

ONLINE INSIGHTS

Online programmes at Oxford Saïd



Joining the dots

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I found that my Oxford Saïd education journey has been leading to an unplanned destination.

By the time I first came into contact with Oxford, I already had an MBA and an MSc in Financial Management, together with a number of other professional qualifications and more than 20 years' experience in international financial institutions. I was looking for something at the strategic level that would give me practical skills and knowledge, and found it in the Oxford Diploma in Financial Strategy. Not only did it cover the topics that I needed – financial strategies for growth and acquisitions and valuation for example – but the teaching was by a great mix of academics and expert practitioners.

Double the benefits

The diploma is a year-long modular programme. This meant that for a year I was alternating between an intense, academic environment and my equally intense work environment. It was hard work but it doubled the benefits. Each module of the diploma gave me at least one 'takeaway' that I could apply in my job the moment I got back. I did not have to save up all my actions until the end of the diploma, nor did I have to keep looking back through a year's worth of notes to respond to a new situation. And it worked the other way round too. Because each time we covered a topic I

was able to apply it, when I took the final exams I could draw on real-life examples rather than theoretical cases (and that, I think, is what earned me a Distinction).

A topic that I found useful immediately was valuation. Like many other organisations we commission an annual valuation. It is of course carried out by consultants, but as Director of Finance it is really important for me to be able to understand what they are doing and what the details of the reports mean. Thanks to the diploma I was able to ask the right questions and know where to go to check the data that contributed to their overall valuation.

I loved the taste of the Oxford lifestyle I got from the diploma – right down to sitting exams in the Examination Schools in full subfusc! But what was really important was the high quality of teaching. And I was fully confident that Oxford Saïd would be able to reproduce that in any circumstances. So when my employer started thinking of introducing digital technology to our suite of development finance products, I saw my opportunity to have another Oxford experience with the online programme on Fintech.

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Active and involving

As with the diploma, the learning was pretty intense: we were given weekly assignments, to be completed either as a group or individually. Each module was graded and we were given our grade the following week: it was much more active and involving than any previous online course that I had attempted. I also liked the fact that we were introduced to additional resources that we could use to expand our knowledge and thinking independently.

Having completed the Oxford Fintech Programme, I started looking at the other programmes in Oxford Saïd's online portfolio, and signed up to them as part of my continuous professional development. And then a funny thing happened. The experience made me realise that my career had reached a plateau. Programmes that focus on entrepreneurial venture finance and algorithmic trading prompted me to think about creating a business of my own, not continue to work as an employee.

Oddly enough, the Covid-19 crisis has contributed to my decision. As a result of Covid's impact on the stock market, my personal portfolio shrank by 80% in March 2020. But the lessons I had learnt from the Oxford Algorithmic Trading Programme in particular enabled me to keep trading and to recover – and I was back in the black. The confidence this gave me was incredible.

Confidence and resilience

The Oxford Executive Leadership Programme then inspired me to do something with that confidence. A major theme in the programme was that we should not just return to 'business as usual', but that we should develop the resilience that would allow us to reposition ourselves and retool business priorities in light of the unknown that is ahead of us. I am currently still at the 'explore' stage with my own venture, but bearing all this in mind as I move forward.

I have a powerful network that I developed through both the diploma and the online programmes. Some of my classmates are now CEOs of banks all over the world. We have a Whatsapp group, so if an issue comes up – advice is just a telephone call away. The network started with my fellow students on the diploma, but it is surprisingly easy to make connections via the online programmes – even though none of us had ever met.

I look at the list of programmes that I have done at Oxford Saïd – from the Diploma in Financial Strategy to Fintech, Strategic Innovation, Algorithmic Trading, Executive Leadership, and Entrepreneurship: Venture Finance – and they fill me with confidence for the future. I am sure there will be challenges, but I have the network and the educational background and expertise that I need: it is just a matter of connecting the dots.

What I love about Oxford is that it does not rest on its laurels as the oldest English-speaking university in the world. It embraces new knowledge and technology while still respecting its past. There are not many other places where you can dine in an 800-year-old college one night and investigate the cutting edge of finance and technology the next day. The reputation, lecturers, access, and open-mindedness of Saïd Business School are unparalleled. In fact, I wish I had known and been empowered like this much earlier: I may have made some different decisions. But better late than never!

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www.sbs.oxford.edu/online

To find out more please visit the website or get in touch with our team to start your learning journey on:

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