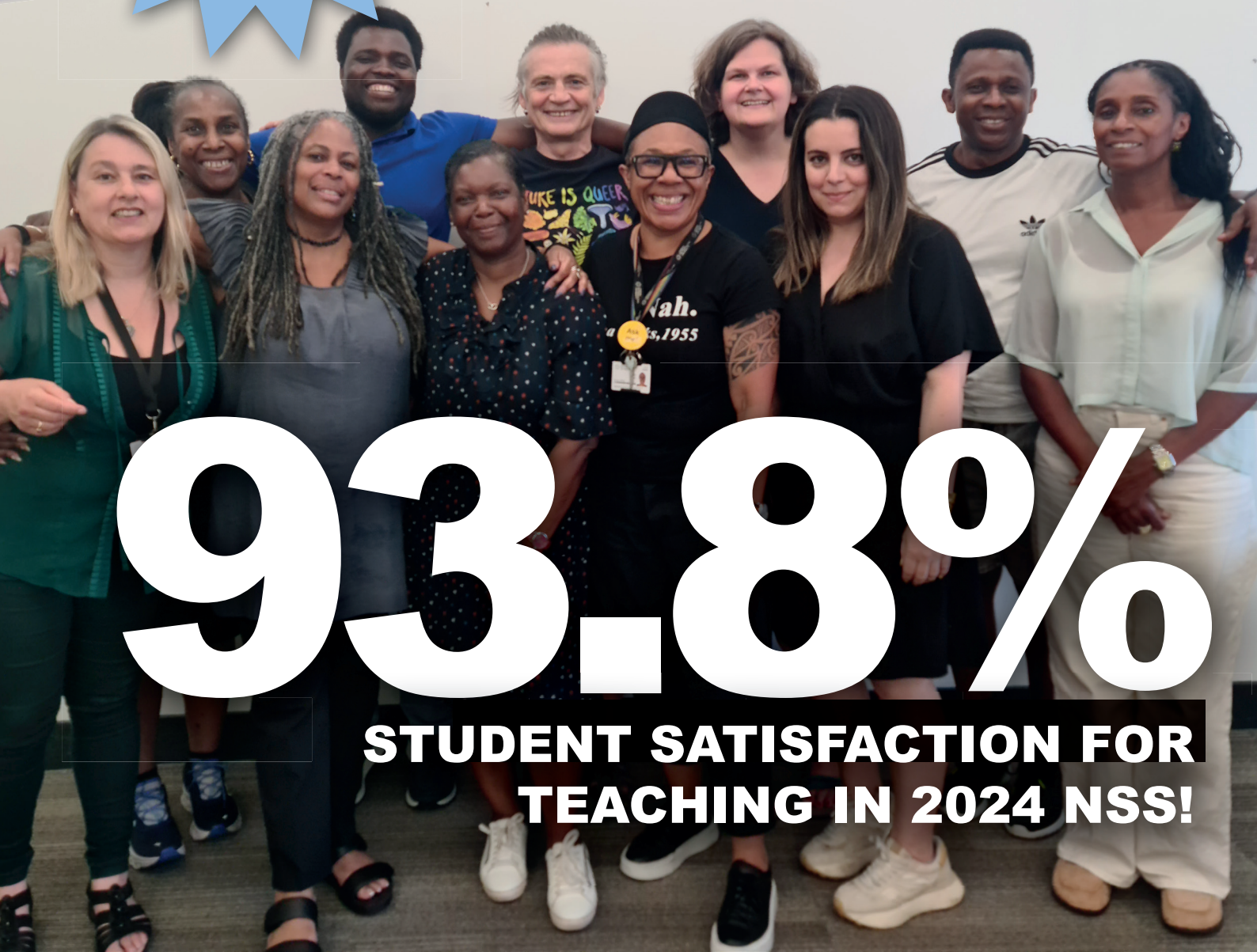


LONDON MET'S **SOCIAL WORK** STUDENT NEWSLETTER


SPECIAL
NSS
SUMMER 2024
EDITION



93.8%

**STUDENT SATISFACTION FOR
TEACHING IN 2024 NSS!**

Welcome

Welcome to the 9th edition of the  the iconic publication co-produced with social work students. The Loop is a termly vehicle for students to use to share their views, not just of the social work course, but other issues of interest both within and without of the university. The Loop will be a platform to share news and events from The North East London Teaching Partnership, and the teaching, learning and research interests and activities of the academic team and wider colleagues.

