



## **60-second interview: Mark Chahine- Warrington**

Mark runs a small steel trading company in the City of London. Alongside his work, he decided to pursue an MA in Social Anthropology through distance learning. Having recently finished his MA he has gone on to do his PhD at Queens University Belfast.

### **Can you briefly describe your MA in Social Anthropology?**

Well I did my MA part-time through University of Wales, Lampeter's distance learning programme. There was a great deal of flexibility with this approach, and I found it to be especially useful for people in full-time employment. However, the flexibility also meant that you had to be a good self-motivator and be prepared to develop your ideas and interests alone. Without being able to bounce ideas around, it is easy to head off in the wrong direction. I tried to attend conferences and public lectures as a way to further engage, and I hope, keep on the right track!

### **How did you first find out about the MA?**

I was first introduced to the discipline and the course by a friend. We were both looking for distance learning options, and had mutually discussed social anthropology. She found the course at Lampeter, and it was, and I believe still is, the only distance learning Masters available in England.

### **What made you interested in returning to education to study anthropology?**

I was travelling extensively for work, mainly to Russia, China, Brazil, and the Middle East, and found the differing approaches needed for each country to be interesting. I wanted to further explore these issues and anthropology seemed like the best discipline to do so. I also wanted to have a focus outside and other than work. Returning to academia gave me another interest and a way to switch off from work, and also a good way to ground my work experiences.

### **What did you expect to gain from the degree?**

I am not sure exactly what I expected, however I have found it to be a much more individual experience than I would have liked, and I think I would have enjoyed it more if I could have studied within an academic institution itself. But still in full-time employment, I could not achieve both my need to work, and my desire to study. It is a pay-off, but it does leave you with holes in your knowledge that you need to be aware of, especially if you want to develop to a higher academic level.

### **What do you think are some of the advantages of studying anthropology later on in your career?**

Life and world experience is the most valuable advantage, and extensive travel is a huge benefit, or at least a 'deep' exposure to other cultures. I think that you also take your ambition to study more seriously and after all, it is a choice to go back to study, not a requirement.

### **What are some of the challenges you have faced in undertaking your studies?**

The time needed to study is often much greater than you have available, and the time required from researching an essay, to writing and submitting can be so long, it is hard to remember much of your early reading! However, the most dangerous challenge is the risk of heading off on the wrong foot, there is no one to correct or re-direct you.

### **How do you see yourself using your degree in the future?**

I would like to further develop my interests, and continue on a research basis, but this would mean giving up work. It is tough decision, and again, one that is not easy when you are mainly 'outside' of the academic arena.

### **Do you have any tips for other lifelong learners who are interested in studying anthropology?**

Anthropology is very well suited to lifelong learners, and is one of those few subjects that attracts mature students. Experience counts, and is a great help in understanding and developing your own ideas.