rewarding in itself, they do take a lot of time and energy – and that's ok – you need to adjust your expectations of what you can do and be very organised.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Don't compare yourself to people who have more energy and time than you.

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

Resilience and perseverance are key qualities needed to succeed. Also being able to say no and to be able to "switch off" from work. An academic career does not need all of your time and it's healthy and beneficial for one's wellbeing as well as one's career to have interests outside of work. Rest is important.

You will get rejected a lot. Your self-worth can't be tied up in your latest publication or theorem. You have to love your subject and do things for their own sake.

Briony Thomas

2002: Bachelors in Textile Design, University of Leeds Two years working in the textiles and fashion industry

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- 2003: Maternity leave for 6 months
- 2004: Masters in Design, University of Leeds Teaching Fellow in Design Theory, University of Leeds
- 2007: PhD in Design Science, University of Leeds Lecturer in Design Theory
- 2008: Director of Postgraduate Research Studies (2008-2013) Maternity leave for 4 months
- 2010: Promotion to Lecturer B Maternity leave for 4 months
- 2012: University Student Education Fellowship
- 2014: 12-month sabbatical at York Centre for Cross-disciplinary Systems Analysis, University of York
- 2015: 4-year secondment to School of Mechanical Engineering Faculty of Engineering E&I Coordinator



CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY?

My current position is as a full-time Lecturer in Design Theory. For the past four years I've been on secondment in Engineering working with the Product Design team and researchers within iDRO. This academic year I'm working 50:50 between the School of Mechanical Engineering and the School of Design.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED WHILE AT LEEDS?

I joined the University in 2004. I had just started a part-time PhD when I was offered a 0.4FTE teaching position. Following several fixed-term contracts, I was appointed as a full-time lecturer when I had completed my studies.

I've been fortunate during my career to establish a network of colleagues both within and beyond the University. I was offered a sabbatical position at York Centre for Cross-disciplinary Systems Analysis (University of York) in 2013 and I spent a fantastic 12 months working with scientists and engineers from different disciplines.

In January 2015 I began a four-year secondment in Mechanical Engineering working with the design science group in iDRO. Over the past few years I have collaborated with colleagues in robotics; taught students on the MDes Product Design programme; delivered a Newton Fund project with Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico); and undertaken an invited study visit at MIT. It's been an exciting time!

WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE THIS CAREER?

I never knew what I wanted to do as a career. I was creative at school, so my teachers encouraged me to go to art college after A levels. My interest in structural and scientific aspects of design developed during my art foundation year and I decided to study at Leeds because the course offered a balance of creative practice and science/technology. This interest continued and I focused on geometry in design during my Masters, which led to my PhD research. When I was offered the chance to teach while studying my PhD. I jumped at the chance. I never intended to become an academic, but here I am!

WHAT PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I enjoy working in a subject where I can engage in both theory and practice. I'll sketch and make models to visualise the ideas I'm working on. I also find working with students very rewarding and one of the most satisfying parts of the job.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU FEEL STARTING A FAMILY HAS HAD ON YOUR CAREER?

I had my first child before my career had really started. I decided to use my maternity leave and part-time working hours to allow me to study and I began my Masters when my daughter was two weeks old. As a single parent I was working two-days a week and studying full-time. It was a very challenging time but I was determined to provide the best possible future for my daughter and I was fortunate to have my family supporting me. I met my husband at University and we had a further two children. Having children at a relatively young age made me re-prioritise. It also made me realise that I'm defined by more than my career success.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE THE DEMANDS OF WORK AND FAMILY LIFE?

It's not been easy working full-time and also being a mother to three children. It's a constant juggling act. My husband is also an academic so we support each other and share the responsibilities of family life. We managed pre-school childcare with the support of extended family and used the University's Bright Beginnings nursery. We now make the most of flexible working arrangements and working from home when possible. My recent study visit to MIT was supported by the Engineering conference and training support scheme, which was invaluable in helping to cover some of the extra costs incurred for childcare.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

To surround yourself with people who share your values and inspire you to become the best version of yourself.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

To look for the positive in every situation – challenges are opportunities. There are often times where I'm asked to deliver things outside my comfort zone. I've learnt to enjoy the challenge. I've also learnt to observe and reflect on what I've seen in meetings, presentations, teaching and in different management styles. It's helped me to develop my professional skills and to understand the leadership styles that I respect.



- 2001: Masters in Chemistry, University of Oxford
 2005: PhD in Atmospheric Chemistry, University of Oxford
 2008: Two years in public sector at Yorkshire Forward
 2010: Post-doctoral researcher, University of Leeds
- 2013: Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Fellowship
- 2015: University Academic Fellow in Sustainable Energy Systems, University of Leeds
- 2018: Maternity leave Promotion to Associate Professor



I'm currently an Associate Professor, and I work across two faculties, the School of Earth and Environment and the School of Chemical and Process Engineering. I've worked full time throughout my time at the University.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT YOUR CAREER?

Doing something different every day and the fact that I can still learn are what I enjoy the most. I also get to talk to a range of interesting people from the government, industry, and business.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER IN ACADEMIA?

During my masters I enjoyed the research project, especially developing new methods and coming up with new research questions. I worked for two years in the public sector working with industry and I learned a lot, but there was something missing. I missed research and the challenge of learning something new. I am now in a place where I enjoy my research and teaching and can fully utilise my skills and knowledge.

ARE THERE ANY POLICIES OR TYPES OF SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY THAT HAVE HELPED IN YOUR CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

I was really pleased by the flexibility and support I was offered when I wanted to work across two faculties. Support and advice have been available whenever I've needed it.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE THE DEMANDS OF WORK AND FAMILY LIFE?

I try to maintain a good balance between the two so that I don't have to think about work when I go home. When things get busy, I'll work hard to meet the deadline, but that will be for a limited period of time and then I'll go back to having weekends with my family.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN YOUR CAREER?

Juggling and prioritising is challenging sometimes.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

I learnt what kind of academic I want to be and that I don't have to change who I am to get there. Sometimes I see senior leaders and they are so different to me. But I know that I don't have to change my personality to be as successful, and that I can find my own way. When I was an undergraduate, I didn't see any female lecturers, so I never thought that I would be an academic, but here I am.

THINGS YOU DID WE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO KNOW?

I did a loop-the-loop in an aeroplane. I once did a parachute jump and the parachute didn't open properly, I sort of clanged too quickly to the ground!

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING?

I spend time with friends and family, go on walks, play drums, and do some gardening and sewing.

Have confidence in yourself and always remember the good things you've done and the reason why you're here. If there's something you want to do, then surround yourself with people who will support you in doing it. FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES



- 2000: PhD in Mechanical Engineering, University of Leeds
- 2002: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Civil Engineering, University of Leeds
- 2006: Maternity leave for 6 months
- 2007: Lecturer in Environmental Engineering, University of Leeds
- 2009: Chartered Engineer and Member of Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE)
- 2010: Reader in Infection Control Engineering Director PACE Institute (2010-2014)

- 2013: Fellow of Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estates Management (FIHEEM)
- 2014: IMechE Construction and Building Services Division Prize Professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings Director of Research and Innovation, Civil Engineering Athena Swan Lead, Faculty of Engineering (2014-2017)
- 2019: Co-Director of Leeds Institute for Fluid Dynamics



I am a Professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings, and the Director of Research and Innovation in the School of Civil Engineering. My research and teaching is about indoor air quality how you design a building that makes people healthy, happy and productive.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED WHILE AT LEEDS?

I did my PhD in Mechanical Engineering followed by a research contract. I considered leaving academia, but then a postdoc opportunity arose in Civil Engineering. Although this was a change in research field, I discovered something I was really passionate about. I successfully applied for a Lectureship in 2007 and since have progressed through the University promotions.

WHAT PURSUADED YOU TO CONTINUE IN ACADEMIA?

I found that I could progress as there were opportunities at Leeds that appealed to me. Academia also offered flexibility and variety. Most importantly, I enjoy what I am doing.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I really enjoy the variety of my role, and the fact that I learn something new every day. My research involves working with people from many different disciplines and I find that bringing different perspectives and techniques to a particular research challenge really exciting.