The Editorial Team would encourage and welcome contributions from students and staff for the next edition. Please be a part of this exciting initiative.

Your newsletter. Your voice.

Editorial Team

Kabir Bakare
(MSc 7.1)

Maria Dominguez
(MSc 7.1)

Donna Jones
Head of Social Work

Know your Social Work student reps

BSc

Level 4
Grace Babb
Aida Isufi

Level 5
Chinwe Nwosu
Taqiu Imoro

Level 6
Samantha Halil
Emma Birbeck

MSc

Level 7.1 (1st year)
Anna-Rose Zammit
Kabir Bakare

Level 7.2 (2nd year)
Cindy Martin
Melissa Namwanje

Your student reps are here to represent your cohort's views at formal meetings like the Course Committee Meetings that happen once a term or informally via the Open Door! that has been set up for each cohort. They will highlight any concerns to the Course Leads and also share with the academic team when things are going well. They are in regular contact with the Course Leads, so do please let them know if there are things you feel we need

BSc Course Lead

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course leads

London Met Social Work Course 2024 National Student Survey



Donna Jones, Head of Subject said:

'This is an amazing result for the social work team. Our student's are telling us that our relationship based approach is vastly improving their experience of learning with us. We have seen an improvement across the board. From 'learning opportunities' (89.2 % satisfaction) to 'academic support (87.5% satisfaction) we are above national benchmarks.

We are proud of our social work courses, and so are our students!'

SCOOP OF THE LOOP: PART 2

Kelly Cooper, Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Social Professions, by Kabir Bakare, Co-Editor

Co-editor of the LOOP, Kabir Bakare, sat down (virtually) with Kelly Cooper to discuss her journey into academia from a non-traditional background. She also shared insight, as a former early childhood practitioner.



Kabir: Could you tell us about your inspiring journey from a non-traditional background into academia?

Kelly: When I was in school, I was really shy and avoided talking in class. I preferred to blend in with the crowds without drawing attention to myself because I am dyslexic. I didn't want to have the spotlight on me, and that's why my teachers underestimated my capabilities. They never talked to me about the possibility of attending university, and they never gave me any encouragement to consider a career in that direction. My school offered me a level one course after I completed my GCSEs, but I wasn't interested because it was the old GNVQ qualification. I therefore applied for the NEB, the Nursing Education Board diploma instead. At least that was a level 3 course, which is what you would do after GCSE. I had to undertake a long commute each day to Redbridge for the course, and everyone thought I wouldn't be able to finish. But I was motivated, I remained driven and confident in my ability to obtain a higher qualification. The course also presented an opportunity to work with children and that was even a greater motivation.

Being in college was different, nobody knew me, so I had an opportunity to be a little more vocal in class. Also, being among the kids was enjoyable as well, and it helped

me gain confidence. With children, you feel genuine because they are just different from adults. At the end of college, I got my first job at Imperial College in their nursery for children of staff and students. I had a great early childhood career there, which is where I started. However, part way through, I realized that I still had more to learn and that this couldn't be forever. And then there was Lizanne, one of my colleagues, who wanted to take a degree course. She convinced me to apply after mentioning that London Met offers a degree in early childhood studies. I was dyslexic, a working-class girl from a council estate, had a lower grade in English GCSE and I didn't have an A-level qualification, so it was an uphill battle for me. Also, my parents were migrants from Ireland and all these things made me think that university was not on my horizon. I also had a terrible fear of interviews because I assumed I would be asked a lot of questions and would perform poorly. I often talk about my first day at the university because it was shocking to be accepted. I almost walked away because I felt like I was an impostor and that it was too big a thing for me. But I blossomed at London Met, the school gave me a platform to hang my knowledge and truly encouraged me to find my voice. It served as confirmation to me that my ideas and thoughts were valid.

