Postgraduate Experience Project
MSc Scholarship Stories
An Anthology
Introduction

This Kingston University-led project is one of 20 projects funded by the HEFCE Postgraduate Support Scheme, which is a £25million publicly funded programme. The scheme will test ways to support progression into taught postgraduate education in England by working with universities and employers to stimulate participation by applicants who would not otherwise progress to this level of study. The project, known as the Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP), is the largest consortium that has been funded. It comprises 11 universities (nine English, one Welsh and one Scottish) that are geographically dispersed across the UK.

The PEP project, entitled Investigating the expectations and attitudes towards postgraduate taught (PGT) STEM study, and post-study outcomes from the perspective of students, universities and employers to support and sustain PGT growth in the UK – A collaborative project, officially started in January 2014 and is due to report the majority of its findings at the National Dialogical Conference at Kingston University on 14 and 15 July 2015.

There is a lack of research on, and understanding of, how prior study experiences and the expectations of new students due to embark on an MSc by coursework level can impact on entry to study and their ability to persist and succeed at this level. The available research has mainly been confined to post-experience surveys. By identifying prior study experiences and study expectations as well as the motivations and barriers faced by applicants and students at masters level, education providers in higher education institutions (HEIs) can use these insights not only to improve retention rates and the overall student experience, but to achieve a sustainable postgraduate population. This research is now becoming quite urgent due to the decline in postgraduate enrolments, which is said to be affected by the increasing undergraduate student debt, postgraduate fee levels and a lack of available funding for masters-level study. What is uncertain is whether the decline is a temporary occurrence or a long-term trend.

The fee scholarships in PEP are one strand of the research and are designed to track the expectations and experience of MSc science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) students from pre-entry to post-graduation across the nine English universities to throw light on the neglected areas of research mentioned above. Due to the declining numbers of British citizens resident in the UK who are studying full- and part-time courses at English universities, the scholarships that consist of varying levels of contributions towards fees (£1,000, 60 per cent and full) have been targeted at this population. The legal rationale for this has been clearly provided as part of the application process.

PEP is a mix of quantitative and qualitative research. Where quantitative research can provide statistical patterns and the big picture but tends to be impersonal, qualitative research can provide us with portraits of individuals, thus helping us understand the complex and personal nature of what is being examined.

This anthology is a collection of stories describing the very personal journey of some of the project’s scholarship recipients in getting to the start line of their MSc degree. Collecting their personal accounts was not a planned activity of the project, but as the scholarships were being awarded by the nine English partners, some recipients started emailing the project links at each university about how grateful they were for the scholarships and how much it had changed their lives. As a result, it was decided to ask the recipients if they would like to submit their story to inspire others and to help us further understand the barriers and motivations facing masters-level students. The stories and comments have provided immensely valuable data that we had not anticipated.

Their stories illustrate their hopes, frustrations, dreams and determination, as well as their belief that postgraduate study will provide benefits for them, their families and society. The stories have been put into chapters reflecting the broad themes arising from them. It is important to note that a constant re-occurring theme throughout the stories is that of finance. This finding supports and underpins the rationale by HEFCE for the urgent work being undertaken through PSS to explore how postgraduate study can be funded and sustained in the future.

Thank you to the scholarship recipients for sharing their stories. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have.

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Principal investigator and project lead
Postgraduate Experience Project

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Dedication

This anthology is dedicated to all lifelong learners.

“You can’t change where you’re from, but you can change where you are going.”

Scholarship recipient
PEP 2014

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Higher Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for making the PEP research possible and for making a difference to so many lives.

Thank you to Dr Brooke Storer-Church and Dr Paul Wakeling for all their support and advice to PEP.

Thank you to all the institutions who got involved in PEP due to their determination to help shape and support the widening of postgraduate participation. And lastly, a huge thanks to the PEP institutional leads and researchers, who are working so hard to understand the postgraduate landscape in order to make a difference.
Contents

**Widening participation** 7
Lucy, South-east Coast University 2 7
Nic, South-east Coast University 1 8
Jasmine, London University 9
Moshab, South-east Coast University 2 10
Magda, London University 12
Kathy, London University 13

**Value of postgraduate study** 15
Katherine, South-east Coast University 2 15
Jeremy, North-east England University 16
Sally, South-east Coast University 2 17

**Employment** 19
Diane, South-east Coast University 2 19
Mark, North-east England University 20
Alicia, South-west England University 21
Tofara, Black Country University 22
John, North-west England University 23
Simi, North-west England University 24
Nial, South-west England University 25

**Finance** 27
Tom, West Midlands University 27
Charlotte, North-east England University 28
Michael, South-east Coast University 1 29
Peter, South-west England University 30
Sara, Black Country University 31
Tina, London University 32
Adnan, London University 33
Rebecca, North-west England University 34
James, South-west England University 35

**Personal development and life chances** 37
Josh, South-east Coast University 1 37
Lily, East Coast University 38
Clare, East Coast University 39
Stuart, North-east England University 40
Lesley, North-east England University 41
Erina, South-west England University 42
Rashige, London University 43
Luke, Black Country University 44
Tim, South-east Coast University 1 45
Matthew, South-west England University 46
Loren, South-east Coast University 2 47
Emily, East Coast University 48
Paul, South-west England University 49
Mustafa, North-east England University 50
Isobel, South-east Coast University 2 51
Elizabeth, North-east England University 53

**Decliners of scholarships** 55

**Closing comments** 57

All fee scholarship recipients’ names have been changed to protect their identity in accordance with the project’s ethical requirements.
Widening participation

Lucy, South-east Coast University 2
Part time, full scholarship

“My dad passed away when I was 15 and I was always brought up in a low-income family. I am so proud to be a postgraduate student, and my whole family are proud of me for making something of myself in the face of adversity.”

I am writing my postgraduate story and I would love you to share it with anyone you would like to. Firstly, I would like to sincerely thank you and your team for giving me the opportunity to study at a postgraduate level. Without the PEP, I would be unable to continue to study at university, and would be forced to abandon my dreams of studying geography. When I was writing my final-year dissertation during my postgraduate degree, I started to develop stronger research and writing skills. Looking back on my yearly module grades, I realised I was improving each year. I fell in love with my dissertation research project (Water Management) and was learning more and more to do with the subject.

I got a first in my dissertation and was so proud. I knew I had worked the hardest I had ever worked on a piece of coursework. I felt like it was only the beginning of my learning journey. I had found a way to write, to research and to learn effectively. I was sad that my degree was coming to an end.

Speaking to my dissertation supervisor as I was nearing the end of the project, I told her about my desire to study at postgraduate level, but that I knew there was no chance I would ever be able to afford it. I researched the Water and Environmental Management course at my university and thought it sounded brilliant. I researched the available funding schemes at the university, but there were no full-funding options. As an alumnus, I could get only a 10% discount, and this would still leave me with about £5,500 to pay – it was impossible, I decided. My supervisor sent me an email at the end of term that sounded too good to be true. It was the PEP scholarship scheme. I met the criteria and applied for it. It was a chance to do a fully-funded postgraduate degree. During the months between finishing my dissertation and finding out I had been awarded the scholarship, I was worried. My mum was worried. We both wanted it so bad.

My mum has been a teacher since she was 24. She has always encouraged me to embrace education, although I think this used to be more difficult than it is now! When I finished my A-levels and wanted to take two gap years, she supported my choices – although she probably had her fingers crossed I would choose to go to university. And I did – partly to make her proud, and partly to follow my passion for geography. My dad passed away when I was 15 and I was always brought up in a low-income family. Money has always been tight for my family, and I was so proud when at the age of 17, I could stop asking my mum for money once I got my first job. I worked throughout my undergraduate degree, and managed to balance my income with my outgoings well. My mum doesn’t provide me with any money – she doesn’t have any to give me, and I regularly give her money when she needs it.

Mum was worried that I wouldn’t get the PEP scholarship and she just wanted me to have a bright future and could see the enthusiasm I had for postgraduate study. When I told her the news over the phone, she cried. She shouted ‘Praise the Lord!’ and I laughed. I felt proud of myself, and I felt that my mum was proud of me. I have chosen to do the part-time course, over two years, so that I can continue working. My part-time job [three days a week] will provide me with just enough cash to pay the rent, and bills, if I budget well. I plan to work my hardest in the next two years. I am so proud to be a postgraduate student, and my whole family are proud of me for making something of myself in the face of adversity.
I think I may be the oldest student on my particular MSc course in this year’s intake. I’m terrified, having spent the last fourteen years working full time. It’s been a long time since I have written anything in an academic language, and have forgotten the simplest things, which I have to learn all over again. When I left University first time round, I was well equipped with industry knowledge and have since had that somewhat sapped from my grey matter through the surprising lack of application in the world of work.

I am a funny kettle of fish. I have a massive point to prove not just for myself, but for some very special people close to me who suffer greatly with low self esteem. Here’s a potted history of me!

I was adopted as a baby to an educated middle-class family in 1977, and despite their absolute love and full support to do whatever I wanted, I was never going to succeed alongside my peers academically at the same time. I struggled with core subjects, but got through school with 10 GCSEs with a scattering of grades, I was by no means an elite student. My ‘pure blood’ cousins of similar educated parents flew past me through A-levels and on to university and I constantly felt like the poor relation. Despite lots of positive reinforcement, I felt embarrassed to be a disappointment to my mother and father. I wasn’t really, I just had different skill sets, and I realise that now, but I felt that my face was being rubbed in their success by countless aunts and uncles over the years and sadly it left a scar.

I worked hard as a volunteer in sport and coaching in many areas and developed an impressive vocational portfolio. Alongside this, I went to university and completed an HND in sport and recreation. I lived at home and found paid work as a multi-sports coach to pay rent to my family. Upon completing my HND, I was head-hunted straight into working for the Football Association county body and stayed there as a football development officer for some seven years. I loved it, and getting my dream job, I never considered going back and completing my degree.

In 2007, I took a leap of faith when the opportunity to become a school sport co-ordinator came along. Again, I was head-hunted straight into the role without interview. I’ve been here ever since, I love it, but not having a degree now holds me back from moving into full-time teaching and subsequently up the ladder.

Not being able to deal with my adoption for fear of upsetting my mother and father, in 2012 I did a lot of research and found out about my birth background. I found out that my birth parents had died in 2010, a week apart, of separate illnesses and I had seven brothers and sisters out there that never knew I had even been born, the youngest of them born in 1964 and the eldest born in 1952.