As I progressed I realised that I enjoy the leadership aspects of academia, and that has enabled me to take on school research leadership roles as well as Athena Swan. I particularly enjoy supporting students and early career researchers – it's a great feeling when they have their first success.

WHO INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

My parents. My mum is a computer scientist, and my dad is an aircraft design engineer. I remember my mum teaching me the basics of computer programming when I was a child. I grew up with engineering and technology being the norm.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

I had 6 months maternity leave when I was a postdoc and I became a lecturer very quickly afterwards. The University has been flexible with hours and working from home, which helped me a lot in balancing work and home life.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES, THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

I have learnt that there is not only one way for doing things. There isn't a set of rules for being an academic and there is usually a way of making things happen – you just sometimes have to think about different solutions. I've also learnt to follow what makes you happy and drives your curiosity – although I haven't yet learnt to say no!

ADVICE

A short-term ambition is good. When deciding on a role model aim to choose someone who is a few years ahead of you, in order to benefit the most from the relationship.

When you work in a team it is important to recognise other people's needs and priorities – you gain so much more together when you allow flexibility in relation to personal circumstances.

I particularly enjoy supporting students and early career researchers – it's a great feeling when they have their first success.

Diane Cochrane

1989: Technician, School of Materials, University of Leeds

- 1996: Fellow of Royal Microscopical Society
- 1998: Women in Technology Prize Technician of the Year IOM3 Award
- 2000: City & Guilds, Licentiateship Materials Engineering
- 2003: Maternity leave and part-time on return to work (0.6 FTE) Incorporated Engineer EC
- 2007: Lead Technician, School of Chemical and Process Engineering
- 2008: Contract change to 0.8 FTE
- 2012: Contract change to 0.9 FTE



CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?

My interest in laboratory work started when I was about 12. My father used to take me into his work at Rockware Glass on a Saturday morning. I used to help out in the glass testing and analysis labs. In high school, I arranged my own work experience in the laboratories at Ferrybridge C power station. This was supposed to be for one week however, due to my interest, they let me stay for a month. I enjoyed the testing, analysis and problem-solving.

After leaving sixth form, I got a job in the laboratories at King's Mills flour mill. Over the next six years, I progressed to Assistant Mill Chemist before everyone was made redundant due to a fire. I was devastated but my father reassured me that I would get something else, which I did. I joined the University of Leeds in May 1989. I was the first female technician in the School of Materials. The first six years were a steep learning curve, learning all about Materials Science and technical photography from experienced technicians and attending college.

Thirty years on and I am now a Lead Technician managing a team of six technicians and 22 laboratories.

WHO INSPIRED YOUR CAREER?

My dad gave me direction and greatly influenced who I am today. I believe I inherited his 'can do' attitude.

WHAT PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

That no two days are ever the same. I particularly enjoy the class interaction with undergraduate students and working with

researchers, especially in microstructural preparation and microscopy. I also enjoy working on the Schools Open days, outreach and work experience programmes.

HOW DID THE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE FACULTY HELP WITH YOUR CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

I have worked with some good line managers, colleagues and Heads of School with whose support I gained two HNCs in Materials Engineering and Technical Photography. I won the Technician of the Year for The Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining (IOM3) and the Women in Technology award for Bradford and Ilkley College. I became an Incorporated Engineer (IEng) and served for three years on the IOM3 Technicians Committee helping technicians gain professional qualifications and IEng registration.

A few years later I attended a Springboard course which I found very interesting. Since then I have been involved in the Athena Swan programme and attend the Women in Science, Engineering and Technology meetings. I have also undertaken many University health and safety, management and CPD courses. I believe these have made me a rounded manager.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND RETURNING TO WORK FROM MATERNITY LEAVE?

The Faculty was very flexible and allowed me to return to work part time and gradually increase my FTE. This helped greatly with my work life balance.

HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE?

I see what works, and do that. I have a good line manager, who has given me room for flexibility. I believe that giving people flexibility is advantageous, because it tends to make them more productive.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

To never let an opportunity pass you by, always believe in yourself, keep your objectives realistic, and don't undersell yourself.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

Nothing is for life and change will happen, and you have to learn how to embrace it. When we feel comfortable, we don't like to change things. My being made redundant was the start of a new and exciting career which, thirty years on, I still love.

WHAT WE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

Before joining the University my friend (another Diane) and I raised £1800 doing a sponsored tandem skydive for the Castleford Ambulance Service. They were fund raising to buy defibrillators for two of their five ambulances as their budget would only stretch to buying three. We also organised and took part in a bed push with family and friends from Knottingley to Pontefract raising another £300.

I also have an interest in steam engines and once drove a Jinti steam train on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway.



- 1981: Bachelor of Arts, Computing and Linguistics, University of Lancaster
- 1981: Research Associate in Computing and Linguistics, University of Lancaster
- 1984: Moved to Lecturer in Computer Studies, University of Leeds
- 1990-4: 4 children arrived
- 1990: Changed role to SERC Advanced Research Fellowship non-teaching
- 1991: Promoted to National Coordinator, JISC Knowledge Based Systems programme

- 1994: Changed role to Director, JISC Language Computing programme
- 1996: Changed role to Senior Lecturer returned to teaching (and research)
- 2008: PhD in Computing and Linguistics, University of Leeds
- 2013 Changed role to Associate Professor, University of Leeds
- 2016: Wife disabled by cancer and treatment
- 2018: Promoted to Professor of Artificial Intelligence for Language, University of Leeds
- 2019: Changed role to Director of Research Postgraduate Studies, University of Leeds



I am a Professor of Artificial Intelligence for Language and Director of Research Postgraduate Studies for the School of Computing. I have been a visiting scholar in Sudan, Manchester, Saudi Arabia, Sheffield, Dublin and the Netherlands.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

Professor of Artificial Intelligence for Language, lecturing to 300+ students in 4 modules and supervising 20+ research projects; and Director of Research Postgraduate Studies, overseeing 140+ PhD students in the School of Computing.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

Slowly! At least it seemed so: I got a Lectureship in 1984, promotion to SL-level post in 1991, then my next promotion to Professor in 2018. I changed roles several times over 36 years at Leeds University, and experienced many new challenges, at work and in my outside life.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

At school, I enjoyed Latin and Maths, but saw no career prospects in these subjects. I relished formal analysis of word and sentence structure and meaning, and an A-level Maths teacher showed us an early computer; so I decided to pursue my dream to be a Professor of Computational Linguistics and Artificial Intelligence.

WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO CONTINUE IN ACADEMIA?

I liked my job! I found I enjoyed University teaching and research, and being autistic I do not like change, so I stuck with this career. It is also hard to uproot a wife and family with their schools and jobs in Leeds. I considered job offers elsewhere but the switch would have been too complicated. While my children were young, I was able to win several grants to fund sabbaticals or secondments from teaching while still employed by the University of Leeds, but with more flexible work times.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I enjoy giving lectures in my research field, attending conferences and research meetings in new places, winning research grants and supervising research student projects.

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

At school, my Latin and Maths teachers kindled my interest in Language Analysis and Artificial Intelligence. As an Undergraduate, my Lecturers in Artificial Intelligence and Linguistics inspired me further, and a Professor invited me to be his Research Associate on a 2-year Computational Linguistics project. My wife then got a job near Leeds, so I moved to a Lectureship at Leeds, the nearest University. She was a Religious Studies teacher, and this influenced me to research Artificial Intelligence for understanding religious texts, which proved a fruitful research area.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

When we had 4 children in the 1990s, paternity leave was not on offer; but HR policy allowed an academic to apply for and win large grants to fund secondments from teaching, with flexible working times. More recently, HR policy has adapted promotion procedures to be more inclusive and accessible, which has enabled me to apply for promotion to Professor.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

I have found that my autism, and caring for my family, can involve good as well as bad experiences.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

Promotion and progression requires social and networking skills which I find challenging. Juggling many competing commitments, in work and outside, is challenging.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

It is not enough to be good at research and teaching for promotion and to be appreciated, you need to devote time to publicity! Try to stay focussed on one research topic: for academic promotion you need to show you are a world-leading expert in a specific niche, rather than competent in a broad area.

