

ADVERTISING FEATURE
IF YOU THINK YOU HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO LEARN A NEW SKILL. THINK AGAIN. THESE THREE READERS HAVE FOUND THE TIME TO STUDY TO CREATE A BETTER FUTURE FOR THEMSELVES.

WE'VE FOUND THE TIME

FOR most mums of three a career in fashion would seem like a far-fetched dream. But for Shaheen Popat that dream is coming true.

"I've been keen on fashion since I was a kid," says Shaheen, 32, from Leicester. Shaheen was fascinated with fashion, she even used to unpick her clothes to see how they were made when she was younger. But she finished school at 16, was married at 18 and had three children. "I thought that was it. I'd never follow my dream. I couldn't imagine where I'd find the time to fit in some learning while bringing up a family. "But with a lot of sheer determination, and the brilliant support of my husband, Feroz, I'm about to complete a BTEC in Contemporary Fashion at Leicester College. I feel fantastic." Next year Shaheen will study for a foundation degree at Leicester College, which she hopes will lead to a teaching job in pattern cutting. "I think I've got another skill – a juggler!" she laughs. "I've had to fit my studying around the children, running a home and my responsibilities to both sets of parents. "I study during the day so I can be there for the children when they come home from school and to take them to religious school in the evenings. "It can be a bit of a whirlwind keeping on top of everything but it's worth it. I'm building a good future for me and my family." Shaheen says her children are really proud of her. "They love what I'm doing, especially my daughter, who now wants to be a designer too." And Shaheen has inspired her older sister too. "She was in the same boat as me but found the idea of studying a lot more daunting. After she saw how much I enjoyed it she started a 12-week IT course and she loves it. "My advice to others is to go for it. There's lots of help out there – and flexible learning times to fit around kids and family. It's all down to self-motivation."



ALL SEWN UP:
Weaving her magic



IT ALL ADDS UP:
James catching up on homework

TOP OF THE CLASS



JAMES Ross is taking the next step on his way to a teaching career. He has just finished his first year at Sunderland university after successfully completing an Access to Higher education course. "I used to work in production at a pharmaceutical company and really wanted to change careers," says James, 46. James works with children at his local church and decided some time ago that teaching was the career he really wanted to take up. "I enjoyed helping with the kids' groups at church and wanted to find a way to make a career out of helping children learn and develop their skills. As a father of five who has spent the last two years looking after the home and family, it needed a bit of planning to find the time to go back into education. "But this was important, something I really wanted to do. So with a bit of determination I managed to go to college during the day, when the kids were at school. And then set myself up some space to work on assignments in the evenings when my wife Angela was home to look after the children." To help him financially while at college, James received an Adult Learning Grant of £30 a week, funded by the Learning and Skills Council. "Knowing I had the extra bit of money, helped to take some of the pressure off having to find travel and other costs," says James. "It's a great feeling knowing that I am on my way to achieving the career I really want, and to helping children make the most of their future."

LEARNING FOR ALL

FINDING the time to learn can seem impossible with all the other commitments of work and family you already have. But there are so many flexible learning options available, if you really want to learn a skill or gain new qualifications, you will find a course to suit your needs.

Here Tony Rous, a Careers Coach with Learndirect Advice guides us through some of the learning options and gives his advice on choosing the right course.

The first thing you need to do when deciding to go into learning is to ask yourself these questions:

- 1. What level do you want to learn at?**
- 2. Why do you want to learn?**
 - It could be that you want to change career, have been made redundant and are looking for a new opportunity. Or you may need to update and improve your existing skills or maybe you are just disillusioned with your current life and want to improve your job prospects.
- 3. When would be the best time and method for you to learn?**
 - It's possible to do courses from home by correspondence – whereby you do assignments at your own pace and send them off in the post. Or you can do online courses, which you can fit around work and home, filing assignments online.
 - There are further education courses that are run both during the day, in the evenings or at weekends – ideal for busy mums or those in full time work.
 - Full-time and part-time courses – with full-time it's worth checking what that actually entails. It can mean only a small amount of time at college or university with most of the work being done at home.
 - Open University courses, for example, only require a minimum amount of contact with tutors and fellow students. Basically it's working from home at your own pace.

Don't take on too much.

- Do your learning in manageable chunks.
- Remember there is a certain amount of time and effort involved in going to college or university plus the time needed for follow up work.
- Choose your learning options wisely or you may give up and not achieve your goals.

