MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

MSc FINANCIAL CRIME AND COMPLIANCE IN DIGITAL SOCIETIES (TOP-UP)

STUDENT STORIES: DONNA PORTER

DONNA'S STORY

Donna Porter
Head of Financial Crime Quality Assurance and Standards, Natwest Bank

Our MSc in Financial Crime and Compliance in Digital Societies (topup) attracts applicants from around the world with an interest in improving their knowledge of governance, risk and compliance to the latest global standards. Developed with the ICA, this course brings a collaborative approach to help students enhance their knowledge and turn science into practice to drive corporate strategy, policy and processes.

We spoke to MSc Financial Crime and Compliance in Digital Societies graduate, Donna Porter, about her background, career interests and what drove her to choose this master's.

Please introduce yourself and briefly describe your current role?

I'm Donna Porter, and I work at NatWest Bank, where I head up the Financial Crime Quality Assurance and Standards function. My team ensures we're driving the right outcomes in terms of risk mitigation and compliance, particularly with onboarding and maintaining customer relationships within our risk appetite. We also set the standards for how we address financial crime risk and compliance across the bank.

What attracted you to this top-up master's?

I started the postgraduate program after moving into financial crime about six years ago. Although I had prior experience in risk and control roles, this was my first direct financial crime position. Having taken over leading a compliance programme which required engagement with the FCA, I thought this was a good opportunity to seek a formal qualification to support the role I was doing, particularly with regulatory engagement.

When I saw the opportunity for the master's, I was intrigued by the focus on technology and data, both of which are increasingly shaping the banking industry and creating new opportunities for criminals. This was highly relevant to my work, so I wanted to deepen my understanding of emerging threats and how we can leverage technology to combat them.

How has this course contributed to your professional development?

The course has given me a much stronger understanding of financial crime, which has made me more confident when engaging with regulators and stakeholders. It's also helped me bring a digital focus into my role, contributing to strategic thinking around the future of our function. As the organization shifts toward data-led approaches, including machine learning and AI, the skills I gained through the master's have been invaluable in shaping our future operating model and developing my team's capabilities in data analytics.

How do you balance studying with your professional and personal commitments?

It's definitely a juggling act. I had to be organized and creative with my study time. Masterclasses held on weekends were really helpful, and I would often study early in the mornings. I also arranged flexibility at work, finishing early on Fridays to dedicate time to my studies. It wasn't easy, especially during the dissertation phase, but planning ahead and having support from my family and employer made a huge difference. My organization's study leave policy also gave me dedicated days to focus, which was a great help.

How did you benefit from the practical masterclasses?

The masterclasses were fantastic, not only for the subject matter and expert speakers but also for building relationships with the rest of the cohort. The face-to-face interactions allowed us to form a strong support network, which was invaluable throughout the course, especially during the dissertation phase. It was great to share experiences, challenges, and ideas with others in similar roles.

You recently had an article published in the ICA magazine inCOMPLIANCE, please can you tell us a bit more about that?

I was thrilled to have my dissertation topic published. My research focused on how technology impacts customer due diligence and what this means for financial crime professionals. It's a topic I'm passionate about, as it's highly relevant to the future of the industry. The feedback I've received from colleagues and others in the field has been really positive, and I'd love to do more writing if I can find the time!

What advice would you give to someone considering this course?

I'd say absolutely go for it! The course is incredibly relevant and engaging, with so many opportunities to apply what you learn in practice. The support from the course leaders, Dr Katie Benson and Professor Nicholas Lord, is outstanding, and the chance to build relationships with like-minded professionals is a huge benefit. It's hard work, and you'll need to be organized, but I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

What's next for you?

Professionally, I'm focused on putting the course learnings into practice, particularly exploring how we can use machine learning and data analytics to improve financial crime assurance. Personally, I'm debating whether to pursue a PhD, as I'm passionate about the subject and would love to continue exploring it in more depth. It's just a matter of finding the balance to make it work!

Key highlights:

- **12 months**
- **Part-time master's**
- **Developed with the ICA**
- **Online with 3 practical masterclasses (in-person or online)**
- **Flexible format**
- **Ability to study alongside career progression**
- **International collaboration**

GAIN THE DIGITAL EDGE

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