

Blog NW #1 Me and my HND

What **rdi** Students Say

My Learning Experience Blog - by Nicky Washida

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(To find out why Nicky is writing about her own learning experience - [click here](#))

About me

I'm 35 years old, (nearly 36!) British, married with a 2 and a 4 year old, living in Tokyo Japan with my Japanese husband.

I am working part-time as a teacher, and also studying Japanese when I have the time. I don't smoke, drink in moderation (most of the time!) but I have a moderately heavy chocolate habit and am trying to cut down on my trips to Starbucks, so far without much success – studying is always such a great excuse to go there!

My daughter is in Kindergarten and my son is in a local daycare centre. My husband, like many Japanese in Tokyo, works pretty long hours, and his family live a plane ride away from us in Osaka, so I don't get a lot of help, but Mum comes over from the UK once a year for a couple of months, so I am looking forward to her next visit this March.

I live in a typical Japanese "shoebox" of an apartment so I don't have a study desk or a "quiet" place to go, which means I basically have to take the opportunity to study whenever and wherever I can. My laptop has been a great investment for this purpose.

I left school with really good A levels, and no idea what I wanted to do, so I decided to take some time out to think about it, and found myself in a series of temping jobs before finally grabbing my backpack and heading off round the world. When I came home I "fell" into IT, where I pretty much stayed "temporarily" for 8 years, until I realized that after 8 years a job is no longer really temporary and is actually "What I Do".

And that was my life until I took a holiday in Thailand, met my husband in a café in Bangkok, figured from his broken English that this guy had "potential" - married him a year later and moved to Tokyo to start a whole new life!

Reason for Studying

A degree was always on my To-Do list, but 3-4 years always seemed like such a long time to sign up for something when I wasn't even sure what I wanted to study. In my previous IT life, it was never much of an issue because of all the experience I had, but after coming to Japan, I learned pretty quickly that these days a degree seems to be something of a pre-requisite, or at the very least a major door-opener, and at the age of 33 with two children it really was about time I started mine!

I looked at all my options from Japan – Japanese universities, American colleges online, and Australian institutions also through distance learning. The Japanese universities were not an option in terms of language and school hours, and the American and Australian colleges I had never really heard of in a lot of cases, and I didn't know if they were Bona Fide institutions or not. I also noticed a lot of the American

colleges were VERY expensive and the system was confusing – points and credits and transfers, and you could opt to study Chinese even though your degree was advertising....I didn't really understand the literature, never mind the coursework!

So I started looking at UK colleges, where at least I knew that the "University of Shepton Mallet" was highly likely to be an operation run from someone's front lounge.

A bona fide accredited university was of course essential, but beyond that, I needed to find an institution that would let me study from Japan which ruled out some immediately. I had pretty much decided on a Business Studies degree, because that was my background and was still a very general option – from there I could specialize in any number of fields - so I looked for institutions offering interesting business courses. Then I needed a place that preferably offered tuition because I felt pretty sure I would need the "push" to keep going. One of the biggest problems I had was that many places wanted proof of my A level results, which was really frustrating because even though I had very good grades (AAB) my certificates had disappeared years ago, and due to some glitch in the system neither the examining boards nor the school had any record of my results. Although many places would accept me for an "access course" and then upgrade me later, this was going to cost much more money than going straight to the degree course.

Why I chose RDI

I found RDI on the internet and when I called and spoke to them they were really helpful from the beginning, but – and this actually sold it to me – absolutely no pressure at all. They answered all my questions and emailed me some information, but no-one ever pressured me into making a quick decision.

They were offering fully recognized courses in the subjects I wanted, and it particularly appealed to me to start with an HND, because then I would get used to higher level study (it had been a long time!) and I would be able to receive a diploma after 2 years study, without having to do the full 3 years if I decided to change my mind – not unusual for me! Another major factor was the cost – it seemed to be really good value for money, especially when compared to a traditional route of leaving home at 18, living on campus, paying for tuition fees, etc etc. A lot of my friends from school are STILL paying off their uni debts!

The HND experience

I always thought I was a pretty confident, together kind of person, but I have to admit, when the materials arrived I had a bit of a panic! I suddenly got it into my head that this was a huge mistake, I couldn't do this, what on earth had I been thinking?! But thankfully RDI offer a full money back guarantee for the first 30 days, so I figured if I had come this far I might as well give it a go and see what happens.

I remember my first assignment was quite possibly the hardest because I had no idea how to "pitch" it – was I writing too much or not enough? Was there enough detail? I think I've answered the questions correctly, but will the examiner think so? Because it was distance learning there wasn't really any other student to compare notes with, and after a brief introduction online to each other at the beginning of the course everyone seemed to have gone their own way. Fortunately, I had a raft of very smart friends here who I could pounce on for their opinions, so I had some of them read it and make blatantly honest comments – "drivel" was one memorable response (thank you Nicole!)

But my first grade was great and that gave me the incentive to keep going. I can remember thinking "3 modules down, 13 more to go"... "5 down 11 to go"... "Wow! Halfway through already!"... "I can't believe my final exams are coming up"....it seemed like it would go on forever, but looking back it also seems to have gone so fast!

The hardest thing was balancing commitments – to the children, to work, family time and study time. It caused a few "differences of opinion" as the months went on, and it was something I never really completely got under control – I felt guilty for not seeing the children when I studied, I felt guilty for not studying when I was with the children – but it was something I just learned to live with and I kept telling myself that ultimately I was doing this for the family – if I can get a better job in the future, then maybe I can help to pay for the extortionate international school fees we will eventually be paying in Tokyo!

On the other hand, the thrill of learning new things, of working hard on assignments and then getting good feedback for them, and the personal satisfaction of making progress on something I had been planning to do for over 15 years (where???? does the time go??!) made everything worthwhile. I was SO proud of myself the day I finally nailed least square regression on the statistics module after hours of staring blankly at the course notes! (I highly recommend walking away and having a glass of wine if there is something you don't understand – chardonnay seemed to work pretty well for me in getting the grey matter buzzing again, and even if it doesn't work for you, after a glass or two you won't care anymore anyway!).

Every time I had a problem I emailed my tutors and they came back within 24 hours, usually a lot sooner. I sent off my assignments to Fay, my program coordinator and she always sent me a note to say she had received them, and helped if I had forgotten to put them in a plastic folder, or run out of paper clips, or other such thing! Even when they had online tutorials and revision sessions which I usually couldn't join because of the time difference (I'm sorry but exam or no exam I am a Mum of two and NO WAY am I getting up voluntarily at 3am!) they were always recorded so I could read the transcripts later, and email any questions I had to the tutor, so I don't really feel like I missed out.

Suddenly, the course is over and I have passed! I felt incredible when I put down my pen for the last time on the last module (which was an exam). I remember when I did the first set of exams, I sat them in Coventry, and there was a guy there in the class with us who was doing his final exams, while we did modules 7 and 8. I felt so envious of him that he was finished, but then in no time at all I was doing my own finals, this time here in Tokyo. I wasn't able to come home to sit the exams last year, but RDI have an agreement with the British Council so I was able to sit them here, which was really convenient.

Life after HND...

I wasn't sure when I started the HND if I would go on to do the final year top-up. Hell, I wasn't even sure I would get through the HND! But now I have finished, I can't wait to start on the next course and bring my education up to degree level, so I am about to start going through the process of applying now, and that will be the subject of my next blog.

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