

Stuart Bevan, Renewable Energy Consultant

When did you leave school and what qualifications did you have?

I left Stromness Academy after completing sixth year in 2006. I obtained an Advanced Higher grade B together with three Highers at grade A, four Highers at grade B and a Higher at grade C.

What were your career ambitions when you were at school?

To be honest, I didn't necessarily have any concrete career ambitions at school as I wasn't sure what I really wanted to do. I also remember that I was always jealous of those who knew exactly what they wanted to do and had a definitive path worked out. It certainly added to the pressure to figure out what I wanted to do.

What did you do after school?

After I finished school, I took a year out and worked at James Wilson (Orkney) Ltd. I started off in the store, moved on to deliveries before eventually working in the office. I used the money I saved to travel to New Zealand with one of my friends which, to date, still remains one of the most worthwhile things I've ever done.

When I returned in 2007, I went to study Scots Law at the University of Strathclyde. This was a four year undergraduate degree and, if you wanted to go into practice, you had to complete a one year Diploma in Professional Legal Practice which I did in 2011.

I then undertook a two year traineeship with Anderson Strathern LLP, a commercial law firm in Edinburgh, which involved four six-month seats in different departments. I stayed with the same firm when I became a newly qualified solicitor and worked in their private client and commercial litigation departments for around two and a half years in total.

I then started to question if being a solicitor was what I wanted to do for the rest of my working life. I came to the conclusion that it wasn't but I needed to decide what my next move should be. I took the rather bold option, in February 2017, to hand in my resignation and take some time away from the legal profession in order to determine my next move. I'd love to be able to say I was cool, calm and collected about stepping away from the comfort of a monthly pay check but there were certainly times I was questioning my decision. However, that self-doubt is only natural and I was, for the most part, confident that I would be able to work out the next steps.

After about two months, I decided to apply to Heriot-Watt in order to undertake a Masters in Renewable Energy Development at their ICIT campus in Stromness. I was accepted on to the course and returned to Stromness in August 2017. I really enjoyed the course but I'd be lying if I said I was a breeze...the mathematical calculations in the technology classes were certainly not the most fun I've ever had.

Once the taught part of the course was completed, it was then time to focus on my dissertation. I had managed to secure myself a summer internship with a local environmental consultancy, Aquatera Ltd, so I spent four days a week working for them and the rest of my time was used to complete my dissertation. It was a pretty hectic summer but I loved it.

Prior to the completion of my internship with Aquatera, I was offered a full time contract as a Renewable Energy Consultant which I was delighted to accept. I'm still with them today and it surprises me, on a daily basis, the broad range of interesting and novel work we are involved in.

Did you enjoy your undergraduate degree while you were studying?

I enjoyed studying Scots Law but there were always subjects that I was more interested in. For example, I was always more engaged by subjects that focused on human rights law, environmental law and constitutional law.

Why did you decide to undertake a Masters, and move from practicing law into renewables?

I had always envisaged myself coming back to Orkney and I recognised that renewables was a growth industry which could afford me that opportunity. It also had the added benefit of being an industry that reflected my values i.e. preserving the planet for future generations and, on a more local level, the creation of more jobs for young folk in Orkney.

I also felt that my legal training would be of interest to potential employers in the county but I realised I needed to boost my knowledge of the renewables industry. It was, therefore, a no-brainer for me to move back home and undertake a Masters in Renewable Energy Development.

Does your undergraduate degree help you in your current role?

Yes, absolutely. A law degree teaches you how to be analytical, approach problems on a structured basis and present your findings in a clear and concise manner. These skills are equally applicable to issues/problems with a renewable energy project, a business proposal or a presentation to an international delegation.

Do you have any advice to anyone for anyone who may be considering a career change or undertaking a post-graduate degree?

With regard to a career change, there are multiple factors which may be under consideration but I can only speak to my experience. For me, it was about assessing my values and determining if they were being best served by my legal career. I came to the conclusion they were not, so I had to make a change. As part of that process I think there are two pieces of advice I would impart:

1. Don't be afraid to make a big decision for fear of failure; and
2. It is good to have a plan but it is important to be flexible - some of the best opportunities can crop up at the most unexpected times.