I am pleased to say that despite the mental and emotional struggle of never being able to meet my birth parents, now I understand myself a whole lot better. I know I come from generations of farmers, my father never went to school, feared people in authority and encouraged my brothers and sisters to behave the same and subsequently the majority of them never finished school and certainly not one of them went on to college or university in any format. They have an “I’m not capable of that” attitude, sadly, which has been instilled in them since birth. I am fortunate to have escaped that.

My parents are proud of what I have managed to achieve despite the perceived ‘intellectual ceiling’ from my blood line. With this MSc course, I feel I have liberated that ceiling on behalf of my brothers and sisters who have been led to believe they are not capable of anything more than manual work in tertiary industries. Part of me hopes that if my birth parents were alive today, they would be pleased for me too.

My adoptive mother and father are absolutely delighted I was accepted onto this course and I have an overwhelming desire to scrape through just for them – to make them proud of how they have raised me – they have ultimately given me this opportunity since the day they collected me from the foster home. I hope I do not fail them. I have been the first person in my birth family ever to go to university and I am doing it again at a whole new level at approaching 40 – better late than never, but am I up to it this time? Who knows? It does throw into question the nature vs nurture debate somewhat though, don’t you think?

There’s a saying: ‘You can’t change where you’re from, but you can change where you are going.’ It certainly applies here!
This is incredibly unbelievable! My life has been changed overnight! I am stunned! Thank you so, so much. I had been inspired in my second year as an undergraduate by Dr Juliet Dukes to pursue a career in healthcare science and specialise in genetics. The first step in this career plan is entry onto an NHS science training programme (STP) which is highly competitive and requires candidates to have a minimum of 2.1 in their BSc.

When I graduated with a 2.2, I got 58 per cent, which meant I was literally 2 marks off a 2.1. It was the hardest knock-back to try and overcome, but I learned to quickly accept it because the world was going to carry on turning and I didn’t want to fall behind. My hopes for the NHS STP had been dashed unless I was in a position to do an MSc, which at the time felt impossible.

I come from a low-income background and since my family haven’t been able to support me financially, I heavily relied on the government and part-time work during my degree. Since I have graduated, I have been working full time as a legal assistant to support myself whilst applying to hundreds of biomedical science graduate jobs, but so far I have not been successful.

The only option I had if I wanted to do a masters was to move back up North at the end of August and live with my parents whilst working and saving up. I would then apply for 2015 entry which meant the NHS STP would be set back a few more years. I was determined and not put off by this prospect but I was scared whether or not it would work. When I heard about this scholarship I felt like the timing could not have been more perfect. I quickly set about applying for an MSc at my local university and then applied for this scholarship hoping that maybe this could be my ticket towards my career aspirations.

Winning this scholarship has changed my life because now I only have to worry about 40 per cent of my fees and not the whole figure. I received this news five days before moving and so it has cemented a reason for me to stay in London for another year. Finally, this MSc will reinforce my application to the NHS STP and improve my job prospects. I didn’t know where my life was going but the balance has been restored and I have been given another chance. I am grateful to the Postgraduate Experience Project for making this possible.

Addendum
I tried to contact you on your mobile but unfortunately I couldn’t get through on several occasions. It has been one of the most unforgettable summers of my life, and the lessons I learnt from staying positive and not giving up will stay with me for a lifetime. I have decided to give up my scholarship because I have been offered a training placement at Charing Cross and it leads to a specialised masters in genetics, which I will be sponsored for. It is the best option for me, but I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity you gave me and the full scholarship I was offered. This twist in events was completely unexpected again! I had an interview four weeks ago, but I hadn’t heard from them so I thought it hadn’t worked out. I enrolled at the university and all my friends knew I was coming back so to get a call from Charing Cross suddenly and receiving an offer completely caught me by surprise. I hope I haven’t let you down and I wish you the very best success in conducting your research.

Jasmine, London University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“This MSc will reinforce my application to the NHS STP and improve my job prospects. I didn’t know where my life was going, but the balance has been restored and I have been given another chance.”
I am writing to explain how the Postgraduate Experience Research Project scholarship has impacted on my university course choice. Before I talk about the PEP scholarship’s impact, I’ll just briefly explain my education journey. I finished my secondary education at Bexhill High School and obtained 13 GCSEs grade A–C in June 2008. I then attended Bexhill Sixth Form College and I studied A-levels in chemistry, physics, maths, further maths and AS levels in biology and ICT. I graduated from university in July 2014 and attained a 2:1 for my Mathematics and Computing BSc, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

It has always been my ambition to study at masters level, in order to obtain a masters degree in a subject of my choice to improve my employment prospects. I have always thought that once I got a BSc then I would never be able to afford the university tuition should I wish to pursue a postgraduate course.

Although I tried my best during my undergraduate years to save money for postgraduate studies, I was unsuccessful in doing this. This was because the cost of living has immensely increased over the recent years. This greatly impacts on university students where they have got to pay a range of different bills related to their daily livings: cost of travel, which is really high, accommodation and meal costs. Therefore, I thought that my dream of studying at masters level had perished forever and I was very disappointed. In the meantime, I could not ask my parent to fund my postgraduate studies since my parents are on low income and barely manage to pay for daily livings.

Furthermore, during my undergraduate years, I was unsuccessful finding a part-time job, which further deteriorated my financial situation. I continued to resist against my financial difficulties through managing and budgeting very tightly the money I received from student finance. I did not let financial worries negatively impact on my overall degree result and I stayed firm and worked really hard on my studies. As a result of hard work, I ended with a 2:1 in my degree.

It was at this time-point I found that the university from which I graduated offers a £3,000 fee reduction through Vice-Chancellor’s Alumni Scholarship for those graduates who obtained a 2:1. This made me think again about fulfilling my dream of being on an MSc course. Taking into account the £3,000 fee reduction in tuition fee for MSc courses, I calculated that if I study an MSc at the university, my fee for a full-year MSc would be around £2,580, which was far less than £5,580. At that point I went and checked my account – I found that I only had £999 in it. I began to think how or where to find another £1,581 in order to fund my MSc course. So I spoke to a close friend of mine and asked him whether he was in a position to lend me some money for a short period of time and also asked my parents to fund a small portion of my MSc course. Unfortunately, my friend was not able to lend money, but my father agreed that he would fund a very small portion of my MSc fee. However, it was not still enough to reach £2,580.

I considered the £3000 alumni scholarship not being enough to fund my MSc course fee, so I spent many days searching the internet to see whether there was another type of scholarship that could fund a major part of my tuition fee. When I found about the PEP scholarship, I was just over the moon and said to myself that this could be a chance for me to complete my postgraduate studies. I found information about the PEP scholarship scheme on the University’s website. I started to send an application to secure my place on the scholarship scheme. After couple of days the University’s Strategic Planning Office, which is responsible for the PEP scholarship confirmed that I have been awarded a full-fee scholarship on my MSc Computing course for one year. It was just a very happy moment for me and I think that I can now fulfil that dream of holding an MSc in near future.

Moshab, South-east Coast University 2
Full time, full scholarship

“The cost of tuition fees for undergraduate and postgraduate courses have hit badly those British students who come from very poor families or their household incomes are very low. ...I believe that without holding a PEP scholarship, I would have never, ever been able to afford the cost of my MSc course and my dream of obtaining a master degree would have perished forever.”
The PEP scholarship did have an impact on the choice of my MSc course as initially I was going to apply for another MSc, but I found that the PEP scholarship did not cover this course. So I changed my mind and chose to study computing at masters level. MSc Computing is still a great course for me; a very diverse course with a range of optional modules which enable me to tailor my MSc according to my own interests and I am going to immensely enjoying being on this MSc computing course.

It is my absolute pleasure to take part in all of those research activities outlined in the PEP acceptance terms and conditions, to firstly help me as a current postgraduate student as well as improving the experience for future students, and I hope that as a postgraduate student I can help the PEP research team in this urgently needed project.

I could go on and on writing about the positive impact that the PEP scholarship has on my postgraduate studies and words cannot describe how happy I am now as a current postgraduate student. I am helping myself to enhance my skills in the areas of computing and fulfilling my dreams of obtaining an MSc as well as taking an active part in the PEP research project activities, which will help both HEFCE and my university find how to increase the number of British graduate students go on to postgraduate studies. If it can determine what factors prevent British students studying masters courses and what factors help them to go onto postgraduate studies, it will be amazing.

Furthermore, if more British students are obtaining postgraduate degree certificates and masters degrees, this will also raise the position and the reputation of the UK education system across the world. And for me as British student, it would be a feeling of pride to see that one day the number or percentage of British students holding MSc degrees surpasses all other nations’ students in the world. A British degree is still one of the top degrees and a very well-recognised qualification across the globe, so let’s encourage the UK government to fund more UK universities enabling them to attract high number of British students onto their postgraduate courses and become a strong and proud nation in economics, education and on anything which is good for the UK’s sake.

The cost of tuition fees for undergraduate and postgraduate courses have hit badly those British students who come from very poor families or their household incomes are very low. So to sum up everything, I believe that without holding a PEP scholarship, I would have never, ever been able to afford the cost of my MSc course and my dream of obtaining a masters degree would have perished forever.

I believe if all UK universities offer PEP scholarships in STEM subjects and that HEFCE keep on extending this scholarship for many more years to come, then the result will be more British students going on to postgraduate studies, which will be very good for the UK economy as a whole. This is because a British student holding an MSc will have a very high chance of finding a very well-paid job, which will result in them paying more tax for the government and I believe this would bring more money into the UK’s economy.
As I come from a very poor background, education was never something that I took for granted. I had to struggle all my life to educate myself. I consider 27 June 2014 as one of the happiest days of my life, when one of my biggest dreams came true. It was a day when I graduated from university with a degree in civil engineering. After getting my A-levels (Polish Matura), I started to study environmental engineering at Cracov University of Technology. Due to my father’s death and mother’s illness, I had to come to London to earn some money after my second year of studies. Due to family circumstances, I decided to stay in England and I was not able to continue my studies in Poland. I always knew that whatever happened I would do my best to graduate one day.

I felt very bad about leaving my course in Poland, but sometimes things are just meant to be. In London, I met my future husband. We got married and we have a beautiful son that I am extremely proud of. My family supported me during my time at university and they are part of my success. Getting a degree was a first small step in my professional career and I know that since then I have to work even harder. I started to think about a masters degree during the second year of my BSc course. I had done much research and spoke with lecturers and masters degree students. I got lots of information about modules and teaching methods at the university for the MSc Structural Design and Construction Management with Sustainability course. After considering carefully all my options, I decided to apply for this course and I submitted my application in October 2013.

