Taking a new direction
Tom Scott took a different study and career path to many, by returning to study as a mature student having spent 20 years working as an accountant in the head offices of international companies, focussing on systems implementation. However, when his last role ended, he decided to take a year off and study astronomy.

“I had always been interested in astronomy and in the past had taken a couple of distance learning courses. My desire to return to study grew out of an interest in amateur astronomy and a desire to gain a deeper understanding of astronomy and the physics behind it.” However, at this stage he had no plans to study for a PhD, let alone undertake a career change.

However, it was after Tom’s first year that he became really interested in the subject and decided to stay on for one more year, which was the first year of a BSc. This desire to keep learning continued and before he knew it, Tom was at the end of the MSc. At that stage the chance to do a PhD came up and Tom didn’t hesitate to take it up, at which point the development of a new career became possible.

Returning to the world of study
Returning to study as a mature student is a daunting task but Tom found it much more rewarding compared to when he left school. “I found that the University was much more encouraging toward mature students than I had expected. At first it was quite strange being back in a classroom with much younger people that I had been used to working with. I found the change to work at new and different things all the time was really motivating after the repetition of my previous role, although I found that approaches from my previous career proved very useful for getting the most out of studying.”

Star-gazing
Tom now works as a post-doctoral researcher in Astronomy out in Spain, which is principally working with data from radio telescopes. This involves analysing data from telescopes and online archives and presenting the results as papers and talks. On a day-to-day basis it is refining analysis using specialised software, reading papers, and discussion and communication with colleagues.

Through returning to study, Tom has made a radical career and life change. Despite taking longer to reach the same working level in his second career, he does not regret his decision: “It is so satisfying to know that the work I am doing is helping to improve the understanding of the processes driving the evolution of galaxies. I find real satisfaction in my work, which allows me to keep learning about astronomy, a subject that continues to fascinate me.”