

My higher education in the UK

When I left school in 1984 at least 50% of people left school with no qualifications which is amazing to think now but was true then, I was one of them. I worked full time in a supermarket, then at my father's small business until 1991 when I looked into studying with the Open University like in the movie Educating Rita. I started preparing in 91 and started my course in January 1992 studying T102 Living with technology a foundation course which was an FHEQ level 4 and 600 hour degree foundation course in technology, even in 2009 only 29% of the work force were qualified to this level in anything. When I was half way through the course I applied to study at Aberystwyth University and was given an unconditional offer to study Information Science with computer science, maths and statistics. I started in September 1992 when I was 24 years old but found the course really difficult and dropped out in the summer of 1993. I had a gap year 93/94 although I did start another module on the Open University I found it too much work and dropped it. Instead I applied to study at what was then Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education to study an HND (Higher National Diploma) I started in September 1994. This is another level 4 course on the FHEQ or level 5 on the revised FHEQ. I passed it in 1996 and opted to top up to a bachelor of science degree 96/97 which is also an FHEQ level 4 course or level 6 on the newer scale. About 30% of the working population had a level 4 course in anything in 2009

I spent the next five years living in Asia and studying by distance learning for an MBA with Heriot Watt University I passed the post graduate diploma in January 2001 but didn't complete the full master's degree but the post graduate diploma was 1,200 hours of post graduate study and was FHEQ level 5 on the old system, level 7 on the newer system even in 2009 only 7% of the workforce were qualified to this level in anything I think in 2001 it was only about 4%. I earnestly looked for work with all my higher education and I was about 33 years old at the time but I couldn't find anything so I thought what could I do and just by chance I found that there was a bursary of £6,000 being offered to study teaching qualifications in further education. As I'd been out of the country for some years I didn't think I'd be offered a normal teaching training course but I thought I stood a chance to study a PGCE in further education as it was only the university's decision rather than a central recruitment system like there is and was in primary and secondary education.

I had two interviews and a written test and was offered the course at Greenwich University in September 2002 when I was 34 years old. My subject specialism was English for speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and I did my teaching practice at an inner London college of further education. I passed the course in July 2003. This was FHEQ levels 4 and 5 on the old system 4 and 7 on the newer system even in 2009 only 7% of the workforce were qualified to this level in anything I think in 2003 it was about 5%.

I then applied for a few teaching positions and was offered a job at Hammersmith and West London College as a lecturer in business communication three levels up the lecturer scale. I worked there until the summer of 2005 when I was 37 years old but I was finding it difficult with the amount of work I had to do and also the cost of rent which meant that even social housing was far better than anything I could afford as a full time lecturer, I didn't even have a car at the time so I reluctantly resigned. I then spent a year and a half in France followed by nearly a year in Thailand before I returned to England in the summer of 2007 I was 39 years old at the time. I had developed a health problem to do with my eye lids they kept closing so I came back for treatment if there was any. It took ages but I eventually had surgery in 2009 on my eyelids and I have botox injections every four months which is partially successfully but it means I need to be where I can get treatment.

Since 2008 and up until 2017 I applied for work and claimed benefits, at one stage I lived in a single room for six months. I applied and I applied but didn't get many replies and was only offered one job and that was as a part time teacher in London in the summer of 2008 as the person doing the recruiting was someone I had worked with. The problem was even at £24 per hour twelve hours per week wasn't enough to find anywhere to live in London so I reluctantly couldn't accept the offer. I ended up applying for more than 800 different jobs between 2008 to 2017 and that job in 2008 was the only offer I got. Just to show that the recruitment of people in work can be unfair I set about showing that I should have been employable. The only way I could do this was to show parity so I applied for education instead. I was offered a PGCE in secondary education specializing in IT in 2009 which I declined and I was offered a master's degree in Intercultural Communication at Birkbeck in 2011 which I would have loved to have done but it was very expensive and I wasn't sure of the

outcomes so I declined but both of those would have been FHEQ level 5 or level 7 on the newer scale again in 2009 only 7% of the workforce were qualified to this level in anything. So I felt I had proved that I should have had good work not left struggling on benefits and living in a single room but there's no where to turn you simply keep applying or lower your sights to something more attainable but when you think that in 2009 about 55% of the working population were at level 2 it does beg the question why did I find it so difficult to find work for so long? Shouldn't there be some safeguards other than back to work club that is a catch all for anyone who has been out of work for a while and basically has you sat behind a computer applying for jobs.

I was left feeling angry but in all the time since 2008 no one has been remotely interested in either my qualifications or experiences apart from education providers that offer me credit for prior learning and usually offer me the course I apply for but then I would need about £20,000 a year to cover the costs of studying and living expenses so it's not really an option for me and I don't really want to study again anyway as I mentioned I'm qualified in about the top 7% of the working population already and about half of that working population is nowhere near my level what I've always wanted and in a way what I still want is work commensurate with that education and a lifestyle commensurate with that work, it shouldn't have been that much to ask I don't blame anyone but in a way I have 8 years of university education that really should have been respected. It hasn't been all bad I have a very supportive family who have helped me a lot and I have managed to travel as well.

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