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Humanities

Can universities decolonise the curriculum?

Cultural bias may account for lack of diversity in subjects such as history and philosophy

Helena Pozniak

Can you name a philosopher? If Plato or Aristotle come to mind, but Franz Fanon or Gayatri Spivak do not, you may have a case of Eurocentrism – an understanding of the world that centres the west, at the expense of other cultures. But it's not a value judgement on those non-European minds, say those who are increasingly alarmed at a lack of diversity among humanities postgraduates. "It's a blind spot," says Shyane Siriwardena, who lectures in philosophy at Leeds Trinity

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University. "It's down to the naive belief that if black or ethnic philosophers were any good, they'd be up there with the rest of them." And this is damaging for all of us beyond the confines of universities, she says. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students make up 22.3% of all master's graduates, but just 11.5% of humanities postgraduates, and this drops to just 8.6% for history and philosophy and 9.2% for the arts. Business, law and medicine on the other hand have much higher proportion of black and Asian research postgraduates.

"I'm used to being the only brown person in the room," says Dr Shahmima Akhtar, a doctoral fellow working with the Royal Historical Society, whose race, ethnicity and equality report found history is the least diverse subject in the UK - black historians make up less than 1% of university history staff. Akhtar believes the problem in her subject starts in schools, where the history taught is predominantly white and Eurocentric, and is the start of an enduring and implicit bias against history from the perspective of those who are not white.

"If students never see anyone who looks like them in textbooks, they'll think the subject's not for them. They won't feel welcome. By the time students graduate from a history degree, they may have studied Nazi Germany three or four times," she says.

Diversity specialist and business psychologist Binna Kandola says it can be easy for BAME students to feel excluded by lack of representation in the historical account. "Source material in humanities is incredibly subjective in a way it can't be with subjects such as maths or science," she says. "It's easy for BAME students to feel they aren't studying their own culture."

Ironically, master's courses allow for more diversity, but by then too many BAME students are no longer in education. Black students are one and a half times more likely to drop out from university than white or Asian students. And because black students are less likely to gain a high degree than their white counterparts - 57% of black students get a 2:1 or first degree at undergraduate level compared with 81% of white students - this rules out postgraduate study for many.

"But we want a society that is cohesive and multicultural," says Akhtar. "We're divided on so many



levels - history has the power to create that cohesion."

She's still shocked by a 2014 YouGov survey that found 59% of Britons believe the British empire was something to be proud of. Culture shapes our lives as much as politics, say the founders of Arts Emergency, a new and expanding mentoring charity and network for people from underprivileged backgrounds.

"Humanities are about human stories, and we are all human. If you don't have diversity, you don't have the full human experience," says Carys Nelkon, head of programmes at the charity, which has to date mentored 700 students, about 60% from BAME backgrounds. She blames the attainment gap, cultural bias, and simple economics for poor BAME representation in humanities and the arts.

"If you come from a privileged background, research shows you are four times more likely to make it

▼ BAME students make up 23.5% of all master's graduates, but only 11.5% of humanities postgraduates

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

'If students never see anyone who looks like them in textbooks, they'll think the subject's not for them'

Dr Shahmima Akhtar
Royal Historical Society

in the creative industries," she says. Humanities are essential for teaching critical thinking, communication and ethics, says Arts Emergency chief executive Neil Griffiths. There needs to be more clarity around job prospects and opportunities for humanities postgraduates.

"As a student my Sri Lankan family encouraged towards traditional subjects such as

science, medicine or law," says Siriwardena. "They believed that humanities won't get you anywhere." But one year on from the RHS report, there is progress, says Akhtar. Universities are acting on a swathe of recommendations, including engaging with schools, hosting more talks and looking to diversify reading lists and course content.

Some universities have focused master's - Goldsmiths now offers master's in black British history and black British writing, Birmingham City is preparing for its first intake on a new black studies MA, and Bristol University has appointed a black history professor to explore the city's historic links with slavery.

As for the black philosophers and historians, there are plenty, says Siriwardena - from professors Naomi Zack to Kwame Anthony Appiah to medieval philosopher Avicenna - they just need to make their way on to the reading lists.

