



Case Study

Debi Mills
Level 1 Consumer Studies

Debi trained in catering, and spent several years in a variety of jobs, as well as bringing up a family, but always wanted to do more. She applied for Consumer Studies at QMUC as a step towards developing a career in the field of food education, but needed extra qualifications first. "I hadn't got a Higher English qualification, so I did Communications and Literature at college, but wanted to gain more confidence in general study skills.

I eventually found a short Learning Strategies course run locally. When I started the course, at first I thought, what am I doing applying to university? I'll not even get through this! Skills like critical thinking, reflection, reading skills like skimming and scanning - all this was a totally new language to me. But the tutors made it easy to grasp, they related the skills to real-life situations, so it started to feel like common-sense. Week by week my confidence built up. I even did a presentation to the group! I'm so glad I took the chance to look at skills before starting university. It gave me lots of good starting points.

Time Management came up on the Learning Strategies course and again on QMAvance. I started thinking this must really be a key thing. So I sat down, worked out a weekly timetable, planned what I had to do each week - and it's paid off, it's really worked. You have to be flexible, things can crop up, but it helps to have your targets there.

Asking for clarification and support is essential too. Some of the younger students are more nervous about speaking out; they tend to look to the mature ones for guidance. It made me realise that this is a key skill I've developed from life experience - being able to deal with problems head-on, getting things sorted out when it's needed.

Other support services have been useful. The librarians are helpful when you are looking for information for essays, and I particularly recommend getting a mentor. The support and regular contact has been invaluable for me.

My main surprise was that it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be.

It's not so much the study, it's the juggling - fitting everything into your life, especially when you've got children. In fact, going to university is like having a baby - you think you'll never manage, but you do. It forces you to prioritise, and it has helped me to grow to deal with other issues in my life.

Looking back, I can't believe how much I've changed over the past year. I really felt I had no confidence at the start of the course, and I still can't quite believe I'm doing well. I owe a lot to the support and encouragement I have had from my family - this has been a key factor in helping me get on at university".