



Image from the Troubles in Northern Ireland

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69-year-old is relishing postgraduate research opportunity at Northumbria

Retired education adviser David Staples is taking on a new challenge as he embarks on a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at Northumbria University.

The 69-year-old's last on-campus university experience was in 1972 when he studied for his degree in Economic and Social History at York University.

After gaining his professional teaching qualification, David was a history teacher for 11 years before working for several local authorities in education management roles. He then worked as an advisor for the UK Government, under Tony Blair, where he worked on a strategy for raising standards across schools.

David studied part-time for a master's in history from Huddersfield University and after running his own company for a period, decided to retire. But it wasn't long before he started looking to add another string to his bow.

"I was looking for something to do," he said. "And then along came this opportunity to work with [Dr Connal Parr](#), an academic in [History at Northumbria University](#), and I was immediately interested.

"I have a longstanding interest in the Northern Ireland conflict, in which Connal is a renowned expert. I was thrilled to have my PhD application accepted and to be able to study with Connal as my supervisor. It's very special to be working under his guidance as he is a young and forward-thinking expert on history, politics and society in Ireland."

David began his PhD about *Music and The Troubles in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998* at Northumbria University, in October last year. The three-year fulltime doctorate will examine how musicians, particularly rock and folk musicians, tackled the Northern Ireland Troubles and how Irish communities came together for music concerts, despite the longstanding grievances between Catholics and Protestants who held deeply opposing views on Northern Ireland's relationship with Great Britain.

Having been a student at Northumbria for six months up to now, David is full of praise for the University's, staff, facilities and fellow students.

"I would recommend Northumbria as a comfortable, stimulating and welcoming place to study, with opportunities to take part more widely in subject-related events," he said. "The other students here treat me as an equal, not 'the older guy' and I find everyone to be warm and openminded here.

“I find the library staff at Northumbria to be particularly helpful. There is a superb collection of books on Irish history, and great opportunities to use online resources as well as obtain books from other libraries in the UK and overseas.

“The idea behind doing this PhD was always to enjoy the research and combine it with detailed on-the-ground research in Ireland. I want it to be fun, and so far, it has been. Now that I’m approaching 70, it feels like I’m living the dream.”

Northumbria’s History PhD students are studying a diverse range of topics, enhanced by the supervision of new research-active staff. The University’s Department of Humanities offers a stimulating environment for discussions of research and students participate in the full range of on-campus research.

[Click here more information about Northumbria’s postgraduate research.](#)

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