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Postgraduate study: How to master a competitive CV

As George Osborne prepares to unveil new measures concerning postgraduate funding, Northumbria University, Newcastle launches a new loan scheme to provide postgraduate students with funding of up to £10,000. Two of the University's alumni discuss how a postgraduate qualification can set you apart from the crowd.

In the current economic climate, investing more money into your education can feel like a big risk. You've already invested time and money into an undergraduate degree, so why go on to further study?

“There are countless benefits that come with taking your education to the next level” explains Chris Crame, 26, a graduate of Northumbria’s MA in International Development. “For me, the biggest issue when I was considering further study was whether a Masters would help me become more employable. I didn’t just want an extra qualification; I wanted a course that would set out a pathway into employment.

“Although my two degrees are in different disciplines, my Masters helped me develop many of the elements I had studied as an undergraduate, but it made them more relevant to a specific profession. It allowed me to focus my skills development according to the graduate roles I was interested in applying for.”

Chris now works as a Student Recruitment Administrator for Northumbria, a role that involves international travel, visiting prospective students in their home countries to understand their expectations in relation to higher education.

During his studies, Chris found that many of his fellow students were already gaining employment experience. He said: “A lot of people on my course were working alongside their studies – the lectures were taught in the evening to accommodate this and the lecturers were extremely supportive in scheduling around students with other commitments.

“There are many more people who would love to take up further study but who cannot afford to pay the fees. I think more funding in this area would make a huge difference in the number of people who are able to continue their studies.”

Finance remains one of the biggest concerns for students considering pursuing a postgraduate qualification. However, many studies show that a postgraduate qualification increases your earning potential, so students can expect a return on their investment. Indeed, research conducted by the Sutton Trust in 2013 found that students with a post-graduate degree could earn over £200,000 more than those with undergraduate degrees over a 40 year working life (www.suttontrust.com).

Currently, universities offer support to some individuals in the form of bursaries and scholarships, but there has been no loan scheme for postgraduate study – an issue Osborne is set to address on Wednesday.

Additionally, in response to students' concerns, Northumbria University has also launched a brand new scheme to provide additional support for students residing in the North East. Northumbria's loan package will allow full-time postgraduate students to access funding of up to £10,000 to cover the cost of tuition fees, as well as supporting living and accommodation expenses (terms and conditions apply).

So, with financial help on its way, and an increasingly attractive CV on the horizon, the next question is what to study?

“The motivations for studying at postgraduate level vary depending on the individual” says Northumbria's Marketing Director, Adam Dunlop. “While many students sign up to a Masters straight after graduating from their degree, others may have already gained extensive work experience. It may be that they are looking for a career change, or simply want to study a subject they are passionate about.”

Somebody who credits postgraduate study for furthering her career development is Sophie Haagensen, Northumbria MBA (Master of Business Administration) graduate, Head of Strategy and Planning for Atom Bank and former Deputy Director of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Sophie said: “After studying Biology at undergraduate level, I gained a couple of years' management experience which prompted my decision to return to University to study a Masters in business and a few years later, I completed an MBA through distance learning. My postgraduate studies developed a range of practical and theoretical competencies which have supported me in roles spanning all areas of business, from operations through to strategy.”

“When employers hire postgraduates, they are not just investing in the individual,” added Sophie, “They are investing in the breadth of knowledge and skills that this person can share with the whole organisation.”

Postgraduate courses at Northumbria are available on both a full and part time basis on campus, while some courses are offered on a distance learning basis to create flexible study options. For further information, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/pg.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focussed, 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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