

UCEM in conversation with... Nikki Bulteel

Andrew Belt: [00:00:00] Welcome to the fourth episode of our 'UCEM in conversation with...' podcast where I'm joined by UCEM's student outreach manager, Nikki Bulteel. Hi Nikki.

Nikki Bulteel: [00:00:13] Hi Andrew. How are you?

Andrew Belt: [00:00:15] I'm not too bad, thank you. How are you?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:00:17] I'm very well, thank you.

Andrew Belt: [00:00:19] We'll begin with a little bit of background about yourself and what we're going to be discussing.

So, you've had quite the career and association with UCEM; any key components of UCEM's learning provision, Nikki has played a part. Until I looked at your LinkedIn profile, I never even knew that you studied with us as well so there's an added association with UCEM! Following your studies, you worked as a surveyor before joining UCEM as a valuation tutor.

During your time as a tutor, you gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice - the first UCEM tutor to do this - from the University of Reading and your Master's in Online Education from the Open University. That's when you developed our first two online modules as well. You were then associate dean of teaching, learning and assessment enhancement before becoming head of our management and vocational faculty.

You then headed up our apprenticeship academic team. And you are now three years into your current role as student outreach manager. So, it's this variety in your career which is fascinating and I thought it'd be great to discuss your career and thoughts on the built environment.

You can relate to our alumni community as an alumna yourself, you've worked in industry, you've been a distance learning student, you've taught our students, you've been involved in our apprenticeships provision and you are leading on our widening participation efforts currently. So quite the list there, but first, let's go further back.

So, the first question is, why did you want to pursue a career in surveying?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:01:57] I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left school. I ended up working as a secretary in London at a property investment company. Pretty much got as far as I could get, a bit of a glass ceiling there. I felt I could do better. I didn't have a degree and I wanted to study in higher education.

Having learned what I learned as a secretary at the property investment company, I thought surveying was the right career path for me.

Andrew Belt: [00:02:24] And having moved into surveying, how did you find working in the industry? Did you find it an accepting industry to work in?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:02:32] My answer would be mixed. The first company were very supportive of my studies but didn't really consider it right to offer me a surveying position.

I was there to be a secretary and that was it. Fortunately, I got my first trainee position and interestingly it made me take a 60% salary cut in order to become a trainee surveyor from being a secretary.

So that was a financial struggle, however, the team I worked with in Oxford, in England, were very supportive of my aspiring surveying aspirations. So, I ended up qualifying with them with my APC and becoming an RICS member.

Andrew Belt: [00:03:18] And then following that you moved into academia. What prompted you to move into academia?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:03:26] Well, for me, it was about giving back and doing something arguably more worthwhile for others rather than simply earning money or earning my employer money. I was looking for something part-time or flexible as I had a young family and CEM, as it was then, offered that. At the time, there weren't that many opportunities near where I lived to teach my subject area so I was lucky to find the UCEM role.

Andrew Belt: [00:03:50] How did you find teaching our students?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:03:56] At that time, our courses were blended with each programme having up to three teaching weeks face-to-face in Reading. Conversations with students only happened at these face-to-face sessions or via the new email system.

It was very much distance learning. Catching up with the students and, more importantly, seeing them get to know each other at the teaching was by far the best thing. Networking and the support it brings was so important then, and obviously still is important now.

Andrew Belt: [00:04:29] So at that time, as you mentioned, it was distance learning and now we are an online provider.

So, what was your involvement in UCEM's move into online learning?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:04:41] I studied my Master's in Online Education through the Open University and that triggered my role in developing our first two online modules in valuation in 2009. It took quite a bit of work, as you can probably imagine but it was very important when my role changed to associate dean of teaching, learning, and assessment enhancement.

One of the responsibilities I had was to draw up our first teaching and learning strategy for online education. It was quite a short-lived strategy given the

nature of the way technology was changing but it did help us in the development of our new academic offer that was going to a fully online experience for our students.

Andrew Belt: [00:05:42] So, you came up with a strategy for online learning from a teaching perspective, but then it changes an awful lot. And now we're many years into what we're doing from an online perspective.

What would you say are the differences from that time and now?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:06:03] Being online now means a very proactive and active learning experience for the students and also on behalf of the tutors. You think right back to Garrison's theory of online education back in 2002 and he talked about the importance of the teacher presence.

It's fundamental to successful online education that the tutor plays a pivotal role in reaching out to students, trying to help build a learning community, teach, engage with the students, encourage the students, motivate students. When I studied, we used to get a big brown box delivered on the doorstep with matters of printed material and plastic folders, whereas now, it's very interactive and it's up to the student to be proactive and explore the resources that they're given to learn.

Andrew Belt: [00:07:03] And less postage as well now of course with all that material! Moving ahead to where we are now, you're now our student outreach manager.

So, could you explain a little bit about what this role entails?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:07:20] My specific role entails the implementation of a wide set of activities which support all our students on their career journey. Many of the activities are led by our access and participation plan, which sets out UCEM's commitment to widening participation in surveying and higher education to anyone irrespective of their background.