Access

High costs and debt still a barrier to postgrad study

Even with financial assistance, tuition fees and living costs remain prohibitive for some

Seb Murray

Growing up in Redcar on the north-east coast of Yorkshire, Kerry-Anne Revie, who is from a low-income background, thought that "people like me don't belong at Oxford". The elite university wants to change this perception: in July 2019 it launched UNIQ+ - a summer school that is designed to widen minority groups' access to postgraduate education, like those who have been in care or received free school meals.

Revie spent six weeks at Oxford's biochemistry department, assisting an academic's research into DNA transcription. The 22-year-old is doing an integrated master's in biological sciences at University of Leeds, and says UNIQ+ put her on a par with peers who could afford to do voluntary work.

UNIQ+ is one of a flurry of recent schemes, from mentoring to financial aid, designed to boost postgrad diversity in response to concerns that undergrad debt is deterring people from staying on at university. A 2016 study found that 2.4% of white students had started a PhD within five years of graduating, compared with just 1.3% of black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) students. A key factor is the financial barrier: only 1.2% of PhD studentships from UK Research and Innovation research councils have been awarded to black or black-mixed students in the past three years.

Prof Paul Wakeling at the University of York's department of education says universities "focused on the bottom line" by prioritising the recruitment of a more diverse range of undergrad students rather than postgrads - a move driven in part by financial necessity. In order to charge the max £9,250 undergrad fees, a university's fair access plan must be approved by the Office for Students, but only for undergrad degrees and postgrad initial teacher training, because there is no cap on postgrad tuition fees, other than for initial teacher training.

▼ Universities attract a less diverse range of students for postgrad degrees compared with undergraduates

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



"We need more regulatory oomph," says Wakeling. For its part, the government introduced loans of up to £25,000 (now £25,700) for doctoral students in 2018/19, and in 2016/17 loans for master's degrees worth £10,000 (now £10,906) were launched. The latter widened access to postgrad study: enrolment on loan-eligible master's courses increased by 74% among black students, and by 59% among those from low undergrad participation areas - a proxy for disadvantage - between 2015/16 and 2016/17. Both groups had previously cited finance as a major barrier to a postgrad degree.

But the loans could "subsidise the wealthy" as they are not based on students' financial need, says Wakeling - you can get one no matter how much money you have in the bank. And they rarely cover all tuition and living costs, which can be up to £30,000 a year in London, says Catherine Baldwin, director of recruitment and admissions at London School of Economics.

LSE fills this gap in finance by awarding more than £13m of scholarships annually, including needs-based awards such as the Graduate Support Scheme, worth between £5,000 and £15,000. Baldwin says this helps LSE attract a broad range of nationalities, as well as students from across the UK, not just south-east England.

However, Ginevra House, a freelance researcher at the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), says that recent gains made in fair access will be "eroded" if tuition fees continue to increase: "People will rely on part-time work or bank loans that add more debt to make ends meet."

Since the introduction of master's loans, universities have been hiking postgrad tuition fees to cover the cost of running courses; research programmes overall make a substantial loss, she says.

Revie is searching for funding to potentially do a PhD in immunology at Oxford, but she remains undecided. While she was on the UNIQ+ scheme last year, university admissions staff pointed out sources of funding and shared potential admissions interview questions so

'Fair access will be eroded if tuition fees continue to increase. People will rely on bank loans to make ends meet'

Ginevra House
HEPI

she could prepare. Oxford will also waive her £75 application fee.

In addition, UNIQ+ pays a £2,500 stipend, and Oxford put Revie up in halls in Jericho, an Oxford city suburb. Some students in the halls were "snobby" she says. When she complained that bars shut relatively early at the weekend, one quipped: "That's because everyone works harder in Oxford and does better."

But the experience has not deterred her from staying on and indeed, most UNIQ+ students are considering a postgrad at Oxford or another Russell Group university, says Nadia Pollini, director of graduate admissions. She adds: "We were amazed by the response - in four weeks we had 200 applications for 33 places. There's a real need for this. We are looking to expand it."