Partway through my degree, I moved to work at Queen Mary University Nursery for staff and students. Although my initial plan was to do just a random degree and then do a PGCE and become a teacher. But after a year, I was asked to take over as manager while the manager was off sick. There was an assumption that I would make a good manager as I always strive to do my best with the children. I held my first leadership position at an extremely young age, I was only 23 and naive at the time. It took me a while to get used to being the one in charge of the nursery, but I remained true to my beliefs and ideals, and my dedication to excellence in practice enabled me to defend the choices I made. At that young age, I had to oversee a multimillion-pound budget, about 25 employees, and 65 children. It was a tremendous amount of responsibility. Although I was young, there was something about being younger that made me somewhat fearless.

However, there was a drawback as well: I had to stand up for my gender and youth. Some people assumed that I was a young girl, and what knowledge does a young



girl have? I didn't let it break my confidence; instead, I said to myself, "Well, that's a challenge; I'll show you what this little girl is capable of." So that's how it all began.

Kabir: Considering your extensive work on early childhood, can you tell us the factors that could affect cognitive development in children and adolescents?

K: For me, the foundation for everything else begins in the formative years, so it begins much earlier. I think that if we get things right in the beginning, especially for the birth to three age range, then everything else will fall into place. It establishes the groundwork for children's emotional well-being. The most crucial aspect of a child's development is relationships and attachment, which you would have studied in your social work courses. These very early relationship-building experiences and internal working models of their identity, value, and level of carer responsiveness shape what happens to them in primary school, as teenagers, and even as adults. It also applies to adult students; building good relationships with them and letting them know that we care is important. So developing positive relationships and fostering a sense of belonging is crucial, even when working with colleagues. But I will always say that the very early years, particularly birth to three is the most important phase.

Kabir: Could you please share with us the impact of parental capacity on child development?

K: Their capacity to parent could be influenced by numerous factors. For instance, what were their personal childhood experiences, and how well-parented were they? In addition, there are social and economic influences at play, specifically the impacts of poverty on the household. The reality of parenting is that it's incredibly difficult, especially right now, despite the idealized, movie-star images we often have of it. Parenting is undoubtedly complex and a parent's emotional reserve for their child is impacted when

societal struggles and the cost of living are considered.

Since becoming a parent, I've gained more knowledge. I only have one, and it can be occasionally exhausting. When you don't have children, it is possible to have an idealistic view of what should and shouldn't be done, as well as how we should and shouldn't interact with our children. However, when you become a parent or reach adulthood, you'll come to understand that your parents are just regular people with no superpowers. If you're growing up in a home where money is abundant, where time is abundant and experiences are plentiful, it is very different from growing up in a house where there are high levels of stress, where parents are working 2 to 3 jobs, where food is scarce. It's not to say that kids who grow up in those kinds of settings don't accomplish in life.

I'm a testament to that, I grew up in a house where my mum and dad separated when I was a baby. I grew up with my mum working three jobs, she was working days, nights and weekends and there were high levels of stress. There were moments when money was tight for our family, and we were not able to have some of the memorable experiences that other children had. I think there are some positives and negatives; in terms of the negatives, you grow up with a higher degree of stress because of the circumstances of your family at that time. More responsibility is placed on you when you're growing up in a household where everybody needs to contribute. It's not a luxury to come home and do your homework, you must help in the house. You might have to sometimes get a job at a young age to support the home.

