

Starting up

- If you could do a course online, what would it be?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages in relation to classroom-based learning?

- Read through the whole article. Then do the exercise below.

Reading 1

Read the article again to find:

- a) a Central American country
- b) a Texan company
- c) someone who works for it
- d) a part of a university
- e) a qualification that you can study for there
- f) three courses that are part of this qualification
- g) another university course
- h) four coffee-growing areas

Student profile: how an online degree keeps the coffee flowing

At harvest time in Nicaragua, trees are usually full of coffee cherries at farms across the country, waiting to be picked. But these days, most of the coffee falls to the ground, wasted. Coffee farmers have been hit so hard by low market prices in the past three years that it is no longer worth it to harvest the crop. This means many coffee buyers are staying away. “You just see coffee falling off the trees,” says Molly Laverty, director of sustainability at Farmer Brothers, a Texas-based coffee company supplied by these farmers. “The market price is so low that they can’t afford to hire seasonal workers to pick it.”

The uncertainty farmers face each year is mostly driven by changing weather patterns and the volatility of the coffee market. Ms Laverty is working to address this, using the business skills she learnt in her online MBA degree to improve the sustainability of the coffee supply chain and build a stronger partnership between her company and the coffee growers.

“Through direct sourcing we can have longstanding buying arrangements with groups of farmers, and commit to a full year of production — letting them know how much we will need, what price we will pay, often with a premium on top of the regular rate, direct to the farmer, to encourage selling,” she says. The goal is to ensure the company has a reliable supply and that the farmers continue growing coffee.

Having built up expertise in different supply chain and sustainability roles at Farmer Brothers, Ms Laverty realised that an MBA would enable her to “get a grasp on the financial and supply chain concepts that drive our business, and help me perform my job better”. In 2018 she enrolled in the online MBA at the University of North Carolina’s Kenan-Flagler Business School.

Now aged 32, she had joined Farmer Brothers in 2009 straight out of university, initially as a Spanish translator to help the company set up programmes with coffee farmers. “It was a fun entrance into the coffee world,” says Ms Laverty, whose undergraduate degree was in Spanish literature. Travelling to coffee farms, from central and south America to Africa and Indonesia, gave her an interest in sustainability. “I started seeing the real impact of environmental sustainability on coffee growing conditions and the volatility of the coffee market on a farming family’s ability to predict what their income will be.”

Ms Laverty says the MBA has added extra skills and experience. It has already given her opportunities to work on strategy, the supply chain and operations, but sustainability will remain at the heart of her work. The finance, accounting and business modelling courses proved most valuable, though Ms Laverty had been nervous beforehand about taking these subjects. “What I do day-to-day is very open-ended and strategic, so sitting and working through a problem in a finance class was an interesting mental exercise for me.” “It’s a personal passion of mine, and it’s becoming more and more relevant in the business environment,” she says.



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Vocabulary – meaning from context

Are these statements about words and expressions from the article true (T) or false (F)?

Correct the false ones.

Paragraph 1

- 1 *Harvest* is when farmers plant *crops* so they can be used, sold etc.
- 2 If something is *wasted*, it is used.
- 3 If something is *worth it*, it is useful, profitable etc.
- 4 *Sustainability* is when something cannot continue in the future.

Paragraph 2

- 5 Weather *patterns* are the types weather that are only happening today.
- 6 Price *volatility* is when prices do not change often or by much.
- 7 If you *improve* something, you make it better.
- 8 The *supply chain* is all the stages between the producer and the user of a product.

Paragraph 3

- 9 *Sourcing* is how, when and where products are obtained.
- 10 If you *commit* to something, you promise to do it.
- 11 A *premium* is an amount of money that is taken away from the usual amount.

Paragraph 4

- 12 *Goal* is the same as 'objective'.
- 13 If a supply is *reliable*, you can't depend on it.
- 14 If you get a *grasp* on something, you begin to control it.