How to fund it

£25,700

Maximum government loan for doctoral students under current funding arrangements

£10,906

Maximum government loan for master's students under current funding arrangements

74%

Increase in enrolments among black students for eligible master's courses after new loans introduced in 2016

Comment
Jonathan Wilson

Academia looks like a pint of Guinness to me - diverse below, but not at the top

A lot of my work examines counterculture, race, ethnicity and religion - and challenges some western paradigms. In my early days I had to work hard to convince research directors of the value in supporting such research aims, and academic peers of the need to expand our subject discipline and research approaches. It's tough, because I, along with other BAME academics, feel that we are fighting implicit bias on a number of levels.

Firstly, how you look, linked to a presupposed stereotype of academic naivety and inexperience - sometimes disguised with comments of exotic curiosity.

Secondly, we face an overly critical and dismissive reception to the new concepts and sources that we've introduced, as niche, tribal or superstitious. Also, some of this meant actually overcoming biases against me as a person of colour, where pervasively there was an accusation of implied ethnocentrism and bias on my side - questions that I don't think a white person would face. You simply don't encounter the same levels of politics and diplomacy at play in the sciences, where content is more cut and dried.

Master's courses that focus on black history or literature can be fantastic - but I do wonder if you are a person of colour whether you need another qualification that signals that you are black. I'd probably want to study something to overcome stereotyping - Persian poetry, for instance. Humanities is about having an intimate working knowledge of language and rhetoric - and that can cause people to respond emotionally and close doors prematurely. Students might feel they're not communicating in their authentic everyday voice. Can the work of Pulitzer prize-winning Kendrick Lamar, Nobel prize-winning Bob Dylan, Jean-Michel Basquiat or Jimi Hendrix sit alongside that of Ovid, Robert Burns, van Gogh or Beethoven? In my world yes, but many may need help with their cultural baggage.

For years we've been saying we need more diversity among senior academics, but I don't see the progression of homegrown minority scholars. I call it the "pint of Guinness" syndrome - diversity below but not at the top. We want to get to the stage where colour, gender and age don't matter - how do we get there without losing minds who can challenge labels?

Prof Jonathan Wilson is a marketing academic and holds a Doctor of Letters from the University of Dundee



▲ Jonathan Wilson was a LinkedIn's Top Voice for 2019



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▼ *Playing ball: the University of Stirling now offers a master's in human-animal interaction*

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN PHELPS



Experience 'I measure the bond between animals and humans'

Lauren Samet, 33, is about to complete her PhD in animal welfare and nutrition

Interview by Helena Pozniak

I still pinch myself that I'm here. I've always loved animals and wanted to help make a positive change. I'm the first person in my family to go to university. After I graduated in biological sciences from the University of East Anglia, I applied to all the big animal charities - to zoos and to conservation organisations. But animal welfare is so competitive, you need a specialist qualification.

I saved up to take an MSc in animal welfare at Northampton University. It was right up my street, I loved the research element. My supervisor gave me confidence and encouragement to take on a PhD - I never even thought I'd do a master's, let alone research. During my PhD I've worked part-time as a nutritionist for Marwell Zoo for a year on maternity leave cover, which was an amazing experience as those jobs are like gold dust. I've also worked as a pet nutritionist in Yorkshire and lectured on an animal science degree.

My research looks at anxiety in dogs and whether herbal supplements actually do have a calming effect. I joined the research team of the Dogs Trust in spring. This is the kind of work I wanted when I first graduated, but I now realise I needed to take the research route to get here. When we are collecting data, we work directly with dogs. Our team is running a groundbreaking longitudinal study looking at dog health, welfare and behaviour. I'm working to develop a tool that measures the bond between humans and animals.

At this level you can carry out research that's needed to support positive policy changes, as well as having an impact on the welfare of thousands of animals. This is my dream job.