However, there are some advantages as well. For example, you grow a new level of resilience that will help you in your future careers. Because you've been in a variety of situations, you develop a new appreciation for things and become more receptive to opportunities. My earlier experiences are what kept me at London Met because students often have similar life stories. I like sharing my story with our students to hopefully, not in a big-headed way, inspire them that something different is possible. I want them to know that they are entitled to achieve as much as anybody else if not more.

Kabir: As social work students, we have learnt obvious signs of child neglect, as an expert, can

you explain some subtle (non-obvious) indicators of child neglect?

K: It links to the relationship-related response I gave earlier. You will only be able to identify subtle indicators of neglect if you already have a well-established rapport with the child. At that point, you'll start to see some minor variations in their behaviour or how they react to different situations. Consequently, some of that will be more personalized and you will be able to notice. Although there are more obvious things, such as, losing weight, coming in dirty or in soiled clothes, those sorts of more obvious things. However, there will be some that are more subtle which can be discovered through an established relationship with the child.

I remember working with a child many years ago where we weren't sure what was happening initially but the thing that made us more observant of this child was the way he responded to a new activity. It was a tasting activity, and we were looking at tasting foods from different parts and the child froze and wouldn't make eye contact. That was a very subtle moment, an indicator that something wasn't right. It didn't last for very long, but it made me tune in a little bit more and said, ok what's going on here? He's never done that before, it was unusual behaviour, so we sort of stepped back from the situation and became a little bit more observant. Then we started to notice some other things that were happening, and we were able to support that child. So, I think secure relationships are important to know how a child will normally react. But we must know the kind of more common signs because they are often useful indicators.

Kabir: Kindly explain what might cause non-attachment between a child and the parent.

K: There's lots of lots of potential things. It might have something to do with the parent's upbringing and coping mechanisms. It might have something to do with how their early attachments developed, which may have an impact on how well they were able to build relationships as children and adults. It might be a medical condition affecting either the parent or the child, which can occasionally affect attachment. Traumatic events may also interfere with or result in irregular attachment patterns and the accessibility of attachment figures might also play a role.

However, other variables may impact attachment and parents' capacity to react to their infant and child. For example, are they attempting to care for the child while working three jobs? , Do they reside in what you would refer to as insecure housing? Do they have any additional stresses in their lives that might affect how responsive they are to their baby? I remember when I was pregnant with my daughter, I thought, oh, this would be easy, because my specialism is birth to three. After all, I had worked with very young babies for a big part of my career. But it was a complete shock to my system when I had mine. The baby didn't sleep, she was awake all the time, and so even with all of my knowledge and experience, it was really hard in the beginning.

Therefore, I think there were lots of circumstances that might impact creating good attachments. One of the big

things that is probably more prevalent in modern-day society is the fact that we have fewer support systems in place than we've had previously. In the past, we would have the whole village raising children, but in modern London, I don't even know who my neighbours are. It's good that we have moved away from a very traditional view that attachment only happens between the mother and child. We have found that attachment happens between more than one attachment figure. There used to be a belief—especially when I was first training—that if we get too close to the kids, it will harm their relationship with their parents. However, the reverse is true, the more attachments a child has the stronger the attachment network around the child. In the UK, there has also been a culture change, and babywearing is now popular. Our children are now being cradled on both our back and chest, which promotes attachment. One of the best methods to promote attachment behaviour is through skin-to-skin contact, which will also stimulate happy hormones to be released.

There is a lovely book that I would recommend to anyone, particularly in social work titled *Why Love Matters*. This book examines how love affects a child's brain development and neurological maturation. Some old wives' tales exist that say you shouldn't pick up the baby too often because you're just going to spoil them. I advocate the opposite, pick your baby up when they cry, there's a reason they're crying, that's their way of communicating.

THE RAINBOW ROOM

As founder of The Rainbow Room I only went and WON the category of Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at last month's London Met University Student Union Awards! The award recognised my great initiative and leadership by being the driving force in creating a safe space on campus open to both students and staff.

