

Middlesex University London response to Greater London Authority Skills and Employment Vision for London

11 June 2019

Introduction

1. Middlesex University London has been home to innovators and change-makers for nearly 140 years. We are a progressive London university that puts our students first and provides expert teaching informed by inspiring research and practice. We boast a diverse, multinational and multicultural community of nearly 20,000 students and 1,900 staff from 140 different countries based at our modern north London campus in Hendon. We also have campuses in Dubai, Mauritius and Malta, bringing our total number of students to 37,000.
2. A key part of the skills ecosystem in the capital, Middlesex University London generates more than £280 million a year for the Barnet economy, supporting some 3,800 local jobs. Middlesex embraces widening access, with almost all our UK students coming from state schools, over 60% from black and minority ethnic groups and over 50% with parental occupations that are semi-routine or routine rather than senior manager or professional. We also play a key role promoting social justice and fostering social cohesion by supporting a diverse, often disadvantaged student cohort through accessible learning and onto a skills escalator creating pathways to new careers and career progression. Our partnership with the Capital City College Group (CCCG) of further education (FE) colleges in London gives us even more scope to align skills supply with skills demand. We work with employers to make sure that what our students learn is what employers need, and we strive to transform the lives of our students so that they have an excellent experience while they are with us, and a solid foundation for inspiring careers when they leave us.

1. Empowering all Londoners

- a) ***London Government wants to ensure that all Londoners have access to inclusive and good quality education and training from early years through to late adulthood. What more can London Government do to help deliver this objective?***
3. The Middlesex University student demographic includes a high number of students from disadvantaged groups with 52% of our students eligible for free school meals. A large number of our students commute to our campus in Hendon from areas of high deprivation using public transport. Our research shows a clear relationship between travel time and non-continuation rates, a pattern found in many London universities which a gap between retention rates in London and other parts of the country. This pattern was recognised in the Social Market Foundation (SMF) report recently commissioned by the GLA, *Building on success Increasing higher education retention in London*, and is an area where London Government can have an impact in supporting access to higher level learning. This is an area highlighted in the report of the Government's independent review panel on post-18 education and funding chaired by Philip Augar which calls for a detailed study of the characteristics and in-study experience of commuter students and how to support them better.
4. Our analysis shows there are complex dynamics in relation to geographies of deprivation and connectivity in London that affect the relationship between commute time and non-continuation for young students even when other factors are taken into account. Over 80% of UK undergraduates

at Middlesex University travel over 40 minutes to reach the campus and over half (52%) commute to campus for more than an hour, seven times the national average (7%). Over half of our UK students (58%) live at home with parents. Whilst commute time is important, insights from the student experience tell us that the overall commute experience is just as important.

5. Middlesex University welcomes the proposed policy response on commuter students in the SMF report. There is a role for the GLA in improving the experience of commuters by promoting flexible accommodation, timetabling changes, appropriate facilities on campus for universities and making it easier for students to use the facilities of other London universities. More should be done to investigate the costs students face in London particularly regarding private sector halls and transport where travel incentives such as TfL weekly travel discounts do not match up with lived experiences of students only coming to campus 2-4 time per week for example.

2. Meeting the needs of economy and employers

b) Globally, we are seeing a rapidly changing economic landscape owing to technological advancements. How can the education and skills system respond to this?