I am really interested in structural design and I wrote my dissertation about the design of straw-bale houses with timber structural frame. During my postgraduate studies, I want to concentrate on steel and concrete structures. I attended ICE and IStructE meetings that I really enjoyed. I also completed two ICE courses: Health and Safety in Construction and Managing Finances in Constructions. In the future, I intend to be a structural engineer and I wish to establish my own company after getting enough experience. Once I am financially stable, I want to travel to the poorer parts of the world to provide accommodation and other facilities by building straw-bale constructions. Like my hero, Elisabeth Murray, the author of the book *Breaking Nights*, I want to inspire other disadvantaged people and help them to continue their education and achieve their goals.

I know from my own experience that I will have to work very hard while studying for my masters degree and many unexpected things will happen, but I aim to achieve masters degree with distinction. I have already started my MSc full-time course and I really enjoy it.

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Magda, London University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“Like my hero, Elisabeth Murray, the author of the book *Breaking Nights*, I want to inspire other disadvantaged people and help them to continue their education and achieve their goals.”
In June 2009, I decided to apply to university. Unsure on exactly I wanted to do, I got a prospectus. I found something I liked, filled out a form and waited. I am sure those at enrolment had a little chuckle to themselves and looking back I can smile at my ignorance and naivety. Though they were very polite, they suggested that I went on an Access course. After a frantic Google search to discover what that was and where my local one was held, I was enrolling on a course in a nearby town (a week later!). I passed the Access course and proceeded to university with a foundation year to complete before embarking on the undergraduate course. The past four years have flown by and, before I knew it, I had finished (with a respectable 2:1). But now what?

I would love to continue my education, but how? Here I am... in my late 40s, a mum to six, a grandmother to five whilst doing a long-distance commute to university to study on a scientific route. All my savings had been swallowed up over the prior five years. How would I fund a masters course? It was a pipe dream that was so far out of my reach, I thought it would remain as a ‘maybe one day’ thought. Then I was told about the HEFCE funding programme. So I filled out the forms... but do I or don’t I send them and which of the two courses (that looked tantalising) do I choose? Decisions, decisions.

Should I not get a job and stop dreaming? Send in the application, Kathy... send in the application. I sent it with all my fingers and toes crossed. Then I started the joy of job hunting, but nothing. I am either too old, not qualified enough, too qualified, not the right fit and in many cases not even a ‘thank you for your application’. I would check my email, but no news and so days turned into weeks. Life went forward, but still no job. It is hard reading statuses about people who were moving on with their lives in jobs or at other universities. I kept checking my mail. Then OH MY goodness me... I have WON funding. I HAVE WON funding. SQUEEEEEEEEEAAAAALLLL and I am dancing around the room (not a pretty sight!!!). I enrol onto the biomedical science with management course online, turn up one week later to collect my ID card... I am back and it feels GOOD... (play tune *It feels good* by James Brown)!

I cannot thank the team enough for giving me this opportunity. Without your help and belief in me and others we would not have had this chance so THANK YOU, THANK YOU AND THANK YOU.
Value of postgraduate study

Katherine, South-east Coast University 2
Full time, full scholarship

“Receiving this scholarship has significantly increased my belief that commencing this postgraduate journey was the right step for me.”

Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to be involved in this study and for choosing me for this scholarship. It has most definitely made a difference to my life and I still can’t believe I was picked for it!

I have always enjoyed studying and really enjoyed my undergraduate course. During my four years at the University of Hertfordshire I completed a placement year, where I was a classroom assistant within a physical education department. I did this year to experience a career pathway that I had thought I may have wanted to pursue. However, completing my final year at university demonstrated that I was keen to stay within academia and research, but unsure in what form.

After finishing my course, I then had a couple of years out of formal study. I worked as a personal trainer and travelled a little. This allowed me to assess what my goals and ambitions were. This scholarship also enabled me to research and pick the right institution and course to move forward in my career.

Financially, having this time between studying allowed me to earn and look into my options of how I would fund postgraduate study, as I knew this was the right step for me.

Receiving this scholarship has significantly increased my belief that commencing this postgraduate journey was the right step for me. It has already given me more confidence and dedication to work even harder and achieve my career goals.

Thank you again.
Throughout my undergrad, I never intended on continuing in higher education and doing an MSc. Although an MSc in strength and conditioning was something that has appealed to me, I had only one goal since I completed university. My dream has always been to become an officer in the Royal Marines, and I was desperate to finish university and join up. Throughout my final year, not only was I studying to get my BSc (Hons) Sport & Exercise (Coaching Science), I was revising the vast amount of information about the Royal Marines, the Navy, and current affairs required to become a RM officer. Most importantly, I was training to meet the high standards of fitness. In May, I handed in my dissertation and had finally finished my undergraduate degree. I then began training even harder for a three-day officer selection course. The course was incredibly tough, as it needs to be, and I endured some of the toughest physical and mental tests I had ever been through. After three days, with only half the original applicants left, I was told I had just missed the pass rate by 0.1 of a mark. I was told to return again in six months to give it another go. At this point I was devastated. The Marines take in a ‘batch’ of officer recruits only once a year in September, so this means I would have to wait over a year before I could begin training. Now I was going to have to find a boring, dead-end job until then. I felt like I was going to be in a rut for the rest of the year and was pretty fed up with myself. I hadn’t even thought about going back to do an MSc until one evening I was out walking my dog and suddenly it hit me, why not go back and do a masters? It was certainly more productive then working a nine-to-five office job, and it would give me plenty of time to prepare for my next selection course. I knew I would want to return to the same uni, so this way I could stay at home with my parents and save on costs, and the more I found out about the strength and conditioning course the more it interested me. The fees would be the only issue. However, when applying for my course I found out about the postgraduate scholarship scheme. This could be the answer to my problems.

After that, everything seemed to fall nicely into place for me, I was quickly accepted onto the course and soon after that got the results of my degree, which were better than I expected. I also managed to get an internship with a professional rugby team, working with the strength and conditioning coaches. Looking back now, I think failing to make the pass mark this year may have been a good thing. For one, all of the guys who passed were two or three years older than me, so there is no rush to join. Now I have a chance to get another qualification and gain practical experience in my internship, both will enhance my career prospects for later life and look good at officer selection. So many people have degrees today, and an MSc will put me a step ahead of them. Most importantly, I have one more year to enjoy my life before going into a career that is quite demanding. This time next year, I am 100 per cent confident I will have an MSc in strength and conditioning and will have begun training to be a Royal Marines officer.

Jeremy, North-east England University
Full time, £1,000 scholarship

“So many people have degrees today, and an MSc will put me a step ahead of them.”
I gained a BEng in civil and coastal engineering in 2000 and spent the next ten years working in various roles in the water industry. Following the births of my second and third children it became increasingly difficult balancing work/life demands and so I haven’t returned to work since 2010.

My husband and I split up this year and I am now a single parent trying to survive on state benefits. I am desperate to return to work but have found employers reluctant to take me on after my career break. I talked to many people within the industry and decided that an MSc would be a really positive step forward. The course will bring me back up to speed with current legislation and improve my employment prospects/future career path.

This summer, it was looking doubtful that I could afford to do the course as I was really worried about taking on a huge personal development loan to cover costs. The scholarship was like a windfall from heaven and has taken a big burden off financially. I am excited to be back in education studying a subject area that I am so passionate about. I hope to use my experience and the knowledge I will gain this year to undertake work in the humanitarian sector in the future.

Sally, South-east Coast University 2
Part time, 60 per cent scholarship

“I hope to use my experience and the knowledge I will gain this year to undertake work in the humanitarian sector in the future.”
Employment

Diane, South-east Coast University 2
Full time, full scholarship

“Although I think I would have coped (just about), this has taken so much pressure off of my studies. I also feel that because I have been given this brilliant opportunity, I am going to work even harder to make sure that I achieve the absolute best I can with it.”

Since I have been fortunate enough to get a scholarship as part of the PEP project, I would very much like to share my story in order to help with your study. I studied an undergraduate degree at Sussex University in biomedical science. I had also completed a foundation year as part of this because at the time I didn't quite feel ready to go straight into a degree but equally I didn't want a gap year. When I started my undergraduate degree I was very hesitant about what I should do afterwards. I knew about MSc degrees and I was interested in these, but the cost put me off. After my first year of the undergraduate degree, I started looking around to see what was out there for me and also if my potential future career needed me to have any more qualifications in order to get a job. I realised that having a masters degree would give me a greater chance in the future when looking for jobs and that I really should complete one. So during my final year, I looked around for the best masters for me (as well as everything else I may need to do in order to get the job I want) and I found the perfect one at a nearby university. I applied for it although the cost still worried me considerably. I also looked around for other scholarships, but sadly I didn’t appear to match the criteria for the ones I had found. So I started saving as much as I could.

During the summer, I received an email from the university where I was going to study my masters, advising me that my degree was going to be part of the PEP project, which was offering scholarships for fees. This made me so excited and, although I hadn’t actually got it yet, I felt slightly relieved that there was still a little hope for me to be able to afford my masters degree without the worry. Once I realised I matched the criteria for it I was so thrilled and applied straight away. Then when I got the email telling me I was successful I just couldn’t believe it (I actually cried a little with the relief!).

Thanks to this project, I am able to complete my masters degree without worrying about paying for the fees as well as funding other things such as the train fare. I feel I will be able to fully enjoy this next year of my life and ultimately achieve my goals in the future because I know I can get through it now. Although I think I would have coped (just about), this has taken so much pressure off of my studies. I also feel that because I have been given this brilliant opportunity, I am going to work even harder to make sure that I achieve the absolute best I can with it. It will drive me on during those days when I feel extra tired from revision or other studying. I also hope that I can provide you with valuable information for your study, I will certainly do my best!

My future plans are now to either try and get a PhD (if I get accepted onto one, I know they’re hard to get), which will lead me to a career of researching into alternatives to animal testing, helping both humans and animals, or I am going to try to work in the NHS as a biomedical scientist, which although may not help humans so directly, it will provide patients with a potential diagnosis, allowing them to be treated correctly and so help them in life. Then, when I am older and I have worked hard enough to earn enough money, I plan to open my own animal sanctuary, meaning I would have helped humans all of my working life, then helped animals in need for the rest of it. Thank you so much for this scholarship, it means so much to me and I really hope I can give back what you need from me for the PEP project, I will certainly put as much in as a can!

