



## Barbara's Story

### **Dr Barbara Becker, Learning Systems Advisor**

At school I was into the sciences and at home I used to go into the garage and mend my mum's furniture. I was very hands on, very practical. My mum saw a job as an Apprentice Technician in Engineering. I didn't know there were apprentices then, it wasn't something I'd thought about and I didn't know anything about engineering but it really suited me. They sent me for day release at a college to do Mechanical and Production Engineering. I was then promoted onto the Technician grades. Then I was made redundant at the age of twenty-one and I applied as a mature student to the University of Bradford to do Mechanical Engineering. Now there are Higher Level Apprenticeships and I would have done this if they'd been available to me: to study and work at that professional level.



At the same time as doing my degree I was also getting interested in technology. My first thing was how to programme a machine code in binary. Computers were getting interesting. In the final year of university, we did lots of programming and Computer Aided Design. You had to write lines of command to send an email. We were the first group of Mechanical Engineers to do an IT course. You had to book time to go on a PC then.



When I finished my course David Brown, the tractor manufacturers approached me about a job offer. They had sponsored me on my degree. At the same time two different researchers came to talk to me about doctorates. If I had a sliding doors moment this was it and I agonised. It was tough in the manufacturing sector so I chose to go and do one of the PhDs which had been offered to me. I spent a happy five years researching artificial hip joints. After completing and being made a Research Fellow I was made redundant again. So I decided to sell my digital skills.



I could build computers and programme so I started my own business with my redundancy money. I did that for a few years: building websites for people. I got a business client who after working with me offered me a job and I became their IT Support Manager. All along the way I was teaching myself things and getting more qualifications. I started working at a university and then went to Bradford College as an Assistive Technology Development Officer to support students who have additional needs. Eventually we had half a million pounds' worth of equipment and were helping hundreds of students. Now I'm working at Leeds Beckett University as senior member of a small team responsible for system development and delivering training to staff and students, in a range of online learning technologies.

