

MSc Success Stories: Dr Natalie Polack, Information Analyst at Public Health Scotland

Case Study



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Dr Natalie Polack joined The Data Lab MSc Programme in 2017, undertaking her course at Stirling University on a part-time basis. This allowed her to balance studying with parenting, and to navigate the pressures that come with completely changing the course of your career. In 2019, she completed a six-month remote placement with Public Health Scotland, which eventually led to her permanent role as Information Analyst.

The Challenge

After completing her doctorate in Chemistry, Natalie worked in the industry for ten years, covering research and development and marketing and communications, before being made redundant. She used this as impetus to start a new career entirely, but wasn't really sure which way to turn. She started investigating data science, and it was on the University of Stirling website that she discovered The Data Lab.

The Solution

The TDL MSc programme offered her the flexibility she needed as a mother with a young child to care for. Both TDL and Stirling University were forthcoming in meeting her needs and allowed her to undertake the course part-time, over two years.

Natalie decided to embark on this course in particular due to its connection with TDL - the opportunity to complete a placement as part of the degree was a big part of her decision, as well as the chance to attend various workshops and networking events throughout the year. It was at Data Talent she met Caroline Crocker of PHS.

The Outcomes

Natalie secured a placement at PHS. Instead of a full-time summer placement, she completed mine from January through to June, and was able to work remotely. Natalie was set up in the Open Data team, using publicly available data

to analyse and decipher trends, and a support network was put in place allowing her to touch base with my supervisor, who she met every two weeks.

Natalie completed her MSc in 2019, and started working with Public Health Scotland full-time as an Information Analyst in the Local Intelligence Support Team, providing assistance to Health and Social Care Partnerships and GP clusters across Scotland. Her experience on the programme and placement with them was massively beneficial in helping her secure the role.

Caroline also described the experience as very positive, assisting their search for new talent – from apprenticeships, to industrial placements. It opened the door for them in sourcing a wide net of strong calibre students from MSc backgrounds from many different universities and degrees involved.

“I would absolutely recommend the Data Lab MSc Programme – from an employer's perspective, it's a talent pool brimming with savvy, engaged candidates.”

Caroline Crocker
Staff Development Manager,
Public Health Scotland

