

Iryna Kushnir: My name is Iryna Kushnir. It is the 3rd of May 2023. This is an online interview with Taisiia Corolova for the oral history project entitled Ukrainian Refugees in the English Higher Education Sector. Could you please say that you give consent for this interview to take place?

Taisiia Corolova: Yes.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank you. Great. Well, please can you please tell me a little bit about yourself first?

Taisiia Corolova: So, my name is Taisiia. I'm 20 years old, I'm Ukrainian, but currently I live in the UK, Leicestershire. I used to be a student in Kharkiv Karazin University and I'm in my third year now. I keep studying online. And I'm at the foreign languages department, so I learn English and Spanish languages to become a translator basically, and I could teach as well. And I was really enjoying my studying before the war. We keep doing it, but it's very different right now. The classes are online, we don't see each other anymore. I'm a bit unsociable. Yeah, but I love my studies so much.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank you. Can you reflect a little bit more please on how this beginning of the work experience looked like for a student in Ukraine, in Karazin University?

Taisiia Corolova: So, before the war, we sometimes had online classes because of the pandemic still, and then we would still go to university and see each other and study. And then when the war started, we stopped our studying for a month, and we had no information at some point, and we had no connection with our teachers as well. And then we started doing it again. And everyone was in different countries already by that time and I moved to Germany because I'm from Kharkiv and this city was invaded one of the first. It was complicated and it was stressful, but then I moved to the UK, and I had a hope I would keep studying.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank You. Thank you. Can you please tell me about your experience of moving to the UK? You mentioned you first went to Germany. So, what was the process of kind of relocating from Ukraine to the UK?

Taisiia Corolova: So, when the war started, we left Ukraine with my mom and we went to Berlin, to Germany, and then we lived there for half of the year. And then I always wanted to be in the UK, as I can speak the language and German is a bit hard, obviously to learn. And then I decided to go to the UK on the Ukrainian scheme, and I found my host. She is an amazing woman from Leicestershire, and she decided to host me. And so, my mom stayed in Germany, and I moved alone to the UK to live with this woman who wanted to help me. And I am still living here. We're in a really good relationship. So, I'm here alone, yeah. And I've been living here for six months now.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank you. What expectations of the higher education sector in England did you have before coming here?

Taisiia Corolova: Well, I I've always wanted to study here as I know an English Degree is a really useful and a good one. The quality is amazing. It's just it was such a dream always. And then, because I'm still a bachelor in Ukraine, I wasn't really sure if I want to do bachelor's degree or maybe I could become a master when I finish my bachelor in Ukraine. So, I'm still hesitating between choosing these two, but I always knew that English education is just amazing.

Iryna Kushnir: What do you like about it?

Taisiia Corolova: Well, I really like the language. And I really, I feel like it's very useful. It helps you to improve your own skills as well and it gives you just way more opportunities, I think.

Iryna Kushnir: And how do you imagine this teaching and learning process and the relationships between teachers and students?

Taisiia Corolova: I would really love to study offline finally in my life because I've had the pandemic first when I applied to my Ukrainian university and then the war started. So, we are all pretty unsociable, I think. And we've never really had an opportunity to study offline and to communicate with people in real life and with

teachers in real life as well. And I really miss this one and I'd really love to go to classes, you know, and talk to people and I would really love the atmosphere to be friendly and supportive. I feel like it's very important.

Iryna Kushnir: And what do you think are the main differences in higher education between England and Ukraine?

Taisiia Corolova: As I heard people here study two or three days a week. And then Ukraine was 5 days from Monday to Friday. I also think that we have more classes and sometimes the atmosphere is not really friendly. So, it also depends on the teacher as well. But I think it's not as different.

Iryna Kushnir: Okay, Thank you. So, you mentioned that you still study online in Ukraine, right? Can you say a little bit more how exactly that works? Are the teachers in Ukraine? Are they abroad? How's the connection? How your exams work?

Taisiia Corolova: So, when we started first, so we had no classes for a whole month after the war. I mean when the war started, we had no classes. And then after one month, they contacted us again and then we started doing zoom classes. So many teachers are still in Kharkiv because they work there, they go to university and sometimes they have classes in university. I have a few teachers who are abroad. I think they're in Germany. And we still have classes every time and we work in zoom and then we have a classroom platform. When they send us homework and we have Moodle platform as well. So basically, you just have a class for one hour and 20 minutes every day. I have, I think I have three and or four classes per day and then I do my homework and then I send to my teachers. They always check it. So, we have a good connection really and they always check my exams as well and they would mark my mistakes and we would discuss it. So, you can really text them whenever and you have good connection.

Iryna Kushnir: And how does technology work at the moment in Ukraine? Well, in the context of the air raid warnings, is it always stable?

