



## **STUDENT LIFE - LLM IN LAW**

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### **Introduction**

This report will introduce myself and the steps I had to take before starting the LLM at the University of Plymouth, followed by my experiences during the first semester.

### **A bit about me**

Prior to moving from Birmingham to the South West, I was on a medical roller coaster. In 2004 (age 4) I was initially given a diagnosis of juvenile arthritis, having suffered the symptoms from age 2. I was unable to walk and in extreme pain until 2005 when I had gold injections in both knees at Birmingham Children's Hospital and still bear the scars. Subsequently, however, things still weren't quite right. After extensive examination and numerous hospital visits, I was diagnosed with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome Type 3 (EDS), which is hypermobility of the joints that affects individuals in different ways. Unluckily for me, my EDS was graded 9 (the most severe version), so the aches, joint pains and easy dislocations now made sense.

Following this diagnosis, in 2007 I moved from Birmingham to Newton Abbot (age 7) where I still live today. I had to settle into a more relaxed way of life, which was very different to the big city. I later studied at Newton Abbot College, where I dislocated my right knee while attending a P.E class. This led to major reconstruction of my knee in 2014 (age 14) which was very successful. After this I studied at South Devon University Technical College (UTC), where I grew hugely in confidence and was ready to try new things. By the age of 17 I even volunteered to support other students in the classroom, which continued after I had finished my A levels. At UTC the EDS struck again when (age 19) my left knee repeatedly dislocated and required the same surgery

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as my right. The same year, while preparing for mock exams, I also had a suspected heart attack which led to an ambulance being called and more tests conducted. It was later discovered I had a slight heart defect, as one of my valves was not performing as it should. This was not a huge concern but definitely something to be mindful of when under pressure.

After UTC I applied to Plymouth University to study Biomedical Science in 2019, but this was not to be. I was offered a place, but health got in the way. I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, which took the wind out of my sail. The cause of chronic fatigue syndrome is unknown and symptoms vary from person to person. The most common symptom is extreme tiredness, even after sleep. It may also involve muscle aches, dizziness, extreme exhaustion from physical and mental activity, headaches and problems with memory and/or concentration. All the above explained the symptoms I had experienced for many years and had finally been given a reason why.

My GP recommended that due to my health I should not go to university. However, that was not an option for me, so I applied to Open University to study Law (LLB). This was due to a change of mind about biomedical science, after thinking about where I see myself in the future and accepting some compromises due to health. The Open University was a great stepping stone for me, as all lectures were online and I could communicate with my tutor virtually. I was also able to fit my study around the times when the fatigue was not at its greatest. This was very useful, as my disabilities did not hold me back and I successfully completed my LLB with the grade I wanted.

I then applied for the LLM in Law with the University of Plymouth and was given a conditional offer. After a painstaking wait to see if I met the conditions, I received a confirmation email. This was a huge step for me, after being told I was not well enough to attend university. Before starting the next stage of my academic journey, I got in touch with my GP for a reassessment to see if they now believed I was medically able to attend university, but they still were not convinced. Nevertheless, I took the leap in accepting the offer to study at Plymouth.

### **Starting at Plymouth**

The first day was very nerve racking, as I'd never been to a university before, despite having an undergraduate degree. However, I was reassured when I met the LLM course lead/my tutor, who gave me an overview of the course. This was followed by an introduction to each of the two

modules in semester one and the lecturers that would lead these modules. The talk was extensive and was also included for future reference in the LLM course handbook. We were also taken through the Digital Learning Environment (DLE), which has been very useful and has helped a tremendous amount throughout semester one. I knew a few people at Plymouth before applying, but nobody on my course. This changed rapidly as a group chat was formed, so that we all became familiar with each other.

### **Later experiences**

As semester 1 progressed, I realised the workload had increased significantly from being an undergraduate and that, as a Masters student, the responsibility to develop my own learning is key to success. Fortunately, I had already been exposed to this at Open University, where the learning is self-driven and self-motivation is essential to stay on top of the workload. At this stage, the freedom that I have been given to study those areas that I am most interested in is different but hugely rewarding, as I am encouraged to pursue my own learning. This will become an invaluable skill beyond the LLM and in the world of professional work or doctoral studies.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the leap from undergraduate to postgraduate study has been relatively smooth, due to the extensive explanations about the LLM and the support that is offered by the lecturers and my tutor. The other students on my course have also made the transition smoother, due to their willingness to get involved with class activities and to communicate and meet up regularly outside of lectures.