

## Transcript

So we're now joined by Rayhana. So thank you so much for joining us and for doing this interview with us today. So can you? Tell us a bit about your educational journey, please. Yeah, so?

Yeah. So hi everyone. So my name is Rayhana and I'm a final year accounting and finance student. Well, it's accounting and finance, but it's more accounting and management. So it's like a bit of math and a bit. Of business, a bit of my education agency. I don't. I don't come from a a family background where my parents have been to university or they've had a higher education. So for me this is like a real pro. College. And so I went to primary school. I went to a state school and then I went to an all girls high school and an all girls sixth form. So the 6th. Form was obviously in conjunction with the All Girl High, All Girls High School in Blackburn and and then I came to Lancaster for university. And my siblings have all been to university, but my parents haven't. So because they haven't been, they want to give me the opportunity to go. Yeah, like I said, it's a real privilege because I've seen what life is like without a solid education. Like I've seen the the life that my parents have had to. Work hard for. And because they didn't go to university, so me having a solid education like this, it only makes me value it more.

Wonderful. So what did you enjoy most Rayhana? About your sixth form?

I think as biased as it may sound, I think it was the all girls element, just because I I had friends from high school and then they all came to that. Same six form. So, like, yeah, like we'd really enjoy all the free periods that we used to have because in high school you never used to get free, period. And and also one thing that I really enjoyed was actually finding myself within all the stresses of like a levels and stuff. Like I actually used to find time to go to the gym and to have like that suitable work life balance which I think is important for anyone. Regardless of whether you're working or in education, I'm sure you, Eddie and Saturday yourself. I'm sure you can both relate like it's so important. To just maintain a healthy work life balance, which I think I found when I was in sixth form, I feel like in highschool I didn't really find that as much, but in sixth form I did.

That's great. Thank you. And and just a quick question. When you mentioned three period, well, what is that in the context of the sixth form?

So in the sixth form, it's basically you get like an hour, so you you're not taught any lessons. Basically you might just get 3 periods like, I don't know, like 6-6 hours a week. So we have we used to have like 6 hours. In the normal school. Day so you might get like, I don't know, two hours free one day and then the next day you have a full day of lessons. And then the day after that on say for example Wednesday, you might only get one hour free. So in the double periods where we used to have two, I was three. That is, when I'd go to the gym and I really used to enjoy it. Like, yeah, I just. Used to really enjoy it.

That's great. Thank you. And it sounds like it's a really good way of helping you with time management and getting to experience other things while studying at sixth form. So what did you find difficult about the 6th formal college?

OK, I think there are few. OK, so I think I think the first thing was the idea of actually going out to university like so we'd have like uni trips and it's something Lancaster also did for my scooter as well

where they organised a trip to the university and that we get to spend an entire. Day at the union. Explore the uni so I think that I that I'm not going to open this. I just found it really difficult to like find my element especially because I I don't think you mentioned but I wear the new club and the niqab is obviously the. All that Muslim women choose to observe, so because obviously I wear that and it's it's a very a small minority of women who. Choose to do. That and and for me that is like my identity and it's a commitment that I've chosen to do so going to university and going to all these openings coming from. Someone who's who's been in an all girls high school and sixth form and then all of a sudden coming out to these openings where it's like full of mixed people, mixed races, people from different backgrounds. I found it really difficult. Well, so yeah, I've just found it really difficult to find my and then. But also I think one thing that I also found difficult in sixth form was having like the girls who are doing medicine and dentistry, be favoured when it came to personal statement health, even though I've chosen a degree, for example accounting. I know a lot of people like my cohort right now at university, it's really big, but in College in sixth form, sorry, there was like only a I think there was me and like this other girl who was doing account. Eating and I just felt like I hardly got any help, but I did. However, I'm gonna I I did have have one teacher and. She was just so selfless. So knowledgeable, so inspiring, like and it just made the process of applying to uni so much easier. I'm definitely not romanticising the process of UCAS. Because it is a very stressful process amidst all the other work commitments that you have. But I would definitely say like if you have like even just a teacher, especially someone who's been through the experience of you. Knee and just to like, stay with you and like, advise you, especially when you're facing, like countless rejections, it it kind of didn't make the process so difficult. Even though I. Did find some aspects difficult? I think I found ways to combat that difficulty.

