Change of heart? Change course

Postgraduate courses offer a good way to switch career paths, says Liz Lightfoot

...you feel you’ve studied the wrong course for the career you want to pursue, then you’re not alone. Many students change their minds between making subject choices in their mid-teens and graduating in their 20s.

Sometimes you can make the switch through work experience and internships, but signing up for a postgraduate qualification is another way to do it.

Switching means buckling down to another year of study, but if you choose a course with good industry links there will be opportunities to get practical experience and network with potential employers.

Extracurricular pursuits can often help you make the switch. Maybe you have organised gigs or worked as a DJ on the university radio station and want to go into the music industry. A music industry management master’s degree at a university department with good links to people already working in the field could be one option.

If you spent as much time on the sports field as in the lecture room, then there are master’s courses to help you build a career around sport – ranging from sport and exercise science to sport psychology, marketing or management.

There’s a wealth of industry-oriented courses that can be found through searchable databases, such as the Guardian’s online Postgraduate Guide 2015 which has an A-Z of subjects and courses. The tables evaluate courses on nine measures, including staff-student ratio, the proportion of international students and completion rates.

Book illustrator Lewis Peake changed direction after travelling to Africa and experiencing the poverty of people living on the land. He now has an MSc in the school of environmental sciences at the University of East Anglia and is doing a PhD on the effect of charcoal on soil quality and conservation.

Jonathan Potts, course leader at the department of geography at the University of Portsmouth, which runs a coastal and marine resource management MSc, says many of his students have first degrees in geography, biology or environmental science, but two of his most successful ones had studied pharmacology and history.

“It’s a subject that crosses theory and practice and leads to a diverse range of employment opportunities,” he says.

Sometimes the switch means following your heart and being prepared to start from the bottom. Gemma Griffiths studied geography at Cardiff but is now doing an MA in interior design at Portsmouth. “It’s been a big learning curve but I am happy I made the switch. I couldn’t have done it without the unwavering emotional and financial support of my family,” she says.

Universities offer master’s courses in a vast range of subjects and career paths, and should be able to tell you about the jobs their graduates go on to do.
Extracurricular activities often inspire a change in career

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