

## **I used to put my qualification certificates in the living room window**

When I was 23 years old I took an Open University course a bit like Educating Rita which romanticized university education. I was quite disappointed that I had studied something as difficult without getting any change in my lifestyle and that was years ago but I was truthfully surprised by how difficult it was and the lack of any opportunity having passed it.

I have spent a total of five years full time at universities and three years of distance learning at university level. I hoped very much for a nice job, a good income, a reasonable house and car just as a matter of fact but I've gained none of these things. I have had a few nice jobs but the pay I received wasn't enough to live on which can be quite depressing.

The best job I had was as a teacher of further education in my mid thirties but it took about 75% of my take home pay to pay the rent on a very simple studio flat, I couldn't even afford a car. Is that fair? I didn't think it was then and I still don't now fifteen years later.

I resigned from my teaching job in 2005. A job where I had learned a lot and gave a lot of myself. I was incredibly service minded and efficient and as it turned out qualified in about the top 6% of the working population at the time.

I spent two years as a stay at home dad until 2007 and then set about finding work with that same service mindedness and efficiency. I was daunted by the ten page application forms for any further education teaching job as they would take a few hours to fill in and no one was interested in any accumulated references I had all they wanted was referee's addresses, one being my most recent employer, which for a year or so is fine but gets a bit tiresome as you don't get replies from application after application for months on end or you attend interviews but don't get selected.

Three years after leaving my most recent employer in reality my referee was no longer relevant but was still asked for with each application I made. Remember that two of those years I had been a stay at home dad and one of those years I had actively looked for work but three years is three years and I don't think it was relevant or fair to have a recent referee as a condition. I should have just furnished references that were taken at face value for what was written about me as a graduate and qualified teacher regardless of how current they were.

Another year went past and still no real offers of work apart from a part time position that really didn't pay enough for anywhere to live so I declined.

I found I was now deeply frustrated, I had so much to offer and so much that I wanted from life but try as I might I would just face application forms and application letters mostly being written and sent and getting no reply what so ever which became increasingly disheartening but also remained my only avenue to bettering my situation. I will tell the shocking truth that my situation did not change at all for several years I just kept sending job applications increasingly for jobs I wouldn't have chosen but still getting few if any replies and no offers.

I felt the world owed me something 'so you think the the world owes you a living?' Yes I do is the answer. I felt that I deserved a good job and all that goes with it for one thing I had far too much free time and lots of pent up energy and frustration that I think severely affected my mental health. I would sometimes put my qualification certificates and references in the living room window when I was living with my wife and children (when they weren't in) Why you may ask. The truth is I wanted to get some recognition and for years I had none what so ever and it affected my mental health.

I had really good references, university level qualifications and in my late thirties basically in my prime and all I did was keep applying for jobs I wouldn't want to do any way. Where I wanted to be, where I saw myself was somewhere with responsibility a good salary and a sense of dignity. Where I found myself was simply accepting welfare from people who had no respect for my education or work experiences what so

ever and my long suffering family didn't really understand my frustration so it was very hard on them too.

I have medication now. I am fifty years old and for the last two years I haven't looked for work at all but soon I will have to start looking again for fairly menial work this despite being all unfurled post nominals Mark Benniman HND (BIT), BSc BIT/Bus Mgt, PG Dip Bus Admin, PGCE PCET FENTO ESOL. All of those are letters that I can put after my name because of my education. Even today I am still qualified in the top 10% of the British working public, when I first qualified that was the top 5% but there remains nothing I can do to change my outcomes. This article won't change anything, probably not in my life time anyway but all I wanted was for those university tests to lead to something it's not asking that much of anyone is it?

Mark Benniman HND, BSc, PG Dip, PGCE PCET