

Proof positive of success

by Sarah Harris

HAZEL HARRIS gained a first-class degree in English literature from Durham university and spent two years as a children's bookseller.

The 26-year-old, from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, enjoyed managing the children's book section at her local Ottakar's, but was keen to break into publishing, so she embarked on a distance-learning basic proofreading course with the Publishing Training Centre at Book House (PTC).

It is an educational charity that provides high-quality training for publishers in Britain and overseas and offers a range of distance-learning courses, including basic proofreading and copy editing. All allow students to work at their own pace from home.

Mrs Harris was able to fit her studies around her job as well as start a new career working for Elsevier, a scientific publisher based in Oxford.

She began there in the shipping department, but after gaining her proofreading qualification in 2007, moved to the production department, managing the copy editing, typesetting and proofreading of encyclopaedias.

Mrs Harris said: 'It was a modular course that taught all the basics of proofreading and how to get into the industry. It worked very well. My job didn't interfere with it at all as I set aside time on Saturday mornings to do the modules.'

'I had to be quite structured in the way I approached it. I'd set aside a few hours to do the modules rather

than trying to do half-an-hour here or there. That way I was able to focus on it.' Elsevier gave her the confidence to become a freelance copy editor and proofreader in September 2009 (wordstitch.co.uk) and Mrs Harris now focuses on academic books, mainly in the humanities and social sciences, but is also interested in genealogy.

She said: 'My main client is Elsevier, and I've got Wiley-Blackwell as well. I'm proofreading for other organisations, and I am also approached by individual authors. It's a great variety, and I love it.'

'It's one of those careers that's Catch-22 — you need the experience to get in, but no one will give you the experience. Doing qualifications is a great idea because it shows you're serious about it.'

'This really suits me. I can work my own hours and control what I do a lot better. I'm doing the job I love. It's the best thing I've done, really.'

Mrs Harris advises people considering distance-learning study to get organised. 'You do need to be disciplined,' she said. 'Make sure you plan ahead and think about whether you really can fit it in. If you don't leave

yourself enough time, you don't get enough from it. You're always rushing and not concentrating on it.' The PTC's basic proofreading course costs £395, and the estimated study time is at least 35 hours over five to six months. Other distance-learning courses include editing on screen, picture research and effective copywriting.

A spokesman said: 'Each student is assigned a personal tutor who will guide them through their study, provide feedback and mark any assignments. With this assistance it is possible to build a new career or

improve existing skills.' There are plenty of courses on offer for people looking for distance-learning opportunities.

The Writers' Bureau specialises in distance and open learning with a range of courses for budding authors. This includes novel-writing, writing for children and even poetry.

Meanwhile Chapterhouse has been training people to proofread and copy edit for 20 years.

COPY EDITORS and proofreaders work from home, correcting mistakes in books and other publications. The recommended minimum rates of pay are £21 an hour for proofreading and £24 an hour for copy editing.

Chapterhouse offers a range of courses, including classroom and distance-learning options. Courses are fully assessed and certificated.

Course director Richard Littler said: 'In the early Nineties, working from home was unusual. These days, the internet now makes it easy to communicate from your own kitchen, it's increasingly popular.'

Chapterhouse co-founder Daisy Crowther adds: 'We've seen an increasing range of students over the past year or two.'

'People from all walks of life are training to proofread and copy edit to give a useful second income, develop their career or provide a way out of their existing job.'

■ **PUBLISHING Training Centre:** 020 8874 2718, train4publishing.co.uk. **The Writers' Bureau:** 0845 345 5995, writersbureau.com. **Chapterhouse:** 01392 811642, chapterhousepublishing.com.



Maintaining standards: Home-based proofreader Hazel Harris has a roster of blue-chip clients