Taisiia Corolova: Some of the teachers can contact me and say, 'sorry, but we have no power at home so I'm not able to do my class right now' because they either don't have the Internet connection or you know, just power in general. So sometimes it's really complicated, and I used to miss some classes with one teacher because she wasn't able to deliver classes. And so, they changed a teacher, because we were just not studying, but most of them have good connection and they try their best to be in contact with us.

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah. So now you carry on basically with year 3, is it year 3?

Taisiia Corolova: I'm in my third year, right.

Iryna Kushnir: Do you plan to get enrolled in in higher education in England?

Taisiia Corolova: Yes, definitely. I'm still just like I said, I'm still a bit hesitating between choosing a bachelor or master degree, but I think I need one more year to finish my bachelor's degree and then I could become a master here and this is what I'm planning. But I would really love to choose something completely different from languages so I could have another diploma, another degree. For example, I'd probably go for marketing or management. Something like this. So, it's a bit related to languages and I could use so many different skills. And I think this is what I would do.

Iryna Kushnir: And why would you like to do something completely different and not carry on with the languages?

Taisiia Corolova: I do love languages so much, but I feel like if I have an opportunity here and I could choose something else and I could find some new skills, you know, something really useful. And then I could connect all of them, it would be really great.

Iryna Kushnir: And you think that England could give you that opportunity, right?

Taisiia Corolova: I heard of so many different programmes, and I think I'd be able to do it here.

Iryna Kushnir: Can you say a little bit more about what opportunities you have explored already? You mentioned you've already seen some options for yourself what have you explored?

Taisiia Corolova: I saw some companies here who work with Ukrainians, and they offer you different universities and they offer you help. I'm not really sure about those, because they don't really understand how it works. I feel like they just want to promote some universities they work with. So, they just give you a list of universities and they say, 'we're going to help you with everything, you don't have to pay anything.' I'm so I'm not really sure about that, but I also know that I would need to pass an English exam and give them an English certificate so they know I can speak English and then I would have to go for an interview, I think. So, this is what I heard.

Iryna Kushnir: What about these companies that help Ukrainians? Do they help only Ukrainians or other nationalities, and do they charge for their services?

Taisiia Corolova: So, there are so many groups for Ukrainians in social media and stuff, telegram, for example, and when they post their pictures when they talk to Ukrainians and they say, 'hi, we're here to help you to enter the university and stuff'. They only talk about Ukrainians. I don't think they work with other nationalities, and they all speak Ukrainian, so I think they're Ukrainians as well who work here and who promote some universities. And I worked with one of those and they said they wouldn't charge me because they just want to help. I'm not really sure about that one. I don't know. Maybe a bit later they would be like: 'Oh, you know, we need to use £50 just because whatever'. But I'm sure they promote universities they work with. So, it's not the [inaudible].

Iryna Kushnir: How easy do you think it's going to be for you to pursue one of these opportunities to get enrolled either in the master's programme or get enrolled into a bachelor's programme and a graduate degree?

Taisiia Corolova: I think it wouldn't be really easy. I definitely would have to take a student loan. I'm not sure about the accommodation. I don't know if people live on campus or I'm not really sure how it works. So, I think I'll have to find out a bit more and it's complicated. But I also need to find some documents from my university in Ukraine which is going to be complicated because I don't have physical documents here with me because they're all in my university and I don't know if I'll have access to them, which is kind of a problem. I can't really prove that I finished school or whatever because I just don't have those documents anymore with me. And I really hope they still have it in my university, otherwise it will be a big problem, I think. I'll also have to pass an English exam, which is IELTS or maybe Cambridge and I would have to prepare for that one and I'm currently looking for a course here in Leicester where I could enrol and prepare myself for that exam. So yeah, this is what I'm doing.

Iryna Kushnir: Great. You mentioned, well some challenges already that you see on your way, right, in terms of the documents and also you mentioned the English exam. Do you feel this English exam is going to be a challenge for you?

Taisiia Corolova: I think it takes a lot of time to prepare and I talked to so many people who tested and some of them failed it. So, if I have enough time to prepare myself, then I would probably pass it. I'm pretty sure. It really depends on, and I'll have to spend a lot of time preparing, I'm pretty sure.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank you. Do you think there are any other challenges on your way in addition to the absence of some of these documents that you need and preparing for the English exam?

Taisiia Corolova: Accommodation, I think. So, in Leicester there is only one great university which is called the De Montfort University, but I wouldn't really want to stay in Leicester. I'm not enjoying life here honestly. I'd really want to move to another city, but then I'd have to find accommodation and I don't think I would do it on the Ukrainian scheme. I think I'd have to live somewhere with other students, and it's complicated being alone in a different country in a different city with no one, having no support. But I hope I can do that.

Iryna Kushnir: Certainly. Also, you mentioned you're not quite enjoying life in Leicester as it is. Can you say more about this why is that so?