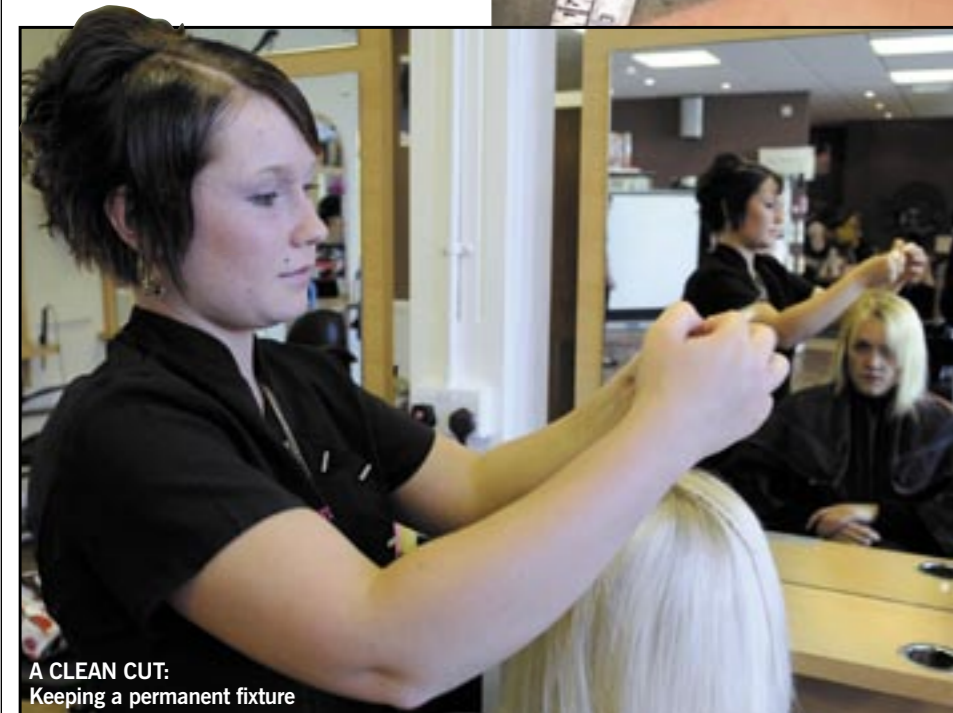
But with a bit of planning and research you can find learning to suit you.

Our future. It's in our hands.

SCISSOR HAPPY

WHEN Samantha Stockdale fell pregnant at the age of 16, people told her that she was throwing her life away. But she was determined to prove them wrong – and she's now well on her way to her lifelong ambition of becoming a hairdresser. Samantha, now 18, has just achieved her NVQ Level 1 in hairdressing and is delighted. "I'm feeling really good about my future. I'm going to start studying for my Level 2 in September," says Samantha from Bridlington, East Yorkshire. "I've wanted to be a hairdresser for as long as I can remember. I started a hairdressing course after my GCSEs but when I got pregnant I decided to put my education on hold. "People told me I'd ruined my life and that I'd never return to education, but I knew I needed to study to get a decent

job and provide for my son, Tylor." Samantha didn't think she'd find the time to study, along with looking after Tylor, now 18 months old. "I just had to juggle a few things to make the time," she smiles. "I get up at 6am every day to commute to Yorkshire Coast College in Scarborough. I drop Tylor off at a childminder before going off to my classes. "Then once I get him off to bed I work on my college assignments." It's long days for Samantha but she says it's worth every minute. She did a work placement during her course at a Bridlington salon and she's been offered a job after she graduates. "I'm really excited about starting work. It's my dream to have my own salon one day and this is the first step on the career ladder for me."



A CLEAN CUT:
Keeping a permanent fixture

Did you know?

- Learning a new skill or gaining a new qualification could be a step in the right direction moving up the career ladder at work, earning more money, finding a job or just simply improving your confidence and self-esteem.
- Gaining a new qualification can result in a £2,000 to £3,000 increase in annual salary.
- An NVQ Level 2 is equivalent to five GCSE passes at grades A to C. An NVQ Level 3 is equivalent to two A-level passes.
- BTEC qualifications are under taken in vocational subjects ranging from business to sport to health and social care. A BTEC National Qualification is equivalent to two A-level passes.
- If you want to learn a new skill you could be eligible for funding. The Adult Learning Grant (ALG) has been designed by the LSC to help adults to overcome the financial barriers to learning. ALG allows adults learners up to £30 a week to help with the extra costs that learning can bring. Visit direct.gov.uk/alg for more information.

Based on Labour Force Survey 2007

So what's stopping you? Visit lsc.gov.uk/inourhands to find out how you can make the most of your time