

WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF EDUCATORS FUTUREVERSITY DISCUSSION 13 OCTOBER 2014

On Monday 13 October a group of members met for discussion evening under the title 'Futureversity' The discussion was led by Michele McKendry, the CEO, of Futureversity an educational charity based in Tower Hamlets. Gresham College provided the venue once again and Martin Gaskell the Chairman of Education Committee chaired this meeting. Also present was one of the students of Futureversity who spoke about his experiences.

Futureversity previously known as Tower Hamlets Summer University has been running for about 20 years. It believes all young people have the potential to be extraordinary. They provide free courses and activities for 11-25 year olds to help them develop the skills and self-belief they need to make the most of their lives. The core activities are run from Tower Hamlets but most are open to young people from across the capital. In Tower Hamlets it is reckoned 42% of children are living in poverty.

Many young people end up in the category of not in education or employment and are known as NEETS. Of the 605,000 children born in 2000, the millennium children, it is estimated that 121,000 of them (20%) will experience NEET between the ages of 16-24 and 6,600 of them will have fallen out of education by the age of 16. There need to be quality interventions before the young people are leaving school. Factors influencing NEET are school culture, poor socio-economic boundaries and to some extent ethnicity where one of the lowest performing groups are poor white males. Current national initiatives to address the problem include: Raising the Participation Age to 18; the Pupil Premium; and careers advice. The most disappointing of these has been the provision of careers advice which Ofsted found to be very patchy in its delivery.

One set of courses offered by Futureversity are free of charge school holiday courses. These can be of different lengths up to one week. The subjects covered include: arts and fashion, digital media, film and photography, music and performing arts, sport, fitness and well-being, business and readiness for work, and life skills. The aim is to encourage young people to learn how to learn rather than to teach them in detail about any subject. Non-formal course can be effective in making learning appealing and in establishing different educational relationships whereby adults are seen as co-learners. The young people take ownership for their own learning and usually find that learning by doing is enjoyable. The tutors come from a variety of backgrounds including some businesses. However, it can be expensive to train tutors.

The other set of key courses are the 11 week Job Ready courses. These are offered free of charge to NEETs between the ages of 16-25 and include some graduates. They are run in partnership with industry partners who include Barclays, Credit Suisse and Network Rail and include a work placement. The objectives of the course include opening up networks and building confidence. Some young people arrive who cannot read and write and their first goal must be that they need to build up their literacy, numeracy and IT skills. Ray *Kallaman?* gave an interesting account of his

experience on one of these courses to the group. He is now working as a team leader on some courses at Futureversity.

There is evidence that the Futureversity programmes have been able to raise aspirations, reduce youth crime, break down racial tensions and get unemployed young people off benefits and into work. In conclusion Michelle McKendry mentioned the six core capabilities for work readiness suggested by the Impetus trust. These are: Self-aware, Receptive, Driven, Self-assured, Resilient and Informed. The Futureversity aims to develop these capabilities in young people.

A discussion followed the presentation and the following points were covered.

- The funding originally came from Local Education Authorities (LEA) but this has stopped so the main sources now are trusts and foundations.
- The office has been scaled back since the LEA funding stopped and some of the office space is sub-let. There are about 6 people in the administration team now
- The courses are offered to young people free of charge but the cost is £3000 per student on the Job Ready courses and around £120 per pupil on the holiday courses.
- There is a debate between whether young people value qualifications most of all but the Futureversity approach is to get young people to enjoy learning on the basis that qualifications could follow. The aim is to stop the young people becoming NEETs.
- Employers in London can find it difficult to get good well motivated young people and there could be advantages in working with the Job Ready programme to identify possible employees.
- Parents are encouraged to attend a showcase at the end of a school holiday course but it is difficult to get some of them involved.
- Outreach is important in encouraging young people to come on the courses. Most come through word of mouth.
- Alumni still come back to see the staff.
- Relationships with schools and teachers are mixed and the changing environment in schools with less coming under a Local Authority has made links more difficult.
- Motivation for work can be difficult for some people if they feel they can get more on benefit than on a low paid job at the start of a work career. They have to have self-belief that they can mount the career ladder.
- Careers advice in schools seems to be a major problem. It should be started in primary schools. Research has shown that 75% of young people have unrealistic aspirations.

The evening ended with a vote of thanks to the speaker and her former student for a most interesting evening.