Thank you.
The fact that I have received the scholarship is obviously a great boost financially, but it also means that it takes off a bit of the pressure that is created by going into debt/running up debt.

Being a parent of two children is very rewarding, but, again, finances are very much directed towards their needs (school trips to France – War Graves, football trips etc). We are solely reliable on one salary now and our savings.

The aim of the course is to improve my job prospects long term. I have been a primary teacher for twenty years and decided to make a change because I know from my wife’s experience that there is scope to change career. Primary teaching has become very bogged down with excessive paperwork and accountability which is a real shame because I did enjoy the job, especially in the first few years.

I have always been interested in sport and science and this course follows on perfectly from my previous degree; however, this was a long time ago.

I am really looking forward to the challenge and hope that it will bring new career prospects as well as being educational.

Mark, North-east England University
Full time, full scholarship

“The aim of the course is to improve my job prospects long term.”
I graduated in 2011 with a 2.1 BSc in zoology from the University of Manchester, but found it impossible to find paid entry-level work in my field. It seems that the opportunities for graduates in many fields are very much skewed towards those who are able to fund their own subsistence without any income, which is disheartening to say the least. I undertook some unpaid work experience with the RSPB, but for most of the three years since I graduated I’ve been working in temporary customer service roles out of necessity. I continued to apply for nature-, conservation- and zoology-related jobs, but I think it must be off-putting to employers when they see that your current employment is so wholly unrelated to your qualifications.

Caught in this cycle, I often considered postgraduate study as I thought it would give me additional skills and prove my commitment to a career in science or conservation. However, on the wages common in temp jobs, it would have taken me years and years to save up to fund a course. I can honestly say that, had I not been awarded the PEP scholarship, I would not have been able to take up the opportunity to study. Due to a lack of student funding for maintenance costs (I am ineligible for the Career Development Loan), things will still be very tight and I will have to work part time alongside my studies to afford rental costs etc, but if I had to pay for course fees as well, I would need to work full time to cover costs. This would be impossible whilst simultaneously trying to focus and get the most out of postgraduate study.

Thank you very much for this opportunity!

Alicia, South-west England University
Part time, full scholarship

“I can honestly say that, had I not been awarded the PEP scholarship, I would not have been able to take up the opportunity to study.”
It was a blessing to learn that I am among the students who have benefited from the PEP scholarship scheme to study at MSc level. Without the scholarship award, I honestly could not have gone ahead to study at the masters level. Financially, I would have struggled as I haven’t been able to find employment and have not yet saved enough to pay for the tuition fees. I would be very worried about adding another loan (if I could get one) on top of the one I already have. And providing for the family could have been difficult.

However, this scholarship has made it possible for me to continue with my studies, as I enjoy learning. This award is worth so much to me and will significantly help the success of my educational journey where I am looking forward to broadening my knowledge and skills. I am confident that by completing a masters degree, it will provide an opportunity for me to contribute further within the IT industry. Studying at this level will also increase the prospects of a better career and a better lifestyle.
I did my A-levels in biology, chemistry and physics and an AS in maths. Then I went on to study BSc Zoology in Reading University and graduated in 2010 with a 2.1. Following this, I was on social welfare for about six months, failing to find a job and loitering around my parents’ house. It was during these six months, due to desperation of needing a job, I applied for a PGCE in biology. Although I had never really had a desire to become a teacher, there were jobs in teaching and I needed a job. So I applied for a PGCE at my local university and got called to interview. During the interview, I was offered a place on the physics PGCE as long as I did the physics Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course prior to it. The SKE course was thoroughly enjoyable, but the PGCE on the other hand was not. I was very slow with the paperwork (likely due to my dyslexia) and also not actually being qualified in physics resulted in me quickly falling behind with things like writing lesson plans as well as university coursework. I didn’t particularly get on with my placement school either due to the sheer lack of support they provided.

As a result, I ended up skipping meals and losing sleep in order to complete the work and attempt to catch up with the work expected of me. It resulted in me ending up being clinically depressed and being prescribed Prozac, something very out of the ordinary for me. When I asked the University for support, I was basically told there was nothing they could do and put me on special measures, which to me felt like more paperwork, and therefore was somewhat counterproductive. Having been encouraged by the University to suspend my studies for a year on health grounds, I took the decision to do this. Due to my thoroughly un-enjoyable time on the course, I never returned.

Following on from this, I worked a few mediocre jobs in bars and shops whilst I looked for work in the zoo industry, which had been my initial career aim. I started volunteering at the Living Rainforest near Newbury while I worked part time in a shop. Then, due to my experience in teaching, I got a job in the education department as a tour guide. The summer of 2013, I got a keeper job in the New Forest Wildlife Park in Southampton. I thoroughly enjoyed my time here and this consolidated my desire to work in this industry for life. Unfortunately, it was only a seasonal role and once it finished I returned to the Living Rainforest for the winter.

In the spring of 2014, I applied for in excess of 75 jobs, receiving interviews for about a third of them, but not getting any permanent career, so I decided to study a masters. I applied to this university due to the fact that the course was very suited to my career – MSc Zoo Conservation Biology. It had a module based in Chester Zoo so would be useful for getting my foot in the door and gain contacts in the zoo industry. Importantly, the course also offered the PEP scholarship. Had I not received this, I likely would have been unable to fund my masters, so it all worked out quite well for me!

John, North-west England University
Full time, full scholarship

“In the spring of 2014, I applied for in excess of 75 jobs, receiving interviews for about a third of them, but not getting any permanent career, so I decided to study a masters.”
When considering my options after my undergraduate course, I knew that I wished to complete a level of postgraduate study (to increase my employability chances, etc). However, I was worried about the cost of a postgraduate degree and, given some personal family circumstances at the time, my parents were unable to offer me much support. I had savings from a previous employment, but was struggling to come up with the course fees (also considering the student debt I had taken on earlier). My initial plan (before learning about PEP) was to pay the initial tuition fees and then raise money by becoming a personal tutor for GCSE and A-level students. However, seeing the link to PEP on the university course page allowed me to research and apply for the scholarship. Luckily, I received a scholarship for the full amount of my fees! The scholarship has afforded me the opportunity to study at MSc level without worrying about finances and growing student debts – an opportunity I am grateful for!

Simi, North-west England University
Full time, full scholarship

“When considering my options after my undergraduate course, I knew that I wished to complete a level of postgraduate study to increase my employability chances.”
During the final stages of my undergraduate degree, I realised that to enhance my career further, it would be greatly beneficial to myself to take a postgraduate course. Due to the course, one university was my only choice. After hearing of the possibility of receiving a scholarship it confirmed to me that I would do the MSc. Although the scholarship was not vital to my partaking on the course, once received it relieved the pressure of fees on me and my family and is much appreciated.

Nial, South-west England University
Full time, full scholarship

“During the final stages of my undergraduate degree, I realised that, to enhance my career further, it would be greatly beneficial to myself to take a postgraduate course.”
Finance

Tom, West Midlands University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“I can now afford to choose and have the time to take part in extracurricular activities that will boost my chances of good employment, where, hopefully, I will soon be paying back the government for helping me.”

I am very grateful for this scholarship, without it I’d have to be working part time some 12 to 15 hours a week to make up the difference in what I have saved and how much it costs to do a masters, not just from a fee perspective, but also accommodation and living costs. Now I should have more than enough to get by without adversely affecting my ability to study. Additionally, I can now afford to choose and have the time to take part in extracurricular activities that will boost my chances of good employment, where, hopefully, I will soon be paying back the government for helping me.
I have always wanted to study to masters level, but I never anticipated it would be so soon. There is no way I could have done this course without the scholarship, and it has enabled me to carry on and do the masters after my BSc, rather than going away and working for a number of years in order to be able to afford it. I value the scholarships immensely. I think the scholarships provide fantastic opportunities to students who otherwise wouldn't be able to further their education to this level due to the large costs involved with higher education!

Charlotte, North-east England University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“I think the scholarships provide fantastic opportunities to students who otherwise wouldn’t be able to further their education to this level due to the large costs involved with higher education!”

I have always wanted to study to masters level, but I never anticipated it would be so soon. There is no way I could have done this course without the scholarship, and it has enabled me to carry on and do the masters after my BSc, rather than going away and working for a number of years in order to be able to afford it. I value the scholarships immensely. I think the scholarships provide fantastic opportunities to students who otherwise wouldn't be able to further their education onto this level due to the large costs involved with higher education!
After graduating this year from Loughborough, I was looking at taking a bank loan out and piling on more debts to afford this masters. However, I saw the PEP scholarships and pinned all my hopes on it. Thankfully it came through for me. This project was a lifeline, as without it I’m not even sure whether I would have been able to undertake further study. More of these scholarships should be available around the country, as for the less fortunate they provide a lifeline. This project has my upmost thanks and I don’t know what I would have done without it.

Michael, South-east Coast University 1
Full time, full scholarship

“This project was a lifeline, as without it I’m not even sure whether I would have been able to undertake further study.”
I am 29 and have lived in the city for the last four years. I came here originally because I wanted to further my education in the form of a degree. After a year studying on the extended science Access course, I decided to enrol on BSc Environmental Science. I chose this degree because of the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, but also with a view to job prospects for the future.

Towards the end of my BSc, I began to think seriously about the next step. My final goal has always been a career in ecology or conservation. I was aware, however, that competition is stiff, with many employers expecting either an MSc or many years worth of volunteer experience. Being a mature student, who is also married to another mature student it was essential that I maintained paid work whilst completing my bachelors degree. I did not have sufficient time to also be a volunteer.

Therefore, I felt that my best option for getting a dream career was through doing an MSc degree. I chose to study MSc Environmental Consultancy, due to the success that previous students have had getting employment. The course has started now, so I am excited and also a little nervous about the year ahead.

The main barrier/worry that I had before committing to the course was the costs involved. Due to my low income, and lack of a certain job once completing the course, I was worried about applying for the loan, which would be necessary for me to complete the course. Nevertheless, I took the plunge and applied for the loan. I also applied for a PEP scholarship. When I received confirmation of my scholarship I was over the moon. It has taken a huge weight off my mind, firstly when thinking of affording the course in the first place; secondly when thinking of the smaller repayments of the loan which I will have once the course is complete.

