



Karen Bell

PhD Plant Sciences (Biological Sciences).

Staff Scholarship
(which paid tuition fees; no bench fees levied)



What part-time roles did you do/are you doing during your PhD?

I continued with my previous role as a research assistant and lab manager, but on a part-time basis.

What were the benefits to you of working part-time?

I was able to continue receiving salary! This was very important for me as I was 29 when I started to study and had a mortgage (and a husband who had quit his job to return to full-time education!) so going on a stipend wouldn't have gone down well with my bank manager. I was also able to maintain continuity of employment and that helped me get a new mortgage when we moved.

As I wasn't leaving my old lab I knew I would pretty much be expected to maintain a lot of my old duties (health and safety, equipment maintenance, training and supervising new lab members) so the extended PhD study time of 6 years and the official acknowledgement that I had a paid role to fulfil took the pressure off when I was juggling roles.

Also, through increased autonomy in my research I became a much more confident lab manager and felt more able to handle some of the responsibilities that came with this role.



Do you have any tips for future PhDs on making the most of the opportunities available to them during their PhD?

Be prepared to 'go with the flow'. At sometimes of the year I could spend almost all my time on my research (often the summer) whereas at others I was required to work almost exclusively on lab manager tasks (e.g. to help my boss organise resources ahead of lab classes; ahead of health and safety audits). It is important to have a good relationship with your supervisor however so that you can remind him/her of your need to commit time to research and that in trying to juggle two part-time roles it might not be possible to accomplish all the tasks set in a given (short) time especially in a way that a full time equivalent would. Similarly, don't judge yourself by the output of full time colleagues – you are part-time and whilst you will generally have to commit a significant amount of personal time to your studies you cannot expect to achieve what they do on a consistent basis.

How have you used this experience in your career to date?

I am currently finishing up my PhD and have used my experiences as an autonomous researcher (writing papers, reviews, presenting posters and giving talks) to boost my confidence as a lab manager especially when communicating with others – academics, sales reps, senior BTO, health and safety department staff.