



The Learning Grid

I'm Lara Meeran teacher of resistant materials and product design at James Allen's Girl's School. I am also an assessor on the panel for the Learning Grid and have the opportunity to look at all the projects that are submitted for the Learning Grid approval.

The Learning Grid is an initiative to develop collaboration between industry and Government, with funding from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Motorsport Industry. The Learning Grid aims to attract students to a career in engineering as a core contributor to the nation's wealth by offering fun, safe and effective learning activities for young people. Learning Grid competitions, events and materials are available for students of all ages from primary school up to university. All the programmes have been assessed for their educational value, effectiveness and quality.

As part of my role as an assessor I was asked to be involved in a promotional video for the Learning Grid. The aim was to explain the value of enhancing links between education and industry and explain the impact this has on pupils' perception of Industry and the positive benefits to schools. I also talked about some specific projects that the Learning Grid has endorsed and what the projects contribute to the mission of bringing together people from industry and education.

One such project that will part of the promotional video, is the Shell Eco-Marathon project to design and build a fuel-efficient car that is then tested at Rockingham Race Rack. The project has all the elements of a really good project; it demands a strong understanding of different areas of study which means the teams must be well-rounded to succeed. Business and mathematical skills are required to raise a budget and calculate fuel efficiency, while art is needed to design the concept that will serve as the template for the engineers and builders. Students are confronted with real life problems and must apply the knowledge learned in their courses to finding the solutions.

This event presents an opportunity for schools to gain recognition and reputation with regard to an enhanced curriculum and its commitment to the education of its students. It also allows for students to work alongside professionals and gain a greater understanding in the technical field.

The spirit of teamwork and enthusiasm this initiative inspires in schools could be the spark that inspires students to pursue engineering careers. As well as finding solutions for fuel efficiency the Shell Eco-Marathon UK helps to uncover the hidden talents of today's school children. It aims at challenging students to express their creativity and share their innovations by designing, building, and driving their own car.

The Learning Grid now consists of seven approved initiatives, each of which will receive their funding for three years to ensure long-term sustainability.

In addition to the discussion about specific projects, I was asked my views on the role of women in science and engineering, the perception of employers as to the value of studying subjects such as Product Design and how we inspire the designers and engineers of the future.



Further Notes

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The 7 quality accredited activities in the Learning Grid are:

Primary Engineer

Greenpower

Formula Student

Formula Schools

Shell Eco-Marathon UK

F1 in Schools Technology Challenge

Youth Engineering Summit

The Learning Grid maintains a Quality Standard for initiatives, so as to ensure that the activities which it supports are effective, safe and good value for money. Any UK initiative whose aims align with those of the Learning Grid may apply. Those that meet the criteria and are approved against the Quality Standard can also apply for funding from the Learning Grid to support growth and development - though not all approved activities are funded.

The Learning Grid is a group of activities, events and competitions with an engineering theme. In addition to the Youth Engineering Summit, these include Formula Student, Formula Schools, F1 in Schools and the Greenpower electric car challenge.

Projects such as the Rockingham Festival are a fantastic opportunity for schools to work in liaison with industry. Pupils gain first hand experience from the collaboration with experts from industry and it brings a real life context to the theory. The Shell Eco Marathon car project has all the elements of a good project, pupils work in teams to build a fuel efficient car of the future under the expert guidance of people from industry. It inspires pupils to be involved in a project to create a car for a greener future, whilst developing a greater understanding of technical fields and the world of industry.