Lauren Samet's research focuses on anxiety in dogs

Animal behaviour

Learn to master the subtle art of communication

'We tend only to listen to our own voice and that's dangerous. We have forgotten we are part of something bigger'

Clara Mancini
Open University

Degrees in this emerging field offer fascinating research opportunities and career options

Helena Pozniak

If your pets could speak, what would they tell you? Experts at the animal-computer interaction lab at the Open University (OU) are close to finding out. There, animal behaviour specialists work with designers to create the kind of technology that helps animals

communicate and work alongside humans more naturally - to raise the alarm if an owner falls ill, put a wash on, or switch out the lights for an owner who has a disability.

"If you give animals more of a voice, they can make themselves better understood. It's as though they can talk back to us - and this can be very valuable," says Clara Mancini, a communication and design expert who founded the lab back in 2011. "We are researching with them, allowing animals to participate in the design process."

This is a niche area of an already niche field - but dozens of master's at UK universities relate to animal behaviour in some form; some research-led, some practical.

Working closely with charities, the OU's lab has collaborated with the likes of Dogs for Good and Medical Detection Dogs. Traditionally, medical detection dogs trained to sniff out cancerous cells have learned to sit down in front of positive samples. But for a dog, this is an unnatural response to an exciting smell, says Mancini, and limits what they can reveal. Her team have created a sort of sniffing platform with pressure pads that measures a dog's spontaneous response to an odour. Mancini hopes this will allow scientists to detect more nuances in a dog's reaction, revealing more about the stage or concentration of the cancer, for example. Other projects include designing an alarm - in the shape of a sausage, no less - that an assistance dog could pull if a diabetic owner suffers a hypoglycaemic attack. Researchers have also designed large

snout-friendly buttons for assistance dogs in the home.

While the OU's lab is unique in the UK, the University of Stirling is also offering a master's in human animal interaction. Many taught courses, such as a new master's in animal behaviour at the University of St Andrews, aim to act as a springboard into a research career.

Students at Exeter's MSc in animal behaviour spend a week on Lundy Island observing abundant wildlife, including puffins, guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes, not to mention the island's rare breed Soay sheep, says programme director Dr Lisa Leaver, an animal behaviour expert with a background in psychology who founded the course in 2003. "Most of our graduates go on to do PhDs," she says.

"Some work in science education departments in zoos, or go on to teach, or work with conservation charities." A research apprenticeship forms a significant part of the course, she says, with subjects as varied as social structure of killer whale groups to male signalling of fiddler crabs on Portuguese beaches.

Understanding animals better has wider moral implications, Mancini believes. "We tend only to listen to our own voice and that's dangerous. We have forgotten we are part of something bigger - and if we don't adjust our perspective, we are eventually going to destroy the planet."

Climate emergency Why education and activism go hand in hand

For students and universities, tackling the climate crisis is a shared responsibility

Anna Turns

Turned down a six-figure training contract to focus on climate issues," says law graduate Harry Holmes, 21, a King's College London master's student in environment, politics and globalisation. Worried that many years of studying environmental law or a PhD would take him well into what he calls "the climate decade", he opted for a one-year course that allows him to continue his environmental activism while broadening his understanding of climate breakdown. He volunteers for UK Youth Climate Coalition, engaging 18-29 year olds in national and community campaigns and works with UK Student Climate Network. "Juggling activism with my studies is difficult and draining but it's the right thing to do," says Holmes.

With sustainability-focused postgraduate courses ranging from agroforestry to engineering, the choice is now vast. "Sustainability is no longer just for biologists and geographers," says Iain Patton, chief executive of the Alliance

for Sustainability Leadership in Education, who recently launched the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Leaders with 40 vice-chancellors and principals from UK institutions plus students working together to meet net-zero targets. "Yes, we need environmental specialists but everyone needs a baseline carbon literacy and understanding of sustainability." Thanks to youth climate activism, Patton has noticed a huge shift in postgraduate education. "The world is changing now," he says. "This is really significant. Students will deliver carbon-literacy training, influence institutional leadership and have positive impacts on postgraduate curriculum design. What we currently have is broken - we need innovative new approaches."