Peter, South-west England University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“The main barrier/worry that I had before committing to the course was the costs involved.”
After completing the BSc(Hons) Human and Equine Sports Science, I managed to secure an internship at an equine nutrition and rehab facility in Kentucky. Unfortunately, this facility lost their state funding and my internship was cancelled.

After trying and failing to find something similar over here (our equine rehab centres are not state funded), I got a groom job with horses, and although I enjoyed travelling to Spain and Holland with my boss, who was competing, I did miss the science. So I left my lovely outdoor job and got a place at Birmingham City Hospital as a medical laboratory assistant (with quite a hefty pay cut – my friends thought I was mad, but I love lab work!)

With a horse to pay for and my brain to keep in shape, I soon realised I would need to do some more studying to move up the career ladder. I did a distance learning Biomedical Science Certificate with Ulster University and then some top-up modules at a nearby university as the IBMS said my previous degree was lacking in some areas to pass the qualification assessment. I completed my IBMS registration portfolio and did a few years on shifts in biochemistry.

In June 2013, I was encouraged to apply for a maternity cover 18-month ‘acting senior’ position that was advertised in my department. I thought I was a little inexperienced compared to the other staff applying for the job, but thought the interview experience would do me good. The interviewers said all applicants were very good, but I stood out – so to my surprise I got the job!

I love my senior work and hope to make it permanent either at my current hospital or elsewhere. One of the essential requirements of senior posts is an MSc and with the current budget constraints it was doubtful I would get department funding for this. Our training supervisor then brought the PEP scholarships to my attention and luckily I got a full scholarship, as I doubt I could have afforded the MSc myself and would have had to cancel my place on the course without the sponsorship!

So thanks very much to the PEP; fingers crossed my career aspirations will be fulfilled!
During the second year of my undergraduate degree, I was certain I wanted to pursue a masters course. I was unsure at first whether I would be able to cope with the pressures of the increased work level. However, in the third year I became more confident with my studies and was sure I had the capability to be successful in fulfilling a masters to a good standard.

Initially, I was very aware that if I wanted to study a masters course, I would have to be more careful with my expenditure. I was fortunate enough to be awarded a PEP scholarship. It was a big sense of relief and I was very happy on being selected. It now means that I can start my course with ease and focus on my studies without any financial strains. I am very grateful towards the Postgraduate Experience Project scheme as this scholarship significantly reduces the pressures of studying at postgraduate level for me.
As a graduate engineer, receiving the Postgraduate Experience Project scholarship is one of many crucial steps towards my personal and academic development. Initially, I was cautious about furthering my studies due to the challenges of coping with the financial demands of postgraduate education. However, I was advised by friends who directed me towards the Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP), which now alleviates the financial challenges I would have faced. I have always wanted to study mechanical engineering at a higher level and I am able to experience it thanks to the support of the scholarship.
I have wanted to study an MSc for a few years. However, working full time as a college lecturer did not give the flexibility to study. Three years ago my little boy was born and returning to work only part time again caused further restraints to studying due to the finance. The scholarship has helped to support me financially and allowed me to finally reach my learning goal after quite a few years. It is nice to receive some form of financial support towards costs, as my partner and I have always worked and have never received any financial support. Thank you to the PEP scholarship for making it more financially feasible to study at this level.

Rebecca, North-west England University
Part time, 60 per cent scholarship

“It is nice to receive some form of financial support towards costs, as my partner and I have always worked and have never received any financial support.”
As discussed in class today, I would like to offer some further specific feedback in relation to postgraduate student financing. Specifically, I feel the amount of public funding available for postgraduate studies is currently rather inadequate to the needs and requirements of students active at this level.

To clarify, currently the only available funding for postgraduate studies (or even at a lower level if, for example, pursuing a second undergraduate degree) are the Professional and Career Development Loans on offer from either the Co-operative Bank or Barclays Bank via a public–private partnership wherein the government pays the interest applicable on the loan for the duration of the study period. Currently, a maximum of £10,000 may be borrowed under the terms of one of these loans. The interest rate taken out by Barclays Bank is currently 9.9 per cent p.a.). I understand the same rate of interest applies with the Co-operative Bank.

After said studies have been completed, the student becomes liable to pay off the loan within a period of between one to five years. Typically, anyone able to do so then pays the loan off in full, either by borrowing money from friends or family and/or by taking out a commercial loan under more favourable conditions. This usually avoids having to pay excessively punitive rates of interest to the bank (this is, for that matter, certainly what I intend to do at the end of my studies).

There are a number of problems with this system:

- Firstly, £10,000 might just constitute sufficient funds to cater for living costs over the course of a year (though certainly not any longer than this). However, given the cost of tuition fees these days, today the lion's share of one of these loans can be expected to be required just to pay the course fees for anyone embarking on postgraduate studies.
- To the best of my knowledge (though this will need to be corroborated by further research) the £10,000 maximum facility available from a Professional and Career Development Loan has remained unchanged for the better part of a decade – despite the fact that tuition fees have, of course, climbed ever higher (a development that we may expect to continue unabated going forward...).
- Today, therefore, anyone wishing to pursue a degree at postgraduate level will have no other option than to (a) either borrow additional funds from friends, family or alternative commercial sources, (b) save up sufficient funds of their own accord, or (c) seek a scholarship. This means that people from a poorer background will inevitably struggle to take up a study place at postgraduate level – they are certainly penalised.

In regard to the current set-up of today's Professional and Career Development Loans, I would like to add the following observations:
- As noted above, my loan provider – Barclays Bank – charges an interest rate of 9.9 per cent p.a. for the funds that I have borrowed to finance my postgraduate studies.
- For the duration of my studies, the government will pay this interest to Barclays.
- Of course, Barclays gets the money that it lends out to me in the first place from the government (via the Bank of England)...!
- This means that the government is paying something like 8.5 per cent to 9 per cent p.a. net to Barclays on funds it could have lent out to me directly in the first place!
- How is this good value for tax payers?!

From my own point of view, I would happily pay the government 5 per cent p.a. directly, rather than have commercial banking interests make a profit from a loan facility carrying – effectively – zero risk to anyone but the tax-payer. Of course, it would be even better if postgraduate students were – as undergraduate students are – eligible also for loans via the Student Loans Company – in which case, even lower rates of interest would become payable.

Indeed, it should be noted that the current financing system for students in the UK effectively penalises anyone wishing to pursue studies at postgraduate level. Such loan facilities as are available are much more onerous than is the case for undergraduate students. Now, this may or may not be an implicit aim of the current set-up: ie make anyone wishing to pursue studies at this level invest in them at a higher level – both emotionally as well as financially (the better to make sure that the studies ultimately result in actual ‘career development’). An alternative way to look at it might be to consider that investing in postgraduate education – making it easier for students to undertake – is also tantamount to investing in the future of the country (though that will be for politicians to decide, ultimately...).

I hope the above observations/comments are of some use for your work in this field.

James, South-west England University (non-scholarship student)

“...it should be noted that the current financing system for students in the UK effectively penalises anyone wishing to pursue studies at postgraduate level”.
I feel that my journey into postgraduate higher education has been based on a few factors that carry equal significance.

1) Personal enjoyment. As a mature student going into undergrad study, I very much enjoyed the process and found it very rewarding. It helped reignite some passion in myself with education. So it seemed silly not to carry on with something you enjoy.

2) Following on from point one, alongside the enjoyment element, there was pride to achieve what I did. So now in a ‘semi-ego’ way, postgraduate study is to prove to myself that I can set out to achieve new challenges and tasks and better myself.

3) Again, closely knitted to points one and two, being older and having already enjoyed myself, I have been able to focus on postgraduate study that I believe will have a positive impact on patients (I am doing a clinical exercise science MSc). I believe that by undertaking this study, I am better placed to help others I will encounter. Tied in with my enjoyment and passion, I am hoping that my feeling of ‘self-wellness’ will hopefully envelope my patients and show that you can make changes for the good, if given the opportunity.

The impact upon my choices is that it’s given me peace of mind that I don’t have to worry about the money. I can just enjoy the experience, which is only going to help me involve myself more.

Josh, South-east Coast University 1
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“I believe that by undertaking this study, I am better placed to help others I will encounter.”

Personal development and life chances
I was extremely shocked to receive a scholarship. It has been a blessing, so thought I’d share how.

I started my BSc Animal Behaviour Science with the full idea that I would continue onto the MSc. This has been my dream since discovering what career path I could take from it. The three years of my bachelors was brilliant and I knew that taking the masters would be even more rewarding. However, during my dissertation project I became extremely stressed and anxious, and was having increasing difficulty believing in myself and my abilities. I’ve had some long-term mental health issues which showed no let-up. When it became apparent I had been accepted onto the masters, I was happy for only a few short days until I became fearful about the social contact it would include (the MSc includes counselling others, new people, etc).

My mother said she would fund some of the MSc tuition fees but not living cost. This meant that I needed a job pronto for that! However, I was still grossly unhappy with myself in general and felt that I didn’t deserve anything life gave me, and I hated my job. I found out about the PEP scholarship and applied for it.

On the day of my graduation I felt increasingly worried because I’d heard that two of my coursemates had received the PEP scholarship and knew I’d feel awful if I didn’t get one. After the ceremony I gathered the courage to look at my email. I couldn’t believe it! I had received the 60 per cent scholarship! I was over the moon and felt like weight had been lifted. Even though the scholarships were randomly allocated, since I learned that I’d got the scholarship, I’ve felt happier and more confident in myself. I’ve managed to secure pro-bono consultation work with a charity that has asked for my help at fund-raising events all over the UK. If I hadn’t received the scholarship, I would have never had the courage to even ask them, let alone agree to help them!

My confidence is at an all-time high and I want to thank you so, so much for helping me see there is light at the end of the tunnel and I am worth more than I thought!

Thank you for reading and thank you again for everything!

Lily, East Coast University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“Even though the scholarships were randomly allocated, since I learned that I’d gotten the scholarship, I’ve felt happier and more confident in myself.”
Seven years ago when I finished sixth form, I came to this university to study English. However, it wasn’t my passion and after a few weeks I realised the course wasn’t for me. I returned home to Yorkshire and got a full-time job in retail. I saw a poster for an open day at Askham Bryan College and discovered their BSc course in Animal Management. I studied at the college part time and worked my way up from sales adviser to store manager within retail. This enabled me to pay my tuition fees without accruing any debt and even enabled me to start saving. Alongside studying and working, I volunteered at puppy and dog training classes with several companies, enabling me to gain experience working with dogs and alongside their owners.

