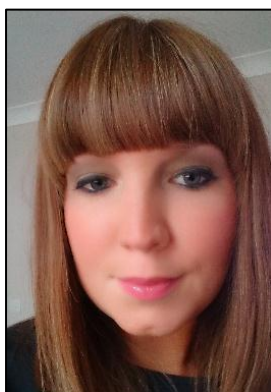


Reflections from Current Students on the QMU MSc in Dispute Resolution

Queen Margaret University's MSc Dispute Resolution – the world's first masters programme aimed specifically at professional and ombudsman complaint handling staff – launched successfully earlier this year. The course is largely available online and is designed to be relevant to professional ombudsman and complaint staff around the world. In January 2015, we were delighted to welcome nine students, from a range of organisations including the Legal Ombudsman and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. As we prepare for our next intake in September 2015, some of our current students reflect on their experiences of the course so far.



Name: *Sophie Carmichael*

Organisation: *The Legal Ombudsman*

Role/ experience: *Senior Investigator. I have worked for the Legal Ombudsman since it was established in 2010, and before that was a caseworker for the predecessor body- The Legal Complaints Service.*

Experience so far: *When I applied for the qualification in dispute resolution, I had recently returned from maternity leave and it seemed like*

the ideal opportunity to develop myself professionally. Learning about the significance of the wider cultural context in dispute resolution, in addition to how redress systems are designed was particularly interesting and I really enjoyed building on this knowledge when completing the assignments. I'm looking forward to undertaking the modules in Complaint Management and Consumer Behaviour as I expect these to be particularly relevant to my day to day role at the Legal Ombudsman. This course has already developed my understanding of the dispute resolution sector and I am looking forward to continuing to study for a qualification which is very relevant to my career.



Name: *Sinead Cook*

Organisation: *Public Services Ombudsman Wales*

Role/Experience: *I started as an Assessment Officer for the Ombudsman in December 2008 and became an Investigator the following year. I am in the Complaints Advice Team at the moment which provides a front line service. In addition to investigations I also negotiate a number of settlements between complainants and relevant bodies.*

Experience so far: *I undertook both the professional certificate and award in Ombudsman and complaint handling practice which QMU run at undergraduate level so when the MSc came up I was really excited to be involved as there is so much to learn about the mechanics of what I do every day and hoped it would help me perform my role better.*

One module down and I already feel like I have a greater understanding of why I do what I do, the history and cultural values that form the service I belong to and that shape other dispute resolution services. I enjoyed the collaborative working, a long forgotten skill as I am used to autonomy in my workload management and I am getting used to the online learning.

The support provided by the teaching staff is really good and you feel like they want you to be successful which spurs you on. There is a lot of reading but the workload is manageable even with a fulltime job and a four year old to look after.



Name: Susan Fortune

Organisation: Large Global Bank.

Role/ experience: *My role is a Complaints Team Manager within a large global organisation. I have worked within the financial sector for 29 years. For 15 of those years I have been a Complaints Manager within an Investment House and my current organisation.*

Experience so far: *I enrolled onto this programme because I wanted to develop myself further and gain a qualification which would benefit my career. I have learnt that Dispute Resolution is so much more than just resolving complaints. Complaint Handling is starting to be recognised as a specialist skill within the UK and this programme is essential in developing this field of expertise. I have enjoyed working with people across the country and having my thoughts and views challenged in a fun and safe environment. Having passed the first module I am especially looking forward to the next module on Complaint Management and Consumer Behaviour. I would recommend anyone who deals with complaints at any level to take this course.*



Name: Nicky Hampton

Organisation: Legal Ombudsman (LeO)

Role/ experience: *I have been an Investigator at LeO for almost a year. Prior to that I was a freelance academic proof reader and worked at the Citizens Advice Bureau, giving money advice and acting as a Debt Relief Order Intermediary.*

Experience so far: *Before joining LeO I studied for the Professional Certificate in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling with QMU. I leapt at the opportunity to study the MSc as a result of attending that course, as I found it so informative and interesting.*

I hoped that further study of the topic would inform my work at LeO, as well as broadening my knowledge of the world of Dispute Resolution. The foundations module for the MSc has met those expectations and more. I have learnt to reframe complaints as a problem to be solved by both parties working together, if at all possible, and the cultural section of the module has helped to me to walk in the shoes of complainants when considering their viewpoint.

I am particularly looking forward to the practical mediation module, as this is an area in which I am hoping to develop over time. Overall, I think the course is ideal for anyone with an interest in becoming more effective at complaint handling, together with those who would like to gain knowledge of the history of our legal system and, perhaps more importantly, where it is heading in the future.

Name: Deborah McIntyre

Organisation: Legal Ombudsman

Role/ experience: Team Leader. I have worked for the Ombudsman for 4 years and prior to that worked as an Area Director in retail banking.

Experience so far: I signed up to enhance my understanding and be able to support my team in how they investigate and provide service to parties.

I have learnt about how different cultures approach dispute resolution has helped me give guidance to others on the best way to approach cases. In addition a better understanding of the barriers to accessing justice, and different views of what this means, has given me a greater appreciation for the difficulties complainants' experience. The course so far has also introduced me to the different forms of conflict and disputes, forms of dispute resolution and redress systems.

I have enjoyed all of the subjects so far but would put the different forms of dispute resolution at the top.

I am looking forward to learning more about mediation as I believe this to be an opportunity to take learning from this to enhance our own approach and because of personal interest.

If this is an area of interest for you then the course provides a good variety of modules. However, be prepared to work.

If you have been inspired by these reflections and would like to join Sophie, Sinead, Sudan, Nicky, Deborah and other on the course – it is not too late! Applications for entry to the MSc Dispute Resolution in September remain open until **31 July 2015** (with some potential for flexibility thereafter). The prospectus is available here:

<http://www.qmu.ac.uk/be/Research/CIC/Doc/MSc%20Dispute%20Resolution.pdf>.

Applications can be made online here:

http://www.qmu.ac.uk/courses/PGCourse.cfm?c_id=272

If you would like to find out more or have an informal discussion about the course, please contact Chris Gill, Programme Leader, at cgill@qmu.ac.uk.