Wonderful. And that teacher? Sounds so inspirational. That's that's left a mark on you because even now years on, you remember her in a in a in a in a very favourable light. And and and yes. So so so sixth form for you was at a levels that you did because you can do lots of different types of qualifications.

Yeah, of course. So my 61 also offered B.Tech, but I chose a level, so I did Urdu. I did English language and I did sociology. And you're probably thinking right now, like, how has she chosen accounting and finance and management? Sorry. And she's not even gonna math to a level, but I'm gonna cover that later on. Where Lancaster didn't require you to have a a level to do the degree, and I just felt like that was, that is probably one of my main reason I'm going off on a bit of a tangent here, but I just really want to mention it that I think that is. One of the main reasons. Why I did choose Lancaster? Because it just. Felt so reassuring that when I was reading the. I still remember at the time when I was reading the requirements and he just thought, you know what, if this uni is going to take me on without having dinner degree and they're going to accept me for the choices that I made for my A levels, then so be it. I'm definitely going to that. University. So we, Hannah, you chose accounting.

And management as a degree programme. And so how did you come to make that choice to to, to do a degree in the area of business management, specialising in accounting and management?

Like you said, it's more of like a business degree. There are maths elements, but more of my modules are a lot of business and and I. Think I think one of the main reasons was I. Think it was just a different change. At college, we didn't have any animals in business or in business management. Same in high school, you didn't have any GCSE's that were like, I don't know, business. We have any sort of GCSE's like that. We had maths GCSE but we didn't have like a business thing. Ah, business related subject and I did. Have I I and I still do I have a serious passion for English and anyone who knew me would have thought I would have definitely gone into an. Degree. But I chose the complete opposite end of the spectrum. Maybe because I think I don't know. I think I just wanted to kind of

take a little risk and just. See where it. Takes me. I mean, come on, Sajida. And I don't know, I don't know what, what's life without what? What's life? Without risk, you know what? I mean, so yeah, so. I mean, this is definitely a huge risk. This is like three years. Obviously the possibility of changing the degree was always there so. Yeah. So I. Just chose accounting and management cause I thought it's got a bit of maths but it's got a lot of business into and when I looked at the modules I thought this is something I really wanna do like marketing and. Brands and like right now I'm studying a module and it's it's called professional ethics and part of the course work is you have to choose a company and you have to analyse the ethics behind it. So it's that you just choose any company you want. So I chose STL loader because it's a cosmetic company and I love cosmetics, makeup, skin care. Of all of that. So and I have to analyse the. Company and basically it's it's so fun. Like I I'm genuinely enjoying the coursework because like I'm researching the behind the scenes of the companies and of of a company that I use on a daily basis. So yeah, like, I'm actually so glad I took this first. Like, I don't think I've ever seen this because I remember in the first year it was. Fully maths and I found it so difficult they. Taught all the maths from the car. Which I really loved about this one is that when you start a degree you you taught everything from the core. So like all of maths level, it was all recapped and it was all taught again. I think one thing I would definitely say to anyone listening to this right now is don't choose based on stereotypes. Like everyone in my ear was going for like English degree. Reason dentistry and medicine and those are all amazing degrees. Don't get me wrong, but definitely choose something that you know you're going to enjoy, like explore the modules. Definitely do that. Like go on to a uni website and just explore the modules around it and don't be afraid to ask. I still remember ringing the Union multiple times and. Constantly asking the guy who picked up like, Are you sure there's not? Are you sure the maths is taught from the core and and Are you sure I can change the degree if I want to change it? So yeah, definitely, definitely do your research.

