

Chris Anderson

SWAP Access to Chemistry, Biology and Dietetics 2014-15

HNC Applied Science at Glasgow Kelvin College

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Tell us about yourself!

I'm Chris. I'm 39 years old, originally from Bellshill. Family life growing up was really good. I was lucky enough to be part of a family with lots of people in the medical profession, which was always inspiring to me. I always wanted to work in a healthcare environment, too, but there was something in the back of my mind that told me I wasn't as clever as other people in my family who were in that field. There's also a creative side to my family, though, and I was always musically inclined. At an early age, my parents noticed that I had a natural ear for music and they got me some lessons. I then studied music formally, right up through high school.

Although I could play multiple musical instruments and I was good at music in general, I realised eventually that I was never going to be a world-famous musician. The technical side of things interested me, though, and I thought I could get a job in the music industry. So when I left school, I went to Coatbridge College and got my HNC in Electronics and Music Technology. However, I was pretty young and naive, and only looking for work around Glasgow, which just wasn't available at the time. Music had been the only thing I felt I was any good at, so finding out that I wasn't going to be able to get a job doing what I had trained to do was disheartening. One day I was in the town and saw an ad for the Air Force. I needed to get a job of some kind so, on impulse, I signed up. That led to me becoming a policeman in the RAF for a little while, and then my daughter was born.

After leaving the Air Force, I needed to work to support my family so I bounced around from job to job, doing everything from working in call centres to working security to selling insurance. I just took whatever job I could get to earn some money and keep food on the table and clothes on our backs.

During this time, I saved up some money to go back into education, eventually undertaking a diploma in Sound Engineering from the School of Audio Engineering, which led me to doing some live work for local musicians. I was then able to go on tour with them, and wound up travelling around Europe and Asia. While I was out in Thailand touring with the band, I witnessed a few injuries that happened in the large crowds that gathered for concerts. I observed the emergency personnel that came in, took ill or injured people out of the crowds and looked after them. The work they did seemed both exciting and important. It made me think back to when I was in primary school and I witnessed an elderly gentleman having a massive heart attack. I was there when the paramedics arrived to work on him and try and save him. The way they came on the scene and took charge in a frightening situation,

working really hard as a team to save his life, was so cool. I recognised then that I had been going down the wrong road, career-wise. Healthcare was my calling; it was what I really wanted to do. So when I returned to Scotland, I started looking into my options for returning to education.

I wanted to be a paramedic, but I didn't have the formal education in science required and no qualifications for entry to university in the healthcare sector. My partner at the time happened to be doing a SWAP programme (she later went on to study Anatomy at Glasgow University and has done very well for herself). I saw her success and decided that I wanted to do something similar. I found the SWAP Access to Chemistry and Biology programme, applied for it and got in.

How was your SWAP programme?

I absolutely loved it. Loved it to the point that I was starting to think that if I wasn't able to get in to do the paramedics, I would quite like to work in a lab. I had done biology and chemistry in high school, but hadn't really appreciated it, then. Doing it again at college was really good and I got right into it.

The SWAP class I was in was really close-knit, friendly and supportive. We were all of a similar age and we had a common goal of getting back into education. We didn't view it as a competition with each other and we saw no point at all in being "clique-y". We acted as a unit. The early camaraderie we had with each other helped us weather the tough times, when we occasionally fell out with each other (usually around exam time), so we all got through it. I feel really lucky and privileged to have been part of that class. I don't think I'll ever forget them. I see several of my former classmates on campus quite a lot, and I'm in regular contact with a few who have become close friends.



What did you do after SWAP?

I used my SWAP qualification to get on to an HNC in Applied Science. I chose that route because I was mainly aiming to join the ambulance service, but I wanted a backup plan in the sciences. I knew that if the ambulance service didn't work out for me, having that HNC

would allow me to do some lab work. I had actually finished the HNC and gone back to work for a year while still applying to get into the ambulance service when I heard about the paramedics course at GCU. I applied for it straight away and got in! I'm now in first year doing the BSc in Paramedic Science.

The science reports I had to write throughout the SWAP programme and the HNC stood me in good stead for the type of writing that is required at the university level. I found it difficult learning how to research properly, particularly with regards to accessing and selecting academic journals, but I'm getting the hang of it now. I am now studying subjects that I enjoy and that I know will push me towards my end goal. All going well, I'll graduate in the winter of 2020 and I'll register with the HCPC Paramedics, which means I can then go on to apply for the Scottish Ambulance Service to work as a paramedic. So, hopefully, by January 2021 I will be out in my green uniform in an ambulance, helping folks!

Any other comments?

I was terrified of getting old and looking back on my life, full of regrets over not doing the thing I really wanted to do. And, without SWAP, I think I probably *was* doomed to work a string of boring, dead-end jobs. The Scottish Wider Access programme helped me get on the right track and gain access to higher education.

Now, I get to go out on placement as part of my university course, observing and assisting qualified paramedics as they work. I've had a lot of jobs in my life, but nothing compares to that feeling of riding in the ambulance on the way to help someone who is in a life-threatening situation. To be able to be there, to be equipped and trained to help out and maybe save a life is just amazing. Without SWAP making a difference to me, I wouldn't be able to make a difference to anyone else, so I'm immensely grateful.

Thank you, SWAP!

