

Case Study

Student: Rory Feilen

Advanced Highers: Chemistry, Technological Studies, Maths, and Physics

Home Town: Aberdeen

University: St Andrews — School of Chemistry

Degree: Masters Chemistry



‘Omni nunc arte magistra’ — ‘Make the best of all your abilities’ is the motto of Robert Gordon’s College in Aberdeen, the school Rory attended. Aged 19 he is now making the best of his abilities in the third year of a Masters in Chemistry at the University of St Andrews. With four Advanced Highers at ‘A’, Rory could have been accepted by any of the three universities he applied to, but chose St Andrews because of the reputation of the Chemistry department. Also it was something of a family tradition and his sisters were enjoying studying there. Although he was clear he wanted to study Chemistry, Rory has as yet no definite career plans and recognises that his Chemistry degree will give him many skills that are also applicable in careers outside chemistry.

Rory’s applications to two Scottish universities (his third choice was University College London) were for second year entry — a key factor, as his Course would otherwise be five years. He recalls his guidance teacher mentioning second year entry and he acquired detailed information on entry requirements from the university and UCAS publications and websites. Seven of Rory’s fellow students also gained direct entry to second year, three of them coming from England with A levels. St Andrews offers special courses to help plug gaps resulting from skipping first year and these also provide credit towards the degree.

Some people worry that missing first year may mean missing out on university social life. This hasn’t been an issue for Rory, who was able to participate in freshers week and, being a keen singer, has made lots of friends through singing in various university choirs. He also lived in halls for his first year at St Andrews before moving into a flat the following year. Rory feels that the compact nature of the campus at St Andrews was conducive to feeling at home quickly and participation in university clubs and societies is perhaps an even more important part of university life in St Andrews than in metropolitan universities.

The major benefit of second year entry for Rory has been the saving of a year from an otherwise five year course together with the associated financial savings. He has also

enjoyed the greater challenge. Rory cannot identify any major disadvantages, but feels that intending students should be aware that, whereas it is possible to take a very wide range of subjects in first year at St Andrews, choices are more limited entering in second year.

Rory advises those who have achieved good grades at school and who are confident that they can cope with the higher work pressure immediately, to apply for second year entry. He also believes that parents know their children and should have a good idea if they are capable and can cope with pressure — if so, they should share their son or daughter's confidence. Finally he advises people to have a look at the campus of universities they are applying to. The nature of the St Andrews campus has been a plus factor for him.