That's great. Thank you, Rayhana. And your enthusiasm is so infectious. Cause now I'm thinking, oh, I I would have. Liked to have? Done marketing and done all that research. It sounds amazing, so sort of to follow on from that is what over the last three years has been the most exciting opportunity that you've had at university?

I didn't a lot of things like I'm. I'm always trying to, like, get myself involved in like like where I can cause I have such a busy, heavy schedule as you both know. I think so. Last year I was a peer mentor for international students and what that involved was. So I was a second year last year. So I was helping first years trying to settle. Into uni those. Who have come from, like China had a a mentee. Who'd come from Indonesia? So yeah, and also bear in mind that my entire first year of university was COVID. It was all online, so I found it very difficult because I hardly interacted with anyone and and last year there was still some students who were still living in their home country. They couldn't come because of COVID. I think early on in 2020. Do I understand the difficulty of the transition of transitioning into university because I've been there myself? I found it so. So last year I was a peer mentor, but also one of the rules involved having to speak to students in lecture theatres because my first year was all online, I had to do my exams online, so I had to speak about my experience of online exams in a lecture theatre and. And I had to basically just give them any sort of advice that I would give them and the dos and don'ts like what to stay away from when you're doing online exams and what to do when you're doing online exams. And so I had a learning developer and she really nurtured myself belief. She gave me the opportunity to speak in a lecture theatre alongside other professors who I've been taught by myself. And I never ever imagined doing that, like talking in electric theatre with a professor. You had taught me. And and it was such a significant role because I was what? That in that peer mentor team, I was one of. The small number of. Muslim students in that team and she made sure that I wasn't. Looked and and just speaking in a lecture theatre it there

was just something about it. It gave me like a taste of leadership because it was such a prestigious role. So yeah, it was very nerve wracking, but it I I never forget it was a really exciting opportunity to.

And and all about that, Rayhana, because, you know, I observed you do that. And the benefit that the students got from listening to you, I mean, some of the things that you were saying, some of the insights that you were given about approaching revision and the exam. Period were aspects that even as an educator, I hadn't thought of, and my colleagues hadn't thought of. So you were not only educating the students, but also as, as you know, as the the lecturers as well. So it was very much appreciated and that's why you were also put forward for the. The Deans Award, which you won as well, which I was really very happy about and it was well.

Deserved. Thank you. I didn't. I didn't. I'm just a bit you to mention that. But yeah, I think I don't know. I I'd never forget the opportunity. So yeah, I think sometimes again, just take a little risk and you'll never forget it.

Yeah. I mean, we, Allie and I always talk about making the most of opportunities and that university, it's not just about attending your lectures and thinking that your tuition fees is just paying for those, you know that time in the lecture theatre. It's also about the other opportunities that you're getting as being part of an institution. And if you're part of a very good institution, the opportunities are also immense. And the networking is is fantastic as well, but you have to make use of it then that means being proactive and I think you're a great role model for somebody who has gone to university and has seen these challenges and not shield away has thought, OK, that's difficult, but I'm going to go for it. I'm going to stand in front of hundreds of students and I'm going to talk about. My experiences of approaching my exams and my my revision techniques and other things that you've done as well. Which is absolutely fantastic. So you're the kind of person that, you know, we want to put in front of other other students or the prospective students to say, look, this is what you can achieve. And I'm sure you'll agree, honey, your confidence has also grown a lot with all these experiences. That you've had.

Yeah, definitely. I think last year I remember I think the first. So you had to deliver the exam advice session, the revision approaching exams and revision session. He had had to deliver it multiple times because I was doing it to first years and to third years because. I had to deliver it more, but I remember the first time I did it. I was so nervous. And then the second time I don't. I just got the hang of it and yeah. Your confidence just increased, so yeah.

So now you've spent, you know, almost three years at university, you're approaching your graduation. What is a myth or a stereotype about university that you think is wrong, that you want to?

