

Q & A With

Kathryn Rose Brian

By Daisy Dobrijevic
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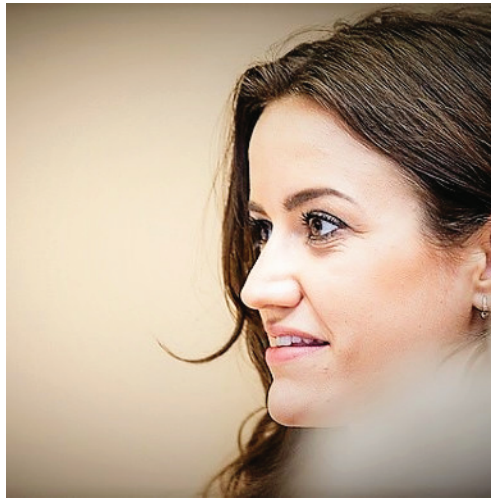
Here we talk to Kathryn Brian, a Manchester University and University of Nottingham graduate. With a broad scientific background Rosie answers some questions about her degrees and how she got to where she is today.

Broadly speaking, what is your academic background?

It is so varied! For my undergraduate degree I studied Biology at the University of Manchester. I really enjoyed the medical science side of things however, after an ecological course in my 1st year I started to lean towards zoological and environmental modules. Leaving me at the end of the degree with a broad range of interests and skills. I then ended up doing a PhD at the University of Nottingham, in soil microbiology which actually ended up having a heavy soil chemistry focus! Funny really as I don't even hold a chemistry A-level!

Crikey that is varied! So what would be your one peice of advice to someone currently completing a PhD?

Naming just one is too hard, can I give a few? Mainly, I guess it's to plan, plan, plan. If you know what you need to do, in both the short and long term, it's much more manageable both physically and mentally. Oh and one more thing, find a coping mechanism! A sport, a craft, start baking, anything! There are times when things are going wrong and no-one knows why (not even your supervisor) the stress can get too much and in 3rd year you reach a slump as you've been doing the project for so long. Find outlets other than your work to keep you happy and the stress of things going wrong won't seem quite so catastrophic.



Great peice of advice, so what job so you have now?

I work as a Pesticide Regulatory Specialist in the Chemical Regulations Division at the Health and Safety Executive who work to approve or refuse plant protection products based on the legislation.

Sounds so interesting! When starting you PhD did you see yourself going down this particular career path?

Definitely not! I didn't know what regulations and policy there were surrounding agricultural products nor that the job even existed. But after a placement at Sense About Science EU, I was exposed to agricultural and environmental policy at the EU level which developed my interest and it all really expanded from there!

Did you find it easy to find? Where did you see it advertised?

Job searching is never an easy process is it?! I had alerts set up to my email from a variety of jobsites which meant many jobs passed me by. Although as the job was advertised on many sites, as well as the civil service website, it stood out straight away.

Great ideas, so what do you think made you stand out from the rest of the applicants?

Haha crikey! I mean the PhD helped, specifically the Doctoral Training Program that I was part of. While I was applying I compared my CV that I wrote at undergrad to the postgrad equivalent and I was amazed by how much I had gained through the 4 years of my PhD. I did a 3 month placement in Brussels at Sense About Science EU, where I helped organise events in European parliament which developed my communication, organisation and time keeping skills as well as provided me a bit of experience other than my PhD! The PhD itself shouldn't be under-estimated in terms of the skill set it provides to: project management, people management, planning and so so much more!

Gosh, you have a lot of experience. Do you believe that what you know is as important as who you know?

I do, although many would disagree. I have been afforded many opportunities, both through established contacts and from scratch (so to speak) and some of the best opportunities are the ones I have set up myself. Plus the success feels much sweeter if it's based on what you know!

Is there any advice you would give to a student unsure of what career path to follow?

Just go for it! Try a bit of everything. You don't know you don't like something until you've tried. The more strings to you bow the more skills you have and the more jobs you rule out. You figure out what you want from a job by trying.