6. Universities have a crucial role to play in combining an advanced technical education with developing key skills to enable their graduates to adapt and innovate in this changing workplace and economic landscape. Modern knowledge jobs need both technical and academic learning – specific skills and general competencies developed in a wide range of subject contexts.
7. For the future workforce to keep pace with advances in technology we need an education and skills system that enables learners to upskill throughout their lives. A system for lifelong learning should recognise that for many the learning journey is not linear and support complex learning pathways with opportunities to pause, accelerate and change focus depending on the learner's circumstances and needs. We need to avoid learners and workers getting stuck at a particular level or part of the education system or labour market because routes through are not clear or supported. Currently the different funding systems across FE, apprenticeships and higher education (HE) do not support this 'whole system' vision and make it difficult for learners to move between different types and levels of learning. This creates progression barriers because credit, standards and qualifications poorly articulate with each other, and is exacerbated by a tendency in policy to regard academic and technical routes as separate when there is considerable overlap. A system of credits, such as a common competency-based framework, that helps learners to move between routes, as well as levels, would help to address this. The proposals for modular, credit-based learning accompanied by a lifelong learning allowance in the Government's Augar review report on post-18 education and funding are also helpful in this regard.
8. An education and skills system that develops 'learnability' and the skills and behaviours that automation cannot easily replicate, such as creativity and critical thinking, are also key to our response to advances in technology. The skills required by the fourth industrial revolution can best be serviced by business, FE and HE working together in a compact which encourages and incentivises universities to lead the development of an innovative, integrated curriculum that will allow the UK to lead in the new economy. In particular, HE needs to develop ways of thinking which reflect the fusing and converging of technologies and sectors in complex ways that were never envisaged a decade ago. Our Building Information Modelling Management programmes, for example, bring together areas of engineering, construction, management and smart environments in ways not imagined before. We need graduates who are equipped to tackle this technological convergence and drive value from technology as innovators, creators and lifelong learners.
9. A unique feature of what we are doing at Middlesex is how we realise the 'diversity bonus' that we have among our diverse student body. It is increasingly recognised that there is a diversity bonus from bringing together insights from different social, cultural and geographical contexts to solve

complex problems and inspire creative ideas. For us, this is a development of our focus at Middlesex on learning from experience, and learning as an expansion of experience beyond just our own abilities and identities. Inspiration from diversity will be essential in producing the creativity that will put human abilities centre-stage in the fourth industrial age.

8. Higher level skills

a) *In what ways can London's higher education institutions strengthen work at a local and city-wide level to increase opportunities for Londoners to access higher education, gain good degrees and enter graduate-level jobs?*

10. Middlesex University London plays a pivotal role in the capital's skills ecosystem delivering high level technical and professional education through advanced practice-led learning, supporting social mobility, plugging skills gaps and boosting productivity.
11. London HEIs can play a key role in expanding access to HE, raising aspiration and creating progression pathways to enable learners to move between different levels of learning and into employment through partnership with schools, colleges and employers. For example, through our strategic partnership with CCCG and our group of Associate Colleges Middlesex University London is mapping provision in key sectors and modes of learning, including apprenticeships, to simplify progression routes to higher level learning. Our outreach work with schools and colleges and pioneering work developing high quality careers information and guidance for young people is helping learners to understand the opportunities available to them. Our innovative [Make Your Mark](#) resources provide guidance for young people on what is likely to be the best pathway for them, including vocational routes such as apprenticeships, through a dynamic and interactive web micro-site. Universities, given the access they have to schools, have more potential to be the 'one stop shops' for careers information and guidance at every level. There is also scope for employers, FE and HE to collaborate more effectively in providing high quality careers information and guidance in schools centred around the key themes in the Government's industrial strategy.
12. HEIs can also work with employers, local and national government to ensure that the skills we provide are aligned to the skills needs of the future. This is often around technical skills that will need continual updating (more often as small bites of learning rather than second or higher degrees) but is also about lifelong skills such as computational thinking and learnability to enable workers of the future to continue to adapt and respond to changes in the workplace. At Middlesex we have developed these as clearly articulated graduate attributes, skills that can be applied to a wide range of professional and learning environments such as critical thinking, problem-solving, organisation of workload, quantitative and qualitative analysis and presentation skills.
13. Through the West London Alliance (WLA), the University is working with local boroughs and employers to commission skills aligned with employer needs. The University is also involved in a WLA project with the Royal Society for the Arts and London Heathrow to develop a digital skills passport which helps learners to articulate their skills to employers more effectively.

b) *How can we better support people in low and medium paid work to gain higher level qualifications outside of the full-time degree programme model?*

14. We refer to our response in section 2 b on the importance of a flexible lifelong learning system based on a modular, credit based system that enables learners to upskill throughout their lives. Middlesex also sees apprenticeships as important additional pathways to higher level learning while in the workplace. We are a pioneer in delivering higher and degree apprenticeships with programmes including Chartered Management, Construction, Business to Business Sales, Teaching, Nursing, Police and Social Work.

c) Are there opportunities to increase the range and number of Level 4-5 qualifications delivered to Londoners? If so, what do you see as significant areas of growth and how is this best achieved?