I graduated with a first class honours degree and as the top student with the top dissertation, so I was over the moon! I didn’t know what to do after college, but I’ve always loved studying so a master’s course seemed like the next best step. I applied back to the university where I had initially studied English, because of the general reputation of the University, the reputation of the academic professionals in the School of Life Sciences, and the research opportunities.

Due to the fact that I studied my BSc part time and had savings, I would have been able to pay for the masters course myself in full. However, I would have had to study part time and work in order to pay for general living costs, or struggle on the full-time course with a job. This scholarship has enabled me to study full time with a small contracted job, so I can dedicate more of my time to my studies.

I am excited about all of the research opportunities that the University has to offer and am keen to further develop my specialist knowledge in the field of animal behaviour, with the view to becoming a clinical behaviourist or a lecturer in higher education in the future.

Clare, East Coast University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“This scholarship has enabled me to study full time with a small contracted job, so I can dedicate more of my time to my studies.”
I am a 39-year-old mature student. A brief history of my journey is the following.

After a marriage break up I was left unemployed and a lone parent. Having worked since I left school, my decision to originally attend university as a mature student was to help create a better life for my son and myself. As I had been out of education for so long (20 years), I had to do a HND then a top-up degree at my local university. It was just what I was looking for and it increased my confidence and broadened my mind, as well as making some new great friends.

After I graduated, I looked for work, but to no avail so I started my own IT business. When the opportunity to do my MSc came up through the project, I jumped at the chance to be able to increase my knowledge bank, enhance my career prospects and my education. When graduating, it was inspiring to see the ladies and gentlemen getting up on the stage with their different hats compared to the mortar boards of the graduates. With the assistance of the project, I am able to afford to do the masters degree. I hope to also go on at some point to do a PhD after completing my masters.

Stuart, North-east England University
Part time, 60 per cent scholarship

“When the opportunity to do my MSc came up through the project, I jumped at the chance to be able to increase my knowledge bank, enhance my career prospects and my education.”
During the second year of the forensic biology degree course, we had a series of lectures by guest speakers from Fuji Film Biosynth about biotechnology and its application in industry. It was through these that I became interested in a career in biotechnology.

I live in Middlesbrough and, having thoroughly enjoyed studying for my degree at the university nearby, it was a natural choice for me to want to continue my postgraduate study with them when I discovered that they were offering an MSc in Biotechnology.

I completed the first two years of my undergraduate degree course part time whilst working full time at the Inland Revenue. I had to leave my employment in September 2013 in order to complete the final year of my course as the rules regarding the use of flexi-time at work, which had enabled me to attend lectures and laboratory sessions, changed. I lived at home using my savings for living expenses for my final year.

I was determined to do a masters, but the tuition fees for the MSc course would take all of my remaining savings and I did not have a job to pay for my living expenses. In June 2014, I signed on at the job centre and spent the summer looking for part-time work. I found that I was overqualified for most posts and expensive regarding minimum wage posts. Although my mother, who is retired and on a pension, insisted on me continuing my studies saying that we would manage our finances, I knew it would not be easy, so it was a great surprise and huge relief to me when I received the letter stating that I had received the full scholarship, as it means that I will have some money to pay for living or unexpected expenses that come up throughout the academic year.

I have also just started a part-time job at Next Plc until Christmas, which will help with any additional expenses regarding books or course-related costs. In the new year, I will then be able to concentrate on my studies. I am extremely grateful to the PEP scholarship fund for aiding me through this year.
After working extremely hard on my undergraduate course and dissertation, I graduated last year with a first class honours degree in geography. I was privileged to get a job as a research assistant over the summer and intended to go on and complete a masters degree immediately afterwards using my wages from this job to fund it. Having obtained a place on my masters course I knew that finances would be tight. I had to stay in my parents’ house and got a part-time job at a local cafe. However, my parents were going through financial difficulties and with further difficulties at home I realised that I could not afford to continue studying.

To the disappointment of my tutors, I dropped out of my course and devoted more time to my job in order to help with living costs. Despite my best efforts, I was unsuccessful in finding a job that required my degree. I applied for the masters course the following year and, optimistically, for the PEP scholarship, knowing that I would have to continue working in order to fund it if I didn’t get the scholarship. I had real difficulties justifying the costs of the course to myself and wondered whether I would be better off just trying to find a second job. I couldn’t believe it when I got the scholarship! I am incredibly grateful that this opportunity was available as it has allowed me to continue studying when I would have struggled to otherwise. Thanks to the scholarship I can work just one or two days a week and focus on my course without having to worry about balancing work and study. I can devote my time to my degree to do the very best I can do!

Thank you to everyone involved in this project.
Rashige, London University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“It reduces stress levels and causes us students to work harder due to the feeling of being privileged.”

The scholarship helps a student like me to focus more on the education rather than the finance. I believe this scholarship will help direct all my effort into studying rather than having to work a certain amount of hours in order to pay off the loan. It reduces stress levels and causes us students to work harder due to the feeling of being privileged. Others wanted this scholarship and didn’t get it. I got it so I must utilise this opportunity to the best of my ability.
In the final year of my undergraduate degree, I decided that a graduate job would be the ideal next step for me in my career. My intention was to then return to education sometime in the future to complete my masters degree. However, due to a lack of confidence or work experience, I found obtaining a graduate job difficult. As a result, I decided that I would continue at university and study my masters degree part time, whilst also working part time. The part-time work would enable me to fund my masters degree, whilst gaining confidence and work experience. Once I had completed my masters degree, I would then apply for graduate jobs.

In July this year, I obtained part-time work at ASDA as a counter assistant. This role has already helped me to improve my confidence and, with the assurance of an income, has enabled me to apply for my masters degree. Whilst applying to the University, one of my lecturers from my undergraduate degree informed me of the PEP scholarship.

Having been successful in obtaining a scholarship worth the full fee for the course, I now have new choices available to me and have more ability to study at postgraduate level. The scholarship has also enabled me to purchase my own car as none of the money I earn from my job will go to paying fees. This will enable me to make the choice of applying to graduate jobs that are located further away from my home town, thus more graduate jobs will be available to me.

My ability to study at postgraduate level has increased as I do not have to work more than my contracted hours, so I have more time to spend on the course. Also, as I know that the fees will be paid, I have the reassurance of knowing that I can complete my masters degree. Without the scholarship, I would have relied on my income to pay the fees, which would enable me to continue with the degree.

Thank you so much!

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Having been successful in obtaining a scholarship worth the full fee for the course, I now have new choices available to me and have more ability to study at postgraduate level. Before I obtained the scholarship, my plan was to complete three modules each year and work as much as possible in order to cover the costs of the fees and living costs such as board money and transport costs. Now that I have the scholarship, I no longer need to work as much. This means that I can take four modules in one year; leaving me more time to focus on the more challenging modules in the second year. Although this choice is now available to me, I may take three modules each year if the dissertation is started upon completion of all six modules.
When I attained my current position, I knew that I would have to develop my skills and qualifications to be able to fulfil the role. More importantly, I knew that for me to progress in the field, I had to gain the appropriate industry qualifications. I thought I was going to be in the similar position that I had found myself in with the ambulance service – of not being able to have access or funding for career development.

I found the appropriate course and spoke to the tutor. It was clear from the conversation that I had found the right course, but my excitement and enthusiasm soon started to diminish when looking at the cost both financially and personally. Going to university soon became a regular topic of conversation between my wife and me about how and what we would have to do to finance the course.

To ease the strain, it was agreed the best way for this was to do it over two years. The fees would be managed by saving and working additional hours. When I received the information and application form for the PEP scholarship, I initially had the view that I would be very unlikely to qualify due age or circumstances. I never told my wife I had received the application, as I truly thought that I would not have a chance of being awarded it.

After a couple of days dwelling on it, I sat down one evening and completed the application and returned it with the supporting documents. When I received the email saying I had been awarded the scholarship my initial reaction was one of disbelief, I even sent it to my wife to ask her to check that I had read it right. Being awarded this scholarship allows me to focus all my efforts on the course without the worry of using savings and working longer hours.

Thank you.

Timothy, South-east Coast University 1
Part time, full scholarship

“It was clear from the conversation that I had found the right course, but my excitement and enthusiasm soon started to diminish when looking at the cost both financially and personally.”
I studied and completed a molecular biology degree at Liverpool University in 2004. I chose this course because it fitted in with my interests at the time and my ability to study biology. At the time of studying, I did not know how I was going to use my degree afterwards. Prior to going to university, I took a year out and worked for 12 months as a lab assistant with a company producing products for the life sciences. During this time, I realised that a career in the lab was not for me.

After completing my degree, I joined the police. I became a detective and continued in this job for the next ten years. Within a couple of years of starting work, I began to regret my decision and started to consider looking at a career change and returning to the field of science. It was also during this time that I developed further my interest in the environment and renewable energy sources. By this time, I was married and had started a family. My wife had started a five-year university course, so the option of me leaving work to take further study in view of a career change was in no way possible. During these five years, I was relied upon to support my wife through her study and I relied upon my job as the only source of family income.

It was only after my wife completed her study and found work that it was possible for me to consider taking on postgraduate study. During those previous five years, I had not had the opportunity to save any money with which to pay for a course. When I began to research the courses available to me, I considered mainly the ones that allowed me to study part time, as this would enable me to continue working at the same time. However, given the opportunity I would have preferred to study full time for one year.

I submitted an application for my chosen course on the full-time structure. I also submitted a PEP scholarship application at the same time in the knowledge that if I was not lucky enough to be awarded a scholarship, I would have to change my mode of learning to the part-time course. In all likelihood, I was expecting to defer my application altogether until I had had the opportunity to save some money. I was very fortunate to have been awarded a scholarship of 60 per cent! This has had a huge impact on my ability to take the course with a view of making the career change that I have been looking at for a long time. The fact that the scholarship is such a significant amount enables me firstly to take the course full time and secondly to concentrate my efforts on the course rather than having to work at the same time. Before being awarded the scholarship, the thought of leaving a job to study on a course that I had no means to pay for was something of an unachievable target. The PEP scholarship has made this achievable for me and given me the chance to concentrate all my efforts on the course.

Matthew, South-west England University
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“Before being awarded the scholarship, the thought of leaving a job to study on a course that I had no means to pay for was something of an unachievable target.”
I am a biomedical science graduate. My decision to choose biomedical science as my undergraduate degree was a rushed one (having just dropped out of a maths degree, I only had a month to complete the UCAS application). Although having read up on the subject and what I would study during my degree, and knowing that this was the right path for me, I didn’t look into whether the course could get me into healthcare, my ultimate goal. Unfortunately for me, the institution I chose to do my undergraduate degree at was not accredited by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), a requirement for those desiring to go into healthcare science.