This is such an honour! I am thrilled that recognition of the impact and importance of this inclusive, vibrant safe space has come from our wonderful students!

If you haven't visited The Rainbow Room, you are welcome to come and use it to relax, work or eat your lunch. Whilst the building works continue over the summer it has Popped Up temporarily in **TMG-47** (opposite the Canteen on the ground floor) and is open all day.

The work goes on, and it is my pleasure to do it. Thank you.

Donna



INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MARCIA WILSON

Professor Marcia Wilson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience and Institutional Equity, conducted by Kabir Bakare, Co-Editor

Co-editor of the LOOP, Kabir Bakare, sat down (virtually) with Marcia Wilson to discuss her role as the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience and Institutional Equity. We also discussed racial harassment and the initiatives she is introducing into the student experience at London Met.



Kabir: For those who may not be aware of what you do, please explain your role as the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Marcia: As the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience and Institutional Equity I have quite a broad portfolio. The institutional equity part is the equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) aspect of the work and it involves ensuring that London Met has equitable, diverse and inclusive structures that enable our community to flourish. Much of this work happens through the Centre for Equity and Inclusion that I have the pleasure of leading and working with a small team of devoted colleagues. I also support the student experience with ultimate responsibility for student services, the school offices, and registry. It is my responsibility to ensure that all of these things are running effectively so that every London Met student gets the most out of their time here and is able to reach their full potential. The student voice is critical so I am fortunate to work very closely with the CEO of the Student Union as well as the President and the elected officers and I report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julie Hall.

Kabir: You have done much work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), can you tell us a bit about it?

M: Equity is ensuring that our students and staff members, particularly our students, have what they need to succeed. It is not the same as equality because equality provides every student with the exact same resources. We may not all need exactly the same thing because we are all incredibly unique. We learn differently and we require various forms of assistance to support us throughout our academic journey. EDI is primarily concerned with ensuring that the institutional structures support what our student need to achieve their academic goals: do all students have a sense of belonging or inclusion? Are we paying attention to things like awarding gaps and what causes the awarding gaps or a lack of equitable outcomes? That was one of the big things that I focused on at the University of East London and within a matter of a few years, we managed to reduce the awarding gap between global majority students and white students by 8%. It involves focusing everyone's attention on what interventions work and emphasising how important it is to be or strive towards becoming an inclusive, anti-racist university.

Kabir: How can Racial Harassment be tackled in the university?

M: The university is fully committed to tackling racial harassment. Within the Centre for Equity and Inclusion, we have someone devoted to working in this area to ensure that people are aware of constitutes bullying and harassment. It's important that there is an education piece available for those who need it. If students or staff do experience any form of racial harassment, we have reporting mechanisms in place to tackle it and when there are reports of racial harassment, we deal with it promptly and effectively. We need to instil trust in the system that every report will be treated with utmost seriousness. If we don't, people will stop reporting problems and these issues become part of the culture of the institution.

Kabir: How does the university support its staff to embrace the diverse student population and demonstrate cultural competence?



M: It starts with the recruitment and selection process. It is important to have colleagues who embrace and share the London Met 'social justice' vision. We aim to recruit people who have demonstrated that they have cultural competence and engage in equitable, inclusive practices. The work that takes place in the Centres for Equity and Inclusion and Teaching Enhancement also supports this with the work that has been done on the Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF). We are in the process of developing ESJF 2.0 and will embed that updated framework across the institution in the new academic year. We also have a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee where we share good practice across the different areas of the university.

Kabir: What initiatives are you introducing into the student experience at London Met?

