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African adventure for geography student

A Northumbria student put his university studies into practice when he spent six weeks helping communities in Uganda.

Final year Geography student Peter McGowran got the chance to experience the realities of sustainable development first hand thanks to Northumbria

University and charity Big Beyond. He now plans to continue his studies at Northumbria on the [MSc Disaster Management and Sustainable Development](#) degree from September. Peter said he felt drawn to Africa after a second year module at Northumbria on sustainable development in the continent. He was inspired to contact charity Big Beyond and volunteer for the trip, which involved six weeks of work helping a community in Uganda, supported by a bursary from Northumbria.

Peter said: "I ended up working mostly in conservation work, but also a bit with education and enterprise, though these projects were all interconnected. For example, I would work with a local project coordinator by loaning seeds to local farmers.

"I also prepared and taught a lesson in a local school about the benefits of composting, how it works and why everyone should do it, especially in an agricultural area such as this. This is only one example of the project I was involved with."

As well as his volunteering activities, Peter was able to visit the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, home of the critically endangered Mountain Gorilla. The Geography student credits his time at Northumbria as having inspired him to undertake this experience and said he would highly recommend the course to anyone interested in the wider world.

Peter added: "If you are someone interested in travelling and understanding the world, but also passionate about being able to change it for the better, I can't recommend Geography at Northumbria enough - and a volunteering experience such as the one I took part in.

"I would really recommend Big Beyond, the organisation I volunteered through, too. They are switched on to many issues surrounding sustainable and local development.

"This trip, combined with what I have learned studying geography at Northumbria, has inspired me to continue my interest in this topic, by deciding to study an MSc in Sustainable Development and Disaster Management here next year, with a view to pursuing a career in the field."

[Dr Richard Kotter](#), Senior Lecturer in Economic and Political Geography at Northumbria said: "After Peter had returned to Northumbria for his final year of undergraduate study, I found out that he had spent a really productive spell volunteering abroad in Uganda to further and deepen his interest in tourism, sustainable development and community development.

"This will give him extra experience, not least taking human geography and development concepts and processes out of the academic classroom into the applied world of conservation, agriculture and tourism economic and community development overseas.

“This will nicely supplement, in terms of internationalization, cultural experiences and skills, Peter’s undergraduate dissertation on tourism labour market and human resource dynamics in the Windermere areas of the English Lake District.

“I am delighted that Peter has applied to continue his studies further with us at Masters level with our internationally recognised MSc in Disaster Management and Sustainable Development.”

Peter’s experience will also be featured in the Geographical Association’s Post-16 to HE committee’s online newsletter [Geography Matters](#): with printed copies shared at this year’s GA Annual Conference in Manchester in early April. Northumbria’s Geography department hosts the Tyne & Wear branch of the Geographical Association, which supports teachers and aspiring teachers and educationalists.

Northumbria’s research into Disaster and Development has been ranked among the top 20 most impressive examples in the UK for its contribution towards global development. Of the 6,975 impact case studies submitted to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – the system that is used to assess the research quality of all UK universities – judges singled out work by the Disaster and Development Network (DDN) at Northumbria.

Since its foundation at Northumbria in 2004, the DDN has been researching and facilitating the implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies to improve community resilience in some of the world’s poorest communities. Researchers from the University worked with communities in Bangladesh, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan and Zimbabwe to gauge ideas and perspectives on the risks they face. The DDN at Northumbria was the first, and for a long time the only, UK university research group to be an official partner in the United Nations process to decide a global agreement on disaster risk reduction. For more information visit:

www.northumbria.ac.uk/ddn

Northumbria offers a range of courses in Geography with the department ranked Top 30 in the UK based on research power following the results of the Research Excellence Framework 2014. To find out more about studying at Northumbria go to: www.northumbria.ac.uk/geography

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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