WHAT SURPRISING THINGS WOULDN'T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

As an atheist, I believe there is no point to life. Except to enjoy it. Also, some people are surprised to learn I have autism; I've learnt how to hide it.

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

The advice I would give to my younger self is relevant to others. If you really want promotion, then devote time to achieving this: study the promotion criteria, and devote time and effort to collecting evidence to meet the promotion criteria. To do this, you have to spend less time on other things, like teaching and research. Also, your research must be focussed: don't get involved in projects unless they help make you a world leader in a specific research niche.



- 2009: MEng Civil & Structural Engineering, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain
- 2011: MSc Applied Statistics, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain
- 2013: PhD Construction Engineering, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain
- 2013: Marie Curie Research Fellow, Queen's University Belfast
- 2015: Lecturer, University of Leeds



CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED WHILE AT LEEDS?

I joined the University of Leeds as a lecturer in 2015. Since then, I have progressed in many ways: I've had the opportunity to develop and lead the new MSc in Transport Infrastructure: Design and Construction and I am Deputy Director of the Neville Centre of Excellence in Cement and Concrete Engineering.

One of the most (unexpectedly) exciting things that have happened to me is being Civil Engineering's Champion of Equality and Inclusion. This has involved working with staff and students from across the Faculty, serving as a panellist to assess Athena Swan applications from across the country and being invited to give a talk at the first LGBT in STEM event in our University. I was also involved in organising the first ever #BuildingEquality entry to the Leeds Pride in August 2018, which was also the first time that our Faculty took part in such an event to promote LGBT+ visibility in the construction industry... It has all been extremely rewarding.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I've always liked to study, to look for information and read from books or papers, especially in relation to science and engineering subjects. In addition to civil and structural engineering, I also did an MSc in statistics and studied foreign languages... Not that I needed any of that to get better chances from a professional point of view, but simply because I liked to pursue different interests and learn new things. Also, I've always been very fond of teaching, and I think it's an enormous privilege. When I was an undergraduate back in Spain, at one point I had to start working part-time, so I took the qualifying exam to start teaching English as a foreign language, and I loved it. So basically, a career in academia was the perfect way for me to make a living doing what I loved – can one be luckier than that? I doubt it!

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST IN YOUR CAREER?

Interacting and working with my students, at all levels: teaching undergraduate courses, supervising those doing their research projects or dissertations and postgraduate students... I say 'working with them' because it really goes both ways and I try to form a team with them, even in the lecture theatre. Those days when you're driving back home with the feeling that you've made a difference to some of your students' lives, that you have helped them discover or learn something new... There's nothing better.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

It took me some time to stop thinking as a postdoc and start thinking as an academic. It probably sounds like an easy thing to do but it is a big change and, at least in my case, it took longer than I imagined. Learning to cope with the frustration that comes after having grant proposals or papers rejected is a big deal. Or learning to clearly see the difference between what's important and what's urgent but not necessarily important. Or being able to multi-task and try to stay focused when you're writing a paper and e-mails keep coming. Another big challenge is to be taken seriously despite your age: being (relatively) young sometimes feels like a disadvantage, and

I guess that's not very different from what our graduates experience when they take up a new job. The solution is always to focus on what you do, to enjoy it, and not to be disheartened.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Don't take anything too personally. It's difficult because, when you love your job, it becomes personal. But the ability to switch off and the capacity to keep on working even when things get difficult is a valuable skill. And again, it sounds obvious but it can be extremely difficult at times. Patience and perseverance are equally important.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

In my experience, there are two main challenges: our inclination for overthinking, and the fact that we're always connected and surrounded by a lot of information. The fact that we carry our work with us in our mobile or tablet, in our laptop, always and even out of hours, can become a huge distraction. You need to give yourself e-mail-free time to think, work and write.

WHAT WOULD WE BE SURPRISED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I think one of the most surprising things people usually don't know about me is that I am passionate about literature, to the extent that I did a BA in English language and literature. My living room is full of books, and not only novels – I've got an entire bookcase packed with poetry books! But there's not a single one about engineering (I keep those are in my office!). I can spend hours in a secondhand bookshop...



1999-2003:	MSci. (Hons) 1st class Mathematics with Physics University of Glasgow
2003-04:	Certificate of Advanced Studies in Mathematics, Cambridge University
2004-08:	Ph.D. in Mathematics, University of Leeds
2009:	Investment Management Certificate
2009-14:	Investment Analyst, Mercer Limited

- 2012: Diploma in Actuarial Techniques
- 2014: Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries
- 2015: Senior Teaching Fellow, School of Mathematics, University of Leeds
- 2017: Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- 2019: Deputy Director of Student Education (PGT and International)



Prior to Academia I worked in investment consulting for a number of years providing analytics and advice to trustees of pension schemes in the UK.

My current role is Senior Teaching Fellow and Deputy Director of Student Education (PGT and International) for the School of Mathematics.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

I feel that challenging experiences have taught me that good communication between people is vital, especially in difficult circumstances where not every aspect is under your own control. Often a way forward can be found by getting people together in the same room (or on the same conference call). In a similar way, many of the good experiences I have were a direct result of people coming together and working effectively as a team where good communication and close team working was vital.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

To varying degrees in my career so far, I have been outside the typical background for someone in my role. Whether this was starting in a graduate role in Investment Consulting after spending 9 years in higher education, or returning to the School of Mathematics with a background in professional practice rather than research. While I have always felt supported by my managers, it has required that I develop my self-confidence that I am adding something to the organisations I have worked for, even if at first glance I might not appear to fit the expected profile.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR CAREER IN INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT AND THEN WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO GO INTO ACADEMIA?

I would say my career route started during my PhD, though I have not taken what would be considered a well-travelled path from that point. One aspect I enjoyed most about my time as a PhD student was the opportunity to become involved in teaching Undergraduates. On deciding that I did not want to pursue the next stages of an academic career, I wanted to find a role which would also have a strong element of working to provide support to others. I felt that the Consulting sector could offer this. Moreover, I wanted to use my Mathematical background and felt that Actuarial Consulting would combine the two.

After a number of years working for an Investment Consultancy and qualifying as an Actuary, an opportunity arose to return to the School of Mathematics in a role focussed on teaching. This seemed like an opportunity to bring the professional experience I had back to the teaching activities I had enjoyed so much.

While I enjoyed my Actuarial role and still work closely with the profession, returning to academia has been a very positive change for me. I feel I have more control to shape my career and contribute to the development of the educational experience of our students.

To varying degrees in my career so far, I have been outside the typical background for someone in my role.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

I would advise my younger self to be more confident in my own abilities and to be more comfortable in not possessing exactly the same skill set to those around me.

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

While in any role there will be aspects which are not as enjoyable as others, finding a role where you can enjoy a significant proportion of the work and have control over your career development and direction is desirable. I certainly feel like I have found the right role for me.



- 2009: Joined University as an Apprentice Technician
- 2012: Promotion to Technician in the School of Electronic and Electrical Engineering
- 2014: Promotion to Technician in the School of Mechanical Engineering
- 2016: Lead Technician in the School of Mechanical Engineering



I've been a Lead Technician in the School of Mechanical Engineering since 2016. I now manage a team of three technicians and together we manage seven labs.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED WHILE AT LEEDS?

After leaving school I worked in a plastics company for five years. When I realised there was no chance for improvement, I applied to an advert for an Apprentice Technician in the School of Mechanical Engineering in 2009. My application was successful and I've been at the University ever since.

After completing three placements as a trainee, a technician position arose in the School of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, where I worked for two years. I then moved back to the School of Mechanical Engineering to work with the Institute of Functional Surfaces, on a project called Lifelong Joints.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

The chance to develop. I left a well-paid job and came here to re-train as an Apprentice

Technician. It was a better choice, considering my long-term development and career ambitions.

WHAT PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

The diversity in the job and the people I interact with. I do different work all the time with post docs who are working on varied research projects. Moreover, I am able to interact with people from different backgrounds all the time. I also get the chance to work with the people who have trained me on a daily basis, which is great, because it shows me how much I've progressed.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN YOUR CAREER?