M: The updated ESJF 2.0 is important for the student experience. It is crucial that we deliver a curriculum that is decolonised and global regardless of the subject area. Not only will this prepare our students for life beyond the university, but it will also help produce global citizens. Another area that I am working on in collaboration with the SU is a foodbank. I am very aware that the cost of living has negatively impacted many students, so I have been working with the SU to help reduce the impact. We opened a foodbank in the SU in March of this year. We stock non-perishable food items, and it is available to all London Met students. Another initiative in the pipeline is updating the Race Equity plan. I am a firm believer that the way forward for London Met is to reaffirm our commitment to building an anti-racist university. This will be an ongoing project over a number of years but will result in a better institution for all.

Kabir: What is your vision for London Met in the next ten years?

M: London Met is an amazing institution. I want to see this university fulfil its true potential and for our institution to be the number one choice for local students and beyond. I want to see us continue with our social justice mission and be the choice university for anyone who wants an outstanding quality education rooted in our values, and that includes people actively choosing to work at London Met because it is such a fabulous place to be employed.

I would like to see the disparities between different groups of students and staff effectively and sustainably addressed so that we do not have awarding gaps or pay gaps. I would like to see more quality partnerships both domestic and international, in particular, it would be great to continue developing our partnerships with the Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to the extent that we offer a wide range of staff and student exchange programmes.

Kabir: I heard you're one of the first Black women professors in the UK.

M: I was number 26, out of 66 Black women professors. And we are only 66 Black women professors out of about 23,500 professors in the UK. I was promoted in May 2019, and it was great to be recognized for the work that I've done. However, there is still a long way to go in being adequately represented. At London Met, we are in the process of piloting a programme called 100 Black Women Professors NOW. It is in partnership with the Women's Higher Education Network (WHEN) and designed to feed the academic pipeline which will lead to an increase the number of Black women professors in our universities. The programme is supported by our Senior Leadership Team as well as the relevant Deans and we currently have four outstanding participants: Donna Jones, Mavernie Cunningham, Janet Douglas-Gardner, and Ronke Shoderu.

Kabir: Who is your greatest inspiration and why?

M: There are quite a few people who inspire me. First and foremost, my parents are my biggest inspiration and were my number one supporters. Both died in 2017 and I am eternally grateful for the positive impact they have had on my life. They came to London as part of the Windrush generation and despite the many continual challenges they experienced, they kept moving forward. I was blessed with absolutely phenomenal parents.

I love the writings of Audre Lorde and a lot of what she said resonates with me. In particular her essays about the 'Masters Tools' and 'Your silence will not protect you' are powerful lessons for us all.

Since this interview was conducted, Professor Wilson has accepted the post of Pro Vice Chancellor for Education at Birmingham City University. Although her time with us at London Metropolitan University was short, Professor Wilson made a huge impact in working to ensure higher education is a place where all students, regardless of their background can flourish and reach their full potential.

We wish her all the very best of luck in her exciting new role!

My journey towards Social Work as a middle-aged and immigrant woman.



Letting go Ready for a New life

My decision to transition into social work was not a sudden one; it was the result of my life experiences and desire to make a difference in people's lives; this realisation came to me during a particularly challenging time when I just emigrated to the UK. They started questioning my career path and considering other options, eventually leading to social work.

Like many Europeans pre-Brexit, I found myself in a challenging situation, searching for work in my country while completing my first degree. I was 24 years old, a new mother to my beautiful daughter, and had two more years to graduate. Just finishing a degree on its own requires much effort, and being a full-time single mother and employed was a monumental challenge.

As the great recession in 2006/2007 and 2009, I just wanted to work to provide for myself and my daughter. I realised that I was part of what is called 'the lost generation' in my country. There were no jobs; luckily, my family support from my mother was our provider all these years. I wanted to work to provide for my small family and to give a home to my baby daughter. But there were no jobs; there was very little support for single mothers in my country. Social Care was not on my mind. Social Care was my mother. Deterred by the closed doors, I continued studying, hoping that different qualifications would allow me to work.

At that point, I did not care about a career, just a job; that was everything. All doors were closed. There were no jobs. I achieved several qualifications over the next decade and went through life's struggles with my daughter.

