

HERE team, Montenegro

Study visit, King's College London- Student Support Services

29th, 30th January 2013

Final Report

As representatives of Montenegrin students and members of our national HERE team we had an incredible opportunity to visit this prestigious school and learn more on their approach to students through presentations of various student services offered to students. On those presentations where lecturers mostly shared their personal experience of working at King's College we could see what kind of services they offer to their students. The first thing to capture was not the quality of the overall system at this University, but passionate approach each one of them to what they are assigned to.

Maybe 20 to 30 years ago students' needs were only in the field of actual learning- going to lectures, reading books, passing exams. Today as the whole world changes, our expectations- being the students or academics, change as well. If you are a student you expect to gain quality knowledge through higher education process but also to get more skills so you can be better prepared for the 'real world' once the school is done. Employers today have also raised their own expectations of young graduates. Having in mind overall job market stats, increasing number of people looking for a job that goes along with decreased need for new employees it is no wonder that competition is very high- not only among the students, but among universities as well. In such wetting, King's College works hard to modernize their approach to students and to create complete atmosphere for everyone involved.

Since the recent change in U.K. universities budgeting, King's College raised their tuition fee to 9,000 pounds per year, which obviously meant they needed to ensure students will get the adequate attention according to the paid money. Stephen Large introduced this whole program explaining what does it actually means to put students 'at the heart of the system' but also how they see students as customers. We have to admit, hearing 'students as customers', we've all reacted surprised- when does the education become business? But then, after the whole lecture,

we realized how this was mostly said very expressively in order to capture our attention and that they realize how students cannot be only customers. On the other hand, after thinking more about it, we believe that if you're offering services to someone you need to satisfy their needs and what is better way in our world but to see him as a customer. Overall, this approach ensures good quality in University offer and promises creating good professionals later on.

It is not only the question of tuition fee raising that worried University leaders, it is also debate around widening participation or special students' recruitment where we take only the best ones. Anne-Marie Canning did an amazing job in explaining how the King's College focuses on giving chance to talented young people who maybe couldn't afford such education. Therefore, King's College works passionately to find such students and prepare them for this school. Further on, we had a chance to hear Laura Mackenzie from Careers Service who did a great overview of how they prepare their students for real life and how they work towards attracting employers (it is not only today in UK that students need to ensure their visibility on job market, but Universities need to do the same so they provide better chances for their students later on). They put attention to employability as an important skill or virtue essential for job gaining after school. Personal Tutoring and Counseling for students that gives attention to their mental health are great examples of practice at King's where they really show to students they care about them, not only as a registration number, but as complete individuals. It is a great way to ensure prosperity of vast majority of students- if you follow their grades and behavior and you're in contact with them personally, chances they will leave school are smaller. On the other hand there is a need to check up on all these university services and make sure they work perfectly, as well as the professors and academics. There comes in place Quality Assurance which, according to our speaker Hilary Placito, completely renewed and changed the way it is perceived from the employers at King's. She gave us a great perspective on how they try to measure things in order to create complete picture of what is happening and how we can improve our lectures, services and general student-university relation. Furthermore on how King's take care of their students is the course on Digital Professionalism that is compulsory for all students. On this very interesting lecture, Bernadette John, explained us what does the digital footprint means and how does it affect our professional as well as private lives. It was obvious why this is something needed at the University and no one wondered the fact that students find this incredibly important for them.

During this study visit we had an opportunity to learn more on how they worked on enhancing their curriculum and what did they do in order to create better learning environment at the library and other King's spaces as well. Processes they went through in exploring the students' needs and searching for the people who can put this into reality were amazing. Still, at these topics, more than anything before it was very obvious the huge difference in financial stability of this university comparing to Montenegrin ones. There are certain things here we simply cannot afford at the moment.

Not only we had a chance to hear various employees at King's and London University but we got the chance to hear more about students' own experience. Thomas Clayton, president of Student Union at King's met us with the structure of Union and many of their activities which proved that all the work King's administration had done definitely meant a lot to students.

Overall, we've spent two days at King's listening to great lecturers and learning about great schooling system they've created here. As already stated, we are aware that our universities simply couldn't afford majority of these things, due to our budgets and small tuition fees we pay as students here, but we've learned one important thing- it is not only about the money. It's about desire for development, it's about hard work and enthusiasm. And we definitely can afford that.