Learning all the health and safety requirements, creating risk assessments and making sure everything is safe for different categories of staff and students, including researchers, undergraduates and PhD students.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU FEEL STARTING A FAMILY HAS HAD ON YOUR CAREER?

The University is where I met my wife. She was a technician in Civil Engineering, so we have a similar work environment. We try to keep our work and home lives separate. We only discuss work on our commute, and when we get out of the car we completely forget about it.

The University is very open about telling their staff what they're entitled to, which is really good. For instance, the paternity leave policy is generous and my wife and I are planning to benefit from it soon, as we're expecting our first child.

WHAT HAS HELPED YOU ACHIEVE THIS BALANCE?

I have always believed that work is only a part of my life, so I try to keep work and home life separate. I have a large family and spend most weekends with them. I have also gained a lot of friends at work and we spend time together outside of work – we don't discuss work then!

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING?

Sports. I go with my wife or brother to watch cricket or rugby league. I used to play football, but everyone I used to play with has now got married and had children, so things are more family orientated now.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Make sure you listen to everyone's advice and then make your own decision. Don't be afraid to retrain or do anything challenging. Try to take opportunities that arise. Money isn't everything, so you should look at the bigger picture and the long-term advantages of different opportunities.

Always be grateful to the people who have helped you and be keen to improve yourself.

Josephine Aldred

- 2012: Bachelor's Degree French and Russian Civilisation
- 2012: Account Manager Digital Marketing Agency
- 2014: Marketing Officer Faculty of Engineering
- 2016: Certificate in Professional Marketing Chartered Institute of Marketing
- 2017: Marketing Manager Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Faculty of Environment
- 2018: Maternity Leave
- 2019: Studying towards Diploma in Professional Marketing



I work for two Faculties, Engineering and Physical Sciences, and Environment as a Marketing Manager for Student Recruitment. I recently came back from Maternity leave in 2018 and am studying toward a Diploma in Professional Marketing.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

I am the Marketing Manager (Student Recruitment) for the Faculties of Environment, Engineering and Physical Sciences. My responsibilities include developing and delivering marketing plans to support the faculties student recruitment targets.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

During the final year of my degree, I started a part-time job at a digital marketing agency based in Leeds. I didn't realise at the time, but this was the start of my career in marketing.

The agency's focus was search engine optimisation (SEO) services and I was involved in projects for a wide variety of

clients, including insurers, car rental companies and fashion brands. Although I enjoyed the challenge and learnt a lot, I realised that I wanted to see more of the impact of my work and focus my efforts on an organisation whose values I believed in. When I spotted a job opening at the University of Leeds, I jumped at the opportunity!

Two years after graduating – and not long after a nerve-racking interview(!) – I started as a Marketing Officer for the Faculty of Engineering. At first I was responsible for the day-to-day tasks required to deliver our postgraduate recruitment strategy. The University supported my desire to obtain a professional marketing qualification and, as my experience and knowledge grew, I was able to progress to the position of Marketing Manager for the newly formed Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences and the Faculty of Environment.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I only realised I wanted to work in Marketing after finding a part-time job while in my final year of University. I hadn't finished my degree and thought I would probably go into teaching after graduating. However, I soon realised that working in Marketing involved a lot of things I love doing – writing, meeting new people, going to events, and generally allowed me to be creative!

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I love the variety of work involved in my job. Last week I was filming academic research on Ilkley Moor in the morning and writing web content in the afternoon! I have also had the pleasure of working with lots of interesting people at the University and learning about the fascinating work and research being done here.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

The University of Leeds has been a great place to start my working life. I have been given loads of encouragement and support to achieve my Chartered Institute of Marketing qualifications.

Returning to work after my son was born was an incredibly difficult transition but the University has some great policies to ensure you can continue your career while encouraging a good work life balance. Working part-time with flexible hours has made the adjustment to a new life of baby groups and nursery pickups a little easier to manage.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

Confidence has always been a challenge for me. I've passed up on opportunities and deferred to others because I've had difficulties putting across my ideas and not felt able to speak up.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

You don't need to have all the answers straight away! Opportunities present themselves when you least expect them so don't feel so anxious when you think things aren't going to "plan".



1976: Worked in the mining industry until closure in 20041984: Joined the trade union movement, becoming Chairman of the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mine Workers 2004: Health & Safety Manager at Leeds City Council
 2007: Health & Safety Manager for the Faculty of Engineering, University of Leeds



CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF DESCRIPTION ABOUT YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION?

In my current position I am a full time Health and Safety Manager. I started work at 17, keen to make my way in the working world rather than higher education, which I took up later. I took a mechanical engineering apprenticeship in the mining industry – an education that cost in the region of £250k. I then worked in the mining industry for 25 years until they announced closure in 2004.

I was involved in the trade union movement, and eventually rose to become the Chairman of the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mine Workers. I also stood for parliament as a candidate for the Bassetlaw constituency. When the last coal mine in north Yorkshire closed. I had to make a decision whether to transfer to another regional coal mine, pursue a career in the trade union movement, or a career in health and safety. I saw an opportunity to change career and chose to work for Leeds City Council for two years as a health and safety manager where I became the responsible person for H&S management for LCC agencies.

When an opportunity arose at the University of Leeds in 2007, I recognised a new challenge, addressing vastly different activities to what I was used to. It has been interesting to deal with an environment that contains multiple high risk hazards associated with all types of research and manufacturing processes. During my time here, I have developed strategic plans which have introduced effective, workable procedures in consultation with colleagues and world leading academics.

WHAT PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

Interacting with people. When you find yourself encountering expertise in so many areas, it is rewarding to be able to learn as well as contribute to our activities.

WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE THIS CAREER?

As a young man I was angered by the poor treatment of workers and indifference to the dangers they faced. I wanted to stand up for workers' rights and so became a trade union representative. One of my most rewarding achievements was to complete the equal value claim for 3500 mining industry women, settling at over £40m compensation.

Health and safety seemed like a natural progression for me, after witnessing several deaths and many serious injuries. I felt strongly that nobody should have to face the trauma experienced by families dealing with the aftermath of bereavement or disability.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN YOUR CAREER?

People don't understand the necessity for safety and how even a simple event, could escalate to a serious injury, and ruin their quality of life or wreck their career. People need to understand that safe working does not inhibit, but enables work. By simple planning, consideration and resourcing, work proceeds efficiently and safely. This is the ethos of the Faculty of Engineering Safety Team.

IN WHAT WAY DOES YOUR WORK AFFECT YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

In mining, I worked a three-shift pattern, including weekends and call-outs; the

environment was high-pressure and geared to production needs. At the University, we experience pressure in different ways, but I find it easier to balance between my work and home life. I am proud to work for an employer that helps carers, helps people in return to work after illness or injury, and is considerate with compassionate leave. All these are aspects of good personnel and health and safety management.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Access higher education at the earliest opportunity. Think about what you're going to do before you do it and consider others' views. Appreciate advice from those with greater experience.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

I have learnt to accept people for who they are, and understand that taking into consideration others' opinions as well as my own is important, even if it's in opposition. I believe that everybody should have a voice. An organisation should listen to all its workers, plan properly and communicate truthfully.

AWARDS

We have won the Vice-Chancellor's Award for H&S several times, as well as numerous commendations. We hold the RoSPA Gold Award for H&S and RoSPA's Education & Service Sector Award (finishing second in the UK three years running). We were also the first higher education research and teaching establishment to be accredited to the OHSAS 18001 H&S standard, which we have maintained for five years.

Kimberley Holmes

2006-2010:	Graduated with a BSc in Chemistry with
	Pharmaceutical and Forensic Science, University of Bradford
2009:	Became a Mother, whilst studying for BSc.
2010-2012:	Worked several part-time retail jobs

2012-13:	Became a mother for a second time, took Maternity leave
2013:	Teaching Lab Technician in the School of Chemistry at
	the University of Leads 1875 hours

2019: Increase in hours to 24 hours



Kimberley is a Teaching Lab Technician in the School of Chemistry.

