

# Bring IT On News

8 March, 2019

## International Women's Day

**Dr Áine MacDermott - Senior Lecturer - Liverpool John Moores University**



what I wanted to do, but knew computer forensics and cyber security seemed to be something to learn more about and get into.

### **What was your favourite subject at school?**

My favourite subject at school was IT – I got an A at GCSE and came top of the class. Prior to picking GCSEs, I also loved technology and design, art, and music, but we were only allowed to pick one ‘creative’ subject, so I chose IT.

### **What has been your favourite job to date and why?**

I love my current job as I am finally doing what I love full time. I worked as an Associate Tutor at Edge Hill University, which I loved, but the contract was always renewed and the subjects you teach can differ per semester. Now in my new role I can plan my curriculum, adapt my material, offer my own insights and ideas, and convey my passion for all things digital forensics and cyber security.

### **What has been your least favourite job to date and why?**

I worked on a market stall while I was finishing my PhD as I had no funding left but still some work to complete. I was grateful to have the job, and it was definitely a new experience, but being outside in

### **Tell us a bit about your current job role?**

I am a Senior Lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University and teach on both the Computer Forensics and Computer Security programmes in the Department of Computer Science. I teach students at level 4 (1st year) right through to MSc level, so get to meet and teach a wide variety of students with differing skillsets and backgrounds. I get to teach about digital forensics, and the tools and techniques for data retrieval and potential evidences on devices. For computer security, I get to conduct research into current methods and trends, and educate students on implementing secure computers/networks, and all the policies and procedures in between. It is an interesting and dynamic environment to be in.

### **What does a normal day look like in your job?**

My day can vary but each morning starts with coffee! Like school, my teaching is scheduled per cohort, and thankfully, some days I do not have a taught session. When I am lecturing, the subject can range from digital forensics, cyber security, data structures and algorithms, but each of these sessions is followed by a lab and/or tutorial session where we can apply the theory and do some hands on work. I also try to fit in time for research (currently my focus is on the Internet of Things (IoT)) and catch up on admin/emails. While I’m not doing this I often have meetings with students about their work, or any projects that they are completing.

### **What was your first job?**

I had a paper round in my street for a few years, then when I was doing my A levels I worked each Saturday in a butchers shop. Both helped me improve my communication skills and helped me gain confidence in speaking to new people.

### **How did you get to where you are now from school?**

Curiosity and eagerness to find out more. I always loved studying IT and when I was leaving school, I looked at all of the different courses on offer at universities. I had offers from Queens University to study Computer Science but was intrigued by Computer Forensics at Liverpool John Moores University, which at the time (2007/2008) was one of the only places to offer such a course. I did

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the cold and trying to maintain an enthusiastic and friendly rapport through all weather conditions was hard. Oh, and as I would spend my wages on the chocolate!

### **Best piece of advice you have received?**

#### **“Don’t let others dampen your spirit”**

I am generally quite a positive and optimistic person, and while I have had some ups and down getting to where I currently am, I was always reminded to not take the opinions or negativity of others too hard.

### **What are your top tips for getting into the IT industry?**

- Learn a programming language – I would recommend either Java or Python.
- Make sure you have researched the role you would like to go into and have realistic expectations about what the day-to-day job would be.
- Ask questions – do not be afraid to ask for more information on companies, roles, job expectations.
- Be resilient! It is a journey and not a race, but we get there in the end if we stick at it. Sometimes you are not the right person for the job, and that is fine. Use the experience to apply for the next job, or to build your confidence with interviews. Taking advice and acting on it is important, e.g. skills you may not currently possess but need, gaining experience, changing your CV, etc.
- Get experience where possible! Unpaid experience is good too!

• Network and attend free events to build your network. It is also a good opportunity to find out about the lingo being used in your industry, and possible trends in the workplace.

### **IT is such a fast moving industry, are there any jobs/roles that don’t exist now that you are excited to see in the future?**

I think the development of smart cities and the smart grid mean that the role of digital forensic analysts will become more complicated than it currently is. In terms of new roles, I suspect machine learning and artificial intelligence will play a key part in these?

### **Who is your role model and why?**

I don’t have a specific role model but I feel motivated by people who are passionate about what they do, and those that help and support others. People who motivate, inspire, and push each other into reaching their goals.

### **What would you say to a young female who is contemplating pursuing a career in IT?**

Be yourself, and do not be afraid to share your views. I find that young females pursuing careers in IT are often afraid to break away from the industry ‘norm’ but honestly employers prefer to see the ‘real you’. Surround yourself with people who add the fuel of advice and encouragement to your fire.