Taisiia Corolova: There are not so many Ukrainians here. So, I've been living here for six months, and I don't really have friends. And I was very sociable before the war. I had so many different friends, and I also had friends from different nationalities. And here when I came here, I feel like I'm a bit different from the teenagers here as well, and because I don't study at university, it's hard to find someone. It's hard to become friends with people when you don't study, and you just don't socialise properly. I find it really difficult to find a job here because I was studying languages before, and I was studying exactly English, and everyone speaks English here and I'd really love to become an English tutor and I am passionate about teaching. But it's hard for me to do it just because I don't have the exact qualification, they ask me to have, so it's a big challenge for me as well. Either they want documents, a degree or whatever or I can't really do it.

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah. So, the job is another challenge at the moment as well. And you mentioned that you feel a bit different from the teenagers here. What is that difference?

Taisiia Corolova: They probably brought up a bit differently from us. I've tried to talk to some people, but they were not really friendly to me. Maybe because I'm from another country or they don't really want to talk about the war, and maybe they just don't want to have it in their lives. So, this might be a reason I'm not sure. Some of the people are really separative, but they just don't want to be close with me. Some of them just don't want to talk at all.

Iryna Kushnir: And in what context did you meet these teenagers?

Taisiia Corolova: I've tried to do it online as well. There were so many different apps where people look for friends and then I could text them and we could have a conversation and then when I offer to go for a walk or just to go out and have some coffee, they just probably, ignore me and stuff.

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah, I see. And how are you planning to overcome all these challenges that are not just related to, to looking for a place at the university, but also these life challenges of getting integrated in, in the new culture, new country? How are you planning to overcome them?

Taisiia Corolova: I feel like applying to university will be the best thing I can do, so I can meet so many different people. I could improve my skills that I already have, and then I probably would be a bit easier to find the job, I think I'm. I am still trying to find the job and I am very much into teaching and translating. But another challenge is that people want people with experience, and because I'm still a student, it's really hard to get experience and keep studying at the same time and working. And so, it's just a bit complicated.

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah, yeah, definitely. When are you planning to start your applications?

Taisiia Corolova: As soon as I finished my bachelor's degree, which is going to be next year, so in one year because I'm in my third year and we study four years in Ukraine, then I would go for Master. But for now, what I'm planning to do is I really want to find an IELTS of course and then I would pass it in September. I mean, I would try to pass it in September.

Iryna Kushnir: What universities are you considering?

Taisiia Corolova: I think it's London, but not really. I would love to study in Manchester as well. I think it's a nice city. I was even considering university in Leicester and then one in Nottingham, so I really need to know what the course I'm going to take and then I'm going to choose.

Iryna Kushnir: How are you looking for what courses are available?

Taisiia Corolova: So, because I worked with one of those company, I was talking about earlier, they just sent me a list of universities with whom they work. And so, I was just looking online. I was Googling it and then seeing those websites and choosing.

Iryna Kushnir: OK. Yeah, sounds good. How easy do you think it's going to be to combine studies in an English university and a job that you may also get when you become a student?

Taisiia Corolova: If it's a part time job, I think it would be OK. If it's full time, I don't think it's possible. It also depends on if I'm going to study in my university and then go into university here because it's really complicated to combine both universities at the same time in work. So that's why I was thinking about a Master's so I can finish my bachelor's degree in Ukraine and then apply it to a new one here. So, I don't have to study in two universities at the same time. But I think working part time and studying in university here would be good.

Iryna Kushnir: Thank you. And what are your plans for a more distant future? Obviously, for the near future, you're planning to apply for university studies, overcoming all these challenges that you see in front of you. Why would you like to do a degree in England. What are you going to do with it later on?

Taisiia Corolova: So, for now, I'd really love to go home, at least for a week, just to see my family and my parents to recharge, because it's something that I really need to have in my life and phone calls is not enough at all. I just want to be with my close people around me and then I'm just like I mentioned, I really want to pass an English test so I can get a qualification in English. And then I would start looking for universities here and apply for a Master's. But for now, I need to know what course I want to do first. I need to think of this, and I feel like it takes a lot of time.

Iryna Kushnir: Would you go back to Ukraine, after you finished this new degree in England, for example, a master's degree.

Taisiia Corolova: I don't know yet. I don't think I would go to Ukraine because I don't think it's safe there and I don't see so many opportunities there. So, I think I would stay here.

Iryna Kushnir: And in terms of jobs, where do you see yourself after you finish a master's degree?

Taisiia Corolova: So, I'd really like to become either a private English teacher, for example, to deliver private lessons because I'm passionate about teaching and I love explaining things and I love delivering information. Or I could become a translator because I can speak Russian and Ukrainian and English, so I could be useful there. I would really love to work with people. Yeah, and it would be offline, right? And I'm pretty sure I don't want to work online at home, remote, whatever, because I just want to talk to people so much.