I could advance some challenges for my daughter in the future if I were not well settled. I decided to do private tuition as English as a Second Language teacher. However, I was yet to be a breadwinner for me and my daughter. A group of my generation who were unemployed were migrating to England, and for just the fact of having a job like winning the lottery. I started to think about that for my daughter and me: Would it be the right option? Change your country? Raising a child is not easy; starting from scratch in your 30s with limited finances, no support work, and no too much knowledge about how England works as a country.

"The Lost Generation" from my country was making it in UK, they had jobs, they were working, it was in the news, in the mouth to mouth, everyone knew someone who came to UK and was working, maybe in an unqualified job when the person was unqualified, but Who cares? They were working.



Unemployment can impact your mental health, and I was starting to fight against that; that is why I truly believe that "work dignifies the person", and it is written in my heart, almost like trauma is a tattoo in the heart.

After seven years of trying to get a job and with several qualifications under my arms, I came to the UK. I had graduated as a teacher, and I was able to validate my studies and get my QTS. I had to leave my daughter back for the first months while I found a job and a place to live. I had some savings from selling my car and my mother's savings, which allowed me to live for 4-5 months. That was my time scale. Otherwise, I would have to return to my country. When I arrived, I tried supply teacher jobs, but everyone wanted some experience. I ended up volunteering in a primary school in a deprived area to gain that experience, and after that, I started to work. I could not believe it. I could bring my daughter now, and I did not have to return to the unemployment world. So I did. As a single mum with a seven-year-old daughter in a foreign country, I knew nothing about the social care system, what I was entitled to, or which support my daughter or I could receive. My mum was scared for us; she asked me if I was happy for her to be with us until I found my feet and my daughter grew up a little more. Plus, she did not want any stranger to look after my daughter if I had to go to work early or arrive late. She was scared of England. Some biases play a part here, but to me, it is the land that gave me a chance, and of course, as a very family orientated I have grown up, there was no better news than my mum, in her latest 60s, wished to come with us.

As a foreigner in her 30s and a single mum, "other white" as my race, accent, and woman, I faced several challenges. First, the educational system was so different from that in my country. The way schools teach in both countries and the approach could not be more different. I was determined to master it. I finally had a permanent job as a teacher, and nothing would stop me from having a job to provide for my daughter for the first time. At this point, you already know quite a few of my social graces, and maybe imagine how these have helped me to be able for some things and unable me for others.

After more struggles in this article, I worked in Social Service. I was more settled by then; I had a partner who was working in Social Service and suggested to me that I would be amazing in the field; he helped me to prepare for my interview; there was so much jargon, new legislation, social care in general, I knew nothing about, and I did not get it on my first attempt, but if I am something is resilient, I did a second interview taking on board the feedback from the first interview, and I got it. It was still in an unqualified job, but I was shining; my boyfriend was right; Social Care and I are like fish in the sea. Supporting all these service users in their struggles came so naturally, and even with my limited knowledge about how the country works, I managed to do a good job, and I was happy for the first time since I was a teenager.

That is when the child I was once, ambitious with dreams, started to show up again with a new dream. I was helping people with life difficulties, but I could help more if I became a social worker. The idea was already baking inside of me even before I realised it. I was always talking to my managers; they were social workers and the first ones to tell me I should try to qualify as a social worker. I had this manager himself go through a similar experience. He had to leave his home country in Africa and start from zero in England, and he used to tell me, If I did it with four kids, so you can. There were many conversations about this during our supervision.

During this time of personal and professional growth, I had a profound realisation: I wanted to make a difference in people's lives. This was the turning point when I decided to transition to social work, driven by a deep-seated desire to help others.