This left me in a difficult position after my graduation. I knew I wanted to do a masters at a different institution to build on the skills my unaccredited degree had left me without. But I also had to do top-up courses to accredit my degree, costing just under £2,000. Paying for a masters and the top-up courses as well as living costs, after already being a student for three years, seemed impossible. I was stressed and felt like my desired career choice was going to lead me down a long and difficult path.

Being accepted for the PEP was a weight off my shoulders. I feel like I can put my full concentration into my masters without worrying where the money would be coming from, or working in all my spare time, leaving me little time to study. Although I still require a small part-time job, I can ensure that I still leave enough time for my studies.

Loren, South-east Coast University 2
Full time, full scholarship

“*I was stressed and felt like my desired career choice was going to lead me down a long and difficult path.*”
After graduating from Nottingham University with a BSc in animal science, I was at a loss of what to do. I had originally attempted to reapply to vet school on the veterinary surgeon programme, as this was what I had originally applied for before my degree course. I, amazingly, gained a place on one of the courses, but was soon depressed to find out that the yearly course fees were a massive £20,000. I researched all my options and I came to the conclusion that this was never going to happen, as I couldn’t manage to find the money to support myself or pay for the course.

Despite this, I was adamant to still specialise in an animal-related area and build up a career. After a lot more soul searching, animal work experience and researching, I found the MSc Clinical Animal Behaviour course. I made the decision that, no matter how hard it was, I was going to get on this course and find a way to cover the costs. Following this decision, I worked any job I could get. I had been struggling to find work during this time and so when work came up, I worked all the hours they could give me. Starting on a contract of 20 hours at M&S, I pushed and pushed so that I gained more responsibilities and more hours of work. As I was living at home with my parents, I managed to save the majority of my wages whilst only using the rest on bills (including rent). I pretty much had no social life and experienced continuous migraines from stress (although I refused to take time off). Any extra penny I got I saved. I tried to keep in touch with animal-related husbandry by volunteering on my day off, but as I was finally given a full-time contract, I had to give this up.

Through so much hard work and ridiculous shift hours over two years, I managed to scrape together three quarters of the course fees by August 2014. With this in mind, I knew I would have to work whilst on the course to support myself and gather the remaining money for the course. I decided to study part time on the course so it didn’t affect my studying so much. Whilst preparing for the course, finding a new job and a place to rent locally, I discovered the scholarships for the Postgraduate Experience Project. I thought I was unlikely to get it, but at least I would have tried all my options in the hope of getting the money together. I quite honestly didn’t think I would be able to manage it and I was so worried that I would have to give up the course halfway through due to lack of funds and support (as my family is unable to financially support me).

But quite unexpectedly, looking through my emails at work one day, I found a response from the PEP team telling me I had been awarded a full scholarship and quite honestly I started crying with joy. It took me a while to calm down again to get on with work. I was so unbelievably happy. I was so close to giving up on the course and reapplying.

So I would like to say a massive thank you, to you and the team as I really wouldn’t be here on the course today without this scholarship. You’ve given me the opportunity to do something that realistically, I really wouldn’t have been able to achieve by myself and for that I am forever grateful! I can finally start to develop my animal-based career. I’m not very good at writing these sorts of things, so I hope this helps.
I think my true passion and excitement for marine science was realised with the help of the BBC! 'Coast' and 'Blue Planet' fascinated me in my early teens; I even did a little Open University course that was offered without cost as part of my A-level. This course ran parallel with the 'Blue Planet' series and provided information about marine species, ocean currents and meteorology.

When it came to choosing a university, none of my close family members had ever undertaken a higher education course and so I was rather anxious and excited to have to make this important decision myself. I knew that at school I had loved geography, learning about how the world we live in physically works. Owing to the discovery of marine science, I found myself rather intrigued by a course entitled BSc(Hons) Geography with Ocean Science, being run at Plymouth University.

Being from the land-locked city of Birmingham, I had not enjoyed the privilege of a life on the coast. Family holidays enabled me to enjoy the coastline, from building castles and moats on Cornish beaches to watching the weather with wide eyes as it taunted the coast with all of its ferocity. Can you guess that my favourite childhood story was 'The Mousehole Cat'?

Plymouth was the perfect choice, near to all those childhood memories and a world-leader in marine science research. I moved from the West Midlands to Devon in 2008 and I completed my undergraduate course in 2011, afterwards choosing to remain in the city that I had learnt to call 'home'. During the course, I worked some long hours in retail to be able to pay for the opportunity of collecting dissertation research on the western coast of Australia, north of Perth. I met with PhD students from the University of Western Australia and it became rather apparent that a research career was exactly what I wished for myself. The idea of being in an eternal state of learning and discovering, striving to understand nature and its role on the coastlines of our world was an awe-inspiring thought.

So what happened next? The safety blanket that the Student Loans Company provided had past its three-year sell-by date. I wanted to continue my dream of further study, although without savings or an income, this proved difficult. Rather sadly, it transpired that I had to depart the postgraduate course, MSc Applied Marine Science, that I had begun directly after my undergraduate course. A combination of ill-health and low funds in 2011 meant that I was forced to explore other career options, namely in hospitality.

For three years, my lively personality helped me to rise significantly quickly in the hospitality sector, through management to seasonal work abroad. There was however a persistent idea in the back of my mind, the realisation that I never once in those three years felt quite as fulfilled as I had on those beaches in Australia.

In 2013–14, I was working as an events assistant for the Faculty of Business at Plymouth University. Returning to the environment of study strengthened my thoughts of reapplying to the MSc Applied Marine Science course, but still, how did I plan to be able to fund this dream? Almost as if it had been written in the stars, one day, I found a small advert on the Plymouth University website regarding the PEP STEM scholarship scheme. On reading 'Applied Marine Science' in the list of supported courses, I frantically printed out the application form at work and made haste!

I filled out the application pack in Looe, Cornwall, with my parents who had visited for a cold February walk along the coast path. Whether it was the linkages between my childhood, my study interests and my aspirations for the future but I felt instinctively hopeful about this exciting opportunity.

So it transpired that I was one of the lucky scholarship holders! I couldn’t believe it! I was thrilled! I can only describe the feeling as being as good as being able to return to a good dream after having awoken. I’m back on track now, I can well-manage my studies and my funds on a part-time basis.”

Paul, South-west England University
Part time, 60 per cent scholarship

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Part time, 60 per cent scholarship

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Pursuing a career in medical sciences has been a dream of mine since an early age. When most of my peers left school, they went into full-time jobs as our understanding at that time was that experience counted more than qualification. However, being brought up in a family where education was top priority, I decided to go to college where I worked really hard to get the grades I needed in order to be accepted into university. I studied biomedical science at university and having gained a good result (2:1), I was very passionate about going into further studies (MSc and PhD).

One of the main obstacles for me personally was the financial aspect. After graduating, due to the financial difficulties I faced at the time, my main mission was to find a job. After months of applying, I found a full-time position in a pathology laboratory. Despite the fact that I like my job and enjoy working in this field, my desire for further studies never burned out.

I would regularly visit my local university’s website to look for available opportunities because this university was local and it was ideal for me. After coming across the PEP scholarship, I decided to apply straight away, as this was an excellent opportunity. If this scholarship was not available, I would have not been able to undertake further studies.
I was born in Lahore to English-speaking Anglo-Indian parents. As an only child, I was always shy and tended to stay in a corner at parties when other kids seemed to be having a more fun time. I was, however, always good at my studies and being Catholic, went to one of the top two girls schools in the town. The first I remember being seriously ill because of asthma was in Class 3, when I missed half of my exams but was allowed to pass to Class 4. Since then, I started getting asthma attacks and related illnesses every second or third month. I was unable to keep my reputation as a fast runner and was moved to the back of the line when teams were chosen and was never preferred choice for school plays and group activities.

From a very early age, I loved animals and could not bear cruelty, which would make me sick to my stomach. I persuaded my parents to get me a pet, which I had been denied due to the asthma, but at the age of nine years, we got our first pair of Siamese cats. This was the start of all the cats, dogs, chickens and birds that we kept. When the time came to choose between science and arts, I chose arts as I did not want to cut up little animals in a lab. I stand by my decision to this date, but wished I could have got around this issue somehow and taken the science pathway.

My parents split up when I was 11 after continued friction at home and my father moved away to live with his family in England. I missed my father and if I had his guidance at that time, I believe I may have chosen a different path. He came back a year later, but they were unable to make it work and he left again.

Things changed for me at the age of 17 when I was prescribed an inhaler and able to control the asthma to a greater extent. By this time, I had started college and found that I loved biology and excelled at the nursing course that I took, so much so that the new teacher in the second year used my work book to verify the class’s progress. Unfortunately, I left college before I could start my degree in order to get a job and support my mum and step-dad to pay the rent and other household bills, etc. This was a country without a national welfare system, my mum was struggling to cope on her salary and pay for my education and my step-dad couldn’t really help due to his business troubles.

I was lucky to get a good job at an American bank, where I worked as a secretary for six years. I made some good friends and was included at functions and parties. This was a Muslim country and it was at weddings, in particular, that I felt I did not quite fit in. With one foot in the local culture and one foot in the west, I always felt that I wasn’t where I needed to be. I gained a lot of confidence at this time, but working with highly educated people with masters degrees made me want to better my lot and study further. My need to prove myself and alleviate our housing issues, led me to get a loan from my bank and have my own house designed and built in my early twenties.

My health fluctuated up and down at this time and once, when I was incorrectly prescribed an unnecessarily heavy dose of medication because of a chest infection by a ‘recommended’ physician, I thought I wouldn’t recover – it took months before I was back at work.

The political state of the country was rapidly changing and most of our family and friends had emigrated to different English-speaking countries. Both my parents’ families were settled in England, so after my visa was initially refused and then granted, I moved to the South in 1990 with my mum.

Finding work was impossible, but I was excited now as I could do different college courses. I didn’t think I’d be allowed to take a science subject, so I completed a BTEC in fashion design and then due to my technical strengths, went on to have my own business in bespoke design and tailoring. I closed the business three years later, as I wasn’t making any money, and applied for numerous paid jobs, but only managed to gain temporary or admin work. A couple of years later, I started another BTEC in music production and although I did well, knew that I would not work in this industry. Once again, I started looking for work.

