

# NO FAILURE NOW

As A-level students begin to assess the impact of their results, Fiona Reid tells how a poor performance put her on the trail of success. **ELIZABETH GOMM** reports



TRAIL OF SUCCESS: Fiona Reid

## **FIONA Reid was devastated when she didn't make the grade at A-level.**

"I didn't fail, but I didn't do well enough to take up my offer of a university place for a law degree.

"It felt like it was the end of the world at the time," said Fiona, now a solicitor and first female owner of a 144-year-old Blackpool law firm.

"What was I going to do now?," she said "I know I didn't work hard enough, I was seeing boys and being a typical teenager, but I didn't admit it at the time.

"I am not a natural exam person either, I have to cram, cram, cram and then when I sit an exam it all goes out of my head.

"I ran into school on my own, picked up my results and ran out again.

"I opened them in the car outside my mum and dad's and burst out crying."

Fiona, educated at Arnold School, Blackpool, had already decided she wanted to be a solicitor and didn't waste any time.

"I got out the Yellow Pages opened it on solicitors and rang the first one I came to - Ascroft Whiteside - and rang to see if they had any positions available.

"I spoke to Anne Smith, then Alan MacPherson's PA, and she said there were no positions for a junior, but they could probably do with somebody.

"She spoke to Alan, told me they could offer a junior £50 a week job and to 'come in and let's speak to you'. She interviewed me, and I got the job, all on the day I got my results."

Fiona, who set out to qualify via the legal executive route, struck lucky that day.

Ascroft Whiteside boss Alan MacPherson became her mentor, sending her on day release at Blackpool and The Fylde College for two years, followed by two years' home study, to qualify as a legal executive.

Fiona said: "Basically, as a legal executive you can do what a solicitor does, all the fee earning, representing at court and seeing clients, but at that time you couldn't become a partner in a firm.

"I was happy where I was for a couple of years, but then, in about 2003 I think, I approached Alan for a pay rise. He told me if I wanted to earn more money I'd have to be a solicitor ... he gave me the carrot and the stick."

It was a big commitment for Fiona, involving two years, full-time, at university.

Ascroft Whiteside paid her a retainer, while her husband Alex took on the lion's share

of the domestic bills. Later he was made redundant from his job as a slaughterman.

Fiona was able to return the favour in supporting him while he qualified as a plumber.

Fiona gained her practising certificate in 2005, after she received a distinction on the Legal Practice Course. On April 1 the following year she became a partner in the firm.

"It didn't matter that I hadn't gone to university, I was still under 30 and young to be a partner."

This year, when Alan MacPherson retired, Fiona took over. The firm has become a limited company and solicitor Lester Samuels is a fellow director. Alan still works there part-time on a consultancy basis.

"I am the first female partner and owner, and we can trace the company back to 1876, and possibly as far back as 1841."

Fiona, sitting at her desk in the Whitegate Drive offices, said: "Things can take you totally by surprise.

"I picked up the phone book that day and rang here by chance, I came in that afternoon and went out with a job - just the right time, right place.

"I have done every job going here - from office junior to owner. I know exactly what everybody does."

Fiona, who lives in Blackpool with Alex, and their two-year old daughter, Tia, plans to grow the business and to make Ascroft Whiteside a household name for professional excellence in a friendly environment.

She also finds time to go into schools to help young girls strive to reach their full potential - as part of Jane Kenyon and Clare Young's Girls Out Loud initiative.

"The aim is to give them better role models and to illustrate that you don't need to be a WAG or a supermodel to be a success."

Fiona's mum and dad, Paul and Evelyn, are a constant support.

Her mum looks after Tia while Fiona is at work.

Fiona, who is developing her own management skills by taking Lancaster University's LEAD management leadership course, spends her spare time with her husband and Tia, but still finds time for regular workouts at the gym.

She has no plans to lean on Tia to step into her business shoes

"I want her to do her own thing - she can do whatever she wants to do."

## Delicious smoothie for mornings

**KICK-START** your day with a delicious smoothie ... even when you are right out of fresh fruit. Just stock up on some cans, and you'll never be left struggling for a quick and delicious breakfast drink.

### Very Berry Smoothie

Makes 6 glasses

### Ingredients

150ml semi-skimmed milk, cold  
100ml evaporated milk

1 banana, peeled  
1 x 410g can strawberries in fruit juice  
1 x 300g can raspberries in fruit juice  
1 x 284g can blackberries in fruit juice

### Method

1. Drain the fruit juice into a bowl, reserving 300ml of the juice. Place the fruits and juice in the freezer for 1 hour.

2. Place the juice, evaporated and semi-skimmed milk, banana and half the berries into a blender or smoothie maker. Blend for 2-3 minutes until mixed well.

3. Add the remaining fruits and blend until

mixed and smooth.  
4. Pour into chilled glasses and serve.

### Canny Hint:

Use any selection of canned fruits - or for a tropical touch, how about adding a spoonful of coconut milk?

### Nutritional value per serving

Calories: 77  
Protein: 3.3 g  
Carbohydrates: 11.8 g  
Saturated Fat: 1.3 g  
Fibre: 2.1 g