Well, I think I'm just going to talk from my personal experience here. I think the one myth that I got a lot or the one stereotype that we used to talk about a lot in sixth form was that everyone's racist. And like I used to get that a lot, especially because I'm a woman, a Muslim British Muslim woman who. Observes the and I wear very traditional clothing, so I wear the jaban the. Hijab and that is just, I don't know when I came to uni. So in my second year, so first year was entirely cold, so that made me more nervous because I hadn't been to university at all. I'd only been like one or one or two times, and even then campus was completely empty. But second year. Was was when I was. Like I was so nervous. I remember it came to the first lecture. Second year. I was going on that. I'm so. With us. But when you come to the when when you come to the university and you see the campus after about a month, you just realise that, yes, often the crowds that you're not populated with people who are predominantly white but everyone's like. There are so. Many different people from different

backgrounds like that. You get people. From China and you hear them speaking Chinese and they're not afraid to and it's completely fine. There's shops around campus that are like that cater for all these different ethnicities, like we have work, which is like Chinese and then we have another Chinese and then you have burrito. And like you have spam and you have you even have Muslim like we have sultans that we have Muslim traps as well that there's so many different trips like. With different people and and you just eradicates that myth as a whole. Like because there's. I don't see. I don't see that statement of everyone being racist being in played into action at all. And and like you know, one thing that especially the communities that we come from these Asian communities that. We we forget that these predominantly white students may have come from communities which have faced like difficult and challenging circumstances like their parents may have struggled to make ends meet and they want to come to university to stop themselves from that position. So just like how I said, I've come from parents who. Haven't been to who haven't had a higher education and I'm coming to uni so I don't have to live the. Life. So sorry so I can like kind of secure my future. These right people may also. Be doing the same thing. What you realise eventually, like as cliché as it sounds, is that everyone is there for the same purpose. Like no matter what background you come from, everyone has this sense of humanity. Because I think everyone realises that. The reason why they're here is to aspire and maximise their opportunities. It's completely untrue. Like I hear, like everyone appreciates the diversity and like I think you just come to realise that it's not a matter of. Being racist or. Thinking bad about other cultures. I think it's more of being curious like or why does he or she dress like that? And I think that curiosity itself just encourages. People to become. More aware of, like the different communities like that, that people come from, like I was on, I was doing a coach trip a few weeks ago and I was partnered with a white, a white girl, and she was she was curious like she was really respectful about the fact that, like, how we have to pray at certain times. And why where the hijab and and I told her why I observed the bin and it's just like like she was just asking questions from it and you could just see the curiosity from it so. Yeah, that is. And that, that, that, that also just told me as well like that people aren't racist, they're just curious. They just wanna know why. Why you dressed like that and that way they're informing themselves.

Thank you, Rayhana. And just wow, what an amazing answer. So sort of building on what you've just said and as a Muslim woman, do you? Have any tips for? Other Muslim women who are thinking about going to uni. I would say.

I would definitely say stay focused on what you want to achieve, like try to not get distracted by other things that might oppose what our religion says, or that may hinder you to reach your goals. Definitely work hard and also stay true to your values like I wear the new car. But I'm not afraid to wear it at uni like, just be yourself. If you wear the hijab, if you wear the niqab, wear it to university. Like, don't be afraid to be the minority of crowd of the majority like believing when I say like at the beginning of the year, just like how I felt like an outcast. You you will like that will slowly fade all the time and you definitely will not be treated differently because of it. Like even when you go to lecture. Lecturers at the end of the. Lecture to ask questions. They're not going to treat you differently like they'll treat you exactly the same, even if you don't wear the hijab. And like your, you're a Muslim woman. The tip. I would just give is. To maximise the opportunity to have available at UNI. Like if you have a, if you come from a traditional family like mine where my parents didn't go to university. You become the. Changing factor and you go to university like nowadays, even in the news. Like I was reading an article on the Guardian that the dinner was talking about this empowerment for women and women in leadership and why, like, why? Why is the emphasis so strong? And I think it's because people and even society as a whole is just realising that women have ambitions just like everyone else, and we're just as capable and that we have our own strengths and we. Play to them. But don't ever think that your religion or that your appearance should be a weakness that stops you from

aspiring. Like I wasn't the best in maths, but I'm still succeeding somewhat succeeding in my degree right now. Let's hope I get that first. Even if you wear the hijab or you wear. Any God don't. Be that don't let that be a factor that stops you from educating yourself.

