

Success Stories in Mathematics

What does it mean to be a successful mathematician? What is involved in a successful mathematical career? The LMS Success Stories project aims to celebrate the diversity of successful careers and mathematicians. We are always interested in new profiles! If you have an idea, or would like to submit your own profile, please email Success.Stories@lms.ac.uk.

Name: Neil McIvor

Job: (Acting) Chief Data Officer, Department for Work and Pensions

Substantive: Chief Statistician, Department for Work and Pensions



During a period of unemployment, I decided to start a degree course in mathematics with the Open University. It started out as a hobby as I had always been interested in maths, and frankly, just wanted something to do. Indeed, in my first year I forgot even to mention it on my CV.

I successfully finished both a first degree and a masters in maths and stats with the OU, taking 11 years in total from start to finish. And this was a life changing experience for me.

While studying for my first degree I held down a variety of different jobs, some of which were enhanced by my studies. After obtaining a first class honours degree, I was able to meet the minimum requirements to join the Government Statistical Service's Fast Stream programme. I successfully passed the recruitment process in 2003. Since then I have enjoyed a range of roles in the civil service, not only as a professional statistician, but also as a professional policy developer. I rose quickly through the grades to enter the Senior Civil Service in late 2012, starting my current role in early 2013.

Now I am the Deputy Director, Statistical Services Division and Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department for Work and Pensions — the Department's Chief Statistician — and just coming to the

end of a six month stint as the Department's Chief Data Officer, which included building the Department's new Data Science function.

As DWP's Chief Statistician, I am mainly responsible and accountable for the production of the Department's official and national statistics. We publish around 60 series of official and national statistics to the highest standards of integrity, free from political interference, as laid out in the *Codes of Practice for Official Statistics*. This ensures that all my statistics are trustworthy, and of the highest quality. These range from the UK's income statistics, overseas nationals registering for a National Insurance number, to caseload statistics on the UK's welfare system.

Between May 2010 and January 2017 I was responsible for over 1,000 separate publications. I am also responsible for advising ministers and senior officials around the appropriate use of statistics, and ensure statisticians play a major role in influencing the development of current and future policy.

In May 2016 I appeared before Parliament alongside the UK's National Statistician, giving evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the UK's migration statistics, just prior to the referendum. This session was live recorded, and soon reports were appearing online and in mainstream media, each with a different perspective on what we had said. This was a great development opportunity, and whilst challenging at the time, I look back at the experience with pride.