The first obstacle I faced in applying for an MSc in Social Work was my qualifications; the GCSEs Spanish equivalent were not accepted in many universities and they would require me to do the English GCSEs despite having several higher university qualifications. I was determined anyway; when I encountered this company, all the European staff members who assisted Europeans with university applications asked me what university I would like to apply to. I had a very clear idea: I wanted a university with a diverse community where I could feel I was at home, not just a woman with a strong accent. My understanding and appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism stems from my experiences in [specific instances or situations]. Then, I was told by London Metropolitan University, "If there is one university whose diversity and multicultural students are up to your expectations, that is London Metropolitan University". I visited its website and felt it; I felt that it could be where I could fulfil my dream.

The first obstacle was that it was already more accessible; I did not have to spend a year sitting GCSE; I had to do a Math and English exam, one to ensure I was at the level. I remember feeling that was more than fair; I took my daughter's books and school notes, who was doing GCSE then. I studied day and night for some days, and I did great. Then, a social care exam, due to my experience, I believe I smash it :), and the personal interview. When I remember the phases of accessing the MSc, I still feel the enthusiasm and happiness I felt only with the application process like a child waiting for Father Christmas.

During my course

By Maria Asuncion Munoz Dominguez



WELCOME BACK TO.... UNIVERSITY!

I decided to resign from my job and pursue further education in England. The idea had been brewing for a while, and I finally leapt. The decision was not easy, but I was motivated by a desire to challenge myself academically and gain a new perspective by studying in a different country. In less than a week, I shuttled between my home and London, embarking on a new journey. I didn't have the luxury of pondering what studying in England would be like or reading any books about my course; I went from a full-time job to being a full-time student. Those initial weeks were a whirlwind of emotions and challenges. The sheer size of the building felt overwhelming, and I often found myself lost, trying to remember my way to class day after day. I yearned for a familiar face to guide me to the class, to make this new environment less daunting. The academic workload was much heavier than I anticipated, and I struggled to balance my family responsibilities with my studies.

As I previously attended university, I think I may have initially felt a bit overconfident about my abilities. Soon, I realised that studying in England differed from my experiences at Spanish universities, not just the language. The teaching methods were more independent, requiring me to take more initiative in my learning. The academic culture was also different, emphasising critical thinking and participation in class discussions.

A bit later, I found a huge reading list about all the different modules and reflections; that was my first obstacle. I was not used to reflecting, so when I was reading about how to reflect in social work, I checked big authors on YouTube about what a reflection was and looked like, and I did it.

Then I had my first assignment with role-play; again, as I used to work with people, it never occurred to me that I would fail that one, but that is life; life sometimes enjoys a good laugh. At that moment, I realised the course would be more challenging than I

imagined. I learnt a very good lesson from that failure. I never took anything for granted in the course; I would face everything as it was my first time at university and seek support when needed. So I did. I learned to be more proactive in seeking help from my professors or peers. I also learned to manage my time more effectively, setting aside dedicated study hours and sticking to them.

The master is hard; I would lie if I wrote the opposite. As a mature student with a family, the journey has challenges. Balancing academic commitments with family responsibilities requires a delicate juggling act. Yet, with the right support systems, it can be successfully navigated, inspiring others in similar situations. As a mother, my two main difficulties were childcare and finances. Regardless of age, sorting out your child's care would be best. Child care is not just the payments for caring; it is their school material, uniforms, food, and time. Our kids need our time. Here, I learned something which will accompany me for the rest of my life: good organisational skills. Organisation is fundamental. It is a skill that I developed extensively during my master's, and I used it effectively during my placement. Now, I have become obsessive about the organisation in my life. I organise everything.

Financially, the journey had its challenges. While students have some support from the bursary or England Student Finance, we need more than the full extent of our needs. We have to fund our and our families' lives and pay the fees. In my case, the financial support went towards the fees. I had to sort out two years of finances meticulously. Some students have part-time jobs, and I was fortunate to have my husband's unwavering support. His contribution has been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for his understanding and encouragement.

By Maria Asuncion Munoz Dominguez



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