Former pro vice-chancellor of Arden University Dr Alison Green is an expert witness for the Climate Commission. Having moved from academia to activism, she's now national director of Scientists Warning, a global movement of climate scientists, because "it can't be business as usual", she says. "Universities should be a force for good, enabling us to become good planetary citizens and stewards of the planet. The relationship between economy and education must be resolved - we need to transform MBAs based on classical growth theory to evidence-based environmental economics, for example."

Manchester Metropolitan University leads the way with a pioneering carbon literacy programme as part of its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2038, and sits in second place in the student-led People and Planet University League that ranks universities by ethical and environmental performance. Helena Tinker, Manchester Met's head of environmental sustainability, works with the Carbon Literacy Trust, training students and staff to reduce their environmental impact. "We're embedding this into some degrees and we offer free five-day intensive courses teaching students how to lead carbon literacy training. From an employability perspective, it's fantastic," says Tinker. "While learning about sustainability and climate change they become competent, confident trainers."

At the University of Sussex, which has 3,000 solar panels, an anaerobic digester, grey water recycling and renewable electricity, vice-chancellor Adam Tickell explains that sustainability will soon be integral to every student's experience: "A compulsory, non-credit-bearing programme will give everyone a sense of collective environmental responsibility. The Sussex student spirit is hungry for change - we want to lead the way," he says.



Experience "There's been a real culture shift in awareness about plastic and the environment"

Emily Stevenson, an Msc student at Exeter, co-founded Beach Guardian CIC in 2017

Interview by Anna Turns

I've been incredibly lucky to grow up in Cornwall so I feel a strong duty of care towards the ocean. As a child, I started making art out of the plastic I found on beaches and set up my first website when I was 11 to raise awareness and funds for the Marine Conservation Society. While studying marine biology at Plymouth University as an

undergraduate, I realised how dire the situation really was and how much needs to be done. In 2017, during my third year, I co-founded a social enterprise called Beach Guardian CIC with my dad. After watching Blue Planet, people wanted to make a change but didn't know how, so we had the privilege of facilitating local community beach cleans around Padstow - it's a special thing because everyone feels Beach Guardian belongs to all of us. We'd be nothing without the volunteers who join us on the beach.

Since we began, we've organised hundreds of outreach events and delivered workshops to more than 12,500 schoolchildren across Cornwall and as far away as

Manchester, Kent and Salisbury. For me, it's been a phenomenal learning curve. I've gained experience applying for grants, organising events, and my confidence has grown exponentially through regular public speaking. When someone's outlook on our throwaway society is changed because of what we do - I feel so inspired.

Now as a postgraduate, my peers are so supportive and some are getting involved with Beach Guardian. I know that if I want to see global significant change, I have to start working with policy and legislation - so my master's in conservation science and policy at Exeter is giving me enormous insight. I want to learn not just from my lectures but from my peers as well - I'm broadening my horizons beyond just marine biology and I'm always eager to learn more.

It's undoubtedly hard work juggling postgraduate studies alongside my activism. I have a great support network, and I plan my school bookings around lectures. This year has been intense but I

wouldn't change it - it's a stepping stone that will help my career by broadening my knowledge, expanding my profile and developing my network. Volunteering is one of the most important things that anyone can do, especially as a postgraduate student, because it shows potential employers that you have that drive to do something you feel strongly about and put your passion into practice. It opens up doors, too - I've made new connections with some amazing people, which empowers me to keep going.

This university is a hub for sustainability expertise. So much peer-reviewed research in sustainability comes out of Exeter, there's the Centre for Circular Economy that collaborates with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, plus the university is a partner in Tevi (Cornish for 'grow'), an initiative that aims to gear business towards environmental sustainability.

There has been a real culture shift in awareness about plastic, the environment and the climate

Experience "I want to make a difference as a scientist"

Lucy Carruthers left her job in pharmaceuticals to study environmental modelling

Interview by Helena Pozniak

I was so anxious about leaving a good job in an industry I knew well for a course I'd picked off the internet. But just one week in, I rang my mum and told her it was the best decision I've ever made.