She works part time to manage caring responsibilities and advocates the staff counselling and psychological support services.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

My current role is Teaching Lab Technician in the School of Chemistry. In my role I have responsibilities that range from ordering and handing out glassware and chemicals, advising students on their practicals, sourcing, ordering and maintaining equipment, helping to organise and plan logistical aspects of the course and making sure the lab is clean, tidy and safe.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I love my job. When I saw the advert for my role I was really interested in it. I saw the connection between the retail roles I had enjoyed, and the scientific training I had worked towards when I was studying. I work 24 hours a week, which fits in around my family responsibilities.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

One of the parts of my job I enjoy the most is dealing with the Undergraduates, I love being able to solve a problem for them and get a great sense of satisfaction when I know they are getting a great service. I also really like tackling the maintenance of our kit and instruments. There is always new learning to be done, which keeps the role stimulating.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

HR policy around caring commitments has been so important for me - I know that those policies have my back when one of my kids is ill.

I would love to tell other people with mental illness - you are not alone, you have nothing to be ashamed of, and please reach out for help and support.

I have also had a lot of support around my mental illnesses. I live with PTSD and recurrent depressive disorder. When I saw a clinical psychologist, the HR policies around hospital appointments meant that I didn't have an added layer of stress of fitting the appointments into my week. The staff counselling and psychological support service has been invaluable to me. The access to something like that has been a real bonus to the job, and I am so lucky that I have been able to access free counselling when I need it. My counsellor was also able to come along to a case conference to support me when my mental health was particularly bad - again, this was invaluable. I see a counsellor regularly at the moment. They can also provide help with mindfulness training and other courses to support staff with their mental wellbeing.

My conditions are chronic, so I go through periods of wellness and periods of illness. HR get involved in helping me make adjustments when I am ill, but well enough to be in work, such as "time outs" when I need them. They have also been incredibly supportive when my illnesses have required time off work.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

The challenges I have faced in my career, regarding my health, have taught me how resilient I am. I have learnt to try not to allow myself to be defined by me at my worst. I know that I am a capable person, and though depression tells me I am not, a valued member of the team

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

If I could give my younger self any advice it would be to give myself more credit for my strengths.

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

I would love to tell other people with mental illness - you are not alone, you have nothing to be ashamed of, and please reach out for help and support. I found that discussing my illness when I was well as well as when I was ill meant that the University was able to support me all along the way, and I am really grateful for that

Lekshmi Kailas

2000:	M.Sc. (Physics), University of Kerala, India
2001:	B.Ed. (Physical Sciences) University of Kerala, India
2001-05:	Ph.D. (Materials Physics) Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
2005-12:	Post-doctoral Research Associate, University

2005-12: Post-doctoral Research Associate, University of Sheffield, UK

- 2012-13: Visiting Scientist with Department of Atomic Energy (Government of India), IGCAR Kalpakkam, India
- 2013-18: Instrument Scientist at Bernal Institute, University of Limerick, Ireland
- 2019: Experimental officer in AFM, School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leeds, UK



I graduated in Physics in 2000 and in Science Education in 2001 from the University of Kerala and then progressed to do a PhD at Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

I then worked as a researcher for the University of Sheffield, as scientist with Government of India and as staff scientist with University of Limerick before landing my current role as an Experimental Officer in Atomic Force Microscopy in the School of Physics and Astronomy.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

I am an Experimental officer in Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) at the School of Physics and Astronomy. I am in charge of the AFM Facility which houses some of the most modern systems with a wide range of capabilities for investigations at the nanoscale. I manage the AFM laboratories, provide support and training for researchers and students from different departments, and provide microscopy services to external users. I am also involved in various research projects with colleagues from different departments in the University.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I have a fascination for science and scientific developments and this made me choose Physics as my field of study. My education and years of research work prepared me for this career but ultimately, I chose this path because I enjoy what I do at work and I am thrilled to do it for the long term. My job helps me to satisfy my curiosity as a scientist, gain new experiences and constantly improve myself.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I like working with people as well as with instruments. The University environment helps me interact with the best minds from different disciplines: expert professors, gifted researchers and enthusiastic students. At work, I am surrounded by people who share my interest and enthusiasm in different projects. I also get to work with state-of-the-art scientific instruments and new techniques. I am able to effectively utilise the skills and expertise I have acquired over the years. I am constantly exposed to innovative scientific ideas and I am learning new things every day.

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

My maternal grandfather, who was a school headmaster, piqued my interest in science from a very early age. It was my aunt (a close family friend, who was also my college professor) who guided me towards research. My parents made sure that I received the best education possible which has helped me to pursue my current career. Their encouragement and emotional support motivated me to follow my dreams.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

My experiences have taught me that you never know what you are capable of until you try. I have learnt that one failed experiment does not mean that I should give up. Failure is also part of the learning process and sometimes it helps us to look at the problem from a different perspective and come up with an even better solution. I have also come to appreciate and value more the people in my life and I am grateful that they were/are there for me.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

After finishing my PhD, I had to decide between staying back to continue doing post-doctoral studies or going back to India. Being away from my family was a tough decision. Some of my friends went to work in industry after their post-doctoral studies and I was also tempted to explore that option. But in the end, I stayed on in academia as opportunities came my way.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Don't be afraid to explore new avenues. You might have been focussing intently on one path that made you ignore other opportunities. You don't have to follow the footsteps of others. Believe in yourself and always think positive.



- 1981: Bachelors in Engineering, University of Kerala, India
 1982: Worked in Structural Engineering for 18 months
 1986: Masters in Civil Engineering, University of Calicut, India
 1991: PhD, Queen's University, Belfast
 1991: Postdoctoral researcher, Queen's University, Belfast
 1993: Lecturer, Queen's University, Belfast
- 1996: Senior Lecturer, Queen's University, Belfast
- 1998: Reader, Queen's University, Belfast
- 1999: Professor, Queen's University, Belfast
- 2014: Chair in Structural Engineering, Universty of Leeds
- 2015: Head of School, Civil Engineering, University of Leeds



I am Chair in Structural Engineering and also the Head of the School of Civil Engineering.

WHO INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

My introduction to civil engineering was through my dad. I was fascinated by the things he did.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO PURSUE AN ACADEMIC CAREER?

I love teaching, I worked as a teaching assistant for six months in India before working as a practising engineer for 18 months, but I enjoyed teaching better. I also enjoy research and international activity. I had numerous opportunities to move into administration, but I preferred roles where teaching and research could go with administration.

HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THE BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY?

I always remind myself about the purpose of life and why I am doing the things I do. The way I consider it is by asking myself; how can the abilities I have be used to support other people? And when it comes to family, I am always there for them, otherwise the purpose is lost.

WHAT QUALITIES HAVE HELPED YOU IN ACHIEVING THE BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR WORK AND FAMILY LIFE?

I live in the present time. When I do something, whether at work or with family, I am fully engaged and dedicated in what I am doing at that moment. It took me some time to develop this skill.

The mistake people usually make is that they don't allocate time for family, social life and work. Everyone needs time for all of these in order to keep a health work life balance.

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

I didn't push my ideas and personality towards other people. Instead, I gave them the chance to get to know me and this is what has helped me achieve my goals.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST IN YOUR CAREER?

Working with world class people in both academic and professional circles and hence getting a sense of achievement.

AWARDS YOU'VE RECEIVED

The most memorable was when I got the Royal Academy of Engineering Fellowship from HRH Prince Phillip in 2014.

THINGS YOU WOULD WANT YOUR YOUNGER SELF TO DO DIFFERENTLY?

The one thing I would change is the time I would spend with my parents, brother and sister. I think I was so focused on my studies and so this reduced the time spent with close family. When people grow up, time is demanded by many things, while at a younger age there is more time.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING?

I go to social events arranged by a charitable organisation that I support. I also spend some time with my family, we go out for dinner, watch a movie or try and visit family friends. Often, I drive to Glasgow to visit my daughter.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES, THE GOOD AND THE BAD?

