

My future? Isn't this the future? A future I hadn't imagined, even though it was expected all along. A future that felt like a short-term ordeal which I would endure and then go back to my cocoon, having ticked university life off my non-existent bucket list. But here I am, realising that this is not the future anymore. This is the present. I also know that my future is unpredictable because it is life, but I cannot be ignorant and let things unfold. It's not enough. Definitely not enough if I want the life, I dare dream of, to become reality.

Growing up in the UK, you'd think attending university was not a big of a challenge as it was for others. For those that have left their loved ones behind, for those struggling to completely grasp the language and settle in. But everyone has a story, a story in which they are the main character and face a challenge which they think is the toughest.

I went to a faith school for my entire childhood. From primary school to sixth form, all in one building, all the same faces for 14 years. That was my world, and I didn't want it to change. When I joined university, I longed to go back to those familiar faces, to a familiar building, repeat the same journey day in and day out. As an introvert, I had a few close friends, but none of them joined City. I regretted it. I was on my own. But then I realised, that was my biggest strength.

My first day at university: my first day in the real world. I decided I would change. Become bold, and confident, no longer quiet or shy. My first hope for the future. Did it happen? No, I'm still the same. My first hope was crushed. Maybe I am hopeless, I thought. But the truth is, I did change. I became confident and braver in who I am. It's only my second term at Bays, but I have grown. Having hardly travelled on the bus alone, and certainly never on the tube, I can now do it with my eyes closed. It sounds so trivial and I'm not sure if I want to be laughed at by putting it in this essay. But my fingers don't want to press the backspace button. I'll just leave it. And that's not only for this sentence, but what I thought when I realised, I failed to change; failed to fit in. But then again, what am I supposed to fit in with? With whom? And does it make a difference to me? I'm happy, because I'm pushing myself out my comfort zone, one day at a time, one step at a time, sometimes consciously and at others because it's the requirement. There are so many students at university, from a multitude of countries, endless nationalities and countless ethnicities. And no one fits in completely with one other, everyone is a misfit. And that's the first reality of the real world.

Now, so far, I've described my past and present, not my future. That's not the point of the essay. But it is, because this was a future, I realised was in store for me in August 2022, and a

month later, it became the present. I found it difficult to accept. When I saw this essay competition poster for the first time, my first thought was writing about my future at university. But as my fingers linger above the keyboard, I realise that university is no longer the future, it is a present. A present that is a box inside a box and then another box, and each box is an experience, an opportunity to become me, a better stronger version of me, a version of me which is happy to let the previous go, but only with feelings of pride, not of regret or shame. And in the last box, the future awaits. A new journey in which the best version of I will step into. A future in which I am armed, armed with the weapon of knowledge, of knowingness, of familiarity of differences and acceptance of change. All provided by a decision of joining Bayes. A decision which I thought I would regret.

Bayes, in a short time, has given me a lot, including insight. Insight into what steps to take and how and when to take them. How to look for and seize opportunities. How to make the best of them. Now I plan, to overcome the possible challenges I will face in the real world, in accomplishing my dreams, of prospering in my career. I don't know what I want to be yet, a HR professional or a management consultant, or maybe I'll boast a job title that I don't even know exists yet. But what I do know, is that I will go into the future, prepared, confident in myself and happy with being me, because Bayes has taught me it is never too early to start.