



WHY IT MATTERS... CREATIVE ARTS



Loughborough University

Kirsty Kirk

Research Student

My research matters because people get extremely hot when they are working in protective clothing, so hot that they can die, but mostly it makes their work extremely uncomfortable and difficult.

How comfortable did you feel wearing your protective mask during the Covid19 pandemic?!

I am interested in improving the thermal comfort of protective clothing. I like to know that I can give something back and help the people that spend their lives protecting us. It's extremely interesting and fulfilling work and inspires me to get out of bed in the morning.



Post 16 Education:

BTEC National Diploma Art & Design.
This course covered Textile Design, Fine Art, Graphic Design, and 3D Design.

Higher Education:

BA Hons Textile Design at Manchester Metropolitan University.
MSc Advanced Textiles and Performance Clothing at the University of Leeds.

Why did you choose this research area?

I wanted to pursue my research degree because I have a great deal of knowledge and experience of garment and textile design, but very little understanding of the body and thermal physiology.

I am now studying my research degree within the Environmental Ergonomics Research Centre at Loughborough University where the focus of that group is to understand the responses of the human body to a particular environment.





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Kirsty's experience as a student

I rushed into my undergraduate degree and didn't know what career to pursue at that time, only that I enjoyed textiles.

My industry experience drove my interest in textiles technology and fortunately I had the opportunity to return to university at a much later date. Here I found my true career passion whilst studying MSc Advanced Textiles at the University of Leeds. I became interested in protective clothing and realised I could use my textiles knowledge and experience to have a positive impact on the world.

Other interesting avenues opened too such as automotive textiles – did you know that textiles are one of the main weight reducing strategies for F1 cars!

Kirsty's Career

I am currently studying a PhD at Loughborough University and looking at ways to reduce thermal heat stress for fast jet pilots - yes, think Top Gun: Maverick.

Following my master's degree, I went back into industry where my first role was Research & Development Manager with a fabric manufacturing company focussing on military and waterproof fabrics. I then became a Technical Manager at a garment manufacturer of protective clothing working with militaries around the work on their garment specifications.

As you can see, there is more to textiles than blanket stitch and fashion!



Kirsty's advice:

1. Choose subjects that you enjoy the most.
2. Know that at school the subjects are structured into very narrow fields, seem quite separate from one another, and it's not always obvious how applicable these subjects are to your interests. I work in textiles, and it wasn't clear during my school days that maths, chemistry and physics would be important because you are taught that textiles concerns only sewing, fashion and soft furnishings. Try not to think *'this isn't important to me'* because you never know when you will need it or where it will lead; keep an open mind and try to enjoy it.
3. A qualification, no matter what the topic, will be useful so give it your all!