Dr Catherine Douglas is Degree Programme Director in Joint Honours Science and Lecturer in Animal Science in the School of Agriculture Food and Rural Development. An animal welfare behaviourist by training, she joined the School in 2007, managing the regional part of a HEFCE project to encourage students from under-represented groups to take up animal and veterinary science subjects at university.

Catherine has a young family and in 2011, after her second maternity leave, she was able to return to work on a half-time contract. In 2012 she moved onto a short-term 0.6 FTE contact as a Teaching Fellow and in 2015 was promoted to a permanent lecturing post, with the added responsibilities of Degree Programme Director.

She is pleased with the progress of her career to date and the way in which she has been able to combine it with family responsibilities. She said: “I applied for and
successfully secured early promotion. My line manager encouraged me to do this at an early stage, mentioning that there is evidence that women tend to hold off applying for promotion compared to men, so why didn’t I try for it now.”

Catherine had been worried that taking a break from research and then going on maternity leave might have set her progress back. She explained: “It has been difficult to pursue my ideal career in animal welfare research, but the University’s policy for parity of esteem for traditional academic research posts, and now teaching and scholarship posts, has meant I can return to lecturing: bringing on the scientists of tomorrow, while involving myself with smaller research projects and positioning myself to return more fully to research when I can dedicate more time and energy to it.”

She has also found that even if she has to miss some meetings she can catch up later: “Another example of the school’s flexible approach which supports all employees, not just those working part-time due to family commitments is the recording of important meetings which are subsequently available to listen to, so those of us who have to do the school run, can catch up at a convenient time”.

Part time workers sometimes feel they are not accepted as full members of the team but this hasn’t been Catherine’s experience. She has also found that flexibility can work both ways – to the benefit of both employer and employee.

She explained: “I am delighted at how reasonable the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has been in supporting my flexible working requests in order for me to manage (and enjoy) my family life, while pursuing my preferred career in Science: balancing supervising student research projects and still attending the parents’ numeracy mornings at school with my daughter and witnessing my son’s star performance as a chicken in the Christmas nativity! Both management and colleagues have been very positive about part-time working, and it’s great that it is accepted as normal. I feel valued and supported, and in return I am flexible and accommodating in how I work. I am very grateful for this progressive attitude and as such I feel my loyalty to my colleagues and work place is much enhanced. Athena Swan helps recognise and commend this approach.”