

# TO GRADUATE OR NOT TO GRADUATE

Little did I envisage my final year as a geography student at Queen Mary University, London, turning out the way it has.

I was due to travel to Boston, USA, at the end of March on a field trip to enrich my studies but this was cancelled in February – a taste of the changes that were about to be unleashed in our corner of the world. The first part of the work of the cancelled trip was converted into online research which culminated in a 2,000 word essay instead of enjoying life in Boston and actually exploring this new area for myself.

Final year exams have ultimately morphed into more coursework and assignments. It has been particularly frustrating over the last few weeks not knowing what was happening with assignments and even now I don't know how these difficult circumstances will be accounted for in the marking criteria – a stressful situation for any student in their last year of studies. The effects of this pandemic, combined with the university lecturers' industrial strike during February and March, has caused significant disruption to my final year at university.

My graduation, which has been postponed from July to an unknown date in the future, means there is great uncertainty regarding when I might finish the year and when I find out my degree classification. If someone had told me in September 2017, when I was embarking on my studies at university, that my graduation would be cancelled because of a virus causing everyone to stay inside, I would not have believed them. With a new job hopefully starting in September, this poses another challenge as this requires a 2:1 degree but, in the circumstances, it is impossible to know whether I will have achieved this by then.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the social life of a young person like me. As a keen netball player, our league was left abandoned in the middle of March, with league winners yet to be finalised. Being someone who enjoys going to the pub with my friends, we have had to find new ways to socialise virtually. For example, we've been having virtual group quizzes and have been creating group videos on TikTok. However, these cannot replace normal face-to-face contact and I, along with everyone else, am very much looking forward to this pandemic being over. In the meantime, I will be maintaining social distancing and staying at home.

We are very fortunate living in a beautiful part of the country surrounded by many footpaths for daily walks. I'd like to end with a huge shout out to all frontline workers everywhere who are putting their lives on the line every day. It puts everything else into perspective.

***Jo Watts***