From the good experiences, I realised that in any society there are numerous good people in all walks of life and I should try and find them and should stay close to them. From the bad experiences, probably one dominates, which is that my ability to ignore or forgive bad attitudes towards me is sometimes seen as a weakness in me by these people. FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Nicole Hondow



- 2007: PhD in Chemistry, University of Western Australia
- 2008: Postdoctoral Researcher in Electron Microscopy University of Leeds
- 2012: AXA Independent Research Fellowship
- 2015: University Academic Fellow in Materials Characterisation, University of Leeds
- 2020: Associate Professor in Materials Characterisation, University of Leeds.



I started as a University Academic Fellow (UAF) in the area of Materials Characterisation in 2015, which is a role that involves both teaching and research.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED WHILE IN LEEDS?

I joined the University as a postdoctoral research assistant after completing my PhD in Chemistry in Australia. I really enjoyed the work I was doing and the people I worked with, so I continued on a second project. Following this I was encouraged and supported in applying for independent fellowships.

I find both science and engineering really interesting and enjoy having the opportunity to work with lots of different people.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

There have been a few challenges, especially being away from family and friends and starting fresh in a new country. Also, the transition from postdoctoral researcher to academic has been interesting; I am still learning how to get a balance between lecturing, supervising, acquiring research grants, and all the other things that unexpectedly come with being an academic!

HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THOSE CHALLENGES?

By deciding the areas that I need to focus on and improve in, learning to prioritise, and continuing to seek advice from mentors.

I enjoy the combination of research and teaching and I love working with researchers who are passionate about their projects.

HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE?

I went on a fantastic course through the University that helped me achieve worklife balance. One of the main things I've learnt is that it's OK to say 'no' to some of the things you are asked to do; therefore you can prioritise the things that are important to you, in both work and at home.

AWARDS

I was the first person at the University to be awarded an AXA research fellowship in 2012. Through this fellowship I had two years of independent research where I could continue to use the amazing equipment we have here at Leeds, to build collaborations, and to develop my career.

Noemy Ellis Martin

- 1999: Bachelors in Literature and Politics, University of California San Diego (UCSD), USA
- 2002: Assistant Director, Engineering Student Services (UCSD)
- 2007: Masters in Education (Postsecondary Educational Leadership: Student Services), San Diego State University (SDSU), USA
- 2008: Student Education Service (SES) Manager, Mechanical Engineering, University of Leeds
- 2013: Maternity leave for 11 months and part-time (80%) on return to work
- 2015: Maternity leave for 10 months an part-time (60%) on return to work
- 2018: Student Education Service Manager (Programme Support), EEMaPS



CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY?

I manage the programme support function within the Student Education Service (SES) for the thirteen schools (including SWJT-Joint School) in the Faculties of Engineering, Environment, Mathematics and Physical Sciences (EEMaPS). I work in partnership with the SES Management Team and academic leaders to ensure the processes and practices within the Faculties are managed effectively, delivered consistently and to agreed quality standards, all with the end goal to provide an excellent student experience.

WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE THIS CAREER?

After double-majoring in Political Science and Spanish Literature, I worked in corporate America, but I felt my job was soulless and really missed the excitement of being on a University campus. I returned to work at my alma mater (UC San Diego), starting from a front desk role, moving up eventually to an Assistant Director role in the Engineering Student Services Office. I also decided to pursue an MA in Postsecondary Educational Leadership (Student Services) to gain the theoretical knowledge of HE student development.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN YOUR CAREER?

As the University is a large institution, it is important to develop excellent working relationships with colleagues, in order to work collaboratively to implement change. You need a lot of negotiation skills and patience, as change takes time.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I enjoy the variety in my role, and the ability that I have to make changes that directly improve the student experience. Universities are always changing and there are always things happening. What I love the most is the fact that I am continuously learning and always improving myself. It's not the kind of job where you'll become bored at some point, because our roles are always evolving due to internal and external influences. I work in collaboration with a great team of staff across the University and Service, and really appreciate the supportive work environment and diversity of the colleagues that I work with daily. It really makes my job enjoyable.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU FEEL STARTING A FAMILY HAS HAD ON YOUR CAREER?

As a working parent, I have found that there is constantly a balance that needs to be sought between my professional and personal life. As such, I am lucky that this is recognised and supported at Leeds University, so I have found that my reduction in FTE to part-time has allowed me to find the perfect balance that works for me (and my employer).

HOW DID RETURNING TO WORK FROM MATERNITY LEAVE GO?

I was managing two Engineering schools and the Assessment function before I took my second maternity leave in November 2015. At the time I knew that I wanted to spend time with my children when they were young, and we don't have family nearby. Due to the support received from my line manager and academic colleagues, I was able to shift to working on a 60% FTE basis upon my return to work in 2016. In my Monday/Tuesday/ Thursday working pattern, I only ever have one day's worth of work to catch up on, and this allows me to keep up-to-date with what is happening across the School and Faculty. Although there was an adjustment period, I think it has gone brilliantly.

WHAT POLICIES IN THE UNIVERSITY HELPED YOU WITH THAT TRANSITION?

HR Policies such as Keep-in-Touch Days and utilising Flexible Working were very useful when coming back to work after a maternity leave. They helped me make the transition back to work gradually and allow me to have an excellent work-life balance

Try to learn from experiences, good and bad. It's important to be positive, efficient, and enjoy life. Life is short!

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES?

Always be ambitious and strive to never stop learning, but remember that "Work to live, not live to work!" It's all about balance.

Samantha Pugh

1997:	BSc Colour and Polymer Chemistry, University of Leeds
2001:	PhD Colour Chemistry, University of Leeds
2001:	Teaching Fellow, Applied Polymer Chemistry, University of Leeds
2004-06:	Three periods of Maternity Leave (ranging from 4-6 months)
2007:	Switched to part time (60%)

2008: Faculty Learning and Teaching Enhancement Officer

- 2013: University Student Education Fellow Award
- 2014: Lecturer in STEM Education (School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leeds)
- 2015: Switched back to Full Time
- 2017: National Teaching Fellow Award
- 2018: Associate Professor in STEM Education
- 2019: Director of Student Education (Physics and Astronomy)



I started my career in the field of Colour Chemistry.

I became interested in Education so became a Lecturer, then an Associate Professor in STEM education before progressing to the Director of Student Education role for the School of Physics and Astronomy.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

Associate Professor in STEM Education and Director of Student Education for Physics and Astronomy.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

I've never had a clear career destination in mind. I've always had a keen interest in teaching students Science and in the development of Education. I also enjoy developing new ideas to test and implement. Throughout my career I have just looked for opportunities that seemed interesting and would provide me with challenge. I am not someone who likes to keep doing the same thing year in, year out, so leading new projects and initiatives has suited me.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I enjoy working in Education. I love the opportunity to meet new students who have so much potential, and be able to play a part in helping them to have a successful future. I like being able to undertake research and lead new projects. I didn't start out with this career destination in mind – I have always just gone with what interested me at the time.

WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO CONTINUE IN ACADEMIA?

I like the freedom academia gives to explore things that interest you most. Whilst there are many things that are set and part of the job, we also have lots of freedom to explore and implement new ideas. I love having the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded people from across the world. Being able to attend conferences to make connections is definitely a perk of the job!

I've found the flexible ways of working extremely valuable. I'd go as far as to say without this, I would have probably resigned, as this level of flexibility has been vital to enable me to also look after my three children.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

Working with students, particularly on project work. Seeing them come out of themselves, shine and then hearing their success stories. Also being able to try out new ideas and get involved with all kinds of activities at all levels of the University. I've always felt a warm welcome in whatever I've been involved with.

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

A world-renowned Professor of Chemical Education plus the STEM Education community in the UK has influenced my career choice. Meeting like-minded people at a conference in 2010 made me realise that I could build a career doing what I loved! I hadn't met people doing similar work up until that point.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

Flexible working, including flexible hours has made all the difference in the world to me. Without it, it would have been impossible to continue. Coupled with the policy, is having an understanding line manager too. During the years when my children were young, I was fortunate that my line manager took the attitude that as long as the work was done, and done well, the means by which I achieved it were not so important. This was so helpful.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

Always be enthusiastic. Always support others to be enthusiastic too! Don't expect that everything will go right, or even go your way. Learn from things that don't go well and then move on. Always deliver on your promises. And don't take yourself too seriously!

