

An Interview with Vice-Principal Katie Stobbs

Admittedly, before I interviewed Stevo Vice-Principal Katie Stobbs I didn't really have the greatest idea as to what her role entailed. I'm sure a fair few Stevo students will have come across the disciplinary aspect to her job when facing the consequences to their drunk actions at summer ball (I'm not naming any names) but believe it or not she doesn't spend her days shouting at students. I caught up with Katie to find out more about her role as Vice-Principal and her journey that led her to Stevo.

How would you describe your role as Vice-Principal?

Katie describes her role as Vice-Principal as a generalist one in the sense that she "has her fingers in a lot of different pies." It seems that a lot of the work she does goes on behind the scenes and most students have probably experienced the outcomes of her work, without necessarily knowing it was Katie who organised it. Her prime focus is The Wider Student Experience (WSE), and her role includes ensuring everything relating to the WSE is running smoothly as well as coming up with ways to expand it. She oversees the Connections Programme which includes the Stephenson Ideas talks and IAS lectures in College, the Community Connections trips and Durham Inspired Award, as well as exchanges and events promoting global citizenship. Katie also helps to coordinate events, formals and activities such as Freshers Week and open days.. Katie also coordinates the Connections Grants scheme and College Participation Fund. She liaises with stakeholders from the University and local community as well as internally with the JCR (especially around sports, societies and volunteering and outreach), MCR and alumni relations. Many college presidents also sit on various committees around the University and Katie is part of the Vice-Principal's Group, Pre-Season Sports Scholars Working Group and the Global Working Group for Durham Global Week.

How did your previous career prepare you for this role?

After completing her Masters at Durham in International Relations she volunteered for three months in the West Bank for an NGO called International Service. She worked for the Anne Frank Trust in London and then ended up returning to the West Bank few years later. At the time, International Service was a UN-affiliated organisation who worked on capacity building projects for Palestinians.

She then worked as a Research Fellow for the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies. As part of her role, she worked with a group of Palestinian Wastewater engineers to develop low-cost, low-tech waste solutions for off-grid communities.

When asked if it was an experience that she would do again she replied most definitely. However, she said she initially returned home from the West Bank after using a fair few of her nine lives. Throughout her time, there were two severe escalations of violence in Gaza which respectively had knock on effects in the West Bank and Jerusalem. She had also been on a tram that was caught up in an attack. Katie said that "she fancied seeing her 30th birthday!"

How did you end up being Vice-Principal at Stevo?

After returning to the UK, Katie decided that Durham University seemed like a good place to work. In the West Bank she managed the Department for International Development's (DFID) overseas volunteering scheme and wanted to carry on working with young people to implement social change. She joined Durham University Student Volunteering and Outreach and explained that it was a good way to begin her involvement in the WSE and working with colleges.

The Assistant Principal role came up at Ustinov College and Katie applied and was awarded the job. She was then acting Vice-Master at Hatfield College during the pandemic. When asked which college was the best she refused to answer!

Do you have any future plans for Stevo?

As many of you probably know Stevo has been focused on building a reputation within Durham and making sure they have strong foundations. Katie said that the increased number of societies and the excellent results from sports teams are helping to build a sense of community within the college and put Stephenson on the map. She said that it's important to her to hold events that fit in with the college values and themes and iterates that they sometimes say no to events that don't necessarily fit or uphold this..

Katie is looking forward to developing the global opportunities available in College, including the first-generation scholar exchange with California State University, Los Angeles.

She's also really proud of Stevo's work promoting diversity and inclusion and mentioned that this work is mainly student led. For example, Stevo hosted the University's Holocaust Memorial Day remembrance events in January 2022 and 2023 and will host Eid prayers in April 2023 for up to 700 Muslim students, staff and community members.

In terms of future plans, it seems like one of her main aims is to work on building Stephenson College's reputation in Durham, something that is also very prevalent in the Presidential candidate's manifestos.

Can the college do anything to make livers-out feel more included due to the distance of college?

Katie says that college are aware of the distance issue however they can't do anything about their location. However, she pointed out that many second and third years often return to college whether it be to attend events or to study when the library is full. She says that putting on events and activities that appeal to each Stevo member is important and that every Stevo student is always welcome at college.