Travelling had already opened my eyes to the environment and the climate crisis. I'd always wanted to see the Great Barrier Reef - but when I went scuba diving there, I saw how bleached and damaged the coral was. It was depressing. Travelling in India, I met farmers who were talking about how drought had hit their crops. I grew more interested in the environment and started reading up about it I began to feel more and more guilt about the industry I was working in. Although the company met environmental standards, I was still working with harmful chemicals on an industrial site where huge stacks were pumping out emissions into the atmosphere - I didn't like it.

When I told people at work I cared about the environment, they called me a tree hugger and a hippy. They were all intelligent people. It still shocks me that some people don't understand climate change; they don't think it's happening. You can

find any answer you want online to suit your opinions and convince yourself it's not happening. I think more work needs to be done in communication.

This course caught my eye as it was so hands-on. People have come from all different disciplines: geography, astrophysics, teaching - we all have a basic interest in climate change. As part of the course, we've taken samples from Lynemouth Bay, where coastal erosion has caused an old colliery landfill site to begin leaking waste on to the beach. Many of the beaches along the coast are being eroded - we've written a report that we hope will bring some positive action. In another project, we've analysed core samples to reconstruct an environment from 2,000 years ago. In June, we're going to Abisko in Sweden to learn new skills and techniques monitoring the environment in a faster changing, extreme climate. I've never been so far north before or stayed in a research facility.

This has been a leap into the unknown - but I'd rather give it a go instead of wondering. I think there will be so many jobs linked to tackling the climate crisis and the environment in the future - from research, to environmental consulting or engineering. Course leaders want us to be the next generation of scientists to raise awareness. I do want to make a difference.

"It still shocks me that some people don't think climate change is happening. More work needs to be done on communication"

Lucy Carruthers



▲ Beach Guardian has organised hundreds of outreach events since its inception
PHOTOGRAPH: JODY DAUNTON

"I know that if I want to see global significant change I have to start working with policy and legislation"

Emily Stevenson

crisis. Sustainable solutions must be part of whatever postgrads do in the future. There's something every profession can do and university courses must reflect this. Every course needs a module about sustainability but even if they don't, you can still be proactive and sign up to university societies such as Extinction Rebellion - every student has a voice and the power to make positive change and limit their own environmental impact. Of course, we need top-down help from industry and policymakers but everyone can make a difference.

► Travelling abroad heightened Lucy Carruthers' awareness of the climate crisis
PHOTOGRAPH: JOANNE CRAWFORD



PHOTOGRAPH: JOE TWIGG PHOTOGRAPHY

▲ Harry Holmes chose a one-year degree to allow more time for activism

Funding Why there are more ways to pay than you think

From crowdsourcing to grants, there's a surprising range of options out there to fund your study

Lucy Jolin

When Amy Booth realised that funding a master's degree in the UK was beyond her, she decided to go much farther afield - Argentina, to be precise. She's currently finishing the second year of a master's in political and

social theory at the University of Buenos Aires. "My family could have given me some financial support, but the fees alone would have been between £8,000 and £14,000 for this kind of master's at UK universities, and I would have needed to pay the costs of living on top," she says. By contrast, her master's in Buenos Aires costs just £131 for her matriculation fee, and a monthly fee of around £60.

Booth isn't alone in finding it hard to fund her master's. Although students can now access postgraduate loans that cover fees and living costs, universities are also hiking tuition fees. The most recent figures from the Complete University Guide's annual survey of fees shows that the average fee for home and EU students taking a classroom-based taught postgrad course is now £7,400 - an increase of 8.3%. But going abroad isn't practical, how can you fund your master's in the UK?

Many charities have grants of all sizes available for master's funding. You'll find the most comprehensive list of these in the Grants Register, published every year - it contains information on 1,200 awarding bodies in 58 countries. If you're doing a master's in a particular subject or sector, identify the main trusts and foundations that operate in that field and have serious money to give away, such as the Wellcome Trust for health-related issues.

Research councils such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council

▼ A number of institutions, such as the University of Surrey, offer discounts for returning alumni

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



(AHRC) or the Medical Research Council (MRC) are another potential source of funding, again depending on your chosen subject. And scholarships, grants and bursaries may also be available. Check on sites such as thescholarshiphub.org.uk or with your course provider.