That's great, Rayhana. So how else have you? Found the university and balancing your work with uh. You know your other commitments such as your religious commitments to praying five times a day. And also you know you're a commuter student, so you're not living on campus or you're travelling from Blackburn on a daily basis. How? How do you find balancing all of?

So OK, I think the first aspect of the question, I'm gonna focus on is obviously prayer. So praying five times a day. And I. Think one thing. That I would definitely say to anyone, this thing is that draw strength from your faith. Like, I definitely don't need to say much more on that because I just feel like it is a very stressful balance, but. It's very manageable. I feel like if you work your day around prayer. Everything else falls into place and I've seen that myself. Like I wake up very early, around 5:30, just to get the bus at 6:30, and then in this time I pray the early Dawn prayer. Now, in the winter months, the early Dawn prayer starts much later. It starts at around half 6, and that's the time that I need. To get the verse so I. Just create the bus. Station. Everywhere I go, I travel, I travel to. Comma and and even in between lectures if I'm running around and I need to pray, then I will do that. I'll just pray in the. Corner no one will say. Anything and I just pray and but for for the early Dawn, pray I have to pray that at the bus station and is very cold. Like taking your shoes off and praying with bare feet. Kind of praying out. It's a commitment, but then again, it goes to back to my point of drawing strength from your faith. It is a 2 hour commute to the university and from the university because I travel by bus from Blackburn. So most of my work it gets done on the bus. Like I just always have my laptop charged and I always do as much work as I can, but that way the more work I get done on the bus and the more work I get done at uni in between my lectures, the less I have to do when I go home. So when I go home, I can chill for a bit, but I also deliver a tuition for Madrid. Students in the evening it's done privately, so it's like just one to one or one to two. It's a small, small group, but it also gives me that additional flexibility that I need to cancel when it's necessary. So for example, if I have, I don't know, an exam or if I have coursework due. And and I feel like I'm not gonna have enough time. Then I'll cancel it when I need to. I also cancel it if I feel like I'm not giving enough attention to my family. So I also those of you who come from an Asian background, you'll know that as Asians we make roties and yeah, I need to have my mum make those so, oh, by the way. Eleanor wrote this chapatti, so it's basically we have this thing where we have to like roll them out on a I've gotten it's it's like a hard hard board and you have a rolling pin and you have to like affect it lots of times to get the circular shape. So yeah, so basically because my mom, like, she's constantly like on my case to get me to make these round patties, and I also need to spend time and commit to that too. So yeah, it's it's definitely manageable. But definitely I would definitely say that work your day around. And I like. I think when you do that, everything else falls into place. I wake up very early, so half five. So I also go to sleep very early around like half nine. I'll be in bed. But yeah, it's definitely manageable. Don't even if you if even if you're travelling and or people who travel by car, that's also definitely easier. You get more time, but for some reason I find the bus journey a little bit therapeutic. Sometimes I get really loud when there's like bus strikes or or like train strikes or I don't know the bus hasn't come on time one day and it's so annoying. It's so cold outside, even. Though it gets annoying because like there's busted. Is and stuff. I find it therapeutic just because, like, it's just time to myself. Like I don't need to socialise with anyone, so yeah I can just like focus on myself, focus on my work. And so yeah, it's definitely manageable.

Thanks for honey. You've made me really hungry now. That sounds so so yummy and just wow your time management. Skills are incredible. They're absolutely incredible. Do you have time to do?

Anything I mean? You're. You're doing so much, but do you have any time to do anything extra curricular or? Or could you expand a little bit about the madrassa classes that you teach as well?

