

THE REAL WORLD

Saira Khan

Entrepreneur and TV presenter



SCOPE FEATURES

'IT'S ONLY NOW THAT I'VE FELT CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO SET UP MY OWN BUSINESS'

Saira Khan came runner-up in the first season of BBC2's *The Apprentice*. Since 2005, she has presented the BBC programme *Beat the Boss*, where a team of children are pitted against adults to win a business brief. Last year, Khan launched a range of natural skincare products for children, Miamoo.co.uk. She has a humanities degree from Brighton Polytechnic and a Masters in environmental planning from Nottingham University.

How useful was your first degree?

It was useful in terms of constructing letters, comprehension, language and broadening my thinking. It was very much a social science and for me now, in business, it's very much about meeting people from different backgrounds and building business relationships, and I feel very confident. These are the kind of skills that arts degrees give you.

How did you find the university experience?

I chose Brighton because I wanted to get away from home. I just remember going there and thinking what a great place to be a student. It had a seaside - just fell in love with the place, really.

How well did you adjust after graduation?

I moved back to Brighton after graduating from my Masters in Nottingham, got myself a little studio flat and started looking around for jobs in environmental planning. I soon realised that one of the best ways to go was to do some voluntary work. I went to the local planning department to talk to planners and shadow them. I was also learning

about systems and processes, which was the biggest adjustment from university. You have to understand how an office works and I think that can take up to six good months, then you can really start feeling confident.

What was your worst job?

Working behind a bar in a pub - I absolutely hated it. It was just too much going on at the same time. I didn't like that.

How did you get into doing what you do now?

I have had ten years' experience working in corporate environments and I have learnt my business. I've moved around and it's only now that I have felt confident to set up my own business. Go out and learn the trade or learn what it's like to work in different departments and then, if you want to be an entrepreneur, you have got the skills.

What advice would you give to new graduates?

People are looking not just at the fact that you got a 2:1 or first at university but what kind of person you are. Most employers are thinking, "This is the culture of our company, can this person fit into our culture? Are you willing to work over the odds to get the job done? What other interests can you bring to our company?". I think people should make a life CV as well as an educational CV. All those things are so important to take to the interview. Also, be prepared to say so if you don't think you have got the right experience. Say, "I will work for you for six months on a low salary so that you can test me out". I think if you are willing to do that, people will have an enormous respect for you.

INTERVIEW BY
ANNE GIACOMANTONIO

RECRUITMENT

Alternative thinking

Graduates from ethnic minorities are entering a wider variety of careers than ever before. **Kate Hilpern** reports on the success of diversity initiatives - and the death of some old prejudices

In spite of the uncertainties over the UK's economic situation, vacancies for graduates are predicted to increase by 16.4 per cent this year, according to the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) bi-annual survey. "Growth is predicted to be the highest it has been in a decade, which is great for graduates looking for a job," says Carl Gilleard, AGR chief executive.

For black and Asian graduates, there's more good news. The proportion of graduates recruited from ethnic minorities rose from 15.1 per cent in 2006 to 26.7 per cent in 2007. "That's a massive rise," says Gilleard. "What it says is that the effort a lot of employers have put into being an equal opportunities employer is paying off."

One of the biggest hurdles graduate employers have been up against is that the pool of professions that some ethnic minorities have traditionally applied to has been relatively small. But Gilleard says this is changing fast.

"I can remember holding meetings with groups of parents in the Asian community in Yorkshire 20 years ago, trying to broaden their horizons and stop them just wanting their children to become doctors, dentists and accountants, but it was a bit like talking to a brick wall.

"Most of those parents hadn't been in England long and had brought values about work from the Indian subcontinent. And I think there were understandable suspicions about why all these white guys were telling them what to do. But today we have a very different society and people from all cultures are far more knowledgeable about there being great graduate opportunities in a wide range of sectors."



Banking on change: Lloyds TSB has tried to attract more black and Asian recruits into the profession PA

Part of the change, says Gilleard, has been down to graduates doing what they want to do, rather than what their parents would have chosen for them. But probably more significant is the fact that employers have invested heavily in shouting about their career opportunities to

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a wider range of communities, as well as ensuring that diversity policies inside the workplace have an impact.