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

Fitting everything in. Being enthusiastic coupled with a commitment to always deliver on promises can lead to over-commitment!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Don't be afraid to chase your dreams, even when other people tell you they are impossible. And travel more – I wish I had taken up the opportunity for international travel when I was younger and had no commitments!

WHAT SURPRISING THINGS WOULDN'T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I've got three teenagers and six cats!

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

Choose your attitude. In any aspect of life, we can choose to see the bad or the good – try to see the positives and you will be happier.

Taisir Elgorashi

2004: BSc, University of Khartoum, Sudan
2005: MSc, Swansea University
2009: PhD in Optical Networking, University of Leeds
2010: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Leeds
2012: Maternity leave for 6 months

2015: Lectureship, University of Leeds2015: Maternity leave for 5 months2017: Maternity leave for 4 months



I graduated from University of Khartoum in 2004 and then progressed to do an MSc at Swansea University. Later, I received funding to do my PhD in Optical Networking at Leeds. I never had a clear plan, the opportunities just came along and they were too good to miss. I am currently a full-time lecturer in the School of Electronic and Electrical Engineering.

WHAT CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED WHEN COMING TO THE UK AND STARTING A FAMILY?

Settling in the UK and having a career here was not that difficult as everyone (family and university) was very supportive. However, there were some sacrifices that had to be made. hen starting a family, for example, my husband and I were apart for a while because his work isn't based in the UK. But when you have your mind focused on your goals you do not see them as challenges, they become part of the journey to success.

For every situation there is a right balance that can keep everyone happy long term. So no need to sacrifice your career to have a happy family!

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND RETURNING FROM MATERNITY LEAVE?

I took a six-month maternity leave for my first child, five months for my second child and four months for my third child.

Coming back after maternity leave was not really difficult as I stayed in touch during that period and the work environment was very supportive.

HOW DID THE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE FACULTY AND HR POLICIES HELP YOU ACHIEVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

I benefited from the flexibility my job provides, i.e. I do not have set start and finish times. I am able to be flexible with these which helps with childcare arrangements. I am also able to work from home when needed.

The difficult part is finding the balance, sometimes I need to spend a few days apart from my children but once I get the chance I try to compensate them.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNT DURING YOUR JOURNEY?

I have learnt to think for myself and take decisions independently after setting my priorities. I have also learnt that surrounding myself with the right people can be crucial to success.

Enjoy the journey itself as there is no guarantee to reach the destination.

ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Prioritise and focus on the important things. Be open to advice provided by others.



1985:	BSc(Hons) Chemistry, University of Durham
1989:	PhD in Organometallic Chemistry, University of Durhan
1989:	SERC-NATO Postdoctoral Fellowship, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
1990:	Lecturer, University of Leeds
1995:	Senior Lecturer, University of Leeds
2009:	UG Admissions Tutor, School of Chemistry

- 2009-12: Became a dad twice
- 2012: Schools Liaison Officer, School of Chemistry
- 2013: Postgraduate Progressions Officer, School of Chemistry
- 2016: E&I and Athena SWAN Chair, School of Chemistry, 0.1 FTE
- 2019: School Academic Lead for Inclusive Practice, School of Chemistry, 0.2 FTE



I have been an Associate Professor since 2005. My research domain is Soft Matter Chemistry.

Recently I have taken on additional roles as the Equality and Inclusion School Lead and Athena SWAN Chair for Chemistry in 2016. I also work as a School Academic Lead for Inclusion Practice for the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

Currently I'm an Associate Professor in Chemistry, School of Chemistry, University of Leeds.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

This is a really interesting question as, from my perspective, the word "progression" is probably not the best fit in terms of how my career has been. In my 30 years here, I've been so fortunate to have been able to contribute to many different aspects of Science, the University, and student experience. There's been no plan, just following my passions and being supremely fortunate to be granted those opportunities.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I was always interested in Science as a kid. mainly in things connected with space, so naturally gravitated towards Sciencebased subjects. In terms of career though, I never had any "career plan" to become an academic until perhaps at the late PhD-early Postdoctoral stage. When I look back on it now though, I can see that a career in academia suited me as I love the freedom to pursue what interests me with as little constraint as possible. Perhaps that would have been possible to do in other sectors, but Science and academia always held a pull for me. Strangely now that I'm 30 years on I find just as strong a pull now from areas that I would never have considered earlier on; such as Philosophy, Ethics and all forms of creative expression.

WHAT PERSUADED YOU TO CONTINUE IN ACADEMIA?

Simply put; it has been such a rich, emotional roller-coaster of a journey.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

All aspects which place creativity and joy at their centre

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE?

So many people to name in such a short space. My parents for sure; many teachers down the years and Carl Sagan's Cosmos series stand out as helping me get into academia. Thereafter, every single student and colleague with whom I've interacted over the years has helped influence, and continues to influence, my choices.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

As all good support mechanisms should; as and when they are needed, effectively and without judgement

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES THE GOOD AND BAD ONES?

For me they both say the same thing; follow your passions

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED IN YOUR CAREER?

Hanging in there!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Hang in there Terry. It's the ride not the destination!

WHAT SURPRISING THINGS WOULDN'T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

That's a good question. Here are three things about me that are pretty well hidden.

- (i) I have gypsy roots through my maternal grandmother
- (ii) I write poetry (badly!)
- (iii) I am a passionate West Ham United fan (oh dear!)

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

I guess the only thing I would offer in the way of advice is to follow your heart and never be afraid to change.

Thomas Ranner

2009:	Masters of	Mathematics.	Universit	v of Warwick
				, or maninor

- 2013: PhD in Mathematics, University of Warwick
- 2013: Move to School of Computing, University of Leeds, fo EPSRC Doctoral Prize Fellowship
- 2015: Postdoctoral Research fellow, University of Leeds
- 2017: Lecturer, University of Leeds
- 2017: Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship, University of Leeds
- 2019: 3 Months shared parental leave



I am a Lecturer in the School of Computing. I recently took 3 months of shared parental leave during my son's first year, this has helped me to create a wonderful bond with him.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS?

I am a lecturer in the School of Computing supported by a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I really stumbled into this career without much prior planning. I really enjoy the many varied day to day activities I get to do. I like the excitement of getting to know a research problem very deeply and trying to work out how to get something working. But I also love finding the right way to share that knowledge for different audiences either for publications, talks, through teaching or outreach.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU'VE PROGRESSED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

On paper the progress through my career seems quite straight forward. At the end of my PhD, my partner and I were looking to move closer to both our families and I was lucky to find my first job at Leeds. It was an independent position which gave me lots of time to travel and explore my own ideas (whilst renovating our first home). During this time I met my post-doctoral supervisor who is still a very useful collaborator. At the end of my time as a post-doctoral researcher I really didn't want another short term contract. I applied to several permanent academic jobs with a deadline to secure a job or move on. Luckily this worked out!

I have the flexibility to choose where and when I work. This has also allowed me to spend more time supporting my wife.

WHICH PARTS OF YOUR JOB DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

One of the main reasons to stay in my current job is the flexibility to choose where and when I work. This has also allowed me to spend more time supporting my wife in her job. I now spend as much time as possible with my son too. He really does change every day so time spent with him is never wasted.

HOW HAS HR POLICY SUPPORTED YOU?

I was lucky to take 3 months shared parental leave in my son's first year. It has helped me create a wonderful bond with him and to better understand his needs. It's a time that I look back on so fondly. There are not many times in life that you can take such an extended break from working to focus on other things. My time off also allowed my wife to get back to work too. I now work from home a lot which allows me to avoid wasting time commuting.

WHAT SURPRISING THINGS WOULDN'T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I live out in the countryside which gives a great quality of life and long commute.

ANY ADVICE YOU WANT TO GIVE?

Any new fathers should take as much time off work as possible and to not work at all during this time if possible. Leaving childcare to women only is missing out on a fantastic opportunity!

Any new fathers should take as much time off work as possible and to not work at all during this time if possible.