15. As indicated above, the best way to encourage a wide range of high quality pathways is to make the whole system more flexible and enable students to choose the study mode that is right for them, with the option of pausing and re-starting study or changing direction through a modular, credit based system of lifelong learning. There may also be a case for more students to study shorter courses at level 4 and 5, however there is a danger that some of the current policy narrative about lower cost alternatives to degree education could widen social inequalities in terms of access to degree education and its benefits. It also needs to be recognised that people from disadvantaged backgrounds, or with lower prior attainment, can succeed in HE but may need additional support, and this is not a reason for degree education being regarded as the wrong choice for them. Government incentives will play a critical role in stimulating further provision at level 4-5 qualifications by HE providers.

Apprenticeships

a) London has historically had a low number of apprenticeship starts compared to other regions. How can we increase the number of high-quality apprenticeship opportunities in the capital?

b) London businesses contribute more to the apprenticeship levy than businesses from any other region, but apprenticeship starts have fallen since the introduction of the levy. How can London government support businesses to better utilise the capital's unspent levy funds?

c) In December 2018 the Mayor, London Councils and London businesses called on government to introduce flexibilities to the apprenticeship levy to make it work better for Londoners and London's businesses, and to devolve apprenticeship funding to London government in the long term. What changes should central government make to the apprenticeship levy system to make it work better for London?

17. There is a potential role for the GLA in bringing together the London-wide apprenticeships offer, promoting and advertising opportunities in a unified way to learners. This could support existing activity by apprenticeship providers and work to develop an understanding of apprenticeships as a route to earn while you learn and upskill.

18. Through our experience of working with employers to develop apprenticeships, we see a reluctance to take on the commitment to three to five year longer degree apprenticeships particularly in this climate of economic and political uncertainty. In line with our hopes for a lifelong system of education and skills based on modular and credit based learning outlined above, the allocation of credits to apprenticeship training at different levels could help address this challenge. It could enable the apprentice to continue to develop his/her career over a timeframe that suits their own learning patterns and lifestyle and switch between employers and learning channels.

19. Employers are best placed to make judgements about the skills they need. If employers choose to hire apprentices in job roles that they value, this should be celebrated as evidence of ownership of the need to further develop the higher-level skills of their workforce and engagement with the apprenticeship levy. It is an important principle that if employers see a business or service enhancement reason to invest in higher level skills and degree apprenticeships, the apprenticeship system should welcome and support this.

20. There are challenges around the working of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) which are holding up development of new apprenticeships. For example, the IfATE needs to be more transparent and effective with the process for apprenticeship standard

approval. The mandatory qualification requirements also need to be reformed to reflect the expressed needs of employers and the current approach for allocation of funding bands lacks validity and transparency.

21. There is an urgent need to make apprenticeships available to all non-levy employers via the same digital system used by levy-paying employers. The broadening of the scale of levy transfer arrangements to 25% will help some smaller employers access apprenticeships. For example, very large public sector employers are already enabling smaller non-levy employers to access to health sector degree apprenticeships. However, the current two-tier system is the major barrier in SME take up of apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships.
22. The current quality arrangements for apprenticeships brings duplication and additional regulatory burden for providers who offer both level 5 and level 6 apprenticeships who are currently subject to two different quality assurance regimes. This can act as a disincentive to the development of apprenticeships and diverts valuable resource away from delivery. Duplication could be avoided if the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency for HE took responsibility for all apprenticeships delivered by providers on its Register. Ofsted should then oversee the provision, including apprenticeships, of all organisations not on the OfS register. Ofsted and OfS could agree this approach in the same way that they have currently agreed that Ofsted will not inspect level 6 and 7 apprenticeships, even though they have a statutory responsibility to do so.

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