

#MonthlyMotivation: Fiona Parker (class of 2011)



Alumna Fiona Parker realised at 16 that journalism was the career for her. After working for various news agencies and supplying national papers with stories, Fiona is now working at The Daily Mail.

What did you do after you left Putney?

I left Putney in 2011 and went straight to York to study English Literature. I had a fantastic time at university and thoroughly enjoyed organising social events for my college and writing feature articles for my student newspaper, Nouse. In my second year, I was lucky enough to become the features editor.

What did you write about?

Back then, I was a real fan of Louis Theroux's weird and wonderful

documentaries. As a result, I strove to approach colourful and eccentric interviewees including a nun who spent much of her day on Twitter and an animal lover who organised weddings for cats and dogs!

What did you do once you had graduated?

After graduating, I went to City University to study for an MA in Newspaper Journalism, and passed my required exams in shorthand and media law.

My first job was as a trainee reporter at National News, a news agency which supplies all the national papers. It was a great place to gain experience in court reporting, breaking news and getting 'every spit and cough' out of interviewees. After nearly two years at National News, I left to freelance and spent around six months working day shifts at The Sunday Times, The Telegraph and Metro.co.uk. In July 2017 I was thrilled to secure full time shifts at The Daily Mail and fortunately, I'm still there today.

What does a working day look like for you?

One of the best things about being a journalist is that often you have no idea what the day will hold. Sometimes I will be in court, covering a high profile case and another time I could be writing about a tortoise who has found love after a century of solitude. You don't know whether you will be on a crime scene, or talking to loyal royalists about Meghan and Harry's wedding.

Working on a national newspaper means you can be sent across the country to cover some of the biggest stories of the day. On one occasion, I was sent to Wales as soon as I walked into the office.

How did you get into journalism?

When I was in Year 10, we all had to book work experience slots. I spent a week at KPMG and while it was a great opportunity, I quickly realised it wasn't for me. As English Literature was always my favourite subject and I was a keen rower, my mum suggested that I write to the magazine Rowing and Regatta. The editor got back to me immediately and said I was more than welcome to come for work experience. I was only 16, but she let me write several pieces for the edition and even went through the news list with me, to help me understand what made some stories stronger than others. By the end of the fortnight I was hooked and couldn't imagine doing anything else.

Have you found getting into journalism hard?

As I was preparing to leave City University, I applied for several jobs and graduate schemes with no success. Not getting on a graduate scheme was a real blow, at the time I thought it had ruined my career. Now I cringe at how silly a thought that was. When I was on the rowing team at Putney I was always having to work hard and struggle on after a defeat or setback. In this respect, rowing probably taught me some really good life skills. As a journalist, you are frequently knocked-back, ignored and told someone doesn't want to talk to you. You've got to develop quite a thick skin and reinforce your own self-belief repeatedly. Fortunately, I've managed to stay close to some fantastic Putney friends. It's great to know that no matter how tough my week has been, I can rely on them for a good catch-up and a laugh. Whenever we meet up it's like we're Putney girls all over again.

What advice would you give to current pupils and fellow alumnae considering a career in journalism?

Work experience is essential, but it's good to be open-minded about where you apply. While having a national newspaper on your CV looks good, a local newspaper or small magazine might offer more writing opportunities.

While everyone has different political views, it's important not to let these influence you too much when applying for publications. You could end up ruling out a brilliant magazine where you could be really happy.

Finally, make sure you are always polite and approachable. Journalism is all about speaking to people you probably haven't met before and if you are warm and approachable you're off to a great start.