Virginia Pensabene

- 2004: Bachelors and MSc in Electrical and Electronic Engineering, University of Pisa, Italy
- 2008: Exchange researcher at the Department of Life Science Medicine, Waseda University, Japan
- 2009: PhD in Humanoid Technologies, University of Genova and Italian Institute of Technology, Italy Maternity leave for 6 months CEO for WIN Medical Company, Italy (2009-2011)
- 2011: Postdoctoral Research Associate in Biomedical Engineering. Vanderbilt University, USA
- 2014: Maternity leave for 2 months
- 2015: Research Assistant Professor in Biomedical Engineering Vanderbilt University, USA
- 2016: University Academic Fellow, School of Electronic and Electrical Engineering and School of Medicine and Health, University of Leeds



WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO PURSUE A CAREER IN ACADEMIA?

After having my first child, I spent some time as a CEO for WinMedical, a company that I found with my husband and some friends. At that time, I got the chance to experience the work environment in industry, and I had to ask myself what do I like more; industry or academia. I realised that I was more interested in academia as I get the chance to solve problems, to be involved in education and to talk to people from different disciplines. And here I am.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I really enjoy working as part of a team. There are things that I just can't do by myself. I also like to receive continuous feedback from my team, students included! That makes me and my group grow and succeed! Academia also offers me the chance to come up with my own research topics and find out more about something that I am really interested in, and that's what keeps me motivated.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND RETURNING TO WORK FROM MATERNITY LEAVE?

I had my first child in Italy, and it was alright because I had time to recover, to plan my new life-as-a-mum, and I also had the support from my family. When I had my second child, I was working in the USA and it was quite challenging because I only had eight weeks to recover. I was told that I couldn't take more time off, otherwise, they wouldn't be able to reserve my position as a postdoc. These cultural differences, together with the need to grow my career, made me and my husband think about moving to the UK. Don't look at what you've achieved in a single day as sometimes it makes you frustrated. Instead, wait till the end of the week and see the results!

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF HR POLICY?

I have not utilised any of the familyfriendly policies of the University yet, but I am aware of HR policies (flexible working, carers leave, etc.) to support us during specific periods when balancing family and work needs can be challenging.

HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR HOME-LIFE AND WORK-LIFE AFFECT EACH OTHER?

Having two children is a huge responsibility because everything needs to be scheduled, especially when they are young. And even when they are busy at school during the day, I always need to be reachable and informed. Sometimes I worried about how my frequent movement from one country to another affects them, but I am happy to hear them speaking different languages, to see them growing without any prejudice or bias, and to expose them to cultural differences.

WHAT SURPRISING FACT WOULDN'T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I like to keep my teenage times alive, I like to listen and sing along to loud rock music in the car.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES, GOOD AND BAD?

I have learnt that sometimes it is better to wait, get things correct and then speak. I don't have to always say something just for the sake of showing my presence. Another precious lesson that I have learnt is that difficult things make us stronger. I remember in University, I was one out of five girls in a class of more than 200 students and one professor said: "You're girls, engineering is not for you and you should stay at home knitting." However, that did not stop me or either of us to quit, instead we managed to get respect from everyone.

YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

I had my first two projects awarded in my first year in Leeds. Now I am planning to focus on how to develop as a Professor, to complete my five-year probation and to spin off a new company with my PhD students here in Leeds.

I also look forward to exploring new cultures and having international collaborations.

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES

HR Policies

The University of Leeds has a wide range of inclusive policies to support all staff including; flexible working, carers leave, generous maternity leave/adoption leave and shared parental leave. The Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences has a dedicated Athena SWAN and Equality and Inclusion committee. The Faculty currently holds an Athena SWAN Silver and Bronze award. The committee and related working groups are continuously working on expanding and broadening the Faculty E&I holistic action plan to ensure all of our staff feel fully supported and are aware of the Faculty and University's inclusive guidance and policy. The committee are constantly gathering feedback and data from staff in order to create actions relevant to what staff are requesting.

To help with raising awareness across the Faculty on the policies and support that is available for our staff, and how to easily access these, the Faculty HR team have an easily accessible Faculty HR Sharepoint site for current staff. This is the first point of contact for information both specific to the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences and University policy, and is a key place where staff can find important and regularly used policies, guidance and available support including the family friendly and flexible working policies. We have a dedicated and approachable Faculty HR team and HR contacts in each School and Faculty services, to ensure that our staff members' queries can be answered efficiently and effectively. We ensure that we provide thorough consistent information for all our staff, including inductions for our new starters and ongoing support for our current staff. Please do not hesitate to search our internal Faculty HR SharePoint or contact the Faculty HR team: engineeringhr@leeds.ac.uk

For the latest information please refer to the University's HR website http://hr.leeds.ac.uk

Example Equality and Inclusion Activities

- We have created two **Wellbeing rooms**, which can be used, for example, to express milk, take medication and rest for health related reasons. One is located in the School of Chemical and Process Engineering the other is located in EC Stoner.
- We have played a leading role in shaping the University's guidance regarding support for those returning from extended periods of leave related to caring, e.g. maternity and shared parental leave.
- We play a leading role in organising the University's annual LGBT STEM day, usually held in July. We hosted an LGBT STEM panel as part of the University's LGBT+ History Month. We are part of the Building Equality working group. This is an external LGBT+ Construction Working Group, which aims to challenge and change the construction industry to be more LGBT+ inclusive.
- We ensure that all those involved in recruitment have undergone E&I training, and undertaken in person unconscious bias training, if possible. Our new starter survey shows that 99% of respondents said that the interview process ran smoothly and was carried out professionally, which would suggest that our recruiters take a fair, professional approach.
- We interviewed women who had been offered academic posts with us, to help us to determine how to attract more **female Academic staff.** They said that having the opportunity to gain a sense of whether the School would be a good cultural fit for them was a major factor in their decision-making about accepting a position. As a result we now provide academic interviewees with more opportunities to meet students and less senior academic staff when they visit for an interview. We follow this up with feedback via our 'new starter' and 'recruitment' surveys.

EPSRC NORTHERN POWER INCLUSION MATTERS PROJECT



The University of Leeds is taking part in a cross-consortium research project *Inclusion Matters - Northern Power*, this aims to shape an active inclusive culture in the Engineering and Physical Sciences community, academic and beyond through a variety of initiatives and project activities. The project invites early career researchers, established career researchers and senior academic leaders in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences who feel they are **underrepresented in their discipline*** to register for a range of opportunities including career development, mentoring and networking with colleagues / industry.

*Examples of under-represented groups and individuals that may benefit from the project activities include: ethnicity, neuro-diversity, mental health, physical ability, sexual orientation, gender, caring responsibility, first in their family to enter academia and many more.

See the eligibility page for more information: https://northernpowerinclusion.org/

Activities within this project include:

- Shared Characteristics Mentoring
- Networking and Leadership Development
- Collaboration with Industry
- Reciprocal Mentoring

Some of the benefits of being involved in the programme include: career development, research advice, shadowing opportunities, exposure to decision makers/making, increased confidence and impacting cultural change within the University and beyond.

To register for the activities including to become a mentor / mentee:

- 1) Visit https://northernpowerinclusion.org/
- 2) Register (button at the top of the page)
- 3) Fill out the agreement and questionnaire

STAFF NETWORKS



The University of Leeds currently has 5 staff networks, for BME, LGBT+, Muslim, Mental Health and Disability and Women. They are organised by staff for staff, providing a space for staff to reach out to colleagues outside of the University's support services such as Staff Counselling and Safety, Wellbeing and Health. They are recognised as being crucial to the promotion of the University's wider equality and inclusion agenda and through their activities, and can help to open the door to changing the culture of an institution or organisation.

The LGBT+ Staff Network has a webpage of LGBT+ Role Models and Allies who work at the University. Increasing the visibility of LGBT+ Role Models and Allies can help to encourage, influence and develop others. It is important that staff and students see people like them at all levels within our University.

https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/initiatives/ lbgt-role-models/

Staff network link: https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/staff-networks/



Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences University of Leeds Leeds, LS2 9JT

https://eps.leeds.ac.uk