Rosemary Proctor used three scholarships to fund her Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) where she's currently studying at BPP University Law School Manchester. She holds an Advocacy scholarship from BPP, and a Lord Brougham GDL scholarship and a Lord Denning BPTC scholarship from Lincoln's Inn. "Google was my best friend when I was applying, as I

'Google was my best friend when applying, as I discovered my course providers had a selection of awards'

Rosemary Proctor
GDL candidate

discovered that my course providers had a selection of awards," she says. "Eligibility for some of these is means-based, and I'm unaware of any award that would cover the entirety of anyone's course fees and living expenses for the GDL or BPTC - but course provider awards are still a great supplement and can make all the difference."

However, she also used her own money. "While recognising that it may simply be impossible for many people, I'd advise taking a year out to work in between undergraduate and graduate study. I came away with a decent pot of savings and a bit of work experience."

It's also worth considering if the university where you took your undergraduate degree may also offer discounts for returning postgraduates. The University of Surrey, for example, is offering 10% off taught master's fees for alumni, while the University of Westminster offers 15%.

And some postgraduates are even turning to crowdfunding - it's a particularly popular way of raising money for arts master's. On GoFundMe, would-be master's students are currently raising money to fund masters in contemporary dance, theatre directing, and music, along with more traditional subjects such as law. But while many have ambitious targets, few seem to raise more than a couple of hundred pounds, so you may also need to look elsewhere.

Meet the makers How crafts are fusing tradition with innovation

As the UK's creative sector booms, demand for the skills of qualified craftspeople is surging

Lucy Jolin

Jayne Childs wants to change the way we think about lace. "I'm challenging the perception of lace as just something we use for curtains," she says. "Lace doesn't have to be fusty and dusty. It can be something we wear in the 21st century - something that's embedded in a tradition, but also looking forward."

The craft economy generates almost £3.4bn every year in the UK, much of it from craftspeople like Childs, who runs her own business creating wearable lace jewellery and gifts alongside studying part-time on the MA textile design

innovation course at Nottingham Trent University. But offering craft skills at postgraduate level has a wider value too, says Nicky Dewar, learning and skills director at the Crafts Council. "These courses are an important opportunity to spend dedicated time exploring, thinking and challenging," she says. "They bring skills, but also an opportunity for conversation and innovation."

Crafts are also being woven into new ways of thinking at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The new MA ceramics and master makers course forges the university's tradition of ceramics with a broader range of skills and materials such as wood, metal, enamel and glass. "We are problem finders and problem solvers," says programme director Natasha Mayo. "It's not all concept-driven. Our students come on the course because they understand that ideas are connected through skills. Skills are a catalyst for ideas, rather than the other way around."

The course attracts students from all over the world: this first cohort has makers from Japan,



▲ The craft economy generates nearly £3.4bn a year in the UK
PHOTOGRAPH: STOCKSY

American, Korea, India and Canada. "Their skills have strong cultural resonance," says Mayo. "And this means that the vocabulary becomes even more layered and rich."

It also looks beyond the local to the wider makers network, with frequent talks and demonstrations by successful practitioners, and visits to Wales' many studios and factories. But it's vital, says Dewar, that postgraduate courses don't

become the only pathway into crafts. "We have got world class courses and a booming creative industry, and the social benefits of crafts are only just starting to be recognised - yet they are pretty much disappearing from our schools. We need makers: people who ask how we can change society, as well as producing beautiful objects, and use their skills to make the world a better place."

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Business

Why an MBA is the degree to take you all the way

They don't come cheap, but MBAs remain one of the most sought after qualifications

Emma Sheppard

When Conor O'Shea left the army in 2017, he admits he felt a bit lost. The idea of taking a year out to think about what he really wanted to do was very appealing. He's now working in Dublin as the EMEA operations lead at Google, after completing a one-year MBA at the University of Edinburgh in 2019. "When you leave the military, you feel a bit useless," he says. "You always feel like: 'I have no tangible skills' - like you're a bit of a risk. I thought doing an MBA would be a stamp of credibility for me. I'm over the moon to be here in a job I never thought I'd be able to apply for."

