



Farouq Aldandashi

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## Syrian student shares his experiences

A promising student who was displaced from Syria has spoken of his experiences studying at Northumbria University, Newcastle.

27-year-old Farouq Aldandashi came to Northumbria to study for an [MSc in Disaster Management and Sustainable Development](#) last year after being awarded a prestigious Chevening Scholarship.

[Chevening](#) is the UK government's longstanding international award programme, aimed at developing global leaders. It provides future leaders,

influencers and decision makers from across the world with the opportunity to develop their professional and academic skills within the UK. The awards are funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with scholars personally selected by British Embassies and High Commissions throughout the world.

Farouq was chosen for the award due to his ten years of experience working in the voluntary and NGO sector. As a 17-year old living in war-torn Homs, he wanted to help people and be a part of the community so began volunteering for the Red Cross.

He said: “I spent almost seven years working for the Red Cross in the most complicated and complex man-made human crisis in history, all while studying for a degree. I never thought that helping people in this way would bring a smile for me. Their lives could be shattered and you can be heartbroken with what you see, but I found I could go to bed and feel content that I had made a difference to someone, even if it was extremely marginal. It’s so important to find the positive seed inside the bad plant.”

His parents were keen that he continued his studies throughout the war as they wanted to ensure he had future opportunities. However, when he began working after graduating, high inflation rates resulting from the war led to his earnings dropping so much that he could no longer afford to live there. He made the difficult decision to leave his family and move to Turkey.

After arriving in Turkey, Farouq joined the International Medical Corps and CARE where he spent three years reporting on and evaluating the success of projects that had been awarded grants. He was keen to build on these experiences and expand his learning in this area, but found opportunities were limited to him due to his Syrian origins.

Farouq explained: “My work experiences had made me more interested in the work of NGOs and the sociology behind it. I was keen to further my studies in this area to better develop my career, but it was almost impossible to get a visa with my status as a Syrian. Some friends suggested I look for scholarships and that’s when I discovered Chevening. It’s a massive thing – the Harvard of scholarships for those in developing countries.”

After being awarded the Chevening Scholarship, Farouq applied to study Northumbria’s one-year full-time MSc in Disaster Management and

Sustainable Development. This globally-focused course was the first of its kind in the world and is designed to help students prepare for and respond to man-made and environmental crisis situations. Graduates have moved into a careers with the likes of the United Nations, World Vision, governments, charities, development and humanitarian aid organisations, and local authorities.

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He has thoroughly enjoyed his time at Northumbria, where he lives close to the centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He said: “The course at Northumbria is very interesting. It’s not always about the practicalities of disaster management; it also looks into the literature and makes you think critically about new and emerging possibilities. Science is always changeable in this field so it has been a brilliant experience to combine my practical experience with an understanding of the core concepts behind it.

“The people here are beautiful. They have treated me well,” he added. “I love the country, the culture, the music, the football... The multicultural aspect of the city is absolutely beautiful. I have always felt welcomed in Newcastle and I guess this was proved when it was the only city in the North to vote against Brexit.”

Farouq is due to complete his full-time course at the end of September and is now beginning to look for a future job. He said: “This prestigious scholarship equips me with the arsenal to have a great role in Europe, but I’m not yet sure what that will be. Being Syrian means you don’t have the luxury to choose where you would like to go. However, I have faith, I speak two

languages and though I have lost everything in my life, I will not lose my ambition. I'm here to show people that Syrian's are just like everyone else.

"I'm 27 and have faced war, displacement and lack of money, yet I managed to work in a decent job in Turkey and achieve a scholarship to study in the UK. Amongst all the chaos I've faced, I feel I have achieved. I can walk proudly with a master's degree from the UK. I feel that I'm now well educated."

Northumbria University is a partner of Chevening and supports the scholarship programmes. The University's International Partnerships Manager, Alejandra Vicencio, said: "I have experience of assessing applications for Chevening scholarships and they are definitely not easy to get. They look for future leaders and only want to award the scholarships to the best of the best, so we should feel very proud that Farouq chose to come to Northumbria via this scheme. I am very glad to see that someone coming from this situation has been able to take advantage of this opportunity."

Click here for more information on Northumbria's MSc in [Disaster Management and Sustainable Development](#).

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