So, for example, I work on our bursaries working group, which is there to help students who struggle to pay our fees; students can apply for a bursary award. I run the hardship fund, which is there to help students who face unexpected financial difficulties. I run the nomination and appointment system for our student ambassadors. We currently have four phenomenal student ambassadors, representing key themes for our students at UCEM: diversity, welfare, sustainability and communities. I'm pleased to say we're going to be recruiting more next year in 2021. I also run student-staff focus groups where we look at issues for our black, Asian and other minority group students and for supporting our disabled students.

I'm also responsible for our schools and college outreach activities, where we visit school and college students to introduce them to surveying as a career and tell them about apprenticeships in surveying and what UCEM can offer.

The outreach team as a whole, which I lead on, includes our disability and wellbeing advisors, our careers advisor and the safeguarding team. We do a lot of very varied and fascinating work.

Andrew Belt: [00:09:22] All-encompassing that is and it's great that you are reaching out to try and tell people about what fantastic careers you can have in surveying, and also opening it up to as wide a group as possible which is so important and a massive part of the UCEM strategy moving forwards.

So, what are your ambitions in the role?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:09:51] My fundamental passion is helping make the surveying industry a more diverse profession. Currently, the percentage of female surveyors drops dramatically once they leave university and it's even worse for students who, in the UK at least, have a diverse background. The statistics are woeful.

In my opinion, there's something fundamentally wrong that the profession manages to lose so much talent once surveyors graduate. So, I would love to have a small part to play in turning that around.

Andrew Belt: [00:10:28] I really hope you do play a part in that; that would be a fantastic achievement.

So there's plenty of scope within the role and also a big part of that as you've alluded to is the diversity and inclusion.

So how would you say that the built environment has changed over the past 15 to 20 years? And do you think it's becoming more diverse?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:10:50] Sadly, I don't think there's been a massive improvement. There's much more conversation going on about diversity. There's even a book about it from our new chair of trustees, Amanda Clack.

However, in my opinion, there's a lot of talk, but not nearly enough action. And that's what we need to see. We need a cultural change and the actions that support that.

Andrew Belt: [00:11:15] What other changes would you like to see the sector make to produce a more diverse workforce?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:11:28] It's got to be a cultural shift from the top down to create real opportunities for underrepresented groups of people to become good and successful surveyors and have a good career in our industry and stay in our industry. Those of us in the sector need to listen, really listen, to those who are trying to climb up the career ladder or even get on the career ladder.

Why did they leave the profession? Once we've done the listening, we need to stop talking and take action. I'd love to see annually published tracking of

all firms on diversity of all shapes and sizes which hopefully might result in a better understanding and commitment to the surveying sector.

In my opinion, our sector should represent and serve all parts of our society and it doesn't at the moment.

Andrew Belt: [00:12:24] The work you're doing will hopefully really help with that. I think it'd be remiss not to mention Building People, which is an organisation which we help, who work with underrepresented groups, specific groups, and tries to tie them to built environment jobs. They're doing really great work and it's more of this we want to be seeing.

Just touching on Building People, are there any other organisations which spring to mind in terms of bringing about a more diverse workforce?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:13:05] There are quite a few. For example, I'm a board member of DiverseCity Surveyors which is an organisation that is promoting networking opportunities and mentoring opportunities for people with a black or Asian or other ethnic heritage to get into the profession.

There's also BAME in Property, there are various religious identity groups in surveying and there are also gender and identity groups and surveying. There's a lot out there all desperately wanting to be welcoming and supportive of our diverse community.

Building People, I think, is a massive step towards full engagement with these organisations, giving them more of a voice, giving them more opportunity to reach out to all surveyors and similarly for anybody wanting to get into the profession and succeed in the profession. The Building People platform gives them the information and the links to these organisations to help people so it's a really good initiative.

Andrew Belt: [00:14:22] We recommend to all our listeners to check out the Building People website and get an understanding in more detail about what they're doing because it really is fantastic. Hopefully, these actions will start to make those changes which we've discussed there where there's a lot of talk, but they really seem to be doing the action.

Hopefully, that becomes more widespread. As you say, the idea there about what companies can do to file their reports about their workforces and what they're doing to become a more diverse workforce would be another great step.

And finally, what advice would you give to someone looking to pursue a career in surveying?

Nikki Bulteel: [00:15:10] Surveying is a wonderfully exciting and dynamic sector. There are so many different roles and career paths you can follow. You can really make a difference to the world in which we live, through creating better communities, more sustainable approaches to building design

and building construction, managing our built environment to make it a better place to live and work, to make it more sustainable and help our planet, which is in dire need of all the support it can get.

It is a great sector to be in. Come in, be resilient and help us improve the sector. Don't be afraid to have a voice. The sector's got to reflect the society in which we live.

Andrew Belt: [00:16:12] If you're interested, do look up what a career in surveying could look like for you. If it's through academic means, then, of course, you can look at our website - ucem.ac.uk - and see what programmes we have there. Thank you for your time Nikki.

Nikki Bulteel: [00:16:31] It's my pleasure, it was good to talk to you.

Andrew Belt: [00:16:33] It was good getting to know some of the current roles which you're working on and look back at where you've got to within your career to get to this current stage.

You have that wide perspective, which will be fantastic in your current role where you're really trying to widen the net and try and bring as many people into the industry and make it as diverse and dynamic as possible. And a big part of that is the student ambassadors. So, if you'd like to find out more about them, you can head to our website - ucem.ac.uk - head to the 'Blog' section, and you'll find profiles with each one of them.

Thanks for listening.