

The benefits of higher education

A parent's perspective

As a parent of three teenagers, the COVID years caused me anxiety that extended beyond the central fear that a mutating deadly virus might wipe out humanity. As my children's academic life came to a halt, a sense of stagnation, restriction and drift came to characterise the pattern of their days. Obviously, we were all prevented from enjoying experiences like world travel, communal sporting and cultural events, and general adventuring but, for teenagers brought to a halt just when they were getting up to top speed, it seemed particularly cruel and damaging. Insulated in upstairs bedroom with Wi-Fi as their closest companion, the academic dreams they had planned seemed distant and obsolete.



I am now pleased to say that two of them are enjoying exciting degree courses and the youngest is planning optimistically for university applications that will free her, too, from the confines of her room, house, parents and city. One lad is at the University of Nottingham, studying Ancient History and the other is studying Financial Trading at Sheffield Hallam with the coming year on a placement in the City of London (one positive side-effect of COVID was the chance to for him to develop fiendishly clever stock market methods from his bedroom nerve centre).

It is great to see them making friends with people of all backgrounds from all over the world and, aside from the academic benefits, it is the random events they stumble upon that go towards making higher education such as enriching experience. One of my son's new pals is a jockey and that led to an impromptu trip to a race meeting at Ascot when he should have been attending a lecture on the Lost World of Atlantis. I'm not condoning wagging lectures but both choices open up worlds of knowledge and experience that would have been unlikely if he had chosen to stay at home. It's true that dealing with Student Finance England and topping up their living costs did sometimes make me nostalgic for the days of the coronavirus but, if I keep working until the age of 85, I am sure I'll just about break even, and it'll be worth it for the opportunities it has afforded them.