

## Q&A with MSc Quantity Surveying Programme Leader, Amanda Milambo. Podcast transcript

**Andrew Belt:** This week, we have been shining a light on our MSc Quantity Surveying programme via our social media channels and it is only right that we speak to the Programme Leader, Amanda Milambo. Hi Amanda.

**Amanda Milambo:** Hi Andrew.

**AB:** So we published your Programme Leader blog this week. It makes a really inspiring read. I love the bit where you say: 'once you are committed, you have a focus, you know where you want to get to, nothing is impossible. If I can do it, anybody can.' And that relates to your time studying an MSc whilst working full-time and also having your first son while studying. So it seems a really good place to start seeing as we are talking about an MSc programme. First off, tell me about the MSc which you took.

**AM:** I studied the MSc in Construction Project Management at Birmingham City University. What motivated me to want to do it was that I wanted to get into teaching and I wanted to find a way to do that. I thought getting an MSc would open up the pathway for me to be able to do this.

**AB:** So you did the MSc to support your teaching ambitions. Did it work?

**AM:** Well, there was a teaching aspect [to wanting to undertake the MSc] and then there was wanting to further my knowledge and understanding of managing projects. So, I could either do Construction Project Management or Construction Law at MSc level and I didn't want to go down the route of the latter - I just wanted to understand further, at a strategic level, how to manage a project.

Therefore, there was that aspect and then the teaching aspect of it. And to your question, did it work? Well, I graduated and soon after graduation, an opening came up at UCEM so I believe having an MSc qualification was an advantage at that point.

**AB:** Okay. So you achieved the aim you had in terms of teaching. What other reasons would you give for wanting to do an MSc?

**AM:** My motivation for doing it was critical in motivating me to keep going during my studies. Each student has to understand their motivation for wanting to study, whether it's an MSc or whatever it is that they want to study. That motivation has to keep you going because if you have a goal you want to achieve, that is one thing that will keep you going.

If you're doing it [studying] because your employers want you to then I suspect that won't be the best reason for doing it, which is why it's important that, if you want to further your career, that it is your passion and what you want as an individual. That will then keep you motivated rather than somebody else insisting that you have to do it.

We have had students drop out because they say: 'I'm no longer with that employer'. So you can see that the motivation [for studying] is really important.

**AB:** What advice would you give in terms of keeping that motivation going and what tips would you give for completing an MSc?

**AM:** I think one thing that you have to do at the point where you feel so tired and unmotivated is reminding yourself: why did I begin this journey? What made me start? And

then you have to keep reminding yourself of that goal that you set for yourself, because you want to further your career, as most of our students are either already working in the industry or wanting a career within quantity surveying.

You have to keep reminding yourself about what made you want to study in the first place because there will be times when you don't feel like it.

I'm an early morning person, so I wake up quite early to do my studies. Even now, if I have work to do, I wake up very early. So sometimes I don't feel like waking up [and studying] but that is what you have to remind you - thinking 'I've got to do it'. And that's what pushed me.

I understand what students are going through in terms of studying, working and family life. So I know where they're coming from in terms of having so much on my plate, I've been there. But again, that reminder of why you're doing it is worth the reason for you to want to pursue and carry on and motivate yourself.

**AB:** How did it feel when you did complete your MSc?

**AM:** It was such a relief because what happened was we had our first son when I was getting towards the end of my studies so I had to take a break and apply for mitigating circumstances just like anybody else. So I understand that process [mitigating circumstances] totally.

That meant that I had to sit the exam later on when it was more convenient for me. And then I had to do my dissertation. I remember the very final day when I had to submit my dissertation and the night before, I was even afraid of sleeping because I thought if I sleep, I would just sleep right through the morning and miss the deadline.

That's how badly I wanted to just submit that dissertation because it was the last stretch. So, I stayed up all night, had just 45 minutes of sleep, finished my editing and then went to submit. It was great to have that weight just taken from me. I just felt so relieved to have completed it.

**AB:** Why would you say people should sign up to the programme? And secondly, who would it benefit?

**AM:** The reason to sign up is the difference our qualification would bring to your career now. It doesn't matter where you are. We have students who are already working in the industry and are studying with us and they can see the difference studying with us on the MSc Quantity Surveying programme is making on their career already because we've had testimonials in what it's doing in terms of their learning and what they are learning and how it applies to what they're doing in the workplace.

So, there is a correlation really because our MSc is designed in such a way that it reflects what is happening within the industry. We work with professionals within the industry to design our modules and, therefore, whatever you study pretty much is up to date with what's going on. It's unlike when you're studying in a mainstream university and you go through your studies and at the end, you think: 'oh, that doesn't quite apply now because things have changed'. But that's not the case with UCEM. Our MSc Quantity Surveying blends the theory with what is really going on in practice, and therefore, whatever you study is something that you can apply within your work.

Now, there are those who are not yet working in the industry. They're working in a different profession. What the MSc Quantity Surveying programme will do is start your career within

quantity surveying so you can get the good grounding you need to be able to understand the skills that you need and the principles that are relevant for a professional within the industry.

**AB:** And it is a conversion programme so you can come from a different industry and decide that quantity surveying is the profession you'd like to make a career in. In terms of those who might already be in the industry, are there any particular jobs studying on the programme can set you up for?

**AM:** I think there are a wide range of jobs that are out there. You can work anywhere. You can work for a bank, you can work for a contracting organisation, you can work for a professional quantity surveying firm. So there is a wide range of organisations that you can work for.

It just depends on where you want to go with your career. For example, I come from a contracting background, so I worked for contractors and most of my experience in practice is from that perspective but there are those who want to further their career and would like to focus on being a consultant.

So, working for a professional quantity surveying firm, you can work for a subcontractor or you can work for a bank. It just depends on what you want to do, where you want to end up. So I'm happy to have a chat in terms of where you want to go with that and what your motivation is in terms of your career and where you see yourself. Because what you have to do is [consider:] where do I see myself in the next five to ten years? And that would give you what you want to do and how this quantity surveying programme will help you with achieving that.

**AB:** What do you enjoy about quantity surveying and working in that profession?

**AM:** Interesting. There's a lot that I enjoy, obviously. Now my experience is more working with students on a day-to-day basis but if I look back at my time in practice, it's the difference that a quantity surveyor makes as part of a team in terms of changing people's lives or being part of people's dreams.

When you have a client who wishes to embark on a building project, that is that client's dream and you become part of fulfilling that dream because you work with other members of the professional team - with the design and in terms of putting the project together - whether on the professional side or on the contracting side. You are able to make sure that that is achieved to the client's expectations.

For example, you have a piece of land. Seeing that piece of land develop into a building that will make a difference to somebody else - for me, that is worth it. I love to be part of seeing all these buildings constructed.

That's what my motivation was previously but now it's different because I work with students, and I've had students come back to me to say: 'this qualification has really made a difference in my life', 'I have been promoted because of this qualification', 'I have seen a difference in terms of how I can apply what I'm learning to what I'm doing in my work'. So that is really what makes a difference for me. For me, that is really fulfilling, and you can't put a price on that.

**AB:** Great to hear your thoughts on quantity surveying in general and being part of a team. So if you want to be part of a team and get involved in these construction projects, then it's a great profession to get involved in. It's also really lovely to hear the impact you have as a Programme Leader at UCCEM and how it really boosts people's careers. Thank you for your time. Amanda, lovely talking to you. And thank you for listening.