Jacqueline Allan has a remarkable story to tell and is extremely grateful to Birkbeck. She received a scholarship and first-class honours for her BSc in Psychology at the College, and is now continuing her studies at PhD level, thanks to one of Birkbeck’s 20 Anniversary Scholarships for PhD students. The doctoral scholarships, which cover tuition fees and provide a stipend of £15,726 per year, were offered in 2013 to mark Birkbeck’s 190th birthday.

Six years ago, Jacqueline started a charity called Diabetics with Eating Disorders to offer support to people suffering from diabulimia – an eating disorder in which a person with type 1 diabetes reduces their insulin intake to lose weight.

She said: “I knew that getting a psychology degree would be the best way to make a difference through my charity work and that was a driving force for me”.

Jacqueline, who at the time suffered from diabulimia, delayed starting her undergraduate degree for a year so that she could make sure she was healthy enough to be successful. She credits her achievements at Birkbeck with playing an important part in her recovery, saying: “It’s been totally transformative, and I feel completely different about myself. I now get my value from my academic progress. That’s what’s kept me going – knowing that I’m improving all the time, and that what I do now is so much more important than what I look like. I can’t really put it into words how grateful I am to Birkbeck. Birkbeck has turned my life around.”

Jacqueline’s PhD research looks at psychological risk and protective factors in variations of blood sugar in those with type 1 diabetes. She explained: “If blood sugar levels in people with type 1 diabetes are not controlled by daily insulin injections, then the body begins to destroy its own tissues. There are people with type 1 diabetes who deliberately omit to take their insulin in order to achieve rapid weight loss. This is incredibly dangerous and can lead to serious health complications and death. It is an eating disorder in its own right with a very different etiology and prognosis from anorexia and bulimia, but it remains largely unrecognised. “My professional goals and my personal goals are one and the same thing now and when I actually stop and think about that, it’s mind-blowing. My work is my PhD, but my PhD is done solely on behalf of people who have supported me and who I support.”