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Amma Mensah, BSc Psychology

Amma Mensah talks about how she has set up her own organisation - a theatre and education social enterprise, and how her degree and extra-curricular achievements at the University have benefited her.

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Read the transcript

My name's Amma Mensah and I am a graduate of the University of Birmingham. I graduated two years ago, with a Psychology BSc degree. Since then, I've set up my own organisation, a theatre and education social enterprise. We go into schools and colleges, and other youth organisations to deliver theatre-based programmes to address various social needs.

[Can you give a brief description of what you did from graduation up until now?]

For a while, I didn't do much, which I think a lot of graduates need to do after a degree because it's quite intense. I did a bit of travelling and I did a bit of reflecting over my journey of being at University. Then I gathered my experience and my qualifications and kind of decided what I was going to use those for. So I applied for some funding to set up my organisation and since then I've put all of the wheels in motion to pursue that and I've been running the organisation for a year.

[Can you give a brief description of the course you studied and how it benefited you?]

I studied for an undergraduate degree in Psychology and it's a study of human behaviour from various different perspectives, so you've got the cognitive psychology as well as the social aspects, so what really attracted me to the course at Birmingham, was that it had a very healthy mix of the social aspects of Psychology, which are what most people perceive to be Psychology, but also the scientific side of things, which is probably where most of the transferable skills come from.

[What would be the range of typical starting salaries and potential for progression within your career?]

Starting salaries are sometimes zero, sometimes minus zero and that's just the truth. But in terms of progression, ask Richard Branson, it can literally be anything and that's the beauty of taking the passion for an organisation and starting one up yourself, is that your options are endless and it is whatever you make it.

[What transferable skills have you taken from your degree into the world of work?]

I think the obvious ones would be written communication and oral communication, but essentially what's more unique about a Psychology degree is the ability to conduct research. Research is relevant in every industry that you could possibly go into, so I've taken it into a social dimension but it could also be used in any other industry, so I'd say the ability to conduct vigorous and reliable research.

[What were your reasons for pursuing a career in your chosen field?]

I think it was that I had a passion. I identified a niche and I am trying to fill that niche, it's pretty much as simple as that. I saw something that needed to be done, I thought I could do it, and so I did.

[What activities did you undertake at university to enhance your chances to get into your chosen career, and with hindsight would you have done anything differently?]

In terms of opportunities, there were a lot that were advertised at the University that I took. A couple of those would be the student associates scheme, which I found directly through the university and that allowed me to work in a school for up to three weeks. I was also a mentor in the aim-high looking forward programme as well, which again was directly facilitated by the university. So I think that as well as my academic achievements, the university was instrumental in my extra-curricular achievements as well, in helping me to guide my future. In hindsight, the only thing that I would change about my degree and university journey is that I focused a lot on getting the grade and getting a degree. This is obviously what you come to university for, but outside of that, there are so many things that you can learn. Because of the system of learning that you go through before you get to university, everything is focused on grades and not so much on actual learning. I think I could have learned a lot more if I had just tried to acquire information to better myself, rather than to put it into coursework, or towards an exam, and just to try and enrich me as a person. That's what I'd say is the mind-set that a lot of undergraduates come with, and that's one thing that I'd definitely warn against.

[If there is such a thing in your profession, could you describe a typical day?]

No! There isn't really one and that's something that I love about it as well, because one day I could be in the office, liaising with schools and trying to bring in business; another day I could be with young people, listening to their issues and helping them. It varies so much, especially when it's quite a small organisation, and I'm required to fulfil a lot of the roles. On the average day, anything can happen.

[Can you outline your likes and dislikes about your job?]

My dislikes are probably that I don't get any paid holiday. That's probably the biggest thing, everything is reliant on me and the buck stops with me. But that's also the greatest thing, which is that I have complete autonomy with what happens and I haven't got a boss telling me what to do. So the best things and the worst things are kind of the same.

[What are your aspirations for the future?]

Definitely to expand and continue on the journey that I have already started. It's already proven to be successful, so just to expand and address more social issues and be able to address them in different areas. At the moment it's just been London, but I'd love to come back to Birmingham and go to other cities around the UK and abroad.

[Do you have any words of wisdom, or advice for anyone looking to get into this type of career?]

I'd say research it well, know what you're getting into and speak to anyone and everyone that you can that is in any way relevant to what it is that you're doing. I think the most important thing is to network. Your network is essential in anything, but particularly in any business that you plan to pursue, your network is going to be your be all and end all.

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