Paragraph 5

- 15 If you *set up* an activity, you organise it.
- 16 If you do something *initially*, you do it at the end of something.
- 17 The *impact* of something is its effect.
- 18 If you *predict* something, you forecast it.

Paragraph 6

- 19 The *heart* of something is the most important thing about it.
- 20 *Strategic* thinking, planning etc is for the immediate future.

Grammar – present perfect with *already, just, yet*

Choose the correct alternative and the correct present perfect form of the verb in brackets to complete each sentence.

- 1 Molly's MBA _____ (already/yet – *give*) her opportunities to work on strategy.
Molly's MBA has already given her opportunities to work on strategy.
- 2 She _____ (just/yet – *complete*) her latest project on sustainability.
- 3 Coffee drinkers around the world _____ (already/just – *begin*) to realise the importance of prices paid to coffee farmers – in fact the process began about 20 years ago.
- 4 Nicaragua _____ (already/yet – *benefit*) from special programmes, but other countries have _____ (not – yet/already – *start*) them.
- 5 Over the last three months, 20,000 students _____ (just/already – *enrol*) at the local university to start this October, and no more are being accepted.
- 6 Online learning is growing more popular, but many older people _____ (not – yet/just – *consider*) trying it.
- 7 Studies show that learning via the internet is highly efficient, and many employers _____ (already/yet – *accept*) this.
- 8 A lot of business schools _____ (already/just – *decide*) to offer special online courses, but some _____ (not – just/yet – *wake up*) to the possibilities.
- 9 New research _____ (just/yet – *show*) that studying online can be lonely, but also that students use their time better.
- 10 Students _____ (already/just – *understand*) the big differences between studying online and going to a campus for lectures – the process has been going on for some time now.

Reading 2

Which are the correct 'takeaways' from the article?

- a) Coffee growers can benefit when business skills are put to use by coffee buying organisations.
- b) Molly Lavery was originally recruited by Farmer Brothers because she had these skills.
- c) Graduates in non-mathematical subjects can learn business skills, but they are not as good as those who did maths at university.
- d) Strategic thinking is important when dealing with coffee farmers.

Further discussion / Group work

- 1 Do you think about how products are made when you choose them? If so, in what ways?
If not, why not?
- 2 When people study online, what can universities and business schools do to make them feel less lonely?

ANSWER KEY**Reading 1**

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| a) Nicaragua | e) MBA (Master's of Business Administration) |
| b) Farmer Brothers | f) finance, accounting and business modelling |
| c) Molly Lavert | g) Spanish literature |
| d) Kenan-Flagler Business School | h) Central America, South America, Africa, Indonesia |

Vocabulary

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 F - It's the time of year when they cut crops so they can be sold. | 11 F - It's an amount of money that is added to the usual amount. |
| 2 F - It is not used. | 12 T |
| 3 T | 13 F - You can depend on it. |
| 4 F - Sustainability is when something can continue in the future. | 14 T |
| 5 F - They happen over a longer period. | 15 T |
| 6 F - It is when they change suddenly and by large amounts. | 16 F - You do it at the beginning. |
| 7 T | 17 T |
| 8 T | 18 T |
| 9 T | 19 T |
| 10 T | 20 F - It's for the long term. |

Grammar

- 2 She has just completed her latest project on sustainability.
- 3 Coffee drinkers around the world have already begun to realise the importance of prices paid to coffee farmers - in fact the process began about 20 years ago.
- 4 Nicaragua has already benefitted from special programmes, but other countries have not yet started them.
- 5 Over the last three months, 20,000 students have already enrolled at the local university to start this October, and no more are being accepted.
- 6 Online learning is growing more popular, but many older people have not yet considered trying it.
- 7 Studies show that learning via the internet is highly efficient, and many employers have already accepted this.
- 8 A lot of business schools have already decided to offer special online courses, but some have not yet woken up to the possibilities.
- 9 New research has just shown that studying online can be lonely, but also that students use their time better.
- 10 Students have already understood the big differences between studying online and going to a campus for lectures - the process has been going on for some time now.

Reading 2

a), d)

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