Iryna Kushnir: I see. So, a degree in management potentially, right? That's what you're considering? Do you think you will actually need that, a degree to give private lessons. If I understand correctly that just tutorials right or private tutorials in English?

Taisiia Corolova: I like tutoring, where you just explain and help people. I'd really love to teach just to teach English. I'm not sure yet. I'm still thinking what would be best for me, but I as a manager I think I could do so many other different things as well, which would be interesting. For example, I was considering an HR manager, a management...

Iryna Kushnir: What's that?

Taisiia Corolova: Oh sorry, HR management which is, which is great because you work with people. You explain things, you help people as well and you're actually, you have to do so many different things, which is interesting and it's something new.

Iryna Kushnir: Definitely. Yeah. Thank you for that. You also mentioned the fact that you would like to go to Ukraine soon, to recharge, to stay with the people that you know. Can you say more about why that is needed while you still want to pursue a career potentially in England?

Taisiia Corolova: I feel like I just want to share my thoughts about living here, about my future and I just want to talk to my parents, to my mom, and to know what she thinks as well, because I always get really good advice from her and I think it's something that I really need because it's just hard being on my own with all those thoughts. And I just need some advice. And I would want to talk about my future opportunities and

things that I could apply for. So that's why I'd really love to go to Ukraine and just to talk to people who I feel comfortable around and feel loved.

Iryna Kushnir: Right, of course. And what about any advice in the UK... Have you been receiving any form of advice from anyone?

Taisiia Corolova: Well, I really talked to a woman who I live with, and she has two sons, and they all graduated here from universities, and I was talking to them as well. And they all think that master's degree is something really useful here, and they really recommend me to go for a Master's. So, they are the ones who gave me advice. Also, that Ukrainian agency that was helping me to enrol to university. And then I said that I'd rather do a Master's than Bachelor's. But they said: 'no, we don't think so, we think that bachelor's degree is way better than a Master's.' So, you know it's just very different opinions and I really have to think about this, but I'm still going more for Master's than Bachelor.

Iryna Kushnir: Did they justify why they think an undergraduate degree is better?

Taisiia Corolova: I think they just work with bachelor's so this is what they needed to say. I'm not sure. Yeah. And I feel like master's degrees would be better because I would already have one degree and then I could go for Master.

Iryna Kushnir: And what about advice from any job centre, for example?

Taisiia Corolova: They know nothing about education for Ukrainians, and they know nothing about English courses for us. They don't know that we have to pass an English exam to prove our knowledge and to enrol to university. So, this is what I experienced, so they can't really give me any advice about this. They just know about jobs but not more. And when I asked help for English courses and then so I can pass the exam they just said: 'oh, we're not sure we can help you with that.'

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah, I see. Perhaps the last question, unless we get a few more follow-ups from what you say, how easy do you think it will be for you to integrate with the people of your age at university and how different you think it be from your experience currently?

Taisiia Corolova: I feel like I'm pretty friendly and I love meeting new people. As soon as I meet some new people, I think we could become friends. I haven't spoken to so many British people yet, so I just hope that when we are all in the same situation, all in the same course at university, we will have a lot of things in common to discuss and then this would be a good thing to do. We could just study together and, you know, explore it together.

Iryna Kushnir: Definitely. And actually, another question, you know these challenges that there are on your way to, for example master's degree, what do you think would be helpful and for whom to implement to mitigate these challenges for you and for anyone else in similar circumstances?

Taisiia Corolova: I think you need confidence. You need a lot of confidence in yourself, and you really need to set up some goals and then you have to know how to achieve them. And this is what you have to do when you come here. You really need to know what you're going to do here, otherwise you're just lost all the time and you're insecure and you have anxiety. Because everything is new, and it's understandable that it's hard, but you just have to get together and just keep going and looking for more opportunities and set up goals definitely.

Iryna Kushnir: And do you think anyone else needs to provide any other form of support that that you're lacking for now?

Taisiia Corolova: Yeah, I really appreciate those British people who live here and who host Ukrainians and they just try their best to help us. And even those who don't host, if you just can help with anything you could, it would be just very much appreciated. You know, there are some Ukrainians who left their houses, and they have nothing like no clothes, literally nothing. And if you donate or you just go to charity shops, whatever, it's really helpful.

Iryna Kushnir: Great. Thank you. Well, that's all my questions for now. Is there anything else that we have not covered, and you think it will be useful to mention in this interview?

Taisiia Corolova: Believe in the Ukrainian army because they will definitely fight all the bad things. And if you could just help somehow, it would be very appreciated.

Iryna Kushnir: Yeah. Thank you. Thanks a lot, Taisiia. That's all, really appreciate your time and effort in contributing to this project. Thank you.

Taisiia Corolova: Thank you.