According to the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS), O'Shea is one of more than 61,000 people who study for a postgraduate qualification in business and administrative studies in the UK, accounting for nearly a quarter of all postgraduate degrees. It's a course that attracts an incredibly international cohort - CABS found nearly seven in 10 graduates are international students from non-EU countries. Of that overall number, 11% will take an MBA. Matt Symonds, director Fortuna Admissions, an MBA consultancy firm, says demand has been increasing over the past two years among applicants for the top UK business schools, including London Business School (LBS), Cambridge Judge, Oxford Saïd, and Manchester. That's in stark contrast to the US, where schools are struggling to attract students.

But with fees ranging from £17,500 per year at the University of Glasgow, to £87,500 a year at the London Business School, students will often look for scholarships or loans to help fund the course. The University of Hull's MBA programme director, Dr Margaret Nicholson, says they're seeing a growing number of students being sponsored by their employer via the apprenticeship levy. "We've got medical practitioners for example, engineers, people in the fire

service and police, who've evolved into roles where they're needing management and leadership training," she says. "Doing the MBA [helps students] learn to think in a different way - it opens you up to possibilities you didn't know existed. And it all comes from that collaboration and exposure to other people's points of view."

The paths MBA graduates take after study are as varied as where they've come from. The Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC) interviewed almost 6,000 MBA alumni and found them across eight different industries, including consulting, finance, technology and government or non-profit roles. There are some who will return to their employer to progress within the company, or enhance their own career paths in some way; others may look to start their own businesses or take control of the family firm. Approximately one in three are looking for a career change. GMAC found that more than 90% of Fortune Global 100 and 500 companies plan to hire MBA talent this year, and almost all (90%) of MBA alumni say the skills they developed on the programme have advanced their careers. Many talk about the value of a life-long professional network.

At London Business School, Nikki Gupta is part-way through a full time, two-year MBA course, which is due to finish next summer. She'll then be going to work with Amazon, where she says her pre-MBA salary of £20,000 will be multiplied by five. "This is not something I would ever have had within my reach two years ago," she adds. "I used to teach A-level maths."

The impetus to study for an MBA came after she and her co-founder struggled to scale their education technology startup beyond the UK. She was interested in product management and approached a number of people on LinkedIn to ask where her skill gaps were. "I thought: 'Would I learn more in two years through the MBA and a couple of internships, or would I learn more from two years in a job?'" she says. "That's when the decision to do an MBA made sense." She was lucky enough to receive a £30,000 scholarship, which she describes as a "gamechanger", and has had family support to cover the rest of the fees. "What you're buying is membership to an incredibly smart group of people, an education, and a chance to explore different skills you may not have known that you had."



▲ Almost all (90%) of MBA graduates say the skills they developed on the programme advanced their careers
PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

MBAs Top tips for choosing where to study

The content of the course
Most MBAs will have similar core modules covering accountancy, marketing, organisational behaviour and HR, and strategic management, but it's the electives that will really tailor your MBA to your career path.

The cost
Fees for MBAs vary wildly - around £18,000 is typical for a school accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA) - but there are grants, scholarships and fellowships on offer. Some of these may be aimed at improving the diversity of the student intake for the course.

The reputation of the school
MBAs are accredited by three bodies - the Association of MBAs, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and EFMD Quality Improvement System.

Fewer than 100 institutions worldwide are approved by all three (known as triple accreditation). There are also league tables, published by the Financial Times, QS Global, and The Economist. You might also consider the level of access to academic staff with real world experience and the location of the university, which will dictate the connections it has with the local business infrastructure.

The network
Many MBA graduates will point to their newly acquired network as a key benefit of the programme. Students are typically handpicked to ensure a broad range of professions, nationalities and backgrounds. The number of women has been slowly increasing in recent years, hitting 39% across the top business schools in the US, Canada and the UK.

'What you're buying is membership to an incredibly smart group of people and a chance to explore different skills'

Nikki Gupta
MBA candidate



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