I would just say that like the mudre situation that I'm doing in the evening is definitely a religious activity and I've been doing that since college, so not even just the years I'm doing that for like 5 years now. And and it's because I genuinely enjoy it. Like sometimes kids can drive you up the wall and so side you can agree. But I genuinely enjoy it like and I enjoy teaching faith. It's definitely a rewarding activity because like how they say, teach them young and that's exactly what I'm doing. And and it feels so good. It's definitely a rewarding thing. Extracurricular activities does going to the gym count as one cause. If it does, then yeah, I love running on the tread. Yeah, it's definitely. Yeah. It's definitely like a great way to release steam and just get my mind off everything like a solid one hour to myself. Like I know people like taking gym partners and stuff, but I just prefer my own company. Like I love that time to myself. I think anyone would agree with me though, like even like. Just forget going to the gym like. Going for a. Walk or around campus like we have that we have loads of like greenery and it's so nice like just some sort of physical activity. It's like physically and mentally. It's so good for you. Like it gives your brain a break from, like all things study related, like the library. I love the library. The library is like my second home, literally from the lectures. I'm just straight in the library and I have like a specific space on. The second floor. That I always try and get because it's like my second home like I. Can work so well there. Just for your brain, mentally and physically and emotionally, it's just so good to, like, do some sort of like physical activity going for a walk, going to do anything that makes you feel good.

Wonderfully, Hannah, we could talk to you all day. And but unfortunately, we've got to bring this interview. To an end. So last question. Is about your post graduation plan. So Rayhana you mentioned that you are a BSc accounting and management student. So you've been doing your degree for three years now. So you hopefully and shall I be graduating this summer, and you're hoping to to get a first class degree. So first class degrees where you're you're averaging. 70% or above in your modules which is fantastic and I hope inshallah that works out for. You. So what are the plans? Postgraduation then have you? Have you been applying for jobs or what is? What is the? Plan that you have currently.

Definitely finding a job closer to home like I know a lot of people in my year in my cohort are applying for these big firms like PwC, KPMG, IBM. They're all amazing companies. Don't get me wrong, I'm sure you can agree sajada. And but I think just this, I've had the experience of commuting and I just don't think I'll be doing it again. So yeah, definitely finding a job close to home in Blackburn, Lancaster is an amazing place. Like with so many lovely people, such a humble community, but I definitely will not be travelling 2 hours daily just to get to work. It's been worth it for my degree. I don't regret choosing Lancaster Uni, but for a 95 job, I think somewhere closer to home is a little bit more reasonable. Yeah, the processes are very strenuous. I'm not going to lie. You have case study assessments and then assessment centre and video interviews and it's a very stressful process and it's doing it behind all of my modules and and showing I'm keeping up with all of my coursework. So yeah. But even in the long term, I think maybe doing a masters that appeals to me. But even if it's not in business, like even if it's something in faith, like I've researched a master's degree course, which focuses on, I forgot. The name of. It, but it's about religion in a British Muslim society. I think the university that's doing its card. I don't know. Does that sound familiar? But I've come across it and I definitely want to. I'm going to study further. I definitely would do it in the areas of religion, something that I'm passionate about. I'm definitely passionate about my degree accounting management. I love it. But so I think something which would draws on to my faith. I definitely would do.

That I think you'll do well in, in whatever you choose to do, whether it's theology or whether it's an A career in accountancy. I think you've got a very positive work ethic, Rayhana. And you, you really have that infectious personality. I think anybody who's around. You, you know, feeds from your positivity and yeah, you you see things, everything in a positive light and and I'm sure our audience as well will agree to that. You've you've made them smile a number of occasions through this interview and I'm still smiling now listening to.

You. Yeah, I'm sitting, smiling away. It's just. Brilliant interview Rayhana.

Really, really, really good to hear you and. Really get really nice to get to know you a little bit better as well Rayhana. So thank you so much for joining us and all the best in your.

Thank you so much for having me too. I've really enjoyed it. I've enjoyed speaking about my faith especially, and I hope I've had some sort of impact on people who are considering university as as one of their future goals. So yeah, definitely draw strength from your inner faith, but and don't ever let your faith. Stop you from doing what you want to do.