

Transcript: Lucy Faber alumni interview

INTERVIEWER (Professor Rob Barton):

Recording. Okay. So I'm speaking to Lucy Faber, who graduated with a BSc in Anthropology a year ago in 2024.

So hi, Lucy. Would you tell us a bit about what you're doing now and how you got that role?

LUCY:

Sure. So I'm currently a fast stream social research analyst at the Department of Health and Social Care.

So this is within the civil service and I'm in the Department of Health and Social Care for this year.

And then next year I rotate to a new department. And again, the following year, that's kind of the nature of the fast stream.

And so, yeah, currently working in social research, which basically involves evaluating policies, using quantitative and qualitative research methods to inform policy, interviewing people, presenting on things, designing research, commissioning research.

It's quite broad. And it's a really interesting area of government.

INTERVIEWER:

It was a competitive process to get onto that, wasn't it? Can you tell us briefly about that?

LUCY:

It was, yeah. So it's quite a grueling one. I applied initially in October of 2023.

And then you have five stages of the application process. And I found out I was successful in February.

So it's quite long, the duration. And it culminates all of this in a final selection board.

This is for social research specifically, which involved an interview, a presentation and an exam in social research methods.

So it was quite intense. But, I mean, I was very lucky and I got on.

The fast stream, I think, is only around 2% success rate of applicants that get in.

And social research is even more because it's like less, I think it's 0.9% of applicants get in.

There's only 20 of us among 900 fast streamers in my cohort.

So we're a rare breed. But it's a really interesting area of work.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, that's so impressive. I don't think it was luck. I think it was skill.

Which brings me on to the next question, which was people sometimes wonder who don't know anthropology,

what kind of skills it does give you to go on to a career.

So how did your study at Durham in anthropology help you to acquire those skills that got you onto that fast track?

LUCY:

I mean, in the simple sense, it really helped with research methods.

That was something that I wasn't expecting to be tested on so much with this scheme.

Obviously, I maybe should have expected it with the name social research.

But, you know, the exam was quite intense and quite gruelling.

And I'd had a really good introduction to both quantitative and qualitative research methods with anthropology at Durham.

I mean, the skills in things like RStudio and Excel, those softwares, I use pretty much daily now.

So having that basis from Durham has been really, really helpful.

And I think that definitely showed in interviews.

And also, I think the critical thinking aspect of things that you get from an anthropology degree is really useful.

And I think that definitely showed in interviews and in assessment centres.

You know, you're able to challenge people's views, look at things from the other perspective,

which is also really important when you're commissioning research,

because, you know, I'm able to think about the participant's voice and think about maybe what questions we're not asking that we should be,

who we're not considering that we should be, try and put myself into participants' shoes,

which is really useful and definitely has come from anthropology.

INTERVIEWER:

That's great. And so obviously, there are other anthropology courses around the country in the UK.

What made you choose Durham?

LUCY:

I mean, I love Durham as a place. I think the college system is fantastic and, you know, the city itself is beautiful.

I really particularly liked, this is something that stood out to me at the Open Day,

I loved how the anthropology building in Durham is really central.

So it's, you know, middle of the science side.

It kind of shows that anthropology is really valued as a discipline in Durham.

A lot of the other places I went to for Open Days, you know, it was hidden away in a kind of corner behind things.

But we've got our own building that really shows how valuable anthropology is to Durham.

And yeah, I mean, Durham allowed me to do a year abroad in anthropology and psychology, which was great.

So I was able to, you know, immerse myself in another culture while, you know, exploring other disciplines.

I also in my first year was able to do a module in archaeology, which was really interesting.

It wasn't something I'd ever really got into.

So that was really nice to be able to keep that breadth.

And I think that's the really big thing about Durham anthropology is that it's really broad and you're encouraged to kind of keep your thinking open and keep your speciality open so that you really explore the whole discipline, which is really interesting.

INTERVIEWER:

That's fantastic.

And finally, Lucy, is there any sort of particular advice you would give to people who might be thinking about doing anthropology at Durham and looking into that?

LUCY:

I mean, I think if you're interested in in humanity and what makes us human, anthropology is absolutely the discipline for you.

All of my friends are forever jealous whenever I tell them about my anthropology degree.

And I do think it's something that everyone should study at least once in their life.

When you actually get to Durham, it's really great because, you know, I'd say just say yes to every opportunity that's given to you and seek out other ones.

You know, I started a blog when I was in Durham about anthropology at Durham and the department were really supportive of that.

So that was really great.

I think you can also really appreciate that breadth that I mentioned before of all the different things.

You know, I was quite keen to focus in on BSC anthropology and really go down that route and was initially quite annoyed almost that I had to do cultural and medical anthropology as well.

But it's been I mean, some of them ended up being my my favourite modules and now working in the Department of Health and Social Care, medical anthropology particularly, has been really, really useful for me.

So that's really great.

And I would also say, like, as an anthropology student, you've got to be an ambassador for anthropology, because, as you say, not a lot of people know what anthropology is sometimes, which is a shame.

And it's really great to be able to be proud of what we study and, you know, be able to champion it and define it in whatever way makes sense for you.

And Durham really allows that as well.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, thanks so much for talking to us, Lucy.

I'm sure that will be of great interest and value to prospective students.

So thank you so much.

LUCY:

You're welcome.