

Jessica Floyd, MSc One Health alumna, 2014

When did you finish your PGT course at the RVC?

September 2014

What are you doing now?

I am now a Research Assistant in the Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at Imperial College London. My research involves developing mathematical models of infectious diseases, including pneumonia and malaria. In October 2015 I will be embarking on a PhD at the University of Southampton, looking at human and livestock movement patterns in Kenya, and the associated risk of zoonotic disease transmission.

What aspect of the PGT course prepared you best for your career?

The skills I gained while designing and carrying out the research project during the last 6 months of the course were essential to my chosen career path, and thus prepared me best for my career. The freedom to design my own project with the guidance of my supervisors allowed me to develop a specific skill set within infectious disease epidemiology that I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to.

What did you think of the teaching staff on the course?

The teaching staff were knowledgeable, enthusiastic and, most importantly, very supportive. I always felt I could approach any of them with any problems I had, and felt that I was treated as a colleague rather than a student, which I felt was quite different to my experience at undergraduate level. It also surprised me how much I learnt from my peers, who came from a range of different backgrounds and provided a solid network of support throughout the year.

What did you think of the learning and research facilities at the RVC?

The learning and research facilities are extensive, being spread across two campuses. The ability to travel between the two and make full use of all facilities had a positive impact on my learning experience, as each campus provided a different learning environment, yet both had everything I needed for any one day of learning.

Has the PGT course at the RVC enabled your career goals as you had hoped?

The One Health course not only enabled my career goals, but helped me to realise them. The course provided me with a platform to learn and expand the boundaries of my knowledge whilst at the same time focusing my skillset and career goals. The skills I gained on the course were essential to my chosen career in the field of infectious disease epidemiology.

Why did this course appeal to you?

The multidisciplinary approach to infectious disease was what attracted me to the One Health course. I wanted to move into the field of infectious disease and this course provided an interesting pathway which allowed me to build on the skills I gained in my first degree at the same time as acquiring new skills and knowledge which would allow me to shape my career path. The broad range of topics studied allowed me to find a subject that particularly interested me and develop my experience in that subject through the 5-month research project. It was because of the skills I developed in this project that I got my current post as a research assistant at Imperial College.

Coming from a non-health background, what were the challenges you faced on the programme?

At first it was challenging coming from a non-health background, as much of my previous studies focused on the intricacies of molecular and cellular structures and functions, rather than the clinical aspects of biological systems. I didn't have a strong background in infectious diseases (especially animal diseases), but through lectures and reading I soon found that I was able to participate in discussions. Most importantly, I learnt from my peers, who came from a range of different backgrounds and provided a solid network of support throughout the year.

How did the course help you overcome them, and how did your first degree contribute to your studies?

Being based at two universities, the course immersed us in two separate learning environments which contributed to my studies in different ways and enriched the learning experience by allowing me to observe different perspectives on similar topics. This allowed me to overcome the initial challenges of coming from a non-health background by providing many opportunities to learn new topics and eventually specialise in those that interested me most. My first degree provided me with a strong biological background which was useful during the course but I found the more general scientific skills that I got from my first degree (such as conducting research and communicating results) contributed more to my experience on the One Health course.