"We looked at our graduate recruitment because only 2 or 3 per cent were coming from black and ethnic minorities," says Andrew Wakelin, senior manager in the equality and diversity team at Lloyds TSB. "Some of the things we did were increasing the number of black and Asian faces in our literature and convincing parents that banking is a good career choice."

Wakelin adds: "We found a lot of family pressure in some groups about going into careers like accountancy, pharmacy and medicine. These families were initially unenthusiastic about people coming into banking because they saw banking as working in a local branch. They were not aware of all the other opportunities that existed behind the scenes, but through talking to them we changed their minds."

Lloyds also started training recruitment teams and advertising in specialist publications. "It was about taking every measure possible to send out some positive signals that we wanted the most talented black and minority ethnic graduates to work for us. These days we no longer need to proactively target them because 15 to 20 per cent of our graduate intake is from ethnic minorities every year."

Wakelin says the rest of the banking industry appears to be equally committed to ethnic diversity. "Between us all we have really changed the image of the profession."

Some industries, including publishing, have put in place specific training schemes to help address their shortage of ethnic minority employees. Bobby Nayyar is an Arts Council England positive action trainee, who spent his traineeship at Faber and now works in marketing at Little Brown.

"I studied literature at university and really wanted to go into publishing. When I saw the traineeship advertised in the paper and got on it, I felt really lucky because the experience you get is unrivalled," he says. "When it ended, I started a job the very next day."

Fiona Czerniawska, director of the Management Consultancies Association, says investment in graduate diversity is often demanded. "One of the reasons consulting firms started taking ethnic diversity seriously was because clients were starting to change who they recruited and the kind of consultants they wanted to work with. Essentially, they wanted a more diverse range of experience - people with different perspectives."

Among the things firms have done and are still doing, she says, are getting employees from ethnic minorities to talk to groups of ethnic minority students; inviting people to special networking lunches with senior members of a firm; and ensuring recruitment advertisements don't put people from ethnic minorities off applying.

Such are the ethnic minority shortages in the construction industry that they have put in place a team of dedicated quality advisors throughout the regions. "They help and support black and minority ethnic candidates during the job



Broader horizons: parental pressure can mean some students overlook the creative industries GETTY IMAGES

hunt process," explains Paul Sykes, head of recruitment and careers at ConstructionSkills.

Jamal Cassim, account manager at the advertising agency RKCR/Y&R, says advertising is one sector that still has a long way to go. "It's very much Caucasian persuasion," he says. "I'm surprised there aren't more ethnic minorities. But I've never felt any kind of prejudice."

Cassim says that he was encouraged to think about medicine as a career while growing up, largely because his father was a doctor. "But as I got older, I found my strengths were English and languages. There are still people from my parents' generation who don't understand why I would want to go into advertising over medicine or accountancy."

The next step for employers is ensuring that promotion is without bias. A recent survey from Capita Resourcing found that just 3 per cent of the public and private sector organisations they questioned said their management team was truly diverse.

It's also crucial that industries don't see ethnic minorities as a homogenous group, ensuring that no one

group is left behind. In recognition of this, employers have backed a positive action campaign to attract more Muslim women into the workplace. About 800,000 are estimated to live in the UK, yet they are the most economically inactive group. Proposals include local businesses setting up mentoring schemes, as well as promoting job opportunities by using positive role models.

'My parents see me involved in some high profile jobs, and are pleased'



After graduating in 2005, Sachin Shah, 24, now works for the Home Office where he is team leader of an asylum case resolution team at the Border and Immigration Agency

"My family weren't keen on me becoming a civil servant because of the higher wages that can be earned in the private sector. They had grown up without much money. It was a struggle to get enough money together to buy a house. So the idea of me getting a job in the public sector

did concern them in terms of my financial security.

"Nonetheless, having done a work placement in the Home Office as part of my degree, I was really attracted to the high level work you can do in the Civil Service. It was obvious that you can make a real difference. I was really interested in current affairs and political issues too - that's why I'd chosen to do a degree in social and political sciences. I applied for the Fast Stream Scheme in 2005, the year I graduated. My first post was in the Cabinet Office - Prime Minister's Deliv-

ery Unit - where there were few ethnic minority faces. I have since moved to the Home Office, working on asylum and there is much more ethnic minority representation. I think the nature of the work - asylum - and the location, Croydon, has a lot to do with that. In general, however, I think the Civil Service is a pretty impressive equal opportunities employer.

