



Full name: *Professor Nicky King*

What subject did you study? *PhD in Chemistry*

Year of Graduation: *2005*

Current Job Title: *Associate Dean for Education*

Current Employer/Organisation Name: *University of Exeter*

You can [find out more about Nicky on the University website.](#)

What is your disciplinary and educational background?

BSc Chemistry with European Study

PhD Chemistry

I am a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy

What made you decide to become an academic?

I didn't really, I just fell into it. An opportunity to do some chemistry teaching at the university opened up just as I finished my PhD. I knew I wanted to stay in science but hadn't found the right post-doctoral position. It also worked for me personally as my boyfriend, now husband, was working in Exeter.

What has been your career path/trajectory to date?

I was an associate teaching fellow for two years before being promoted to teaching fellow in 2007. In 2010 the structure for those mainly involved in teaching here at Exeter changed and I was promoted to senior lecturer in the education and scholarship job family. The University has changed almost beyond recognition over the last 11 years and I've been in the fortunate position to be able to shape some of those changes and forge a career path which simply didn't exist when I started. One of the things I'm most proud of is my involvement in the establishment of the education and scholarship job family to replace teaching fellows, which improves progression for those who are mainly involved in education and leadership of education and also raises our profile within the institution, putting us on a level playing field with the more typical education and research academics.

I've been involved in a number of scholarship activities over this time, in addition to a significant teaching load. I coordinate the schools liaison and widening participation activities for Biosciences, am engaged in pedagogic research around the transition from school to HE and also on the use of technology in learning and teaching. I've also been senior tutor in Biosciences and am now the

Director of Studies for Natural Sciences, which is a new programme seeing our first graduating students this July.

What are the good bits about being an academic?

I love working with our students. Despite it sounding a bit corny I love making a difference to the students and hopefully passing on to them some of my enthusiasm for science and fascination with chemistry. I find work a much more boring (though less stressful!) place in the long summer holiday as it seems such an empty place without the students around. I think it's easy for academics to become caught up in the stresses and administrative frustrations and forget how lucky we are that we get to pursue things which we're really interested in and which excite us. It's also a very flexible job and in many respects you have much more control over both your career trajectory and on your day to day work in academia than in many other jobs. You don't have people telling you which bits of your subject you have to read, research and write about, you can follow your interests and academic curiosity. There's also, in my experience, good flexibility for working at home and childcare responsibilities.

What are the bad bits about being an academic?

There are periods of a lot of pressure and at times an awful lot of admin, however particularly in E&S these are fairly predictable based on the academic cycle, which does make them easier to deal with.

Having said that academia can be family friendly and flexible this is often not the case early in your career where you will probably have many short term contracts which is really hard and can make it difficult to settle. I was very lucky that I was able to remain at Exeter and got a permanent contract fairly quickly but that's certainly not true for many.

Do you have any tips or advice for PGRs seeking a career in academia?

Remember that you don't have to work 100 hours per week in order to be successful, it seems that there's a lot of pressure amongst PGRs and ECRs to work late into the evening and at weekends, but if you have a life way from the bench you'll be more productive and happier when you are at it.

Learnt when it's expedient to do something 'extra' and when to say no. There are lots of committees, focus groups and additional roles which will impact upon your research and for which there's very little material reward, however some of these are worth doing because they increase your visibility within a department/institution and can lead to valuable networking opportunities. Similarly learn to say no when you're too busy and there's little reward, you have to be a little selfish with these things occasionally.