Finally in 2000, I got a full-time job at the local civil service and although I did not like the nature of the work, continued for four years due to financial reasons. I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with my lot. In 2004, I moved to the Probation Service which was interesting and I received a lot of on-the-job training.

Isobel, South-east Coast University 2
Full time, 60 per cent scholarship

“I am finally getting to where I want to be in life and hopefully be a role model to my son. I gratefully acknowledge receipt of the scholarship, without which I would not be able to achieve my dream.”
During this time, I met my future husband and had a beautiful son. I went part time at work, but was made redundant after a lengthy and very stressful ten months in 2009. This was the final straw!

After looking in vain for work over the next few months as the recession set in once again, I made the decision to improve my educational qualifications and do what I should have done all those years ago. I did not want to waste any more of my life! I signed up to a joint honours degree at university in environmental biology and media studies as a mature student. Luckily, the campus where I was going to study was local so I did not have to spend too much time away from my very young son. Unfortunately, my husband also lost his job the following year.

I graduated in 2013 with a high 2:1 and a first class dissertation after having left university a few months earlier, but returned to finish the degree despite the enormous amount of stress in my personal life primarily brought on by nearly having our house repossessed.

I had finally proven to myself that I could do it and just wished that I could have made my parents proud while they were still around. After graduation, I wanted to study further, but couldn’t afford to do so, and found myself a job with the local borough council. Once again, this was a familiar predicament of having to take a low paid, tedious job that I did not like but needed for financial reasons. I researched scholarships, queried all possibilities and finally found and applied for the STEM scholarships at my own university. In the meantime a part-time job came up in a different department at work which I applied for and was taken on.

I believe in the saying: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”. A few days later, my prayers were answered and I was awarded a STEM scholarship. I am finally getting to where I want to be in life and hopefully be a role model to my son. I gratefully acknowledge receipt of the scholarship, without which I would not be able to achieve my dream.
I was initially awarded a part scholarship, which was great, but the position I was in meant I could only attend if I was fortunate enough to receive full scholarship. I applied for those career development loans and was unsuccessful. I was also not fortunate to be in a position where my family could financially assist me, because I do not have one.

I have declined from sending you my story until now as I cannot say the things I do to support my family... the things I have to do to provide simple things such as toilet paper and food.

I am a single mother of two children, one of which lives at home. This child is an adult, but cannot find employment, apprenticeship or other work despite many positive interviews. I am the sole wage earner at home. My child works voluntary in the hope of employment. It’s all about voluntary work these days, excuse the cynicism.

I have many jobs that I run back and forth to so that I can earn just enough money to pay my bills. I would like to say that I do not have any debts whatsoever, I don’t even have an overdraft, but we are still living in poverty. I have desperately been applying for jobs for the last year but with no success.

I cannot get credit or overdrafts, as when I came to university in 2008, I was losing my business and nearly lost my house for a £700 debt. I was also left with a £160 County Court Judgement. And to be fair, I wouldn’t want credit, it would only compound my situation.

I was just about to email you last week to say I cannot continue on my masters course as I could not fund it. I was hoping to reduce my household outings each month by cancelling things like pet insurance, boiler insurance, mobile phone contract and TV contract – the things you work for – but I just couldn’t manage to save that much, even working full time.

I lost my full-time job (supply teaching) by coming to do this masters degree. This did not concern me too much at the time because I thought I would be able to work somewhere else part time as well as a few of my other part-time jobs. I was working my notice at the school, but this was cut short by three weeks because I had to leave – one student took a dislike to me and was trying to fight me for two days, then, in their classroom, kettles of boiling water were being thrown around the room. It was an emotional and behavioural school and the student takes priority. Supply staff are easily replaced. I then used the last of my savings to live on over the last few weeks because I couldn’t even find any supply teaching or office temping work, let alone a job to bridge the gap in my earnings and my outgoings.

I currently sit here with £40 to last us to the end of the month and we currently have no heating, but I am in the lucky position of being able to pay most of my bills this month.

Fortunately, I had a job interview last Wednesday and to say I am relieved to have succeeded in getting a job is an understatement. I was quite ill on hearing the good news on Friday and, as the weekend has passed, the stress of wondering how I was ever going to manage has subsided into happiness of some employment security. I will have some wages coming in next month and will be able to pay my mortgage in future. Even so the wages of this new job and a second job is still not able to pay for my bills and the masters. I cannot explain how grateful I am that I have been awarded a full scholarship and I can now stay.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. My future is looking much more positive now. I have the security of a main job, it will be much easier to work two jobs instead of five, and my education is being funded and I can now provide for my children in a better way.
PEP has funded and had accepted more than 300 scholarships across nine English universities, comprising £1000, 60 per cent and full-fee scholarships. Without doubt, the PSS HEFCE scheme has provided substantial opportunities for people who would have struggled to undertake MSc-level study or who felt that the costs incurred would make it prohibitive. A further 14 scholarships were offered across the consortium, but were declined for a variety of reasons. Some of these are highlighted below.

**Decliners of scholarships**

**Part time, full scholarship**

“"I am writing to advise you that, regrettably, I will not be in a position to start the course that has been offered to me. I would like to thank you both for helping me, but having made several dummy runs to access the university, I have come to the conclusion that the reality of the travel distance, expectancy of the course workload and the fact I still have a day job will, in reality, be too much. I would rather that the sponsorship opportunity be afforded to someone else at the earliest opportunity. I apologise and sincerely regret any inconvenience that this has caused you.”

**Full time, full scholarship**

“It is with a sad and heavy heart that I have to decline this amazing offer. I was hoping to have secured a part-time job, which would have enabled me to attend university, but unfortunately I have not been successful in finding employment. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity and I am gutted that I am unable to continue in my university training.”

**Part time, 60 per cent scholarship**

“I was offered a full-time teaching assistant job at my university I just graduated from, supporting the lecturers on the sports therapy degree program. They will also put me through a PGCE at the same time and as I want to be a lecturer I felt this was the best decision. I still want to do the MSc and I have been informed it can be done part time so I plan to reapply next year part time with a view I can have a teaching career alongside my study.”

**Part time, full scholarship**

“Unfortunately I am unable to accept my place on the PEP scholarship as I was unsuccessful in getting a student loan this year to cover living costs. As a result of this, I will be deferring my place on the Sports Performance masters course for one year.”

**£1,000 scholarship**

“It is with deep regret that I am unable to accept the £1,000 scholarship. My financial situation has changed recently and I am no longer able to fund the MSc course myself. I was hoping I may be lucky enough to receive one of the higher scholarships, however this wasn’t the case and I am now unfortunately going to have to pull out of the course. I truly thank you for the offer of the £1,000 and feel that the scholarships are a fantastic opportunity, it is just unfortunate that I am not able to accept it. I hope someone will benefit from the scholarship in my place.”

**Part time, 60 per cent**

“This is very disappointing but I may have to withdraw from my scholarship. Work agreed to release me to complete the MSc, but now they are saying no. I will be speaking to my HR department and the FINAL DECISION will be made by end of this week. Is there any way I can start my degree/scholarship in 2015?? I will have a final decision by this FRIDAY so I will be contacting you with the decision. I am hoping they will let me continue this year.”

**Part time, full scholarship**

“Before applying for the course, I specifically asked about timetabled course hours as I have a young baby and part-time work to work around. One week before induction week I was sent a timetable scheduling lots of essential activities that I hadn’t been told about and this was very stressful trying to reorganise childcare. I couldn’t cover everything and so wrote to the course director explaining the situation and asking what the totally essential activities were. I received a one-line email response saying something like ‘well, you’re going to have to make yourself available’. This was unhelpful and left me feeling even more stressed about the situation. I replied saying I couldn’t change the situation and he replied being more accommodating, but by this point I’d started to stress and doubt my ability to fully commit myself to the course. If I couldn’t even manage induction week, how many more extra activities there would be in the future that I couldn’t manage.”

PEP has funded and had accepted more than 300 scholarships across nine English universities, comprising £1000, 60 per cent and full-fee scholarships. Without doubt, the PSS HEFCE scheme has provided substantial opportunities for people who would have struggled to undertake MSc-level study or who felt that the costs incurred would make it prohibitive. A further 14 scholarships were offered across the consortium, but were declined for a variety of reasons. Some of these are highlighted below.
It is already becoming clear though the PEP project that different people require different amounts and types of support to participate in postgraduate study and succeed. This may be a certain level of funding, time off work or support to improve their self-belief that they are capable of this level of study.

Managing applicants’ and students’ study expectations is just as essential, if not more important, at postgraduate level as it is at undergraduate. For the applicant/student and employer to know the course demands well in advance enables all stakeholders to plan effectively, whether that is organising work commitments, travel demands or childcare.

The perception of some applicants in this project is that there are few scholarships available to British citizens resident in the UK. One opportunity to obtain financial support is through a university alumni discount scheme, which many universities offer to their graduates. However, these are only applicable to those who previously completed a course at the university and for courses that are provided. This puts at a disadvantage the graduate who has moved away from the area or finds the university does not offer the course they require. With the increase in alumni discounts schemes being offered at UK universities, maybe an allocated number of ‘UK graduate alumni’ discounts could be offered by universities to graduates from other UK universities – to support widening participation, provide a further method of financial support and potentially increase a university’s market.

A primary aim of the PSS funding has been to explore widening participation at postgraduate level. The challenge is how this is defined at this level of study. At undergraduate level, parental class is the metric used to measure widening participation. However, is this applicable at postgraduate level? How influential is social class? Research suggests that, at first glance, first generation status and social class are not as critical as they are at undergraduate level. However, when the statistics are explored in detail, a complex picture emerges dependant on a range of variables such as type of qualification, ethnicity and gender. Should metrics such as institutional mobility be considered (eg progression from a new university to a Russell Group institution) or is career progression post-study a more effective measurement?

PEP is already identifying a range of important issues as are the other PSS-funded projects. In July 2015, the 20 projects funded by HEFCE under PSS will come to fruition and it is hoped that the findings will be able to inform policy that will lead to the sustainability of the postgraduate sector.
The Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP)
collaborative university partners:

Kingston University (lead university)
University of Brighton
Coventry University
The University of Edinburgh
University of Lincoln
Manchester Metropolitan University
University of Portsmouth Higher Education Corporation
Plymouth University
University of South Wales
Teesside University
University of Wolverhampton

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Designed, produced and published by Communications, Kingston University,
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X(14.343)B