"Since my parents have seen me get involved in a couple of high profile jobs, they have become pleased about what I'm doing. Also, the reality is that salaries aren't that bad."

COMMENT

Rowena Forbes

The Manchester Leadership Programme, Careers & Employability Division, The University of Manchester



'FROM A GRADUATE'S PERSPECTIVE, THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HOLDS REAL PROMISE'

THE UK'S VOLUNTARY sector has never been so expansive. The number of employees in this area has increased by 26 per cent over 10 years to 611,000 and the sector now includes over 2 per cent of the UK's overall paid workforce, according to *Voluntary Sector Almanacs 2006 and 2007*.

Nor does the situation look set to change. The Government officially raised the sector's profile by creating the Office of the Third Sector in 2006, with further plans mooted last summer to invest over £515m in this area. The Conservative Party's Social Justice Policy Group has also advocated greater use of the third sector in public services.

From a graduate's perspective, the sector holds particular promise. It already employs the highest proportion of degree holders at 33 per cent, beating the public sector's 32.7 per cent and 15.5 per cent in the private sector. The proportion of professional roles is also high, with 43 per cent of voluntary sector workers employed in "associate professional and technical" or "managerial and senior official" positions. But what exactly are these jobs, and what future opportunities will be available?

At The University of Manchester, Fiona Christie, a careers consultant, recently conducted a national research project, funded by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit, looking at the nature and range of graduate opportunities in the voluntary and community sector. Her report, to be published this year, indicates that employment opportunities are incredibly diverse. As well as traditional front-line roles dealing directly with communities and environments, many professional supporting roles sought-after by graduates exist in management, marketing, events, fundraising, policy-making, researching, recruitment and more.

True, there are downsides. Many charitable organisations tend to be small (54 per cent have fewer than 25 employees) and have small budgets (56 per cent have an annual income of less than £10,000). Smaller teams mean flatter structures, with limited chances for career progression, while smaller incomes mean lower salaries.

Christie's research, however, indicates that some roles in this sector have salaries comparable to the public and private sector, particularly at graduate entry level. Of course, should the big bucks prove irresistible, moving to the corporate arena at a later stage is always possible.

Future employment in this sector is likely to be driven by current skills shortages. A quarter of

employers report having "hard to fill" vacancies, especially in social care, youth work and health care, while skills gaps have been identified in legal knowledge, fundraising, leadership and the strategic use of IT according to the UK Voluntary Sector Skills Survey 2007.

The main problem seems to be finding these opportunities. Small charities often favour their websites over the national press for advertising vacancies, and, although the National Council for Voluntary Organisations is working on setting up structured career entry opportunities across the sector, graduate entry schemes are currently very limited in number.

Pre-graduation volunteering experience can help. This not only opens students' eyes to the wider range of careers out there, but can also provide a foot in the door; charities often advertise their vacancies internally. It may even make the difference when applying for jobs; organisations often look for evidence that applicants understand the volunteering "ethos".

Just as graduate jobs in this sector are wide and varied, student volunteering opportunities can be diverse, too. Andrea Rannard runs Manchester Graduate Volunteers (MSV) at The University of Manchester, which links students with overseas and UK-based volunteering projects. As part of MSV, four final-year students in accountancy with business information systems are currently developing a website to raise international awareness about the slums of Nairobi, where recent Manchester graduate Sammy Gitau (see page 2) is undertaking pioneering work to empower slum residents through the provision of resource centres. The old website, www.marifa.org, is set to be relaunched by the students this spring.

The key is to be proactive. Students interested in working in non-corporate careers really need to do their research; look beyond the big charity names; get advice from careers services and get involved in voluntary work. The University of Manchester's upcoming Kaleidoscope Fair is aimed at students and graduates from any UK institution who are interested in careers, volunteering and work experience in the public and voluntary sectors. Information, advice and opportunities are all available for those looking for an "alternative" career.

The University of Manchester's Kaleidoscope Fair takes place on 6 March, 11am-3pm, The Sugden Centre, Grosvenor Street. Find out more at: www.manchester.ac.uk/Careers/fairs