

NATIONAL SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY CONFERENCE LONDON - *SEPTEMBER 2017*

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I represented the London School of Science and Technology (LSST) as a delegate at the National Skills and Employability Conference in Central London on the 21st of September 2017, in order to gain new information on current trends, developments and regulations in the skills, employability and careers areas. There were speakers from OFQUAL, OFSTED, AELP, CIPD and other Universities, Careers Services and Training organisations. It was also an opportunity to network and liaise with colleagues from across the country.

The focus of the conference was on the Governments' Education requirement that educational institutions focus on employability and this should apply to all students from Further Education upwards to Higher Education and should ideally begin within the careers advice at school level. The requirement for Higher Educational institutions is to take applicants from what is considered, "not the usual people who go for Foundation Degrees and Degrees." The result of this requirement is that social mobility will be enhanced and greater number of the population will achieve a higher level of and skills via Foundation Degrees, Degrees and Degree Apprenticeships.

LSST is meeting this requirement of increasing employability and social mobility initially through its HND courses – and now more specifically through the Foundation Degrees and Degrees and its links with the University of West London and the London Metropolitan University. However, unlike most HE educational establishments represented at the conference, LSST focuses on the current need to help and encourage people who have left the normal educational routes, sometimes for many years.

Among its students, again unlike the majority of other educational establishments present at the conference, LSST also has amongst its student body, students from abroad who

have not been through a British Educational system. So unlike many educational establishments who focus on those currently in the educational system, LSST focuses on those who have missed out on the new focus on careers and employability.

Work Based Learning is a priority for increasing employability and work and career skills and becoming an essential part of both Further and Higher education. Again LSST is, with its collaboration with proud university partnerships, highly focused on these areas and is ahead of the game in many ways.

The emphasis, much mentioned at the conference, was the careers guidance and employability, in order that students not only begin courses that are relevant to their future goals but also that when they achieve their qualifications they move on to work in areas they planned for and which they are ready for. For those students who move on to higher qualifications they would have already gained the necessary employability skills and are job ready once leaving full time education.

Apprenticeships are already present with FE and today there are an increasing number of universities that are now offering Degree Apprenticeships. In all over 50 universities across the UK are now involved in Degree Apprenticeships of one form or another. Some of these Degree programs include work based learning for the majority of the learning hours with mentoring, both on and off the job, being provided and the use of on line learning being increased so as to increase the number of hours an apprentice is in the work place.

The government aim is that by 2019 all major employers will be engaged with Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeship and the involvement of SMEs to also increase as SMEs are highly important and relevant to local economies. One of the major issues with Apprenticeships however, is the fragmented nature of the funding where funding is obtained via local bodies, regional bodies or national bodies and awarding bodies are many and various. There is also the issue of the majority of funding going to the larger organisations through the government levy and a smaller slice going to SME's who are vital to local employment and economies.

Degree Apprenticeships is an area that colleges like LSST could consider operating once the college has achieved its aim to achieve degree awarding powers in the future and when the funding of apprenticeships is less complicated and various.

Work Based Learning is an essential element of the modern educational world and is essential for those who have no direct work experience or are changing their careers to work in a new occupation or area.

The governments focus is now changing not only to look at those who achieve good academic grades from 16 upwards, but towards the less traditionally academically achievers. There is a clear need to look at the workforce as a whole and not just on those with academic abilities but on those who have other talents and skills and to offer and to combine these talents and skills with the opportunity to achieve higher educational qualifications that are fit for purpose and work force relevant.

The government now focuses upon employability skills, careers guidance and advice, so that when a student obtains degree they are not, just a nice document that can be admired and hung on the wall, but a relevant document that has increased a student's

employability and career goals. In this respect, LSST is meeting all requirements, as along with the new Foundation Degree and Degree courses, LSST now has dedicated Work Placement, Careers and Employability Units across all of the campuses and a centre hub for these areas in the main Alperton Campus, staffed by experienced and dedicated staff members.

Because the student body at LSST come to the college from a variety of backgrounds and educational achievements and work experience, LSST has been able to meet the government requirements on employability, LSST is in fact ahead of the game and has been able to hit the ground running in terms of placements, careers guidance and employability skills.

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